

Is the European Union still an attractive international actor? Challenges for the global role of the EU

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Abstract

The purpose of the article is to try to outline whether the EU is still an attractive actor in international relations, which is conceptualised as a specific soft, normative and the same transformative power and the centre of attraction for states located outside this organisation. The credibility of the European Union on international arena was undermined by global changes taking place in the 21st century, including emergence of new non-European powers, and particularly a series of crises (financial, migration, identity) that have affected the EU recently. In the article the following analysis will be made: the basic components consisting of attractiveness of the EU and evolution of its perception on the international arena, and the main challenges that the EU has to cope with in order to become a significant power again. It is assumed that the European Union certainly lost its attractiveness and prestige as a result of recent transformations that affected it within the system, but also due to the dynamics of the international environment.

Keywords: attractiveness of the EU, European values, soft power, challenges for the EU, global power

Czy Unia Europejska jest wciąż atrakcyjnym aktorem międzynarodowym? Wyzwania dla globalnej roli UE

Streszczenie

Celem artykułu jest analiza potencjału Unii Europejskiej jako istotnego podmiotu stosunków międzynarodowych, conceptualizowanego jako swoista miękka, normatywna, a tym samym transformacyjna siła i centrum przyciągania dla państw znajdujących się poza jej granicami. Globalne zmiany jakie dokonały się w XXI wieku, w tym pojawienie się nowych mocarstw pozaeuropejskich, a szczególnie seria kryzysów, które dotknęły Unię w ostatnim czasie (finansowy, migracyjny, tożsamości) podważają znacząco jej wiarygodność na arenie międzynarodowej. W artykule zostanie podjęta analiza: podstawowych komponentów składających się na atrakcyjność Unii Europejskiej oraz ewolucji jej postrzegania na arenie międzynarodowej oraz najważniejszych wyzwań, którym musi sprostać, aby być ponownie liczącą się potęgą. Zakłada się, że Unia Europejska niewątpliwie

utraciła swą atrakcyjność i prestiż w wyniku ostatnich przeobrażeń, które ją dotknęły wewnątrz systemu, ale i wynikających z dynamiki środowiska międzynarodowego.

Słowa kluczowe: atrakcyjność Unii Europejskiej, wartości europejskie, miękka siła, wyzwania dla UE, potęga globalna

In recent years, the European Union, absorbed in the debt crisis, growing populism and the struggle with the refugee crisis, not only failed to achieve the desired economic growth, but also declined to strengthen its influence and presence at the international level. As a result, the perception and overall potential of the European Union in the world have deteriorated. In addition, we are witnessing a departure from the transatlantic and Eurocentric international order. The policy of the President of the United States, Donald Trump, poses a great challenge to the principles and values on which the European Union was built, including the dominance of the model of liberal democracy and its attractiveness. Competitive models, including Russia and China, are gaining increasing popularity.

Strengthening of the political role and influence of the EU in the world has been the ambition of this organisation since its creation. The Treaty of Maastricht, adopted in 1993, in Article 3 (ex Article 2 Treaty on European Union) lists objectives and basic assumptions reflecting great hopes that countries entertained in connection with membership of the European Union. These postulates include: protection of shared values, fundamental interests, security, independence and integrity; consolidation and support for democracy, the rule of law, human rights and the principles of international law; protection of peace, conflict prevention and strengthening of international security (TEU 1993). These objectives were strengthened in the Treaty of Lisbon of 2007 through their consolidation in art. 21 of the Treaty on European Union (TEU 2012). They constituted the basis for the perception of the European Union as a normative power, whose actions produced significant effects, especially in four areas: trade, human rights, security, environmental protection and climate change (Fischer 2015: p.101). From the point of view of Ian Manners normative power is the power of ideology, opinions or standards set by the European Union (Manners 2002: p. 239), which can also become a guiding light.

