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EUROPEAN UNION AND CHINA IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY – PROBLEMS, OPPORTUNITIES AND THREATS

INTRODUCTION

In 2014 the Institute of Political Studies of the Polish Academy of Sciences published the first edition of the book, which I edited, entitled “*Unia Europejska – Chiny. Dziś i w przyszłości*” [‘*European Union – China. Today and in the future*’] which has been friendly welcomed by the readers. The great interest in this publication is evidenced by the fact that its first edition has disappeared quickly from the shelves of bookstores, which today in the age of the Internet and the crisis of readership occurs quite rarely in our country. Moreover, the book had numerous and very good reviews which appeared in prestigious scientific periodicals in Poland¹.

In this article I will try to show the current opportunities and threats for both of these actors in the international arena and their mutual relations today and in the future. In addition, I will try to verify the controversial, in my opinion, hypothesis promoted by many scholars, which assumes that the twenty-first century will be the age of Asia, that is *de facto* of China because discussing Asia in terms of power, it must be first kept in mind that China will disturb the international order most heavily, in line with Organski’s theory of the ‘transit of power’. Thousands of years of the imperial past, political culture, the worldview, the vast territory and the large population, economic

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¹ See *Przegląd Politologiczny*, no. 1/2016, pp. 205–207; *Studia Europejskie*, no. 4(72)2014, pp. 191–198; *Studia Polityczne*, no. 4(36)2014, pp. 170–174; *Mysł Ekonomiczna i Polityczna*, no. 3(46)2014, pp. 332–336.

successes so far, resilience to the global financial crisis – all of these support the thesis that China will soon regain the status of a world power lost in the mid-nineteenth century. For now, however, it is not animated by the missionary spirit, which was one of the factors motivating Western imperial ventures². Fareed Zakaria writes: ‘It is satisfied with what it is and gaining the status of a world power in a sense is fulfilling its historical role’³.

This raises the question of whether the path that China follows after Mao Zedong’s death and the reforms launched in 1979 by Deng Xiaoping are an alternative to democracy and liberal capitalism. The answer is yes and no, because democracy and capitalism, in spite of many problems, are still fine and predominate in the world, and Communist China in practice applies capitalistic principles and economic mechanisms. This has resulted in the economic foundations of the power that China lacked under dogmatic Mao Zedong: industrial foundations making China a ‘factory of the world’, and trade and financial foundations – this country has become the main exchange centre in the world. Universally open to the world, China strives to keep up with its modernity: catching up on technology, educating hundreds of thousands of students abroad and tens of millions in the country, developing multinationals, taking over foreign companies, adopting soft power techniques, etc⁴.

The Chinese economic model and impressive development affect the positive perception of the PRC. At present, China is seen as a land of prosperity, especially by people from poor countries, where the American dream seems unattainable, while the Chinese one is within reach. The Chinese example shows that the economy can develop without the functioning of liberal democracy. But such a vision of development is dangerous for the values of the West and also for the EU, because it means that economic growth and basing power and prosperity on it can be achieved without democracy⁵.

The Chinese economy is undoubtedly a carrier of soft power, but its strength also influences the development of other elements of power of China which modernises its army, especially strategic aviation and navy, and builds

² See Buhler, P. 2014. *O potędze w XXI wieku*. [About power in the 21st century.] Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Akademickie DIALOG, p. 475.

³ See Zakaria, F. 2009. *Koniec hegemonii Ameryki*. [The Post-American World.] Warszawa: Media Lazar, p. 140.

⁴ See Łoś, R. 2017. Soft Power Chin. [Soft power of China.] *Studia Polityczne*, vol. 45, no. 1, pp. 37–57.

⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 41. See also Leonard, M. 2008. *What Does China Think*. London, pp. 96–98.

modern aircraft carriers. At the same time, Beijing pursues a well thought-out and prudent strategy to minimise the inevitable negative side effects of China's power growth. Aware of the uneasiness and reactions that this fact may provoke in Asia and in the world, it takes numerous steps to demonstrate the groundlessness of the perceived 'Chinese threat'. By following Sun Tzu's recommendation – 'refuse to fight when the opponent is too powerful' – Chinese leaders avoid confrontation with the United States, which might feel the most threatened in its position as a world power, and whose military superiority is so overwhelming that it prevents any adventurism. At the same time, it systematically checks how far it can go, particularly vigorously reiterating since 2010 claims to sovereignty over maritime areas and building military installations on the illegally seized offshore islands in the South China Sea. Americans continue to patrol these waters⁶.

On the other hand, in relations with the Asian powers, especially with Japan and India, which directly feel the rise of China's power, the distribution of power is much more favourable for Beijing, which sometimes forgets about the necessary caution. Since the mid-1990s Chinese leaders have been striving to combat all prejudices against the PRC, but since 2009 they have begun to conduct increasingly assertive policies that concern not only its neighbours, but also the United States, which tries to integrate China with the existing international system still controlled by the US. Consecutive US presidents, including Donald Trump, stress the benefits it brings to China and at the same time warn it against the consequences it may face when attempting to overthrow this system. This was expressed by D. Trump at the last G7 Summit in Taormina, Sicily, on 26–27 May 2017. But Chinese leaders know that Donald Trump must change his course if he wants to 'quickly resolve' – as he promised – the North Korean problem. Without cooperation with Beijing it is impossible to do it⁷.

Today the situation in China and in the European Union and their role in the world are already different from a few years ago. There are other international realities to a smaller or bigger extent fostering cooperation between China and the European Union. The world constantly evolves and dynamically changes its face. In this way, George Modelski's theory of

⁶ See Buhler, P. 2014. *O potędze w XXI wieku*. [About the power in the 21st century.] ..., p. 477. See also Warszawski, D. 2017. Trump igra z wojną. [Trump is playing with war.] *Gazeta Wyborcza* 20 May 2017, p. 11.

⁷ See Korzycki, R. 2017. Po szczycie G7. Trump nie da rady zniszczyć klimatu. Dzięki Obamie [After the G7 summit. Trump will not manage to destroy the climate. Thanks to Obama.] *Gazeta Wyborcza* 29 May 2017, p. 17.

the hegemonic cycle, Immanuel M. Wallerstein's world-systems theory and Robert Gilpin's theory of change of the international system are justified in the international practice⁸.

