

1. Introduction

It is a very difficult task to describe very recent events and try to predict their long-term effects. We do not have access to all the materials and diplomatic circles tend to filter the information. We are overtaken by a huge amount of media coverage and conflicting interpretations. Many times we are manipulated because public opinion and academic circles can play important role in softening one's position. Part of the success is to be perceived as right and impartial.

The year 2003 was quite gloomy for the European politics. It was marked by quarrels about the attack on Iraq and the project of a new constitution. Both processes were particularly difficult for the Polish foreign policy as it jeopardized the inclusive position of supporting both the EU and USA. Important choices were to be made and properly publicized to the international arena, domestic political parties and the citizens. The environment of the government sharply deteriorated during this year, mostly among the allegations about senior politicians' role in a corruptive scandal - 'Rywingate'.

The main subject of this article is to describe the Polish position towards the treaty prepared by the Convention on the Future of Europe and later reworked throughout the IGC. When we discuss the Polish position towards the new treaty prepared by the Convention, the most important is to distinguish between that which is constant and the change, most visible after the failed summit in December 2003.

Where there reasons for such a strong Polish opposition? Should we look more at the international situation, internal standing of the government or psychology of the nation?

The IGC convened on the 4th of October last year is was one of the biggest diplomatic endeavour ever. Never before 25 countries were negotiating a document of such importance. True, this time they had a blue-print prepared by the Convention under Valery Giscard d'Estaing. But IGC has its own manifold structure and dynamics.

The IGC was originally scheduled to start in 2004 after a 'cooling period' following the Convention. However this calendar was changed during the final months of the Convention. Following the Athens summit in April 2003, when the EU Heads of state and governments refused to prolong the Convention, beyond the June deadline, the events start to stampede. This was the most controversial part of the Convention's operation. Between 23rd April and 12 of June (during just 50 days and only five sessions) the members of the Convention were to agree on a major institutional shake-up. The result was a tough compromise on institutional issues, a compromise, where the accession states were not fully represented and heard¹.

¹ MEPs which played an important role could not represent the 75 million of citizens from the new countries. 'Your vote doesn't count'- words supposedly said by VGE towards Alojz Peterle (representative of the candidate states in the Preasidium as invitee), during the last meeting (Gisela Stuart, The making of Europe's constitution, Fabian Society, 2003, page 24).

Without any doubts one can say that the whole compromise package meant a shift of powers between the member states. For Poland the two most important aspects were the change of voting system, which was only introduced by the Accession Treaty² and the reduction of the Commission size.

The timetable was particularly inconvenient for the accession countries which during that time were organising referenda on membership. However they managed to keep the Convention agenda out of the political debate. The frequent changes of the conditions of membership do not help to give a feeling of security and legitimacy of the institutions.

Only in July during the summit of Thessaloniki the accession states received a confirmation that they will participate in the IGC 'on an equal footing with the member states'. The same summit decided to convene the IGC in October and established a goal of having the Constitutional Treaty agreed before the June 2004 European Parliament elections.

We can conclude that establishing the goal of reaching the compromise in December was a skilful achievement of the Italian presidency, leaving only about 70 days to conclude the negotiations. The Italians had an extremely difficult job to do but they failed to handle it. It is not my aim to evaluate the presidency. However it failed to be perceived as an honest broker and to a large extent stuck to the Convention letter supporting France and Germany in their sacrosanct positions³. The Italian Prime Minister created an image of a general agreement with only few institutional problems that could not be agreed. However, many observers remained doubtful about the scope of points agreed. In fact the December IGC meeting was concluded even before it started as the presidency proposed to defer IGC following the 'confessional meetings' that failed to show a scope for a compromise. An important question is whether the Italian presidency did not try to put too much time pressure, knowing that the chances of success were limited⁴. Paradoxically if we look at the 'constitutional process' the failed summit in December 2003, received the most newspaper and media coverage.