In addition, the Common Foreign and Security Policy and defence policy were institutionalised in the Treaty on European Union (Chmiel 2002). This policy was a response to the upheavals that hit the European continent in the 1990s: the collapse of the USSR, the democratisation of the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, of the Balkans and the re-unification of Germany. It seems, however, that over twenty years later the effects are insignificant and rather far from the initial assumptions. The dynamic situation in the world has posed difficult challenges for the Union and its foreign policy, starting with ethnic cleansing in former Yugoslavia in the 1990s, the war in Iraq, or conflicts in Libya, Syria or eastern Ukraine. In all of them the EU has demonstrated its helplessness, weak presence or spectacular division between the Member States. As a result, the position of the European Union has marginalised at the international level, where the helm has been taken over mainly by its strongest Member States.

Today, it is still unclear what role the European Union will play in the 21st century. Will the Europeans be able to respond to old and subsequent regional and global challenges? To what degree will the EU and its Member States influence the conditions of the new order? Today – just like in 1945 and 1989 – Europe is again at the crossroads, and the situation is developing in two opposite directions: either Europe will be able to co-determine the future rules of global governance, or rather it will begin to weaken, gradually marginalise, until, in the worst case, it will be doomed to complete lack of significance at the global level. As the situation may develop in both directions, it will be worthwhile to carry out an analysis of key factors that are likely to shape the future global role of the EU, and thus, affect its attractiveness.

The aim of the article is to analyse the change in the perception of the European Union in the world from the perspective of the challenges that the EU has faced recently and those that it will meet in the future. The main hypothesis is that the European Union has undoubtedly lost its attractiveness and prestige as a result of recent transformations that have affected it within the system, but also due to the dynamics of the international environment.

The following research questions follow the hypothesis thus formulated: What have been the evolution and theoretical approaches to the perception of the EU in recent years and what are the premises? What are the attributes of the EU and what are its weaknesses that determine the position of the EU in the international arena? What challenges will the European Union have to respond to in the near future? What are the reasons for the EU's loss of its strategic orientation as well as internal and external attractiveness?

Components of the potential and attractiveness of the European Union in the world

The discussion on the theoretical foundations of the European Union has continued since the 1970s. The majority of the approaches have referred to defining it in terms of soft power, primarily due to the lack of hard, military parameters of a power characterising this organisation. In this discourse the EU has been mainly described as a civilian power (Duchêne 1972), a normative power (Manners 2002), a transformative power (Leonard 2005), a soft power (Nye 2004), a smart power (Nye 2012), a small power (Toje 2010), a quiet superpower (Moravcsik 2009: p. 403-422), an ethical power (Aggestam 2008), or a civilian power with teeth (Steinmeier 2007). (Piskorska 2017: p. 193).

Leaving a detailed analysis of the above approaches apart, for the purposes of the article soft power is regarded as the most comprehensive concept referring to the specifics and attributes of the attractiveness of the EU, as the basis of this concept is appeal, that is the attractiveness of the system of values and the way of conduct (power of attraction), culture and foreign policy. According to J.S. Nye, who is considered to be the creator of the concept of soft power, the more the subject is attractive, the more power it has to exert outside (Nye 2012: p. 163). Soft power is based on the ability to shape the preferences of others – according to J.S. Nye: "an entity can achieve the desired result in

world politics because other countries admire its values, imitate its principles, aspire to a similar level of prosperity and openness – they want to imitate it" (Nye 2012: p. 5).

In the case of the European Union, all three elements find a real reflection not only in its history and identity, but also in the EU strategies (European Security Strategy, EU Global Strategy, EU Enlargement Strategy), programme documents (European Neighbourhood Policy, Eastern Partnership, development policy, cultural policy, etc.) and on-going activities (mediation, negotiations). (Piskorska 2017: p. 211).

A very important determinant of the attractiveness of the EU is culture, understood as a set of norms, desirable behavioural patterns and values – transferred outside the EU. In this field, Europe competes with the United States. The broadly understood cultural heritage of Europe, including common European roots, is a common denominator for the sense of identification of the EU Member States, but also of countries outside it. This community contributes to the construction of the concept of European identity understood as a civilisational community referring to art, literature, Roman law, architectural style, secular humanistic thought, or the Christian religion and language (Sokolewicz 2003: p. 450–451)¹. These traditions form the general framework of the European system of values and still have a significant impact on the development of European culture (Gołembski 2012: p. 96–97). It is also necessary to include them in the discourse on the attractiveness of the European Union as a cultural community. They undoubtedly belong to essential resources of soft power of this organisation, attracting other communities, conditioning Europe's strong position in the world.

