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National Report

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NEW PACT FOR EUROPE – Rebuilding trust through dialogue

Project description

Launched in 2013 by the King Baudouin Foundation and the Bertelsmann Stiftung, and supported by a large transnational consortium including the Open Society Initiative for Europe (OSIFE), the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, the European Policy Centre (EPC), the BMW Foundation Herbert Quandt, and the Open Estonia Foundation, the New Pact for Europe (NPE) project aims to promote a European wide debate and develop proposals on how to reform the European Union in light of the manifold challenges Europe is currently facing.

After a first successful period in 2013-2015, which included more than 80 events in 17 EU countries and the publication of two major reports, which elaborated five strategic options on the future of the EU, the NPE project entered a new phase in 2016-2017. The ultimate aim of this new phase of the NPE project is to work out the details of a wider ‘package deal’ to equip the EU with the tools it needs to meet the internal and external challenges it faces. This proposal will contain solutions generated by connecting the discussions on the key policy challenges, and propose changes in the way the EU and its policies are defined to avoid future fundamental crises.

Building on the analysis and proposals elaborated in the previous phase, the NPE has in this period explored how the EU can better serve the interests of its member states and citizens, through a series of 30 national and transnational debates on key policy challenges (including the migration/refugee crisis, internal and external security, as well as economic and social challenges).

National Reflection Groups have been created and met specifically for this purpose in ten EU countries (Belgium, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Poland, Portugal and Slovakia), followed by transnational exchanges between these groups. This national report is the result of the work and discussions of one of these National Reflection Groups.

The discussions within and between representatives of the ten National Reflection Groups will be discussed by a European Reflection Group of eminent persons, which includes all the national rapporteurs. It will be tasked to produce a final NPE report taking into account the national and transnational debates, scheduled to be published at the end of 2017.

The project also benefits from the overall guidance of an Advisory Group of high-ranking policy-makers, academics, NGO representatives and other stakeholders from all over Europe. It is chaired by Herman Van Rompuy, President Emeritus of the European Council and former Prime Minister of Belgium.

For more information on the NPE project, please see the project website: www.newpactforeurope.eu

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The views expressed in this report reflect the result of the work and discussions of this National Reflection Group, enriched by exchanges with two other National Reflection Groups, but they do not necessarily represent the views of each member of the group or the institutions they are affiliated with.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CEE	Central and Eastern Europe
CFSP	Common Foreign and Security Policy
CSDP	Common Security and Defence Policy
EP	European Parliament
EU	European Union
EMU	Economic and Monetary Union
EP	European Parliament
MEP	Member of the European Parliament
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NPE	New Pact for Europe
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
NMS	New Member States
NRG	National Reflection Group
PESCO	Permanent Structured Cooperation
PiS	Prawo i Sprawiedliwość (Law and Justice)
PM	Prime Minister
PO	Platforma Obywatelska (Civic Platform)
ToEU	Treaty on European Union
TTIP	Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
US	United States
V4	Visegrad Group

FOREWORD

This report is inspired by the discussions of the Polish National Reflection Group enriched by exchanges with National Reflection Groups from Italy and France. It reflects on the 'state of the Union' from a national perspective and discusses the main challenges the EU and its members are facing, taking into account both the European and national perspective. Finally, it proposes ideas and recommendations how the EU and its members should react to these main challenges and lays down how the EU and European integration should develop in the years to come.

This paper is part of a series of ten national reports. These reports and the debates in the Member States will provide a solid basis for the discussions in the NPE European Reflection Group. The latter will be asked to bring the reflection a step further through in-depth and thorough discussions at the European level. The Advisory Group chaired by Herman Van Rompuy will provide input to this process. All these reflections will lead to a final NPE report analysing the current 'state of the Union' and making proposals on how to re-energize the European project in the years to come. It will be published at the end of 2017.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Following the 2015 elections, the Polish government has become increasingly disapproving of the current state of the European Union (EU); while EU institutions, most notably the Commission, criticised the PiS government for infringement of the rule of law and other values and principles enshrined in Article 2 of the TEU. The deepening rift between Warsaw and Brussels is accompanied by a deep polarisation of Polish public opinion and elites on many crucial issues regarding the future of Europe. These facts notwithstanding, Polish society strongly supports Poland's EU membership and the government's 'Brussels bashing' has had limited impact on the general support for integration.

While distancing itself from both Germany and France, the PiS government sought to build new alliances with the United Kingdom and the countries of Central Europe. Brexit and the distinctive interests and perspectives among Central Europeans have put this policy in check: the net result is the limitation of Poland's ability to influence the policy agenda in Brussels, including on important issues such as the Posted Workers Directive.

This report, inspired by the debates of the Polish Reflection Group, differs significantly from the official government position in many areas. Unlike the PiS government, the report does not endorse the idea that re-nationalising EU powers is an appropriate solution to the European '*poly-crisis*'. On the contrary, it recommends that the EU be more engaged in crucial policy areas, such as economic governance, migration and security. EU reforms should primarily aim at improving the EU's '*performance legitimacy*' rather than focus on the perceived '*democratic deficit*'. The report supports improved and more impactful communication policies at the European, national and regional levels to address the double challenge of populism and Euroscepticism. This report also calls for a pragmatic and results-oriented approach, which would focus on reforms within the framework of existing treaties.

In the areas of **institutional reform and economic governance**, the report advocates reforms based on enhanced cooperation. While "multi-speed Europe" seems unavoidable at this stage, such an initiative must not lead to splitting *de facto* the EU into a semi-permanent 'core' and a 'periphery'. Eurozone reforms are a subject of particular concern in Poland. The report calls for these reforms to be implemented within the framework of the existing EU institutions and remain open to latecomers, such as Poland.