Importance of past experience

What means EU for the Poles? How important is belonging to the West? Jacek Wozniakowski, professor of art keeps saying that Poland is neither East nor West, something in between. During the Middle Ages its expansion was mostly directed to the East, towards the contemporary Ukraine. A lot of Polish customs, architecture and fashion reflect deep fascination with the East. However East, during the last three centuries was a source of deep wounds. Not that the West was innocent. As much as the Polish state was the winner of the Great War, when its independence was re-established under more than hundred years, it was one of the biggest losers of the second world war. Despite heroic engagement (over 200 thousand soldiers thought against the Nazi Germany) the country was badly served by its allies. Lost of over 20% of the population,

² One has to remember that the Protocol on Enlargement agreed in Nice was until the Accession Treaty only a political declaration, which had to be introduced to the acquis.

³ EU Constitutional Project Newsletter, January 2004 page 2.

⁴ 50-50 as it was pronounced by Berlusconi on 7 of December (Ibidem).

forced change of homeland by more than two million of 'Easterners' and the communist regime installed by Moscow, did not relieve the nation, who has just survived the German 'Drang nach Osten'. However 'the Poles are more Western in their outlook than the inhabitants of most Western Countries'...⁵. 'Poland's old-age contact with the Russians has brought nothing but bitterness and mutual mistrust'(...)'The repeated failures of the West to come to Poland's aid have undoubtedly caused pain; but they have not diverted the Poles' instinctive westward gaze'...⁶

However the history limited the scope of trust towards the western countries. 10 years of hard diplomatic efforts spread between the application and entrance to the Union.

Few events from Polish history need to be revoked here.

The years of war and communist rulers taught many Poles the value of resistance. Compromise is not a word of highest political value. On the right side there is still a deep mistrust about the meaning of 'the round table'. They claim to be the only truthful to their rules. Collaboration with the occupying countries and especially with Soviet Union was perceived as dishonour. The odium of communist rule is still a very important stain on the ex-communist ruling party. One of the few leaders from this political grouping who managed to build a profound trust is Aleksander Kwasniewski the president of the country. However even he had to admit that joined forces of the church and Solidarnosc threatened seriously the referendum on the Constitution in 1997. Anti-communism or rejection of the post-communist formation is one of the strongest basis for the existence of a main far-right party, the League of Polish Families. The second is the rejection of the EU. All this undermined the position of Leszek Miller and made him eager to play on the national tune before the December meeting.

The role of the Catholic Church in Poland is also very strong. The support of the Pope played an important role in the accession referendum. Polish Episcopate is divided over the attitude towards the EU. However it keeps a medium approach rather as observer and commentator. One has to remember that also in its tradition the legacy of resistance is very strong. One of the main cardinals in Poland Stefan Wyszyński was famous for his words 'non-possumus' that means no compromise. It is widely accepted that certain principles are not negotiable.

Another strong legacy coming from the pre-partition's time was the saying 'nothing about us, without us' used by the Szlachta. It was revoked many times and recently during the reunification of Germany, when Poland successfully demanded to be included in the negotiations of 4 + 2. The history of three partitions in the end of eighteenth century and the Ribbentrop - Molotov pact from August 1939 made the Poles very sensible towards any kind of agreement behind our back. This can to a large extent explain a very emotional rejection of the Convention's Presidency deliberations behind closed doors.

⁵ Davies Norman, Heart of Europe. The Past in Poland's Present, Oxford 2001, page 303

⁶ Ibidem p.302

On the other hand Poland cherishes the memory of a dual, federal polity composed with Lithuania between 1569 and 1795. The central power was very limited and the then nation of noble comprised about 12% of the whole population. This democracy was haunted by a spirit of 'liberum veto' which meant, that any member of those elected to the Diet could block any decision and through this dissolve the Parliament.