A basic resource shaping the attractiveness of the European Union are values and norms that are the underpinning of its constitutive foundations (Zajac 2014: p. 123–124). They are listed in art. 2 Treaty of the European Union: "dignity, freedom, democracy, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, the rule of law"² (TEU 2012). These principles, common to all Member States, were supplemented by subsequent four of lesser importance: social solidarity, non-discrimination, sustainable development, and good governance and treatment as the basic instruments of its foreign policy. Undoubtedly common norms in the field of human rights and democracy constitute the essence of normative power of Europe (Manners 2002: p. 235–258).

The European Union promotes these political values very extensively through each form of external relations. For example, a specific goal of the European Neighbourhood Policy is to inspire political and economic reforms in partner countries ensuring in return, inter alia, their participation in the EU internal market.

The identification of the EU as a normative power, and indeed a "force for good" took place in the first European Security Strategy adopted in 2003. It is stated that the promo-

¹ There is linguistic diversity in the European Union. Among the 24 official languages, three main language groups: Germanic, Romance and Slavic dominate.

² „The Union is founded on the values of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities. These values are common to the Member States in a society in which pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity and equality between women and men prevail”.

tion of values is the main principle of the EU's external relations (Council of the EU 2003)³. The same goal is also pursued in the European Union's policy towards its neighbours in the east and south of Europe. Within the framework of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), common values are revealed mainly in the area of: "the rule of law, good governance, respect for human rights, including minority rights, good neighbourly relations, market economy principles and sustainable development, as well as intercultural dialogue" promoted by the Union. Strengthening of democracy, the rule of law and fundamental freedoms occupies a high position in action plans, association agreements or in-depth free trade agreements – key ENP documents signed with partner countries. However, one should note the resistance of some of the neighbouring countries to the transposition of European values into their axiological system, e.g. Belarus. Proponents of this concept argue that the EU's power lies in its ability to project fundamental values beyond its borders in order to achieve ideological influence of the EU, for example in such areas as the death penalty, peace building or institutionalisation of the International Criminal Court or the Kyoto Protocol (Scheipers, Siccarelli 2007: p. 435–457).

An essential resource of soft power of the European Union is its external activity, based largely on the aforementioned values and principles. A common feature of the European Union's foreign policy is striving for stability and peace on the continent also outside the European Union, not through hard, force methods (forcing peace), but the policy of association, partnership and cooperation, creating free trade zones, promoting democracy and economic prosperity, facilitating interpersonal contacts by introducing free movement of people, cultural and educational exchanges. In foreign policy, the concept of soft power consists of applying its determinants, such as: observance of international law, non-interference in internal affairs of other countries, or the level of culture of pursued foreign policy (Piskorska 2017: p. 231). The European Union also carries out its actions through development and humanitarian policies.

Challenges for the European Union: the reasons for the decline in the attractiveness of the EU

Looking at the many breakthrough moments in the history of European integration, it seems that today the European Union has found itself in the conditions of a prolonged political, economic and social crisis. As a result, the Union currently suffers from a loss of strategic orientation and attractiveness both internally and externally. The EU has entered a period of internal exhaustion after almost twenty years of cumbersome attempts to reform political and institutional structures and the last three enlargement rounds. At the same time, being in the midst of the debt crisis, the Union is often compared to a freighter with a glorious history, which has lost "a command bridge indicating its next destination" (Emmanoulidis 2012: p. 87–88). However, if only the EU can overcome the

³ "Spreading good governance, supporting social and political reform, dealing with corruption and abuse of power, establishing the rule of law and protecting human rights are the best means of strengthening the international order based on effective multilateralism".

current lack of internal dynamisms, it will be able to continue to co-influence the managing of global affairs.

