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Is There Life Outside of the European Union? Lower Silesians' Opinions About the Alternatives to the EU Membership

Abstract: *This paper answers the question about the alternatives to the European Union membership (and its consequences) conceptualised by the inhabitants of Lower Silesia. To achieve this goal, this text delivers and discusses the empirical data, both quantitative and qualitative, answering the sub-questions if and how their lives have changed as a result of the accession to the EU as well as what are the alternatives, namely: How would our lives have looked like if Poland had not joined the EU in 2004? The article is empirical at its heart. It is built on some fresh data from an extensive research project conducted in 2014 – at the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the EU ‘big bang’ enlargement. At the same time it is the only study conducted in Poland which explores the question of citizens’ perceptions on the Europeanisation effects in such a complex and comprehensive way on the regional level. This study focuses on explaining the Lower Silesians’ opinions exclusively, which allows to see one of the most economically successful regions of Poland in the eyes of its inhabitants.*

Keywords: European Union membership, alternatives, Lower Silesia

Introduction

The article aims to shed some light on the Lower Silesians’ opinions about how their lives would have looked like if Poland had not joined the European Union (EU) in 2004. Explaining the EU citizens’ (in this case at the regional level) perceptions about some possible alternatives to the

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established socio-economic order is an important scientific challenge for numerous reasons. First, it allows to diagnose the people's awareness as regards the advantages and disadvantages of the current historical trajectory. Second, the regional dimension of identities is quite salient due to the growing separatist tendencies observed in various location all over Europe (e.g. Catalonia or Scotland). The Catalan case represents a critical example of tensions between the centre (Madrid) and periphery (Barcelona) and how they may evolve into a crisis situation. Silesian case (apart from Upper Silesia where the Silesia Autonomous Movement has gained some noticeable political power) is far from the *critical situation*. However, the context of the multiple crisis in Europe (economic, migration/refugee, identity, institutional, etc.) creates an interesting environment in which it is vitally important to investigate the citizens' speculative thinking (alternatives to the EU membership) also at the regional level.

Relying on the fresh qualitative and quantitative data from an extensive research project this paper explores the perception of the changes that were brought about by the EU membership as well as conceptualisations of the eventual alternative scenarios that could have happened, together with some evaluative statements. 2014, the year of the round anniversary of the EU Eastern enlargement, brought numerous studies on the Europeanisation effect.¹ However none of them conducted in such a comprehensive manner and none of them in the regional scale.² This is a result of Poland being a highly centralised country. Not only administratively, but also in many spheres of social and economic life one can observe dense centralisation.³ This is also true in most of the scientific undertakings which deliver a picture of the Polish society as a whole without much interest on the regional differences. This paper tries to answer this deficit, however it is not comparative in relation to other Polish regions. Its objective is rather to deliver a detailed picture of the Lower Silesians' perceptions on the changes that the EU membership brought to various dimensions of their lives as seen from the regional and local perspective (only occasionally in reference to the general Polish tendencies in this regard).

¹ See for example: M. Kałużyńska, P. Karbownik, W. Burkiewicz, K. Janiak, M. Jatzak (eds.), *Poland's Ten Years in the European Union*, Warszawa 2014.

² Compare: R. Riedel (ed.), *Śląsk – dziesięć lat członkostwa w Unii Europejskiej (Silesia – Ten Years of Membership in the European Union)*, Wrocław-Racibórz 2014.

³ M. Ferry, *Regional Policy in Poland on the eve of EU membership: regional empowerment or central control?* "European Policies Research Centre Paper", No. 53/2004.

In 2014, at the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the European Union (EU) Eastern ‘big bang’ enlargement, the author if this text was involved in a research project entitled: *The Influence of the Ten Years Membership in the European Union on the Lower Silesians’ Civic Culture and Everyday Life*. His role in the project was very comprehensive starting from designing the research concept, through monitoring the works of the research team, supervision over the scientific quality, up to the popularisation and dissemination of the research results. In specifics the unit commissioning this research project, Center for Social Monitoring and Civic Culture in Wrocław / Breslau (CMSiKO – Centrum Monitoringu Społecznego i Kultury Obywatelskiej we Wrocławiu), was interested in the transformations of the local and regional societies after ten years of diversified Europeanisation pressures. The research design was developed in the Spring of 2014, the research was conducted in the Summer months and the final report was printed and presented in the Autumn of 2014. The overall research project was quite an ambitious and costly undertaking – it involved a multiple research methods (a mixture of qualitative and quantitative ones), a large team of researchers investigating in the form of desk research but also a large-n survey questionnaires as well as individual and focus group interviews. It resulted in an extensive report which summarised the results on more than one hundred pages⁴.

This text is based only on a narrow part of the data available extracted for the purposes of the research question of this article. It answers the question how the Lower Silesians evaluate the impact of EU membership on their lives and how they speculate it would have looked like, if Poland had not joined in 2004. The tenth anniversary of EU enlargement was a good occasion to investigate the Europeanisation effect in diversified social groups, localisations and contexts.

