

FROM CONSENSUS TO SKEPTICISM? : ATTITUDES OF POLISH SOCIETY TOWARDS EUROPEAN INTEGRATION

Ewa Szczepankiewicz-Rudzka*

DOI:10.24193/subbeuropaea.2018.1.02

Published Online: 2018-07-01

Published Print: 2018-07-15

Abstract:

Public opinion surveys conducted in Poland systematically since 2001 confirmed a high, more than 80-per cent, support for our membership in the EU structures. While the need for Poland's membership in the European Union has never been questioned, the issue of the development of European integration has aroused controversy and is still a cause of dispute. The hypothesis of the paper bases on two statements: (1) Polish society attitude towards European integration is more skeptical than would be apparent from the data on general support for EU membership, (2.) Current government, which has established Euroscepticism as the main direction of its foreign policy does not diverge from the mood and social expectations.

Keywords: Polish society, European Union, Euroscepticism

The beginning of the political transformation process was accompanied by the slogan "Return to Europe". Shortly afterwards, this idea was formulated further in the postulate of Poland's integration with European structures (first the EEC, then the EU). As early as February 1994, the European Agreement establishing Poland's association with the

* Ewa Szczepankiewicz-Rudzka, Ph.D. Assistant Professor at the Institute of Political Studies and International Relations at the Jagiellonian University, Krakow. In 2008 she defended her PhD thesis titled: European Union-Maghreb: dynamics and directions of Euro-Mediterranean Partnership's development. Her scientific research is focused on democratization of the Maghreb's political systems and the EU policies. Author of one monograph and of over 20 articles and reports on above topics.

Contact: ewa.szczepankiewicz@uj.edu.pl.

European Communities came into force (signed in December 1991). Ten years later, on May 1, 2004, six years after the start of accession negotiations, Poland became a member of the European Union¹.

The accession to the Union was perceived by many Poles as an unavoidable consequence of the system changes initiated in the late 1980s.

At the same time, it can be regarded as the culmination of the transformation process and simultaneously as a confirmation of Poland's place in Europe. The enthusiasm of the society in linking the political fate of the country with the structures of the Western world (including NATO) is confirmed by the results of social research in terms of support for our country's membership in the EU. During the whole period of Polish presence in the EU, with minor deviations resulting from the changing political and economic climate in Europe and Poland, our society showed one of the highest support rates for the EU project among the countries of the community. The latest survey conducted in April 2017 by Centre for Public Opinion Research confirms this trend. 88% of Poles are enthusiastic about our country's membership in the EU².

The non-decreasing pro-EU attitude of Poles, especially from the perspective of the last two years is, however, puzzling and it deserves a broader analysis. For since 2015, along with the creation of the majority government of PiS (Law and Justice party) a volte-face in the policy can be observed, unprecedented in the history of post-communist Poland, marked with even downright anti-EU measures in the domestic and foreign policy of the country. This is attested to by a growing dispute with the European Commission and other European institutions over the rule of law standards in Poland, the common ideological front with Viktor Orbán and the Parliament's resolution on the EU, postulating its transformation into a loose union of strong sovereign national states.

The dissonance that arises between the support for Polish membership in the EU and the political programme of the ruling party, which is supported by 40% of Poles, seems to prove thesis about conducting politics contrary to the expectations and attitudes of the majority of society.

¹ *10 lat członkostwa Polski w Unii Europejskiej*, CBOS, Research Report, no.54/2014, p.1: [http://www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2014/K_052_14.PDF], 20 January 2018.

² *Jakiej Unii chcą Polacy*, CBOS, Research Report, no. 50/2017, p.15: [http://www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2017/K_050_17.PDF], 20 January 2018.

However, the discord between the opinions of Poles and the current line of government is apparent. In order to support this hypothesis, not only the surveys alone will be quoted indicating support for Poland's participation in the EU structures, which is undisputed, but also opinions on the implementation of specific EU policies. These are no longer accepted with such enthusiasm. In the further part of the study, the Batory Foundation's 2016 report: "Poles towards the EU: The end of the consensus" will be presented. Authors of the study place Poles on the axis marked by extreme attitudes- openness and reclusiveness- towards the reclusive one.

They thus demonstrate, on the one hand, their sceptical attitude towards European integration, and on the other hand, they point out that the current government's policy does not diverge from the mood and social expectations, as can be seen from the surveys of general support for our country's membership of the EU.

