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System transformation vs. European integration. A case study of Poland and her agriculture in historical retrospection

Benon Gaziński¹

Abstract

This article is an attempt to overview the issues of correlation between the system transformation and the European integration including a performance of agriculture and development of rural areas in Poland. These topics are outlined in three parts. In the first one, the integration as an economic and social phenomenon is analyzed as well as the transformation of the economic and political system. In the second part, the experience of Polish agriculture in the regime of a centrally planned economy and within system transformation is discussed, whereas in the final part – the influence of the European integration on agriculture including some development trends.

Key words: system transformation, European integration, agriculture in Poland, rural development.

I. Integration processes and system transformation

Integration: definition and comments. The word ‘integration’ is derived from Latin (*integratio*). It stands for merging parts into one functional unity. In order to understand the core of integration, it is helpful to refer to the system. Ancient Greeks expressed the meaning of that notion in a very concise way: a whole is more than a mere sum of its components.

The mentioned ‘more’ shapes a new quality. It stands for the benefit which is revealed as a result of combining components into a defined ensemble, in which those elements become interlinked with one another. In the case of a car, it is the ability to move independently (Gaziński, 2005, pp. 198-200).

The complexity of a system is well illustrated by biology, being also helpful in explaining other qualities of it. Noteworthy, between the organisms belonging to different species, there is a very frequent phenomenon called synergy since they do not live in isolation ‘next to each other’ but cooperate in making fuller usage of their ecological niche.

Another feature of a living organism is the ability to adapt, that is to adjust to the changeable environment, as well as homeostasis, that is being equipped with defensive mechanisms to protect its identity against any accidental stimuli from the environment. Adaptation takes place when changes occur slowly but happen in the same direction, whereas homeostasis – if they are short-lived, act chaotically and with a lot of force (Spedding, 1979, pp. 4-16).

In theory of politics, integration defines the state and level of unification of a given social group as well as of the whole society which, in spite of the fact that it consists of various social and professional groups, classes and social strata diversified by religion, political views, ethnic relations, a range of functions, is perceived as an entity. Integration also concerns the international and interstate bonds. As an example of

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reaching by the Polish society a high level of inner integration could be given the phenomenon of 'Solidarity' at the beginning of the 1980s.

Then, an example of political integration can also be delivered. In international relations, integration manifests, among others, by founding organizations and international institutions such as the United Nations network, the NATO and other defense structures, or the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe.

An important reason and also frequently an initial condition for political integration is economic integration. As a process of dynamic changes, it leads to establishing new structures (economic organisms) merged by a network of interrelations arising within the course of the above-mentioned process.

The opponents seem to underestimate the notable benefits of the integration for the cooperating parties. They are reaped also when the partners show different levels of development and wealth. It is confirmed among others by the theory of comparative costs, formulated by D. Ricardo in the 19-th century and belonging to the canons of the classical economics. It is stated in it that an international exchange allows the participating partners to reap notable benefits since each country specializes in production of those goods manufactured relatively better and imports from abroad those commodities, the production of which seems to be less effective in that country (Rufin, 2002, pp.727-748).

Depending on the political, economic, and cultural conditions, the diversification of the level of social and economic development as well as the hitherto experiences of partners, integration assumes various institutional and legal forms. Integration is not always voluntary (although that model seems to prevail today in democratic societies) – it also happens while forced from the outside. In the course of history many examples of military conquerors have taken place, as a result of which not only the defeated were assimilated by the winners but quite the opposite also tended to happen that the winners were assimilated by the defeated. Correspondingly, it is possible to distinguish three basic types of integration, depending on the character of the relations between the states (Gaziński, 1991 pp. 43-51).

□ **Politically unequal integration**, when some partners are subordinated to the others (formerly: the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance, a colonial dependency).

□ **Conventional integration of sovereign states** (e.g. the EFTA, the CEFTA, the NAFTA).

□ **Conventional agreement of states which voluntarily limit their sovereignty** for the sake of representing them supranational institutions (e.g. the European Union).

Classifying the European Union into the third category is justified by the political vision of the foreseen Community, as elaborated by Jean Monnet and Robert Schuman, their founders. Not by case, it constitutes the unique feature of the institutional framework in comparison with a state or typical international organization. Depending on progress of economic integration, various forms of it can be distinguished:

□ **Free trade zone** which stands for an agreement on abolishing in mutual trade customs duties and other restrictions of similar effect to customs duties such as quotas or compensation fees. Partners remain free to maintain trade policy with the countries which do not belong to the zone.

□ **Customs union**, usually the next stage of integration, achieved, when the partners forming the free trade zone adopt a uniform trade policy towards states, which do not belong to the zone (common customs tariff and trade regulations).

□ **Economic union** results from the evolution of the customs union, the development of which demands unification and setting numerous detailed solutions covering law, taxes as well as public finance, social issues and other. More and more institutions are being established to fulfill the above mentioned tasks (Barcz, Kawecka-Wyrzykowska, Michałowska-Gorywoda, 2007 pp. 21-32).

Distinguishing a free trade zone from a customs union is by no means a mere theory, far from the daily practice, but is explicitly reflected in the history of the European Communities both the former and the recent years. Still in the 1950s, when the future Rome Treaties were being negotiated, seven states participated in them. Apart from ‘the sixth’ of founders of the European Steel and Coal Community (established by force of the Paris Treaty which came into force in 1952), there was also the United Kingdom among them. She, however, withdrew from the negotiations when Henry Spaak, former Belgian Prime Minister, who chaired the negotiations, demanded from the state delegations the government authorizations that they accept reaching the stage of a customs union as a task of economic integration.

Another example of similar character is Norway, connected with the states of the present European Union by the agreement on the European Economic Area (having features of a free trade zone). In that state membership was rejected twice in national referendums: for the first time in the period preceding the first enlargement of 1973 when the UK, Denmark and Ireland became members of the Communities and again prior to the enlargement of 1995, when Finland, Sweden and Austria joined the EU (Gaziński, 2005, pp. 196-200).

