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The Polish Vision of EU Future: Imitation of the Hungarian Model?

Introduction

In the widely shared view of Kundnani (2018) there are currently three competing visions of the future of the European Union. The first of them is Merkel's one, called the neo-liberal concept of a "competitive Europe." It is based on imposing market discipline on member states and on severe reforms in the eurozone. The second one is Macron's vision, referred to as the left-wing concept of a "protective Europe" based on solidarity between member states as well as redistribution and risk sharing in the euro area. The third vision is Orban's model called a "Christian Europe of sovereign states" including the principles of "illiberal democracy."

It is not difficult to prove that the ideological discourse in Central and Eastern Europe is dominated by the Hungarian concept. This results both from an attractive way of communication, as well as from the fact that Orban formulated his concept as the first state leader in this part of the continent. Similar visions must be secondary in nature, which applies also to Poland articulating after 2015 an imitative version of the Hungarian model. However, the identification of Polish and Hungarian positions becomes an increasingly serious political problem rooted not only in the radical nature of Hungary's position, but also in the fundamental contradictions between the interests of those states.

This article is divided in two main parts consisting of the presentation of the Hungarian model and the Polish vision of EU future, supplemented by the conclusive identification of basic tensions between those states' interests. The first substantive argument is based on the view that Hungary and Poland have contradictory interests both in Central and Eastern Europe and in the Union. The second argument points to the fact that the existence of a close coalition with Hungary indicates a weakening of Poland's position in the EU decision-making system. In the light of liberal intergovernmentalism, a theoretical approach most frequently used to analyse the role of states in the integration system, the distribution of the outcomes of inter-state negotiations results from the relative bargaining power of each state, which is in turn dependent on states' relative asymmetric powers (Moravcsik, 2008, pp. 159–160; Moravcsik, Nicolaidis, 1999, pp. 59–85). Poland – due to its relatively high political and economic potential – should play the role of a regional leader in EU debates, which is not true for today.

Hungarian EU Model

The position of Hungary on the future of the European Union, repeatedly and strongly articulated on many political arenas, can be referred to as the Hungarian EU model. It has been presented in the number of Orbán's statements, most of all his speech in Baile Tuznad in July 2018. The Hungarian prime minister addressed there several important aspects of the future of Europe and the region. First, he confirmed the need to "build Central Europe" where the culture is different from that of Western Europe. He proposed to introduce the following five regional principles: (a) every state has the right to protect its Christian culture and reject the ideology of multiculturalism; (b) every state has the right to protect its traditional family model; (c) every state has the right to protect its national strategic economic sectors; (d) each state has the right to defend its borders and oppose immigration; (e) each state has the right to insist on the principle of equality in matters of paramount importance. Second, he suggested that relations with Russia be renewed: (a) there are indeed states being afraid of Russia (Poland and the Baltic states) but the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary, as well as Western Europeans, "obviously" do not share such a threat; (b) NATO and the EU should provide the Baltic states and Poland with special and "enhanced" security guarantees, while the Union returns to intense trade relations with Russia. Third, Orbán supported the creation of a joint European army, since Europe – while remaining in NATO – must have its own "independent defence capabilities." Fourth, he referred to the "collapse" of the European civilization, which results from: (a) Europe's rejection of its Christian roots; (b) censorship and political correctness; (c) advantages of the United States in the research sector; (d) the dominance of the "spirit of bureaucracy" in European administration; (e) the liberal and the left-wing character of European elites who "seek to bring socialism into Europe;" (f) the existence of a "liberal non-democracy;" (g) the existence of an Islamic immigration. Fifth, the prime minister presented an alternative to the current European model, proposing: (a) the introduction of principles of "Christian democracy" understood not as a defence of faith, but as a protection of culture based on Christianity; (b) the recognition of the dignity of men, families and nations; (c) the protection of nations as an important task of Christian culture; (d) installing an "illiberal democracy" (Orbán, 2018b; cf.: *Hungarian...*, 2018; *EU-Russian...*, 2018).

