

FOREWORD

Attempting to address the topic of this book, as announced in the title, may strike the reader as an excessively bold endeavor. However, we resolved to undertake this topic in view of its gravity for the future of our country, Poland. Irrespective of the wide variety of possible future events, Poland's fate will remain profoundly and inseparably linked to the situation of Europe as a whole. In this book, therefore, we address many issues that we consider key to Europe's future. We analyze issues of globalization as confronted with ever-stronger efforts to preserve the sovereignty of nation-states, in the context of the modern nature of the state and mechanisms altering that nature. We attempt to characterize the modern-day social structure, accounting for phenomena of such current importance as increasing multicultural diversity and changes in the labor market. We pay close of attention to current economic issues – the role of the state, the influence of the development of IT technologies and the significance of transnational corporations. We broadly examine the role of the financial sector, including in the context of the virtual economy.

Answering the question posed in the title of the book is certainly extraordinarily difficult. The answer surely depends both on the time-frame considered and on what approach is adopted in scrutinizing the role Europe has played in the past, is playing now, and what role, in reference to its history, it may play in the future. Overall, we can distinguish three main approaches that might be taken in analyzing the broad question of “Where is Europe headed?”

The first approach, perhaps the most tempting, would involve analyzing Europe's problems from the standpoint of the present day. Here the analysis could examine the various political, social, economic, and demographic barriers that crucially need to be overcome for Europe to continue to play a significant role in the world in the future – perhaps not with the same degree of importance as it has had in the past, but with at least no lesser importance than it has today.

The second approach would be to look at Europe's development from the standpoint of its potential influence, both positive and negative, on the possible resolution of the problems plaguing the world. The accumulation of existing problems is already immense today, and yet new challenges, completely unknown until quite recently, continue to emerge. The system of interconnections on the worldwide scale is currently much stronger and much more closely intertwined

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than ever before, posing a great risk that ill-thought-out decisions may have very dangerous, wide-ranging consequences.

The third approach would involve looking at Europe and its role since the times when it first began to significantly shape other parts of the world, all the way to the present-day epoch, adopting the standpoint of both Europe's defending of its own interests and the models of behavior currently in force, and also pointing out the factors changing Europe's role in the world, from domination all the way to the current beginnings of its marginalization in certain spheres of activity. This of course does not mean that Europe has ceased to have significant intellectual and technological potential at its disposal, enabling its future to be discussed with cautious optimism.

Each of these potential approaches to analyzing the problem arguably has its own rationale and methodological justification. As choosing between them is difficult, we have considered it appropriate to weave certain threads from all three approaches into our analysis. While it is true that modern problems and challenges have a significant impact on Europe's role in the world, and also determine the possible directions of its development, we should nevertheless not forget that the past is also of great importance for the further course of events.

There are at least two reasons why it is important to look at Europe in the long-term perspective. Firstly, Europe has been continually divided and the states extant on the continent, even if they were not in constant armed conflict, have very frequently been locked in peaceful disputes of various kinds. These conflicts have at the same time acted as an important stimulus for development. Secondly, if one retraces the history of the past millennium, it turns out that Europe has constantly been striving to unify. Sometimes these have been attempts at coerced unification via warfare, but sometimes also attempts at peaceful unification by means of concord and agreement. It is true that modern Europe is fraught with contradictions, but at the same time it retains numerous advantages that could potentially – in the short term, and definitely in the long-term perspective – reinstate the importance that it is nowadays partially losing.

With all certainty, one should not treat today's Europe as an area that can be gradually eliminated from the list of important global players. However, as we have said, forecasting events in detail is highly difficult in view of rapidly occurring changes – the most important of which should be taken to include transition points of civilization (including elements of religious warfare), the appearance of new, highly diverse countries, the non-uniformly distributed huge demographic boom, climate change and the degradation of the natural environment over significant areas of the globe, and also mounting income disparities, both on the worldwide scale and in selected countries.