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ΚΕΝΤΡΟ ΔΙΕΘΝΩΝ ΣΤΡΑΤΗΓΙΚΩΝ ΑΝΑΛΥΣΕΩΝ  
CENTER FOR INTERNATIONAL STRATEGIC ANALYSES

# **Polexit: Poland's plans to leave the European Union**

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# ***Polexit: Poland's plans to leave the European Union***

## **Introduction**

On 1st of May, 2004 Poland became a member of European Union. Together with 9 other countries joined a political and economic community. The community, which was founded on 1st of November, 1993 in Maastricht, by 6 countries: Germany, France, Italy, the Netherlands, Belgium, Luxembourg. Most Poles waited impatiently for this moment and had great hopes. In June 2003, a referendum was held in Poland in which over 3/4 of Poles voted in favor of EU membership. Poland's joining the EU not only meant integration with other countries and the development of Poland, but also easy travels, which were previously limited. So what happened that the idea of Poland leaving the EU emerged? This and other questions I will answer in the following research paper.

This paper is about the plans of Polish politicians to get Poland out of the community of the European Union. For the purposes of this research, a research question was posed: *Will Poland leave the EU?* In order to maintain the transparency of this essay and to introduce readers to the issues of this topic accurately, I will divide my paper into 4 main parts and conclusions. The essay is preceded by this introduction.

The first part called "Poland's admission to the European Union gives us the general information about the admission and the entire procedure. In the second part called "Poland's relations with the European Union", I describe Poland's connections with the community and main benefits. The third part "Will Poland leave the EU?" is strictly related to the research question and will be an attempt to answer it. The fourth part "What could be the consequences of leaving the EU by Poland" presents consequences that would be caused by this leaving. The conclusions will be the summary of the essay. I will also include some personal reflections on this topic.

## **1. Poland's admission to the European Union**

The first of May, 2004 was a historical moment in relations between Poland and the European Union. On that day, Poland together with Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia, Malta, Slovakia, Slovenia and Hungary became one of the Member States of the European Union. At the moment, the process of integration with European structures has been completed. This event was preceded by the accession process, which culminated in the signing of the accession treaty. On 16th of April, 2003 in Athens, Polish Prime Minister - Leszek Miller, Minister of Foreign

Affairs - Włodzimierz Cimoszewicz and, as the third, the then Minister for European Affairs - Danuta Hübner, signed the accession treaty.

The process of Poland's integration with the European Union began in Athens on 8th of April, 1994. At that time, Poland applied for membership in the European community. The application was confirmed by all member states at the conference in Essen in December 1994. In December 1997, during the meeting of the European Council in Luxembourg, was made a decision to conduct membership negotiations with six countries, including Poland. Official negotiations began on March 1998. But to be able to integrate with the European Union, on 16th of December, 1991 Poland had to sign an agreement on the association of Poland with the European Communities. The agreement specifies the terms of cooperation on various levels: political, economic and cultural. Ultimate and the main goal is Poland's membership in the European Union.

In order to be a member of the EU, Poland had to meet the following conditions:

- well-functioning democratic institutions
- respect for human rights and the rights of national minorities
- adjusting the national law to the law in force in the European Union
- a stable market economy
- an economy capable of coping with international competition in an open market.

In 1996, the Committee for European Integration (the Polish administrative body) was established to coordinate the process of integration with the EU. The first chairman of the committee was Włodzimierz Cimoszewicz. A year later, the National Integration Strategy was adopted. The committee was established to coordinate matters related to Poland's integration with the EU.

