

## What is Europe Aiming at?

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**What is Europe Aiming at?** The problems faced in the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century by the integrating Europe are quite serious and require an effective action. The above is true for both economic, political and social issues. Economic dilemmas are best seen in the Economic and Monetary Union, competitiveness and economic growth. Their importance has been raised even higher by the now overwhelming global economic downturn. Political issues are invariably connected with the future vision of the European Union, and relate, among others, to the identity, security, stability and prominence of individual states. The formal empowerments of the EU remain debatable, especially when seen through the context of (non)ratification of the EU Constitution and the Lisbon Treaty. Social problems focus mainly on the demographic decline, illegal immigration, dissimilation, inequalities in life quality, etc. The EU has to be constantly guided by the demand that these difficulties are effectively surmounted.

**Key words:** European Union, European integration, economic, political and social issues, European identity.

**Kam smeruje Európa?** Problémy, ktorým zjednocujúca Európa čelila v prvom desaťročí 21. Storočia, sú veľmi závažné a vyžadujú si efektívne riešenia. Vyššie uvedené platí pre hospodárske, politické a sociálne problémy. Hospodárske dilemy sú najlepšie viditeľné v hospodárskej a menovej únii, otázke konkurencieschopnosti a ekonomického rastu. Ich význam ešte zdôrazňuje súčasný hospodársky pokles v globálnom merítku. Politické problémy sú vždy spojené s budúcou víziou Európskej únie a týkajú sa okrem iného identity, bezpečnosti, stability a dôležitosti jednotlivých národných štátov. Formálne splnomocnenie v EU zostáva diskutabilné, a to najmä pri pohľade v súvislosti s (ne)ratifikáciou Európskej ústavy a Lisabonskej zmluvy. Sociálne problémy súvisia predovšetkým s demografickým poklesom, ilegálnou imigráciou, v nerovnostiach v kvalite života. Európska únia musí reflektovať požiadavku, ako tieto problémy účinne prekonať.

**Kľúčové slová:** Európska únia, európska integrácia, hospodárske, politické a spoločenské problémy, európska identita

### INTRODUCTION

European integration spans many different, in terms of size, importance and political and economic wealth, countries in Europe. Previous experience of the

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European Union indicates its enlargement invariably entailed the need to deepen and/or reform cooperation. Enlargements with new countries also carried the strengthening and protection of the Communities and the EU. Each of the members became stronger, not only territorially. New countries still aspire to membership. The EU will therefore continue to struggle with the need for reform in the internal and external dimensions. This will also be the need to ensure the internal cohesion of both the EU and Europe as a continent<sup>2</sup>.

In this article we will look at some of the problems associated with the existing and future processes of political integration in Europe, particularly within the EU. We treat it as a successful and no-alternative process of European unification, though not without significant difficulties. Although they have been present from the very beginning of the integration process, it seems that in recent times, even after the entry into force of the Treaty of Lisbon, some of the problems have been clearly preventing the acceleration of political cooperation. Therefore, we will focus mainly on the identification of several problems and challenges that hinder the practical institutional and political cooperation. It is not our role to question the EU integration achievements. We simply want to look at the declared and actual activities in the non-economic planes of European cooperation.

### **POLITICAL CRISES**

In analyzing the integration processes, it has become common to point to several major crises, which blocked many initiatives at the Community forum. References are then primarily made to the 1954 collapse of the concept of a European Defence Community and European Political Community, which led to the weakening of the work on effective shaping of security in Europe. Equally important (and perhaps even more important) consequences had the Community crisis of 1965. It was connected with the aspirations of Charles de Gaulle to the explicit protection of national interests of France, especially in terms of agricultural policy, and the anti-British and anti-American attitude.

In the EU's recent history, a clear political problem was associated with the process of ratification of the Constitution for Europe, then the Treaty of Lisbon. Adoption of a constitutional act is too big a step for the national states. Hence, after the fiasco of the referendum in France and the Netherlands it became evident that it was necessary to focus efforts to adopt a new treaty that would enable the functioning of the EU in a new "post-constitutional" reality. The reform of European institutions was necessary. The EU had to adapt to the challenges of the 21st century and learn how to act as a group of 27 Member

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<sup>2</sup> See: W. Gizicki, ed., (2009): *European Union – present and future*, Lublin, Wydawnictwo KUL.