In the area of migration policy, the report concludes that the quota-based system of relocation and resettlement has led to many negative consequences in a number of member countries, including Poland. The system should be replaced with a Common Asylum Policy, which would be financed and managed by the EU. Likewise, the report welcomes the establishment of the European Border and Coast Guard Agency and advocates that it receives sufficient resources to successfully improve EU border security. Last, but not least, the report calls for a long-term migration policy that would reconcile the concerns of the public with the needs of European labour markets given the continent's current demographic trends.

Finally, regarding **matters of security**, the report reflects the Polish sensitivity vis-à-vis potential threats from a resurgent Russia, while recognising that other EU members, especially Southern Europeans, may have different perceptions in this area. It calls for extensive discussion between politicians and experts from different member states to bring these differing perceptions closer as a pre-condition for the truly effective



and positive development of European foreign and security policies. The report welcomes new initiatives in the field of security, such as PESCO or the European Defence Fund, but argues for the complementarity of these efforts with NATO commitments, which remain crucial for Europe's defence. The report also points out the heterogeneous character of current security threats, emphasising the need to build up Europe's resilience to cyber threats and propaganda warfare.

INTRODUCTION: POLAND AND THE EU

Since the fall of communism in Central and Eastern Europe in 1989, the idea of a ‘return to Europe’ was the guiding principles of Poland’s transition to democracy and a market economy. Following the 2004-2007 enlargement, dynamic economic development, successful absorption of structural funds and record high societal support for EU membership lead some to portray Poland as the “best student” in the “class” of so-called New Member States (NMS). In 2007, as prime minister, Donald Tusk declared his ambition to make Poland a major player in Europe. Working in tandem with foreign minister Radosław Sikorski, the Tusk government forged strong ties with Germany, which became Poland’s leading international partner. Tusk’s policies allowed Poland to punch above its weight in European politics. The Tusk-Sikorski tandem pushed for the EU to deepen its relations with the countries of the former Soviet Union, especially Ukraine, by proposing (together with Sweden) the Eastern Partnership policy, arguably the first ambitious proposal supported by an NMS to be adopted as EU-wide policy. At the same time, Tusk’s government attempted to improve Poland’s relations with Russia during the Medvedev presidency. However, this process withered away following Vladimir Putin’s re-election as president. When Russia later occupied parts of Ukraine in 2013, Poland was a strong supporter of EU sanctions on Russia to bring it in line with international law.

Poland was the only EU member state not to fall into recession following the 2008 global financial crisis, which strengthened the Civic Platform (PO) government’s international reputation for good economic governance. Poland’s successful European integration and foreign policy was acknowledged with the appointment of Poles to top jobs in the European institutions, such as the President of the European Parliament (Jerzy Buzek) and the President of the European Council (Donald Tusk). Yet, despite large and sustained economic growth, highly Europhile attitudes and comparatively low levels of immigration, the largest opposition party – Law and Justice, abbreviated as PiS – gained a parliamentary majority in the 2015 elections.¹ The Law and Justice party was elected on generous socioeconomic promises. Its strong adherence to identity and sovereignty issues and mutually exclusive alliance with the Polish Catholic Church fuelled its resilience after years in opposition as well as a dominant position on the right of the political spectrum. The refugee crisis, and especially the European Commission’s controversial policy of mandatory quotas of refugees for each member state, spurred a rapid upswing of xenophobia within a few months. The Polish brand of populism resembled its Western European right-wing populist counterparts.

The Law and Justice government also sought to forge new European alliances, stressing the need for strong cooperation with Britain and the countries of Central Europe. Despite Brexit, Poland is still calling the UK an important partner. This partnership struggles, however, to find meaningful substance. Thus far, it seems limited to declarations in favour of deeper cooperation in the field of security and defence. Without London’s support, however, Warsaw’s position would be much weaker among other EU partners. On the other hand, possible restrictions on the rights of Polish nationals to reside in the UK and post-Brexit cuts to the EU budget may adversely affect Poland.

¹ Jacek Kucharczyk (ed.), “Poland – When fear wins: causes and consequences of Poland’s populist turn but fear itself?” [In:] S. Gaston, P. Harrison-Evans (ed.). *Nothing to fear but fear itself: Mapping and responding to the rising culture and politics of fear in the European Union*, Demos, 2017.

The attempt to forge new alliances was accompanied by the gradual, yet clear, deterioration of Poland's relations with Germany. While leading PiS politicians – including Prime Minister Beata Szydło – named Germany as Poland's most important partner, the prevailing PiS discourse stigmatises Berlin as a dangerous European hegemon subordinating all EU policies to its national interests. The result is a paradoxical mixture of pragmatic cooperation in some fields on the international stage and anti-German rhetoric in the domestic arena. Relations with France, previously Poland's partner within the so-called Weimar Triangle, have also deteriorated following Poland's decision to cancel an important military purchase in 2016. It went from bad to worse when, during his presidential campaign, Emmanuel Macron named Poland as one of Europe's budding autocracies, alongside Russia, Turkey and Hungary.²

In order to balance the Franco-German "domination" of Europe, the PiS government and president Andrzej Duda sought to develop regional cooperation in Central Europe within the so-called Visegrad Group and more recently, the Three Seas Initiative.³ Solidarity among these new allies was put to the test when earlier in 2017 the Polish government unsuccessfully tried to block Donald Tusk's re-election as President of the European Council, and was outvoted 27 to one. Poland's adversarial relationship, not only with Germany and France, but with the EU as a whole was later exacerbated by the criticism of the PiS government by both the European Parliament and the Commission, for alleged infringement of the values inscribed in Article 2 of the Treaty on European Union (TEU), particularly the rule of law.

²Reuters, "Poland outraged after Macron comments on Le Pen and Putin", 2 May 2017, <<http://www.reuters.com/article/us-france-election-poland-russia-idUSKBN17Y1IE>>.

