



# Komentarze natolińskie

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## Political union: *imagine if you can...*

Undoubtedly, the notion of political union, which is utilized as a solution provided for the EU in crisis suffers from the very vague definition. Sometimes, one may have the impression that those who use this term in the political debate consider it as a sort of elegant excuse for doing nothing and petrifying the *status quo* in the Union of today.

On the other hand, we have indeed witnessed significant changes in the institutional and legal design of the Union since 2010. European Stability Mechanism is established, Fiscal Compact is accepted, recently we had an agreement about the first pillar of the banking union,

and the role of the Central European Bank is currently undergoing a significant shift which transforms it into the most central and powerful institution in the Union's architecture.

All this provokes the debate whether we are witnessing the real turning point in the European integration and raises questions about the political union crowning inevitably the whole process of changes in the euro zone. Some politicians contributed to strengthening of that impression by asserting that old modes of intergovernmental and supranational integration became obsolete, and are no longer appropriate to the situation we have in Europe today. They were also

promoting the new union method as Angela Merkel did in her famous speech from 2010.

However, all these developments do not support the claim that we are now on the path leading to establishment of a real political union. New institutional arrangements should be rather perceived in terms of crises management and buying of time, although they will have potentially significant political, social and economic consequences for all member states. What more, European political leaders of today are not able to assess these consequences. This issue lies far beyond their electoral horizon they are mostly concentrated on.

As a result, it is difficult not to be a sceptic to all expectations *vis-à-vis* the idea of

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turning point in the European integration as well as to the alternative that if the EU does not become a federal superpower it will drift to the global insignificance. As a matter of fact, such an alternative is little old-fashioned and missing the point. A key problem is whether we are going to buy time for reinventing the concept of the European integration by taking lesson from the current crisis and abandon false premises it was based on or we decide to stick to the way of institutional development, which could be character-

ized as “crisis to crisis”. Such strategy is visible at least since the negotiations on the Nice Treaty. Member states cannot solve problems of the EU by missing the question of democracy. Real changes came not without and against the will of people.

The European Central Bank apart from the Council became the most influential manager of the current crisis. This institution is by definition separated from the mainstream of the political, democratic legitimization. It means that on the basis of current anti-crisis activities two modes of integration were strengthened: on the one hand the technocratic-supranational

one and on the other - if we look at the European Council as well as the European Stability Mecha-

nism - the cabinet and intergovernmental one. Simultaneously, we observe in many European societies increase of the democratic, bottom-up disagreement *vis-à-vis* the implemented austerity measures and fiscal coordination. Such disparity between democratic societies, governmental policies and technocratic solutions cannot be maintained for a long time. Democracy gave the citizens of European demoi (not European demos) the unique feeling of being rightful to forge their

own live and future. Historically apart from the economic freedom of individuals this right was treated as a main European achievement. Are we ready to abandon this way of life?

In this grim image, we can find positive aspects as well, however they may slightly disappoint you. Point one: each institutional design after the crisis has to be conformed with the desires of democratic society to shape their ways of sustainable development, even if they act in the framework of the mutual commitments and obligations in the EU. There is no shortcut from that.

And point two: do not forget - the European Union is already the political system, a complicated but functioning one. The concept of the political union whatever it may mean is therefore misleading or at least premature in our current situation. The European Union needs to be reshaped, reinvented in order to create a link between the new anti-crisis arrangements and existing structures of democratic legitimization. The priority should be alteration of the system, not necessarily its political extension. Otherwise we can face three serious threats: firstly we can petrify the way of institutional design from crisis to crisis; secondly we will increase the disparity between technocratic solutions and democratic expectations which is extremely dangerous for the European project; and thirdly we can end the process toward the political union in the circle

of much decreased number member states than in the Union of the 28.

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