The structure of the article is the following: after the short introduction including the already presented objectives and the general context, there are introduced some basic facts about the methods employed in the research project. Then it is followed by the presentation of the most valid statistical data. Complementarily to this some qualitative material is delivered and commented. Then the conclusion comes which some discussion of the presented material in the context of the claims stemmed from the rich literature on Europeanisation and related sub-disciplines of the European studies.

⁴ Additionally there are available a couple of hundreds of pages of in-depth interviews transcripts, also quantitative data aggregated from the questionnaires and large amount of other analytical material.

1. Methods of the research project

The research project *The Influence of the Ten Years Membership in the European Union on the Lower Silesians' Civic Culture and Everyday Life* comprised of both quantitative and qualitative analysis, which is very much in line with the current trend in social sciences to combine two or more methodological approaches. Complementary methods allow draw a more detailed and nuanced picture of the analysed reality. The whole project started with some desk research, however in this article no material from this phase of the project is presented. This text focuses on the qualitative data gathered in the form of interviews and only occasionally refers to some quantitative data when necessary.

The survey was conducted among 1118 adult inhabitants of the Lower Silesian Voivodship (administrative region in Poland) using the CAPI method (*Computer Assisted Telephone Interview*). The sample is representative due its participants were selected (in RDD – *Random Digit Dial* method) in accordance to the balanced age, sex, income, education and other criteria as well as geographical distribution among the different sub-regions. Applying quotas within the sample in line with the general demographic and economic characteristic of the region's population, allowed to reconstruct its features in statistical manner.

The qualitative component comprised of two elements. First one, the FGI – *Focus Group Interview* was organised in ten sessions with altogether 81 participants. They represented all the sub-regions of Lower Silesian Voivodship and were organised in line with some important social characteristic, like for example: students, working from an urban area, working from the peripheral area, the unemployed, farmers, NGOs representatives, the elderly, etc.

The second qualitative method were IDI – *Individual In-Depth Interview* was conducted with 30 persons representing the opinion leaders, experts and others informed individuals (teachers, journalists, NGOs activists, priests, businessmen, etc.) from Wrocław and the other sub-regions of Lower Silesia. The questions were blocked in five groups and related closely to the pre-defined research questions.

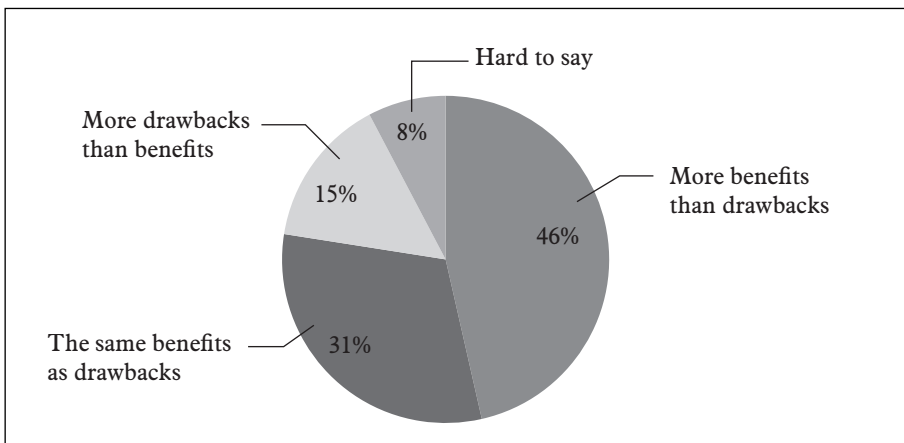
Whenever in this text some citation from the *Focus Group Interview* is presented, the notation FGI appears together with information about the major characteristic of the person interviewed, for example: (FGI, the retired from Wrocław). Citations from the *Individual In-Depth Interviews* are referenced as IDI also accompanied. Such method of quoting the statements guarantees the anonymity of the respondents which was taken as a standard for this research project.

The data was collected in the second and third quarter of 2014 and external monitoring audit covered the whole research process. The diversified method allowed to reconstruct an information-rich picture of the Lower Silesian society to be confronted with the important research questions on identity, its constructions and place as one of its vital constructive components.

2. Data presentation and discussion

The starting point of the data presentation is quantitative. It is at the same time one of the very few quantitative pieces of data (out of a very rich statistical material collected in the overall research project) that is going to be delivered in this article. Its objective is to deliver a statistical picture of the perceived by the Lower Silesians changes that were generated after Poland joining the EU.