³ Agnieszka Łada, *Poland and the EU. Regional Leader or Outlier?*, Institute of Public Affairs, Warsaw, 2017.

PART 1: THE STATE OF THE UNION. A VIEW FROM POLAND

The current Polish national narrative about the state of the European Union (EU) is not easy to monitor due to its heterogeneity, which translates into stakeholders voicing diverging arguments about the challenges facing the EU. Perception of the EU is thus in a jumble with often radically different opinions, supported by PiS government representatives, their political opponents, key opinion-makers, and last but not least, the public. While the government and some of its supporters would like to see the integration process partially reversed, there is a sustained pro-EU sentiment among the elite opinion leaders, who are backed by vibrant pro-European civil society groups. It was mainly the latter that took part in the discussions of the Polish National Reflection Group.

POLISH SOCIETY'S VIEWS ON EUROPEAN INTEGRATION

The Polish paradox – the combination of the population's enduring support for EU membership and the government's relatively strong Eurosceptic rhetoric – requires a rather complex explanation. The general appreciation of the benefits of membership goes hand in hand with a growing dissatisfaction with some aspects of integration, such as refugee quotas or the adoption of the Euro, both of which are opposed by a majority of citizens and can be easily exploited by Law and Justice.

According to Eurobarometer, Poland is consistently among the top-tier countries where the EU maintains a positive image.⁴ For the past decade, Polish support for membership has not dropped below 70% in the national polls. It peaked at 89% in 2014 and remained at 88% in April 2017.⁵ In a poll conducted prior to the 60th anniversary of the Treaty of Rome, only 9% of Poles supported a hypothetical withdrawal from the EU.⁶ Support for EU membership is not, however, accompanied by public backing for deeper integration. A recent study showed that just 14% of Polish respondents wanted the EU's powers to be increased.⁷ On the other hand, when asked differently, only 24% of Polish respondents agreed with the statement that “the integration of Europe has gone too far,” while 48% said that “Europe should integrate more.”⁸

The Polish public appreciates the benefits of EU membership, such as the free movement of labour, the availability of EU funds, strengthened security and a stronger role of Poland in Europe.⁹ They also want the

⁴ European Commission, *Public opinion in the European Union*, Standard Eurobarometer 83, spring 2015; Standard Eurobarometer 84, autumn 2015.

⁵ *Jakiej Unii chcą Polacy?* [What Union do Poles want?], Komunikat z badań 72, Centre for Public Opinion Research, 2017.

⁶ Survey conducted by Kantar Public for “Gazeta Wyborcza” on 23.03.2017, <<http://wyborcza.pl/7,75248,21545381,polacy-o-ue-odrzucamy-polexit-dajemy-unii-prawo-do-interwencji.html>>.

⁷ Aleksander Fuksiewicz, *Globalisation and European integration* [In:] Jacek Kucharczyk (ed.), *Poland – When fear wins: causes and consequences of Poland's populist turn but fear itself?* [In:] S. Gaston, P. Harrison-Evans (ed.), *Nothing to fear but fear itself: Mapping and responding to the rising culture and politics of fear in the European Union...*, Demos, 2017, p. 329.

⁸ *Jakiej Unii...*, *op. cit.*

⁹ B. Roguska, *10 lat członkostwa Polski w Unii Europejskiej* [10th Anniversary of Poland's membership in the European Union], Komunikat z badań 52, Centre for Public Opinion Research, 2015.

EU to assert a more active role in international affairs, but they do not consider the promotion of rule of law, democracy and human rights as priority areas for Poland's foreign policy.¹⁰

The EU's migration policy has, however, affected the Polish support for EU membership because this issue in Poland is intertwined with the fear of terrorism. Since 2014, support for welcoming refugees has fallen from 60–70% to 40–45% because immigrants are predominantly presented as a cultural and security threat.¹¹ When asked specifically about refugees from Muslim countries, 70% of respondents oppose accepting them in Poland. Moreover, 65% declared being against accepting refugees even if it meant losing access to EU funds.¹² In this context, the European Commission's push to force Central European member states to accept refugees on the basis of mandatory quotas has had the adverse side-effect of boosting anti-EU sentiments in Poland and other central European countries. They could result in a decrease in public support towards EU membership in the long term.

Another problematic policy area is Poland's attitude towards the common currency. Recent polls reveal that a strong majority of Poles (72%) are against adopting the euro. The high level of support for Poland's EU membership does not translate into support for the euro because the latter is associated with the EU's economic problems.¹³ This topic thus hardly exists in the Polish public debate and (with some notable exceptions) even pro-European politicians avoid talking about adopting the euro in the foreseeable future.

Finally, despite public endorsement of the EU and the process of globalisation process, PiS's "sovereignty instead of cooperation" rhetoric appears to be resonating within growing segments of the Polish electorate. The mixed reactions to the international criticisms of Poland's recent political developments have made this evident. The PiS government-led reforms of the judiciary (and other legislative initiatives) have been criticised by both the Council of Europe (Venice Commission) and the European Commission, amongst others. These reforms were also debated in the European Parliament. In Poland, during the summer of 2016, large demonstrations across the country and in many cities protested against alleged violations of the independence of the judiciary. Polish society remains, however, very divided regarding the criticism from Brussels. According to a recent opinion poll, 60% of respondents agreed with the statement that the Law and Justice government wanted to subjugate the judiciary and seize all of the power for itself. At the same time, only 47% agreed that the EU cared about rule of law in Poland, while 53 per cent said that European politicians and institutions were biased against the PiS government.¹⁴

In another 2016 poll about the European Commission's position vis-à-vis the Constitutional Tribunal case, a plurality of respondents agreed that the European Commission's critical opinion about the rule of law in

¹⁰ B. Stokes, R. Wike, J. Poushter, *Europeans Face the World Divided*, Pew Research Center, <<http://www.pewglobal.org/2016/06/13/europeans-face-the-world-divided/>>.