For years, the European Union is on the stage of advanced economic union. By the Single European Act provisions, a single internal market was created which is characterized by four freedoms of transfer: goods (removal of customs barriers), capital, services and people. Following-up to the processes of establishment the internal European market, the programme was launched of the Community’s currency. Announced in the Treaty on the European Union, it was reached (the third stage of the so-called economic and currency union) by introducing the euro – in 1999 in a cashless form. Since 2002, the euro replaced the national currencies in 12 states, which joined the ‘Euroland’ (Gaziński, 2002, pp. 127-135)².

Due to political reasons and as a result of the very nature the regime imposed on Poland after the World War II, for some decades Poland was not capable to participate in those processes encompassing the democratic European nations. A clear example of that was the lack of any bilateral agreements between the Polish People’s Republic³ and the European Communities. Mutual relations were regulated by international law as well as unilateral directives of the European Economic Community on the principles of trade and economic cooperation with the Centrally Planned Economies. The first such an agreement was signed as late as in September 1989, already in the period of the cabinet of the first post-war non-communist Prime Minister in the Central-Eastern Europe, Tadeusz Mazowiecki. It was a turning point in the Polish relations with the democratic Europe but also a stimuli for peaceful processes of rejecting the Communist system elsewhere.

²Other countries followed. Till 2021, euro not adopted by 6 MS *inter alia* the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland.

³ Official name of the state [Polska Rzeczpospolita Ludowa] under the former regime, replaced, since 1-st January 1990, by Republic of Poland [Rzeczpospolita Polska].

Transformation. The word 'transformation' (Latin: *transformatio*) means a deep changeover and is used in various contexts. In recent 30 years, the term **system transformation** is widely applied to describe the changes taking place in the countries, which have set reforms due to their departure from the system of real socialism for democratic structures and a market economy.

The scope of transformation seems to be a unique as it encompasses both the political system and the overall economy. It is possible to point out some examples of transformation of political systems of countries which were ruled in an autocratic way: fascist Germany, Italy or Greece and Spain ruled by military regimes. In referred countries, the fundamentals of market economy remained – indeed, the political changes were accompanied by economic reforms but they did not change the fundamentals of the economy.

Let's pay an attention to the system transformation, undertaken in Poland and other countries of the region. It is noteworthy that the first transformation of the political system in the country started in 1918. It meant the integration of the lands, which had belonged to the partitioners, into one organism of the independent Polish state. And that development was disturbed by the war, just after barely 20 years.

Since 1944 to 1949 the other transformation was imposed on Poland. It covered the following areas (Gaziński, 2011):

a) *Political system:*

Parliamentary democracy of the interwar period was replaced by the system of the totalitarian state, which defined itself as 'the dictatorship of the proletariat'.

b) *Economic system:*

- Market economy was replaced by Centrally Planned Economy.
- Private properties, dominating in an economy, were largely nationalized.

Thus, it can be easily noticed that in 1989 the transformation was undertaken in the opposite direction as compared with that one of the 1940s.

ad. a) *Political system:*

The state of was submitted to reconstruction including the formation of the system of parliamentary democracy.

ad. b) *Economic system:*

- Centrally planned economy was replaced by market economy.
- The nationalized properties, dominating in the economy, were transformed into private ones.

Since September 1939, when the peaceful development was disturbed by the war, till mid-September 1989, when the government of Tadeusz Mazowiecki – the first one in that part of Europe – initiated the programme of system transformation, 50 years and half-a-month had passed. For the entire half a century the country developed according to the principles of a different, ineffective social and economic system. It is the main cause of the economic backwardness which is confirmed by the statistical data.

It is estimated that in 1938 the national income in Poland was two-fold above that in Greece. After 45 years of real socialism the data were reversed in favour of Greece. The picture referring to other European states was similar.

The strategic choice made by Poland in 1989 to replace the inefficient system of real socialism by a

more effective one did not mean, as some people expected, a rapid increase of the pace of the economic development. The fall of the GDP per, observed in the first years of transformation, stood for the costs of reconstruction of the political and economic system.

According to the statistics, in 1990 GDP per capita decreased by 8% in comparison with the year 1989, whereas in the next year – by 7%. A considerable part of citizens felt a marked deterioration of the standard of living. However, the statistics painted an excessively gloomy picture of the situation, contributing to a rapid growth of disappointment and frustration in the society (Rosati, 1998, pp. 99-134). Several overlapping causes contributed to that:

- The so-called ‘grey economy’ was not included in the statistics. An example of that was developing then street trade. According to the Hungarian estimates of that time its share in the economy was comparable with the observed fall in GDP.

- The new economic system put to the end of production of useless trash which increased the statistics of the national income (e.g. at the time of common pocket calculators privately imported, the domestic industry manufactured still mechanic calculating devices, the so-called ‘kręciołki’),

- The scope of wasting was considerably reduced. In the cooperative block flats, warmth escaped through the draughty, not insulated, windows and walls. Again, owing to the mining and heat engineering the national income increased,

- Inaccuracy in estimating the very statistical data. In the former system a nationalized enterprise had a strong motivation to deliver ‘on paper’ results higher than in reality (bonuses for the management and the staff for exceeding the planned tasks). Therefore, ‘on the paper’ data did not meet the true ones, being of much lower value. Contrary, a private enterprise could expect one clear prize for excellent results – higher taxes!

It is noteworthy that the costs of transformation were not borne by everyone and not evenly spread. Thus, not everyone felt the benefits or could participate in the opportunities created by the emerging new system. Paradoxically, the beneficiaries of the new system were in particular the people belonging to the former political establishment which easily got rid of its ideology, the support for which had frequently only a declarative character. And, a paradox, they were between leaders creating the fundamentals of capitalism.

