

POLISH AND EUROPEAN ECONOMIC CULTURE – A COMPARISON

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Abstract

The term "economic culture" describes historically shaped elements in the general culture of population, concerning values recognized and desired by a particular community, relating to the management and to the economic system of the states. The most important economic cultural behaviors include: awareness of economic choices, attitudes and behaviors of economic choices, the rules of the economic game. There is a theory which assumes that the globalization of the economy will lead to the emergence of a single, common to the whole world culture through enculturation, which is defined as a gradual process of growing of the individual (or group) into the culture or cultures through assimilation of cultural heritage of the surrounding community. More inculturation can be understood as a process of movement between different cultures come into contact and the transmission of cultural patterns. The article is an attempt at presenting the Polish economic culture against the European background and identifying the differences. It discusses the impact of national history and religion on the present shape of economic life, with particular regard to its negative aspects, i.e. the relatively high level of bribery and unemployment or the negative personal attitudes.

Keywords

economic culture; Europe; Poland

JEL Classification

A1; Z13; Z12

1. Introduction

Globalisation results in the growing interdependence of countries around the globe. The modern societies differ in their cultural heritage – traditions, customs, values, religion, history and living conditions that have been shaping the national character for centuries. Now those different national specifics meet in the international business and affect the economic, political, social and cultural relations.

2. European economic culture

The cultural identity of Europe is rooted in the Greek logos, the Roman laws and the Judeo-Christian tradition. From the biblical conception of man Europe drew the best of its humanistic culture, found inspiration for its artistic and intellectual creations, created systems of law and, not least, advanced the dignity of the person as a subject of inalienable rights (John Paul II, 2003). Europe, the structure of European Community, shall remain a meaningless concept if it does not constitute an embodiment and expression of a civilisation which comprehends our culture and values, a manifestation of who we are and an instrument to reach our goals. Whether we like it or not, the present constitutional discourse both reflects and builds the European civilization, id est the European identity. It would be ridiculous for the

discourse not to recognise the key role that Christianity plays in this civilization (Weiler, 2003).

The European economic culture started to take shape as early as in the times of the Roman and Byzantine empires. The adopted heritage of Greek philosophy was all for the autonomy and independence of thought. This resulted in the development of logical deduction, rationalism and empirical approach, which facilitated natural sciences and their practical applications in technology. Apart from philosophy, the Greek heritage spread the vision of a free citizen and democratic government. Since the 16th century, the development of political and legal concepts in Europe has been based on the Greek and Roman achievements in the discourse on political order or public and private law. These were the influences that gave rise to the European concepts of national sovereignty, republican order as opposed to monarchical rule and citizen rights as well as to the spread of fundamental concepts of the Roman law regarding contractual relationships (Siewierski, 2006). During the 19th century most European countries underwent a deep modernization process, made easier thanks to the policies of national governments whose role was largely enhanced in this period as a result of this process. The political foundations for the transformation were the British and French revolutions. France, Germany, northern Italy and Benelux countries, subsequently followed by Britain and other countries of Europe, saw a deep transformation of their societies. The British revolution and the French Revolution facilitated shifts in the society and the emergence of powerful middle class, which in turn helped the development of market economies and the industrial revolution which brought about the shift of power from the monarch to the parliamentary assembly. Nineteenth-century France experienced waves of republicanism and monarchy, but the monarchy had already a limited power. Those changes coincided with the development of industry, modernisation of agriculture, growth of cities and deep changes in all the spheres of life (Murawski, 1999). Those changes were the key factors shaping the economic culture of modern Europe. Another significant factor was the religions prevailing in individual European societies.

