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Prepare for a New Europe

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In his autobiographical and excellent overview of culture and society in Europe at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, “The World of Yesterday”, the Austrian writer Stefan Zweig showed how quickly the categories and concepts describing the world around us can become obsolete. The lead up to World War I and the 1920s were separated by a mere decade, but when viewed in retrospect those two periods seemed to have little in common. For Zweig writing in 1940, that entire bygone world was nothing more than an implausible legend.

No surprise, then, that Zweig’s book is currently one of the most read and most quoted. There is a keen sensation that the post-Cold War era is in inexorable decline (or has already reached its nadir). Alongside this we see that the concepts and convictions which have thus far organised our world have become dated (read, outdated). Globalisation and interdependence until recently have been seen as the guarantors of peace and cooperation. These have turned out to be the source of conflicts and the instruments of pressure. “It’s the economy, stupid!” has ceased to be treated dogmatically — the problems of identity and culture move people just as much as their financial situation. Belief in the inevitable triumph of liberal democracy has been replaced by questions about the alternatives.

This miscalculation is just as relevant to the European Union. This is not merely the case in regard to the wave of populism and Euroscepticism which is washing over the entire continent. What is more important is that this, alongside other factors (in particular Donald Trump becoming the president of the United States), is profoundly, though not yet entirely visibly, changing the fundamental assumptions upon which the project of European integration rests. The methods and standards of action appropriate in a given field are termed “paradigms” in academic texts. There is much to show that the revision of the three paradigms of integration which is currently under way is leading to an inevitable parting of ways with “The World of Yesterday”. How the nature and consequences of this process are

understood will be of the utmost importance when considering the key task which Poland faces in the coming months and years — the need to find its place in the new Europe¹.

Security instead of freedom

European integration was traditionally based on a simple principle — it was above all aimed at (market) liberalisation and more openness (of borders). It is built on the foundations of the four freedoms (the free movement of people, goods, capital and services). Since the outset integration was every bit a freedom project as a peace project — perhaps more so. This concerns both the value system and the principles of the political system. The fathers of integration were guided by the conviction that their project would certainly lead to strengthening liberal democracy in member states and that this form of government is the best guarantee that the age of wars in the Old Continent will be consigned to the past. This paradigm of freedom in its previous incarnation was not in contradiction to security. On the contrary, freedom, liberalisation, globalisation were all understood as guarantors of security both in economic and hard terms. This understanding of freedom, in particular regarding market liberalisation, was often criticised. It has been said that the European Union does an excellent job in setting free market forces, but does not care enough for normal citizens who the free market treats with its customary brutality. Put another way, the EU lifts trade and investment barriers but fails to guarantee social protection.

Considering the economic crisis, technological changes and the persistently high unemployment level, neither the member states nor the EU institutions can remain indifferent. Indeed, the EU recently passed the packet to liberalise services. This bears witness to the fact that it is acting in line with the rules of the world of yesterday. But the winds of today have changed direction. It is becoming ever more frequent to discuss freedom in terms of its “excesses” and populists are feeding on the rising social need for stability, certainty and the protection of property. This spells a return to security understood along traditional lines — strong identity and being cut off from the world outside. Employees concerned about cut-price competition of the labour market (social dumping) are demanding greater controls of economic migration. Economic protectionism (or, to put it more delicately, “patriotism”) is returning to favour as an instrument which can secure the interests of a country’s citizens. For many people the price of security (or an illusion of it), e.g. the return of border controls, does not seem excessively high when compared to the perception of the threat of terrorism or the changes in the local environment due to migration. This means that the force which most strongly shapes the political imagination of societies and elites today is no longer the wish for greater openness and integration which has driven change in Europe over the last decades, but rather an overwhelming desire to increase security and stability.