Granting property rights to the enterprises established by the nomenclature contributed to that in a considerable way (the appropriation by the party and state elites of the national property) even prior to the formal fall of the real socialism as well as the subsequent so-called ‘thick line’ policy (abandoning decommunization) declared by the first non-Communist government. On the other hand, among the losers of that time were the employees of the large industrial plants which used to be the mainstay of ‘Solidarity’, whereas in the new reality experienced workforce reductions and even bankruptcy of their companies.

The deterioration of mood was influenced by the effect of demonstration by the increasing in number rich beneficiaries of the changes, excessive expectations of majority and forgetting the misery of life in the conditions of the real socialism. The memory of empty shop shelves of the 1980s tended to be veiled by the short-lived prosperity of ‘the life on credit’ in the times of Gierk (Bekasik, et.al., 1999).

Clearly visible was the lack of understanding for the ongoing transformation in the categories of

system choices. People did not often realize the illusory nature of their expectations: that it would be possible to retain that what was deemed the positive side of the old system: stable employment, lack of unemployment (at least the official one as it occurred in a hidden form), social benefits, provided for free or at reduced prices (it was expressed in the colloquial language: 'what is being given' at the shop or 'to get' a flat) and at the same time to avoid the 'bad' sides of the new system: unemployment, higher risk of doing business or the 'rapacity' which was characteristic for the first period of emerging market economy. Meanwhile, the choice referred to the whole system, to both the 'good' sides of it as well as the 'bad' ones. The Solidarity uprising of the 1980s deprived the hitherto authorities of the social mandate to continue exercising power – the demand for political turnover of the state was explicitly expressed. In the economic sphere, the postulates were not radical – the expectations of that time seemed to be expressed by the slogan: 'socialism yes, distortions no'.

Socialism as a system did not appear as a consequence of a sovereign but a wrong choice – it was imposed on the society from outside. The decision on radical its abandoning, the right one, with no other realistic alternative found, was not made as a result of a referendum or following extensive social consultations, explaining the role of changes or the conditions of the new political and economic system.

There were also other inevitable mistakes, corruption, numerous examples of ineptitude, wrong legal solutions as well as the inefficiency of many offices, including the judiciary. All that contributed to the intensification of frustration and weakening of the sense of connection with own state. That explains the fact that the post-communist fractions soon regained influence. In Poland, it took place in 1993 but it also happened in the most of the countries of the region.

However, those and other deficiencies cannot veil the historical dimension of the changes. The transformation of the political system led to the creation of a democratic state (Gaziński, 2005, pp. 196-200):

- Free elections were introduced.
- The legal system, including the constitution, were altered.
- New institutions were established, including: the office of the President and Senate, the Constitutional Tribunal, the Tribunal of State and the Supreme Administrative Court.
- The fundamental human citizen's rights, which in the socialist system existed only on the paper, had been enforced.

The transformation of the economic system led to the market economy:

- The 'handmade' steering of the central plan was replaced by the regulation by the laws of the market.
- The financial system was changed (convertibility of zloty, independence of banks),
- The private sector became the dominating sector of the economy (property relations, participation in creating GDP and employment).
- The institutional and legal system was adapted to the needs of the reformed economy (and foreseen European integration).

In order to depict the scale of changes let us give some examples. During a period of the socialist economy there was no law regulating the act of opening private business – the interwar Trade Code turned out to be

very helpful in the new circumstances! There were no statutory provisions regarding the collapse of companies – socialism simply did not admit such a possibility. There were also no legal bases for establishing foundations (such a law was adopted under the pressure of the initiators of a church foundation for the sake of Polish agriculture in the second half of 1980s).

The thorough reconstruction of the state was not the only one result of the system transformation. It also contributed to the change of the geopolitical location of Poland on the map of the world:

- Instead of the three, the country has seven states-neighbours.
- Poland met criteria and was accepted to such international institutions as: the International Monetary Fund, the OECD and the Council of Europe.
- The participation in NATO and the European Union gained vast recognition as of strategic importance for the future of the state.

The basic features of the system transformation and the problems connected with it were similar in all countries of concern. From formal point of view, it had been completed in ex-Socialist new Member States, at least according to the so-called Copenhagen criteria, adopted by the European Union. Still a lot has to be done in Albania and other Balkan states. A complicated situation prevails in the Commonwealth of Independent States (*Globalizacja ...*, 2003).

Poland chose the way of a ‘shock therapy’ of economic reforms and had been deemed as a model example of success. Though there is still one neglected problem – she belongs to the few post-socialist countries, which till the present day, were not able to deal with the problem of reprivatization, that is the law specifying the compensation for the nationalization of the private property, carried out against the law of that time.

The transformation of the political system was carried out in a much less fortunate way. Poland initiated the transformation in the whole region but met the criteria of a democratic state later than Hungary, which joined the Council of Europe earlier.

II. Agriculture during the former regime vs. a system transformation

One of the most important features of the socialist system was the domination of politics over the economy, hence political and economic periods overlap. That regime lacked sufficient adaptability to survive, even if demonstrated slow adaptation to changeable economic conditions and political factors. Since the year 1944 (imposition of the new system) till the year 1989 (departure from socialism), several periods can be distinguished:

Setting-up of the new system (1944 – December 1948). During the ongoing war, it was the government-in-exile in London internationally recognized, whereas the new centre of power was deemed usurpal. ‘The legalization’ of the communist power proceeded in stages: from the temporary acknowledgement of the opposition in the public life (the leader of the Polish Peasants’ Party, Stanislaw Mikołajczyk, came from London and became a deputy prime minister in the newly installed government) to step-by-step elimination of independent political fractions (a characteristic event was the escape of Mikołajczyk from Poland in 1947)

till the establishment of homogeneous political centre. In December 1948, an unification congress was held. At that congress the Polish Socialist Party and Polish Workers' Party merged to establish the Polish United Workers' Party. The goal of that transition period, intended from the outset, had been achieved. The turning points in the economic policy of the period were defined by the fight to take over power. There were the decrees (note: not legal acts formulated by the Parliament) on nationalization of the industry and agricultural reform (1944), 'battle for trade' (the struggle since the year 1947 to eliminate the private sector from trade, services and small-scale production) as well as the introduction of forcible collectivization of agriculture, which was decided on at the unification congress (December 1948).