States, with a view to possible further reform for deepening or expanding integration.

The end of 2010 made everyone aware of the serious problems faced by countries in North Africa. The unrest related to the expectations of a socio-political change in Egypt, Tunisia, Algeria and Libya has shown that the EU is facing yet another major challenge. It is about a skilful response to the potential impact of changes in the Maghreb. This is due to the immediate neighbourhood and the increasing wave of migration from these countries to the southern areas of Europe. The EU, apart from taking an official position, does not have many instruments to be able to respond to this crisis. The entire weight of the response actually lied on the southern EU countries. This shows clearly that crises of this kind largely exceed the real capacity to respond by the EU as a whole.

The EU still experiences difficulties, including political turmoil, related to the global economic crisis. It has caused significant problems in many Member States of the Union. As a consequence there emerged the need for a systemic response to the deteriorating situation, among others in Ireland and Greece. In the past three years, the EU has tried to minimize the effects of the crisis effectively while taking action to stabilize the political and economic situation in Europe<sup>3</sup>. Examples of such activities include Economic Recovery Plan, tightening of the budget discipline, or the competitiveness package.

The above presented examples of political crises in the integration process clearly show that their successful resolution requires a great, joint effort of both the EU and individual Member States. These actions have not always been unanimous or entirely successful. However, it seems that each time they have brought new experiences, often reinforcing the integration of Europe.

## EUROPEAN VALUES

The beginning of European integration was associated not only with the necessity of rebuilding political and economic structures after the disaster of World War II. Equally important, or rather most important, was a moral reconstruction, in a spirit of solidarity, of mutual identification and acceptance. The starting point for this work was for the Founding Fathers the Greco-Roman historical heritage, the foundation of the spirit, Christian values. All these influenced in an essential manner the European identity, and attested through centuries to Europe's position in the world. Europe was a continent of shared values<sup>4</sup>. Today, it seems that the neglect and sometimes even a departure from

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<sup>3</sup> See: J. Osiński, ed., (2009): *Unia Europejska wobec kryzysu ekonomicznego*, Warszawa, Oficyna Wydawnicza SGH.

<sup>4</sup> See: A. Fimister, (2008): *Robert Schuman: neo scholastic humanism and the re-*

the common values creates new problems. It is hardly justifiable to leave decisions on many key issues to the Europeans themselves, their subjective beliefs and feelings. One of the goals of integration is yet to give rise to the so-called European society. Is it enough to take institutional action for automatic granting of European citizenship to reach this goal? How to build a common identity and mutual understanding of the achievements, the history by national societies that know little about each other? Have successes in the area of economic integration, and to a lesser extent the political one, not overshadowed the issue of European identity?

It can hardly be expected that values would be unified at the level of the whole of Europe. Also, it is not the point. However, it seems worthwhile taking effective action to implement the concept of "unity in diversity". Mutual respect for cultural, religious, ethnic differences, etc. certainly requires an effort associated with the cultivation of verified and well-established principles<sup>5</sup>. It does not appear that the total relativization of values could be conducive to the agreement. Europe, including the EU, also displays high inconsistency in actions taken. On the one hand, it favours openness, freedom, liberalization of principles and views. On the other, however, it takes steps to reduce many of the freedoms and principles related to the professed religion or beliefs. In many cases this leads to social conflict, both at national and European levels. In several cases it took an almost caricatured figure! An example of this is, among others, the judgement of the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg in November 2009 on the presence of the cross in Italian schools. The Court found that the cross violates the rights of parents concerning the education of children in accordance with their own convictions and opposes religious freedom. Italy successfully appealed against it. In April 2011, the Court ruled that visibility of the cross does not interfere with viewpoints and does not impose Christianity. This example shows, however, that in European "viewpoint" jurisprudence, increasingly we are dealing with attempts to adapt the reality to specific situations. The EU institutions are sometimes similar in this respect.

The problem of shared European values is not easy to undertake and discuss at length. However, it should be stressed that in this area the EU is trying to regulate these issues based on treaties. Article 2 of the Treaty on European Union clearly shows the values on which the EU is founded. They relate to respect of:

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*unification of Europe*, Brussels, Oxford. B. McSweeney, ed., (1998): *Moral issues in international affairs: problems of European integration*, Macmillan Press, London.