Significant supplements to this model can be found in earlier Orbán's address delivered in Budapest in June 2018. The most important elements of that speech included: (a) the recognition of Hungary as a state not having its own strength and the conclusion on the need to focus on defending national interests; (b) emphasizing Hungary's ambitions in Central Europe and in V4, while recognizing Poland's leading role in the region; (c) recognition of border protection as a national, not a European, task; (d) criticising the solution of the refugee problem; (e) demanding the mutual respect in terms of perception of the nation, the main principles of family policy, marriage regulation and social integration; (f) striving for the European Commission to express also the interests of smaller states; (g) recognition that Europe should have its own defence forces; (h) perceiving the EU mechanism of the rule of law protection as a "new name" for the federalist tendencies (Orbán, 2018a).

One of the most visible elements of the Hungarian EU model is its pre-revisionist attitude to the stability in Central and Eastern Europe. Orbán has been continually announcing the desire to rebuild the “Carpathian basin” after the 100 years of Hungarian “loneliness.” He mentioned the construction of new rail and road connections, cooperation in the field of energy and coordination of defence policies, while criticising Romania that “for a hundred years did not recognize more than 1.5 million Hungarians in its territory” (Orbán, 2018b).

To sum up, the Hungarian EU model is ideological in Eurosceptic and hyper-conservative terms. Four main components of this model can be distinguished, with the concept of “Christian democracy” or “illiberal democracy” at the fore. It is based on a strong embedding of political activities not so much in religious principles as in a Christian culture based on a traditional, and hardly present in Western Europe, perception of social structures. The second component is a “provincial” approach to Central and Eastern Europe. It is based on the resentment of the Treaty of Trianon and the recognition of the cultural diversity of Central and Eastern Europe and the Western part of the continent (with a radical rejection of multiculturalism). The third component of Hungary’s model is the pursuit of close cooperation with Russia, based on the intense economic relations and the proposal to provide EU security guarantees to some member states. The fourth component is – somewhat paradoxically – a far-reaching pragmatism, which allows to present a general support for closer military cooperation within the EU and the multilateral global solutions in defence matters.

In general terms, there are four reasons why Hungary’s EU model cannot be the basis for a possible EU reform. The first of them is a small relative political and economic potential of this state, and the second – the lack of any significant allies among member states (with the exception of Poland and – in other sense – Italy). The third reason is a political isolation of Hungary in the pan-European debate, which is caused by the dominant negative assessment of its domestic policy. The fourth reason is the representation of a confrontational position in a manner that clearly differs from the standards of political discourse known in the European Union before.

Polish EU Vision

The main element of the Polish vision of the future of the European Union – which cannot be called a model, since it is rather a copy or a supplement to the Hungarian one – is the idea of polycentrism merged with the recognition of the civilizational separateness of Central and Eastern Europe. The most extensive concept in this respect has been presented by the minister in the Office of the President, who proposed an “EU reconstitution” rooted in the programme of the Law and Justice party. The “reconstitution” is defined as a deep reform preserving the “continuity of political institutions” while re-building the “parameters of their actions” (Szczerski, 2017). Four interdependent dimensions of this proposition can be distinguished (cf.: Tosiek, 2017a, pp. 39–56; Tosiek, 2017b, pp. 369–381).