Over the last three decades, China's position and role in the modern world have grown tremendously. It is connected with the dynamic development of its economy, its significant modernisation and a serious increase in defence forces. On the other hand, the European Union is experiencing a deep political, economic, immigration crisis and many other problems limiting its role in the world political arena. In the EU there has been the illegitimation of all options in opposition to which it the idea of European integration was defined: nationalism, a brutal game of power, zero-sum games, primacy of power over the law, etc. Its image in the world has faded. The hope is also vanishing that united Europe will occupy one of the central places in the newly shaped global order. But, as French political scientist and diplomat Pierre Buhler writes 'It does not mean that Europe is doomed to paralysis. Relationships between states and the Union are flexible enough to respond to situations that require a different rhythm than the rhythm of European reconciliation. Mobilisation of all is a matter of leadership, but the initiative must come from the Members of the EU which have sufficient resources and influence to lead a specific operation or policy binding in the eyes of the world. Only big states, i.e. Great Britain, France, Germany, Italy and increasingly Poland, meet these criteria (...)'⁹.

Unfortunately, the fact is that in the European Union there is also a crisis of leadership and a lack of enlightened political elites. The current EU decision makers are various types of ex-politicians, former prime ministers, ministers or party activists for whom high positions in the EU or as MEPs are just very lucrative jobs. In the context of the above I agree with the opinion of Krzysztof Szczerski who writes that: 'The crisis that has hit the European Union will not be solved by a single, wonderful decision. There is no magic

⁸ See Fiszer, J.M. 2013. *System euroatlantycki przed i po zakończeniu zimnej wojny. Istota, cele i zadania oraz rola w budowie nowego ładu globalnego.* [The Euro-Atlantic system before and after the end of the Cold War. The essence, goals, tasks and role in building a new global order.] Warszawa: ISP PAN, Dom Wydawniczy ELIPSA, pp. 13–14; Donnelly, J. 2000. *Realism and International Relations.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; Czaputowicz, J. 2007. *Teorie stosunków międzynarodowych. Krytyka i systematyzacja.* [Theories of international relations. Criticism and systematization.] Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN.

⁹ See Buhler, P. 2014. *O potęgę w XXI wieku.* [About the power in the 21st century.] ..., pp. 490–491.

wand in politics, there is a need for wise leadership and a sensible vision, but it is just what is missing in the EU's decision-making elite'¹⁰.

1. THE POST-COLD WAR WORLD AND ITS EVOLUTION IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

Contrary to expectations, the world after the Cold War, which ended with the breakup of the Soviet Union and its block in 1989-1991, has become very complicated, full of new challenges and threats. New actors have appeared, including the European Union, the Russian Federation and reforming and increasingly open to the world China and other emerging powers that belong to the group of 'BRIC' countries. Already in the early nineties of the twentieth century a need appeared to redefine the international order and outline its new structure – in order to create a new international order and not to lead to an imbalance, after the years of competition between the two hostile blocks. At the beginning of the twenty-first century it was necessary to redefine mutual relations between more than two hundred participants in international, state and non-state relations and to base them on solid democratic grounds. It was necessary to build a new, democratic international system (order) based on strong foundations. Globalisation and growing global problems almost enforced specific actions (cooperation or competition), especially in relations between states.

However, the triumph of the 'free world' over communism and the breakup of the Soviet Union have strengthened the incorrect, as it has later transpired, conviction that liberal democracy is the only reasonable proposal for the creation of the economic and political order, which in practice has been supposed to strengthen the paradigm of deliberative democracy defining policy objectives in the categories of consensus and reconciliation. Advocates of this approach have argued that the world without enemies, violence and impassable conflicts has become possible thanks to the weakening of collective identities and that deliberative procedures make it possible to solve problems arising from 'democratic deficit' in international relations. But that has not happened. After the two-block rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union the world has become largely dominated by rivalry and

¹⁰ See Szczerski, K. 2017. *Utopia Europejska. Kryzys integracji i polska inicjatywa naprawy.* [European Utopia. Integration crisis and Polish recovery initiative.] Kraków: Biały Kruk Sp. z o.o., p. 105.

conflicts, and has not, as the supporters of the neoliberal theory have argued, become a global village based on the principles of solidary cooperation of all actors of the international scene¹¹. Professor Marian Guzek, an economist known for his critical attitude toward neo-liberalism, correctly noted that: ‘The main source of neo-liberalism has become an ideology whose popularity in the Western world, but not only in the West, has certainly surpassed the Communist ideology, for the latter has been usually imposed upon societies after the communists have taken power and exercised it autocratically. On the other hand, neoliberal ideology has been disseminated under the conditions of a democratic system implemented in all countries. And most importantly, it has been implemented without disclosing its detailed rules, but under one slogan of a free market as a synonym for economic liberalism’ and he adds that neo-liberalism is such a system in which ‘power is exercised formally by democratic state institutions but limited in their functions and competences as a result of dependence on industrial and financial corporations with great wealth potential. This system appeared in its advanced version in the United States in the early 1980s’¹². A quarter of a century later it almost led to the near bankruptcy of the United States and most European countries in 2008–2012. The European Union and to a lesser extent Russia and China have suffered the consequences of this financial and economic crisis, which is *de facto* still in progress, as exemplified by Greece.

The unprecedented economic growth of the PRC in the last three decades is certainly one of the most important processes on the planet that have changed the world. Chinese economic reforms launched in December 1978 yielded an average annual GDP growth rate of 9.8% by the end of 2012. Never in the recent history of the world has any country recorded such great successes for so long, and because it is the world’s most populous state, with a larger area than the United States or the whole European Union, the shift of wealth and power from the West to the East is unavoidable. Of course, the growing power of still communist China has had a far-reaching impact

¹¹ See Kuźniar, R. 2016. *Europa w porządku międzynarodowym*. [Europe in the international order.] Warszawa: PISM; Wojciechowski, S., Tomczak M. eds. 2010. *Mocarstwowość na przełomie XX i XXI w. Teorie – analizy – programy*. [World power status at the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries. Theories – analyses – programmes.] Poznań: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Wyższej Szkoły Nauk Humanistycznych i Dziennikarstwa; Guzek, M. 2014. *Kapitalizm na krawędzi*. [Capitalism on the edge.] Warszawa: Oficyna Wydawnicza Uczelni Łazarskiego, Dom Wydawniczy ELIPSA, pp. 15–27.

