Under the influence of the prolonged economic and political crisis in the EU the integration processes tend to be more and more distanced from the community model. The said model involved a relative equilibrium among European institutions, and gradually growing autonomy of community institutions (such as the European Commission or the European Parliament), which become autonomous from inter-governmental institutions (like EU Council). The community model also involved an equilibrium between the biggest member states and the smallest or peripheral ones. One of the factors of this equilibrium was the system of community institutions and the cohesion of the EU regulatory system. The core principle of the system was solidarity between the rich and the poor.

However, the community model described above undergoes erosion in the period of the eurozone crisis. A new integration model emerges, which involves growing formal and informal political influence of the strongest member states. Also, an asymmetry of power between intergovernmental institutions and the remaining European institutions becomes more pronounced, as does a hierarchical order, ranking the countries from the strongest, to the smallest, politically weakest or peripherally situated. A companion process is the growing political segmentation in the EU, which results in the emergence of different circles of integration, in accordance with the “two-speed Europe” programme. The basis for this process is the strengthening of the political role of the eurozone, and its growing institutionalization, as well as territorial ad political division into central and peripheral states.

Poland remains outside the eurozone. Even though the Accession Treaty obliged Poland to participate in the Economic and Monetary Union, Warsaw still did not announce a binding date on which the country will join the system. The Polish standpoint with regard to the common currency is characterized by inconsistency between economic and political logic.

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On the economic plane, it seems more rational to refrain from joining the eurozone, at least in the mid-term time horizon. This opinion is based on the experiences of peripheral countries of the eurozone who, just like Poland, undergo economic convergence processes (they need to catch up with the central countries). In such circumstances it is more beneficial to maintain fluid national currency rate, which allows for less painful and quicker adaptation to economic changes and reversal of market tides. Within this perspective one has to stress the crucial importance of an intensive domestic pro-growth policy, whose aim it should be to quickly equalize structural differences between Polish economy and the central countries of the monetary union. Strengthening the national economy and catching up with the development level of the core eurozone states are therefore important economic conditions of membership in the monetary union.

However on the political plane the order of the day seems to be the striving to enter the eurozone as quickly as possible. Public declaration of Polish government officials are in line with this goal. They are in all probability conditioned by anxiety about the political consequences of remaining outside the eurozone, when there is a palpable tendency to differentiate the speeds of European integration (the “two-speed Europe” process). Another reason are the gradually stronger and better relations between Poland and Germany on the European arena, which undoubtedly motivates the ruling elites in order to seek accession into the eurozone as quickly as possible.

The political logic seems to dominate over economic considerations. However, the economic crisis in the eurozone cools down politicians’ eagerness and contributes to the development of more rational tactics. It is visible in recent political declarations which stress Poland’s willingness to join the eurozone, but refrain from giving binding dates, taking on specific obligations or starting actual preparations. For all this, Warsaw signs all new agreements that have been coined during the eurozone crisis and which are open also for countries outside the eurozone, such as the Fiscal Compact, the Euro Plus Pact, and also recently the banking union.

An additional challenge for the government is the deteriorating social mood in Poland, which can be linked to the economic slowdown. This social climate change also involves the rise of euro-scepticism and questioning the value of European integration. Before the crisis, close integration with the EU was a *raison d’état* for the great majority of Polish political elites. Now the voices of political opposition, who urge policy-makers to think over Polish presence in the EU grow stronger and stronger. They will clearly gain in force in the case of deepening segmentation tendencies within the EU, and abandoning the community principles, which used to constitute the foundations of European integration. If there should be a change of government, these euro-sceptical tendencies will only grow.

Source: Europe’s World. Read more…