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## **Differentiated Integration and Shifting Power Relations in the European Union A Polish Perspective 2011-2014**

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### **Introduction**

A growing number of scholars and think-tank analysts have been looking into the subject of differentiation of the European integration process over the last 2-3 years. On one hand, they noticed that differentiated integration was hardly a new phenomenon in the European Union as it dated back at least to the entry into force of the Treaty of Maastricht (1993). On the other hand, they indicated the considerable deepening of the differentiation processes in relation to the euro zone crisis and the resulting necessity to transfer further competences to the European level. Some authors even went as far as to say that differentiated integration was indeed the only way to deepen integration in order to overcome the crisis.

What is differentiated integration? Legally, it means divergence in terms of validity of the formal rules (*acquis communautaire*) across the EU Member States. Differentiation can vary when it comes to time (short-term/ temporary or long-term/ permanent differentiation), territory (number of member States included) and content (entire policies or selected legal acts). Politically, it means moving away from the principle of uniform patterns of integration of all the Member States within a single political entity. The aim of differentiated integration is to deal with the heterogeneity of states' priorities and to avoid political impasse.

Differentiation can result both from widening and from deepening of the integration process. The Member States that adhered to the EU in 2004 and 2007 have so far been subjected to differentiation that was the consequence of enlargement (in the form of both exemption and discrimination). However, the case of Poland shows that concerns of sovereignty and identity might play an important role in Central Europe, as some political forces appear to follow the example of Great Britain in distancing themselves from the euro-zone core and attempts to strengthen European integration. As Poland voiced concerns with regard to establishment of the "super state" already during previous debates about the future of Europe (related to Constitutional Treaty and Lisbon Treaty), it is worth exploring the current debate while looking for patterns of continuity and change with regard to strengthening of the European integration, differentiation and the changing power relations in the EU. This paper starts with a brief discussion of the phenomenon of differentiated integration before and after the euro zone crisis. It then proceeds to outline the main elements of the Polish debate on the treaty reform in 2004 and 2007. The main body of the paper consists of a thorough analysis of the current post-crisis debate that started in Poland back in 2011. Principal elements of positions

and statements of the government, major political forces and think-tanks' policy papers are analysed. The paper highlights three main elements: 1) dual (domestic and external) discursive strategy of the Civic Platform government; 2) divergent approaches to differentiation of the major political parties; 3) high chances that Poland stays permanently outside the euro zone and follows the “British path” after 2015 parliamentary elections. This last element points to the strengthening of differentiation resulting not only from enlargement modalities but also from the growing unwillingness to transfer further competences to the EU level.

### **Differentiated Integration and the Crisis**

Until the beginning of 1990s European Communities developed in a relatively uniform way. Subsequent waves of enlargement included opt-outs and transitional periods but those were temporary and lasted no longer than a couple of years. Differentiation resulting from enlargement has typically taken two forms: temporary exemption or discrimination. Exemption meant postponing the entry into force of the rules and standards that would be too costly to implement at the moment of accession considering the level of development of the new Member State (i.e. environmental standards). On the other hand, discriminatory differentiation temporarily deprived the new member of certain rights and benefits resulting from membership, as the implementation was deemed too costly for the EU (i.e. agricultural subsidies, access to labour market)<sup>1</sup>. It was calculated that the subsequent rounds of enlargement in the years 1973-2007 were responsible for a total of 267 cases of legal differentiation (112 in primary law and 155 in secondary law) and the differentiation was usually short-term (an average of 4.5 years). It is worth mentioning that the 1973 enlargement to Great Britain, Ireland and Denmark brought mostly differentiation based on exemption, whereas eastern enlargement (2004 and 2007) – mostly discriminatory differentiation<sup>2</sup>.

Meanwhile, with the creation of the Schengen area and of the Economic and Monetary Union differentiation became permanent as it not only resulted from widening, but also from deepening of the integration process. Whereas differentiation linked to enlargement is explained by issues of effectiveness and cost distribution, differentiation linked to deepening results from concerns about national sovereignty and identity, where some Member States oppose further supranational centralization of political decisions in the EU<sup>3</sup>. Unwillingness to deepen integration, especially on the part of richer European states resulted in specific status of countries such as Great Britain, Denmark or Sweden in the EU or in creation of European Economic Area for countries such as Norway, interested in a stake in the single market but reluctant to engage in political integration entailed by full membership. On the other side of

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<sup>1</sup> Por. F. Schimmelfennig, *EU Enlargement and Differentiation: Discrimination or Equal Treatment?*, “Journal of European Public Policy”, 21:5, 2014, p. 682.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, s. 693.

<sup>3</sup> F. Schimmelfennig, T. Winzen, *Instrumental and Constitutional Differentiation in the European Union*, “Journal of Common Market Studies”, 52:2, 2014, p. 355.

the spectrum, the lack of EU readiness to absorb poor unconsolidated democracies led to the establishment of the European Neighbourhood Policy. The ENP partner countries adopt only part of the EU rules, depending on their political will and readiness to pursue further economic integration. As a consequence of the above mentioned processes, the European Union is gradually becoming a system of differentiated integration rather than a federation or a quasi-state<sup>4</sup>.