¹² See Guzek, M. 2014. *Kapitalizm na krawędzi*. [Capitalism on the edge.] pp. 15–16.

on the economic order, on the geo-economics and geopolitics of the modern world¹³.

The instability of the contemporary international environment is exacerbated by numerous conflicts of various kinds: political, religious, ideological, social, ethnic, cultural, territorial and economic ones. The east of Europe, for example, has been dominated by the conflict in Ukraine, fuelled by Russia which constantly satisfies its superpower aspirations. The war in 2014–2015 raises the question of the survival of Ukraine in its present territorial and political shape. At the last NATO summit on 8–9 July 2016 in Warsaw, to which also the President of Ukraine was invited, the annexation of the Crimea was officially condemned and Russia was called on to withdraw its military and financial support for Donbas separatists, but during Petro Poroshenko's unofficial meetings with US President Barack Obama, German Chancellor Angela Merkel, French President Francois Hollande and Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau Ukrainians were encouraged to grant greater autonomy to Donbas, the region controlled by separatists, and to conduct peace talks with Russia¹⁴.

The West, namely the United States, NATO and the European Union, does not want to irritate Russia, which is an aggressor and has broken all the norms of international law, and *de facto* leaves Ukraine alone at the mercy of Vladimir Putin who tries to dismantle the post-Cold War order, deeply unfair from Russia's point of view as it pushes it to the position of a regional power. The PRC, which after the end of the Cold War formally opted for a peaceful, multipolar and multi-civilisation global order, took a strange, that is ambivalent attitude towards the Russian-Ukrainian war. In the 1990s China joined several international regimes, primarily pertaining to weapons of mass destruction. It became a member of APEC (1991) and also started regular

¹³ See Góralczyk, B. 2015. W poszukiwaniu chińskiego modelu rozwojowego. [In search of the Chinese model of development.] *Sprawy Międzynarodowe*, no. 2/2015, pp. 40–41; Zamecki, Ł., Borkowski, P.J., Wróbel, A. 2013. *Wewnętrzne uwarunkowania aktywności międzynarodowej Chińskiej Republiki Ludowej i jej relacji z Unią Europejską*. [Internal conditions of international activity of the People's Republic of China and its relations with the European Union.] Warszawa: Wydział Dziennikarstwa i Nauk Politycznych Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, pp. 139–141.

¹⁴ See Wieliński, B.T., Wroński, P., Zawadzki, M. 2016. Ukraina bez zmian, Gruzja rozczarowana. [Ukraine unchanged, Georgia disappointed.] *Gazeta Wyborcza* 11 July 2016, p. 4; Winiecki, J. 2016. Uszczelnianie pęknięć. W Warszawie NATO musi zdecydować nie tylko jak i przed kim, ale także czego i jakich wartości chce bronić. [Sealing of cracks. In Warsaw NATO must decide not only how and against whom but also what and what values it wants to defend.] *Polityka* 6–12 July 2016, pp. 12–13.

meetings with ASEAN members (1996). The China-Africa Cooperation Forum has been operating since 2000, and one year later the PRC became a member of the World Trade Organisation and became a founding member of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation. China has also participated in meeting of the BRICS group (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa since 2011) since 2006. As in the case of Africa, its relations with Central and Eastern European countries have taken the form of regular meetings (the so-called 16+1 format) since 2012. China still attaches special role to the United Nations, taking part in peacekeeping missions under the UN flag, actively contributing to the provision of humanitarian aid to countries hit by natural disasters and war. This intensified Chinese activity in international fora has gone hand in hand with the declarations by Chinese leaders in which multilateralism occupied a special place, especially in matters of security and economy. In practice though, international conflicts that weaken the West or Russia are conducive to strengthening China's international position. Meanwhile, in Vladimir Putin's plans to rebuild Russia as a global superpower, abovementioned Ukraine is supposed to play a special role¹⁵.

The situation of Ukraine is aggravated by the financial crisis, the costly war still ongoing despite the signing of the ceasefire, skyrocketing corruption and the political crisis which has been developing since the spring of 2016 and which clearly shows the failure of the governing circles, leading political parties and individual politicians backed by Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko and their inability to fulfil their electoral promises and commitments. Many scholars point out that the level and scale of political corruption in Ukraine reached alarming proportions in 2016 and poses a threat to the very existence of the state in the conditions of Russia's 'hybrid war' and that the current political system in this country is characterised by kleptocracy, corruption, lobbying and abandoning of long-term goals. Corrupt relationships have become a dominant norm of behaviour of the elite. Under conditions of

¹⁵ See Fiszer, J.M. 2016. Geopolityczne i geoekonomiczne aspekty europeizacji Ukrainy i jej perspektywy. [Geopolitical and geo-economic aspects of Ukraine's Europeanisation and its prospects.] In: Tymanowski, J., Karwacka, J., Bryl J. eds. *Procesy europeizacji Ukrainy w wybranych obszarach. [Processes of Europeanisation of Ukraine in selected areas.]* Kijów – Warszawa: BHZ „Nacjonalna Akademia Uprawlienia”, pp. 15–39; Kuźniar, R. 2015. Ukraine – Europe's hic Rhodus, hic salta. In: Góralczyk, B.J. ed. *Europen Union on the global scene: united or irrelevant?* Warszawa: Centre for Europe, University of Warsaw, pp. 63–85; Świder, K. 2015. *Rosyjska świadomość geopolityczna a Ukraina i Białoruś (po rozpadzie Związku Radzieckiego). [Russian geopolitical awareness and Ukraine and Belarus (after the collapse of the Soviet Union).]* Warszawa: Instytut Studiów Politycznych PAN, pp. 181–249.

weak statehood, unstable legal order – the corruption in Ukraine becomes a specific form of relations between government and citizens. All this generates profound social divisions, limits the formation of civil society and inhibits the development of the country¹⁶.