The issue of an agricultural reform bothered the Polish society already in the period of the Second Polish Republic. It was also present in the programmess of the Polish Peasants' Party. However, the purpose of the reform by the new authorities was political to a great extent. It aimed to strengthen the position of the communist party in the rural areas. Moreover, as the later events showed, it turned out to be only a short-term step.

The reform covered the farms and landed estates with the area exceeding 50 or 100 hectares depending on the location either on the 'old' or the 'new' lands (referred to as the regained lands). However, the allotments of land were very small. It often happened that on one farm abandoned by the German refugees were located two families. Correspondingly, one of the results of the agricultural reform, was the fragmentation of the agrarian structure which burdened the country over the next decades (Góra, 1969).

Rapid industrialization and forced collectivization (December 1948 – October 1956). A different economic strategy of expansion of industry and collectivization of agriculture was adopted within the confines of the of the six-year economic plan, the only one of such a time perspective (the previous plan of the post-war reconstruction encompassed three years, whereas all the following ones were five-year plans). That approach was a copy of Soviet solutions from the end of the 1920s and beginning of the 1930s. According to the Marxist dual conception, which divided the economy into two segments – the sector manufacturing the means of production and the sector producing article of consumption, the emphasis was put on the development of the heavy industry (Kaliński, Landau, 1999).

The linkage between fast industrialization and collectivization was not by case – agriculture was treated as a 'suction pump' (Swianiewicz, 1965), supposed to supply industry with food and workforce. Moreover, according to the adopted ideological doctrine, there was an illusion that agriculture can be steered with the help of a central plan. The very existence of the peasant economy, that is thousands of relatively independent economic entities, did not match the logic of the system and the pursuit to subject all the forms of social, political and economic life into the control of one ruling centre, the communist party. In its initial period, preceding the death of Stalin (1953), the collectivization of agriculture was carried out by the most brutal methods. The so-called propaganda brigades were sent to the rural areas to put peasants under various kinds of pressure. Within the confines of the obligatory deliveries so low prices were applied that covered barely the production costs. Those peasants who were not capable to deliver the quotas imposed on them quite frequently ended up in prison. Owners of bigger farms (the so-called kulaks) were in particularly difficult situation as they were burdened with excessive taxes, increasing, progressively. Since 1954, the year

of some corrections of the six-year plan unrealistic tasks, the signs of political ‘thaw’ could be noticed and the burden of collectivization lessened.

Short-term ‘thaw’ and stagnancy of the the Gomułka’s period (1956 – 1970). The workers’ rebellion in Poznań, bloodily suppressed by the militia and the army, did not go unnoticed. In October 1956, on the tide of the growing demand for changes, the power was taken over by Władysław Gomułka, the leader of the Polish Workers’ Party who was removed from his position prior to the establishment of the Polish United Workers’ Party.

The period of the political ‘thaw’ was accompanied by discussions about economic reforms (several years later abandoned). In agriculture, the majority of the forcibly established farm cooperatives were dissolved. It does not mean, however, that the existence of private sector in agriculture was accepted. Gomułka, being convinced of the superiority of the socialized sector over the private farming (state farms, production cooperatives and later – in the Gierek’s period – collective farms of farmers’ associations). Nevertheless, he claimed that a longer time perspective was needed to accomplish that process. It was one of the reasons why in Poland there was no second wave of collectivization in the 1960s, which took place in other socialist countries of the Soviet block where – as a result of the policy, run in a less drastic way but still very effectively - the private sector in agriculture was diminished to small allotments adjoining houses (Jeziński, Leszczyńska, 1997).

Survival of the peasant economy in Poland can be interlinked with the two other factors: the strong position of the Catholic church, which was not disintegrated in spite of the impediments and hostility of the authorities as well as the effectiveness of the peasant resistance (socialized agriculture treated as an alien formation, imposed from the ‘East’). It was expressed by naming the production cooperatives as ”kolkhozes”. By the way, that reference was not formally correct as in the USSR such cooperatives were referred to as ”sovkhozes”, whereas kolkhozes were state farms.

Gierek’s period – credits and an ”opening” to the West (1970 – 1980). Edward Gierek came to power as a political aftermath of the workers’ riots, bloodily crushed on the Baltic coast in December 1970. Then Władysław Gomułka due to his ‘health condition’ stepped down from the Office of the First Secretary of the Polish United Workers’ Party.

Being a mining engineer by education who had worked in Belgian mines, Gierek gave the politics a different style than his predecessor. He enjoyed large authority among West European politicians for many years. The initial years of Gierek’s rule were marked by attempts to introduce economic reforms. A wide modernization and investment effort was made, possible due to taking out Western loans. Those credits were easily offered both from the public as well as private sources.

The so-called strategy of credits “self-repayment” was adopted, the assumption that the credits taken out on the account of investments were going to be paid back after launching them. A speculative solution was the introduction of the law which made it possible for the citizens to open bank accounts in convertible currencies (it should be added that the interest rate was much more beneficial than on the accounts in Polish zlotys). It was easier than ever before to go abroad, including the capitalist countries. After a couple of years it turned out, however, that the economic strategy failed. The economic and political system demanded

more radical reforms, including the political ones (*Gospodarka Polski ...* . 2002).

Regarding the agriculture, there were many contradictions in Gierek's crew. In the first years of the new rule, several decisive steps were taken which were necessary for the agriculture. A pension system for individual farmers was introduced. Farmers employed on a farm, obtained access to health care benefits on the same principles as the whole society. Moreover, the outdated system of obligatory deliveries was dismantled. In the first half of the 1970s, the economic performance was improved. People had the impression that the life in the country was getting better.

