ABSTRACT

The idea of European federation keeps recurring in politicians’ and intellectuals’ discourses on the future of the European Union. The logic of global rivalry of “large territories” favors this in particular, as it somehow forces Europe’s states to enter into a tighter integration if they want to realize their politics. The biggest challenge which the Union faces is the problem of leadership, understood both in the context of internal policy and relationally towards the surrounding. The problem, however, is the diversity of the member states and the unrelenting tension between particular concern about a national interest and European universalism. European federation sensu stricto, just because of this diversity has still been a utopian project. The future of the European Union most probably lies in a new intermediate model, as unique as the European Commonwealths used to be in the 1950s.

Keywords: the European Union, European federation, European identity, globalization

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Halfway through the second decade of the 21st century, the very postulate of integration of the Old Continent in *sensu largo* itself seems not to encounter too many serious opponents. Politicians and intellectuals perceive that it does not only have its justification in the commonwealth of historical experience, but also constitutes a response to the challenge of global rivalry. However, beginning with the moment when one no longer needs to give an answer to the question “Do we have to integrate?”, but “How”, and more precisely – “How deeply and in with direction should we integrate the states of the Continent?” there determinate political divisions which entail a serious political discourse in Europe.

One of the weaknesses of the European Union is the crisis of leadership, understood as a permanent problem of the lack of uniform European politics towards the surrounding, as well as contradicting concepts of development of the European integration. In this context, two speeches delivered by ancient European prime ministers are indeed characteristic and symbolic. The first was made by the then Britain’s Prime Minister, Mrs. Margaret Thatcher, in Bruges, Belgium, on 20 September 1988, in which she declared: “My supreme principle is as follows: the best way to build a successful European Commonwealth is a voluntary and active cooperation between independent, sovereign states.” And the other one, delivered by the then Prime Minister of Denmark, Poul Schlüter, in London at the same time, who stated: “A national state is a creation of an industrial society and – like an industrial society – it wears out” (Wallace, 1994; after Menon, 2013, p. 71).

Amongst a variety of notions, such as *Europe of regions*, *Europe of nations*, *Europe of states*, or *European federation*, the sixth decade in history has already been in progress during which its surrounding, but also its tissue, have been subject to – sometimes violent and sometimes barely noticeable – transformations. Is then, in view of the above, further strengthening of the integration towards a supranational federation still the best answer?

The aim of this article is to analyze a research problem posed by the postulate of federalization of the European Union, as a political solution to the question of leadership crisis in Europe in beginning of 21st century. With this in mind, in the first part, the author raises the issue of validity of
the idea of unification of Europe at all, beginning with the postwar and – at the same time – antiwar narration and then goes on to present arguments of the economic nature. In the second part, he analyzes the problem of contradiction of the idea of unification of the Continent, including the European identity, with the imperative of securing national interests, which is realized in the political practice of the member states, and which is the cause of the crisis of leadership in Europe, mentioned in the title. In the third part, the author draws attention to the problem of different interpretations of European federation, using the example of the speech made by the Polish Minister of Foreign Affairs in Berlin at the end of 2011, which can be regarded as a classical presentation of the idea of deepening the European integration aimed towards a federation as a response to the leadership crisis in the European Union.

THE PROBLEM OF VALIDITY OF THE IDEA OF EUROPEAN UNITY

The governments of states perceive in a clearer and clearer way that none of them is able to singlehandedly meet the challenge of global competition on the international arena. History teaches Europeans that the multidimensional variety favors their mutual rivalry, which used to end up in wars many a time in the past, with benefits reaped only by states standing aside. Hence, the recommendation to integrate, firstly – in the name of peace, and secondly – in the name of prosperity of the Continent. Particularly, in the 20th century, following the bitter experience of, first – World War I, and then – World War II, this idea fell upon a very favorable ground, attaining even the status of the leading narration advocated to by euroenthusiasts. Nevertheless, there arises the question whether this idea can still be valid in the second decade of the 21st century.