The first of them is a geopolitical one embodied in the Three Seas Initiative. The basic assumption here is that the European Union should be an open polycentric structure

consisting of many autonomous sub-centres called the “decentralized regional communities.” Such communities could independently shape the model of their operation in accordance with uniform pan-European general standards. Poland should constitute a separate centre for Central and Eastern Europe, being a coordination core of its own model of integration. The Three Seas Initiative, with Poland as a tangent point, could consist of a group of states located in the region of the Baltic Sea, the Black Sea and the Adriatic Sea. The goal of this new entity is to oppose the German and Russian domination, with Poland’s taking over the responsibility for EU’s eastern policy as one of the means. The overall security of the region would be guaranteed by both the European Union and NATO. In economic terms, close cooperation of the Three Seas Initiative states, being still EU members, would include the construction of new transport and energy infrastructure, while in terms of domestic policies – the abandoning of the “imitation” of the Western European model of economic development. The second group of problems associated with the “reconstitution” is connected with its institutional dimension. The main proposition is the idea of “intergovernmental democracy” based on four pillars: (a) unanimity as the main way of making decisions in the European Council; (b) strengthening of the role of national parliaments in controlling supranational institutions; (c) the abolishment of the right of the European Commission and the European Parliament to interfere in the domestic law outside the areas of exclusive EU competence; (d) the strict enforcement of the principle of subsidiarity. The strategic goal would be to eliminate the hierarchy of member states, while the solidarity would be understood as a method of verifying the current inter-state balance. The third group of issues is the economic dimension of “reconstitution.” The basic assumption here is to move away from the “neo-colonial development model” of Central and Eastern Europe and to create own economic solutions. In a more general context, the goal would be to deregulate economy, abandon the standardization and reduce bureaucracy. Economic liberalization, however, would go hand-in-hand with the maintenance of cohesion policy. The fourth group of problems includes the axiological dimension of “reconstitution.” The two alternative options of EU’s activity in the sphere of values are: an “axiological neutrality” (based on the lack of interest on EU’s part in the functioning of the member states in this area) or a clearly preferred one – the “return” of the EU to its Christian traditions (Szczerki, 2017, pp. 155–239).

The concept of “reconstitution” is not promoted by Polish decision makers at a substantive level that could influence the European political debate. The approach of Polish authorities is still becoming more and more ideologically Eurosceptic, which makes the government unable to translate the vision into substantive proposals. The address of prime minister Morawiecki in the European Parliament in July 2018 in the framework of the debates on the future of Europe can serve as example. The main elements of this speech were: (a) emphasising the respect for national identities, constitutional pluralism, independent states’ legal systems and national traditions; (b) demanding a new balance between the Union and the nation states to be pushed in the direction of “de Gaulle’s vision adapted to the challenges of modern times;” (c) striving for liberalization of the services market, strengthening the cohesion policy, introducing the digital tax, “increasing the rationality of energy transformation;” (d) critique of Russia’s international actions, support for “maintaining the transatlantic alliance” with

creation of a European Defence Fund; (e) critique of the French concept of “European sovereignty” at the expense of the “powers of the member states” (*Future of Europe...*, 2018).

Morawiecki’s speech only partly addressed the problems of the debate on EU future (some fragments being featured with a strong technocratic language), while the most important theses were Eurosceptic in character. To some extent they resulted from a political dispute between European institutions and Poland. The speech was also poorly related to the problems of EU institutional system (there was no position on the *Spitzenkandidat* mechanism, transnational lists, composition of the European Commission or the partial abandonment of unanimity in the CFSP area).

As a typical example of the same ideological approach can serve the speech of president Duda delivered in Zurich in October 2018. Its most important elements include the definition of the new EU “pillars.” The first of them would be an “equal community” based on the following principles: (a) differences in the potential of states should not be reflected in legal and political decisions; (b) support for multilateralism must be combined with uniform and proportional duties for all; (c) the Three Seas Initiative, understood as an infrastructural project, should be developed; (d) the enlargement of the EU to include Ukraine, Georgia and the Western Balkans should be supported. The second pillar is supposed to be a “community of ethics” based on the “spiritual and ethical roots” of Judaeo-Christianity, as well as the restoration of solidarity. The third pillar is “freedom,” i.e. the “respect of the will of governments elected by the nations” to be the basis for European democracy, combined with a constraining European institutions to operate “within their own competences” (*Wykład...*, 2018).