This led to a blockade of all the reforms and eventually contributed to the loss of independence in the eighteenth century. The system of power was shaken also by the half century of wars (second part of XVII-th century) and the parallel rise of new political powers (Russia, Brandenburg-Prussia and Habsburg empire composed of Austria, Czech and Hungary).

The constitutional system gave the noble a large area of freedom, however it decreased the chances of any reforms parallel to the absolute monarchies of surrounding states: Russia, Habsburg Empire and Prussia. To a large extent they decided who should be the next ruler which led to the fall of the country during the eighteenth century (three partitions between 1772 and 1795).

Of course Poland is not the only country claiming the bitterness of the decisions taken in 1945 and before. But the so called 'Yalta agreement' is a bitter memory and a warning for the future. In order to shape the well-being of the country, its elites need to present at a table of negotiations and have some leverage. That is why the issue of QMV is not only an administrative characteristic. It is the assurance that Polish voice will be listened and heard. As much as European Union is a novel system, the memories of the past shape politician's behaviour and influence their evaluation of the situation.

The issue of legitimacy deficit and ways of solving it.

The legitimacy of EU is based more on the authorisation through the treaty changes to establish law.⁷

The legitimacy of the Convention's QMV proposal.

Another important issue is whether double majority is really the simplest and most democratic. There is no space to go into detail; however certain issues have to be raised.

Firstly, the issue of simplicity and democratic legitimacy in relation to the QMV in the Council is problematic⁸. A very important part of the EU legitimacy is the differentiated equilibrium of influence. The issue of how to design such a balance is both mathematical and psychological.

⁷ Craig P., De Burca G. 'EU Law. Text, Cases and Materials', Oxford 2003

⁸ Felderer B. Paterson I. Silarszky, Draft Constitution: The double majority implies a Assive transfer of Power to the Large member States – Is this Intended? Institute for Advanced Studies, Vienna, June 2003 p.3 http://europa.eu.int/futurum/forum_convention/documents/contrib/acad/0475_r_en.pdf

The double majority was not an issue in the debate until the end of April. It was only raised in the Commission December 2002 contribution as a simple double majority (50% of population + 50% of member states).⁹ It would certainly strengthen the Commission's position in front of the other parts of 'the triangle' because of the possibility of its proposal.

The Convention proposal was not properly discussed and attempts to raise this issue were not taken into account by the Presidium. Following the Presidium discussion about VGE's institutional articles on the 23rd April, the issue was perceived as part of a 'closed package deal'. The threshold of the population (from the original VGE's draft) was reduced from 2/3 to 3/5. It can be only seen as a compromise accepted by the Praesidium late at night on the 5th of June¹⁰. The new formula can be therefore seen as an attempt to create '*faits accomplis*'. Polish reaction can be therefore seen as not only opposition to the substance but to the method it was introduced¹¹.

In comparison to the Nice system, Convention's formula enhances the influence of the four biggest states and only slightly of the smallest. The project particularly strengthens the position of Germany and weakens the Polish and Spanish.

The possibility of the proposal is enhanced (from 3.1 to around 14% of all combinations) however this can be seen as reduction of the incentive to adopt a consensus based approach.

The issue of Accession referendum

The whole discussion whether the EU needs a new basis for its operation was overshadowed in Poland by the negotiations and the referendum campaign. As a remainder the referendum took place on the 8th June, 5 days before the Convention reached a final deal on the institutional part. I use the term deal consciously as in this case it is hard to use the term consensus. In the referendum campaign the legacy of the ongoing Convention was not really present. The anti-European parliamentary party: the League of Polish Families tried to play a card of fear towards a loss of sovereignty. They used the Convention as an example of centralizing efforts and domination by the big countries. However as in other European countries Convention did not receive much media coverage and its final articles were not in the center of the discussion for a long time.