The argument emphasizing the need of tight integration of the Continent for fear of either of the global wars repeating, has fortunately lost its validity to a great extent, if it has ever been treated seriously at all (Judt, 1998, p. 18). Obviously, in theory, a conventional war in Europe, in which two regular armies clash with each other, is still possible. However yet in
the era of the 21st century it is simply uneconomic and, as the instance of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict that has been running since 2014, proves, can be fought only under a new cover – as concealed hybrid warfare – one in which the main actors are soldiers in uniforms bearing no signs of their national status and thus requiring engagement of the element of local population (Applebaum, 2014).

Today even more than in past, in the era of global competition, it is money that counts first and foremost, as well as a broadly-understood cultural and institutional expansion, the so-called soft power (Nye, 2007). Economic reasons make for yet another traditional and pragmatic argument in favor of the European integration. The zone of free trade, customs union, common market, which means free flow of commodities, goods, services, capital and people, all that was meant to found and, indeed, favored building prosperity of the member states. One cannot neglect the fact, though, that in the era of globalization and world’s economy, what used to count as an exceptional achievement and the opus magnum of the creators of the Union in the 1950s is slowly becoming an obvious thing on the global scale. The governments of all states in the world do a lot to remove these barriers both for travelers and traders. It suffices to observe that the World Trade Organization, the most important economic organization of the global character, whose main goal is liberalization of international trade in goods and services, has a membership of as many as 160 states at the beginning of 2015, while integrative groups of the economic character have functioned successfully in a variety of forms on all of the continents for some time now (Rymarczyk, 2010, p. 308–309). The European Union, in the second decade of the 21st century, treated as an economic commonwealth, can – with the exception of the monetary union which has found itself in the state of turbulence since the time of crisis (the beginning of which is dated at the year 2008) – ordinarily has ceased to be something exceptional.

It is hard to resist the impression that the expanded form of EU institutions has come to dominate the content, which is especially clearly seen when we look at the continuing façade-like dimensions of the Common Foreign and Security Policy. One cannot speak today either about a uniform foreign policy of the European Union or – the more so – about
a common army – in contrast with the long list of Union’s agencies and officials who are responsible for these areas (Milczarek, Zajączkowski, 2014, p. 180–184). How should, within the logic of global rivalry, the European Union – diversified, weakening and devoid of a common vision – find itself, not to mention individual states in isolation, which are not members of it? The answer seems obvious on its own: the governments of the states of the Old Continent must follow the road of integration, since this is in their vital interest.

Undoubtedly, in the time of globalization, Europe come to deal with undermining of the model of functioning of nation states of the Westphalian sovereignty type, whose scale “is no longer sufficient to solve social and economic problems” (Staniszkis, 2006, p. 167–168). Globalization, thus, is a time of “regional neo-empires” (Staniszkis, 2006, p. 100) or “great territories” (Cichocki, 2012, p. 144–152). This, in turn, means that at the beginning of the 21st century small and medium-sized states are going through a peculiar crisis: functioning on their own, without any integrative structure, they are doomed to failure in the logic of global competition (if they want to be part of it).

**THE PROBLEM OF NATIONAL INTEREST**

Having studied the history of the European integration, the author concludes that the states of Europe decided to integrate within the European Union, directed by their own national interests, encased, however, in the typical of the Old Continent, natural narration of common heritage and experience of history, meant to form the European identity. It is this identity that ought to justify the political unification of the Continent. From the very beginning of the European Commonwealths the shape of this identity has been the object of efforts on the part of politicians, both those with their Christian-democratic and social-democratic roots, as they practice historical politics, in which three great European heritages: Greek-Roman, Christian and Enlightenment have been in competition for the title of the leading narration. It is they, as being common to the whole of
Europe, which are meant to build its identity, and – in consequence – also its unity (Ociepa, 2013, p. 60–62).

Indeed, as studies show, Europeans do perceive elements which build the European identity. It follows from their declarations that these are, primarily: common currency, democratic values, culture, geography and history (Ociepa, 2013, p. 64). Undoubtedly, they make the right foundation to build a common political project and, accordingly, both the creators of the united Europe and their contemporary successors willingly make reference to it. This does not, however, change the truth that the national interest still remains an incessantly vital, if not the most vital, point of reference for them.