President’s speech was an example of separation of Poland’s position from the lead elements of the current European debate. A significant part of the speech had a defensive and confrontational character. The views expressed were oriented mainly on the discussion at the meta-political level and did not refer to substantive problems of EU functioning. Still, even in terms of ideological debate, Poland was unable to present a developed vision that could be treated as equivalent to the positions of France, Germany or Hungary.

The same tone – enriched by some populist elements – can be extracted from the lecture of Polish minister of foreign affairs at the Humboldt University in Berlin in June 2019. In addition to declaring that the “EU’s role in the world will be determined by its ability to actually solve problems, its dynamism, its innovative economy and the attractiveness of the European model of democracy” minister Czaputowicz demanded that the role of national parliaments must have been strengthened. At the same time he criticised the “attempts to force one integration model [...] as a ‘project for the elites’ [that tends to] alienate many social groups and fuel Eurosceptic sentiments.” The minister underlined the respect for sovereignty and non-interference into internal affairs of other states, while advocating “an open European Union” (*Minister...*, 2019).

Even in pragmatic documents presented by Polish government, which generally fulfil the demands placed on them, it is not difficult to find some ideological elements. An example of this is the Polish contribution to the discussion on the new EU strategic agenda presented in May 2019 (*Poland...*, 2019; *A Deeper...*, 2019; *A Strengthened...*, 2019; *Digital...*, 2019; *Migration...*, 2019; *Poland’s Position...*, 2019; *The EU...*,

2019). Apart from substantive elements indicating Poland's interests in the field of internal market (free flow of services), the digital single market, and the climate policy, the documents presented did not lack the confrontational Eurosceptic components. They consisted of: (a) the critique of undermining the competences of member states and their sovereignty in migration policy; (b) stressing the purely intergovernmental decision-making process in the sphere of Common Defence and Security Policy, with the European Commission involved only under strict states' supervision. One cannot fail to notice, however, that the postulate of strengthening of the role of national parliaments has been presented here in a relatively pragmatic way. Indeed, the authors of Polish contribution emphasised that "the European project cannot be separated from the basic democratic communities, which are national democracies," but at the same time they proposed a substantive discussion on the "red card" mechanism and the introduction of several new solutions for cooperation between the European Commission and national parliaments.

To sum up, the factor hampering the proper articulation of Poland's position is – along with its ideologically Eurosceptic character – an actively pursued European policy of the state oriented on the defence of domestic reforms assessed negatively by the majority of European partners. This policy is focused on crisis management and based on uncoordinated reactions to external stimuli, as exemplified by Art. 7 TEU procedure and many actions pending before the Court of Justice of the EU. An important element of this decision-making situation is also the EU balance of powers. The European Parliament elections in May 2019 did not result in a big change in the EU political system, and if so, the liberal and left-wing groups have been strengthened, while Eurosceptic politicians *de facto* marginalised. This applies – albeit to a lesser extent – also to the European Council.

Conclusion: Not (to Be) So Similar?

The Polish concept based on "reconstitution" with its essence – the proposal to create "polycentric circles" distinguished on the basis of political, economic and cultural separateness – constitutes a new quality in the debate on differentiated integration. In the geopolitical context the possible implementation of "reconstitution" could lead to Poland's self-marginalization, contributing in the long run to a deeper institutionalization of the peripherality of the state (Tosiek, 2017b, pp. 49–52; cf. Czachór et al., 2019, pp. 45–56). This is the element that most closely combines Polish vision with the Hungarian model, both based on hyper-conservative and Eurosceptic ideology.

However, maybe except for striving to strengthen the position of an abstractly understood nation-state in the EU system, there are no convergent points in the interests of Poland and Hungary in European politics. The basic threats for Poland stemming from the Hungarian model can be noted in two areas. The first of them is an approach to Central and Eastern Europe (based on the thesis on total cultural diversity of the region compared with Western Europe) and an emerging of revisionist tendencies visible in the phraseology applied to immediate neighbours of Hungary (cf. Kowal, 2018). The second threat is a deep and systemic cooperation with Russia (to be extended to

the entire EU) in connection with a proposal to provide security guarantees to some member states.