The paradigm of security will change the member states and this in turn will change the EU. Its influence can be clearly seen in the above-mentioned area of protecting the labour market and of economic migration — not only in the UK. The German minister of labour, the social democrat Andrea Nahles, has called for economic migrants to be prevented from claiming child support for children living outside Germany. Austria’s chancellor, Christian Kern (also a social democrat) went much further in his “Plan A” (agenda for Austria) which was presented at the beginning of January, when he announced that he will aim to limit the influx of workers from the European Union to Austria, introducing the principle that Austrian citizens will have precedence when applying for a job. In the past only Eurosceptic populists called for this. Now it is heard from the mainstream left.

¹ I greatly appreciate the comments on this text provided by Olaf Osica, Katarzyna Pełczyńska-Nałęcz and Aleksander Smolar.

If Britain had wanted to remain a member of the EU's single market and was granted concessions in the form of limiting the influx of EU migrants, this could be contagious. A hard Brexit, i.e. London leaving the common market, may allay these concerns somewhat, but it will not eliminate them. Measures taken to limit benefit tourism are the area where the European elite can most easily show their societies that they understand their concern and need for security. However, they can easily degenerate into far-reaching encroachments into the four freedoms. Nevertheless, claims that the free movement of people is not a condition for the single market to function well are not the sole domain of politicians seeking social support — experts from the renowned Brussels-based think tank, Bruegel have also put forward this idea.

Perhaps these measures are necessary in order to calm citizens down and, more importantly, to stop them from drifting towards populist stances opposed to European integration. Nevertheless, replacing the paradigm of freedom with the paradigm of security will certainly have a decisive influence on the shape of EU policy and how it functions; this will also concern its finances. One of the most important ideas for stabilising the eurozone today is for its members to introduce a joint additional European-wide unemployment security system. This would serve as an “automatic stabiliser” of the eurozone (meaning that in situations of a sudden increase in unemployment levels in a given country, the cost of this would not automatically translate into excessive strain for the budget of that country but would be distributed across the entire zone). It would also tackle the need to create a social pillar of the EU which could build trust in its institutions and policies which thus far have been mainly associated with liberalisation and austerity. In order to implement this doubtless necessary (and currently rather distant) project, it would mean the financial structure of the EU would have to go through major changes, to the detriment of countries outside the eurozone.

Nevertheless, the paradigm of security does not encroach on the social sphere alone. The issues of internal security, connected with terrorism and migration, are no less important. How European societies react to these challenges will be decisive in the future of the model which so far has been based on far-reaching civic freedoms and the idea of universal human rights. A recent report from Amnesty International is a good example of this evolution — it demonstrates that the paradigm of security lays out how anti-terrorist legislation moves the legal situation in EU countries in the direction of restricting freedom.

Refugee policy is equally important. When asking how to control the influx of refugees into Europe — which is necessary to maintain social order — while also guaranteeing international rights (the 1951 Refugee Convention) and the principles of humanitarianism, the significance of this goes beyond the dimension of crisis management. A Europe based on values cannot allow itself to defend its borders by violating the principle of non-refoulement (returning refugees without facilitating an asylum application) or by limiting itself to the so-called “Australian solution” (permanent detention in camps in third countries). However, the search for a quick solution to the refugee crisis along the lines of the paradigm of security is in fact pushing European elites down this road. The erosion of European standards in this field could have far-reaching results, undermining the axiological framework of the EU and pushing back the legal and psychological borders of what can be accepted and imagined.

Flexibility instead of cohesion

The changes and reforms are a response to the greater need for security and to the differing interests of individual EU countries. Will it be possible to implement them in all 27 member states? The decision on Brexit demonstrated that the rejection of the model of the EU as an entity leading towards



relative uniformity (even if the British decision was more complicated than that) can have dramatic consequences. As integration moved forwards, particularly concerning further EU expansion, the discussion of how to balance the varied integration possibilities and ambitions of member states gained strength. Many terms have been popular inside and outside academic debates: flexibility, varied geometry, hard core, avant garde. Varied integration has for a long time been a fact. Not all countries joined the Schengen zone, not all joined the eurozone, some want to remain neutral in military terms and have steered away from common defence. Despite these conditions, what identified integration was based on the philosophy of “ever closer union”. It assumed the existence of an imprecisely defined horizon of the integration process which all countries were heading towards, sometimes at a different pace and in a different choreography. Flexibility was viewed as an unpleasant necessity, a deviation from the rule, a transitory problem which needed to somehow be managed rather than a permanent element of the architecture of integration. In other words, the image of the EU was governed by the paradigm of cohesion — the more cooperation and proximity between member states, building up their interdependence and mutual solidarity, the better for the durability and stability of the project.