Christianity, which emerged as a synthesis of Jewish beliefs and Greek spirit, needed just three centuries to reach dominance in the originally hostile antique world. It brought along some new qualities. The Gospel teachings of truth, love and freedom went to meet the dreams and postulates of the giants of classical culture: Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, Sophocles and Euripides. Christianity entered the Greek and Roman world with no inherent negativity and was well able to incorporate the actual achievements of classical philosophy (Mazurkiewicz, 2004). The most important institutional survivor of the Roman Empire was the Christian Church (Lewandowski, 2004). Today, talking about the Christian roots of Europe may be considered a Christian attempt at an appropriation of the European past. While it is true that nobody can deny the historical influences of Christianity on European culture (Mazurkiewicz, 2004), Europe was not the birthplace of Christianity – it was born in Jerusalem, i.e. outside of Europe (John Paul II, 1979). In the European history, Christianity constituted a foundation of the community of various European peoples, using different languages and originally having their distinct customs and traditions. Christianity's contribution to emerging Europe was a common language, which made communication across the Latinised area possible. This common language was used by Christian institutions to unify and spread the liturgy, the teachings for believers, the funeral customs, the ways of aiding the poor, the obedience to authorities and the respect for higher social class (Siewierski, 2006). The spread of Christianity also meant the inculturation of Europe. In the early 17th century, after 80 years of civil and

international wars, fought mainly in Germany, Switzerland, France and the Netherlands, Europe got divided into four large Christian churches: Roman Catholic in Italy and Spain, Anglican in England, Calvinism and Lutheranism in Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Finland, the Baltics and Prussia. Quite a few countries became multi-confessional: Germany, Switzerland, France, Austria, Bohemia and Moravia, Transylvania, Hungary and finally Poland, which apart from Roman Catholics and Protestants also had a large Eastern Orthodox population. Eastern Europe and the Balkans had been predominated by the Eastern Orthodox church for some time already. Europe unified through a common religion was no longer there (Pomian, 1992).

The original Christian critique of striving for wealth, and especially of usury, i.e. a profit-oriented activity, got transformed in time. Max Weber's *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* presents the essence of the transformations in religious thinking that were decisive in changing the Christianity's stance on economic activity in general and on capitalist economy in particular. For the Roman Catholic church, a breakthrough in this respect was *Rerum Novarum*, a Papal encyclical published in 1891. Through forming specific social attitudes – a rational approach to economics – Christianity affected the European economic culture and business culture to a large extent. The Christian religious and moral tradition has indisputably left its clear mark on European history and even now it plays a large role in the life and beliefs of many Europeans. In the debates on European integration taking place during the Fourth Congress of Gniezno, the participants emphasized that the concept behind the European Union is for the independent countries to form a single organism and not to shun their independence to form a single European state. The EU is not only an economic, political and strategic organisation – it also has a distinct spiritual heritage as well as a religious dimension. Therefore its dialogue with various churches and communities is as important as the economic and political matters. Brussels combines the representatives of about 170 churches, religions and religious communities (Pikus, 2006). The contribution that the Christian politicians are able to bring into the process of European integration is the view of the inviolable dignity of every human person, on the basis of which a European culture of life can be built – a culture that recognizes not only the fact that Europe fares well economically and financially but also the fact that it is built on values that have made it great (John Paul II, 1997).

At the starting point for every European nation there was some different tribe, often hostile to each other, each having its own leader, priests, warriors and mob, its own beliefs, traditions and customs. There were linguistic groups incapable of mutual communication or communicating with great difficulty. There were social classes differing in their legal status, usually hereditary, the largest difference being between the slavery or serfage of ones and the freedom of others. However, at the end point we have quite a numerous community of at least several million people that differs from similar other communities in its own traditions, lifestyle, beliefs, institutions, symbols, area, common history shaping more or less unconscious behaviours, own monuments, familiar landscapes and own language. It is a community whose members are all citizens, equal in the eyes of law and enjoying identical rights to participate in the public life and identical obligations as prescribed by the laws in force.

In simple terms, the history of Europe can be divided into three phases of unity and subsequent conflict, each lasting for about five centuries. The first period lasted from the fall of the western part of Roman Empire to the final separation between the Eastern Christian churches and the Western Church (476 – 1054). This was a period of expansion for both Western and Eastern Christianity and of a widening gap

between the Latin and Greek culture. The second period was that of unification of the Latin Christianity (*christianitas*) and lasted till the beginning of the Reformation movements (1054 – 1517). The third one was an era of conflicts, religion-based at first and then international. This lasted till the Treaty of Rome which established a stable integration of European states (1517 – 1957). This period saw not only wars, uprisings or revolutions, but also fast development of science, economy, industry and democratic institutions (Siewierski, 2006).