<sup>5</sup> See: D. Pietrzyk-Reeves, (2007): *Tożsamość Starego Kontynentu i przyszłość projektu europejskiego*, Warszawa, UKIE.

- human dignity,
- freedom,
- democracy,
- equality,
- rule of law,
- human rights, including rights of persons belonging to minorities.

It is also emphasized that these values are shared and based on *pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity and equality between women and men*<sup>6</sup>.

Regulations adopted, however, do not seem to correspond with the general, practical tendency present in European political and social space. This is true for the above-presented incongruence between the idea and the practice, as expressed especially by the peculiar disappearance of thinking and acting towards the promotion of universal rights and values, unambiguously identified in the European space and in the individual countries, including EU Member States<sup>7</sup>.

How, then, does Europe's struggle with the common values look like? Are they at all necessary in the construction of Europe, as related to the political dimension of integration? Europe is a pluralistic being, no doubt characterized by the rapid civilizational development. However, it does not appear to be sufficient to ensure an effective long-term process of building a European identity based on the success and wealth, understood in economic terms. Human being will always remain the subject of all efforts. Hence their well-being, then the well-being of society and the state, requires that action is taken to seek and build identity, also at the European level.

### **EU AS A POLITICAL COMMUNITY?**

The achievements of the past sixty years in Europe are considerable. In most EU countries and a few outside it financial settlements are made in the common currency euro. Borders between countries, especially within the Schengen area, are significantly blurred. These examples show that European integration has achieved considerable success.

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<sup>6</sup> Consolidated versions of the Treaty on European Union and the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union. After: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:C:2010:083:0013:0046:PL:PDF>. [20 May 2011].

<sup>7</sup> M. Gierycz, (2010): *Rola polskich posłów do parlamentu Europejskiego VI kadencji w kształtowaniu jego polityki w obszarze aksjologii praw człowieka*, Warszawa, Uniwersytet Warszawski, Working Paper no. 1, pp. 5-12; L. Halman, R. Luijkx, M. van Zundert, (2005): *Atlas of European Values*, Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers.

However, the Union has not been, so far, able to develop a broader political cooperation. Political integration remains far behind the successes on the economic front, where the EU is a major international player<sup>8</sup>. In fact, it is difficult to argue that the EU exists as a viable and effective political community. From the very beginning of integration, cooperation on political grounds has been stigmatized by many failures, or at least considerable troubles. Why is this happening? What makes up the inability of the integration processes to step up in this area? To point out the escalating problems we chose to analyze three dimensions of the challenges on the political grounds. All of them require an explicit clarification, both at the institutional and practical levels.

### ***Leadership in the EU***

One of the main problems associated with the practical operation of the EU, effective implementation of its objectives, the fulfilment of political ambitions, especially on a global scale, has been the lack of decision-making institutions, clearly associated with the whole Union, formerly the Communities. This postulate was one of the key ones during work on the draft Constitution for Europe, and after its debacle in the preparation of the Treaty of Lisbon. Ultimately, the EU gained the position of President of the European Council. It became one of the main positions in the whole institutional system of the EU. In colloquial nomenclature, derived from the constitutional draft, the term "President of the EU" is still in use! However, has the EU in fact gained a real chance for unequivocal strong political leadership? Is the way the objectives set are pursued up to the President's decision? Do we need anything else except the adoption of formal and legal arrangements for the main representative of EU policy in the world to be actually able to have appropriate reception in the world?

Let us therefore see how the powers of the President of the European Council are set out in the Treaty of Lisbon. Article 15 clearly states that they are focused on:

1. presiding the European Council and conducting its work;
2. ensuring the preparation and continuity of the work of the European Council, in cooperation with the President of the Commission and based on the work of the General Affairs Council;
3. supporting cohesion and consensus within the European Council;
4. submitting to the European Parliament reports on each meeting of the European Council.

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<sup>8</sup> See: J. Zielonka, (2006): *Europe as Empire*, Oxford, Oxford University Press.

The Lisbon Treaty also states that the President is authorized to represent the EU in foreign policy and security matters. However, this is dependent on the absence of interference in the powers of the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy. This position is directly responsible for implementation of activities in the area of the former second pillar of the EU.