Figure 1. The assessment of profits from membership in the EU

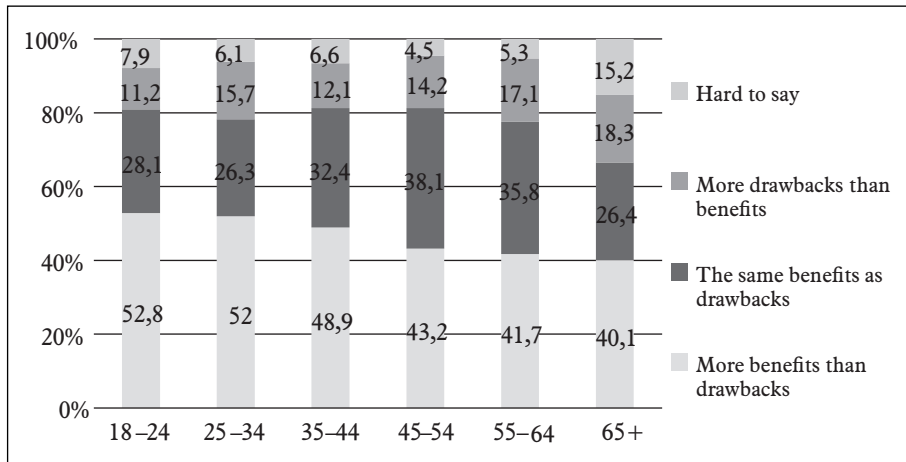


Source: data from the database of the research project: *Wpływ dziesięcioletniego członkostwa w Unii Europejskiej na kulturę obywatelską i życie codzienne Dolnoślązaków*, Raport z badań CMSiKO, 2014.

The first general question referred to the assessment of profits stemming from the membership. Important to notice, the question focused on the profits for Poland in general (which is vital from the point of view of the later confrontation with the personal benefits observed by the respondents). Almost half (46 per cent) claimed they see more benefits than drawbacks, one third see it balanced and only 15 per cent judge that the EU membership had a rather negative consequences. This result is very much in line

with some other Poland-wide opinion polls⁵ and one cannot identify any serious difference between the Lower Silesians' and other Poles' answers.

Figure 2. The assessment of profits from membership in the EU in terms of age



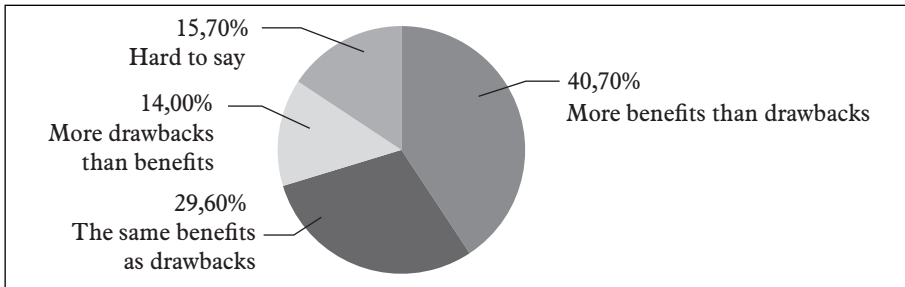
Source: data from the database of the research project: *ibidem*.

Much more interesting picture is delivered by more detailed data based on the age of the respondents. Here we observe a clear pattern that the younger the Lower Silesians are, the more positive they are about the balance of positives and negatives associated with the accession (on the positive side: 52.8 per cent in the age group 18–24 and only 40.1 per cent in the age group 65+). Interestingly, the percentage of those who see the same amount of drawbacks and benefits remains stable spread among the various age groups. Proportionally 18.3 per cent in the oldest age group see it negatively and only 11.2 per cent in the youngest group. Worth mentioning is also the relatively large percentage of “Hard to say” answers among the older group (15.2 per cent). The younger groups have very little doubts in their judgements on the EU membership effects.

The assesment of personal gains look however seriously different. Less then in relation to the whole country benefits, on the personal level only 40.7 per cent of Lower Silesians see more benefits then drawbacks. The percentage of those who see more drawbacks then benefits is similar to the previous question, the same with those who see the benefits and drawbacks balanced.

⁵ CBOS, *Centrum Badań Opinii Społecznej, 10 lat członkostwa Polski w Unii Europejskiej (Center for Public Opinion Research, 10 Years of Poland's Membership in the European Union)*, nr 52/2014, Warszawa 2014.

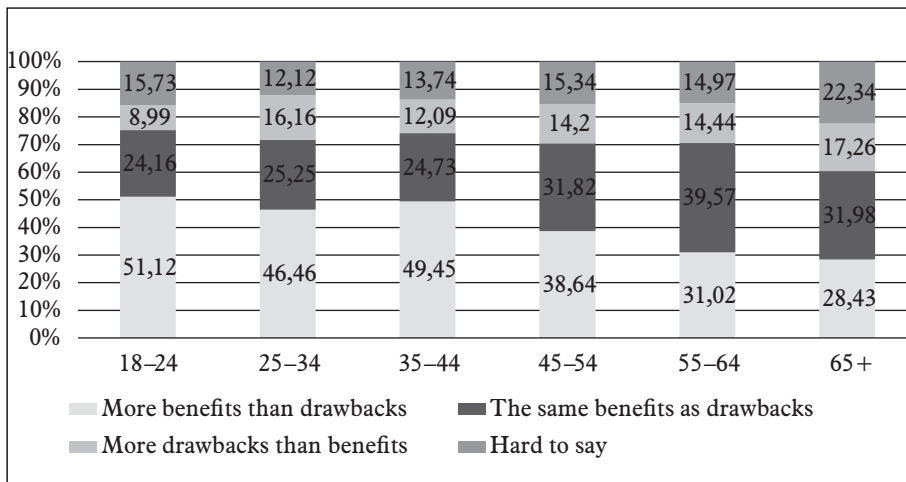
Figure 3. The assessment of personal gains



Source: data from the database of the research project: *ibidem*.