The basis of Western European cooperation started taking shape after the Second World War when the countries had to face enormous destruction which made fast and efficient economic development impossible. The concept of joint work on the reconstruction of broken national economies originated in the USA. Churchill presented his idea of the 'United States of Europe' as early as 1946. The idea began to materialise a few years later with the establishment of the Council of Europe. Americans earmarked significant financial resources for the rebuilding of Europe within the framework of the Marshall Plan. The intensive effort taken to reconstruct a relatively strong Europe was related on the one hand to the economic need for increasing the trade turnover and building a strong competitive advantage, and on the other to the political plan for blocking Soviet expansion. An additional incentive for integration was the economic and political expansion of the United States which since WWII had been working on their position very effectively. Thus Europe made use of American aid but soon started to consider the US a competitor rather than an ally (Tobiszowski, 2006).

The adoption of European Social Charter, first by the EU-15 and then by the EU-25, popularised the belief in social Europe and liberal America. However, in reality Europe saw five different paths of development. The most significant of these is the model of social market economy (adopted in Germany, France, Austria and Belgium). Then there is the Scandinavian model of welfare state with its high level of taxation and the welfare offered not only to the employees and their families, but to all the citizens. The third model is a market economy with a well developed system of social benefits (UK, the Netherlands and Ireland). The fourth model could be nicknamed Mediterranean and is characterised by an over-regulated labour market and some economic statism components (Italy, Greece, Spain and Portugal). Finally, the fifth model is presented by the Central European countries under transformation (Bossak, 2006). The model for economic cooperation between those different models was established by the Treaties of the European Union. The Treaties incorporated the classical concept of integration that recognized five basic steps leading to full economic integration: free trade zone, customs union, common market, economic and monetary union and finally total integration (Balassa, 1961). The implementation of integrative activities within European Communities was based on practical premises, with the main incentive being the benefits of trade liberalisation and the positive economic climate favouring such benefits (Tobiszowski, 2006).

However, debates on the political organization of unified Europe have demonstrated that while the principle of 'unity in diversity' is generally adopted as the basis of forming European identity, its interpretations vary significantly. Some interpretations focus on the community as a whole while others stress the open multicultural Europe. The interpretations may be grouped into three basic viewpoints (Haller, 1994): 1) Europe as a 'new nation' in the making, whose unifying aspects are common ethno-religious identity, Christian tradition, rich cultural heritage and shared values, with the collective memory of common roots and historical experience; 2) 'United States of Europe' as a constitutional federal state, combining European nations within a joint system of political institutions, government and administration; and 3) 'Europe of

Fatherlands’, or an association of sovereign national states, abiding by the agreed laws but cooperating on different levels in different spheres and at different levels of integration.

Nearly all the discussion on the unification of Europe focuses on the legal and technical issues. However, a problem far more significant than that is the enormous diversification of national cultures, seen nowhere outside Europe. One of the fathers of European Communities, Jean Monet, is often quoted as saying that if he could start the project of European integration again he would start with culture (Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 2002). Every society is founded on values. They determine its character and the features making it stand out among the other forms of human social life. Europe as a society is a mode of turning those values alive. The European values include inviolable dignity of every human person, central role of family, significance of education, freedom of speech and religion, protection of the rights of individuals and groups, solidarity and common good, and the recognition of work dignity (Świątkiewicz, 2006). Experience proves that there is a distinct cultural difference between the north-western Europe (cool analysis, logic, systems and rationality) and the Mediterranean countries (interpersonal relations, following own intuition and emotions). Significant cultural differences occur even between the neighbouring nations, e.g. the Dutch of the Netherlands and the Flemish and Walloons of Belgium (Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 2002). Europe is first of all a definite culture. It is, so to speak, a continent of culture (Mazurkiewicz, 2004). It seems to me that there is no better combination than British inventiveness. French wit. Slav music. Italian cuisine. German perfection. Spanish reality, Dutch decency. Scandinavian fairness... in short, the best combination in the world (Hill, 2004). Thanks to its preservation of diversity, Europe is an area of a wealth of cultures and civilisations whose coexistence is a phenomenon in itself (Kadłubiec, 1987).