As different forms of differentiated integration are hardly a novelty to the EU, it is worth asking about the role and specificity of post-crisis developments. To what extent is the differentiation around the euro zone unique and qualitatively different from the differentiation trends of the past? The European Union was confronted with the unprecedented crisis in its history. The financial crisis turned into economic crisis, and then into the political and symbolic one – the crisis of legitimacy of power. The common currency had until then constituted the symbol of the Union strength and unity, as well as foundation for economic but also social integration in Europe<sup>5</sup>. The crisis, hitting the core of EU construction, revealed the impossibility of keeping the economic and monetary union in its initial shape. It also made clear that Member States' coordination of economic policies had to be strengthened and further integration towards banking, fiscal and ultimately political union was imperative by virtue of the spill-over logic. With the crisis, the Union became more heterogeneous, but it also experienced more pressure for further transfer of competences to the supranational level. Thus further differentiation appeared inevitable as politicization of European integration was growing and the process seized to be a bureaucratic endeavour. Any further step on the integration road generates ever more significant political costs in the Member States, which logically leads to expansion of differentiation<sup>6</sup>.

According to some authors post-crisis differentiation has been changing EU governance modes, it affected EU cohesion and internal balance of power<sup>7</sup>. It also required a new strategy of Union's development in the future. The EU has been divided into several groups of states linked to participation in the euro zone, Euro Plus pact (2011) or fiscal compact (2012). In 2014 the euro zone consisted of 18 Member States, whereas the Euro Plus pact was signed by 23 states (with the exception of Great Britain, Sweden, Hungary, Czech Republic) and the fiscal compact – by 25 (except for Great Britain and Czech Republic<sup>8</sup>).

For Central European countries euro zone differentiation was, in principle and according to accession treaties, of temporary and instrumental character. However, current political and

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<sup>4</sup> D. Leuffen, B. Rittberger, F. Schimmelfennig, *Differentiated Integration: Explaining Variation in the European Union*, Palgrave Macmillan, Houndmills Basingstoke 2013.

<sup>5</sup> M. Avbelj, *Differentiated Integration – Farewell to EU-27?*, "German Law Journal", 14:1, 2013, p. 202-203.

<sup>6</sup> D. Leuffen, B. Rittberger, F. Schimmelfennig, op. cit., s. 267-268.

<sup>7</sup> N. von Ondarza, *Strengthening the Core or Splitting Europe? Prospects and Pitfalls of a Strategy of Differentiated Integration*, "SWP Research Paper", Berlin March 2013, s. 5.

<sup>8</sup> However, the Czech government announced its decision to proceed with the accession to this treaty in March 2014.

economic circumstances suggest that the differentiation might become long-term or quasi-permanent as it is the case for Sweden. Consequently it is justified to speak, in the context of differentiation processes, about the EU divided into core and integration circles and not about the multi-speed Europe. The notion of “multi-speed EU” assumes that goals of all the members are identical and it is only the time frame for their realization that is subject to differentiation. Meanwhile it becomes more and more evident that the goals might be different (for instance when it comes to the membership in the euro zone) and thus the differentiation could become long-term or permanent.

Obviously, the very term “differentiation” does not have to be used by political actors, as the case of Poland makes clear. Instead, notions of “disintegration”, “core”, “centre”, “peripheries”, “marginalization”, “circles of integration”, “political union”, “federalization”, “politicization” or “sub-regional centre” appear in discourses of various actors. Their use is determined by the audience (domestic or external) and the perceived gains in the domestic political confrontation. The differentiation rhetoric is nevertheless used to make sense of the post-crisis evolution of the European Union and the interpretation of this process is reflected in two contrasting visions of Poland’s European policy.

### **Continuity and Change: Polish Discourse on the EU Reform 2004 – 2007**

Before the accession Polish debate on the European Union focused almost exclusively on costs and benefits resulting from the prospective membership. Moreover, statements on the future of the integration process were deliberately avoided for the sake of smooth conduct of the accession negotiations. The Constitutional Treaty was supported only by the ruling Democratic Left Alliance (SLD). It was criticized by the majority of political forces: both pro-European (Civic Platform – PO and Law and Justice – PiS) and anti-European (League of Polish Families – LPR, Self-defence – Samoobrona). The critique was aimed in particular at the new majority voting system in the Council as it formally weakened the negotiating position of Poland in comparison with the system of the Nice Treaty. This was reflected in the famous slogan “Nice or death” voiced in the parliamentary debate by Jan Rokita, then deputy of the Civic Platform. Heavy criticism was also directed at the fact that the Christian heritage was not mentioned in the treaty preamble. Further discontent, albeit to a lesser extent, concerned the new institutions: permanent presidency of the European Council and the EU foreign affairs minister<sup>9</sup>.

In 2007, on the initiative of the German presidency the discussion on the mandate for the new Intergovernmental Conference was resumed. The goal was to modify the rejected Constitutional Treaty so that it could be accepted by all the Member States. Poland proposed

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<sup>9</sup> M.A. Cichocki, K. Czerwińska, *Independence and European Integration – Leitbilder in Poland* in: *Leitbilder for the Future of the European Union: Dissenting Promoters of Unity*, eds. G.-S. Brincker, M. Jopp, L.A. Rovna, Nomos, Baden-Baden 2011, s. 277.

an alternative method of weighing votes in the Council, based on the square root from the number of citizens of each country<sup>10</sup>. In addition, the Polish government demanded the inclusion of the principle of energy solidarity into the new treaty, greater role for national parliaments and exclusion of provisions stipulating the primacy of the Union law over the national law (including constitutional law). It continuously campaigned against the above-mentioned new institutions that were supposedly leading the creation of a European “super-state”.

