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The Difficult Road to European Solidarity¹⁵

I will try to be more optimistic than professor Offe. I have three points to make. **First**, for years we have been discussing here in Poland and Europe the relations between values and interests. To what extent we need to sacrifice our values in order to promote our interests and the other way round. I would argue that this is a false dilemma. The main common interest of the European Union is to promote and to preserve common values. I understand that in the present world there are many obstacles, objective constraints, particularly to promote our common values outside the European Union. Although I believe that we should try to do our best to attract at least our immediate neighbours to our values to our way of life. But first and foremost we should focus on ourselves. We should defend, promote, explain our fundamental values inside the EU in the member states. And this is not an easy task, also in my own country. But without this the EU will not be able to speak with one voice, will not be able to develop common agenda and pursue the shared features on the international arena. Moreover, I would say that if the rule of law is undermined or it fails in some member states, the whole European legal space would be at risk. And this would undermine every sphere of the EU's functioning. In some circles, some politicians and some states believe that this is a problem that should be solved within the member states and between the voters and their governments. And this is this optimistic note. I believe that the EU has done a lot in the last years to develop a values policy, to develop a new mechanism as well as to apply the instruments that have already been in use. But what we can say from this experience is that unfortunately soft approaches based on dialogue, based on consensus do not work as effectively as we would have expected. What works is pressure and concrete financial consequences. And this of course raises political costs. But I would argue that lack of action would be even more costly, for Poland, for Hungary, for Romania, for other member states, for the European Union's integration process.

And here, more optimistically is my **second** point. I do not want to say that common values are the only common interest of the European Union. Especially in the last months the EU has rightly focused on two main objectives. First, to combat climate change, second, to secure Europe's place among the big powers in the global economic competition. I am relatively optimistic about the ability of the EU in pursuing these goals. But at the same time we have to be realistic and we cannot ignore the divisions. Since we are today in Warsaw, I would like to draw your attention to the dividing lines between the old member states and the new ones.

¹⁵ Title added by the editors.

We in Central Europe have a different level of development, mainly for historical reasons. And to benefit from the common market we need free and fair competition. While most of the Western member states are more interested in concentration of capital and in creating big entities that will be able to compete with American and Chinese and Japanese companies. In the security sphere many in Europe think that against the backdrop of the climate change, Russia is a lesser evil or even an acceptable partner. For us in Poland and in the Baltic states – I am not sure if this is also true for Hungary – Russia is still perceived as a serious security threat. Therefore, our message should be, the European way of life is not only about the ability to limit illegal migration, but also to maintain security and order based on such principles as respect for sovereignty, inviolability of borders, and rule of law. And of course, it is absolutely normal that there are differences between regions, between member states, between political powers in Europe. But what is very important is our ability to handle properly our differences.

And here I come to my **last point**: how to stick to the rule of solidarity. This means, among other things, maintaining this very complex balance of representation that has been worked out over the decades. We have a much more pluralistic European Parliament after the last elections and I think this is a good thing. But apart from this, in the European Parliament there has always been a very complex balance of other representations between richer North and poorer South and between the West, the older member states and the East, the newer member states. This balance has been significantly disturbed and has shifted towards the older member states. In the previous term of the European Parliament representatives of Central and Eastern Europe had eight chairs in the European Parliament committees, now there is only one. There was the President of the European Council, now there is no representation of our region in the top jobs. This is worrying. I understand that this is the effect of certain self-isolation on the side of Central and East European countries' governments. But Western member states took advantage of it and my impression is that they have done it without any hesitation. This is not a good sign and this is not good for Europe. Problems with the rule of law have to be addressed effectively and decisively. But at the same time Central Europe should have its voice in the European structures.