Despite the fact that one of the goals of the EU is to create a monetary union and a single currency, Poland does not belong to the euro area. The currency in Poland is PLN. Currently (20/06/2022) 1 Euro = 4.63 PLN. The discussion about joining the euro area has been going on since Poland joined the EU. Most people are afraid of a decline in living standards and refer to the argument that joining the euro zone is not always a good solution, as shown by the current situation in such countries as: Italy, Spain, Portugal and Greece. The assumptions were that the introduction of the common currency was to ensure stable development, facilitate access to foreign markets, and eliminate the exchange rate risk in foreign trade. The reality, however, did not confirm these expectations. Less developed countries of the South - Italy, Spain, Portugal and Greece are experiencing many years of economic crisis, falling GDP and high unemployment. The latest information on Poland's joining the euro area is that on 26th of April, 2022, a conference was held, organized by the Economic Freedom Foundation and the Res Publica Foundation, where the

majority of voices were that today the adoption of the European currency in Poland is not very realistic. The first date of adopting the European currency in our country was 2007, but this possibility was receded when in 2005 the government dominated by the Law and Justice party was established. The next date for introducing Euro was 2011, but the global financial crisis broke out. Currently, Poland does not fulfill any of the criteria necessary for joining the euro area.

## **2. Poland's relations with the European Union**

Some time after joining the community, on 13th of June, 2004 Poland took part in the first elections to the European Parliament. During which Poles elected 54 MEPs. From this time, we had Polish politicians in Brussels who represented the interests of Poles. After more than a year of membership in the EU, Poland received funding in the amount of € 59.65 billion. Another important event for Poland in the EU was joining the Schengen area(2007-land borders, 2008 - air and sea borders). Thanks to this Polish citizens could start traveling from one member state to another without border controls. It also facilitated the transportation and flow of goods.

Since the 1st of July until the 31st of December 2011 Poland had the honor of holding the presidency of the EU Council. The most important task of this role is to organize, in terms of content and logistics, many meetings, different in terms of nature, place and level. Representing the Council vis-à-vis other EU institutions (in particular the European Commission and the European Parliament) and in relations with third countries and international organizations.

Main benefits for Poland from membership in the EU:

- additional security guarantee (because the basic guarantee is NATO),
- development of Poland's trade hubs with other countries,
- protection of human rights,
- industrial development,
- cooperation of schools and universities,
- exchanges and internships of pupils, students and teachers,
- popularization of foreign languages,
- reducing disparities in the economic sector,
- gradual equalization of disproportions between Polish regions,
- participation in the international arena with other member countries,
- conducting foreign policy with other member states,
- lifting border barriers among EU countries,
- humanitarian aid in the case of a disaster,
- ease of traveling around EU countries

- investments and modernization of schools, hospitals, etc.
- the possibility of legal work abroad,
- creating and financing projects for various social groups.

The European Commission monitors the situation in the European Union and the level of satisfaction of Europeans with the community on an ongoing basis. Based on the research from 2018, it can be concluded that Poles are satisfied with EU membership. 62% of respondents believe that it is good that Poland is a member of the European Union, and as many as 77% believe that we have benefited a lot from the accession. Currently, Poland is among the few Europeans who speak positively about EU membership. Moreover, in Poland, trust in the EU is much greater than in the most important state bodies, such as the parliament and the government. 52% of research participants trust EU leaders. Such thinking also translates into the view of who is fighting the crisis more effectively. Over 30% of respondents believe that the European Union works best in this case, and only 13% of them point to the Polish government. As many as 85% of Poles also want the cooperation of European countries in the fight against the financial crisis, and 75% are in favor of greater coordination of economic and financial policies within the EU. According to the latest Eurobarometer, published on the 8th of May, 2022 in Brussels, Poles lead the way in support of the EU. In the poll, 82 percent of Poles were in favor of the European Union. This is 5 percentage points more than in spring 2021.

There are also Eurosceptics who see integration with the European Union as a threat. For example, due to the fact that, upon joining the EU, Poland canceled its sovereignty, and thus its independence. Eurosceptics also believe that there is a chance that the European Union will eventually turn into a unified European superpower, in the boldest of ideas without separate statehood and nations. Among the economic threats, there is concern about Polish enterprises which, due to too strong competition, may fail or there will be a reduction in production because they are not able to compete with strong concerns and foreign enterprises. And this will result in an increase in the number of unemployed.