The argument about the referendum and its importance for our membership is one of the strongest. Some politicians claimed that Polish citizens decided to vote for the

⁹ CONV 448/02 5 December 2002

¹⁰ Norman Peter, *The Accidental Constitution*, Brussels 2003 page 281-2

¹¹ J. Truszczyński, *Bronimy Nicei*, *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 28.11.03 ...'The proposal of the Praesidium in the case of double majority is not a result of a solid, profound discussion, therefore it is hard to perceive it as a thoughtful compromise. During the session on 15th May, devoted to institutional issues, 26 members mentioned this issue, out of which only 6 supported the double majority (...) The Praesidium did not react to the proposal of 18 government representative to retain the definition of Nice QMV tabled on 12 of June. During the last session several government representatives, including Danuta Huebner, subdued the institutional part, while endorsing the Convention's draft' ...

membership for its own sake, and not only on specified conditions (such as QMV system). However our weight in the Council of Minister was one of the main arguments of the 'Yes campaign'. This argument opposed the voices that from the moment of joining we shall be dominated by Germany, our huge neighbour. That is why many campaigners used to say that we shall have almost as many voices as Germany. This might resemble the French quest for parity, but it remains an important argument.

The observers from the west should also understand how essential for the Polish society the very referendum was. Its historical importance was only parallel to the Polish-Lithuanian Union from 1569. This also underlines the long-term political engagement expressed by the citizens. It should be remembered that the biggest challenge for the Yes campaign was not the number of supporters, which was relatively safe, but the participation rate (which in order to have a binding effect had to exceed 50% of eligible voters). That is why for the first time in Polish history the referendum was conducted during two days. After the first day, there was a kind of political horror as only 17% took part. It is hard to describe the huge relief when the final rate was declared to be almost 59% (13.5 million- more than 77% voting yes). If we compare it to the Constitution referendum from April 1997 (almost 43% participation rate and only 53% in favour), we may claim that the Accession Treaty enjoys higher legitimacy.

The first European Council with Poland and other acceding countries as full observers in Thessaloniki was therefore of huge symbolic importance. This is a paradox that the same summit received the first 65 articles of the first, second and the fourth part. During this summit Polish prime minister expressed for the first time a strong opposition towards the change in the QMV system which was part of the deal reached in Copenhagen only six months earlier. According to Włodzimierz Cimoszewicz expressed his satisfaction about the formal decision that acceding states will be full participants in the IGC. He reiterated an old principle 'nothing about us without us'. (...) 'All states, all societies belonging or acceding EU, have the right to co-design the future of the Union'. (...)

Concerning the QMV change he said: 'I want to openly admit, that in my belief, (the proposed change) is only about a new redistribution of roles in the EU, not about simplification or democratization. I do not see any reason, why we should accept it.'...¹²

It is difficult to analyse to what extent the new treaty changes the conditions of Polish membership and if yes, then if this change is overall positive or negative. The first full analysis available to the public was published in September by the Institute of Public Affairs by three professors of law.¹³ I shall quote the main conclusions further on. However it can be a wider philosophical question about how legitimacy of a decision can be subdued by its immediate change. It concerns also any Treaty signed in the future. One of the main issues raised by the Polish president about our current constitution is that it should not be changed too often. Part of the legitimacy of institutions comes from their stability. It is therefore deeply unfortunate that an important round of treaty changes was

¹² www.msz.gov.pl (this interview available only in Polish language) 20.06.2003

¹³ Barcz Jan, Mik Cezary, Nowak-Far Artur, Ocena Traktatu Konstytucyjnego: wyzwania dla Polski, Warsaw 2003, www.isp.org.pl

in the making just after the referenda in the candidate countries. On the other hand this enabled these countries to have a say, and they expected to be at least listened to. To a certain extent it was not the case.

Polish relations with France and Germany.