The provision for “ever closer union” is still in force and was not affected by the pre-referendum agreement between the EU and Britain which weakened it and which finally was not implemented (it was intended to persuade British citizens to vote to remain in the EU but, as we know, was unsuccessful). However, neither this purpose of integration nor the paradigm of cohesion now organise thinking of the future shape of the EU. In the past it was necessary to limit the negative consequences of varied integration. Today it is increasingly seen as a promising solution to the problems which the EU is struggling with. Advocates of increased flexibility as a principle for how the EU functions believe that the only method to prevent the EU from falling apart is to loosen the bonds of integration and to allow member states to have a greater say in which joint projects they wish to participate. For the Visegrad countries, “flexible solidarity” is their response to the trauma caused when attempts were made to impose relocation quotas. France and Italy are in favour of a return to a “hard core”, thus demonstrating a reluctance towards an EU expanded eastwards. It is not entirely clear how a flexible EU should function — on the basis on concentric circles, or centres of strengthened cooperation in different areas of politics, but the paradigm of flexibility has certainly captured the imagination of politicians and analysts.

The supporters of flexibility as the new principle governing the EU argue that it must include the assumption that no country should suffer any consequences for refusing to participate in projects of enhanced cooperation. As attractive as this demand may be on paper, it is unlikely that it can realistically be put into practice. The EU’s cohesion was always a condition, even a synonym of the solidarity of member states. Should a loosening of the bonds by way of introducing more easily accessible varied integration levels occur, then it is difficult to imagine that this would not be accompanied by an erosion of the fundamental values which the EU is based on. Above all it should be expected that increased cooperation among a group of countries in a particular area will generate an enhanced sensation of proximity and solidarity, which will inevitably be detrimental for those countries outside this group.

The eurozone is of course the best example of this. Even without the introduction of automatic transfer mechanisms (Eurobonds), the awareness of the scale and consequence of links between its members proves that the willingness to offer financial aid to countries within the eurozone is higher than to those outside it. The creation of the European Stability Mechanism, the European Central Bank’s easy-money policy and the banking union are all expressions of this stance, as is the Germany’s inclination to come to the aid of countries of the South in its own interests (linked to interdependence).



Further steps taken for greater eurozone integration, such as the above-mentioned unemployment insurance, a common budget and Eurobonds will inevitably lead to negative consequences for the remaining EU countries in the form of: reduced financial solidarity with them, a relative reduction in their credibility on the financial markets, a deterioration in their banking systems relative to the eurozone, and an increase in the costs incurred in acquiring loans on the financial markets. Furthermore, following the UK's departure from the EU, the ability of the countries outside the eurozone to secure their interests will be negligible — London had been — in pursuit of its own interests — a powerful ally for them whom Brussels and the national capitals had to take into account.

A further example is provided by the possible enhanced cooperation on migration and asylum policy. Organising this area and subjecting the influx of migrants (in particular of refugees) to more effective verification and limits will be among the most important challenges in the immediate future. It is difficult to imagine that the response to this problem could be restricted merely to strengthening the protection of external borders. This is essential but massively insufficient, not only for humanitarian reasons. The EU above all needs close cooperation with the countries of origin of the migrants, mainly to ensure the efficacy of the policy of readmission of migrants who did not receive asylum in Europe. But this cooperation comes at a price — it must also include: assurances that there will be legal channels for economic migration to Europe; the significant participation of EU countries in the policy of direct resettlement of refugees from third countries to Europe (which also cuts off the revenue stream of criminal people smuggling gangs); financial support for those countries and cooperation with them in the field of security. Clearly not all the EU countries will want to take part in joint efforts of this kind. However, we need to stress that without them the administration of the migration and refugee problem will never be effective. However, the group of countries which would decide to take on this challenge jointly and to bear the burden of a policy thus defined will in consequence be guided by a greater sense of mutual solidarity than they would feel towards the countries which refused to take on this responsibility (for whatever reasons).