The fear of Russia's further actions, especially of a hybrid war nature, is also evident today in the post-Baltic countries and in Poland. In connection with this, British General Richard Shirreff, until 2014 the deputy commander-in-chief of NATO forces in Europe, is now calling on the Alliance to concentrate its efforts on building the capacity to deter the potential enemy instead of focusing on assurances for the Baltic States and Poland. This is – in his opinion – essential, because we will have a war that Russia will start in the Baltic States and he adds that 'This country does not retreat from changing borders in Europe using force and develops military potential sufficient to impose its will on its neighbours. The invasion on the Crimea showed that we had underestimated and had not understood Russia's attitude'¹⁷.

In recent months also the US military expressed their opinion in a similar vein, including General Ben Hodges, commander-in-chief of US ground forces, who in an interview with the weekly *'Die Zeit'* said that Russia 'would be able to conquer the Baltic states faster than we could defend them' and confirmed Russian military evaluations according to which the Russians could conquer the Baltic states within 36-60 hours¹⁸.

The above warnings finally led to the awakening of NATO, which at the Warsaw summit decided to deploy four battalions on the eastern flank and concluded a strategic agreement with the European Union, under which both organisations committed themselves to coordinating defence exercises against hybrid attacks and to developing rules for cooperation in such crises.

¹⁶ Borkowski, K. 2016. Ukraina w kryzysie. [Ukraine in crisis.] In: Tymanowski, J., Karwacka, J., Bryl J. eds. *Procesy europeizacji Ukrainy w wybranych obszarach. [Processes of Europeanisation of Ukraine in selected areas.]* Kijów – Warszawa: BHZ 'Nacjonalnaja Akademia Uprawnienia', pp. 67–79; Bielecki, J. 2014. Zachodni sojusznicy Putina. [Putin's Western allies.] *Rzeczpospolita* 7 May 2014, p. 12.

¹⁷ Cited in: Winiński, J. 2016. Uszczelnianie pęknięć. W Warszawie NATO musi zdecydować nie tylko jak i przed kim, ale także czego i jakich wartości chce bronić. [Sealing of cracks. In Warsaw NATO must decide not only how and against whom but also what and what values it wants to defend.] *Polityka* 6–12 July 2016, p. 13. See also: Wieliński, B.T. 2016. Nasza siła odstraszenia rośnie. Rozmowa z Radosławem Sikorskim. [Our deterring power is growing. Interview with Radoslaw Sikorski.] *Gazeta Wyborcza* 7 July 2016, pp. 4–5.

¹⁸ See Kokot, M. 2016, Kraje bałtyckie boją się Rosji. [The Baltic states are afraid of Russia.] *Gazeta Wyborcza* 7 July 2016, p. 5.

At this summit the President of the United States emphasised that he was fulfilling his promises of 4 June 2014. Namely, after the aggression of Russia on Ukraine in a speech delivered in Warsaw on 4 June 2014 he announced that Poland and the Baltic States would not be alone. Then, for the first time, the contingents of the American army (at the start a paratroopers' company) and of other NATO countries were sent to the territories of Poland and the Baltic States. Now the decision was made about the 'permanent rotational presence' of four battalion groups (1 thousand soldiers) in Poland, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia from 2017 onwards. In addition, the deployment of the US armoured brigade on the eastern NATO flank with the headquarters in Poland was announced. Certainly these decisions will increase the security of Europe exposed to Russia's imperial attempts¹⁹.

On the other hand, the south of Europe and *de facto* the whole European Union is struggling with immense immigration waves resulting from the destabilisation of the situation in North Africa and the Middle East²⁰. As the current migration crisis shows, it is not possible to tackle this problem by unilateral moves such as strengthening borders and refusing to admit migrants or refugees. It should be remembered that every applicant for a refugee status has the right (in accordance with the 1951 Refugee Convention) to the examination of their application. No one can be sent back to a state where he/she is in danger of torture or his or her life may be endangered. It is therefore essential to separate refugees from economic migrants, since the obligation to provide assistance covers only the former.

Turkey's relations with Russia and with the European Union are also getting worse. Ankara, instead of coming closer to Europe, is moving further away from it when it comes to democratic standards, respect for freedom of speech and the media, and secularity of the state. Not so long ago, Turkey declared a policy of 'zero problems with neighbours' and today it has problems with each of them, including the European Union. This generates, alongside the growing international terrorism, the rise of populism and xenophobic and nationalist sentiments in Europe and the world. This, in turn, makes it difficult

¹⁹ Wroński, P. 2016. Rosja już mniej groźna. Przebudzenie NATO. [Russia is less threatening. NATO's awakening.] *Gazeta Wyborcza* 11 July 2016, p. 1; Bielecki, T., Zawadzki, M. 2016. Unia i NATO postanowiły się wzmocnić. [The Union and NATO have decided to get stronger.] *Gazeta Wyborcza* 9–10 July 2016, p. 3.

²⁰ See Szpak, A. 2015. Kryzys migracyjny w Europie a bezpieczeństwo – podłoże społeczno-ekonomiczne, zagrożenia, pomoc rozwojowa. [Migration crisis in Europe and security – socio-economic background, threats, development aid.] *Sprawy Międzynarodowe*, no. 2/2015, pp. 111–132.

to solve the immigration crisis in Europe. The disintegration processes in the European Union and the divisions in NATO are intensifying, weakening the security of the whole West and at the same time strengthening the role of China and other powers of the BRIC group in the world²¹.

Condoleezza Rice, the United States national security adviser in the era of President George W. Bush and the head of US diplomacy during his second term, and now a professor at Stanford University, visiting Warsaw recently recalled the concerns more and more frequently heard in the West, namely, that the world that emerged after the Second World War and whose NATO was the main pillar, was beginning to wobble, the symptoms of which were visible also in Poland. This global order was supposed to be guaranteed by the American military power and joint defence, according to article five of the Washington Treaty. Today this order is subjected to tests for which it has not been prepared. Among others, it is attacked by the self-proclaimed ISIS state, but also China and Russia try to take advantage of the opportunity and weaken the role of the West, and especially of the United States of America in the world, pushing them to the position of powers of the second category. European populists promote radical political, social and economic solutions of anti-systemic nature; they reject the free market and globalisation in the present shape and are against immigration and against the European Union in general²².