There were quite a few factors which secured Europeans the leading role in human development. According to Jeremy Rifkin, the American Dream is being replaced by the emerging European Dream that promises to bring humanity to a global consciousness befitting an increasingly interconnected and globalizing society. The European Dream emphasizes community relationships over individual autonomy, cultural diversity over assimilation, quality of life over the accumulation of wealth, sustainable development over unlimited material growth, deep play over unrelenting toil, universal human rights and the rights of nature over property rights, and global cooperation over the unilateral exercise of power. In contrast to the American Dream, the European Dream is based on preserving one’s cultural identity and living in a multicultural world (Rifkin, 2005). Europe, because of its unique historical experience of the past half-century – culminating in the past decade with the creation of the European Union – has developed a set of ideals and principles regarding the utility and morality of power different from the ideals and principles of Americans, who have not shared that experience (Kagan, 2003).

The existing economic culture that accepts the cultural diversity of Europe and its diversity of religions may be unable to resist secularization and the neo-liberal tendencies. This is indicated by the ongoing controversy about secularity and separation of the church from the state. This discussion and polemics are culture-based and are of interest to secular and Catholic intellectuals alike. Catholics see the danger of indifference in liberal democracy, while the laymen claim that ethical relativism is the only guarantee of an effective protection of the rights of individual. Laymen claim that a true democracy can not assign a privileged position to any particular ethics, especially the ethics of a particular religion, namely Roman Catholic, because – according to them – every religious faith entails a potential for

intolerance. Catholic intellectuals fear the removal of religious identity from the Christian cultural heritage which makes the basis of European culture (Mucci, 2005). Secularization is a very important phenomenon, associated with actions to eliminate the influence of religion. It manifests through the weakening of religious ties among the believers, a decrease in religious practice participation and the fading of moral and ethical standards developed and promulgated by religions. In Europe there is a large diversity of cultures, but in the process of European integration the member countries are beginning to create a uniform economic culture – the process is only in its infancy due to the differences in economic systems as well as to the fact that not all the European countries are European Union members. The unification is also attempted in relation to religion which is especially visible in the ongoing debates in France and Italy.

3. Economic culture in Poland

The early history of Poland is a string of successes in the establishment of Polish state, the strengthening and territorial expansion of the kingdom – from the Baltic to the Black Sea and from the Oder river to the Dnieper river. The outcome of this strive was a multi-cultural country, tolerant to diverse religions, social customs and political opinions – one of the first European countries to have laid the foundations to parliamentary rule and constitutional democracy. Despite all these achievements, however, the modern history of Poland is mainly a history of foreign rule (Orla-Bukowska, 2004).

The economic culture of Poland was affected by historical facts. One of the most significant determiners was the Slavic ethos. Even a cursory glance at the Polish past shows that Poles used to attach the highest value to fight, play and pray, and not to work or social discipline. The various opinions, both their own and foreign, portray Poles as a childish nation of knights-errant that disregard the prose of everyday life and has a habit of building castles in the air, are driven rather by emotions and illusory hopes than reasonable calculations. In contrast to the Germanic peoples who soon found themselves at the centre of European civilization, most of the Slavs occupied the periphery of Europe. This was why Poland had no native models of urban areas and had to use e.g. the German experience. From the early days of the Polish Nobles' Republic, the country's development took a specific path, other than that followed by the West. The fifteenth century saw the West already divesting themselves of the feudal forms of economy and releasing peasants, while the manorial farms operating on the basis of villains' work flourished in Poland and the 'later serfdom' prevailed. The manorial system was the economic basis of the Nobles' Republic which lasted for nearly three and a half centuries. This anachronistic economic system petrified the extensive methods of production and gave rise to negative attitudes towards work. The nobility despised the people who made their living from work. This deep contempt persisted even after the fall of the Nobles' Republic (Lewandowski, 1995). A sociological oddity of the First (Nobles') Republic was a record share of nobility in Polish society, unheard of elsewhere in Europe, and a small number of townspeople. The weakness of native bourgeoisie and the loss of independence meant that Poland was spared the European waves of bourgeois revolutions. A far-reaching consequence of the fact was that the noble culture models remained attractive long into the twentieth century (Lewandowski, 2004).

Another significant determiner of the modern economic culture of Poland was the post-war period. During the forty-five years of the People's Republic of Poland, individuals and families benefited from a highly developed form of welfare state.