Polish politician Donald Tusk played an important role in the history of the European Union. On 1st of December, 2014 he became President of the European Council and held this position for the next 5 years. He belonged to the European People's Party. Donald Tusk is an important and respected personality in Polish politics. He was the Prime Minister in years 2007-2014. He was also the chairman of the Committee for European Integration. Currently, he has returned to Polish politics and is again the chairman of a party "Civil Platform".

In 2015 in Poland, the parliamentary elections were won by the conservative, right-wing party - Law and Justice. The party is represented by political opponents of Donald Tusk. When in 2017 it was proposed to extend Tusk's tenure, Polish authorities expressed sharp opposition. Foreign

politicians assured that they would support the candidacy of the Pole "We will take care of the re-election of Donald Tusk. I see his election as a sign of the stability of the entire Union" (Merkel, 2017). Others also believed that Tusk's choice was certain. But the Polish Prime Minister - Beata Szydło (member of the Law and Justice party) did not let go of attempts to torpedo Tusk's candidacy. The woman was outraged when no one shared her opinion: "Nothing without us, without our consent. There is no consent for the President of the European Council, whoever he may be, to become a person without the consent of the country from which the candidature comes. This is a matter of the rules. Those states that do not understand this lead to destabilization". All representatives of the European countries expressed their support for Donald Tusk and did not hide their irritation with Poland's attacks on Tusk. When the vote took place on 10th of March, 2017 - the decision was made unanimously - without Poland. Tusk was supported by 27 EU countries, only Poland was against. This is the first time in the history of the Union that someone has been elected to such a high position against the will of his country. Beata Szydło was against Donald Tusk because she believed that he does not guarantee impartiality and is not a person who could introduce Poland to deep reforms. She commented on her choice in the following words: "I could not raise a hand for someone who is harming Poland. My opinion was quickly confirmed. Please read what Donald Tusk says on twitter. He goes against his homeland".

However, Beata Szydło aroused controversy even earlier, when in November 2015, at the conference after the first meeting of the government of the then Prime Minister, there were no EU symbols, she was accompanied only by state flags. The politician then commented on this event as follows: „I am very glad that in these difficult times we are a member of the European Union and NATO (...) but we adopted the principle that we will implement the statement after the Polish government meeting on the most beautiful, in my opinion, white and red flags”. The flags of the European Union did not appear, among others on the occasion of Beata Szydło's messages. Then Prime Minister announced that this would remain the case in the near future. The event drew the attention of foreign media. The Financial Times wrote about the Polish government as "Poland's new conservative, Eurosceptic government" and that "this symbolic gesture highlights the new regime's cooler relationship with Brussels and its more patriotic worldview." Other foreign agencies also noted that the new prime minister "broke with the practice of his pro-European predecessors." So far, during similar speeches of the Polish head of government, against him, the flags of Poland and the EU were set in the same number, alternately. Politicians from the Law and Justice party on the benches of foreign magazines were described as "Eurosceptics" and "people for greater independence from Brussels". I consider the situations described above to be the beginning of the idea of leaving Poland from the EU. The real controversy was caused by Beata Szydło in 2019, when she ran in the elections to the European Parliament. The politician immediately heard the

accusation: "You took the EU flags out of the cabinet and now you run in the elections European Parliament". The woman stated that the flags had never disappeared from her office. Journalists also recalled the vote on the re-election of Donald Tusk, in which only Beata Szydło objected. The Prime Minister has repeatedly maintained that she had not taken the flags out of her office, but merely performed in front of them. Beata Szydło, representing Poland in the European Union, has repeatedly opposed its interests or made an unfavorable opinion. This was remembered by other members of the European Parliament. Members of the European Parliament's employment and social affairs committee did not remain indebted as they rejected her candidacy to head the committee.