Taking into account the above powers it should be noted that the President is largely a civil servant, who supports the activities of the European Council. Of course, the directory of possibilities mentioned above provides an institutional basis for action. However, in the formulation and conduct of leadership in the EU the goal is (in addition to the institutional framework, which has been precisely defined) that the Union gains a real personal leadership. Only then would it have a chance to seriously participate in global politics, where large countries, especially the largest and most important ones, continue to play a major role. Only then would the problem of "a single call to the EU", as claimed by Henry Kissinger, be overcome in a practical manner.

However, it seems that the largest and most influential Member States do not care that the EU has a real, strong personal leadership. It is evidenced by the choice for the position of President of Herman van Rompuy, former Prime Minister of Belgium. It is hard to expect, considering his previous political career, that he is able to become a charismatic leader of Europe, a clearly equal partner to the heads of the largest countries in the world. A much better performance in the role of a strong, serious, most important EU politician would be expected from Tony Blair, former Prime Minister of the UK. His candidacy proved unacceptable to the biggest states, in particular France, Germany and the UK itself! The selection of van Rompuy was "not quite ambitious but safe"! – as summarized by Prime Minister Donald Tusk, among others.

Is therefore the EU capable of playing an important role in the world indeed, having so much diverse leadership, devoid of personal character? Is it possible to achieve common EU objectives on the basis of a compromise reached only, or a substantially between the heads of the biggest countries? The need for a clear, strong representation of the EU and effective accountability and decision-making is demonstrated by the role played by the heads of states, especially the largest ones, holding the presidency of the EU, among others by the impact of Angela Merkel on the regulation of energy policy in 2007, or Nicolas Sarkozy on the debate on the climate package in 2008. The problem is that even if the presidency works in this version it is not acceptable in the EU due to its national character and particular ambitions. It does not seem that such an impact could be expected of the President of the European Council on the current international policy in the nearest future.

A problem in the field of competence, related to leadership, is the excessive dispersion of activities among several institutions. In this light, it can be particularly true for the relationship between the European Council and the Commission, together with their Presidents. On the one hand, the European Council, a forum of Heads of State, in accordance with Article 15 *gives the Union the necessary impetus for its development and defines the general political directions and priorities*, and on the other hand, on the basis of Article 17, *the Commission shall promote the general interest of the Union and take appropriate initiatives to that end (...), ensure the Union's external representation*. Although the European Council is the supreme institution, indicating the development path of integration, the actual instruments of action are available to the Commission. The Treaty gives it complete independence of action. The European Commission is so often treated as a de facto EU decision-making centre. Moreover, taking into account the criterion of personality, it seems that Jose Barroso, President of the Commission, is much more appropriate for the EU's model of an effective politician, associated with it openly and willingly received by multiple entities, i.e. states and international organizations.

Hence, it is obvious that the EU will not be able in the near future to fully realize its political potential and mark its position on the global scene<sup>9</sup>. Likewise, it will be difficult to unequivocally determine the partner relationships, especially with China, Russia and the United States, based on the Community resources, and not the resources of individual Member States.

### ***Interests of Nation States***

The European Union is a union of sovereign nation states. By joining the cooperation at transnational level they have declared that it would encompass strictly defined areas. This is expressed in Article 5 (2) of the Treaty on European Union: *Union shall act only within the limits of the powers conferred on it by the Member States in the Treaties to attain the objectives set out therein. Competences not conferred upon the Union in the Treaties remain with the Member States*. Hence, despite the very broad definition of the scope of cooperation in many areas, nation states have not entirely given up their independent policies, especially in the external dimension, including security matters. The actual implementation of integration at the political level never took place<sup>10</sup>. So it is natural that to a large extent individual interests may be

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<sup>9</sup> See A. Alesina, F. Giavazzi, (2006): *The future of Europe: reform or decline*, Cambridge, MIT Press.; A. Kukliński, K. Pawłowski, eds., (2005): *Europe – The Global Challenges*, Nowy Sącz. Wydawnictwo WSB-NLU.

<sup>10</sup> A. Podraza, (2007): *Unia Europejska w procesie reform traktatowych*, Lublin, Wydawnictwo KUL., p. 55.

competing against each other, without giving a chance for agreement. Actual decisions must be legitimized by the Member States. The EU thus resembles an intersection, where the direction of driving is decided by all the members. In this case, it can be really difficult to move in the same direction<sup>11</sup>. Examples include the energy policy. It gained its place in the regulations of the Treaty of Lisbon and became part of cooperation at the EU level. However, individual states perceive their own energy security quite differently and pursue projects that do not always remain in the interest of even the closest neighbours. Anyone who has seen the development of the North Stream, South Stream and Nabucco projects will be aware of significant differences in this respect. These problems affect Poland and Germany, among others.