Almost all the employees of state-owned companies and the public sector enjoyed the sense of basic social security. The lack of basic market competition, the full employment and the low wages did not favour any work ethics. There was no system of incentives for individual initiative, entrepreneurship or productive work (Lewandowski, 1995). While describing Poles, Hill notes that undoubtedly, the Poles do not like hard work, making up for that with their shrewdness. The opinion seems justified when you hear stories about Poles' black-market operations all over Eastern Europe: shortly after the fall of the Berlin Wall at the border crossing across the Oder there was a Lada bearing Polish plates stopped while driving east. There were seventy kilograms of meat found in it, hidden in the seats (Hill, 2004). The Poles' black market activities described above were related to the situation caused by the previous regime and any evaluation of this activity requires some knowledge of these issues.

The last two decades of the existence of centrally-planned economy formed a strictly economic motivation for work in the collective consciousness of Polish society. Consumer attitudes were shaped by the collectivist economic system that did not allow independent investments of any entities not constituting a registered company and also took most profits away from the workers into the centrally-planned investments and public consumption. This caused a permanent consumption deficit for households, and the related demand was not coherent with the system of economic institutions. Any increase in the monetary income of the population brought with it an increased demand for consumer goods, which together with the lack of motivation for investment and the supremacy of narrowly economic incentives led to a relative over-consumption. This increased tensions in the economy of shortage, as well as exacerbated the main conflict of the system: the competition for consumption. This gave rise to an economic vicious circle, i.e. any income growth brought a crisis of a relative over-consumption, the crisis deepened the market imbalance causing deviant economic phenomena, and the phenomena in their turn hampered the effectiveness of the public sector but in the short term intensified the personal income growth (Kozłowski, 2004).

In Poland, a controversial issue is the suggestion of building a capitalist economy on the grounds other than Protestant, e.g. on the Catholic tradition. On the one hand, it must be noted that some Catholics – at least Polish ones – feel a distance and revulsion upon any mention of 'capitalism'. The notion is repulsive to people morally or religiously sensitive, as it wears a mask of vulgar, aggressive advertising or an unscrupulous, inhuman employer, and brings connotations of a supermarket chain which transforms the concept of a holy Sunday into the one of lusty shopping. What's more, Polish capitalism still lacks established traditions, positive heroes and mythology. There are no personages or examples that would be inspiring and convincing, also to the deeply religious people. Indeed, it should be remembered that the building of a free market in America, in England or in post-war Germany was in a sense an end to the previous way of life. The modern Polish capitalism, devoid of positive traditions and legends, since the very beginning has been harassed by the black and negative myths. There is the firmly established, self-fulfilling myth of inherent exploitation and embezzlement, originating in part from the propaganda stories of communist Poland, and in part from the fears and prejudices of Polish opinion elites (Sowiński, 2005).

Seymour Martin Lipset, the eminent American political scientist, believed that Protestantism is most successful in teaching its followers the moral responsibility and uncompromising stance in public affairs and in business, while the Catholic, Anglican and Orthodox churches show more tolerance for human weakness, because clergy to some extent have the power to absolve an individual from a sense of responsibility

(Lipset & Lenz, 2003). Any capitalist economy built in the non-Protestant world is bound to face the locally prevalent religion while in search of its moral and aesthetic formation. It is just the quality and spiritual potential of such religious feelings that will determine whether Poles, Italians or Bulgarians learn that getting rich can mean endurance, grace and integrity (Sowiński, 2005). Lech Mażewski suggests that 'religion is considered an irreplaceable lesson in morality, [...] as it teaches tolerance and living a decent life. Through education for respecting the fellow humans and for honesty, Catholicism will strengthen the development of liberal virtues far better than the purely secular commitment to freedom' (Mażewski, 1993).

In Poland, both the institutional church and a very great many of its flock are trying to find their footing in the realities of the capitalist economy and the free market. The attitudes of the Catholic world towards the modern economy have changed. This is highly apparent in the very doctrine of the Church, as described in detail by a Dominican, Father Maciej Zięba in his book *Popes and Capitalism*. Likewise, in the *Centesimus Annus* encyclical, Pope John Paul II explicitly recommended an economic system based on the market and on company and private property to Catholics, while rejecting the welfare state project or some 'third way' between capitalism and socialism. In a manner akin to the Weberian spirit, he approvingly emphasized that capitalism can foster the virtues of responsibility and free enterprise. However, in line with the message of Protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism, he is critical of consumerism or any version of capitalism that ignores any private, moral or religious order (Sowiński, 2005).