The Polish government position was agreed in September. It is very symptomatic that the same newspaper that brought the information about a firm Polish opposition coincided with an article by a Polish philosopher – Leszek Kolakowski about the Centre of ‘Vertriebene’. Yes, the political climate between Poland and Germany was at its lowest point. And the change of voting rules was to the benefit of our western neighbour. There was a growing sense of a political deal between Germany and France, hostile to the interests of the new countries. The old political maxim is to fight or join, if you cannot beat your opponent. Poland chose to fight. And here we need a look at the Polish history to justify our behaviour.

It is paradoxical that the divisions over the QMV were to a large extent parallel to the division about the Iraq intervention. On the one side USA supporters: Poland and Spain, on the other, fierce opponents: France and Germany.

Another problem is the behaviour of certain countries that did not facilitate our feeling as equals. Let me remind the famous ‘faux-pas’ pronounced by Chirac in February last year. What means that ‘the countries missed the opportunity to shut up’? Firstly, that there are some countries, that are better equipped to speak on the international scene. It is true, that the voice of France is more important in international forum. However the right to speak is an essential characteristic of a sovereign country. The independent foreign policy was one of the most important political aims during our cold-war semi-independence. The question of sovereignty is even more precious when a country has regained it only 15 years before. Therefore Polish elites emphasised that European integration is not the giving up of sovereignty but rather its sharing. You may say that the French are quite particular in this respect. It is a good description that when the French politicians say Europe they mean France. European leaders were very patient so far in bearing this kind of cultural superiority. However both Chirac and Valery Giscard d’Estaing claimed so many times to be true European while pursuing strict, narrow interests. This hypocrisy became unbearable following Thessaloniki.

The intransigent Franco-German position on keeping the exact articles of the convention’s draft shows that this draft was particularly beneficial or respectful of their particular interests. Both the 60% threshold and the retention of unanimity in sensitive areas (intellectual property and immigration) during the last days of Convention show that these countries were treated specially. It is paradoxical that the original proposal of VGE was that QMV should be composed of two-thirds of the population which was later reduced to 60%.

The internal situation of the Polish government.

Prior to the December IGC Polish government was bound by the resolution of the Polish lower house – Sejm, to ‘efficiently defend’ the so called Nice system, as the best guarantee of the solidarity principle in the EU¹⁴. This resolution followed the discussion when most of the parliamentarians rejected any compromise on the issue. The slogan ‘Nice or death’ was a very catchy movement of the main opposition leader: Jan Maria Rokita. It is difficult to say to what extent this is his personal conviction that played the role, however his standing can be put in the perspective of anti-communist opposition prior to the Round Table of 1989. The rejection of political pressure and sticking to the values was perceived as the only right decision.

The internal position of the government was weak both in public and parliamentary support. The public standing was weakened by accusation of corruption of the governing party and the operation of parliamentary commission, which managed to trace sleaze around the work on a law about media concentration. On the 1st of March the government lost its parliamentary majority when a junior coalition party - Polish People’s (Peasant’s) Party was ousted.

Polish foreign policy since 1989 was largely uncontested. With two main priorities: joining western institutions that would guarantee security and favourable economic environment; and improvement of relations with our neighbours. In spring 2003 Poland was forced to choose about the short-term commitment. While supporting the intervention in Iraq the government received a large backing from the main opposition parties. It was perceived as sticking to our engagement as a NATO ally.

How many levels of the internal game can we follow? To what extent the opposition parties tried to gamble in order to gain an argument in the approaching elections? The party that used the slogan PO (Civic Platform) raised its public support between October and December around 5%. Maybe the strong position in the IGC debate played a role in this. Playing on national pride is a useful political technique. On the other hand in recent interviews Rokita (candidate for the next Prime Minister) stressed the he is in favour of a compromise. But right now nobody can undermine his patriotism.

The reasons of December crash.

Prior to Brussels - analysis of the newspaper titles:

‘Why Poland does not follow the majority’¹⁵

‘We do not need to be obedient’¹⁶ - ...‘not everybody in Europe has understood that accession of new members is not a gesture, for which we shall demonstrate only gratefulness’ ...