2. THE EUROPEAN UNION AND ITS CURRENT PROBLEMS AS BARRIERS IN RELATIONS WITH CHINA

Observing the current international situation, it can be noticed that the European Union is in a very serious crisis and that a multitude of problems that need to be solved make it impossible to resist the impression that the European project is facing a very serious challenge of its own deep reconstruction. After the successes (though rather spurious from the perspective of the present day) of the first decade of the twenty-first century connected with the introduction of the euro and the accession of post-communist Central and Eastern European countries, the European Union today has to deal with the problems that are emerging as a consequence of

²¹ See Radziwinowicz, W. 2016. Odwilż rosyjsko-turecka. [Russian-Turkish thaw.] *Gazeta Wyborcza* 7 July 2016, p. 10.

²² See Winiecki, J. 2016. Uszczelnianie pęknięć [Sealing of cracks] ... p. 13.

the global financial and economic crisis and recently also very disturbing events in the international arena, whose effects are strongly felt both inside the Union and at its borders, from the refugee waves and the result of the UK referendum to the proliferation of terrorist attacks within the Union. The situation in Ukraine at the eastern borders of the EU, as well as a new set of forces that is shaping in the international arena after swearing-in of the new president of the United States, are also not conducive to the stabilisation within the EU and the Euro-Atlantic structures. In addition, these issues, in a sense, overlap with problems existing in the EU earlier, making them more prominent. Many analysts of the European integration process have for years been pointing to the problem of legitimacy deficits of the European institutions, the excessively elitist nature of the idea of integration, and the not transparent European procedures, pointing to them as the causes of the current megacrisis of the Union²³.

Apart from the financial, economic and immigration crisis, the European Union is experiencing at the same time the worst political and structural crisis in its history. It has a growing problem with democracy. There is a decrease in solidarity with the weaker, the problems with the implementation of European law are increasing, which contributes to its enforcement under political and economic pressure. The politicisation of the European Commission and the free interpretation of EU law by this institution are growing. This weakens the credibility of European institutions and law, which have so far been the foundation for integration in Europe. For the first time one of the largest EU countries – Great Britain – has decided to leave the European Union. Brexit is interpreted as a rebellion of society against the establishment and its liberal economic policy. And while it benefits the UK, it does not spread evenly among the public. Today in the European Union and also in the United Kingdom there is a growing group of losers – the elderly, the less well-educated, the ones from outside big metropolises. They voted for Brexit. The effects of Brexit can be catastrophic for the European Union, as it may be the beginning of its end. Similar tendencies are becoming more apparent in other Member States, among others, in France, the Netherlands, Hungary, the Czech Republic and Germany. According to a recent Pew Research Center

²³ See Heise, M. 2014. *Europa nach der Krise. Die Währungsunion vollenden*, Wiesbaden: Springer VS Verlag; Abbas, N., Förster, A., Richter E. 2015. (Hrsg.) *Supranationalität und Demokratie. Die Europäische Union in Zeiten der Krise*, Wiesbaden: Springer VS Verlag; Szymańska, A. 2016. *Europa dziennikarzy. [Europe of journalists.]* Kraków: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, p. 19–20.

survey, as many as 61% of French people have a negative opinion of the Union and only 38% a positive one²⁴.

Brexit, the financial, economic and migration crises have exposed many other weaknesses of the European Union, especially the powerlessness of the technocratic management of EU policies, and have revealed the real centres of power in the complex EU political system in which daily activities do not always point at the first glance to key decision-making centres. First and foremost, they have revealed the decision-making weakness of the leading transnational body of the European Union, that is the European Commission. These crises, unprecedented in the recent history of Europe and the EU, have also shown the weakness of the intergovernmental factor and the divisions, egoisms and particularities still present in the European Union. In most European countries, citizens have lost their trust in it and the process of disintegration is intensifying. It is happening because there have not been charismatic leaders, visionaries or eminent politicians in the UE for a long time. Today, it is managed by bureaucrats and party activists, separated from citizens and their needs, and its political system is imperfect and requires a deep modernisation, and not only cosmetic changes. It needs to change as soon as possible. If the European Union wants to survive, it has to evolve towards a civil and social state²⁵.

Despite increasing Euro-scepticism and populism, the Europeans – a vast majority of them – still want peace, prosperity, democracy, equality and stable economic development, but are able to sacrifice less to obtain these goods. European solidarity and mutual trust have been – as I have already mentioned – seriously undermined, and yet these are values whose construction takes a long time, but if they are established, they constitute serious potential for the development of beneficial cooperation. On the other hand, their serious

²⁴ See Grosse, T.G. 2016. Kryzys po Brexicie. [Crisis after Brexit.] *Rzeczpospolita* 15 July 2016, p. A11.

²⁵ See Fiszer, J.M. 2014. Czy państwo demokratyczne może być wzorem dla przyszłej Unii Europejskiej? [Can a democratic state be a model for the future development of the European Union?] *Mysł Ekonomiczna i Polityczna*, no. 1(44), pp. 101–125; Ruszkowski, J., Wojnicz, L. eds. 2013. *Multi-Level Governance w Unii Europejskiej*. [Multi-Level Governance in the European Union.] Szczecin-Warszawa: Instytut Politologii i Europeistyki Uniwersytetu Szczecińskiego, Instytut Europeistyki Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego; Wierzchowska, A. 2016. *Wpływ modernizacji i kryzysu na dynamikę zmiany w Unii Europejskiej*. [The impact of modernisation and crisis on the dynamics of change in the European Union.] Warszawa: Dom Wydawniczy ELIPSA; Żakowski, J. 2016. Czas satrapów i nielotów. [Time of satraps and flightless birds.] *Polityka* 27 July–2 August 2016, pp. 12–14.

questioning results in a long lasting modification of mutual relations. The European Union has just come into such a state of mutual distrust and weakened spirit of solidarity. As Anna Wierchowska rightly points out: ‘The systemic crisis has seized many areas of co-operation and spirals negative phenomena in the process of integration. It also hampers the prospect of effective modernisation efforts that have to “break through” obstacles, restrictive solutions introduced in connection with anti-crisis management and, finally, a decline in confidence in European integration growing among the citizens. The dynamics of change is clearly falling, especially if we look at the modernisation component that co-creates the change in the European integration process. The result is a modification of integration process management. The prevalence of the crisis phenomena imposes remedial actions that are often short-termed or involve a selected group of countries at risk of crisis’²⁶.