To prove this thesis, it is worth mentioning in this place two instances of actions which were executed in recent years by states traditionally considered the hard core of the close integration, that is France and Germany, and which do not happen to comply with the “spirit of the Union” at all. The French government did not have any reservations, despite critical opinions, about ostentatiously supporting their domestic car industry from the central budget. Yet as the President of the Republic, Nicholas Sarkozy, said in 2009, “not to learn that yet another factory is transferring to the Czech Republic or somewhere else” (Topolanek…, 2009). One cannot but repeat the word ‘ostentatiously’ here as the declaration was made during the half-year Presidency of the Council of European Union by the Czech Republic.

Another example of realization of a particular national interest even though against “the European unity” is the project of constructing North European Gas Pipeline by the consortium Nord Stream AG, which is a classical German-Russian project of the bilateral character, implemented in defiance of concerns and even firm objections (for various reasons) raised by the Scandinavian states, Poland and the Baltic Republics, that is other members of the European Union (Raabe, 2009).

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1 At a later stage, in 2008, the project was joined in also the Dutch company Gasunie, obtaining 9% of the shares. See: http://rbcnews.com/free/20080620155724.shtml (accessed on 25 November 2014).
The above-mentioned examples have been referred to prove that the category of national interest has not lost its validity even in these states which are leaders in the discussion on a closer integration of the Continent, including such issues as the economic union or Common Foreign and Security Policy.

It is worth observing that, in Europe, somehow by force, there are continuing attempts made at maintaining the criticism of the criterion of national interest in international relations, just because of the narration of the necessity of communitizing interests of the member states, which was mentioned earlier. One can hardly resist the impression, though, that this is taking place paradoxically with damage to the EU states, since the powers which stand in rivalry with Europe, such as: China, Russia and the United States, are large nation states which by no means abstract themselves from the unambiguously and particularly understood national interest. And it does not matter here whether the rise in the nationalistic movement in France or Germany is the cause or the effect of the present evaluation of the Union, which is indicated by Jadwiga Staniszkis (2006, p. 160).

Certainly, one can find many more instances of particularism on the Old Continent, not only accepting the geographical perspective, but also the historical one, since – as Marek Cichocki observes – “The evolution of political unity is a continuous movement between two extremes […] universalism and particularism. Between them there is a continual, sometimes dramatic, game going on, because each of these extremes has its strong – reaching the very depth of human existence – justification (2012, p. 170).” It is then this tension and the high requirements with reference to universalism set to itself by the Union, with simultaneous strong tendencies towards particular behaviors which result in the crisis of leadership in Europe. In order to take the course of supranational leadership it is first indispensable to jointly answer the question: “To what point are we «us, nation states» and what and to what point are we «we, Europe»?” So far the EU states have too often offered extremely different answers to these questions.
A FEDERATION – A POLITICAL AND RHETORICAL MOVE

For years now the answer given by many European politicians to the phenomenon of rivalry between “large territories” has been the idea of the United States of Europe\(^2\) – a federation. This postulate came back towards the end of 2011, on the occasion of making a relatively provoking observation by Radosław Sikorski, the then Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Poland, included in his speech delivered on the forum of the German Society of Foreign Affairs in Berlin (Sikorski 2011). It is worth a brief analysis here as the last example of the vision of the European federation formulated by an important European politician.

That utterance was received, especially in Poland, as an explicit call for further federalization of the European Union. The problem consists in that such a reaction is more an effect of the word “federation” being repeated many times rather than that of the really communicated content. The notion of federation would require a separate work devoted to the problem, one that would undertake to describe and define it with more precision, since it is relatively capacious and R. Sikorski’s statement is the best illustration to prove this.

For reasons of simplicity, the Polish Minister’s postulates can be divided into those of the economic character and the technical-administrative ones. The former include: the proposal to impose on the member states the duty to consult the most important economic reforms with the Commission and the so-called Eurogroup, strengthening the European Central Bank, and “the financial discipline would become stricter thanks to that the access to relief funds would be granted only to these members who abide by the macro-fiscal rules, sanctions would become applicable automatically, and the Commission, the Council and the Tribunal of Justice would acquire the rights to execute 3% deficit ceiling and 60% debt limit. Countries subject to the procedure of excess budget deficit would have to present their domestic budgets to the Commission for acceptance. The

\(^2\) British Prime Minister Winston Churchill had the largest share in the promotion of this formulation, who raised the idea in his speech delivered in Zurich on 19 August 1946 (see: Davies, 2009, p. 1134–1135).
Commission would then obtain the right to interfere in the policies of the countries which are unable to meet their obligations. Countries which notoriously broke the principles would be suspended in their rights of vote” (Sikorski, 2011).