One could interpret that the Lower Silesians are not more pessimistic in assessing their personal (compared to state level) benefits stemming from accession. They are however less optimistic. This is quite symptomatic and visible also in the qualitative part of the research.

Figure 4. The assessment of personal gains in terms of age



Source: data from the database of the research project: *ibidem*.

When the same question is analysed in the prism of the age criterion, we again observe a clear pattern – the younger the respondents the more optimistic about the benefits coming from the EU membership. In this case, the tendency is even more evident than in the case of the assessments of profits for the state. Here the difference between the oldest and the youngest group is approximately 23 per cent, whereas The other answers represent similar tendencies as in the case of the previous question.

An interesting phenomenon is the distinction between the observed and admitted improvement in many spheres of life – among others, the arguments about the beautiful, renovated cities, development and modernisation of infrastructure, etc. – and the neglect of improvement of personal standard of life. There is not transition between the improvement of the public sphere of life and the private sphere of life. The majority of informants claim that the material status of people remained the same and the financial situation is difficult enough that even the basic existential needs remain unanswered.⁶

Counterfactually the informants claim that the salaries are lower, or even when they remain stagnant, the price levels are getting higher, which makes the purchasing power weaker. The same negative perceptions are quite common in all other spheres of material life, including access to kindergartens, health system services or quality of food. In this context, it is not possible to escape from the problem of relativity. It is obvious that the standard of living in Poland improved drastically in comparison to the one from 25 years ago. However the point of reference changed – due to the open borders and easy comparisons to Germany and other West European states and societies, also the aspirations changed. The equality on a very low levels, so much characteristic to the communist times, was much more acceptable by most of the respondents than the contemporary growing inequalities – so natural in a capitalist economy.

Here, it is important to underline that Lower Silesia is one of these Polish regions that is geographically exposed to the West. At the same time the Western Polish neighbour – Federal Republic of Germany – belongs to the wealthiest economies in Europe and the world. Therefore any comparing the situation with the German society must lead to negative judgements about the Polish standards of living.

[...]

- *Referring not necessarily to the incomes but to the purchasing power – some decisions made it that we can purchase less for what we earn. These are decisions that come from the synchronisation of our law with the EU law.*
- *Many products are equalised in the European Union. We earn much less compared to the West. For us buying some butter is a bigger expense than for those in the West' (FGI, working persons, 45+, Wrocław).*

This relative misjudgement thesis can be validated by contrast to the situation of the retired people. Economically speaking, referring to objective statistical data, this social group is in the most difficult economic situation. At the same time, this is the group that is the most satisfied with their ma-

⁶ The more negative opinions were given by inhabitants of Wałbrzych (a city which is a symbol of economic decline, high unemployment and lack of perspectives).

terial standard of living.⁷ How is this possible? The natural answer to this question goes back to the age of the members of this group – they remember very well the economic conditions and the standard of living in the pre-1989 Poland. Compared to that time, their today's quality of material life is much higher, even though objectively speaking still quite modest.

‘[...] it has improved (the standard of living). We are retired, we have our incomes, today I buy what I want and it is enough.

- *When the housewife, in the past, got the salary, went to the shop and her choice was limited, she was forced to buy the more expensive goods. Today she has the selection of seven various types of ham and she selects the cheaper one. Today you can select out of 20 types of cheese, in the past maybe two. Today you can buy 10 dag of ham, in the past you had to take half a kilogram minimum*’ (FGI, the retired from Wrocław).

Part of this problem is associated with the foreign direct investments – the informants claim that the majority of foreign companies and entrepreneurs investing in Poland receive tax preferential conditions and in return they employ workers only on the minimal wage (searching only low labour costs). Therefore even though some of the respondents admit the modernisation impact of FDI but the vast majority underline the negative aspects of it.

‘[...] I know why they (the younger) work twelve hours a day ... in the past it was enough to work eight hours a day. The needs were more limited. [...] now I take extra-hours, I take the second position... to have a better car, to have a better vacations. This is why they work harder.’ (FGI, professionally passive, Wrocław).

Many informants notice also the domination of supermarkets and hypermarkets among the investors. Not only that they offer rather not sophisticated jobs, but also ‘kill’ smaller shops and offer predominantly foreign goods which pushes out of the market the healthy, Polish food.

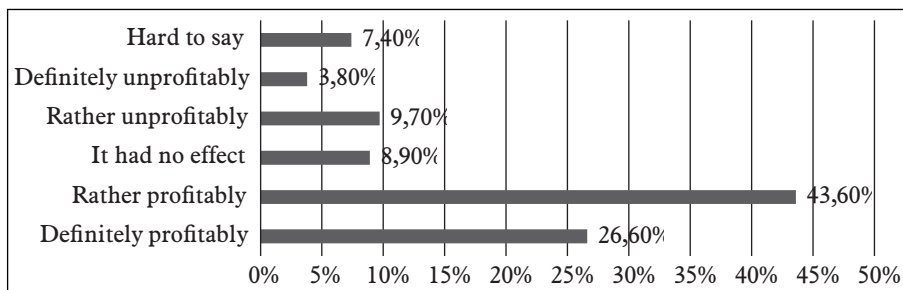
‘[...]’