However, that does not mean, that existence of the private sector in agriculture was accepted as a lasting element of the socialist economy. In the middle of the 1970s, on the 15th Plenary Session of the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party, the documents were adopted explicitly stated that the socialized agriculture was supposed to be the target model of the economy. Those provisions did not remain on the paper only. Peasants were discriminated in terms of access to production means. Investment outlays in the individual agriculture were even tenfold lower per hectare than in the socialized sector - in spite of the fact that its economic effectiveness constituted approx. 70% of the efficacy in the individual agriculture (Kaliński, Landau, 1999).

Another important manifestation of hidden collectivization was the politics of taking over the land estates by the state for the purposes of the socialized sector (among other things in exchange for pensions). It was then, when the combined farms of farmers' circles were formed. Such a form had the worst results in the whole agriculture.

The "Solidarity" conglomerate and an agony of the system. The difficulties which were intensifying in the late 1970s, forced the authorities to apply a short-term measures by taking subsequent loans. Their acceptance was frequently connected with some political after-effects. In particular, following the workers' riots in Ursus and Radom in 1976, the political opposition started to develop dynamically, acting largely in a semi-official way. The so-called 'second circuit', clandestine publications became more and more widely available.

The mentioned factors contributed to the so-called 'August events', that is long-lasting, coordinated strikes spread in overall Poland. This solstice led to the formulation of the famous 21 postulates (inscribed on the UNESCO Intangible Heritage List in 2003). Based on the final agreement, the first non-party controlled trade union was established, the 'Solidarity'.

The experiment of the so-called 'Solidarity Spring' was crushed by the forceful actions under the martial law of December 1981. The authorities were capable to regain the endangered positions. They did not manage, however, in spite of the reform attempts undertaken in an enigmatic way and divided in two stages, to control the economy. According to critics' opinion, it was becoming more and more of a 'bankruptcy estate'.

The agony of the socialist system in Poland took during the era of Mikhail Gorbachev – for the first time, the USSR was not considered as a threat of intervention in introducing fundamental changes. The agriculture of that decade was as much in emergency need to turn as the whole economy. Poland was the only country in that part of the world in which the food supplies were rationed for around fifteen years.

There was an important earlier change to the legal system to which farmers did not pay much attention as they were already taught by the experience of decades that the law and reality did not always correspond. By law, the stability of the peasant economy was guaranteed within the confines of the socialist economy (Jeziarska, Leszczyńska, 1994). That time it was not just an empty declaration. The period of either open or hidden collectivization became a history.

To sum-up, the considerations of the Hungarian author are worth quoting. Balint Magyar, the Staff Member of the Co-operative Institute in Budapest (in democratic Hungary he even served as a Minister), when asked about Polish agriculture during the author's stay in that city in 1987 – he got to know the realities well, as he stayed in Poland and even learned the language quite well (his study on the Polish agriculture, in English, counted about 70 pages long), put it very bluntly⁴: "there are no peasants in Poland. There are no peasants, just like a caged lion, in a zoo is not a real lion. In order to exploit an inner potential, a freedom of the jungle is needed. The bars in a cage for a lion are like a state monopoly of purchasing and supply for the Polish peasant".

He was quite aware of the pain of market shortages (then empty store shelves) and predicted that if the inefficient system was to be changed, it would be easy to buy not only nails or buckets, but also these or other agricultural machines. The neglect of the existing generation gap, resulting from the betrayal of ideas and the loss of the continuity of the cooperative movement, could not be made up so easily. The collapse of real socialism, only a few years later, confirmed that he was right in its entirety (Gaziński, 1991).

Democratic changes of the so-called Spring of Nations. There is no clear date of the democratic breakthrough of the year 1989, assumed as the beginning of the new system because there was a sequence of events which contributed to the departure from the 'real socialism' towards a market economy democratic state.

a) The agreement terminating the wave of strikes in Summer 1988 led to the sessions of the 'Round Table' negotiations with the circles of the democratic opposition.

b) The compromise was concluded, paying a way for the reactivation of 'Solidarity' as well as to partially free Parliamentary elections.

c) A devastating defeat to the governing party of 4th June 1989 – the opposition won all the seats in the Senate (free elections) (only one senator – H. Stokłosa won as an independent candidate), and the candidates of the opposition took all the provided seats in the Sejm, Polish Parliament (famous photo with Lech Walesa during the hustings).

d) In September 1989, an outturn of the June elections, the government of T. Mazowiecki was formed. He became the first non-communist Prime Minister in that part of Europe.

e) The new cabinet adopted the programme of reforms for speedy transition to the market economy. The chief architect of the 'shock' reform package was Professor Leszek Balcerowicz. The date that symbolically opens a new period in history could be the 1-st January 1999:

□ The name of the state was changed from the Polish People's Republic into the Republic of Poland, whereas as the sign of regained sovereignty a crown was placed on the head of

⁴ Personal communication during discussion with the Author.

the eagle – the Polish national emblem.

□ The ‘package’ of essential reforms came into effect, among which the most groundbreaking was the introduction of convertibility of zloty.

At the beginning, changes to the economic and political system had a diverse influence on the agriculture. The introduction of prices set by the market caused that the shop shelves, used to be empty in the 1980s, were filled with food. Only within several months, the food market went from the state of chronic shortages, common for the whole decades of the previous system, to the state of balance or even surpluses (farmers had to learn that important is not only to produce but also to sale their output).

System transformation required insertion of institutional changes related to the agriculture – among the first ones was establishment of the Agricultural Market Agency and later Agricultural Property Agency of the State Treasury (then transformed into Agency of Land Estates) as well as the Agency for Restructuring and Modernization of Agriculture.

The organization of the agricultural market had undergone significant remaking. In the period of real socialism, there were the cooperatives which took an important part in purchasing agricultural produce, supplying the agriculture with the means of production, dealing with a turnover of agricultural produce as well as in being involved in some sectors of food production (Communal Cooperatives ‘Samopomoc Chłopska’ or Local Dairy Cooperatives and Cooperatives of Farmers’ Circles).