It is worth underlining that back in 2007 both the ruling Law and Justice and the Civic Platform in opposition were supportive of the above mentioned position, in particular the square root system. Both parties were firmly opposing the deepening of the integration process at the expense of the smaller and weaker states as exemplified, in their perception, in the move away from the Nice Treaty. The square root idea has indeed come from the circles of the more conservative architects of the Civic Platform foreign policy (including Jacek Saruysz-Wolski, former Minister for European Integration, MEP and currently vice-president of the European Peoples’ Party). In their interpretation, the Constitutional Treaty shifted the balance of power to the benefit of those who wanted “more Europe” and “less European solidarity”, especially France and Germany, and this change should be averted. In the Polish Sejm the negotiating mandate containing the square root proposal was endorsed by all parties but the SLD.

To overcome Polish opposition to the double majority voting system in the Council was the most important challenge facing the German presidency<sup>11</sup>. The strategy was, if necessary, to isolate Poland and force it to accept the compromise. Polish Prime Minister was threatening to use veto powers, but the President was suggesting that compromise was possible. At the June 2007 summit in Brussels Lech Kaczynski agreed to withdraw the square root proposal as it was supported by no other country and in return accepted the prolongation of the Nice system until 2014, including the temporary provisions in force until 2017. Interestingly, it was the Civic Platform that immediately voiced fervent criticism of the president and the government for giving in the initial position too quickly. To postpone the entry into force of the new less favorable voting system instead of eliminating it altogether was considered a failure.

Consequently, back in 2007 main political parties were in agreement as to the perception of threats resulting from strengthened intergovernmentalism and the growing powers and influence of the biggest Member States, especially Germany, on the functioning of the European Union. Equally, creation of the permanent European Council presidency and the position EU minister for foreign affairs was also univocally perceived as a challenge by both Civic Platform and Law and Justice. This was considered a first step towards the creation of a “super-state”, a controversial term that a few years later came back disguised as “political

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<sup>10</sup> In accordance with this method Germany would have 9 votes, Poland would have 6 and Estonia – 1.

<sup>11</sup> D. Phinnemore, *The Treaty of Lisbon: Origins and Negotiations*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2013, s. 84.

union” or a “federation”. The motive of the German hegemony was also going to be a recurrent discursive pattern.

### **Differentiated Integration: Polish Debate 2011 – 2014**

The position of the Civic Platform government in the debate on differentiation and the future of the EU is identified here on the basis of the document “Priorities of the Polish foreign policy 2012-2016” from March 2012, “Information of the Prime Minister on the future of the European Union” from December 2011, “Information of the Minister of Foreign Affairs on the goals of Polish Foreign Policy” from March 2013 and May 2014, as well as statements of minister Sikorski delivered in Berlin in November 2011 and in Leiden in June 2013. The controversial character of the Berlin speech and the fact that its content was agreed neither with the Prime Minister nor the President should be underlined. However, the speech resonated widely and soon became a key reference point for both European politicians and policy analysts. Thus it is analysed below notwithstanding its nature (an official statement or a seminar speech).

#### ***Government’s position***

The Berlin speech, delivered on 28 November 2011 during the well-prepared but hardly influential presidency of Poland in the Council, was widely applauded in Europe and heavily criticized at home. It seems that the speech had three main goals: 1) to make clear that the big bang enlargement had nothing to do with the causes of the crisis; 2) to call on Germany to assume active leadership and undertake real actions in order to save the monetary union; 3) to point out the necessity of strengthening the political system of the EU<sup>12</sup>.

In line with speech, Germany benefited in reality from the crisis in Southern Europe and should therefore bear special responsibility for leading EU reforms aiming at avoiding the collapse of the euro zone. Such actions would be fully supported by Poland as long as they do not entail German domination in Europe. According to minister Sikorski, the Union was facing the most difficult dilemma: more integration or disintegration. Both the notions of “federation” and “political union” were used in the speech, but none of them was clearly defined, although the latter should have been based on the “balance between responsibility, solidarity and democracy”. Poland supported the idea of the new treaty should it make the Union more effective. A few ideas on institutional changes were included: smaller rotation-based Commission of 12 members, pan-European list for EP elections or merger of the presidencies of the European Council and Commission. Importantly, maintaining cohesion between the euro zone and the rest of the EU was singled out as an important goal, which

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<sup>12</sup> R. Sikorski, Minister Spraw Zagranicznych RP, *Polska a przyszłość Unii Europejskiej*, Berlin 28.11.2011, <http://www.msz.gov.pl/resource/c2a33d88-7b8d-4fa5-8680-a67a4b2b38af:JCR> [13.08.2014].

reflected Polish concerns related to differentiation, that is creating the integration core around the euro-zone and leaving non-euro zone members behind.