At the risk of Poland's interests, there are two main reasons for a close relationship between Hungary and Russia. The first of them is a successful authoritarian diffusion from Russia to make Hungary "illiberally" democratic, while the second are mutual interests, including on the Hungarian side energy relations, trade and balancing EU pressure, and on the Russian one – maintaining leverage over the EU through establishing differential bilateral relations towards EU member states (Buzogany, 2017, pp. 1320–1321). Moreover, for Poland it would be a counter-effective way to achieve goals in stopping Russia's aggressive policy by treating Hungary and other V4 states as allies in the implementation of the Three Seas Initiative. As indicated above, the project is perceived as a quasi-economic geopolitical concept focused primarily on the counter-balancing of German and Russian roles in the region. Still, if in the case of Germany such expectations are irrational for historical and functional reasons (due to the close cultural and economic ties between most states and Germany), then in the case of Russia they can prove even more mistaken. The vast majority of Central and East European EU member states do not consider Russia as a significant threat, while it is Hungary's membership in the EU that limits its independence in the pro-Russian policy.

Importantly, EU membership is reducing also the autocratic efforts of Hungarian authorities. A special term – the "externally constrained hybrid regime" – has been invented to describe this situation: such regimes create the constant interplay within the community of democratic states between its more and less democratic members (Bozoki, Hegedus, 2018, pp. 1180–1183). Clearly, the rejection of the Western European type of democracy is the essence of the Hungarian EU model. Some authors use the term "simulated democracy" or "pseudo-democracy" to describe this phenomenon (Lengyel, Ilonszki, 2012, p. 123), featured by a strong connection with economic and cultural populism (Csillag, Szelenyi, 2015, pp. 41–42). Other scholars believe that the state of democracy in Hungary is a kind of the third – in addition to the institutional and participatory ones at the EU level – dimension of the democratic deficit, which makes the Union find itself in an "authoritarian equilibrium" (Kelemen, 2017, pp. 230–231). At the same time, however, it is the close cooperation of states anchored in Western standards, interlinked with the convergence of national arrangements, that forms the basis for the very existence of the European Union. In this case the rejection of "liberal democracy" (though this notion itself allows for multiple solutions and interpretations) prevents the proper functioning of the Union (cf. Nowak, 2018, pp. 31–50).

Nevertheless, one should be prepared to the possibility of withdrawal of the process of de-liberalisation in Central and Eastern Europe, with Poland and Hungary at the fore. It could be a selective process based on the differences between the states. Bustikova and Guasti (2017, pp. 173–174), on the example of the V4, point to three phenomena in this respect. First, despite similarities in democratic and economic performance, the V4 is a diverse group, second – V4 states have demonstrated that they can overcome authoritarian inclinations in the recent past (see Slovakia after 1998), third – none of the V4 states seem to be at immediate risk of a regime reversal to a "typical" autocracy.

In a broader perspective, the visions of integration close to those presented by Hungary and Poland are not absent in other member states, Italy being the best Western example (cf. Bugaric, 2015, p. 244). On the one hand, it may be evidence of the existence of a pan-European “illiberal trend,” but on the other – it is a symptom of the whole European project being exposed to the expansion of such tendencies resulting from local constitutional developments (Uitz, 2015, p. 300). Meanwhile, too strong EU interventions into domestic political and legal arrangements can provoke a nationalist backlash, which is a phenomenon not properly understood in Western Europe (Müller, 2015, p. 160).