¹⁴ Resolution of the Sejm of RP on the Treaty establishing the Constitution for Europe, 11th December 2003

¹⁵ Le monde

¹⁶ Gazeta Polska 51/545 24-31.12.03

So how can we explain the political failure of December summit?

1. Italian presidency putting too much expectations and maybe not handling the talks properly (timing and atmosphere). The IGC was to wrap up the talks in 73 days (4 October – 12 December).
2. The dogma of the ‘Convention project’. In Thessaloniki the draft text was agreed to be a good basis for starting the IGC. If we however look at the web-page of the Italian presidency we can see that the project was perceived as much more than just a good basis¹⁷.
3. The decision to adjourn the summit without even having a discussion might be seen in this perspective as a wise one. The conflict between France and Germany on the one side and Polish-Spain duo was too strong.

It is impossible to say if ever and in what context the December summit shall be depicted in the school books. Shall it be overshadowed by other events (maybe a signature of the Treaty in June) or shall it be a point of reference to explain new emerging reality. The history is constantly redrawn and future generations will judge the importance of a collapse of a summit, which we had witnessed.

3. Constitution back on track. What happened after Brussels? The change of political discourse following the Brussels debacle.

It was my original idea to explain Polish government’s behaviour, when I sent my paper proposal. However, since Brussels European politics has changed. After the confrontation all sides began to use a language, where compromise is no longer the sign of weakness. Following the March summit we can see a changed political landscape. The elections in Spain changed the governing party which attenuated the language marking a U-turn in QMV quarrel. The growing unpopularity of Polish Prime minister - Leszek Miller, forced him to resign on the 2nd of May. However a very important change occurred even before, between December and March. In December the European Council agreed not to agree. In March the same body (with a new Greek prime minister) agreed to agree no later than during their next summit on 17-18 June.

So how should we describe the failed summit in December. Was it pre-mature to close the negotiations or was the Brussels summit an important ‘trauma’, where main parties realised that brinkmanship did not bring the results? How important was the change of presidency of the European Union?

¹⁷ www.ueitalia2003.it ‘In preparation for the Summit of 12-13 December the Presidency circulated a comprehensive proposal in the hopes that the Summit would conclude with an agreement on the text of the future European Constitution. The proposal discussed at the Summit consisted of the following documents, updated in relation to the evolution of the negotiations without however, betraying the intention to keep absolute faith with the legacy of the Convention (...)’ emphasis added

In order to have a better picture of all these events I shall try to present the evolution of the Polish position. I stress the word evolution, because it is unjust to say that Poland retreated from its former position. 'Nice or death' was never the official position of the government. The reasons for change were manifold:

1. Despite various attempts, the Polish diplomacy failed to convince other capitals to 'give Nice a chance'.
2. The European political discourse has changed although threats on the EU budget had materialised.
3. The conciliatory moves of the German politicians, opening the space for a compromise.
4. Growing critics of the government position expressed in the Polish press and during academic conferences
5. Fear that enlargement scheduled for the 1st of May will be celebrated in a climate of distrust and problems brought by the new members

Already during the diplomatic visits in January, the willingness to compromise began to reappear on the surface. On the 13th of January foreign ministers of Germany and Poland expressed a common position that the Constitutional Treaty should be accepted in the first half of the year. Cimoszewicz said that 'adoption of constitution could be a 'symbolic' event proving that the EU of 25 is able to come to agreement'. He added that if a compromise is not reached by July, there will be no need for a rush afterwards, as the Nice system would apply, thus meeting the Polish claim to test it. However there was a fundamental shift in Polish position. He stressed that the Treaty should be formulated in a way, which would not necessitate a second ratification of the Treaty. This wording means that a formula of future 'rendez-vous' was abandoned by the Polish foreign minister. It might seem that consecutive referendums appear to be problematic in Poland as well¹⁸.