- *The chain (‘sieciówka’ – colloquial expression for a chained shop) effectively kills the small market. For example a colleague of mine had a shop where she sold designer clothes (...). Then Decathlon appeared and others and it ‘died’ a natural death. And she lived from this shop*’ (FGI – Legnica inhabitants).

Since the core of the European integration process is economic, the respondents were asked the question about the influence of the membership on the Polish economy (below).

⁷ *Wpływ dziesięcioletniego członkostwa w Unii Europejskiej na kulturę obywatelską i życie codzienne Dolnoślązaków (Impact of Ten Years of Membership in the European Union on Civic Culture and Everyday Life of Lower Silesians)*, Raport z badań CMSiKO, wrzesień 2014, s. 88.

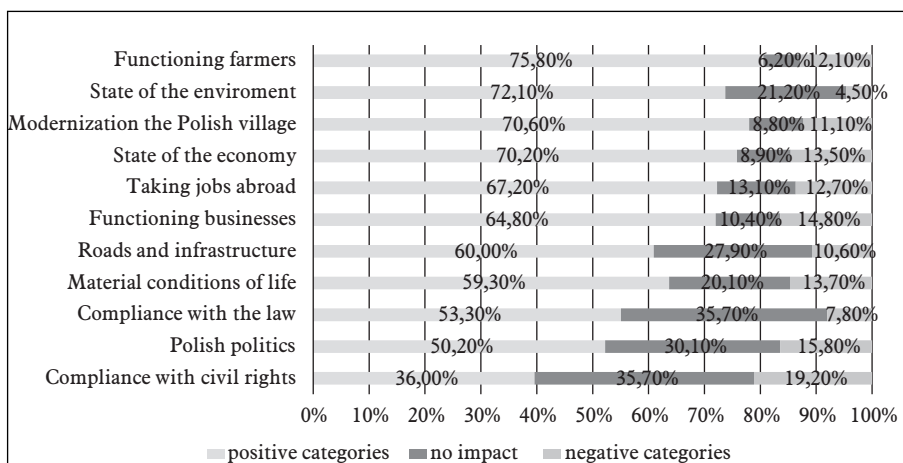
Figure 5. The influence of membership on economy



Source: data from the database of the research project: *ibidem*.

The cumulated positive answers (definitely profitably and rather profitably) sum up to 70.2 per cent. On the opposite, the negative answers (definitely unprofitably and rather unprofitably) cumulate to 13,5 per cent. Unquestionably, the Lower Silesians have an optimistic perception on the economic consequences of the accession. This statement is specially true when confronted with another group of data, that is the assessment of the membership effects on other spheres of social and economic life. Here the ‘state of the economy’ answer takes the fourth position, however the three higher ranked answers are directly connected with the economic affairs (see the graph below).

Figure 6. The assessment of impact of Poland’s accession the EU on some areas of social and economical life



Source: data from the database of the research project: *ibidem*.

The highest ranked answer refers to the farming sector, which is natural from the budgetary point of view. The rich Common Agricultural Policy makes the farmers one of the most profitable social group within the EU societies. Actually, also the third answer in the row refers to the same social group – the answer ‘modernisation of the Polish village / countryside’ is a positive statement on the other side of the same coin. Paradoxically, more than ten years before, at the times of the accession referendum, it was the Polish farmers who represented the most Euro-sceptic group. The second answer in the ranking refers to the environment – Lower Silesians perceive the state of environment highly affected by the EU accession. One has to remember that during the EU membership negotiations (1998–2002), the negotiation chapter ‘environmental policy’ was the most problematic for the Polish delegation. That was due to the relative low levels of environmental protection standards in the whole post-communist Europe. As a consequence, Poland requested the most transitional periods in this negotiation chapter. However as a result of the relative gigantic difference between the state of environment in the Western and Eastern part of Europe (especially in the 1980. and 1990.), the improvements done after the EU accession had a positive impact on peoples perceptions.

On the other side of the scale, one can observe non-economic aspects of EU membership influence. Lower Silesians do not seem to appreciate very much the impact of the EU on the functioning of the Polish politics (traditionally very low levels of trust, attitudes and evaluations among the Polish citizenry) as well as in the dimension of civic rights. Other answers, placed in the middle of the ranking, also deal directly or indirectly with the economy: business functioning, roads infrastructure, material conditions of life.

There is also one negative statement connected with the economy, that is: ‘taking jobs abroad’ answer. This answer has two dimensions, one – less rational one – tackles with the investment replacing (actually Poland gained a lot of investments as a result of the free movement of capital and low costs of the labour), another one is connected with the migration problem. Poland has always been a migrants exporting country, however the dynamics of this process increased dramatically after 2004, when United Kingdom, Ireland and Sweden open their labour markets for the new member states without any transitional period. On one side, it worked as a kind of ventile for the high unemployment problem of the Polish economy after the 1989 transition. On the other side, in the public discourse there was a lot of negative narratives on the brain drain, brain waste and many other aspects (like the future demographic turbulences

and their spill overs into pension system and others) of the negative migration flows balance.