Under the new economic order, a cooperative was classified as a form of private ownership. The tradition of the cooperative movement in the Polish territories dates back to the 19th century, a period of partitions. Several decades of the system of planned economy, during which there were small opportunities for grass-roots organizations resulted in a certain ‘generation gap’ to occur.

The farmers running farms in the end of the 1980s and at the beginning of 1990s could not remember already the cooperative movement of the interwar period. Those forms which were familiar to them, formally called cooperatives were treated with mistrust as imposed by the authorities. In fact, they were a contradiction of the idea of the cooperative as a grassroots and local governance. For that reason, the attempts to re-establish the cooperative movement in the country brought only half-effective results. The niche, occurred as a result of collapse of the hitherto structure of purchase and supply of agriculture, was filled in by the private capital. Fairs, wholesale market as well as dynamically expanding chain of supermarkets became a meaningful sign of the new times (*Obszary wiejskie ...*, 2002).

The negative outturn of that was the distorted relation between the price paid to the farmer selling his products and prices of the ready-made products on the shop shelves. The state farms, occupying relatively small area, were in the first years of transformation left to their own devices, being particularly hit by the inflation, including high interest rates of loan, which was followed by the intensified process of their bankruptcy. It caused particularly difficult social consequences, especially in those areas where that form of farming was dominant (in some voivodships of Northern and Western Poland they covered more than a half of the arable land), especially including the structural unemployment in the rural areas, which had not been overcome for many years (Otoliński, 2002, pp. 244-262).

Of particular importance was the self-government reform providing for the establishment of

communes as independent economic entities, which by law became the owners of the communal property – the form of property which in the period of real socialism did not exist. The opportunity to undertake grass-roots initiatives of the local communities was restored. Non-governmental organizations, associations for local development, foundations and other forms of public activity have gained the possibility of free expansion. The Polish countryside started to participate in the process of changes, proceeding in a more and more dynamic way.

III. The international context. The European integration impact

A characteristic feature of the Polish agriculture under the previous system was the domination of the private sector – among the post-socialist countries only Poland and Slovenia stood out in this respect. For example, comparing the agrarian structure of Poland and Hungary on the eve of the system transformation, a reversed pyramid of land ownership is obtained. In Poland, c. 80% of farmland was held privately, another about 15% was owned by the state farms, whereas the rest, less than 5%, was used by farmers' production cooperatives. By contrast, in Hungary some 80% of farmland was occupied by production cooperatives, c. 15% – by state farms, whereas the private sector made up only approximately 5% of land ownership (mainly house adjacent allotments, *Polska wieś ...* 2008, p. 12).

Thus, Poland was in a relatively better situation than other countries of the region since the system changes referred only to part of the farmland. However, an extensive modernization effort was necessary as agriculture did not meet European standards in terms of technology. There was also a lot to be done in food processing. The beginning of the 1990s was the period of the opening in foreign trade. The liberalization of food trade caused an influx of a wide stream of products from abroad, not been sold on the Polish market before, such as drinks in plastic bottles (for some time, mineral water was even imported from Belgium!), sliced ham, cheeses and other dairy products. Domestic industry took up the challenge of the foreign competition. Imported products, their packaging, way of processing and, last not least, the consumer behaviour became 'the seeds to think' and an example to follow since they were available for free and with no need for research (Siekierski, 2002, pp. 263-277).

The modernization of the processing plants and farms was also accelerated by the new quality norms. Since the beginning of the 1990s the Government Plenipotentiary on the European Integration and Foreign Assistance (in 1996, transformed into the Office for the Committee of European Integration) was among others obliged to monitor the new law in terms of its compatibility with the *acquis communautaire*. The next phenomenon was the influx of foreign capital. As a result, within around fifteen years, still before Poland joined the European Union, thorough changes were made, covering the whole branches of food manufacture, such as the brewing, dairy and meat industries to give the most important examples.

One of the after-effects of the fall of socialism were thorough changes in the structure of Polish foreign trade, referring also to the turnover of food. The dissolved socialist Council of Mutual Economic Assistance was replaced by the European Community Member States (MS). The main trade partner became Germany replacing the USSR – the main trade partner of the Peoples' Republic of Poland. It is worth

mentioning that Germany was Polish main trade partner prior to the World War II (even despite the aggressive German politics and hostile mutual relations, whereas at present Poland and Germany have become cooperating neighbours, overcoming resentments of the past).

The Polish trade with the European Communities was regulated by the provisions of the European Agreement (as the Agreement establishing the Association between the Republic of Poland and the European Communities was commonly called). It was signed (along with Hungary and the former Czechoslovakia) on 16th December 1991 and came into effect in Spring 1994. The part of the Agreement relating to the trade, the Interim Agreement, came into power already in the year 1992. It provided for establishing a free trade zone in trade relations within the period of 10 years, not applying, however, to the agricultural produce.

An important provision was also the principle of asymmetry of concessions in trade – the liberalization pace was supposed to be faster for the European Communities than for Poland. The paradox, against the expected results of the Association Treaty, for many consecutive years, the balance of the food turnover was negative for Poland. It can be explained by number of factors. Import charges from the third countries to the Community (charging compensation fees, later on the basis of GATT agreement converted into custom fees), import and import quotas and applying export subsidies. For instance, the last drove Poland out the market of the Kaliningrad region of the Russian Federation, whereas since ... the beginning of the 1990s the export of Polish food was dynamically growing.

Thus, there is no wonder that in those years, preceding Poland's accession to the European Union, farmers perceived the perspective of membership with mistrust and fears. Their daily experience pointed to the European Union is as 'bad neighbour', with dumping practices (as the unfair practices in foreign trade were referred to already before the war). That could be confirmed by a quite spectacular example of Hungary. She, during the trade negotiations of the GATT Uruguay Round, in spite of the official status of candidate to the European Union, joined the so-called Cairns Group, which under the leadership of the USA played as a team against the European Communities interests.