However, information presented by the Prime Minister to the Sejm at the end of Polish presidency in the Council on 15 December 2014 did not contain any reference to federation or political union. The focus was instead on two aspects: 1) disintegration tendencies and emergence of circles of integration; 2) the urgency for Poland to participate in the euro-zone rescue efforts in an attempt to stay within the integration core (while being outside of the euro-zone) and maintain the “community Europe”<sup>13</sup>. According to the Prime Minister, Poland would be better off in a Union of strong community institutions than in the Union of competing Member States, where decisions were taken by the most powerful states. As the voice of Poland is never going to be dominant, it is safer to advocate the idea of European community even if this means fewer prerogatives for capitals and more prerogatives for Brussels. Thus the government adopted the traditional way of thinking, where smaller and weaker Member States benefited from strong supranational institutions and were put at a disadvantage if these institutions are weakened. In this narrative differentiation ultimately leads (or is equal) to disintegration and Poland does not have much choice but to advocate stronger EU and stronger EU institutions.

Moreover, the Prime Minister made it clear that the old French idea of deepening the Union around the core of the euro-zone was making a comeback. For Poland, currently staying outside the euro-zone this meant ending up in the second or even third circle of integration. As this would be clearly against Polish interests, Poland should actively participate in the reform of the euro-zone. It will anyhow become a member one day and it is crucial to be able to shape the rules of the club one would join in the future. According to the government’s position there was a serious risk that some Member States would form an exclusive club of the richest and most powerful, while neglecting the more peripheral members of the EU. Thus there was no greater risk than a “silent division of Europe”. Here, it was made clear that differentiation meant division into the centre and the peripheries and Poland had to avoid the status of the periphery at all cost and assume obligations of saving the euro-zone. According to this logic, more obligations meant more power to stay in the game to be included in the centre.

In such a context it is rather surprising that the document “Priorities of foreign policy 2012-2016”, published in March 2012, did not contain any reference to the economic and political reform of the euro-zone and the differentiation of the integration process. It was only stated that the foreign policy goal was “strong Poland in a political union”, although there was no

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<sup>13</sup> Sejm RP Kadencja VII, *Sprawozdanie stenograficzne z 3 posiedzenia Sejmu RP*, 15.12.2011 (drugi dzień obrad, Warszawa 2011, [http://orka2.sejm.gov.pl/StenoInter7.nsf/0/B5BC8CC970FA8E58C125796800473F23/%24File/3\\_b\\_ksiazka.pdf](http://orka2.sejm.gov.pl/StenoInter7.nsf/0/B5BC8CC970FA8E58C125796800473F23/%24File/3_b_ksiazka.pdf) [13.08.2014].

elaboration as to the meaning of that union. Polish vision of the united Europe was described as founded on three principles: competitiveness, solidarity and openness. The first meant consolidating of the single market and elimination of protectionism disguised in ecological and social slogans; the second – investing in cohesion and addressing inequalities in economic development between the Member States as well as fostering energy policy that takes into account interests of the entire EU; finally the third principle referred to support of membership aspirations of the Eastern Partnership countries, Balkans and Turkey<sup>14</sup>.

This is in fact a catalogue of traditional Polish demands regarding the single market as well as cohesion, energy and enlargement policies. It was not adjusted to the previously identified changes and threats within the European integration process. Consequently, it could be argued that the document was already obsolete at the moment of publication. On the other hand, one could also see it as a deliberate move not to present the official Poland's position regarding the changes that take place in the EU. A similar approach was adopted during the early phases of the constitutional debate.

The problem of EU reform in the context of the euro-zone crisis was only considered in the information from the foreign affairs minister presented in the parliament on 20 March 2013. It was underlined that a new European construction was emerging, fuelled by the cooperation in banking and finance and concentrated around the euro zone. Differentiation into the integration circles became a reality, according to the minister. Thus it was in Polish strategic interest to accede to the euro zone integration centre as soon as possible. It was not only about an economic decision but also a far-fetching geopolitical decision<sup>15</sup>. The minister also declared close alliance with Germany and hoped to keep Great Britain, an important ally for Poland on the matters of single market, energy and enlargement policies, in the European Union. Poland persistently and consistently voiced its aspirations to join the integration core. However, the problem with that strategy was that Polish accession to the euro-zone in short and medium term was highly unlikely, both for economic and political reasons. Although in February 2013 78% of respondents supported European integration (82% in February 2014), only 29% were supportive of accession to the euro-zone<sup>16</sup>. As a result, no substantial efforts can be expected by the Civic Platform government before parliamentary elections in autumn 2015. Finally, these elections might bring into power the Law and Justice party<sup>17</sup> which is

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<sup>14</sup> Ministerstwo Spraw Zagranicznych *Priorytety polskiej polityki zagranicznej 2012-2016*, 03.2012, <http://www.msz.gov.pl/resource/aa1c4aec-a52f-45a7-96e5-06658e73bb4e:JCR> [13.08.2014].

<sup>15</sup> *Informacja Ministra Spraw Zagranicznych o zadaniach polskiej polityki zagranicznej w 2013 r.*, 20.03.2013, [http://www.msz.gov.pl/pl/aktualnosci/wiadomosci/informacja\\_ministra\\_spraw\\_zagranicznych\\_o\\_zadaniach\\_polskiej\\_polityki\\_zagranicznej\\_w\\_2013\\_roku](http://www.msz.gov.pl/pl/aktualnosci/wiadomosci/informacja_ministra_spraw_zagranicznych_o_zadaniach_polskiej_polityki_zagranicznej_w_2013_roku) [13.08.2014].