This issue was also referred to in the case of the qualitative research. The most frequently repeated change is quite obvious – it is the free movement across the EU borders. Most Lower Silesians enjoy the fact that the passport is not any more needed in case of trans-border mobility. They do not associate it however with the Schengen Agreement is the legal ground behind it, but with the European Union as such.

'[...] It is happening. Opened borders created new possibilities of mobility... concurring in different spheres... earlier that was impossible' (IDI, K. a working person, 45+, Wrocław)

'Open borders' or sometimes even the 'lack of borders' is the most commonly used term for it. It is understandable from the point of view that the Poles (including the today's inhabitants of Lower Silesia) for many decades could not travel freely across borders in the communist times.

'[...] Remember the old times? We lived close to the border and that was the end of the world. You could not put your nose on the other side of the frontier, even thought it was a "friendly" nation (sarcastically). (FGI, retired, 65+, Legnica).

The informants noticed also that the air-travels became more accessible. The appearance of low budget airlines is associated with the EU. Which is the paradox of the fact that their appearance in the EU market coincided with Polish accession to the EU, therefore it is understandable that from the Polish perspective they are an element of the EU integration.

'[...] It is easier to travel not only from the point of view of the open borders. Also the costs of travelling dropped down. Do you remember how much it cost to go to London in the past times? Today it is cheaper, then a train ticket to Warsaw' (IDI, student, Siechnice).

Travelling is not any more related to tourism but more and more often with work migration. Many Lower Silesia inhabitants migrated to Ireland, Britain (who open their labour markets first together with Sweden) and later on also to other EU member states following the massive trend in Poland after 2004.⁸ Some informants perceive it positively, as a chance and opportunity, some others negatively as a 'brain rain' or even 'brain waste'. Others also have a negative narrative about the migrants themselves:

⁸ Important to notice, Germany is not the first migration destination for Lower Silesians. Contrary to Upper Silesia and Opole Silesia – where there remained a lot of autochthonous population with German origin after the WWII, which stimulated the post-war migration to Germany – Lower Silesians did not have much family or social networking with Germany and therefore also the migration traffic in this direction was proportionally weaker.

[...]

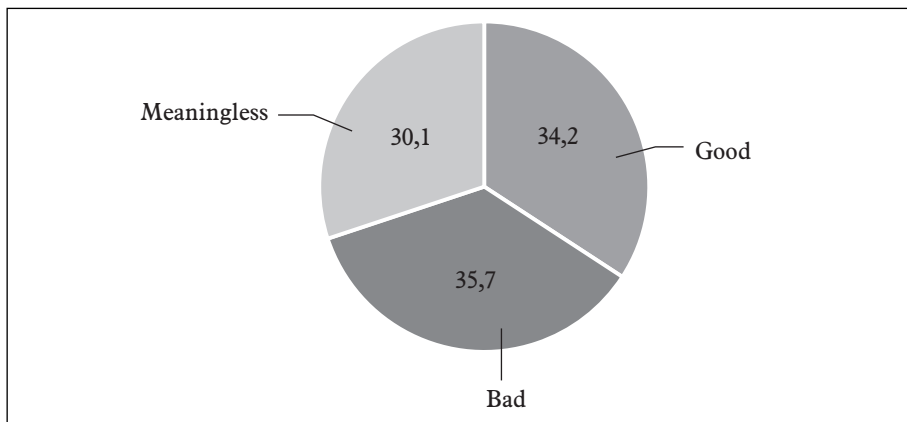
- *In my opinion it is not good that they work there. A young person does not need to go abroad. It is enough to think and make your own business here. And those who emigrate, they are usually those who do not want to work (Wiesław)*
- *My daughter works in England because she could not find work here for five years. She works at school – however our diplomas you can put into ass. Only doctoral or engineer ones count. And the rest ? They say it is only the Polish school (diploma) and nothing more. [...] It was even written that the Poles work harder and better however they are paid less then the English. Even speaking about this is pathetic (Urszula) (FGI, professionally passive, Wrocław)*

[...] *The sad things is that they do not want to come back* (FGI with students and graduates, Wrocław).

[...] *In England or any other country, once you have a job, you can sustain yourself. Even the simple work 'at the kitchen sink' ['na zmywaku' – in Poland the synonym for the typical migrants' work-under qualifications, low-paid, etc.] you earn more then in Poland as a manager* (FGI with students and graduates, Wrocław).

The second portion of data refers to the alternative scenarios. The first general question asked the respondents how they evaluate the option of leaving the EU and other strict international alliances (see the chart below).

Figure 7. The assessment of scenario: 'Exiting the EU and the lack of strict international alliances'



Source: data from the database of the research project: *ibidem*.