It was finally Poland's membership, which put an end to that clash of interests. Poland, before the accession the 'third' country, became the member of the European Union and found herself inside the area. However, the formal acknowledgement of membership was preceded by a positive balance in food trade and Poland, due to its potential, soon became the biggest net exporter of food in the region, exceeding Hungary.

The European Communities reacted very fast to the fall of real socialism and the initiation of thorough changes. Already in the year 1989 the decision was taken to set up the aid program, PHARE (Poland Hungary Assistance for Restructuring their Economies), soon expanded onto other countries of the region, including altogether around fifteen countries. Designed to be a temporary assistance program it became the first pre-accession programme on the final stage of its existence. Admittedly, the agriculture made use of the PHARE means to a small extent but in 1999 to subsequent pre-accession programmes were set up, the SAPARD and the ISPA, out of which the first one applied exclusively to agriculture and was supposed to be a form of training preceding the act of providing the candidate countries with much wider range of programmes and budget means, available from the moment of accession (Gaziński, 2013, pp. 311-366).

The pre-accession negotiations lasted for over four and a half years - they started on 31 March 1998 and finished on 13 December 2002. Out of over 30 so-called 'negotiation fields' agriculture belonged to the most difficult ones and concluded in the final stage (after the mid-night). It was the most difficult to reach a compromise on two issues: obtaining access to direct subsidies by Polish farmer and entrance to acquisition of land – for foreigners (the Jerzy Buzek's government set a proposal of quite long interim period of 18 years).

In the document 'Agenda 2000', announced by the European Commission in July 1997 and adopted on the 'summit' in Berlin in 1999, the standpoint was adopted that the new MS are not going to have any access to the direct payments till the end of the forthcoming budget period (2013). That standpoint was justified by the claim that the essence of the system of direct subsidies is to compensate for the income lost by the farmers as a result of decreasing the intervention prices (the reform of Common Agricultural Policy). In the candidate states these prices were lower than the Community ones. That is why, the farmers from the new member states are going to benefit from higher prices and there is no reason to provide them with the support (Drago, Gaziński, 1998, pp. 159-164).

Such a standpoint could not have been accepted by Polish negotiators (as well as by their colleagues from other candidate states). They insisted that a lack of direct subsidies was an open and evident discrimination because they would have received much smaller benefits per hectare than their counterparts from the 'old' Union. Moreover, the Polish farmers, not e.g. the Danish ones, had still to make a considerable modernization effort in order to meet the requirements of the single European market. Finally the dispute was finished in a compromise - it was agreed that the level of the direct payments for Polish farmers was going to rise systematically, reaching the level of 100% in the year 2013, the last one of the budget period.

The membership in the European Union meant not only obtaining access to the direct subsidies but also to a range of other agriculture support programs, such as structural pension (for farmers in the pre-retirement age group who are going to make over their farms to their successors modernizing their farms), support for young farmers, purchase of machines and modernization of buildings, land reforestation, ecological farming, development of farm tourism as well as employment outside the farms *etc.* (Drago, Gaziński, 1998, pp. 159-164).

It should be added that according to the changeable conceptions and reforms of the Common Agricultural Policy (the development of the so-called second pillar) more and more means were allocated for the development of rural areas. The first years of membership (2004 – 2006) were a kind of a transition period, all the more that the membership fell on the incomplete second half of the budget period 2000-2006. Poland had already participated in working out the next budget for the seven-year period of 2007-2013, enjoying the rights of a fully-fledged MS (quite popular was made the gesture by the prime minister Kazimierz Marcinkiewicz expressing his satisfaction with some further concessions by the European leaders: 'yes, yes, yes').

Recent trends and some concluding remarks. The unprecedented enlargement of the European Union from 15 to 25 and then (following the accession of Bulgaria, Romania and Croatia) to 28 member states (Croatia

became an EU member since 1st July 2013 (the Brexit was ultimately concluded more than 7.5 years later, 31st January 2020), a numerical growth of membership number by 75%, stands for a new epoch in the European history in overcoming the divisions persisting for the whole post-war half of the century. The employment in agriculture following the entrance of newcomers more than doubled. The relation between the number of farmers and the number of consumers w the EU-15 in comparison with the EU-12 amounted to around 1 to 4 (in order to maintain the same number of consumers in the 'new' Union it is necessary to employ four times as many people in agriculture).

Joining the Union has become, especially during the first years of membership, a strong development drive, taking into account the support for the agriculture from the community budget (the level of subsidies in the pre-membership period was at a much lower level than in the Union states). The means obtained for the agriculture from the Union budget during the first years of the membership were roughly equal to the outlays from the state budget.

As it could have been expected the 'accession incentive' begun to run out after several years. The price disparities started to even out. The gradual withdrawal of the Union from the direct intervention on the market caused the farmers more sensitive to the risk connected with price fluctuations. And prices became more frequently lower than farmer's expectations. The positive side was the fact that a farmer were gradually getting more and more freedom in making production decisions (Gaziński, 2006, pp. 73-103).

The hesitance caused by the on-going reforms of the Common Agricultural Policy were the circumstances to which Polish farmers should be accustomed to since they had been hardened after decades of the hostile politics of the socialist state. Later, during first years of the system transformation they lived in the conditions which were much closer to the principles of a market economy than the 'old' Union farmers for, getting different forms of the Union assistance.

Worth to note some trends which could be observed in last years (Zielińska, Nodzykowski, 2009, pp. 73-103):

1. the European integration had influenced the farming households the incomes in such a way that no longer their majority were derived just from farming activities;

2. in the rural areas slightly more than 50% of total households, did not obtain income from agriculture;

3. the eternal 'Achilles heel' of the country, the share of the farming income as compared to non-agricultural one had improved from 65% (2003) to 83% (2006);

4. for the first time a new occurrence had become – positive balance of migration between the rural areas and urban ones;

5. during the period of the membership, farmer's attitudes towards Poland's membership in the European Union has changed. Prior to the accession, they belonged to the most skeptical part of the society, whereas after that their support was above a national average;

6. the urgent issue remained to be solved - the reform of the insurance system for farmers (the KRUS), which had been put off by successive governments.