Among the reasons for the decline in the attractiveness of the EU we can mention: the loss of *raison d'être* and the appearance of the EU conceptual vacuum, Brexit, the elite crisis, a leadership deficit, exhaustion resulting from reforms and enlargement policy, fear of losing sovereignty, a relative decline of European economic potential, policy of isolationism of President of the United States Donald Trump, and the migration and security crises.

Many Europeans – ordinary citizens, but also representatives of political, economic and intellectual elites – question the added value of European integration in the future. The lofty goals that laid the foundations of the European Union over 60 years ago, such as prosperity, solidarity, peace and stability, have been partially achieved. In addition, the Europeans love the four common freedoms of the single market, the practical benefits of having a single currency, the abolition of border control and the creation of conditions in which the prospect of an armed conflict between the EU countries has become unthinkable. It seems that these undoubted achievements of the EU concern the past. What is expected in the future is the definition of a new *raison d'être* of this organisation.

However, today in the European Union there is a lack of a full conceptual debate regarding its future, equalling the "grand constitutional project of Europe" that collapsed more than ten years ago. At the same time, we can see antagonisms between and within the Member States regarding the future political order in Europe. There are, therefore, conflicting and sometimes irreconcilable views on the *finalité* of the European Union. They often even take on an extreme form – from the increasingly intense support for the monetary integration of Europe, Europe of various speeds, to the project of the United States of Europe as a key strategy for the survival of the continent. A discussion on this subject was undertaken in the White Paper on the Future of Europe published on 1 March 2017. The President of the European Commission, Jean Claude Juncker, proposed five scenarios that are to help carry out the debate on the future of Europe: carrying on; nothing but the single market; those who want more do more; doing less more efficiently; doing much more together (European Commission 2017). Differences can also be seen in the proposals of individual countries concerning the solution of specific problems in Europe. The plan for saving Europe (repairing the monetary union) according to the French President Emanuel Macron and German Chancellor Angela Merkel is a particularly outstanding example (Gros 2017, 2017a). Undoubtedly, the wide disagreement on the final direction of the European Union threatens the prospects of the integration project.

A month earlier, in a letter addressed to the 27 leaders of the Member States before the summit in Malta, the President of the European Council, Donald Tusk, calling for unity (Council of the EU 2017)⁴, underlined the three main threats to Europe's stability: a new geopolitical situation⁵, the internal situation, including the rise of nationalistic and

⁴ "United we stand, divided we fall": letter by President Donald Tusk to the 27 EU heads of state or government on the future of the EU before the Malta summit.

⁵ The new geopolitical situation: increasingly assertive China, Russia's aggressive policy towards Ukraine and its neighbours, wars, terror and anarchy in the Middle East and Africa (including the important role

xenophobic sentiments in the EU itself, and the state of mind of pro-European elites⁶, including the lack of faith in the sense of political integration.

The biggest challenge and at the same time an unprecedented event is the decision of the British from 2016 to withdraw from the European Union. According to Marek Prawda, "after the British referendum, the Union has remained the same, but it will not be the same any more" (Civil dialogue 2018). In addition, the resolution of the British undermined the conviction that every crisis strengthens the EU and, as a result, it gets stronger out of it. Although Brexit negotiators try to minimise the damage to both parties, they must expect that it will happen. There is an important task that Europe must tackle – to re-arrange relations in the group of 27 countries and create a new identity of this smaller community.

Another challenge for the European Union that causes a decrease in its moral perception is the lack of citizens' faith in political elites and their decisions, and doubts as to whether they will cope with the complexities of the modern world. This phenomenon intensified during the debt and financial crisis in Europe, during which citizens noticed the limited skills of political actors in confrontation with the need to discipline financial markets dysfunctional at that time. Although a decline in confidence in national political elites at both national and European level is a common tendency in the modern world, it seems to have particularly drastic consequences for the EU, which is still perceived as an elitist project and which enjoys a much smaller benefit of the doubt than the constituent nation states.