Another issue that differed between Poland and the EU was the fact that in 2015, people from Africa and the Middle East fled to Europe because of war and hunger. At that time, Szydło withdrew from the declaration signed by Poland on the admission of refugees under the EU relocation system. In Strasbourg, she announced to the astonished MEPs that: "After all, Poland accepted about a million refugees from Ukraine. People who nobody wanted to help. They are here today and we help them". She confused economic immigrants, whose work saves the Polish economy, with the victims of wars and persecution. The Polish Prime Minister was against refugees for one reason. She believed that the presence of non-Christian immigrants in the EU was associated with a key threat - loss of values. The woman reminded on every occasion that she wanted to protect Christian values: "Poland has an important role to play in Europe. Europe is faced with a huge number of different problems today, where the deviation from values is strong and is a political trend. We are a country that has a chance to rebuild a Europe of values. Someone has to claim value " (Szydło, 2017)

Above, I focused on Poland's relations with the EU since 2015, when the Law and Justice party came to power in Poland. Because it was a moment when there were stormy speeches and behaviors from the Polish side. What has not escaped the attention of foreign media and politicians.

### **3. Will Poland leave the EU?**

Over the past few years, there have been many situations and statements in Polish politics that have weakened Poland's position in the European Union. To the extent that the community imposed sanctions on the country, and Poles fear that it may come to Polesxit.

Real fears about Polesxit were raised by Poles in 2021, when on 7th of October the Constitutional Tribunal ruled that some EU regulations covered by the Prime Minister's application were inconsistent with the Constitution of the Republic of Poland. The Tribunal indicated that the European regulations, to the extent to which the EU bodies operate outside the limits of powers



conferred by Poland, are inconsistent with the Constitution. After the announcement of the judgment of the Court of Justice, the President of the European Commission - Ursula von der Leyen stated that it is possible to initiate an infringement procedure or a procedure for violating the rule of law against Poland. She also added that after the preliminary assessment of the judgment, serious problems related to the primacy of European law were visible. Poland has again attracted attention in the international arena. Representatives of other countries claimed that Poland was "playing with fire", that is, it was taking risky actions. The European Commission reacted immediately to the judgment of the Constitutional Tribunal, recalling that EU law takes precedence over national law and that decisions of the European Court of Justice are "binding on all authorities of the Member States, including national courts". The European People's Party - the largest political group in the European Parliament, also reacted to the verdict, which stated that Mateusz Morawiecki (Prime Minister from the party Law and Justice) not only legitimized the illegal judiciary system in Poland, but also questioned the very foundations of the European Union. And he did it despite the appeals of the entire democratic world not to do so. " MEP Jeroen Lenaers stated that the actions of the Polish authorities were aimed at leaving the European community. The result of the judgment of the Polish tribunal was the weakening of relations with the EU and the suspension of subsidies for Poland.

In Poland, a discussion about LGBTQ has been going on for several years. It divided the Poles. In 2019, the President of Warsaw - Rafał Trzaskowski, signed a declaration supporting respect for the rights of LGBTQ people. But on the other hand, the president of the ruling party Law and Justice - Jarosław Kaczyński, responded to this declaration, calling LGBTQ rights an "import" that threatens Poland. The President of Poland - Andrzej Duda also spoke on the matter, who expressed himself with the words "They are trying to convince us that they are people. They are an ideology". Another move by the opponents was the introduction of LGBT-free zones. This is an area in Poland covered by a homophobic resolution of a local government body declaring that it is an area free from the so-called LGBT ideology. In January 2020, in total, regions where the Local Government Charter of Family Rights or a resolution establishing an LGBT-free zone were adopted, occupied over 30% of Poland's territory. The European Parliament immediately asked for explanations about the zones that were created. And then initiated a procedure of infringement of European law related to equality and protection of fundamental rights. The EU threatened to withhold EU subsidies intended for Polish local governments. The European Commission has expressed concern that these resolutions may breach EU law on non-discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation. The European Commission began to withhold subsidies in Polish communes with "LGBT ideology-free zones". The Polish authorities also received a letter from the ambassadors of 50 countries directly criticizing the behavior of Polish politicians towards sexual

minorities. Unfortunately, the government said it would continue to "protect" Polish families, culture and traditions from the dire influence of LGBT ideology.