The field of defence policy, i.e. in the area of external security, also shows this same dilemma. The cooperation of some countries would in part be based on the integration of their arms industries, joint purchases of military matériel, pooling resources and making common use of them, and finally the creation of joint military units. This will by its nature create stronger bonds between participating countries than other issues. Certainly not every area of enhanced cooperation will lead to such a strong perception of solidarity as is the case with the examples here described. However, what is most important is that an à la carte Europe, in which each country has the right to choose how far it wishes to integrate in particular areas will not necessarily end up as a multi-centred union or lead to a gradual disintegration. On the contrary — assuming that a large group of countries (led by Germany) will participate in all or the majority of joint integration projects, the result of this process may be a de facto hard core of integration and a periphery bereft of influence on the direction the EU takes and its policy.

A post-Atlantic Europe, not transatlantic

This question is crucial in connection with the third, and possibly most important, change in the paradigm which is related to Donald Trump's presidency. European integration was always essentially a transatlantic undertaking. The significance of the United States was not determined solely by the fact that Washington offered Europe security guarantees (firstly the western part and later a large chunk of the east). It was equally important that it was overwhelmingly in America's interests for the countries of Europe to be united and in close cooperation. The role the US played at the dawn of

European integration was invaluable. Also in the ensuing decades the US saw (a united) Europe as an important partner in promoting its world view based on international institutions, free trade, globalisation and above all on liberal and democratic values. In spite of divisions, e.g. during the Iraq war, this transatlantic paradigm remained in force.

The first statements and measures of President Trump praising Brexit, encouraging other countries to leave the EU, and criticising the EU as a project which only serves the interests of Germany may demonstrate that this approach will change during his administration. They certainly demonstrate that the values thus far constituting the foundation of transatlantic cooperation will no longer occupy that role. There is no doubt that this development of America's policy on Europe will significantly impact its security and internal stability. Josef Joffe, the renowned German international publisher defined the US some years ago as "Europe's pacifier", i.e. a power which can assuage Europe's internal quarrels and conflicts by its policy of being a liberal hegemon. America's rejection of the idea that European unity is a good in itself may inflict worse damage on Europe than any potential 'big deal' between Washington and Moscow.

The significance of the post-Atlantic paradigm for the EU will arise based on how individual member states will react to a change in strategy (should one take hold) and on specific moves made by the American administration. The EU should certainly not play down the potential these reactions have for disintegration. The most important areas are of course security and defence. Already during his election campaign Trump described NATO as "obsolete" However, this does not need to lead to Europe closing ranks in order to develop the EU's effective defence capabilities. This direction was in fact already outlined in the EU global strategy adopted in June 2016 which emphasised the need to increase the EU's efforts in this area — regardless of the result of the US election. In turn, in December 2016 the European Council adopted conclusions which lay out the further agenda of works such as the "defence union" project. Immediately following Trump's victory, the leaders of Germany and France made clear statements that the EU should take greater responsibility for its own security. The consolidation of the EU as a response to the uncertainty coming from Washington is the main message Angela Merkel currently communicates to her European partners.