Furthermore, the European Union suffers from a leadership deficit both at the level of the Member States and EU institutions. In the first case, we can identify three main reasons for the current situation: first, the traditional driving force of integration processes – the tandem of France and Germany has lost its attractiveness and efficiency. The enlargement of the EU, followed by increasing economic, financial, social and geopolitical heterogeneity, and diverse interests revealed within it, has structurally weakened the significance and influence of the Franco-German tandem, as well as their motivation to reach a common compromise. Secondly, there are difficulties in identifying a new, alternative coalition that could be a driving force in the European Union. Projects to replace the previously leading states, such as the big three, that is Germany, France and Great Britain or the Weimar Triangle (Germany, France and Poland) have not been implemented. At present, the United Kingdom has deliberately resigned from contesting for leadership in this organisation as a result of the decision to exit the European Union. Poland, on the other hand, has found itself in an infamous position of the first country in the history of European integration towards which the European Commission has initiated the procedure for monitoring compliance with the rule of law under Article 7.1 of the Treaty on European Union, which definitely disqualifies it from acting as a model Member

of radical Islam) and worrying declarations of the new US administration – all these make the future highly unpredictable.

⁶ The state of mind of pro-European elites: a decline of faith in political integration, submission to populist arguments as well as doubt about the fundamental values of liberal democracy.

State (Barcz, Łojek-Zawidzka 2018). Thirdly, the role of Germany in the European Union has changed significantly since the mid-1990s. The European orientation of this country has become more pragmatic, less visionary and more determined by narrow economic, political and financial interests.

On the other hand, at the level of EU institutions, in the late 1990s the European Commission lost a lot of its strategic importance. There were several reasons for this: firstly, the strength and influence of the European Commission shifted towards the European Council, where the heads of states and governments of the Member States increasingly influence the general orientation of the EU. This trend has been strengthened after the entry into force of the Treaty of Lisbon and the consolidation of the EU Presidency (The Treaty of Lisbon 2010: p. 63–85). Secondly, EU enlargement has made it difficult for the Commission to play the role of a compromise seeker in a situation where the EU has become more heterogeneous and more complex. Thirdly, the European Union has evolved over the last decade from a more technological project into a political one, where the role of the European Commission is increasingly questioned due to a lack of democratic legitimacy (Emmanoulidis 2012: p. 90).

The contemporary European Union suffers from both reform fatigue and tiredness resulting from several enlargement rounds. The inability of the EU to carry out effective reforms of its institutional and political system in the last two decades is the source of frustration both for the citizens and for the policy decision-makers. Recent experience in EU history is based on the failures of treaty reforms. Starting from the Treaty of Maastricht, since the beginning of the 1990s the European Union has been in a permanent state of crisis related to the necessity of reforming it. Neither the Treaty of Amsterdam nor the Treaty of Nice brought a long-awaited integration leap. In addition, the rejection by France and Denmark of the constitutional treaty in 2005 and the initial rejection of the Treaty of Lisbon by Ireland in 2008 multiplied irritation, incomprehension and disappointment. Only its ratification and entry into force on 1 December 2009 brought some relief. Nevertheless, the amendment of EU treaties is by no means perfect and is certainly not the final stage of reforming the EU⁷. Therefore, the shortcomings of the Lisbon system will require further treaty changes.

As far as EU enlargement is concerned, as a result of the entry of 12 members to the organisation in 2004–2007 enlargement fatigue has become a widespread phenomenon in many Member States (Eurobarometr 2008: p. 227–230). This does not mean that the process has ended once and for all, but after the accession of Croatia to the EU in 2013, the pace of enlargement has clearly slowed down. As a general consequence, the European project has been deprived of one of the key motivating factors since enlargement policy was the main source of political and economic dynamism in the last two decades.

⁷ The Treaty of Lisbon was a typical compromise between those who supported more politically integrated Europe and those who were not ready to go beyond the existing nature of cooperation. Hence the Treaty of Lisbon is characterised by many shortcomings relating to its legal complexity, lack of transparency, readability and institutional ambitions, as well as inequities in the division of competences between the EU and its Members.