The current Polish economic and business cultures are affected by the national characteristics of the Poles, which were formed in a historical process. Andrzej Walicki believes that the vices and virtues of the Poles acquired their shape mainly in the nineteenth century. 'During that century, and especially the first half, the Poles were still a nation of nobles, having no bourgeois capacity for well-organized, efficient work but cherishing a sense of honour, as manifested by emotional outbursts of patriotism. At that time, Poland had no rationally operating civil society of the *Gesellschaft* type; it still remained a confraternity of nobility, albeit spread over a huge territory; as such, it was an archaic community of the *Gemeinschaft* type, a federation of local neighbourhoods linked by direct and personalized relationships. These social conditions gave rise to a great national revival in response to the country's partition and this found an outlet not in patient work on building civilization and nation, as occurred with the Czechs, but in heroic deeds, national uprisings, the fight for the freedom of other nations and public demonstrations of patriotic feelings, as well as in symbolic gestures which forged the national myths (Walicki, 2001). Perfect examples of what are regarded in Polish culture as paradigmatic cases of courageous and honourable behaviour are the three consecutive uprisings of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries; the last, desperate attack of the Napoleonic campaign in Russia in 1812 led by Prince Józef Poniatowski; the refusal to surrender to the prevailing German forces in 1939; the Warsaw Uprising of 1944; and, finally, the post-war workers' strikes and 'Solidarity' movement against Soviet domination (Orla-Bukowska, 2004).

In a study conducted by the University of Economics in Katowice, a series of Polish-German-French seminars were held with the aim of identifying cultural differences values and characteristics of the nations involved in the study. The Poles taking part in the seminars identified the following national Polish values: patriotism, faith and family. They associated patriotism with love of the homeland and the struggle for its freedom and independence. The next value listed was faith, this being not only religious faith, but also faith in the future and in humanity. To the participants, this

was inextricably connected with the said patriotism. In their opinion, family was the 'little homeland', within which they feel secure and for which they are able to fight. The respondents also indicated their personal values as being love within the family, towards another person and as an expression of fraternity and tolerance; national and personal security, as associated with the issue of Polish independence in the context of the historical and economic situation; and belief in God, as an expression of the strong influence of religion on the Poles' present and future life. National heroes were also selected. They were Tadeusz Kosciuszko, considered a symbol of honour and the fight for an independent homeland; Lech Walesa, because of his achievements; and Pope John Paul II, whom they considered the greatest Pole in the national history, an emblematic figure symbolizing the values with which the Poles wish to identify (Karcz, 2004).

Edmund Osmańczyk compared Poles to eagles and Germans to ants. He wrote that the Germans are thrifty, provident, diligently following the paths traced out by their employers, economical, frugal, eating rationally even in poverty, meek and humble when in need, brazen and ruthless in prosperity, and always sober. He contrasted this with his perception of the Poles, who, in his opinion, are wasteful, reckless, mindful of neither their own time nor anyone else's, going their own ways, living in accordance with their own whim, inclined to rebel against both foreign violence and their own legislation, valuing improvisation higher than organization because the former flatters them individually and unites them in both poverty and prosperity, in the consumption of alcohol and in self-affirmation, while the latter bores them socially (Osmańczyk, 1982).