1. Social support for the European Union

The idea of Poland's integration with European structures met as early as at the beginning of the 1990s, ergo at the time of its emergence in the public discourse, with a very positive reaction of the society, obtaining high public support reaching up to 80% in polls. Opening accession negotiations and making the perspective of Poland's membership in the EU more realistic has contributed to a decrease in the number of supporters of integration. In the second quarter of 2001, support for it declined to 53%, the lowest of the previous quarter. In subsequent months it usually did not exceed 60%. After a short-term increase in support for integration in the period around the referendum (in 2003), doubts and fears related to integration increased again a few months before accession - the acceptance of accession to the EU had dropped. After our country's accession to the EU, Poles quickly felt the relief that the black scenarios related to integration did not materialise, and there was no "post-accession shock" expected by some. The reduction in uncertainty and fears of EU membership, and soon also the growing positive effects of EU presence in the EU, have led to growing public support for membership as early as in the first months after the accession³.

³ *Ibidem*, pp. 2-3.

With the accession to the Communities on May 1, 2004, Poland and nine other countries joined the European Union. The event was followed by an increase in Poles' support for membership, which amounted to 71%, with 20% of respondents objecting.

Three years later, in 2007 it reached its climax: 89% of respondents were in favour of Poland's presence in the EU and only 5% of respondents were against it. Acceptance of Poland's presence in the EU decreased slightly in the following years, but still remained very high. The protracted crisis in the euro area and, probably, perceived as insufficient effectiveness of the EU institutions in overcoming it, resulted in a drop in support for EU membership in previous years.

After a clear decline in support for our country's presence in the Community in the first half of 2013, it has already started to grow in the last months of 2013, reaching a level of 89%, not noted for a long time, in 2014. At the same time, the percentage of opponents of our country's membership in the EU decreased to 7%. It seems that the pro-European attitude was strengthened by the events in Ukraine, which made Poles aware of the importance of the choice they made voting in favour of accession⁴.

A recent survey of public opinion in the first quarter of 2017 indicates a return to an upward trend. The support rate for the European Union has reached 88%. However, it is worth noting that the survey was carried out before two important events that could undermine this result.

The decision of the European Commission, and the finalisation of a complaint against Poland about not applying the European Commission's decision to relocate refugees may have an impact on lowering the pro-EU's climate of opinions.

⁴ Jakiej Unii chcą Polacy, *op.cit.* p. 3.

Table 1: Support of Polish society for EU membership

Social support for EU membership by years (%)	2001	2004	2007	2009	2011	2014	2015	2016	2017
For	60	71	87	84,5	83	89	84	84	88
Against	n/a	21	5	10	11	7	11	10	9
Undecided	n/a	n/a	n/a	5,5	6	4	5	6	3

Source: Own elaboration based on CBOS data 2001-2017

2. Support for the EU policies.

The attitudes of Poles towards our country's membership in the EU are by no means as unambiguous as indicated by the above mentioned research. 37 % of the Polish people believe that our country could cope with the challenges of the future better, if it was outside the EU. A little more than half of the respondents are against it – 51 %⁵. It can be understood in this way that almost 40 % of the total number of people living in the country do not consider the EU to be a non-alternative framework for the development of Poland in the future, but it is likely that in certain circumstances this group of respondents would allow the possibility of operating outside them.

It seems interesting that compared to other countries, Poles are rather opposed to the idea of deepening of the integration. According to a study by the Pew Research Center, only 9 % endorses such purpose, while 39% is in favour of maintaining the status quo, while 38% are in favour of giving some of the competencies back to the national states⁶.

The belief that protecting the independence of Member States is more important than ensuring the efficiency of the Union's action is predominant in the vast majority of socio-demographic groups analysed.

⁵ Standard Eurobarometer 85, May 2016,

[<http://ec.europa.eu/COMMFrontOffice/publicopinion/index.cfm/>], 20 January 2018.

⁶ Bruce Stokes, *Euroskepticism Beyond Brexit*, Pew Research Center,

[<http://www.pewglobal.org/2016/06/07/euroskepticism-beyond-brexit/>], 20 January 2018.

Opinions on this issue are mainly differentiated by political orientation. While right-wing people more often than on average stress the importance of national sovereignty (57% versus 24%), left-wing political views prefer the Union's ability to act over the protection of Member States' independence (47% versus 36%)⁷.