¹¹ *Stosunek Polaków do przyjmowania uchodźców* [The attitude of Poles toward acceptance of refugees]. Public Opinion Research Centre, 2017.

¹² *Oczekiwanie pod adresem polskich polityków w związku z kryzysem migracyjnym w UE* [Expectations as to Polish politicians' reactions to the migration crisis in the EU], Public Opinion Research Centre, 2017.

¹³ Jakiej Unii..., op. cit.

¹⁴ *Krajobraz po wetach* [Landscape after President's vetos], CBOS Public Opinion Research Centre,

Poland was justified: 42 per cent agreed whereas 34 per cent thought it was unjustified. These opinions were clearly correlated with political preferences (Law and Justice voters disagreed).¹⁵

Thus, the Pole's diverging views about European integration echo the profound political polarisation of Polish society as a whole. These perceptions are affected by opposing arguments on the challenges facing the EU, and most notably by the narratives of the ruling Law and Justice party.

LAW AND JUSTICE'S OPINION ON THE STATE OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

The ruling party's official narrative about the European Union has been greatly shaped by domestic considerations. To a large extent, it can be seen as a backlash against EU criticism of the government's attempts to dismantle democratic checks and balances, including by taking political control over the Constitutional Tribunal. Poland has implemented the biggest shift in its foreign and European policy since the beginning of its democratic transition. For the first time in over two decades, in the narrative of the ruling party, European integration is presented as a threat, not as an opportunity.

According to this official narrative, the EU is led by elites who are failing to listen to the concerns voiced not only by citizens, but also – and more importantly – by member states. Brexit is shown as an example of a justified rebellion against the tyranny of the EU, which (as they claim) has refused to address legitimate British concerns.

The European Commission's attempts to address the problem of the rule of law in Poland have served as evidence of the EU's progressing encroachment on national sovereignty in the eyes of the ruling party. Additionally, government-controlled media have described the President of the European Council, Donald Tusk – a long-standing political rival of Poland's *de facto* leader Jarosław Kaczyński – as a "German candidate" who had been elected thanks to German pressure on other member states.

In 2016 Polish political leaders called for a revision of the EU's institutional framework to strengthen national parliaments and weaken the European Commission, but this idea was later seemingly abandoned. Nevertheless, the Polish government has been opposed to the notion of deeper European integration, even for a select group of countries. On the occasion of the 60th anniversary of the Rome Treaties, the government threatened not to sign the Rome Declaration because of its references to a multi-speed integration (it eventually signed the declaration).

The Polish government has vehemently refused to accept refugees from Muslim countries under the current or any future mandatory quota schemes. In the eyes of PiS politicians, the EU refugee relocation and resettlement scheme had been imposed by the German government, who was attempting to spread the costs after having unilaterally decided to accept thousands of refugees. As mentioned before, this particular type of anti-EU and Germany-bashing rhetoric seems to resonate rather well with the public.

Despite these criticisms of the EU and the lack of a positive narrative on the future of Europe, the idea of a so-called "Polexit" is generally rejected in the public discourse. Both Prime Minister Beata Szydło and Poland's *de facto* leader Jarosław Kaczyński have in recent months denied that Law and Justice intended to withdraw

¹⁵ *Reakcje społeczne na przyjęcie przez Komisję Europejską opinii o praworządności w Polsce* [Public reactions to passing an opinion about the rule of law in Poland by the European Commission], CBOS Public Opinion Research Centre, 2017.

from the EU. Kaczyński called such suggestions “a lie, manipulation and nothing more.”¹⁶ PiS politicians nevertheless tend to paint the EU in a bad light and portray the Union as a threat to Polish culture and security. According to this narrative, “Brussels elites” are pressuring Poland and other countries into accepting refugees in the name of ‘political correctness’, which would – in their view - forbid them from considering refugees from Muslim countries as a terrorist threat to Europeans. In the long run, this critical narrative and the government’s clashing relationship with EU institutions may lead to a worsening of the EU’s image in Poland.

¹⁶ *Kaczyński: nie chcemy wyjść z Unii* [Kaczynski: we do not want to leave the Union], 13.03.2017, <<http://www.tvn24.pl>>.

PART 2: KEY CHALLENGES AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE EU

The Polish NRG members broadly agree that “more Europe” should be the answer to the growing concerns of European citizens pertaining to globalisation and post-national politics. European integration should not be promoted as a means to limit sovereignty, but rather as a solution to outstanding challenges and for the general benefit of citizens. In this context, “more Europe” means “a Europe that does more to address citizens’ concerns.” To address current challenges, the Polish NRG members thus believe the EU should adopt a pragmatic approach that shuns both calls for the re-nationalisation of key policies or major steps towards a more federalist EU. Radical institutional changes could prove detrimental to devising common solutions to the challenges facing member states and Europe as a whole. One must look beyond the limitations of the EU’s multi-level governance and see the possibilities it generates. The Union’s legal-institutional framework is not ideal, but it does provide the necessary toolbox for the integration project to overcome the current challenges.

Most importantly, in light of the Polish government’s current standpoint, NRG members believe that the current “state of the union” does not warrant calls for the reversal of the integration process or the significant repatriation of competences back to member states. The debate on the optimal form of governance to address present challenges has been overshadowed by concerns about the role of the nation state, wrongly defined by Eurosceptic leaders as the exclusive vehicle of sovereignty and democratic governance.

