The treaty changes proposed by the European Parliament in November 2023 aim to centralize power in the EU at the expense of national democracies. They significantly increase the influence on EU decisions of the largest Western European countries. This may further strengthen the role of Berlin and Paris in integration processes at the expense of smaller Central European countries. All the more so because the importance of sanction mechanisms in the proposals for treaty changes is growing. The role of left-wing values, defined as European and imposed from above by Brussels, is also increasing. All this should worry the countries of Central Europe, and the voice of Polish and Hungarian experts may mobilize this region to stop these negative changes.

Federalization or building a super-state

The initiative was prepared by the largest factions in the European Parliament. They form the so-called mainstream political movement or are referred to as Euroenthusiastic forces. The narrow group that developed the proposals was headed by the famous federalist Guy Verhofstadt. The other creators were German MEPs: Sven Simon, Gabriele Bischoff, Daniel Freund and Helmut Scholz. The MEPs were heading straight – even in terms of naming – towards the idea of a European "super-state". The head of the European Commission was to be referred to from now on as the President of the European Union, and the Commission – as the EU Executive.

The MEPs proposed transferring the climate negotiations conducted on the international stage to the EU level in their entirety, as the so-called exclusive competence of the Union. This was no coincidence. The climate policy of the European Union was one of the flagships of this organisation in the 21st century. It was to completely rebuild the economic model in the community, including covering a number of economic sectors that had been largely free of climate ambitions until then[1]. In practice, it introduced a number of regulations that restricted economic freedoms on the internal market. In addition, it had a fundamental constitutional significance, as it centralized management to a large extent, and its numerous programs, fees and taxes accompanied the introduction of fiscal federalism.

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According to experts[2] the transfer of new exclusive competence to the EU allowed, in the name of “climate protection”, to influence the shared and exclusive competences of the Member States in other areas. In the event of any doubts in this respect, the Union obtained exclusive competence to conduct “global negotiations” and conclude treaties “on climate change”, which would then have to be binding on the Member States. As a result, the Union could influence the Member States within their competences.

EU parliamentarians announced the transfer of further powers from the Member States to the EU. This was about recognizing seven new areas as so-called shared competences, which in practice meant giving priority to EU bodies in this matter. These include public health, cross-border transport infrastructure, industrial policy, scientific policy in the field of recognition of academic degrees, competences and qualifications, and energy policy. This was another example of the centralization trend dominating the proposals of the MEPs. The centralization of powers in the field of industrial policy will cover the mining, energy and arms sectors, which is particularly risky for Poland and Hungary in the era of geopolitical threats.

The limitation of national sovereignty is the recognition of foreign policy, external border protection policy, external security, defence policy and civil defence as “shared competences”. In the case of defence policy, many strategic decisions were transferred to the EU, primarily concerning arms procurement on behalf of the Union and its Member States. Therefore, we can expect growing pressure from Brussels to limit the purchase of weapons in non-European countries. In turn, Article 79 of the TFEU explicitly includes economic immigration as an EU competence. Until now, this was the exclusive competence of the Member States, which is why the compulsory relocation mechanism caused such controversy. Giving the Union powers concerning external borders may further limit national authorities in the control of their own borders. It leads to the EU institutions taking over responsibility for who is allowed into the country and who is not. The most striking example of how far centralisation has gone in the discussed project was the recognition that all EU countries must adopt the euro currency. They must do so regardless of how economically unprofitable it would be for them or how contrary to the preferences of local voters.

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The Growing Dominance of Berlin and Paris over Central Europe

The European Parliament project assumes a change in the procedure in as many as 34 areas of public affairs – from unanimity to majority voting[3]. The current method of qualified voting within the so-called double majority has been maintained, i.e. at least 55% of Member States representing at least 65% of the EU population. This is a system that privileges the most populous countries of Western Europe. Germany and France together have approximately 34% of the demographic potential of the Union. Interestingly, according to the project, majority voting was also to be the rule in the European Council from now on.