<sup>16</sup> CBOS, *Obawy i nadzieje związane z wprowadzeniem euro w Polsce*, Komunikat z badań BS/42/2013, Warszawa 03.2013, s. 6-8, [http://www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2013/K\\_042\\_13.PDF](http://www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2013/K_042_13.PDF) [13.08.2014].

<sup>17</sup> Various opinion polls conducted in 2014 showed that Law and Justice came first before the Civic Platform or, if it came second, the difference was almost negligible as it was the case for elections to the European Parliament in May 2014, where Civic Platform got 32.13% of the vote, while Law and Justice got 31.78%; <http://pe2014.pkw.gov.pl/pl/> [13.08.2014].

highly skeptical about entering the euro zone and has presented an alternative vision for the Polish grand strategy in the differentiating European Union. This has made the government strategy to stay at the same time in and out of the game even more difficult.

It was again at the Leiden University (Netherlands) in June 2013 that R. Sikorski spoke against the thinking in terms of division of the EU and the concert of powers<sup>18</sup>. The division of Europe into the old core and the new peripheries is not the only one and clearly not the one adequately reflecting economic realities. If you divide the Union into Europe of growth and Europe of stagnation the picture would be quite different and it will valorize achievements of Central Europe and Poland in particular. According to the foreign affairs minister the focus on the euro zone consolidation should not overshadow the entire project of European integration. The speech featured again the notions of “federalization of Europe”, simplification of the EU institutional architecture, European lists for EP elections and election of presidents of the European Council and Commission by the European Parliament or the citizens.

Information on foreign policy delivered to the Sejm on 8 May 2014 was dominated by the Ukrainian-Russian conflict, Eastern Partnership and EU-Russia relations as well as the Polish proposal of an energy union that stipulated EU-level purchase of oil and gas, development of domestic energy resources (coal and shale gas) aiming at reduction of external dependence and construction of new pan-European infrastructure<sup>19</sup>. The eastern crisis was used in order to advocate once again against the differentiation and in favor of “more integrated, political union” and strong leadership. According to the minister, the crisis should also be considered by all political forces in Poland as an incentive to integrate further within the EU and to enter the euro-zone. The new international situation makes it clear that more economic interdependencies between Poland and the EU are vital to Polish interests. Thus entering the euro zone is not only about economy but also about security.

The above analysis of government’s positions shows that the term “federation” appears in the statements that are prepared for external, European audience, whereas domestically, for the purpose of confrontation with the opposition, notions of “political union” or “community Europe” are used. In an attempt to promote the euro accession, the government has come up with a very clear alternative for the future of Poland in the EU: either joining the integration centre (euro zone) in alliance with the biggest player – Germany, or becoming marginalized and exposed to external threats. At the European arena, the government advocated against differentiation and attempted to play the impossible game: shape the new euro zone rules, while staying outside the euro zone and being aware of the domestic political constraints for accession in short and medium term. Thus two different discourses were used for external and

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<sup>18</sup> Minister R. Sikorski, *Poland, the Netherlands and the EU – Common Challenges*, Leiden University, 12 June 2013, <http://www.msz.gov.pl/resource/0324af1d-f2ed-489b-ae6e-4b348626559a:JCR> [13.08.2014].

<sup>19</sup> *Informacja Ministra Spraw Zagranicznych o zadaniach polskiej polityki zagranicznej w 2014 roku*, 8.5.2014, [http://www.msz.gov.pl/pl/p/msz\\_pl/polityka\\_zagraniczna/priorytety\\_polityki\\_zagr\\_2012\\_2016/expose2/expose\\_2014](http://www.msz.gov.pl/pl/p/msz_pl/polityka_zagraniczna/priorytety_polityki_zagr_2012_2016/expose2/expose_2014) [13.08.2014].

domestic audiences. When it comes to the former, the government opposed differentiation, which could lead to serious divisions and ultimately disintegration, and advocated deeper integration. As to the latter, division between the core (euro zone) and the periphery (non euro zone countries) was presented as evident and inevitable, which justified the necessity to enter the euro zone as soon as possible. However, this way of thinking resonated poorly both with the main opposition party and the public opinion.

### *Perspectives of political parties*

Positions of the main political parties are analysed here on the basis of deputies' interventions during parliamentary debates that followed information from the prime minister and foreign affairs minister on Polish foreign and European policy in the years 2011, 2013 and 2014. The main axes of debate were formed already during the parliamentary debate at the end of the Polish Council presidency in December 2011 and continued ever since. The vision of the ruling coalition was largely supported by the two leftist opposition parties (Left Democratic Alliance, Your Movement) and fundamentally criticized and opposed by the right-wing opposition (Law and Justice)<sup>20</sup>. Issues of differentiation, deepening of European integration, cooperation with Germany and the risk of losing sovereignty were discussed both during the parliamentary debates in 2011 and 2013<sup>21</sup>. On the other hand, in the parliamentary debate on foreign policy from May 2014 the issues of security and eastern policy have dominated the debate on the future of Europe. Consequently, differentiation and Poland's integration with the euro-zone were, in comparison with previous debates, of rather secondary importance<sup>22</sup>. The arguments and the tone of interventions were also very emotional, not to say populist and demagogic, which might be explained by the last days of electoral campaign to the European Parliament.