The repatriation of EU powers back to the nation state would constitute a significant setback for Europe in an increasingly multipolar global scene. Following the observations of the President of the European Council, Donald Tusk,¹⁷ the disintegration of the EU would not lead to the restoration of some fabled full sovereignty of its member states, but to their real and factual dependence on great superpowers: the United States, Russia and China. Contrary to what populist Eurosceptics claim, staying together is the precondition for member states to become fully independent in a competitive multipolar world. The Rome Declaration states that if acting individually, member states will be side-lined by global dynamics. Standing together offers the best chance to influence them and to defend common interests and values.

One must nevertheless consider that the success of European integration has come at a price. The relative peace and prosperity on the continent as well as accelerating modernisation have raised the expectations of younger generations of Europeans. Despite the recent political and economic turbulence, The Polish NRG believes that the EU with its huge single market and attractive model of cooperation remains an economic powerhouse and a global trendsetter. The EU’s competitive advantage constitutes an important source of its soft power.

Europe needs a reality check to set aside wishful thinking about future integration. In challenging times, however, more prosperity and security can only be delivered through harmonisation and deeper integration

¹⁷ *United we stand, divided we fall*, Letter from President Donald Tusk to the 27 EU heads of state or government on the future of the EU before the Malta summit, 31 January 2017, <<http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2017/01/31/tusk-letter-future-europe/>>.

in selected policy areas. Many of the EU's alleged failures are the result of failed domestic policies that national politicians chose to blame on "Europe". Ironically, the same politicians often jealously guard the competences of their national polities, thus preventing the EU from effectively enhancing its '*performance legitimacy*' vis-à-vis citizens. The case of Britain in the run-up to the Brexit referendum constitutes a cruel demonstration of the dramatic consequences of irresponsible EU-bashing by national politicians.

The withdrawal of the UK from the EU is a test to Europe's integrity and unity. In the negotiations, the EU must stand firm in protecting its core values and principles and ensure that observance of EU fundamental freedoms, including the free movement of people, is a pre-condition for Britain's access to the common market.

ADDRESSING THE POPULIST CHALLENGE

As Brexit so clearly demonstrates, the rise of anti-European populism across Europe is perhaps the most immediate threat to its future. To counter this threat, it is necessary to strengthen the resilience of European citizens against political rhetoric full of misconceptions (such as fake news) and to protect common European values. The Rome Declaration mentioned that European leaders would make the EU stronger and more resilient through even greater unity and solidarity, and respect for common rules. These words must be followed by practical actions.

Those national governments that refuse to follow the values and rules enshrined in the Treaties and the *acquis* should be held responsible for their actions. If peer pressure (naming and shaming) fails to correct their behaviour, the EU institutions should consistently use the legal means at their disposal, including the provisions of Article 7 of TEU.

The phenomenon of post-truth politics, as exemplified by the LEAVE campaign before the Brexit referendum, is an important aspect of the crisis of democratic politics on both the national and European level. The revolution in social communication and the rise of Internet-based media has been compared to the 'Gutenberg revolution', for its potential to drastically change the nature of human interactions and for its far-reaching consequences for the political outlook of Europe and beyond. The new media environment has provided fertile ground for populist and Eurosceptic politicians. Education and information should become the cornerstones of citizen resilience to populism. The promotion of European values, such as the protection of human rights and the rule of law, combined with education about the real nature of European integration and its symbols are the order of the day for Brussels.

The ability of populist and Eurosceptic politicians to gain public support is to some extent a result of the 'naturalisation' of the benefits of integration. The predominant technocratic approach to cooperation involving limited engagement on the part of citizens in EU policy-making has failed to win their hearts. A compelling story is required for younger generations of EU citizens to identify with the European project. Having grown up with the reality of European integration, an increasing number of individuals take its benefits for granted, while complaining about the real or perceived costs of integration.

The Polish NRG members also argue that the ubiquitous narrative about the EU's '*democratic deficit*' should be critically re-examined. This discourse has gained in popularity in the aftermath of the currency crisis. Initially, it had a neutral connotation and was intended to help put forward interesting ideas about how to increase the

involvement of citizens in EU decision-making. Some of these ideas, if implemented, have the potential to bring EU institutions closer to citizens and increase a sense of trust and ownership among the public.

Today, the discourse on the EU's '*democratic deficit*' is being successfully used by Eurosceptic populists to blame the EU for its lack of democratic accountability and to warrant a retreat from the integration project. The recent "referendum-mania" on EU-related (and other) issues (in Greece, the Netherlands, United Kingdom, Hungary, etc.) shows that populists can easily hijack some democratic decision-making instruments, such as referenda. On the other hand, there is no evidence that referenda can effectively reduce the alleged democratic deficit, while they can, in fact, deepen political polarisation and paralyse important EU policies.

Policy recommendations

- It is of crucial importance to develop innovative tools that can enhance EU citizens' participation in policy debates and decision-making on a regular basis (including by improving available instruments, such as the European Citizen's Initiative), instead of voting on important matters by referendum. More attention should be given to improving the quality of citizens' involvement.
- The EU urgently needs a well-crafted communication strategy, encompassing the use of new information technologies (social media). The strategy should include the promotion of European values (such as the protection of human rights and the rule of law, but also tolerance, diversity and gender equality).
- The Eurosceptic narrative in the post-truth era is effective because it promotes emotions over facts. As part of the new communication strategy, the EU needs new positive and pro-European narratives with recognisable practical symbols (such as European Solidarity Corps or Erasmus). If such narratives are not popularised, there is a real danger of Europe reverting to the old tales favouring the nation state as the protagonist. This new narrative should clearly portray European identity as an added value, not a threat to national identity.
- Citizens' education is not a European competence, so Brussels' ability to act is largely limited. It therefore falls on the member states to implement proper EU-related education at schools to teach about the nature and history of European integration and its symbols in order to better equip youth with knowledge that will increase their resilience to anti-European fake news-based campaigns in the future. Such activities can be inspired, coordinated and financially supported by EU institutions.
- An effective system for disbursing funds directly to local and national Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) and to local and regional governments to bypass (often Eurosceptic) national governments has been championed as a worthwhile solution. In particular, a recent proposal by a group of prominent European CSOs to establish new *European Values Instruments* should be urgently considered and put into practice. The Europe for Citizens Programme of the European Commission as well as the grants from the European Parliament

for NGOs and media should be much better funded and the current excessively restrictive application and reporting rules should be revised.¹⁸

- The relation between communication technologies and the rise of populism is worth more attention (research-wise and politically), and effective ways of bringing back evidence-based debate into the political mainstream need to be properly discussed and put to use.