Eliminating unanimity primarily deprives smaller countries and those that have limited influence on the decision-making process in the EU of their influence on legislation. This applies especially to countries from Central Europe accused by EU institutions of violating so-called European values. At the same time, the majority method of decision-making serves the Member States with the largest population in the EU. It is therefore hardly surprising that majority voting was also promoted by German and French experts[4], in addition to German MEPs. This was in line with previous, repeated calls by political decision-makers from Berlin and Paris on the same issue[5].

The majority decision-making method in budget, tax and joint debt matters in the EU is controversial. In the context of an international organisation, such plans may be treated as undemocratic. They allow for a situation in which voters will have no influence on the taxes that apply to them, because their national governments will simply be outvoted on this matter at the EU level. The possibility of taking out and repaying joint debt in the EU is equally controversial. Some governments and their voters – even if they oppose taking out such loans – will be obliged to repay them, according to the proposal of the European Parliament. This is not only inconsistent with basic democratic standards, but also takes away the sovereignty of smaller or less influential EU members who are easier to outvote. Majority voting in relation to foreign policy, especially in relation to sanctions, security and defence policy, is controversial, given the serious differences of opinion on this matter between Member States.

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Another proposal to change the treaties is to strengthen sanction mechanisms for states that violate the rule of law and other EU values. In practice so far, the described mechanisms have usually served to discipline unruly national governments, i.e. those that opposed the domination of Western European countries, the increasingly strong centralisation of power in the EU, as well as to push leftist and liberal values as European and binding on everyone without exception.

Centralization increases the monopoly of leftist axiology

The European Parliament resolution on amending the treaties referred at the very beginning to the communist manifesto Ventotene of June 1941. It called for the introduction of a centralized European state that would implement the socialist revolution[6]. It is no wonder that in the discussed proposal for the revision of the treaties the role of left-wing political ideas has significantly increased as the basis for so-called European values. This is incompatible with the democratic standard of political pluralism. In all places of both amended European treaties the principle of equality between women and men has been replaced with gender equality. Another borrowing from left-wing axiology is the reconciliation of economic development with social progress. Another example of the same tendency is the inclusion of environmental crimes among crimes with a European dimension prosecuted ex officio (so-called crimes with a cross-border dimension), which left-wing circles particularly strongly insisted on.

In addition, the area of family law with cross-border effects has been included in the “shared competences” to be voted on by majority vote. This may result in a redefinition of marriage and family in the Member States towards respecting the idea of gender, same-sex marriages and enabling them to adopt children. Moreover, education policy is also to become a “shared competence” with a majority decision-making procedure, which would henceforth be based on a new leftist interpretation of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union. In other words, Brussels can disseminate gender ideas and sexual education for children and young people to a greater extent in national education systems.

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Recommendations

The treaty changes pushed by German and French politicians are intended to strengthen the power of EU institutions over national democracies, as well as increase the power of Paris and Berlin over other capitals. They further marginalize the role of Central Europe in integration processes. They lead to a further monopoly of left-wing values in the Union at the expense of the political pluralism necessary for true democracy. This requires a response from the countries of Central Europe, as well as conservative circles that support the cultivation of national democracies in accordance with the model of the Europe of Homelands.

The voice of Polish and Hungarian experts should mobilize conservative circles – especially in Central Europe, showing the negative consequences of the treaty changes for our region.

The construction of a super-state that limits democracy in Europe should be stopped, and at the same time an alternative vision of European integration should be developed. It should be a decentralized and subsidiary vision. Strengthening national democracies, respecting their systemic, cultural and constitutional traditions. It should also respect political pluralism, i.e. the possibility of presenting diverse political values and free public debate. Instead of coercion and sanctions, it should be based on mechanisms of voluntary cooperation. The basis of integration should be the free exchange of goods, workers, capital and services on the internal market, and not top-down regulations that restrict the freedom of economic exchange in the EU.

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The article was created as part of the project entitled “Dual voices of experts in

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international affairs: Poland and Hungary” implemented by the Sobieski Institute, grant no.: DOF-K/IF/RD12/15/2024. The grantee is the Waclaw Felczak Institute for Polish-Hungarian Cooperation.

The publication reflects only the views of the author(s) and cannot be associated with the official position of the Wacław Felczak Polish-Hungarian Cooperation Institute.

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