In 2011 the left-wing parties indicated that the main problem of the EU was unfinished integration process: the existence of economic community instead of common economy. The crisis was diagnosed as an effect of moving away from the federalist policy and lack of courage of politicians that were avoiding real dilemmas and open debate about European federation and constitution. Federation was the right path both for Europe and for Poland. More integration and accession to the euro zone were in Polish interest. Poland must be included in the integration core and the goal should be "one European state". The left-wing opposition parties also confronted the right-wing opposition by pointing out that Law and

<sup>20</sup> Zob. Sejm RP Kadencja VII, *Sprawozdanie stenograficzne z 3 posiedzenia Sejmu RP*, 15 grudnia 2011, op. cit.

<sup>21</sup> Zob. Sejm RP Kadencja VII, *Sprawozdanie stenograficzne z 36 posiedzenia Sejmu RP*, 20 marca 2013 (pierwszy dzień obrad, Warszawa 2013, [http://orka2.sejm.gov.pl/StenoInter7.nsf/0/48239696DF9135D8C1257B350004E792/\\$File/36\\_a\\_ksiazka.pdf](http://orka2.sejm.gov.pl/StenoInter7.nsf/0/48239696DF9135D8C1257B350004E792/$File/36_a_ksiazka.pdf) [13.08.2014].

<sup>22</sup> Zob. Sejm RP Kadencja VII, *Sprawozdanie stenograficzne z 67 posiedzenia Sejmu RP*, 8 maja 2014 (drugi dzień obrad, Warszawa 2014, [http://orka2.sejm.gov.pl/StenoInter7.nsf/0/757955B50A87A1BDC1257CD3000B2502/%24File/67\\_b\\_ksiazka.pdf](http://orka2.sejm.gov.pl/StenoInter7.nsf/0/757955B50A87A1BDC1257CD3000B2502/%24File/67_b_ksiazka.pdf) [13.08.2014].

Justice effectively contributed to exclusion of Poland from the integration centre. It was made clear that isolation was a weakness and the weaker the state the less sovereign it became.

In 2013 the left was much more critical of the government. It was imperative to deepen integration, strengthen the role of EU in the world and avoid divisions in Europe. Meanwhile, the government was passive in European policy and not putting strategic proposals for EU development on the table. For leftist parties, the real guarantee of Poland's security was not political alliances but multiplication of economic ties within Europe (2014). It was the membership in the euro zone and the importance of Poland for German economy that constituted the best security guarantees. On the other hand, the government's initiation of the energy union was bound to fail, especially considering that Poland was the only Member State vigorously opposing EU climate policy. It was also worrying that, despite erosion of the community method, rising intergovernmentalism and deepening divisions in the EU, the government remained surprisingly inactive as to the adoption strategy of the euro.

Parliamentarians from the right-wing opposition underlined in 2011 that the government's strategy was founded on wrong assumptions, namely that the EU had only one centre and that centre had its internal hierarchy based on economic potential. In this vision, the hegemon – the state that was most powerful economically (i.e. Germany) – was entitled to discipline other members. The entire construction was supported by pseudo-democratic arrangements (including politicization of the Commission or pan-European electoral lists) and pursued an economic model based on “monetarism and ratings”. All this resulted in political inequality and democratic deficit that went against the ideas of Europe's founding fathers. An alternative vision advocated by PiS meant more freedom and solidarity (instead of more integration and centralization), a polycentric Union (instead of division into centre and periphery) and a Union of equal states and equal rules for all members (instead of hierarchy and discipline). The idea was about solidarity (EU develops as fast as the least developed state), democracy (democratic legitimacy can be provided by national parliaments only) and openness (enlargement). The right-wing opposition was highly critical of a process where instead of looking for economic remedies, European decision-makers established federal political centre under the pretext of fighting the economic crisis. “Federalization”, i.e. strengthening of the centre was a threat to Poland, not a solution. It was a mistake for Poland to accept the argument that once the euro collapsed, the entire EU would collapse too. The final point of criticism was the alliance with Germany: while aspiring to the “big guys club”, Poland neglected its regional partners and gave up the role of trusted representative of CEE interests.

In 2013 the right-wing opposition continued to criticize the government for the lack of autonomous vision of European policy. In this perspective Poland was merely an observer that adapted to events created by other players. PiS opposed inclusion of Poland into the “core” – if the latter was to be managed by Germany and European Commission. Poland should aim not at a federation governed by the most powerful but at the community of equal

states, freedoms of the single market and European solidarity understood as an alternative to the “egoism of the euro core”. The community of interests with Germany was illusionary. Despite that “alliance” Poland was not part of the decision-making centre as most important decisions were anyway taken by the triangle Berlin – Paris – London. Euro adoption would not give Poland more decision powers, while non-euro status did not prevent Great Britain from playing a major role. Another problem was that the slogan “more Europe” had been so far translated into the antidemocratic therapy of centralized control of state budgets and further loss of sovereignty. According to Law and Justice the EU should instead focus on cooperation with USA and Russia. The perspective of “economic zone from Vancouver to Vladivostok” was deemed “more realistic than the illusion of European federation”.