Kind of threat to joint political cooperation is the temptation to think in terms of, among others, a two-speed Europe or the centre and peripheries<sup>12</sup>. This idea often comes back to the official language of integration. At the same time, it escapes any straightforward judgement. It is difficult to question the right of part of Member States to more thorough and faster relations within the EU. This is especially true for the so-called core of Europe, the founding and best performing members in the processes of integration. The problem arises however when the increasing incidence of state egoisms comes into play. Concerns about state institutions being dominated by supranational bodies still prevail in almost all EU countries. Unfortunately, this is not a marginal situation.

The economic crisis of 2008 made it clear how real the political divisions are, as resulting from the successful, after all, economic cooperation within the monetary union. There emerged a danger of a political division into "Eurozone" states and those that have not yet adopted the common currency. More and more meetings, formal and informal, are held within the group of countries equipped with the common currency. Nevertheless, the euro area suffers from serious problems, which are the result of economic crises in several countries. These include Ireland, Greece and perhaps Portugal. It proved necessary to grant financial assistance to failing economies, although in this respect the euro zone countries were not unanimous. It is sufficient to recall the position on aid to Greece taken by Slovakia, which expressed its opposition to participation in that financial operation.

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<sup>11</sup> See J. Barcz, (2010): *Unia Europejska na rozstajach. Traktat z Lizbony dynamika i główne kierunki reformy ustrojowej*, EuroPrawo, Warszawa.

<sup>12</sup> T. Grosse, (2009): *Europa na rozdrożu*, Instytut Spraw Publicznych, Warszawa, p. 20.

### ***Theory and Practice of the Common Foreign and Security Policy***

From the very beginning of European integration, it was assumed that it would include political cooperation, which would allow collaborative Europe to play an important role in the international dimension, including in the field of security. When in 1993 under the Maastricht Treaty the EU gained institutional framework of this cooperation, centred under the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), it seemed that it would be stepped up to become one of the main planes of integration<sup>13</sup>.

Formal and legal reality that engulfed the EU after the entry into force of the Treaty of Lisbon gives hope that the CFSP might gain in importance and become more proactive<sup>14</sup>. The EU has finally become an international player, has gained legal status. A new independent position of the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy was established. Support in his activities is may be provided by the European External Action Service. Member States also agreed to promote cooperation and solidarity in the field of foreign and security policy. This is also reflected in a completely new rhetoric, which stresses the need to move from the declarations of joint action to the level of decisions, proposals and initiatives.

Are the presented assumptions, however, sufficient to ensure that the CFSP becomes a viable platform for cooperation at the supranational level? Are Member States able to agree, at least in part, the scope of this cooperation? Can we really realistically expect an in-depth cooperation in this area?

We must clearly admit that the CFSP is definitely an example of extensive policy at the EU level. Objectives and tasks associated with this area of activity have been allocated to almost all the institutions of the Union. However, this dimension of cooperation is quite specific for its delicate subject matter. A dominant role in the area of external affairs and security policy is still attributed to nation states. It constitutes one of the main characteristics of sovereignty. Hence, it seems that this initiative has little chance of real and lasting communitarization. The obstacle will continue to be the still diverse and often differently defined practical approach to strategic foreign policy goals, including security, as presented by the Member States. Significant differences associated with these lie not only in the approach to the nature and conduct of political cooperation in Europe, with the participation of the EU countries themselves. An equally important differentiating point is the ambiguous, often sceptical assessment of transatlantic relations, both towards NATO and the

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<sup>13</sup> See W. Gizicki, (2009): *Bezpieczeństwo europejskie w wybranych dokumentach Unii Europejskiej*, in: *Zeszyty Naukowe WSIZ Rzeszów*, no. 2, pp. 90-108.

<sup>14</sup> R. Zięba, (2007): *Wspólna Polityka Zagraniczna i Bezpieczeństwa Unii Europejskiej*, Wydawnictwa Akademickie i Profesjonalne, Warszawa, p. 56.

United States. On the one hand, among EU members are states, which cooperate closely in this area (including the United Kingdom and Poland), and on the other hand, states, which clearly prefer continental cooperation (including France and Germany). This dispute apparently came to light in connection with involvement in the war in Iraq and partly in Afghanistan.