REGAINING PERFORMANCE LEGITIMACY

The Polish NRG members believe that the current populist backlash against the EU has both socio-cultural and socio-economic roots. As a result, any effective countering of the rise of populism must combine communication efforts and European value promotion with effective policies improving the situation of the most vulnerable groups of European citizens, as well as increasing the benefits of integration (and the awareness of such benefits) for the public at large. Regaining *'performance legitimacy'*, that is, demonstrating to citizens that the EU can deliver is therefore extremely urgent. The immediate priority concerns the need for the EU to address peoples' economic insecurities as highlighted in the Rome Declaration, which called for *"a Union which, based on sustainable growth, promotes economic and social progress as well as cohesion and convergence, while upholding the integrity of the internal market."* The Polish NRG members believe that cohesion policy is a prerequisite for any long-term plan dealing with European challenges.

Policy recommendations

- The EU must continue investing in economic development, especially in less-developed regions. Europe has to address the economic insecurities of certain groups of citizens. Addressing the problem of youth unemployment and other sources of the 'precarisation' of this social group should be considered one of the most immediate priorities. A common system of social security safeguards for the unemployed could mark a potential solution.
- When addressing social problems affecting some member states (e.g. deindustrialisation), the EU should make sure the integrity of the internal market is upheld. The Polish NRG has expressed particular concern about some of the solutions proposed during the debate on the so-called Posted Workers Directive.
- Delivering on the expectations for the EU to ensure inclusive economic development will require the creation of additional budgetary resources for the EU, such as the financial transaction tax.

¹⁸For more detailed ideas see: <<http://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/our-work/opinions-information-reports/opinions/financing-civil-society-organizations-eu>>.

- The EU must not forget to ‘market’ its successful policies – that is, to spread the message about the direct benefits of European integration to EU citizens. According to some NRG members, the EU should adopt a new approach to communication, based on experience and good practices from successful business marketing strategies. The EU institutions should unify their communication activities and focus on a single, simple, positive and benefits-oriented message. They could use “storytelling” techniques developed in the advertising industry and promote the Union as such rather than themselves. It is important for EU communication to be tailored to the specific situation and context of each member state.¹⁹

ECONOMIC GOVERNANCE AND INSTITUTIONAL REFORMS

The concept of a multi-speed Europe becoming the prevailing model for European integration occupies an important place in the on-going debates, and is perceived with strong misgivings in Poland. The Polish government and NRG members share the same view on the need to secure the inclusive nature of European policies. The 2017 Rome Declaration concludes that the “EU will act together, at different paces and intensity where necessary, while moving in the same direction, as it has been done in the past, in line with the Treaties and keeping the door open to those who want to join later. Our Union is undivided and indivisible.” However, the current discussion demonstrates that there are many interpretations of such statements – not just among member states, but also within the member states themselves.

On the other hand, one can observe that a multi-speed Europe has been the EU’s reality since the early 1990s. It enables integration to progress, as proven by the Schengen area or the Eurozone. An integration project that prevents ‘coalitions of the willing’ to lead integration efforts will end in stagnation or even disintegration. Hence, the alternative to a multi-speed Europe is *de facto* a speed-less Europe.

The potential threats of multi-speed integration (i.e. leaving countries such as Poland outside and without the possibility of joining new forms of integration) are recognised by both the government and the expert community. They constitute one of the few unifying factors in the Polish narrative on the future of Europe. The obligations arising from the Lisbon Treaty (article 280) regarding the instrument of enhanced co-operation should be respected at all times. Thus, the institutional and policy cohesion of the EU should be ensured, and no member states should be excluded from a particular policy area and locked permanently in a second tier of European integration. In a situation where Poland cannot join the Eurozone due to political and economic reasons, it is particularly important in the Polish debate that deepening the cooperation between members of the Eurozone proceeds within existing EU institutions and remains open to countries that have thus far not adopted the common currency.

Beyond doubt, the Eurozone is and will remain the anchor of economic and political integration in Europe. Presenting the Eurozone as a mere economic project would be a huge misstep. The monetary union has

¹⁹ Konrad Niklewicz, *We Need to Talk about the EU. European Political Advertising in the Post-Truth Era*, Brussels: Wilfried Martens Centre for European Studies, 2017.

significant political value for the future of European integration. As a result, Polish NRG members want an inclusive Eurozone that will allow non-members to remain active participants in shaping economic policies, with an emphasis on the importance of a community approach in economic policy-making.

As a non-euro member state, Poland has limited capabilities to stir developments within the Eurozone. In the context of the calls of President Macron for more integration in the Eurozone, Poland can be further marginalised in this crucial debate unless it actively moves towards adopting the common currency. This would put Poland at the heart of the integration process and prevent its marginalisation from the policy-making process. However, the current government is unwilling to advance Poland's Eurozone membership. Recently, a number of Polish experts and some opposition politicians began calling for a serious discussion over the question of whether or not to enter the Eurozone. Most members of the Polish NRG strongly endorse this view.