Polish deputy Foreign Minister Jan Truszczyński also declared willingness to compromise during the meeting of the European Greens in Warsaw on March the 1st. According to him, Poland was ready for a discussion whether, how and when introduce a new system of voting in the Council. Poland was ready to modify Nice system but also to for other formulas. He indicated that the formula of 'square root proportionality' seems to be the most rational and sensible. He emphasised that Poland expect flexibility from main partners and that 'It takes two to a tango'¹⁹.

The major political signal came from the German government on the 9th of March. The article published in Financial Times Deutschland informed that 'Berlin is prepared to look favourably on a new voting formula that would reduce the power of the big member states and make it easier to reach decisions. However it reiterated the support for the 'double majority formula'. According to the German politicians the new formula would equalize the thresholds for majority as 55% of both states and population.

Probably the biggest impulse arrived from Madrid, when new Prime Minister-elect – Jose Rodriguez Zapatero – pronounced his deep support for the conclusion of the Constitution

¹⁸ Rzeczpospolita, 15.01.04

¹⁹ euro.pap.com.pl (Polish Press Agency) 01.03.04

negotiations. All the abovementioned events changed the political climate in Europe and allowed for a re-launch of the IGC following the spring summit.

Scenarios for the future

What different scenarios can we design on the basis of this event?

1) *Optimistic scenario*

Leaders of the EU-25 agree on the final text of the new Treaty with all parties able to claim satisfaction. Without going into the analysis of eventual ratification, the new Treaty is a sign that political elites from enlarged Union are able to compromise. This would be a big celebration for those who support both enlargement and deepening.

2) *Core group scenario*

Brussels is the beginning of a split between a 'core' lead by France (and Germany) and the 'peripheries' that exclude closer integration and are slowly marginalised. New structures create a new division inside Europe. This would be a realisation of the concentric circles idea (or a French Balladur plan). However divisions might create antagonisms that would be difficult to tame.

3) *Middle scenario. The kidnapping of Europe.*

All members agree on the conditions imposed by the 'moteur'. EU remains a single point of reference, however the distrust inside has profound effects on the operation of the institutions

4) *Punishment of the bad schoolboys*

The EU operates in an unchanged institutional framework. However in various instances Poland and Spain are punished for their intransigence, mostly through economic decisions.

Conclusion

December summit was a first frontal 'muscle flexing' in the enlarged EU. Yet this is most probably not the last one. The process of accommodation and rules-learning is time-taking. IGC was therefore badly timed.

I think that Brussels was an important event which forced Polish elites to redefine national position towards the enlarged Europe. Accession negotiations have taught Polish government to play it tough. The Convention also proved to be a power game where compromise was partly declared by the chairmanship. Confrontation and exclusion promoted a stubborn, fundamental and negative approach. The culture of 'veto' and 'being truthful to the essentials' prevailed.

However on the whole the reaction to the Brussels debacle proved a maturity of the class. Poland learnt the lesson and changed its strategy. Polish solitude (apart from Spain) was a sign that either we are wrong, or we are misunderstood. If we were the only right and all the others were wrong then there was no reason to stay inside an erroneous organisation.

Second stage in this thinking would be. If the new QMV rule is wrong than is the whole project positive for the country's interest. And if not then do the material benefits outweigh the institutional handicap. However this would be a short-sighted approach because the design of institutions has an imprint on the decisions adopted by them.

Brussels summit was another lesson, what the EU is. Furthermore it was an exercise in agreeing what we would like it to be. There was an important shift from a guest, knocking at the door to get inside and then a locator, having a say in how to put the furnish inside. Maybe the shift was too swift.

There are two dates in Polish history that are fundamental to understand the intransigent position. One is the partitions from between 1772 and 1795, which annihilated the country and put an end to the effort to reform the country (the Constitution of 3^d May). Second one is the Ribbentrop-Molotov pact and the following demise of the state in September 1939. The interwar experiment of Polish state, although very divisive was also a legacy for the future.