The postulates of the technical-administrative nature include: “strengthening” the European Commission and lowering the number of its members, giving more competences to the European Parliament, as well as merging the functions of the President of the European Council and the President of the Commission into one post, perchance filled as a result of direct election (Sikorski, 2011).

One cannot but notice that the above-mentioned postulates of the economic character merely exhaust the notion of an economic union in the framework of international economic relations, but they do not refer to that of a political union (Rymarczyk, 2010, p. 295–296), without which one can hardly speak about a federation. The whole of the federalist message is additionally weakened by the statement that “the more power and legitimization we hand over to federal institutions, the more the member states should be assured in their belief that certain prerogatives, such as broadly conceived questions of national identity, religion, lifestyle, public morality or income tax and VAT rates should remain the competence of states” (Sikorski, 2011).

The article by R. Sikorski, which appeared in *Financial Times* on 9 May 2012 contains slightly more components of his vision of the European federation. The Minister outlined in it four scenarios for the European Union in the face of the aggravating crisis of the Eurozone. The first of them is disintegration of the Union, the second (the most likely to happen in his opinion) is a ‘leeway’, during which the member states repair their public finances for decades at the cost of losing their competitive potential in the world, though. The third scenario, called by the author “utopian” and “impossible” is a federation, understood as a “unitary supranational state with a central government and single parliament” (Sikorski, 2012).

The fourth of the Polish scenarios assumes a “lasting political union” with competences of the member states in many domains, such as: culture, lifestyle, religion and tax rates being maintained, which is a repetition of the theses included in the speech made in Berlin.
A comparison of the two voices by one politician, spanning a few months, clearly shows that the notion of federation can be used in Europe in various contexts, with a number of meanings and can always be interpreted in different ways. Still, the definition of a federation makes it precise that it is “a union of states which partially relinquish their sovereignty in favor of this union” (Antoszewski, 2002, p. 104). Nevertheless, in the above-quoted statements, it is hard to find postulates which would exhaust this definition. Probably because of the fact that the governments of many member states of the European Union are not capable of accepting tighter integration geared towards a federation, which would inevitably mean crossing over the line between an international organization, even if truly of a new and unique type, and a federation which functions at the cost of sovereignty of nation states. British Prime Minister David Cameron’s declarations of 2012, concerning the need for holding a referendum in Britain “on the character of further relations between Brussels and London” (Niedziński, 2012) and the joint refusal with the Czech Republic to enter the so-called fiscal pact that was meant to be the nucleus of a fiscal union (Koniec…, 2012) can testify to this only too well. R. Sikorski appears to have no illusions either when he writes, “I can’t imagine parliament of any member state, including Poland, voting for a treaty which would hand over the national sovereignty to Brussels” (Sikorski, 2012). After all, even in Germany – a state of “the hard core of the Union”, which advocates federalization of the Continent in the most consistent way, there is a growing resistance to shifting the competences onto the supranational level. There are also more and more doubts relating to the compliance of these actions with der Staatsräson (Jendroszczyk, 2012).

All this does not change the fact, however, that the logic of a geopolitical and geo-economic competition somehow forces the governments of member states, and will continue to do so in the future, to adopt a form of deepening integration, since – as Jürgen Habermas writes – only broader regional structures are able to preserve the effectiveness of their own politics (Habermas, 2009, p. 161). Thus, in a sense, rejecting further deepening of the European integration can turn against the raison d’état of the Union’s nation states. Furthermore, rejection of the model of a federation sensu stricto does not solve another problem either, which is the lack of ability
for the Union to effectively and in a legitimised way act as a subject on the international arena which J. Staniszkis calls *actorship* (Staniszkis, 2006, 117).

**CONCLUSIONS. IN SEARCH OF WHAT IS COMMON**

In the opinion of the author of this article, R. Sikorski was right in saying that the Union would never become a utopian federation, a supranational state with a central government. In contrast to the United States of North America it would not be formed by non-established, lacking in their own identity, political entities. Still, one cannot fail to notice that its surrounding is changing and mutual dependences are stronger than ever before, which European states painfully experienced on the occasion of the financial crisis mentioned earlier. One cannot ignore either the fact of global competition of “large territories”, in which single states of the Old Continent are simply doomed to fail.