The most orderly and thorough concept of the national Polish character was given by Kazimierz Dąbrowski. He distinguished eight positive and twelve negative national characteristics. Those he considered positive include the tendency to idealize, romanticism, spirituality, mysticism; courage, brotherhood, chivalry, a quixotic nature; humanity, gentleness, generosity, an absence of cruelty; sincerity, truthfulness, faithfulness, keeping commitments; hospitality, especially to strangers from distant parts; persistence, anxiety, infantilism, susceptibility to development; a sense of freedom, independence, individuality; enormous talent in various fields. He devoted much more space to the negative features of the Polish national character. The first one he listed, as giving rise to a number of others, was excessive excitability, emotional lability, volatility and hot temper. To him, Poles are likely to go for the extremes; either all or nothing. Their weaknesses include recklessness, superficiality, a tendency towards rash synthesis and mistaking their own desires for reality. Personalisation is another negative trait. In social relations, the Polish people take account of the general impression, of a gesture, a smile, and manners, and attach less weight to objective evidence. What is of primary importance is a simple judgement: I like something or I dislike it. Another negative feature is cliquishness, which may be due to a susceptibility to the influence of small, well-organized groups. The fifth negative feature listed is a tendency for selfishness and dissent. The predisposition for selfishness and factiousness results in a tolerance of impunity. In addition, the Polish nation is characterized by poor organizational abilities, the reverse side of Polish improvisation, a lack of perseverance when it comes to mental effort, the cult of incompetence, the neglect of people of value, self-centeredness, and a lack of keen self-assessment (Dąbrowski, 1992).

Descriptions of the Polish national character often emphasize the importance of the councils and parliamentary gatherings in the noble Republic, during which the loud, quarrelsome, drunken atmosphere created what has been dubbed 'the Polish hell', which means ruthless envy, malevolence and the underestimation of outstanding

compatriots (Lewandowski, 2004). The period of foreign rule, first Prussian, and then that of Germany, Russia, and the Austrian Empire, – was a difficult one for Poland and the Polish people, but inculturation, especially from the Germanic culture in the areas of Wielkopolska and Silesia, forged a work ethic that distinguishes this part of Poland from those which had never felt the influence of a culture whose primary feature is respect for work and order. According to Teresa Bogucka, the latter represent ‘a contempt for work, laziness and a lack of perseverance combined with bungling. During the 1950s and 1960s the Polish language developed such descriptive phrases as ‘pre-war work’, and ‘pre-war workman’, which meant that Poles were aware of the deterioration of the former quality of work and ethics under post-war conditions. And yet today, there are many places where people work well, which proves that laziness is not a feature inherent to the Polish national character but, rather, one acquired in the decades-long process of corruption. Polish behaviour still shows traces of some knightly-lordly-factious or villain-serf-mutinuous ways of thinking, but these are only traces of the distant past. The fifty years of communism which constitute the more recent past have left far more visible grooves of thought that we keep falling into, but, all in all, the mixture has also produced something new, a quality which has yet to be named” (Bogucka, 1997).

4. Conclusions

Today's economic culture in Poland is founded on a new system that has been transformed since 1989, and since 1 May 2004 also on the impact of the European Union regulations, whose requirements Poland must abide by. Still, the historical past has an impact on today's economic and business culture. Its negative effects can be seen for instance in the low reputation of Poland as a country with a very high level of bribery. As Prof. Jan Miodek writes, ‘I consider any attempts to scare Poles away from the united Europe to constitute a severe socio-political fault and a case of ingratitude towards the gift of history; the expressed concerns for Polish values – a case of pharisaic hypocrisy; and the preaching of endangerment to the very existence of the Polish language – a symptom of magical thinking, completely detached from the context of the history of our native language’ (Miodek, 2006). Polish accession into the EU structures may change both the economic and business culture through inculturation of the positive models from the Western European countries with a longer and better experience in business. Through social rehabilitation the Polish business and intellectual elite may stand a chance of overcoming the lingering attitudes of the communist era and following a path that in a few years will not earn such an acute criticism as the centrally-controlled economy.

When comparing the Western capitalist democracies to the former socialist economies, it should be noted that the latter face many problems that do not allow for a rate of economic development matching the one enjoyed by the countries with a long tradition of market economy. In the post-communist countries, the public still believes that it is the state who should be responsible for its citizens and organize their life so that they do not have to struggle against any problems. In Poland, a large percentage of the population looks forward to benefitting from social aid. These people believe that they deserve aid from the state and are often unwilling to work and become independent. This is especially visible with the shortage of labour supply in the Polish labour market, emerging due to large emigration figures and a simultaneous increase in investments co-financed by the EU. Polish economic culture gets reformed in a new environment of democracy and market economy, but the

impact of forty-five years of centrally-planned economy still have an impact on the rate of development.

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