In order to stop the disintegration tendencies, the European Union should convert the existing neo-liberal policy into pro-social policy and revise its savings policy as well as increase the scale of investment in less developed or crisis-stricken countries. In addition, it should finally solve the problem of democratic deficit in Europe, i.e. introduce full democratisation in the EU by establishing a federation of democratic national states, or returning EU powers back to the Member States, where there is democratic control over the power. Unfortunately, both directions of change are unlikely in the coming years as rich countries are reluctant to increase financial transfers to small and medium-sized countries and at the same time they reject the idea of a federation and favour intergovernmental cooperation of EU countries. European Union leaders also reject the possibility of revising the EU treaties. As a consequence, further economic and political regimes will probably be tightened up, especially those that benefit the strongest EU Member States, i.e. Germany and France after the UK’s exit. This will entail an expansion of EU law, but without the need to change the existing treaties. This is also the direction of proposals by French and German Foreign Ministers – Frank-Walter Steinmeier and Jean-Marc Ayrault, sent shortly after Brexit to other EU members. They postulate the deepening of integration in some

²⁶ See Wierchowska, A. *Wpływ modernizacji i kryzysu na dynamikę zmiany w Unii Europejskiej [The impact of modernization and crisis on the dynamics of change in the European Union]* ..., p. 449.

areas, among others, in defence and migration policy and the strengthening of the euro area²⁷.

There is no doubt that it will take the United Kingdom, Europe, and the whole world a long time to survive all the consequences of the Brexit referendum. The deepest implications of Brexit will of course depend on the European Union's response to Great Britain's withdrawal. It is worth citing here the opinion of Professor Joseph Stiglitz, recipient of the Nobel Prize in economic sciences, who writes: 'Every EU government must now regard improving ordinary citizens' wellbeing as its primary goal. More neoliberal ideology won't help. And we should stop confusing ends with means: for example, free trade, if well managed, might bring greater shared prosperity; but if it is not well managed, it will lower the living standards of many – possibly a majority – of citizens. (...) There are alternatives to the current neoliberal arrangements that can create shared prosperity, just as there are alternatives – like US President Barack Obama's proposed Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership deal with the EU – that would cause much more harm. The challenge today is to learn from the past, in order to embrace the former and avert the latter'²⁸.

3. THE EUROPEAN UNION IN CHINA'S INTERNATIONAL POLICY

Modern international relations in the dynamically changing world in which there is a return to the times of multipolarity and multilateralism abound in numerous and multifaceted threats to international peace and security. The hitherto top guards of the global status quo, especially the United States and the European Union, immersed in a leadership crisis and losing global hegemony to emerging powers, are unable to guarantee security to themselves and the world. In the era of rapidly growing conflicts (especially asymmetric ones, such as international terrorism), no state, even the most powerful United States or China, is able to cope with these dangers. That is why today the need for closer international cooperation is a priority for all international, state and non-state actors. It is up to the international community when it fights for peace and security, whether it will choose joint

²⁷ See Grosse, T.G. 2016. Kryzys po Brexicie. [Crisis after Brexit.] ..., p. 13; *Ein starkes Europa in einer unsicheren Welt* von Jean-Marc Ayrault und Frank-Walter Steinmeier – website of Germany's Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

²⁸ See Stiglitz, J. Lekcja angielskiego. [English lesson.] In: *Obserwator finansowy.pl*. Available at: <https://www.obserwatorfinansowy.pl/tematyka/makroekonomia/lekcja>.

action or competition which, as history of international relations shows, sooner or later leads to increased conflicts and international chaos and to the war of 'all with all'.

The position, place and role of a state or another entity, for example the European Union, in the international system is determined by its system, potential and conducted foreign policy, and many other factors influence its quality, attractiveness and effectiveness. However, strong, large states, colloquially called empires or powers, have greater possibilities in this respect. They *de facto* conduct the most offensive foreign policy and create the international reality and play a major role in the international arena. They also ultimately determine the shape and nature of emerging international systems (orders). It is expressed, among others, in bilateral and multilateral international contacts, active participation in international organisations, membership of international alliances and undertaking initiatives for the international community. The scale, scope and nature of this participation in international life differ, as the reasons, interests and possibilities of individual countries are divergent²⁹.

In the context of the aforementioned theoretical assumptions, modern China, in my view, has a great chance of finding itself among the world's greatest powers which today co-create a new international order, and in the future will govern it. Today, the PRC has a prominent position in the international arena and plays an important role in the process of building a new international system, alongside the United States and the European Union³⁰.

The authorities in Beijing are aware that after many failures at the turn of the twentieth century, the current policy may turn out to be a historic success for the PRC in the international arena. Rich in experience China wants to take advantage of the moment that fate has given it and in this unique period make radical changes in the economic and social structure to catch up with Europe, Japan and the United States. Guided by its own national interests

²⁹ See Łoś-Nowak, T. 2011. *Polityka zagraniczna w przestrzeni teoretycznej*. [Foreign policy in theoretical space.] In: Łoś-Nowak T. ed. *Polityka zagraniczna. Aktorzy, potencjały, strategie*. [Foreign policy. Actors, potentials, strategies.] Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Poltext, p. 17.

³⁰ See Maddison, A. 2011. *The World Economy: A Millennial Perspective*. Paris: OECD; Rowiński, J. 2008. *Chiny: nowa globalna potęga? Cień dawnej świetności i lat poniżenia*. [China: a new global power? Shadow of old glory and years of humiliation.] In: Rotfeld, A.D. ed. *Dokąd zmierza świat? [Where is the world going?]* Warszawa: PISM, pp. 350–351.

and international aspirations, China wants to overtake these countries in every way and at the same time to prove the superiority of the Chinese socio-political, economic and cultural model to its own society and to the world. It quietly dreams of gaining the status of a global superpower that would be able even if not to take control of the world, at least to co-govern it with other superpowers and actors, such as for example the European Union. Is this a real dream? It seems so. Although a few dozen years ago this scenario seemed impossible to realise, today it is well known that a strategy based on consistent implementation of the assumed priorities meets the expectations of its authorities. We are witnessing the ‘re-birth’ of the Chinese empire and gaining by China of the leading role in the world.