Since its very beginnings the European Union has been an original creation (Milczarek, Zajączkowski, 2014, p. 169–175), full of contradictions and indeterminations. Frequent alterations of treaties is a distinct example that this is a constantly evolving subject which remains in the state of permanent tension. As R. Sikorski aptly put it, “[…] weaknesses of the Eurozone are not an exception, but rather typical of the way in which we built the European Union. We have, in Europe, a dominant currency, the guardian of which is not any European Ministry of Treasure. We have mutual borders without a common migration policy. We have, allegedly, a common foreign policy, yet it is void of real instruments of power, frequently weakened by member states which take care of their own particular interests” (Sikorski, 2011). Krzysztof Szczerzki states indeed that inner contradictions are the essence of the European integration, which one has to come to terms with and learn to function in it (Szczerzki, 2011).

Jadwiga Staniszkis, while analyzing the model of a new formula of the global order, which she calls “network geopolitics” (Staniszkis, 2004, p. 116–126), points to the fact that the Union needs some form of constitution which would secure to it the above-mentioned *actorship* “having the
European politicians and intellectuals must work out another original formula of the Union, which will simply be yet another stage in its development. Staniszkis writes that “Europe, once in a few centuries makes itself anew. This means a departure from the previous conception of itself so that it could survive, so that it could compete in the global system” (Staniszkis, 2004, p. 214). It seems that the acceleration connected with globalization causes Europe to “have to make itself anew” every decade in the 21st century and should already have specialized in doing so by now.

It is certain that this cannot be a solely technocratic formula, based on realization of immediate interests. As such, being deprived of the spirit, it will quickly lose social support and will start disintegrating. It seems that this is what Habermas had on his mind when he wrote: “as long as there is no European nation state […] there should not be a constitution” (Habermas, 2009, p. 160). Facing the challenges raised by globalization, the Union must abandon the anachronistic question whether to continue integration for the sake of returning to the foundations which are common to European states, and which can allow it – in the era of rivalry or, as Samuel Huntington prefers to put it – “clash of civilization” – to come back
to common values, whose synthesis is the triad of the ancient traditions: Hellenistic, Roman and Judeo-Christian, enriched with the heritage of the time of Enlightenment. This common experience of Europe’s nations, also marked with numerous contradictions, is another premise for building an original quasi-federative organism which will abandon the ambition of replacing nation states in order to even more effectively compete on the international arena, as their complement.

Nevertheless, constructing the unity of the Continent exclusively on the foundation of common values is as much idealistic as it is naïve. The sincerest and the longest-lasting premises for cooperation of people and states are an effect of connection of hard immediate interests with spirituality knitted from common ideals, experience and emotions, understood as Europe of the third option – an alternative to the mythical European super-state and nation on the one hand, and total disintegration and return to the well-known frames of nation states – on the other one. Anyway, states of the Old Continent do not lack in common goals or values. It will suffice if European politicians and intellectuals do not hamper by force, in the name of shallowly-comprehended unity, the European flexibility, paradoxes as well as contradictions and treat the motto of the Union: \textit{In varietate concordia} – United in diversity, in a truly serious way.

Summing up the theses of this article, it needs concluding that:

- The European Union, in the era of global competition, cannot afford to disintegrate, since this would be at variance with interests of European states which are unable to run their independent game in the logic of “large territories”.
- Contrary to lofty declarations, the Union’s member states are governed by their own national interests, and the European Union will be accepted only when it serves these interests. A creative connection of ideological premises with pragmatic taking account of hard interests of nation member states can yield the best results.
- A federation – in the precise meaning of the word – is not destined for Europe due to the variety and power of the identity of European states which are far from resigning from their sovereignty despite
corrosion of the modern model of a state. Leaders of the European Union must then work out a new original model of integration, which will take into account and respect the diversity of its member states and the richness of all the three heritages that have shaped Europe. However, its essence cannot be the ambition of replacing nation states, but complementing and prolonging their functions so that they should be able to compete on the global scale.

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