The way in which this consolidation plays out and how the remaining EU countries will respond to it will impact not only security in the EU, but above all its unity. One threat it may face are the attempts of individual countries or regions of the EU to seek bilateral agreements with the United States, in response to what Trump has indicated as a transactional approach to international affairs. It is not currently possible to evaluate just how tempting this bilateralism will be. Its chances of success appear to be very limited. This is in particular the case because factors such as a weakening of the American security guarantees should there be a US-Russian rapprochement are precisely those factors which would motivate countries to consider this option (e.g. Poland, the Baltic states, Romania) but would simultaneously rule out the prospect of bilateral guarantees. However, it appears that the idea of the US having stronger bonds with the Central and Eastern and the South-Eastern regions of Europe is present, at least in considerations of the Polish Three-Seas-Initiative. The vision of Poland as the leader of cooperation between countries from the Baltic to the Adriatic and the Black Sea, seeking regional partnership with the US may seem attractive against the backdrop of a shake-up in Europe and the distrust of its western European partners, in particular in the area of security. Nevertheless, parallel attempts to build a European defence union and possible efforts to more firmly establish the US in the EU or in a part of the EU (at what price?) may lead to serious political divergences in the structure of the EU, regardless of the prospects both these projects have of success.

The issue of whether Europe's reaction to Trump's moves will be joint or diversified will be a difficult and dangerous test of the EU's unity, also in many other issues. Possible tension in trade issues (e.g. removing import tariffs on cars to the US) will require a response from the EU. How this is drawn up and the final shape it takes (when it is prepared by the European Commission) may bring about internal conflicts. The prospect of a trade war with America seems rather unlikely but it does seem worthwhile to ask whether a group of 27 countries can find consensus when a section of them wishes to react more firmly than others to Washington's manoeuvres. Consular issues and others which have already been made by Trump may also have a polarising effect on EU countries, leading some to offer greater concessions and others to taking a tougher stance.

This situation could also come about due to intentional measures taken in Washington should Trump determine that the EU is more of a competitor than an ally and opted to attempt to weaken or disintegrate it. The positive reaction of a section of the European populist right to Trump's victory, his criticism of the EU and anti-establishment and anti-liberal rhetoric certifies to the new problems awaiting Europe. Above all Trump's rhetoric pushes the boundaries of public discourse in favour of groups who dislike the EU, liberal democratic values and the paradigm of freedom, i.e. precisely those values which have so far shaped the process of European integration. Naturally, speculation on the impact of Trump's presidency will remain speculative up until his EU strategy takes solid form. However, the uncertainty connected with the post-Atlantic paradigm alone is a serious threat to the European project and all the more means that the pre-Trump era can be discussed in terms of "the world of yesterday".

Poland in the new Europe

A Europe defined by the new paradigms is for Poland an international arena less certain, less stable and less beneficial regarding its key interests: security, prosperity and the solidarity of other EU members. The greatest threat would be a profound erosion or worse, a collapse of the EU's structures. This could lead to Poland lying outside the core of the EU as defined by Germany. However, due to its potential, to the particular significance of its relations with the US and Germany, and to its role as the largest country in the eastern part of the EU, Poland will be a crucial player in processes which will spark a revision of the premises which European integration has so far been based on. This is why Poland in a new Europe will need considered and responsible policy, the ability to cooperate and reach compromises with its partners and also to resist the temptation to take action which could accelerate the process of disintegration. This evaluation leads to four conclusions in particular.

Firstly, it may be impossible to avoid a more flexible EU (by way of loosening the institutional framework towards a geometric integration or even an *à la carte* Europe). Poland should not, though, be an advocate of this divergence nor should it delude itself that it would be in its interests. In the final reckoning it is not the formal treaty provisions or intergovernmental settlements (e.g. guaranteeing other countries access to circles of enhanced cooperation or ensuring equal treatment of all EU members, regardless of their level of integration) which will have most importance. What will be more important is the degree to which a given member state is willing to take on joint responsibility for the EU as a whole and to solve its problems. In other words, the level of solidarity which other member states feel towards Poland, their perception of being connected and their willingness to defend it, will be in proportion to how deeply rooted Poland is in the EU in its main areas of cooperation. In the longer term, the model of the EU as a formation comprised of various, less or more interconnected circles of cooperation is certainly an illusion. Membership of these circles (the euro, migration policy, defence policy etc.) will over time begin to overlap; however, Germany will be at the core of them all. Now that the UK has left the EU (which otherwise could theoretically have served as an alternative centre of

cooperation, outside the “core”), this centring of the EU on Germany will be particularly pronounced. This means that it is not the future shape of a “flexible” EU which will be of the utmost importance for Poland but rather whether it chooses to take advantage of this by remaining at the margins or by more strongly establishing itself in the EU. It is not difficult to interpret this evaluation as a further argument in favour of Poland joining the eurozone.