Depending on the degree of public approval for the part of the Member State's competence being exercised by the EU, two types of areas can be distinguished: 1) areas where, in the opinion of at least half of the respondents, Member States should share competences with the Union; 2) areas which, in the opinion of at least half of the respondents, should fall under the exclusive competence of Member States. The transfer of some or all of the competences to the European Union on security issues: the fight against terrorism (77% in total), border protection (67%) and defence policy (61%) is by far the most widely welcomed. More than half of those surveyed accept co-decision or decision by the EU on tariff rates for trade with non-EU countries (51% in total), environmental protection (53%), economic policy (51%). In the social assessment, each EU country should pursue its own tax policy. The majority of respondents considered that only the Member State should be responsible for the legal regulation of abortions (60%) and the functioning of the whole sphere of social policies: education system (70%), social welfare (60%) and health care (56%)⁸.

Much can be revealed about what Poles think about the EU by examining their views on particular areas of EU integration. In March 2016, as many as 65% of respondents believed that we should not adopt the euro, but only 13% was of the opinion that we should leave Polish zloty as soon as possible. The opposition to the single currency has been visible in Polish society for many years. 68% of the Polish population opposed the adoption of the euro in autumn 2014, including 27% which was rather reluctant. Less than 25 % opted for the project⁹.

⁷ Beata Roguska, *Polska w Unii Europejskiej*, CBOS, Research report no. 31/2016, Warsaw, February 2016, p. 3, [http://www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2016/K_031_16.PDF], 20 January 2018.

⁸ *Jakiej Unii chcą Polacy*, *op.cit.*, pp.14-15.

⁹ Beata Roguska, *Narastanie obaw związanych z wprowadzaniem euro*, CBOS, Research Report 151/2014, Warsaw, November 2014, p. 6, [http://www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2014/K_151_14.PDF], 20 January 2018.

The crisis in the euro zone contributed to the doubt about the project of further deepening integration. From 2009 there were more and more voices in Poland claiming that the unification of Europe had already gone too far¹⁰. In 2015, this approach was fuelled by the migration crisis and a policy of European solidarity advocated by the EU institutions, reflected in the European Commission's decision to relocate refugees among EU countries.

In the opinion of more than half of respondents (54%), Member States should also have the responsibility for migration and asylum policies. A significant increase in the reluctant communitarisation of migration and asylum policy has been observed in Poland since 2015, which is directly related to the refugee crisis in the EU.

By autumn 2015, about half of Poles were opposed to receiving refugees from Africa and the Middle East, while about 35-40% were in favour. The attacks in November 2015 and the electoral campaign, during which the right wing forces intensified anti-Muslim sentiments, led to a significant increase in opposition to the reception of refugees. On average, since autumn 2015, more than two thirds of Poles have been against receiving refugees from the Middle East and Africa (on average, 25% of them turn out to be the opposite). They are supported by less than 30%¹¹.

According to a survey conducted by IBRIS for the "Polityka" weekly magazine in June 2017, 57% of Poles do not want Poland to accept refugees, even if this would entail the loss of some of the European Funds. When asked whether we should refuse to accept refugees if the price was to leave the EU, as many as 51% of Poles replied we should¹².

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, p.13.

¹¹ Agnieszka Cybulska, *Stosunek do przyjmowania uchodźców*, Research Report, nr 136/2016, p.4: http://www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2016/K_136_16.PDF, 20 January 2018.

¹² *Sondaż IBRiS: 60,4 % Polaków, nie chce przyjęcia uchodźców „Rzeczypospolita”*, 15.06.2017: [<http://www.rp.pl/Spoleczenstwo/306159882-Sondaz-IBRiS-604-proc-Polakow-nie-chce-przyjecia-uchodzcow.html>], 20 January 2018.

3. „Reclusive attitude” as an expression of Euroscepticism in Poland

In a report of *Batory Foundation*: “Poles towards the EU: the end of the consensus”¹³, the authors convincingly prove that the public opinion polls against the EU give us a false sense of security, because they suggest that the PiS (Law and Justice party) government has a Eurosceptic policy against the euro-enthusiastic society. A more detailed analysis reveals restrictions on general support for the supranational vision of European integration, and proves that Poles are much more closer to a reclusive attitude whose profile fits in with the anti-European agenda of the current government.

Attitude of Poles towards integration processes is evaluated on the basis of the cultural paradigm whose author is R. Inglehart and P. Norris.