A controversial behavior towards the EU was the speech of Mateusz Morawiecki on 11th of November, 2021 who said that we had long been taught to listen to others for decades and hundreds of years, and we want to govern ourselves in our way, in Polish. Anti-EU comments was also heard from other politicians - Janusz Kowalski expressed the opinion that Poland should "play tough in relations with the European Union", and 2027 will be the time "when there may be a referendum on Poland's exit from the EU". - 2027, when the current budget perspective ends, it will be the time when there may be a referendum on Poland's exit from the EU.

The situations described above caused confusion and fear. Poles began to fear that Polesxit might occur, politicians argued that there was such a chance. Former Polish president Aleksander Kwasniewski stated that Polesxit is a real threat, even a very real one: "Law and Justice is a formation that is at least Eurosceptic, and to a large extent opposed to the European Union. The only problem with PiS is that they rule in a country where the majority is in favor of the European Union. They cannot say out loud that they would prefer to be outside the Union". He believes that the behavior of the Polish authorities indicates a desire to leave the community, but they are held back by the fact that the Poles do not want to.

Polish politicians strongly emphasized that the European Union was built on the basis of Christian values and it should be continued. They claim that all the actions they take are to protect these values. Despite the fact that politicians from the ruling party emphasize every time that there is no possibility for us to leave the European Union, Poles perceive such a threat because the dispute between Warsaw and Brussels is progressing.

#### **4. What could be the consequences of leaving the EU by Poland?**

In September 2021, a survey was conducted on Poland's exit from the EU. According to the survey 62.6% Poles do not want Polesxit. 20.5% respondents do not have an opinion on this matter, and 17% want to leave the Union. The conservative-right-wing circles are in favor of leaving the European Union. Supporters of the Confederation and Law and Justice point to "excessive EU interference in the policies of the Member States".

The main effects of leaving the EU are travels with passport, rising prices, unemployment, and many, many more. If Poland left the EU, it would automatically leave the Schengen Information System, which contains information about wanted criminals and stolen items. Poland would then become a suitable place for criminals. Polesxit will prevent Poland from issuing a European prosecution order. The biggest loss will be the loss of EU funds. Poland joined the

European Union in 2004. Since then, it has received as much as EUR 180 billion from the EU. At that time, Poland provided the Union with EUR 58 billion. This results in a positive balance sheet of EUR 122 billion. Polish schools also received subsidies from the Union. As part of EU funds, many institutions have been renovated, schools have been equipped with IT rooms and psychological help for children has been organized. Scholarships for pupils and students were also financed. The record holders, however, are Polish farmers who received subsidies from the EU in the total amount of PLN 305 billion. Polish schools also received subsidies from the Union. As part of EU funds, many institutions have been renovated, schools have been equipped with IT rooms and psychological help for children has been organized. Scholarships for pupils and students were also financed. The record holders, however, are Polish farmers who received subsidies from the EU in the total amount of PLN 305 billion. For Poles, it should be very important that the European Union watches over democratic standards in the member states. If they are not complied with, sanctions are imposed on the member state. This is what happened to Poland when they introduced LGBT-free zones. I have presented, in my opinion, the most important losses for Poland that would have occurred in the case of Polesxit.

## **Conclusions**

Answering the research question, I think that so far, there is no chance for Poland to leave the EU. Mainly because the citizens do not want it. If anyone wants and strives for it, it is a ruling party. But they know that in the election campaign they cannot even mention Polesxit because they will not be re-elected.

Personally, I do not think it would be a good decision to leave the European Union. I believe that membership in the European Union is a strategic goal of Polish politics. It modernizes the state and improves the well-being of the population and accelerates economic development, modernization of the economy and the legal system, and eliminates the development gap that separates our country from other European countries. It also provides Poles with a sense of security as it monitors compliance with the law in the member states.

I am looking through the prism of a young person who, thanks to membership in the community, has three times benefited from the Erasmus + program, which only covers Member States. This program is an opportunity for linguistic and cultural exchange for pupils, students and teachers. As far as I know, the Erasmus + program is still being developed and takes new forms.

Except that, I come from a village where a lot has changed since 2004. The school, hospital and roads were renovated, and a community cultural center was built. It was funded by European funds.

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