Secondly, Poland should show restraint — both in symbolic-rhetorical and in political terms — in taking measures which would not strengthen EU structures and institutions but harm them. This above all concerns the coming months and the discussion on the future of the EU in the context of the “Bratislava process” and the commemoration of integration in March this year. Among the demands which are unhelpful in solving the EU’s current problems are: criticism of the EU as a project dominated by its largest countries (in line with Trump’s rhetoric); calls for nation states to be strengthened (particularly emphasised by the governments of Hungary and Poland); ideas of institutional changes aimed at weakening the European Commission; and strengthening the binding force of national parliaments. They can in fact lead the debate within the EU astray. At the level of the political message, Poland should support the view that, even though “more Europe” is not an antidote for all ills, nevertheless, in many areas it is impossible to face up to the EU’s problems merely by maintaining the status quo or by deciding to take a step backwards. Perhaps in some areas the EU needs more intergovernmental (and not community-based) cooperation, but if Poland takes this stance it will only be treated as a credible partner if it is prepared to fully and actively participate in those forms of cooperation (e.g. regarding the defence of the EU’s external borders).

Thirdly, Poland should — above all in its own interests — work towards preventing the looming crisis in transatlantic relations from turning into a profound and lasting split between the European Union and the United States. Poland (and the other countries of the EU) has no influence on how relations between Washington and Moscow will develop. In the framework of the EU, though, its voice can have a certain significance. However, the level at which Poland will help shape European policy in the post-Atlantic paradigm in line with its own interests will to a large degree depend on the state of its relations with its key partners in the EU. The comparison to EU-Russia relations is automatic (also because the EU’s political elites see Trump as at least as big a problem as Putin) — in both cases the efficacy of Polish diplomacy will in large part be a function of Poland’s position in the EU. This is why Poland’s priority should be to strengthen its bonds with the EU rather than loosen them. It should also refrain from taking steps which could disrupt European unity. Action taken to maintain (the EU’s and Poland’s) close relations with the US should not cross the red line of the overriding importance of the EU’s cohesion. The temptation to reach bilateral or regional arrangements with the US (regardless of their merely illusory chances of success) should be rejected also because the transactional approach and the Trump administration’s essentially unpredictable policy cannot be seen to guarantee Poland’s security outside of NATO. The real and measurable character of Poland’s links with Europe, in particular with Germany, ensure they take priority.

Fourthly, in the new EU reality, many difficult decisions await Poland which are far from the win-win model which had previously shaped the imagination of European integration as a process where everybody benefits. This truth remains in place but in the area of strategic moves, the coming months and years will require Poland to reach difficult compromises and to take steps which may run counter the majority of public opinion in the country. This social dimension of European policy is very important. As we showed in a recent analysis published by the Stefan Batory Foundation, “Polish views of the EU: the illusion of consensus” (authors: Adam Balcer, Piotr Buras, Grzegorz Gromadzki, Eugeniusz Smolar), the belief that Polish society broadly supports the EU is based on a gross simplification. It is

true that over 80% of Poles support Poland's EU membership, but their willingness for further integration and taking on greater responsibility for Europe is limited. Furthermore, due to the experiences of history and its value system, Polish society (or at least a large section of it) is prone to nationalist and isolationist arguments which reveal an aversion to outsiders and Western Europe. The best strategy in the time of "new paradigms" seems to be for Poland to become more firmly established in Europe (and not just to maintain the status quo). For this to happen, a large section of society will need to be convinced. It is necessary to redefine Poland's "pro-Europeanness" and to re-implant it into society again. This is a task for the section of the political scene and the elite which identifies with the conclusions of this analysis. It is doubtless an extremely difficult task considering it runs counter to the current dominant trend.

Translated by Nicholas Furnival

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