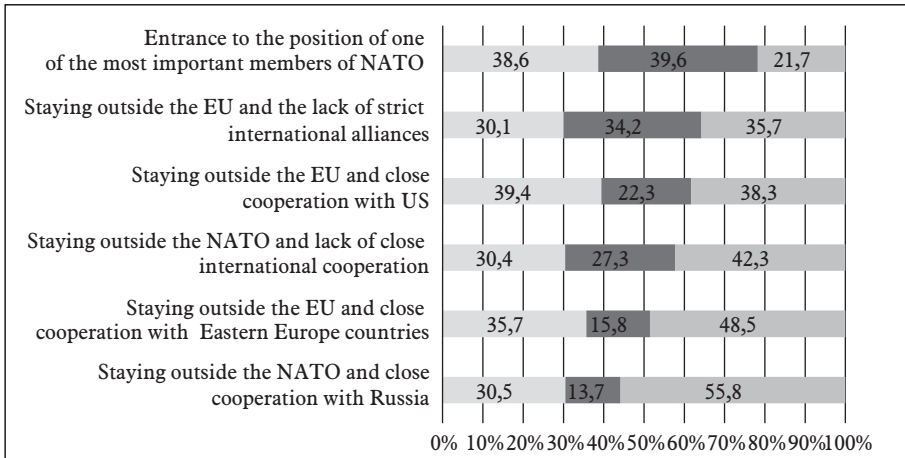
Surprisingly, the answers were equally split between positive feelings about leaving the EU (34.2 per cent), negative ones (35.7 per cent) and neutral (30.1 per cent). This data becomes even more interesting when confronted with the popularity of other scenarios. Several of them were tested. The one ‘*Staying outside of the EU and close cooperation with the US*’ enjoyed 22.3 per cent support. Even less, 15.8 per cent, support were attached to the scenario ‘*Exiting the EU and close cooperation with the countries of Eastern Europe*’. This scenario had also the most negative attitudes – 48.5 per cent of respondents judged it as a bad solution. This answer is very much in line with the general attitude of the Polish society after 1989 in relation to the East. The Poles treat it as a non-option, which is quite a difference when compared to other societies of the former East block countries (like Ukraine). As a consequence, the membership in the EU (at the times of accession – 2004) were non-alternative and the accession referendum question (2003) a rhetoric one. In 2014 however, even though the Eastern option is still not acceptable, the Western option became much less irreversible.

There are two other scenarios that are much less popular than leaving the EU scenario. One is the scenario “Exiting the NATO and the lack of close international cooperation”. 42.3 per cent of respondents think it is a bad idea (27.3 per cent are positive about it). It proves that the security community of NATO is much more valued than the economic community of EU. Undoubtedly, the East Ukrainian crisis plays a role in this case since many other polls proved to have the mobilising effect on the Polish public opinion. The other, even more negative, scenario is the scenario “Exiting the NATO and close cooperation with Russia” (55.8 per cent bad assessments, 13.70 per cent positive and 30.50 per cent – meaningless answers).

The level of support for some other identified scenarios is presented in the chart below.

As described above, the most negatively perceived scenarios are those that are connected with the reorientation of the pro-Western politics acquired after 1989 (‘staying outside of the EU’, ‘staying outside of NATO’, ‘close cooperation with Eastern European countries’, ‘close cooperation with Russia’). The strongest support is entertained by the *wishful thinking* scenario of ‘becoming one of the most important members of NATO’. It has 39.6 per cent positive and only 21.7 per cent of negative answers. At the same time it is the only scenario that has less negative than positive answers. In the case of all the other scenarios they gather much less supporters than opponents. Quite interesting is also the relative high percentage of the ‘meaningless’ answers. They span from 30.4 per cent to 39.4 per cent in the case of various scenarios, which means that usually one third

Figure 8. Level of support for specific scenarios



Source: data from the database of the research project: *ibidem*.

of the population has indifferent attitude to the reality in which Poland is nested in the Western political, military and economic organisations.

In the qualitative part of the research project the questions regarding the impact of Europeanisation pressures and hypothetical alternative (to EU membership) scenario were addressed in a much broader spectrum. They did not refer only to the themes present also in the above mentioned quantitative methods. The partly open nature of the semi-structured interviews as well as moderated discussions allowed the participants elaborate on many related issues and topics.

In some cases it is impossible to isolate the Europeanisation factors from others (globalisation, modernisation, etc.) which is realised by most of the respondents. Sometimes however they attribute to the European Union some unrealistic features and make it responsible for both positive and negative influences which do not have much to do with the European integration as such. Some revealed also scepticism about general influence of the EU on the economic and social development. During one of the moderated discussions:

[...]

- *All these changes – do they have connection with the EU? (moderator)*
- *Rather not – the whole world is developing, not just the Union. (participant 1)*
- *You need to have a look at all the roads, infrastructure – without this, it would be difficult to observe any development (participant 2)* (FGI with Wałbrzych inhabitants).

Conclusions

One of the most striking conclusions that come from this research project, evident in both qualitative and quantitative data, is the contrast between the positive evaluations of developments in the economy and at the same time the perceived negative picture of the changes in the private sphere. The Lower Silesians appreciate the positive influence of the EU accession on the farming sector, on infrastructure, on environment on business functioning and many other spheres of life, however these positive statements limit themselves to the economic dimension.