In 2014 PiS continued to oppose “federalization and politicization” of the EU and Poland’s entry into the euro zone. Poland should instead concentrate on building a “sub-regional centre from Gdansk to Istanbul” that would be able to counter-balance the Berlin – Paris – Brussels triangle. Moreover, the new banking union (and fiscal union in the future) was in contradiction with interests of the Polish business community. Poland should not enter the euro zone exclusively out of political considerations while not paying attention to economic interests. Finally, in order to become a truly important partner in Europe Poland must build its own industrial, energy, technological and demographic base.

Deputies of the ruling coalition asserted that Poland’s goal was to strengthen Europe and not to withdraw from the EU like Great Britain. It was in the interest of Poland to build a political union, also in the social dimension, and not rely solely on economic cooperation. In fact, there was no alternative to the alliance with Germany. Great Britain could not be considered an alternative as it had different preferences and its actions led to effective marginalization in Europe. Finally, the CEE alliance was an illusion: no country asked Poland for regional leadership. In fact, the greater influence of Poland on German position, the more impact it would have in the region. The Civic Platform was also stressing that a new European Union emerged, based on deepening of the integration within the euro zone and the reversal of that process was not possible. Under the circumstances Poland should actively take part in the process and Germany was the most important ally in Europe. In May 2014 the parliamentary debate, taking place just a few days before the EP elections, was attended by the Prime Minister who linked the problem of Europe’s disintegration to Russia’s neo-imperialist policies. He pointed out that eurosceptics and radical right were on the rise in the EU and that they were largely supportive of Russian president’s policy. Consequently, in D.Tusk’s assessment, all attempts to loosen European integration were in fact weakening EU position and strengthening Russia in that conflict.

To sum up, there were two main positions that emerged in the debate about the EU future, deeper integration and differentiation, between the main political forces in Poland. The first one was represented by the governmental coalition and the left-wing opposition and it aimed

at fully integrating Poland into the emerging EU centre led by Germany. Accordingly, Polish accession to the euro zone should not be considered only in economic, but also, and even more importantly, in political and security terms. Outside the euro zone Poland would be marginalized and left behind, which was highly dangerous in view of the growing Russia's assertiveness in the eastern peripheries of the EU. The second position, represented by the right wing opposition parties, did not accept the dichotomous vision of EU differentiation into the euro zone centre and the non-euro peripheries. In this perspective a good example of how a Member State should defend its interests is the case of Great Britain. Poland should work on establishing an alternative centre of power within the Union, based on regional alliances, including candidate and neighbouring states. "Federalization" or any deepening of the integration process was perceived as fostering more centralization, hierarchy and undemocratic trends in the development of EU institutions at the expense of interests and sovereignty of Member States.

As a result, advocates of the first vision perceive differentiation as a crucial threat that weakens the EU both internally and externally, at the time when it needs to be strong and united. The imperative for the EU is to deepen integration and for Poland to enter the euro zone core. Proponents of the second vision understand differentiation as a positive process that might help to avoid German domination and Brussels centralization while allowing for more flexible integration and reaching out across the EU borders towards candidate and neighbourgood countries. Accordingly, Poland is not bound to enter the "euro core" dominated by Germany or to be marginalized but it could adopt a more proactive approach, while strengthening cooperation with other European partners distancing themselves from the euro zone core.

### *Expert debate*

The questions of further differentiation within the European Union, Polish dilemmas regarding accession to the euro zone, the future of the political Europe and Poland's new European policy became in recent years important topics of interest among key Polish research institutes and think-tanks. In the context of differentiation a key question arose as to what extent Poland might gain or lose from emerging divisions in the EU. Another question is about economic and political consequences of the different scenarios related to the entrance into the monetary union (fast track accession, postponed accession, no accession). Analysts also asked whether the crisis constituted a real turning point in the integration process and to what extent the Member States, including Poland, would like to use it in order to substantially reform European structures and construct a truly democratic Union. Finally, the question was what kind of vision of new Union, that would pursue Polish interests but also take the responsibility for the entire continent, Poland could develop.

The 10 years of Poland's membership in the EU were marked by two crises: a constitutional and then an economic one. During the euro zone crisis Poland and the entire Central European region were somehow valorized: it was now the South and no longer the East that became a source of (potential) problems. Increased weight of Central Europe was linked to the alliance with Germany, both economic and political. In experts' assessment Germany replaced Great Britain, the more traditional Atlantic ally that has been now drifting away from the EU. Poland was also seen as a victim of partial membership as it remained, after 10 years, outside the economic and monetary union – a policy that became crucial to the integration project during the crisis. Another challenge is that the EU was evolving towards “new intergovernmentalism”, where all important decisions were taken in the European Council and supranational institutions were progressively losing their weight. Commission gained new prerogatives in the euro zone management but its role was even more subordinated to the Member States. These developments were worrying for Poland that had been traditionally very supportive of the community method and that was now confronted with the growing tendency to privilege the biggest states. According to PISM (Polish Institute of International Affairs, a think tank linked to the foreign ministry) analysts, differentiation process of European integration constituted both an opportunity and a serious risk<sup>23</sup>. On the one hand, differentiation could make greater openness of the EU for new members possible. This would also allow the EU to assume greater geopolitical role or conquest of new markets and resources. On the other hand, differentiation might render the non-euro countries more peripheral and ultimately second rank members.