Much controversy and scepticism in the assessment of dynamized cooperation within foreign and security policy was associated with the appointment of the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy. The selection of Catherine Ashton was evaluated similarly as in the case of the European Council President Herman van Rompuy. Aware of the potential inherent in this position, Member States decided to appoint a politician who will not impose his vision of the diplomatic course associated with the creation of the EU's image in the world. Therefore, it seems, the circumstances associated with this appointment for the most important position in the area of CFSP give reasons to tone down the optimism from the expected stepped up cooperation.

A change in the rhetoric on the CFSP will not automatically translate into a reevaluation of the Member States' approach to specific problems and/or a refined vision of cooperation. This can be seen very clearly over the issues of defining the EU's strategy towards the nearest external environment. At one point, two policies of the Union, i.e. Eastern Partnership and Mediterranean Partnership became competitive to each other, both in political and financial terms.

End of 2010 brought indisputable problems in the south of the EU. Political and social transformations in North Africa showed a real problem which needs to be dealt with in a spirit of mutual support and cooperation. Unfortunately, it is difficult to find any in several important issues. This applies to the response to the transformations, as related to defining strategies to assess the problem and taking action to address it. Equally important differences are related to coping solidarily with immigrants, who massively surge the southern coast of Italy. Requests this country addressed to the EU and its Member States, notably France, for involvement in solving this problem have remained without a broader, positive reception.

In this perspective, today it is difficult to realistically discern sufficient, practical activities related to support for Eastern Europe. It seems that the Eastern Partnership is currently dormant. Much will depend on whether and how Poland chooses to raise the issue during its presidency in the second half of 2011.

## FUTURE OF THE EU

We know what the beginnings of European integration were. What we do not know is what the point of destination will be. It is difficult indeed to expect that such an ultimate finale is possible to determine. European cooperation is still progressing. However, one can try to define an endpoint in the countries directly involved in this process. Future accessions are rather certain. The question is not "if"? Rather, "when and who"?

The EU membership, in accordance with Article 49 TEU, may be applied for by *any European state*. The primary criterion is the geographical membership and acceptance of the principles that form a constructive basis of European integration, i.e. the respect for liberty, democracy, human rights and fundamental freedoms and the rule of law. However, it is difficult to determine whether there exist clear geographical criteria that will prevent reinterpretation of the treaty provisions and impede the integration of the countries, which do not correspond geographically to this formula? (Probably in this case there will be plenty of references to the analogy of the changes in snail species classification – from a mollusc it has become a fish ...). So maybe in the future members of the EU could become non-European countries (Israel? Morocco?).

A real, in accordance with the above criteria, chance to join in the near future lies with countries of the Western Balkans<sup>15</sup>, Turkey and Iceland. They are treated as official candidates, of course, with different timeline perspectives of accession. The integration of Croatia into the EU is now virtually inevitable. Iceland is also close to this point.

After the successful changes related to the "Orange Revolution", it seemed that Ukraine had a real prospect of membership. Today, however, this country is hardly predictable internally. Ukraine itself has not sent, so far, a clear signal for its willingness to engage in processes of integration. Although Ukrainians themselves, while analyzing the integration optics, can not understand why Bulgaria and Romania could have already joined the EU, i.e. countries which according to them are at a comparable level of development, while the prospect of Ukraine's membership in the EU continues to be postponed?

Another, the most serious problem is the possibility of Turkish membership. This accession would pose a big challenge for any reason, whether political, social, economic, cultural or religious. The borders of Europe after the possible inclusion of Turkey into EU structures would reach Iraq. Turkey would be the second largest EU country, with a massive flood of its citizens or people of Turkish origin in many EU countries, especially in Germany. It is hard to believe that the EU could afford it easily today. On the other hand, if Turkey's

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<sup>15</sup> See T. Winkler, ed., (2002): *European Integration and the Balkans: changes, problems and prospects*, Belgrade.

membership is delayed or effectively blocked, the tensions in external relations between the EU and Turkey will gain momentum. So there is no ideal way out of this complicated situation.