There is no doubt that for China the twenty-first century will be marked by a stronger engagement in the global economy and, as a consequence, an increase in the capacity to have an impact first on the regional scale, then on the global one. The financial and economic crisis, which started in 2008, has accelerated this process, making it clear to both Beijing and all its partners that the PRC is on the right path to achieving the status of a world power. In many respects, China today is the second, largest power following the United States, it is supposed to become the first economy in a decade. Its plan is to become more prosperous and gain a dominant position in Asia and beyond.

Dynamically developing China and the growing competitiveness of its economy are and will be a major challenge for the current leaders of the world economy in the coming years. It seems that, just like so far, the tools of trade policy will be an important instrument for building the economic superpower of China. The coexistence of multilateralism and bilateralism will undoubtedly continue to characterise the country’s trade policy, and the advantage of one or the other strategy will result from the possibility of its effective use in order to achieve China’s economic goals.

The rise of China’s position in the world economy is undoubtedly an important challenge for the current economic powers. Undeniably, China’s economic success and its position in the world economy are the result of reforms successfully implemented since the late 1970s and its opening up to the world economy. China is an example of a state that has made the most of the effects of the globalisation process initiated by highly-developed countries. Today, economic relations between China, the United States and the European Union deserve special attention. The relationships between these actors affect their economic and political situation. Both the European Union and China together with the United States have reached the status of

key actors in international relations and will do everything not to lose it in the twenty-first century.

However, the European Union could play a greater role in the rivalry between the United States and China for world domination. Meanwhile, the EU has taken a very cautious stance towards tensions in the South China Sea caused by China's expansive activities in recent years, as I wrote earlier. This attitude of the EU reflects its general policy towards Asia, which focuses mainly on economic and trade matters, and in the sphere of security is primarily limited to promoting peaceful settlement of disputes and respect for international law, and engaging in politically uncontroversial areas such as piracy, help for victims of disasters or strengthening peace. This position of the EU is also determined by the differences of opinion within the Community itself.

For the European Union, immersed in the internal crisis and facing serious threats in its immediate vicinity, the growing tensions in the South China Sea can only apparently seem to be only of secondary importance. In reality, however, the situation in this region, despite its geographical remoteness, may adversely affect the EU's strategic interests, even to a greater extent than many of the inflammatory points on the outskirts of Europe or in its immediate vicinity, which draw the attention of the Community on a daily basis. In today's globalised world, geographical distance is not necessarily the most important factor determining the scale of the impact of processes or events, including conflicts. Much more important is their economic significance for the regional as well as the global economy, and the geopolitical significance which is manifested, *inter alia*, by the strong involvement of the powers.

No wonder that many experts openly criticise the EU for its lack of ambition in its approach to the matters of security in Asia, while proposing a number of measures that would significantly increase the role of the Union in this area of the world and beyond. However, ignoring the long list of challenges within the EU and around its borders, these opinions often overestimate the potential of the EU as an actor in the international arena while underestimating the changes taking place in Asia, especially in the South China Sea region. For many years the EU's policy towards Asia has been based on the premise that China is a 'satisfied' or moderately revisionist power in the context of the current world order. It has been assumed that since China's further development heavily depends on favourable international relations, it will limit its territorial ambitions, or at least postpone their fulfilment. According to this vision, the United States and the EU have tried to support the construction of the Asian legal-institutional order around the

ASEAN association, with reference to the post-war experience of Europe in this regard, assuming that Beijing would not undertake any action that would be contrary to the established rules.

Meanwhile, China's politics is becoming more and more involved in the processes and events portending the declining role of rules and institutions that characterise the liberal international order. This order, among others, due to the activity of revisionist powers such as Russia, China and Iran and the crisis of the Western world, is currently in retreat. The place of law and international organisations is being overtaken by a geopolitical game characterised by unilateral actions and counterattacks by the superpowers. According to many observers, three states: the United States, China and, despite its intrinsic weakness, Russia will play the leading role in this global game in the coming years³¹. Unfortunately, the EU, despite being the largest economy in the world, is not in this group due to its internal problems and limited ability to act as a single actor internationally. Especially if geopolitical rivalry is prevalent today in this arena. Nevertheless, the EU will have to adapt to this new situation. Its policy must, however, be correlated with the actions of other players, both powers and smaller states, and in this respect today there is a very large number of question marks. The most important of these are President Donald Trump's policy towards Asia, especially China, future relations of Asian states, including ASEAN, with Washington and Beijing, and China's further actions.

CONCLUSION

Spectacular economic successes and attainments in other areas of life achieved by the PRC in the last decades of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, on the one hand, are worthy of admiration and, on the other hand, cause fears in the international community, especially among the current superpowers, including the United States. They raise many questions about China's future and its role in the new international system. They are not indifferent to Europe and the European Union speaking in the international arena on its behalf. Therefore, the issue of relations between the European Union and China today and in the future is so popular among political

³¹ See Kamiński, A.Z., Szlajfer, H. 2016. Śmiertelnie niebezpieczny trójkąt. [Deadly dangerous triangle.] *Rzeczpospolita* 20 October 2016; Trenin, D. 2016. Three powers will shape future state of World. *China Daily* 31 October 2016.

scientists, economists, sinologists, historians, European scientists and scholars of contemporary international relations. Many publications have already appeared around the world on China and its role in the international scene and its relations with the European Union, but we still do not know where China is really heading and whether the European Union will not fall apart in the twenty-first century. There are also doubts about the Chinese ‘turn towards multilateralism’. According to some scholars, it is completely apparent and has hidden goals as the PRC has always used bilateral rather than multilateral strategies in its foreign policy. However, this practice became visible in a special way in the twenty-first century, after 2012, i.e. after Xi Jinping assumed supreme authority in China. This pertains to both the normative and practical spheres. Xi abandoned the ‘policy of playing second fiddle’ inherited from Deng Xiaoping and explicitly calls for a global reach that is no longer based on the ‘democratisation of international relations’. Xi stated at the outset that China was a global power and not, as previously called, ‘a partial power’³².