The problems of the country and agriculture development are still going to be solved on the community level

at least in the forthcoming years (in the longer perspective it is difficult to make any forecasts since some critics call for the withdrawal from the Common Agricultural Policy and its 'denationalization'). In that way, it is made clear how important the new member states are for the future of the European Union.

Unfortunately, given the experience so far, their constructive voice is very weak. Unfortunately, it had changed for the worse, especially in Poland and Hungary, where populist advocations are increasing and there a clear turn towards an autocratic and centralized state could be easily noted. Reluctance towards the European Union is also visible in the Czech Republic and Slovenia.

Poland, admitted to the EU in the first group (1st May 2004), was respected as a leader of change and had a strong position as the largest and strategically located country in the region. The distinguished position was held in the EU structures by two former Prime Ministers J. Buzek (President of the European Parliament) and D. Tusk (President of the European Council). In spite of changes at the top of power, there was continuity in foreign policy. Relations with the closest neighbors, Germany and Ukraine, which were difficult in the past due to the burdens of the history, started to develop successfully. Germany was an 'advocate' for Poland's accession to the European Union, and Poland – an advocate of the Ukrainian cause on the European forum. Despite that or other changes at the top of power, there was continuity in the foreign policy as evidenced by Poland's efforts to join NATO and the EU, unanimously supported by those in power and all main opposition trends.

The last years reversal. That continuity was broken in 2015, when the PiS came to power with a minimal majority of votes (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość - the Law and Justice). The name of this party, in the context of the increasing subsequent events, sounds like a giggle of history (*Spięcie ...*, 2021).

The violation of the law began shortly after the seizure of power as a result of electoral success and was an ongoing process. One of the newly-elected President's first moves was the practical refusal to recognize the nominations of three properly elected Supreme Court judges and instead introducing the so-called dubler-judges.

Aggressive actions aimed at subordinating the apparatus of justice to those exercising power - despite the protests of citizens, which were suppressed by force - led to the fact that the judiciary has been dependant to the ruling authorities to such a large extent raising concerns whether the courts and the prosecutor's offices in Poland are still independent.

Threats to democracy and legal order can be briefly outlined as follows (Czarna księga, 2020):

- i) Z. Ziobro took offices of the Minister of Justice, the Prosecutor General and a Member of Parliament in the Sejm. Moreover, he remains the leader of his political group.
- ii) Contrary to the law, the term of office of the National Council of the Judiciary (KRS) was shortened and replaced by the so-called the neo-KRS, where its composition was elected by politicians - a violation of the provisions of the Constitution.
- iii) Public media were subordinated to the rulers and became a tool of one-sided propaganda. The "Orlen" oil company has bought a large number of regional titles, which have so far retained their independence.
- v) Street protests, the so-called women's strikes - the police beat brutally the demonstrators with telescopic

sticks, widely used tear gas; - also against journalists and parliamentarians, despite their visible identity cards.
v) These and other activities led to the deterioration of Poland's international relations, not only with its closest neighbors, but even with its traditional ally, the United States.

vi) The conflict with the European Union has been gaining momentum. The highest-ranking politicians of the ruling coalition speak of it with undisguised hostility: former Minister of Foreign Affairs W. Włazczykowski called for a negative campaign against the EU, the Deputy Speaker of the Sejm Terlecki stated: "We have to look for drastic solutions ... we must not enter anything that will limit our development." Doubts whether that meant the possibility of Poland leaving the EU was dispelled by another prominent PiS politician, M. Suski, who compared EU membership to occupation during the war. He openly announced: "We will fight against the Brussels occupier" compared the EU to the occupation (Tusk, 2021), and Prime Minister Morawiecki put into confusion deputies of the European Parliament by announcing that he would take action against the EU with determination reminiscent of World War III (Europeś Kohut, ... 2021).

vii) This picture could be completed by ignoring the verdicts of the European Court of Justice in the summer of 2021 and, already in the fall of 2021, of the European Court of Human Rights, which means a drift of Polish state beyond the legal space of both the EU and the Council of Europe.

At the turn of the first and second decades of the 21st century, the word "polest" was obtained the "right of citizenship" (Skarżyński, 2021). The described phenomena had been accompanied by overwhelming corruption. The actions of the authorities in the face of new, dangerous challenges, such as the COVID-19 pandemic and the migration crisis along the border with Belarus, had been ad hoc, delayed and not effective.

Poland's withdrawal from the position of the undisputed leader of transformations in Central and Eastern Europe towards a sick European state is a surprising phenomenon (*Polska liderem ... 2021*). However, it should be considered in the broader context of the crisis of democracy and the growing wave of populism, which did not bypass even the already well-established democracy as the United States.

Some concluding points. Considering challenges ahead, it has to be reminded that the enlargement process, due to the internal difficulties of the Union itself and the complexity of external factors, being significantly delayed in recent years, has been, as yet, not completed. The European Union of close to 450 million citizens, is facing the need to find its place on the changeable political and economic map of the contemporary world, in which China (slightly above 1 400 million of people) and India (nearly 1 400 million of people) aspire to the rank of the world powers.

In terms of number of inhabitants, the European Union (just as a union, not as a state) ranks third, quite considerably exceeding the United States. The European Communities in a period of their establishment, the 1950s, consisted of only 6 states, could never aspire to challenge the USA. Today, however, when the number of the member states increased to 27, it is not ungrounded to ask: 'Is it not just a matter of time for Europe to go out of the shadow of the USA?'. The answer to this question is going to depend on various factors. One of them will be the condition of the economy as well as the 'European model' of agriculture which is still being shaped, the other one will be the order of changes of the Union in such a

difficult and complex times, which younger generations have never experienced.

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