Policy recommendations

- Starting from the discussions in the expert community and continuing with fact-based public debate, a clarification must be made regarding the understanding of such concepts as 'core Europe' and 'flexible/enhanced cooperation'. The current narrative in the EU often equates both terms, signalling a possible rupture in integration between states that are members of the core group inside the Eurozone, and those outside of the monetary union.
- Any initiatives for deeper integration among a group of members should observe the principle of inclusiveness as highlighted in the 2017 Rome Declaration, namely "in line with the Treaties and keeping the door open to those who want to join later."
- Europe does not need to reinvent the wheel. Before any decision introducing new institutions (or principles), the EU must make sure the available solutions (instruments at its disposal in the current treaty framework) are being utilised to their maximum potential. Legal changes or a set of new institutions are to be introduced at the right time, not necessarily as soon as possible.
- More economic integration is necessary for European states to compete with global superpowers, although there is no agreement among the EU27 whether further cooperation requires an immediate acceleration (e.g. tax harmonisation) or whether it should remain a step-by-step process. The Polish NRG tends to agree that such changes need to be introduced in a pragmatic and incremental manner. Most importantly, the general public needs to be convinced as to the need for such changes before, and not after, they are decided and implemented.
- Brexit should not be an argument for reversing the integration process for the rest of the EU. On the contrary, it should be seen as an opportunity for the remaining members to step up their cooperation in crucial policy areas, such as economic governance, migration or security.

SECURITY POLICY

The Polish NRG members recognise the importance of EU cooperation in the field of security as one of the few policy areas where consensus, both among member states and across the domestic political spectrum, can be built. Considering global insecurities and concerns about the transatlantic alliance resulting from recent political changes in the US, deepening European cooperation is the order of the day. However, the NRG members also agree that progress in this area should be pragmatic to avoid weakening existing security arrangements with new initiatives.

Russia remains the main security challenge for Poland, and NATO is believed to be the only concrete protection against a possible military threat from this country. NATO is seen as necessary for the security of their country by 91% of Poles, 81% of Hungarians, 75% of Czechs and 56% of Slovaks.²⁰ In the eyes of the Poles, the EU has correctly responded to Russian resurgence by imposing sanctions following its annexation of Crimea and *de facto* military occupation of parts of Eastern Ukraine.

Security is a multifaceted issue and should be approached accordingly. In that regard, the EU should be ready to address both dimensions of *'hard'* security, i.e. the external (military intervention, cyber threats) and internal (extremism, terrorism) threats. Polish NRG members agree that NATO should remain the pillar of European *'hard'* security in the short to medium-term perspective. The EU should also consider boosting military cooperation in areas where added value to NATO can be demonstrated.

Another top priority for the EU in the near future is to develop the ability to respond to cyber security threats and information warfare. In this context, EU institutions and member states should focus their attention on Russia's continuous use of propaganda and hybrid war tactics to destabilise the EU. The Russian government is aggressively employing a wide range of tools and instruments, such as think tanks and special foundations (Russkiy Mir), special agencies (Rossotrudnichestvo), multilingual TV stations (RT), pseudo-news agencies and multimedia services (Sputnik), as well as cross-border social and religious groups to wage its disinformation war. The European Parliament resolution on EU strategic communication to counteract propaganda is an important step forward.²¹ However, practical implementation measures need to follow.

Policy recommendations

- The EU should continue to strengthen military cooperation among member states. A common European army is a solution in the long-term perspective. In the short to medium-term, both PESCO and the European Defence Fund should be developed in such a way as to ensure their inclusivity and coherence with NATO commitments.

²⁰ *Global Attitudes Survey*, Pew Research Centre, Spring 2017.

²¹ European Parliament resolution of 23 November 2016 on EU strategic communication to counteract propaganda against it by third parties (2016/2030(INI)), P8_TA(2016)0441.

- Improving the effectiveness of defence spending by developing a true defence market should be a priority of European cooperation in the field of security.
- The military threat from the Russian Federation should not be underestimated. The sanctions against Russia must be upheld for as long as Russia continues to occupy (directly or by proxy) Crimea and parts of Eastern Ukraine.
- The EU has to take due account of the multifaceted nature of the security threats. Disinformation and propaganda should be given proper attention as security challenges in the near future. For that purpose, initiatives such as East StratCom²² should receive sufficient human and financial resources.
- The European Energy Union should also be seen as a response to the broadly understood security concerns of some member states, including Poland. The EU should actively address economic and political threats resulting from the overdependence of some member states on Russia for energy resources. The European Commission should investigate initiatives such as NORDSTREAM 2 from that perspective. Facts about energy market in the EU and the percentage of gas coming from Russia must be clearly shown to EU citizens to better explain the Central and East Europeans concerns.
- Last, but not least, more debate on security challenges for Europe and mutual understanding is needed among the politicians, experts and opinion makers from the different member states. In particular, the dual perspective of Eastern and Southern members should be a topic of discussion, and the different fears and concerns should be mutually acknowledged and reflected in EU-level policy decisions.

MIGRATION AND REFUGEE POLICY

Across the European Union, the refugee crisis dominated the political agenda and the public discourse about migration issues. Poland was no exception. The scale and speed of the refugee crisis should not, however, overshadow the vital importance of enhancing intra-EU mobility and effectively managing migration from third-country nationals to boost EU's economic performance.

The refugee crisis of 2015 has not affected Poland directly. The country has not welcomed any refugees from Northern Africa thus far. The political fallout from the crisis, however, has been significant. In this context, the EU decision to establish refugee quotas has resulted in an anti-refugee, nativist and Islamophobic backlash. The current government's policy of refusing to accept any refugees has strong support among the public, and threats to sanction Poland for non-compliance appear to strengthen anti-EU sentiments and undermine broad public support for membership. Clearly, from a Polish perspective, any system of EU

²² The European External Action Service East Stratcom Task Force was set up to challenge Russia's ongoing disinformation campaigns.

mandated refugee quotas is likely to lead to a negative political outcome. Instead, a newly forged Common Asylum Policy – with appropriate budgetary allocations and a set of positive financial and political incentives for member states – would have a better chance of being accepted and implemented.