As provided by the proposed model, the attitude of the society towards the external world is defined by its position on the axis which could best be described as the continuum between OPENNESS on the one hand and RECLUSIVNESS on the other¹⁴.

The use of openness and reclusiveness ideas, sets out a new paradigm of state foreign policy and internal politics. In the social and political divisions and party rivalry, the division between the right wing and the left wing begins to lose its importance. Determination of the voter's attitude to issues from the spectrum of economy and social problems (the role of the state in the economy, the scale of redistribution), ceases to be the dominant determinant of party systems. The conflict, which is starting to polarize Western societies most strongly, concerns cultural values. In the "cultural" paradigm that begins to rule the Western world, the attitude towards issues closely related to foreign policy plays a fundamental role.

The question of the identity of the community as defined in relation to the outside world has become crucial. Whether an individual considers

¹³ Adam Balcer, Piotr Buras, Grzegorz Gromadzki, Eugeniusz Smolar, *Polacy wobec UE: koniec konsensusu*, Fundacja Batorego, grudzień 2016, Warszawa, <http://www.batory.org.pl/upload/files/Programy%20operacyjne/Otwarta%20Europa/Polacy%20wobec%20UE%20-%20raport%20Fundacji%20Batorego.pdf> , 20 January 2018.

¹⁴ Ronald F. Inglehart, Pippa Norris, *Trump, Brexit, and the Rise of Populism: Economic Have-Nots and Cultural Backlash*, Harvard Kennedy School, 2016, [<https://research.hks.harvard.edu/publications/workingpapers/citation.aspx?PubId=11325&type=FN&PersonId=83>] , 20 January 2018.

globalisation, regional integration, immigration and cultural and religious pluralism to be something positive or whether they throw away these phenomena as being contrary to national interests or threatening identity is one of the most important determinants of place on the axis¹⁵.

"Openness" in this respect includes attitudes accentuating support for post-materialist values (the Inglehart concept of authorship), such as universalism of human rights, secularism (private character of the religious sphere), individualism, the ability to self-criticism towards one's own nation, the definition of national identity in an inclusive way and support for the state's involvement in solving international problems.

"Reclusiveness" is defined in turn by: the idealisation of one's own nation and perception of its homogeneity as an ideal state, support for materialistic values (social security, survival orientation), traditionalism (meaning religion in public life), tendency to authoritarian and communal attitudes (collectivism), distrust towards inter- and supranational institutions, fear of strangers and primacy of pursuit of protecting the state from the influences of the outside world¹⁶.

As the determinants of a given attitude of Polish society, the authors of the survey propose to explore three dimensions, which most strongly shape the Polish society attitude to foreign policy and thus determine the legitimacy (or lack thereof) of the current government's actions on the international arena¹⁷.

The first dimension, which is considered to be the key dimension for future mutual relations between public opinion and European politics, is the attitude towards further integration of Poland with the EU.

A clear conclusion can be drawn from the selection of opinion polling surveys, as shown in the previous section of the article, on the ambivalent approach to European integration. More than 39% consider that there are alternative forms of policy, non-European Community policies.

More than 50% declared support for the exit from the EU in case of excessive interference by the European institutions with the domestic affairs of the country.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*.

¹⁶ *Ibidem*.

¹⁷ Adam Balcer, Piotr Buras, Grzegorz Gromadzki, Eugeniusz Smolar, *op.cit.* p.4.

The second area of the research interest is in the future course of Poland's European policy and its social legitimacy is the attitude to the country's involvement on the international arena. The scale of isolationist tendencies in the Poles' views is particularly important. Isolationism or, in other words, the focus on internal affairs can be measured both in terms of the political-economic dimension (development aid, etc.) and political-military dimension (allied solidarity within NATO and the EU). In a study carried out by the Pew Research Centre in 10 countries of EU28, a vast majority of Poles (65% at 56% median) supported the opinion that "the state should first deal with its own affairs and allow other countries to deal with their problems as best as they can". On the other hand, only 21% considers that their country should "help other countries"¹⁸.

Consequently, support from Polish citizens for military engagement abroad is limited. Although Poles are among the nations that attach the greatest importance to the North Atlantic Alliance (70 % of them regard it as positive), less than half of the surveyed would be prepared to support the participation of Polish troops in defending European NATO members in the event of Russia's aggression against them. Nearly 35% was against sending troops to aid an invaded ally. In view of the historical experience and how important it is for Poland's security to have the issue of solidarity in response to possible Russian aggression, it is worth noting that support for sending Polish troops to help allies reaches a similar level as in Great Britain or Spain¹⁹.