The changes are so evident in almost every sphere of public life. All regions of Poland are covered by the EU cohesion policy, which results in massive investments through the EU funds.⁹ At literary every corner one can observe signs with some information about the co-financing from the EU budget, be it at the newly-build motorway, renovated building, or modernised water-supply infrastructure. It would be impossible to deny it, therefore the respondents admit it and claim that they see the positive impact of the EU membership.

At the same time however they do not project it to the judgments about their own individual standards of living. There is a long tradition in Poland of the so called 'complaining culture' which goes back to the communist times and even earlier. According to it, people would not greet themselves with the standard 'How are you?, I am fine'. But rather the standard answer in Poland to 'How are you?' question, would be: 'The old poorness / poverty'. Which is a representation of the fact that in the past, when the massive majority of the population was poor (or relatively poor), that would actually be the truth. However it is so deeply rooted in the Polish mentality that even today, when there is less and less reasons to complain, it became a kind of a cultural script.¹⁰ To be rather pessimistic and sceptical is a 'good thing to do' (logic of appropriateness). With the same incomes and the same standard of living, a Pole would complain much more compared to some other national. The conclusions of this research project suggest that the progress in the Poles' material lives is attributed to their own individual effort, whereas the EU membership – even thought positively welcomed – did not have much influence on their private sphere, but rather in the scale of the country and its economy.

⁹ R. Willa, *Ten Years of Polish Membership in the European Union Structures. Was it Wirth It?* „Historia i Polityka”, No. 12(19)/2014, pp. 41–56.

¹⁰ See also: K. Romaniszyn, *Europe and the Formation of the Polish State, Nation, and National Identity* in: *Entangled Identities. Nations and Europe*, A. Ichijo, W. Spohn (eds.), Ashgate 2005, pp. 154–171.

The second observation is connected with the alternatives to the EU membership and their perception in the eyes of the Lower Silesians. The question: what would have happened if Poland had not joined the EU in 2004 was asked in various versions. The answers usually suggested the satisfaction of Lower Silesians with joining the EU. However relatively large portion of the population (approximately one third) was indifferent and claimed that it is meaningless if Poland is a member of NATO, EU or any other international alliance. At the same time, when the popularity of some other scenarios were tested, it became clear that specially the 'Eastern options' were the least popular. The most negative attitudes were observed in reaction to the scenario 'staying outside of the EU', 'staying outside of NATO', 'close cooperation with Russia'. Which is natural in the case of a society with such a difficult history of relations with Moscow and at the same time in the times of Russia's new imperialistic era. Lower Silesians behave in this case similarly to other Poles who are aware of being the front-runner country,¹¹ directly exposed to the threats generated in the East.

Today's population of Lower Silesia are usually ex-patriots from other parts of Poland, especially from the former Eastern peripheries lost in 1945 as a result of the Yalta agreement.¹² Most of the inhabitants have, in their living memory, remembrance about the communist times and some of them also the Second World War times. For many Lower Silesians entering the EU club was just another historical event, unproportional to the changes that they had lived through: post WWII massive / forced migrations, communist regime or 1989 break. From this perspective, this indifference to other potential scenarios is more understood, the same with the allergy to the option of closer cooperation with Russia.

For the younger generation (for example students) the EU is natural, as if it was given for granted. Most of their mature lives they lived in a conditions of a free society and economy as EU citizens. Alternative scenarios are abstract for them and they also do not have much reference to the previous, communist times.¹³ As a result one cannot observe much appreciation of the benefits stemming from the EU membership, especially on the personal level.

Western Poland, including the Lower Silesian Voivodship, was one of the greatest supporters of the EU accession in the 2003 referendum. Today this enthusiasm seem to expire and alternative to EU membership scenarios

¹¹ Poland is the only EU member state that has borders both with Russian Federation and with Ukraine, which makes it the most exposed country to the Russian-Ukrainian conflict.

¹² J. Joachimstehler, *Abschied von Schlesien. "Schlesien" in der Wahrnehmung der westdeutschen Nachkriegsgenerationen vor 1989* in: *Europaeischer Kulturraum Schlesien*, W. Engel, N. Honsza (eds.), Wrocław 2001, pp. 273–291.

¹³ B. Tądla, *Pokolenie '89 czyli dzieci PRL w wolnej Polsce*, Warszawa 2009.

are not 'out of question' options any more. The military alliance (NATO) is much more appreciated which is symptomatic in times of security threats of today. The economic stable conditions which are enjoyed in the last quarter of century seem to be taken for granted and the EU – as well as the consequences of membership – is perceived almost exclusively in economic terms. This is very much contrary to the European integration 'founding fathers' motivations, according to which the European Communities were security communities too.¹⁴ The presented data shows that it is not the case in today's Lower Silesia, whose inhabitants distinguish clearly the security alliances, which are appreciated much more compared to the economic alliances (EU). The spill-over effect of economic integration into a security community building process is not visible in the eyes of the Lower Silesians.

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¹⁴ In reaction to the tragedy of the WWII, the post-war European integration project was both economic and political, in both dimensions however serving the goal of strengthening the Western Europeans' security.