The final conclusion of this article is based on the assumption that the Hungarian EU model and the imitative Polish EU vision are based on Euroscepticism, creating the concepts equally incompatible with Western standards of democracy and the EU mainstream views. It is obvious that the strong articulation of extreme opinions always leads to isolation, but in the light of liberal intergovernmentalism it is the Polish concept that undermines the relative position of that state in the EU system more than the Hungarian one. First, compared with Hungary, Poland has completely different interests based on a Russian threat and geographical location. Second, due to its size Poland could be a relatively strong player in the EU, while presentation of a radical concept weakens its role, making it impossible to act as intermediary, an honest broker or a group leader. On the contrary, the Hungarian model, based on a similar concept, can strengthen the relatively marginal position of that state: being an *enfant terrible* can be beneficial for small actors in some (mainly tactical) games.

To quote some scholars: “Poland is not Hungary,” which makes it possible to break down the current relationship. First, there was a large enough parliamentary majority to change the Hungarian constitution and electoral law, second – the freedom of press in Hungary has been systematically limited, third – the civil society in Hungary has been extremely constrained, all those phenomena being, for today, absent in Poland (Karolewski, Benedikter, 2016). On the other hand, to recall other expert’s views (Gostyńska-Jakubowska, 2016), Polish authorities are scoring worse in EU institutions than do Hungarians, which can be traced to three specific conditions. First, the most important reforms in Hungary were introduced when the EU was preoccupied with the euro crisis (with European Commission having little time to be interested in one of small states), second – Fidesz, belonging to the European People’s Party, has more influential allies than the Law and Justice, and third – the Poles are one of the most pro-European nations in the EU, easy to get some civilizational messages directly from Brussels and ignore their own politicians. In this situation, for both substantive and formal reasons, undertaking a close cooperation with Hungary does not positively relate to Poland’s basic interests, being more a matter of social communication than a strategic coalition.

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Summary

The argument of this article is based on the assumption that the Hungarian EU model and the imitative Polish EU vision are based on Euroscepticism, creating the concepts equally incompatible with Western standards of democracy and the EU mainstream views. The strong articulation of extreme opinions leads to the isolation, while in the light of liberal intergovernmentalism it is the Polish concept that undermines the relative position of that state in the EU system more than the Hungarian one. First, compared with Hungary, Poland has completely different interests based on a Russian threat and geographical location. Second, due to its size Poland could be a relatively strong player in the EU, while presentation of a radical concept weakens its role, making it impossible to act as intermediary, an honest broker or a group leader. On the contrary, the Hungarian model, based on a similar concept but applied to a small political actor, can strengthen the relatively marginal position of that state, being a beneficial way to achieve some goals in tactical games.

Key words: Hungary, Poland, European Union, Euroscepticism, illiberal democracy

Polska wizja przyszłości UE: imitacja modelu węgierskiego?

Streszczenie

Argumentacja niniejszego artykułu opiera się na założeniu, że proponowany przez Węgry model funkcjonowania UE i imitująca go polska wizja Unii opierają się na eurosceptycyzmie i są koncepcjami równie nieprzystającymi do zachodnich standardów demokracji i poglądów dominujących w UE. Silna artykulacja skrajnych opinii prowadzi do izolacji, podczas gdy w świetle liberalnej międzyrządowości polska koncepcja podważa względną pozycję tego państwa w systemie UE bardziej niż węgierska. W porównaniu z Węgrami Polska ma bowiem zupełnie inne interesy oparte na zagrożeniu ze strony Rosji oraz położeniu geograficznym. Ponadto, ze względu na swoją wielkość, Polska może być stosunkowo silnym graczem w UE, a prezentacja radykalnej koncepcji osłabia jej rolę, czyniąc niemożliwym odgrywanie roli mediatora, uczciwego pośrednika lub lidera grupowego. W przeciwieństwie do tego model węgierski, oparty na podobnej koncepcji, ale stosowany przez niewielkiego aktora politycznego, może wzmocnić relatywnie marginalną pozycję tego państwa i być korzystnym sposobem osiągnięcia niektórych celów w grach taktycznych.

Słowa kluczowe: Węgry, Polska, Unia Europejska, eurosceptycyzm, demokracja nieliberalna