These results indicate a policy of consent to Poland's isolationist tendencies on the international arena. The reluctance of the public to intervene in matters that do not fundamentally affect us (including solidarity towards the refugee crisis) demonstrates attitudes of reluctance to engage externally in our country.

The third of the variables determining the position of the openness-reluctance axe, is the attitude towards foreigners and the national identity.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 9.

¹⁹ Katie Simmons, Bruce Stokes, Jacob Poushter, *NATO Public Opinion: Wary on Russia, Leery of Action on Ukraine*, Pew Research Center, 10.06.2015, [<http://www.pewglobal.org/2015/06/10/1-nato-public-opinion-wary-of-russia-leary-of-action-on-ukraine>] in Adam Balcer, Piotr Buras, Grzegorz Gromadzki, Eugeniusz Smolar, *op.cit.*, pp. 9-10.

The authors of the survey are interested in the level of nativism in Polish society, which we understand on the one hand as an attitude characterized by distance or reluctance to foreign, critical attitude towards ethnic and religious diversity, and on the other hand as a way of defining the nation in any ethnic category in particular.

According to the *Batory Foundation* study, ethnic and religious Homogeneity causes Polish society to define the national identity in a rather closed manner. Over 70 % of the Poles considered that Roman Catholicism is an important criterion for recognizing someone as a real Pole (more than 35% consider it quite important). Less than 30% was of a different opinion. Despite a stable economic situation, the absence of terrorist attacks or problems with mass influxes of immigrants, there has been a significant increase in xenophobia in Poland in recent years. It is larger than in many European countries. Between 2010 and 2016, in a regular CBOS survey of attitudes towards other nations conducted since 1993, the reluctance of Poles towards almost all 27 surveyed nations increased (from a few to more than 20 percentage points)²⁰. The increase in xenophobic attitudes among Poles are proven by and on the other hand are driven by demonstrations directed against refugees or annual independence marches organized on November 11, under the banner of "Poland for Poles". The arguments presented by the organizers about the threat posed by Islam to Polish religion and culture, the alleged unwillingness of Muslims to assimilate or the burden that the immigrants will impose on the Polish economy and social system, point to one of the main mechanisms of reluctance towards immigrants and increase the more or less justified fear of the so-called strangers.

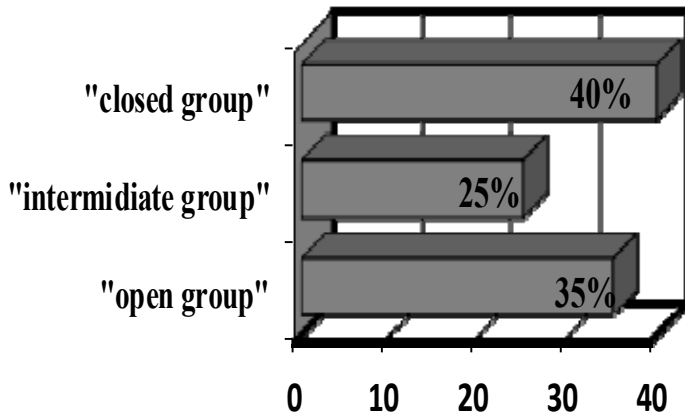
Based on analysis of variables performed above, three groups have been distinguished within Polish society. The first of them, the "open group", are those who, in polls we consider to be important from the point of view of foreign policy, are unequivocally in favour of deepening integration, readiness to help other countries, openness towards foreigners, etc.

The surveys of public opinion, which are quoted above, allow us to put forward a thesis that about 30-35% of the Polish society is characterised by this approach. The size of the second opposite group, i.e. "closed"(putting pressure on defending sovereignty, feeling reluctant towards strangers and focusing on " their own backyard") is estimated approximately 40%²¹.

²⁰ Adam Balcer, Piotr Buras, Grzegorz Gromadzki, Eugeniusz Smolar, *op.cit.* p.10.

²¹ *Ibidem*, pp. 11-12.

Table 2. Scale of reclusiveness and openness of the Polish society



Source: Own elaboration based on A. Balcer, P. Buras, G. Gromadzki, E. Smolar, *Polacy wobec UE: koniec konsensusu*, Fundacja Batorego, Warszawa, grudzień 2016.