Special importance, especially at the turn of 2010/2011, is gained by long-term contacts with North African countries, i.e. Tunisia, Morocco and Algeria, Gibraltar, and Israel. These countries are an important part of security policy in the Mediterranean region. Besides, the EU's relations with non-European countries to the EU are one of the priorities, given the desire to strengthen its role in the world. However, this is not a situation with which the EU is coping well. The above-mentioned problems of illegal immigration are just one example.

An extremely interesting issue is the future of cooperation (membership?) between the EU and the stable and highly-developed European countries, i.e. Norway and Switzerland. Given their potential and opportunities for development, it seems that they could contribute a lot of positive energy in the processes of political integration. The question is whether they are interested in such a scenario? The mere membership would change little in their relations with the EU. It does not seem that this can be realistic in the near future.

A specific, political problem in Europe is becoming the increasingly negative population growth<sup>16</sup>. The progressing depopulation entail risks not only internally but also externally. Since the population of Europeans is constantly decreasing, the desire to maintain an adequate level of development will mean further opening of the flow of immigrants. The presence of a large number non-European populations in EU countries often causes serious assimilation problems. Differences in culture, religion and customs clearly lead to a conflict of interests and social tensions. The situation is all the more important that these conflicts spread to the streets and cause serious material damage, including sometimes human casualties. This awareness is particularly high given the problems facing North Africa. This is, par excellence, "squaring of the circle". Europe must maintain the capacity to receive immigrants, while controlling the illicit transfer through EU's external borders of clandestine groups and entire communities. In the name of the credibility, it is necessary to promote openness, human rights, while securing the internal consistency of the values of Western civilization. So how do we reconcile the interests of the European and the non-European? This is not a simple matter, and awareness of the seriousness of the situation was made sharp by the problems with the ban on the construction of minarets and the wearing of Muslim symbols.

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<sup>16</sup> The demographic future of Europe-from challenge to opportunity, Luxembourg 2006: [ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=2023&langId=en](http://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=2023&langId=en). [20 May 2011].

One should also mention the problems arising from the aroused state building ambitions. In several EU countries, national minorities clearly demand greater autonomy, not ruling out the prospects for the establishment of a sovereign nation state. It is sufficient to look at the processes in Belgium (Walloons and Flemish), Spain (Basques and Catalans), the UK (especially but not only, Scots), Greenland, Cyprus, to note clear ambitions in this regard. After a possible secession of the current states and the emergence of new ones, Europe would have to redefine its political objectives. It does not appear that this process could undermine the entire project of European integration. Assuming that new states could appear in the near future, one can bet that they would tie their hopes for development with the membership, or a remote cooperation with the EU<sup>17</sup>.

## CONCLUSION

The European Union is a successful and important integration project. One should definitely recognize the benefits of European cooperation for the good of the individual, society and state. In the 20th century, the Old continent experienced many tragic moments, especially the two tragic wars. However, we managed to build a transnational consensus and undertake a multi-dimensional cooperation. We benefit from the far-reaching economic cooperation, the borders of the Member States are open, the exchange is made at the level of society and culture. An attempt for political cooperation has been made. The Union has global ambitions.

Without questioning the above successes, it should be clearly noted, however, that the EU has still much to do. The European integration process is very dynamic, but is subject to the restrictions imposed by the globalizing world, in which not everything can be predicted. The most important is that the EU and individual Member States are able to clearly define the needs and overcome difficulties. This also applies the closest neighbourhood of the EU, having membership aspirations, and the other, often unstable and unpredictable regions of the world. The EU must clearly specify the particular direction in which the political integration will follow. This will be a key condition for the EU to build a strong position in the world.

Political integration is much more challenging than economic cooperation, which often takes place naturally as triggered by current needs, related to building wealth. Political processes are subject to restrictions from the EU itself, which often doubles the competences and trusts too optimistically in

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<sup>17</sup> See W. Gizicki, *Kosowo, kto następny? Czy Europa się dezintegruje*, in: W. Gizicki, ed., (2009): *Polityczne dylematy Europy*, Toruń, Wydawnictwo Adam Marszałek, pp. 140-148.

institutional solutions. The obvious limitation relates to the role and objectives of nation states. They are not, understandably, interested in transferring parts of their political powers to the supranational level. Still, it is necessary to try to effectively balance the interests of the EU as a whole with the interests of the Member States. The current situation in the field of political cooperation is sometimes characterized by apparent effect only. One can get the impression that declarations do not correspond to the practice (it is more about "chasing the rabbit, not catching it "...).

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