Additionally, the euro members were less and less willing to include Poland into the euro zone decision-making. Poland was postponing its accession to the point when it would be more beneficial (economically and politically), while at the same time demanding access to decisions already now. The non-euro members are not able to come up with a common agenda to counterbalance the euro core. In line with the *demosEuropa* report chances that Poland, Hungary and Czech Republic accede to the monetary union before 2020 were negligible. The decision not to enter the euro zone in the foreseeable future translated into two scenarios for Poland: 1) drifting away towards peripheries and eventual need to turn to partners outside the EU; 2) pursuing own agenda within the Union, especially in the context of the single market and foreign policy<sup>24</sup>.

With regard to the changes to the institutional architecture that the EU had been undergoing since 2010, another question was asked by Polish experts, namely do we face a turning point and whether the end result would be the political union? Some analysts indicated that we were

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<sup>23</sup> R. Parkes (ed.), *Is this a Future of Europe? Opportunities and Risks for Poland in a Union of Insiders and Outsiders*, Report of the Polish Institute of International Affairs, Warsaw, February 2014, [http://www.pism.pl/files/?id\\_plik=16343](http://www.pism.pl/files/?id_plik=16343) [13.08.2014].

<sup>24</sup> High Level Reflection Group, *Central Europe Fit for the Future: Visegrad Group Ten Years After Accession*, CEPI, *demosEuropa*, 2014, s. 39- 42, [http://www.demoservices.home.pl/www/files/demos\\_Central%20Europe\\_fit\\_web.pdf](http://www.demoservices.home.pl/www/files/demos_Central%20Europe_fit_web.pdf) [13.08.2014].

still witnessing typical EU ad hoc “crisis management”, where European leaders think about Europe while having electoral calendar in mind and were not committed to fundamental reconstruction of the integration process. As a result, it was not so much a choice between the creation of a federal superpower and marginalization at the global arena that the EU was facing. The real dilemma, according to these authors, was whether to stay in the “from crisis to crisis” logic or change the technocratic approach to a democratic one<sup>25</sup>. The crisis has strengthened the technocratic and intergovernmental power, but it has also led to eruption of opposition of European societies on the other. Under such circumstances the confrontation of the EU project with citizens’ would become inevitable.

Polish think-tankers generally agreed that Poland would most probably stay outside the euro zone at least in the medium term and it should therefore start serious work on its strategy for membership in the changing EU. According to experts special attention should be attached to reducing tension between rich post-industrial states and the catching-up states in the field of economic, climate and energy policy, as well as in the context of north-south-east divisions. Poland should actively promote economic growth, development of the single market and creation of the free trade area with the United States as soon as possible. Poland should also focus on strengthening cooperation with Baltic States, Great Britain but also southern states<sup>26</sup>.

## Conclusions

The notions of “federation” and bold ideas for deepening European integration have appeared in statements of the Polish authorities delivered for external, European purpose. In Poland, for the purpose of domestic confrontation with the right-wing opposition, eager to defend “national interests” and “sovereignty”, the government spoke more vaguely about “political union” or “community Europe”. While pushing for Poland’s accession to the euro zone, the government outlined a clear scenario: either joining the euro zone – the integration centre – in alliance with the main player – Germany, or becoming marginalized and exposed to external threats. This is a classical TINA (“there is no alternative”) argument that had been successfully used in the case of Poland’s EU accession. However, due to the necessity for constitutional changes, electoral calendar and lack of public support, it is difficult to imagine the euro accession before 2020-2025. As a result, it is more and more problematic for Poland to influence the direction and the scope of euro zone reforms, while formally staying out of the game.

A certain degree of continuity can be observed between the post-crisis debate on the future of Europe and the debate on constitutional and reform treaties. However, back in 2007 main political parties were in agreement as to the threats resulting from strengthened

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<sup>25</sup> M.A. Cichocki, *Political union: imagine if you can...*, “Komentarze Natolińskie”, 5(24)/ 2013, [http://www.natolin.edu.pl/pdf/komentarze/Natolin\\_Komentarze\\_5\\_2013.pdf](http://www.natolin.edu.pl/pdf/komentarze/Natolin_Komentarze_5_2013.pdf) [13.08.2014].

<sup>26</sup> *Central Europe Fit for the Future...*, op. cit., s. 44-46.

intergovernmentalism and growing influence of biggest Member States, especially Germany. In the following years, the Civic Platform, while moving from a conservative to a more liberal orientation in foreign policy, adopted a position more favourable to deeper integration or “federalization” of the EU, while Law and Justice consistently opposed the “super-state”, “federalization” or “German hegemony”. Whereas the government and the left considered differentiation of the European integration process as a direct threat to Polish interests, PiS saw it as an opportunity to create an alternative centre of power to the imminent German hegemony in Europe. In the context of 2015 parliamentary elections and a possible victory of Law and Justice, it is probable that Poland would not only opt for staying outside the euro-zone in the medium to long term, but it might also follow the British path with regard to other, less popular policies such as climate action. Consequently, differentiation would establish itself as permanent and mainstream feature of the European integration process.