There is still a third group - the "intermediate" group, which includes almost a third of the population. It is of fundamental importance to the key question of the research: in which direction is the majority of Polish society is inclined towards, a more "open" or more "closed"? The attempt to describe this group has been taken by analysing research on three key issues relating to European policy (accession to the euro area, attitudes towards receiving refugees from the Middle East and Africa, and towards military support for European allies in the fight against Islamist terrorists).

On the first issue in the autumn 2014 survey 68% opposed the adoption of the euro, including 27% which was rather reluctant. According to a survey conducted in June 2016, almost three quarters of respondents opposed Poland's military engagement in the ISIS war, including almost 35 % which were "rather opposed". On average, since autumn 2015, more than two thirds of Poles have been against receiving refugees from the Middle East and Africa, including more than 25% which remains "rather opposite"²².

²² *Ibidem*.

The results of these studies lead the authors to conclude that the "intermediate group" chooses the attitude of "rather closed" people on many key issues for European integration. Surveys indicate that the mood and opinion pendulum in Polish society tends to be more "closed" than "opened". This does not contradict the high support for Poland's membership of the European Union, the sense of which is undermined only by the extreme part of the "closed". Nevertheless, the willingness of Poles to adopt "rather closed" attitudes is very important from the point of view of the foreign policy of the current government. In other words, PiS and the forces close to it (e. g. Kukiz' 15) can assume (or at least count on) that the legitimacy of their European policies is stronger than would be apparent from the data on support for EU membership. The potential of sceptical attitudes towards transnational cooperation and behavioural attitudes towards international involvement in Poland is not less (and often even greater) than in countries where the support for EU membership turns out to be weaker than in the Vistula country²³.

4. Conclusions

The claims of the euro-enthusiasm of Poles, often cited by the media and politicians, should be revalued in the face of arguments put forward above. On the one hand, polls of support for the European Union place us among the top supporters of the integration project, on the other hand, even with a superficial analysis of public support for specific EU policies or stronger and deeper integration, the tendency of Poles to abandon pan-European ideas in the name of defending national values is revealed.

While Poland's exit from the European Union is such an unlikely scenario, the policy of the ruling camp, reluctant to integrate deeper, distanced from Western partners and focused on domestic affairs, may distract Poland from the mainstream of integration, leaving us on the EU's periphery. The "option" of the Union's exit from Poland, a country symbolising the successful integration of the former Eastern Bloc countries with the West, is increasingly real.

²³ *Ibidem*, p.13.

The idea of constructing the Europe of many velocities has recently returned once again to public debate on the future of the European Union. Reflection on this subject is facilitated by the recent 60th anniversary of the signing of the Treaties of Rome in March 2017²⁴, but above all by the challenges facing the Union, such as the crisis in the euro zone, the migration crisis and the Brexit²⁵. Poland is most concerned by the implementation of the scenario of accelerating the integration of the countries concerned in selected areas leading to the development of a two or several velocities Europe and, as a consequence, threatening European cohesion by dividing Europe into a so-called hard core and the periphery.

Excessive attachment to the scale of support for Poland's membership in the EU as a measure of Poles' attitudes towards European integration distracts attention from an important fact: social consent to possible political decisions that will determine Poland's place in Europe in the future as secondary one.

This means that Poland, together with a few other countries outside the Eurozone, if it wishes to maintain access to the common market and other benefits, will have to comply with all EU laws and standards, while at the same time not having an influence on establishing and applying them. Relaxation of the ties with the "hard core" of Europe, when demonstrating distinctness in the sphere of values (especially in the context of the Court dispute with the European Commission) and the policy of "flexible solidarity" (e.g. lack of cooperation in the issue of refugees), will lead to our isolation and to the reduction of the European Union's involvement in the further development of our country.

²⁴ The Rome Declaration: Declaration of the leaders of 27 member states and of the European Council, the European Parliament and the European Commission issued on 25 Of March, 2017: [<http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2017/03/25/rome-declaration/>], 20 January 2018.

²⁵ See also: White Paper on the Future of Europe, Reflections and scenarios for the EU27 by 2025 European Commission COM(2017)2025 of 1 March 2017, [<https://www.eda.europa.eu/docs/default-source/Defence-Procurement-Gateway/white-paper-on-the-future-of-europe.pdf>], 20 January 2018.

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