Xi Jinping has set himself ambitious goals and he wants China to become a global power, surpassing the United States in every way. In political terms, he tries to recreate a militarised party-state as an effective builder of national sovereignty. In economic terms, he seeks to develop China top-down instead of creating an individualist and innovative society based on sustainable legitimacy-based institutions. In foreign policy he strives for based-on-power neighbourhood policy in which China subordinates small states to its sphere of influence and establishes ‘great power’ relations with the United States and Russia. Interestingly, demanding a ‘great power’ relationship with the United States, Xi calls Russia ‘the most important strategic partner’ for China (China and the United States do not call their relationship ‘a strategic partnership’). It follows that President Xi wants to combine nineteenth-century geopolitics with twentieth-century Leninist politics to gain an advantage in the globalised world of the twenty-first century. This raises the question of whether in this concept the European Union will become a ‘strategic partner’ of China, or a secondary role has been assigned to it, as a market for the Chinese industry and trade?

³² See Godement, F. 2016. *Czego chcą Chiny? [What does China want?]* Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Akademickie DIALOG, p. 243; Kwieciński, R. 2016. Bilateralizm i multilateralizm w polityce zagranicznej Chińskiej Republiki Ludowej. [Bilateralism and multilateralism in the foreign policy of the People’s Republic of China.] In: Marszałek-Kawa J. ed. *Chiny i świat zewnętrzny. [China and the outside world.]* Toruń: Wydawnictwo Adam Marszałek, pp. 9–28.

Relations between the European Union and China are also very popular in our country, especially after the visit of Chinese President Xi Jinping in Poland on 19-21 June 2016³³. The Chinese want Poland to open up markets across Europe for them, and the Poles would like China to help build our infrastructure and provide capital for investment after 2020 when the EU funding is over. Poland is treated by the Chinese not only as a market, but also – in the context of the construction of the New Silk Road – as a business stop on China's way to the European Union.

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- ³³ See Winiecki, J. 2016. Chiński podział Europy. [Chinese division of Europe.] *Polityka* 22–28 June 2016, pp. 46–48; Maciejasz, D. 2016. Biznes z Chinami na jednym szlaku. [Business with China on one road.] *Gazeta Wyborcza* 21 June 2016, p. 13.

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EUROPEAN UNION AND CHINA IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY – PROBLEMS, OPPORTUNITIES AND THREATS

Summary

Today, EU and China – along the US – undoubtedly play a key role in the international arena. They have established strategic partnership in their bilateral relations and strive to develop cooperation in all areas. Yet, they also dissent on many important issues. In this article, I investigate the premises of EU-China bilateral relations, as well as opportunities and threats to both parties as far as their status on the global stage is concerned. Moreover, I test the thesis I deem controversial, which claims that the twenty-first century will be Asian century, and *de facto* the era of China. The literature on contemporary China, on the role it plays in the international arena and on its relations with the EU is abundant. However no definite answer has been given yet as to where China is heading and whether the EU will break up in the twenty-first century. China's 'turn to multilateralism' is questioned, with some researchers claiming that it simply serves to conceal China's long-term goal, i.e. taking control over the world in the second half of the twenty-first century.

UNIA EUROPEJSKA I CHINY W XXI WIEKU – PROBLEMY, SZANSE I ZAGROŻENIA

Streszczenie

Nie ulega wątpliwości, że zarówno Unia Europejska, jak i Chiny odgrywają dziś – obok Stanów Zjednoczonych – główne role na arenie międzynarodowej. We wzajemnych relacjach mają status partnerów strategicznych i starają się rozwijać współpracę we wszystkich dziedzinach, ale też występują między nimi różnice zdań i stanowisk w wielu istotnych sprawach. W artykule próbuję pokazać przesłanki, szanse i zagrożenia dla obu tych aktorów na arenie międzynarodowej oraz ich wzajemne relacje dziś i w przyszłości. Ponadto usiłuję zweryfikować kontrowersyjną – moim zdaniem – hipotezę, lansowaną przez wielu badaczy, która zakłada, że wiek XXI będzie wiekiem Azji, czyli *de facto* Chin. Na temat współczesnych Chin i ich roli na arenie międzynarodowej oraz stosunków z Unią Europejską ukazało się już dużo publikacji na całym

świecie, ale wciąż nie wiemy dokąd tak naprawdę Chiny zmierzają i czy Unia Europejska nie rozpadnie się w XXI wieku? Istnieją też wątpliwości odnośnie chińskiego „zwrotu w kierunku multilateralizmu”. Zdaniem niektórych badaczy ma on całkowicie pozorny charakter i służy tylko do kamuflowania dalekosieżnych celów ChRL, czyli przejęcia przez nią kontroli nad światem w drugiej połowie XXI wieku.

ЕВРОПЕЙСКИЙ СОЮЗ И КИТАЙ В XXI ВЕКЕ – ПРОБЛЕМЫ, ШАНСЫ И УГРОЗЫ

Резюме

Не вызывает сомнения тот факт, что, как Европейский Союз, так и Китай исполняют сегодня – наряду с Соединёнными Штатами – главные роли на международной арене. В своих взаимоотношениях они имеют статус стратегических партнёров и стараются развивать сотрудничество во всех сферах, однако между ними также имеют место разногласия и несовпадение позиций по многим существенным вопросам. В статье предпринята попытка указать на предпосылки, шансы и угрозы для упомянутых участников игры на международной арене и их взаимоотношения в настоящее время и в будущем. Кроме того, автор пытается подвергнуть критической проверке спорную – по его мнению – гипотезу, согласно которой XXI век будет веком Азии, или *de facto* Китая. О современном Китае, его роли на международной арене и отношениях с Европейским Союзом появилось во всём мире уже много публикаций, однако мы по-прежнему не знаем, в каком направлении действительно идёт Китай и не развалится ли Европейский Союз в XXI веке? Имеют место также сомнения относительно китайского «возврата к мультилатерализму». По мнению некоторых исследователей, он имеет совершенно очевидный характер и служит исключительно для камуфлирования далеко идущих целей, таких, как, например, установление контроля над мировым сообществом во второй половине XXI века.