Immediately after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the USSR, the prospect of joining the EU became the main motivation for the countries of Central and Eastern Europe to carry out thorough reforms.

The loss of dynamism of the European project has also resulted from the concern of national elites about the consequences of further loss of sovereignty. The European Union countries have transferred a large share of their national competences to the organisation over the last 60 years. A further loss of sovereignty in such areas as social policy, employment policy, tax policy, foreign policy, security and defence policy, could not only reduce the existing power of the Member States, but also limit the remaining privileges of national political elites. This is the main reason why national governments, parties, parliaments or even constitutional courts prevent further extension of the EU competences to avoid depriving them of power.

Currently, the European Union, perceived as the main economic player, benefiting from the globalisation process, is facing several challenges, which include: the emergence of new economic powers, the negative effects of the global economic crisis and the European debt crisis. Europe has suffered the long-term consequences of the crisis much more severely than other regions. In addition, most Member States struggle with low growth rates, high levels of domestic debt as well as a growing deficit. Moreover, a technological gap between EU and non-EU countries has shrunk, and European society must face the socio-economic consequences of the aging population.

The economic potential of the European Union as a whole is still high, but the trend seems to be downward compared to other economic powers and previous generations. As a consequence, more and more Europeans feel insecure about future standards of living and the European social model. Under these conditions, the European Union is not perceived as an effective response to the negative economic forces of globalisation. On the contrary, in the eyes of many citizens the European Union is viewed as a catalyst for unrestrained globalisation. At the same time, though, opinion polls indicate that the majority of citizens would like to see the EU as a "protective force" defending them against its negative effects. However – in their opinion – the EU is currently unable to fulfil their expectations (Eurobarometer 2009: p. 194–195).

For several years, the European Union has also been confronted with problems coming from outside. The economic crisis that has lasted since 2008 has turned out to be only a prelude to the multiple crises, aggravated in subsequent years by the challenges of global migration and security. The refugee crisis that affected Europe in 2015–2016 has caused significant social and economic problems, especially in European countries, both of "first contact" (Italy, Greece) and target countries (Germany, Sweden), and to some extent also in transit countries (Hungary, Austria, France). The increased inflow of foreigners seeking protection in European countries is a consequence of the global crisis. According to Global Trends data prepared by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR 2016), in 2016 the number of displaced persons on a global scale amounted to 65.6 million, of which refugees accounted for 22.5 million, internally displaced persons (within the borders of the country of origin) 40.3 million, and persons applying for the

refugee status 2.8 million (UNHCR 2016). Over the last decade, the number of foreigners applying for asylum in European Union countries was regularly increasing from around 200,000 in 2006 to around 1.3 million in 2015-2016 (Florczak 2018: p. 138–139). Citizens of Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq, Pakistan, Nigeria and Iran submitted the largest number of applications at that time (Eurostat Statistics Explained 2018). Germany (722,400), Italy (123,000), France, Greece, Austria and the United Kingdom and Turkey (78,600) admitted the highest number of people (UNHCR 2016).

The response of the European Union to the refugee crisis is constantly criticised, and the solutions proposed by the Council in 2015 have aroused controversy in some Member States. The actions taken consisted in, first of all, launching the funds possessed in the framework of asylum policy pursued since the Maastricht Treaty, part of the third pillar of the EU (Europeanised in the Treaty of Amsterdam amending the Treaty on European Union 1997), and now regulated by art. 76 and 78 of the Treaty of Lisbon⁸. As a result of the 2015 crisis, steps taken under the common asylum policy have proved insufficiency to effectively manage borders and restore stability in the Schengen area. The largest number of migrants reached Europe via the Mediterranean Sea (716 thousand) and the Western Balkans (667 thousand).

