

Both current president and government of Poland have stated many times that they support integration within the European Union, and such view is shared by the majority of Polish society.

Nevertheless Polish authorities would like the Union and its integration tendencies go in a different direction than it is currently heading. The Union, as politicians of the governing party put it, should allow the national states to play a greater role and strengthen their autonomy from EU institutions. A return of parity between member states is also advocated, by which is meant that more powerful countries should not be able to impose their will on weaker ones. Such disparities were evident in some of the disputes between Western and Central Europe, dealing with issues like refugees allocation and posted workers. Finally, Poland postulate fewer competencies for the EU technocrats and forego the efforts to build the European federation. Instead, Polish government supports strengthening of the role of the national parliaments in the European politics and ensuring the proper application of the principle of subsidiarity.

Polish proposals have not met with approval from European institutions and some of the member states, but while the direction of European integration remains currently the most divisive issue, it is not the only one that member states cannot agree on. For several years, Polish government has pointed out the need to concentrate on securing the external borders and opposed the refugees allocation system, emphasizing that admission of refugees and immigrants is a matter of national security and should therefore be decided by respective states. Another issue is the future of the European Single Market. Poland stands by the freedoms guaranteed by the treaties, which include the free movement of services and labour, and opposes restrictions to these freedoms, like recently proposed limitations on posted workers. From Warsaw's point of view, proposed change would only benefit the Western Europe, by raising the employment rates and their competitiveness to the disadvantage of the Central Europe. Other divisive issues relate to the future of climate and energy framework, defence policy and next multiannual financial framework.

Leave this field empty if you're human:

The different perspectives with regard to these policies are not new in the EU politics, and should be seen as a part of ongoing negotiation game rather than a beginning of the dissolution process. It is not an easy game to play for Warsaw, since it is accompanied by a

significant political pressure put on the Polish government. European politicians portray the efforts of internal reforms in Poland as an attack on the rule of law; in their words Polish government is showing autocratic and antidemocratic tendencies. This negative rhetoric together with unfavourable media coverage, helped rivals weaken Poland's position in the EU, especially in negotiations on the future of the integration.

EU technocrats maintained on many occasions that the European law must be obeyed without exception, just like democracy and rule of law must be upheld. Nevertheless, charges against Poland are rather dubious. For example in case of judicial reform, the European Commission (EC) considers different retirement age for male and female judges to be a violation of gender equality. However, such legislation exists in other EU members states. In Poland, different retirement ages for men and women have been considered a norm for many years, and have never been questioned by the EC before. Additionally, Polish Constitutional Court ruled in 2010 that the privilege of women to retire earlier is constitutional. In the light of such facts, it is understandable that Polish government considered many claims of the EC and some member states to be biased and politically motivated. It is therefore less of a real issue and more of an instrument of pressure in the debates over the future of the European Union. After all, many western politicians openly state that the easiest way to resolve current conflict is to change the governing party from Law and Justice to a party which is now in an opposition.

For Poland the national sovereignty is a fundamental issue. Interference of other member states in the internal reforms or external support for the opposition against the legally elected government is considered an infringement of independence. Poland also stresses that the EC, an institution with no democratic mandate, has no right to discipline a government which is fulfilling its election promises. Similarly, no such right was ever given by Polish voters to any of the foreign leaders, especially because in their European politics they focus solely on securing the interests of their respective countries.

The dispute over European values might also be seen as a dispute between social conservatism and liberalism. Politicians of the governing party consider the Christian roots of Europe, as the base for any further EU integration. Such integration should be limited to European nations and their diverse values and traditions. They are skeptical when it comes to opening Europe to non-European immigration, and question the premises of multiculturalism, which promotes the settlement of groups not only not integrating well into the society, but also openly defying European values and posing threat to national security.

Conservative Polish politicians also advocate the strengthening of the role of the traditional family (that is consisting of a husband, a wife and children) in the society. Consequently,

they are against the legalization of homosexual relationship, and deny them right to adopt children. They also oppose easing of the abortion laws, believing that the unborn children have the right to live and their rights are equal to the rights of their potential mothers. Finally, there are differences pertaining to economic matters, described earlier in this article. Almost all of the above mentioned Polish values might be seen as problematic, because they are either against the political correctness or against the interests of key EU member states.

As a result, the dispute in Europe is gaining more and more heat. It is no longer a matter of different national interests, but also a deepening crisis of values, which makes any compromise harder to reach. Polish government remains the supporter of the integration, but it will not forego national interests, national identity and national security. These sentiments are widely shared within the Polish society, which result in high support for the Law and Justice policies, regularly showed in the polls. Simultaneously, the other side of the dispute focuses on maximization of their interest and subduing Polish authorities with political pressure over alleged “authoritarian” tendencies, while radicalizing their stance on accepted values. This conflict is therefore no longer simply about sidelining of Poland, but in fact an effort to “make it leave” the EU.

Author is an expert of the Sobieski Institute and professor of the Warsaw University.