Recent events have demonstrated that the EU's external borders need better protection. The Polish NRG therefore welcomes the decision to establish a European Border Guard, which should be given sufficient resources and powers to convince sceptical Europeans that when it comes to refugees and migration, the EU is part of the solution and not part of the problem.

Last, but not least, in order to enhance general public support for EU migration policy, there is a need for smart communication activities regarding EU asylum policies. A bias-free narrative on migration must be introduced, explaining the need for the EU and member states to adopt policies in accordance with international humanitarian standards. The EU should also communicate why Europe needs qualified migrants to meet the future needs of the EU labour market in view of the existing demographic challenges.

Such information campaigns should be tailored to the specific situation of each member state, taking into consideration the differing experiences and sensibilities of the local populace. At the same time, there is a need for discussion and the exchange of experiences between the different countries and regions, for example, CEE and the Southern EU members.

Policy recommendations

- The EU needs to continue to develop community-based institutions and policies to more effectively respond to challenges resulting from migration flows, as well as the concerns of the general public.
- To deal with migration flows more effectively, the EU should closely cooperate with third countries and international organisations (UN). At the same time, member states should significantly increase their contribution to the EU's development and humanitarian assistance programs for third countries most affected by the refugee crisis.
- Additional resources should be allocated to local authorities willing to adopt more open refugee and migration policies than those of their national governments. Similar support should be granted to local CSOs with experience in migrant integration and with knowledge about the specificity of each county and its public opinion. This is especially needed in Poland, where the current government is not willing to support such activities and organisations, and has blocked some important funding programmes for political reasons.

CONCLUSION

This report is an attempt to outline the Polish perspective on the future of Europe. A crucial challenge for the authors, as was mentioned earlier in the report, has been the profound polarisation of the Polish political debate and a lack of consensus on the most pressing issues facing Poland and Europe. The public debate is filled with emotions but often short of arguments. The present report has been written from a clearly pro-European viewpoint, reflecting the views of the authors and members of the National Reflection Group. We believe that this perspective is legitimate in the light of one crucial fact: a clear majority of Poles supports EU membership, while support for a hypothetical “Polexit” remains marginal. Either in government or in the opposition, leading Polish politicians have also repeatedly expressed their support for Polish membership and their opposition to any British-style discussion about exiting the EU. This broad support for EU membership does not preclude many critical opinions about the current state of the Union and almost equally numerous, often contradictory, ideas about necessary reforms.

Poland has not been directly buffeted by many aspects of the EU ‘*poly-crisis*’, such as the economic recession, the debt crisis, the influx of refugees or terrorist attacks. This matter notwithstanding, the poly-crisis has impacted Polish perceptions of integration and the debate about the future of Europe. While the public remains largely pro-European, on some critical issues (such as adoption of the euro and accepting refugees), most Polish politicians and a majority of citizens have refused to fulfil the obligations resulting from EU membership. This opposition and recent international and European criticism about the situation of the rule of law have undoubtedly weakened Poland’s position in the EU and its ability to effectively promote its interests on such issues as the Posted Workers Directive.

From the Polish perspective, the rise of authoritarian populism is a crucial existential challenge for the EU (and for Poland’s place in Europe). A key message from the discussions of the Polish NRG was that to move the discussion on the future of Europe forward, politicians and analysts should be wary of adopting the language and rhetoric of populists and Eurosceptics in their diagnosis of the nature and causes of the current crisis. Polish experts tend to see the current European crisis as a sum of national crises resulting from national policy failures and the shortcomings of national democratic institutions and party systems. While some of the EU institution reactions to these failures were debatable or may have exacerbated the crises, blaming the EU is first and foremost the tactic of unscrupulous politicians seeking to boost their domestic support. This habit should not be mistaken with a serious analysis of the state of the EU, and should not form a basis for recommendations of policy reforms.

According to the Polish NRG, the fact that the EU is mistakenly viewed as a reason for the current crisis, and not as a possible effective solution to new challenges, is due to an evident problem of communication on several levels. Political elites and experts involved in European affairs seem to be short of ideas on how European integration should be presented to the new generation of European citizens. This is why this report calls for a new communication strategy and a new European narrative to counter the omnipresent Eurosceptic and populist narratives.

In a rather paradoxical way, the past successes of European integration have become a liability for the EU. Having set relatively high socio-economic benchmarks for itself in the past, the EU has in recent years failed to demonstrate to Europeans that it can still deliver on their expectations, which have been growing and changing over the years. The popular belief is that younger generations of Europeans no longer consider the old slogans of “peace, stability and prosperity” as sufficient to embark on further integration. This hypothesis should not be taken for granted: as shown in a recent study,²³ many young Europeans pay considerable attention to peace and security, while needing to be constantly reminded about the merits of integration. Nevertheless, new communication strategies and new narratives will not work unless the EU can demonstrate it can deliver in the areas where its citizens expect it to act, such as stable economic growth, security and migration policy.

To escape the present conundrum, the EU must develop a new communication prowess. Most importantly, it needs to use both existing and new competences to solve the real problems facing citizens and member states. This pragmatic and problem-solving orientation should guide the current debates on the future of Europe.

²³ J. Kucharczyk, A. Łada, G. Schöler (eds.), *Exit, voice or loyalty? Young people on Europe and democracy Case studies from Austria, the Czech Republic, Germany, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia*, Institute of Public Affairs, Bertelsmann Stiftung, Warsaw-Gütersloh, 2017.

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