Challenges related to the illegal flow of refugees forced the EU to develop a policy of their relocation from countries affected by their largest inflow (Italy, Greece and Hungary). The decision on this matter was taken at the meetings of the Council on 14 and 22 September 2015 (Council Decision 2015/1523, 2015/1601). This principle was opposed by some countries of Central and Eastern Europe (including Poland). Some of them (Slovakia and Hungary) filed a complaint against the temporary mechanism for compulsory relocation of applicants for international protection to the Court of Justice. It was rejected in September 2017, recognising it as an effective mechanism for responding to the migration crisis in Europe (especially in Greece and Italy) (EU Court of Justice 2017). An additional solution was the agreement with Turkey concluded in March 2016. This country agreed to admit to its territory those migrants who do not require international protection and who got to Greece from its territory, as well as to receive those who were detained in Turkish waters (Council of the EU 2016)⁹.

The migration crisis has undoubtedly carried implications for the stability and security of Europe. It has been often associated with increased terrorist activity in European capitals, which has affected the sense of insecurity in society. The EU has turned out to be helpless in securing the imperviousness of its borders, which has undermined the effectiveness of security and defence policy. The refugee problems coincided with the

⁸ The EU asylum policy aims to harmonise Member States' asylum procedures by introducing a common asylum system, allowing all third-country nationals who require international protection to be granted adequate status and to ensure compliance with the principle of non-refoulement – a prohibition of deportation to a country in which they are liable to be subjected to persecution.

⁹ In connection with the agreement Council Decision (EU) 2015/1601 was modified (cf. Council Decision (EU) 2016/1754 of 29 September 2016 amending Decision (EU) 2015/1601 establishing provisional measures in the area of international protection for the benefit of Italy and Greece (OJ L 268, 1.10.2016, p. 82).

destabilisation in the southern and eastern neighbourhood of the European Union, which showed that Europe has lost its ability to influence its surroundings. The EU is criticised by the leaders of the countries of the South, i.e. Turkish President R. Erdogan. Moreover, some actions of Russia, which supports nationalist and authoritarian movements in the EU Member States, aim to break EU coherence (Kuźniar 2018: p. 63–64). Russia's aggression towards Ukraine in 2014, the accompanying sharp anti-Western course and attempts to intimidate through increased military presence on the eastern and northern borders showed the lack of EU capabilities in this regard. As a result, the European Union's competences in the mediation process between Ukraine and Russia were taken over by the strongest European states, i.e. France and Germany, which instead of the EU as a whole participated in the Normandy format.

Conclusions

Summarising the above considerations, we can distinguish three main phenomena that cast a shadow on the future and the current perception of the European Union project (Pisarska 2017). The first trend refers to the decline in citizens' confidence in the European Union. Since the financial crisis from 2008, this phenomenon has been noticeable on many levels: between the government/elites and their voters/society (Brexit), on the government-government level (relations between the European Union and Russia) and between countries and institutions (the Eurozone crisis, the migration crisis). In addition, we can discern a slow deterioration of the socio-economic condition and hard security felt by the majority of European citizens, but also the separation of elites from the majority of society, which has led to the expansion of populism and anti-system movements.

Another conspicuous trend is the lack of appealing positive narrative about the European Union: instead of it there have appeared populist movements in Europe that thrive in subsequent EU Member States. They propagate such values as independence, sovereignty and security against so-called others, and the pro-European camp does not react to these slogans with a contrary narrative. Moreover, neither EU institutions nor the Member States make serious attempts to create a counterbalance or reorient the discussion towards EU values and aspirations.

The third and the last trend results from the lack of vision and leadership in the European Union. The wider European project was initiated and later conducted and carried out by talented leaders, presenting their vision of peaceful and united Europe to their societies. In the present context, however, there is a significant lack of visionary leadership at the EU level. The vision of the president of France Emanuel Macron "European Renaissance" presented on March 4, 2019 was not accepted by other leaders of EU Member States (Macron 2019). The continent therefore seems to be closed in short-sighted politics, without a long-term plan.

In other words, the future role of the EU in the international order is determined by political intentions and the ability of the Member States to further intensify and deepen

cooperation. In order to do this, the Union must first and foremost overcome the current crisis of legitimacy, trust and attractiveness both inside and outside Europe.

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