

Position Paper: Poland

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The tumultuous conflict for the right balance between environmental protection/ sustainability and economic and political stability has been a 'hot topic' in international negotiations for more than three decades. The question, whether mitigation or adaptation is the best path forward, is still unanswered as is the question of how the global economy is going to pay for the necessary transformation (Nordhaus, 2018). Globally, different solutions to those questions range from a rapid transformation towards reusable energy sources (RES) or technical innovation (e.g. clean-coal technologies [CCT]) to a wide-ranging readjustment of our economic system: capitalism (Klein, 2014). Within the EU, member states prefer a mix of different policies to ensure that the Paris Agreement and its goals for 2050 can still be achieved. The main question, again, is to what extent should the European community endanger economic growth and political harmony in an attempt to enforce strict environmental measures, which still carry risks (e.g. carbon leaking) and are based on scientific assumptions. While for the most time, politicians preferred political and economic stability over too strict environmental measures, the public concern and the alarming scientific reports have changed the perspective. On the one side, some EU members demand immediate action to limit global warming to 1.5 or 2°C respectively to reduce the challenging impacts on ecosystems, human health and well-being (J.P. Morgan, 2020). Alternatively, some experts warn that the EU is only responsible for 7.8% of global GHG emissions and that a complete abandonment of fossil fuels will entail concerns of energy security, European living standards (Rybak and Rybak, 2019) and the aforementioned political and economic stability.

Starting in 1989, Poland has experienced a socio-economic and political transition from communism, single-party rule, and centrally planned economy to democracy, party pluralism and capitalism based on a free market economy. The World Bank (2017) described Poland as an "outstanding economic and development success story, moving from middle-income to high-income status in record time" and attributed their success to its institutions, namely the rule of law, property rights, democratic accountability and free market institutions. Since joining the EU in 2003, it has used the stability of the European community to reinforce and strengthen its own institutions (World Bank, 2017). The fact that Poland continued to record positive growth during the financial crisis and avoided a collapse of the banking sector (OECD, 2015) present evidence that the mix of sound macroeconomic policies, prudent fiscal policies and a clear vision of a socially responsible market economy provided stability and enabled sustainable socio-economic growth (World Bank, 2017). This development was acknowledged by the FTSE, which upgraded Poland's status in 2018 to 'developed market'. Thereby, Poland became the first country to be promoted within the last decade and the first former Soviet Bloc country to gain this status (Shotter, 2018).

Based on the UNFCCC the fight against global warming rests on two pillars: international cooperation and the principle of common but different responsibility (IOS-PIB, 2018). Poland signed the Kyoto protocol and achieved the set goals for the 2008-2012 period, reducing GHG emissions by ca. 30% in comparison to the base year (OECD, 2015). As the focus lies on ensuring economic growth and stability, Poland has not been a frontrunner in climate change policies but accepts the binding international and regional agreements (Zbigniew, 2019). However, it must be noted that the implementation of EU climate policy represents a big challenge for the Polish economy and political stability. The historical and socio-economical context of our country provides Poland not only a

specific position in the European community but also implies the polish diplomatic efforts to stay sovereign. This does not mean that the polish people, represented through its democratic government, are negating the consequences of climate change or are not willing to contribute effort to the global project of a “cleaner future”. It should be more seen as an appeal to Poland’s more developed neighbours and historical partners that there are specific conditions in our national state which will determine our individual actions towards our collective goal. The collective European goal is defined as a “long term project”. A project which can not be achieved by forcing the same responsibilities on inhomogeneous states, especially with the assumption which is not clearly proven to be the only way to reach the European collective goals. The European union with its long traditions of social equality and esteem for sovereignty, represents the principle of common but different responsibilities. That is what the polish people believe in.

But what shall those different responsibilities in a polish context aim for? Well due to the fact that our country represents the biggest coal dependent state in the European union, we will not contribute to the European coal plan for 2050. The scientific researches have proven clearly, that a radical ambition to transform the polish energy sector will not improve any environmental or human conditions in general (Rybak 2019). But what is certain is that it will provide an unstable economic situation in the Poland national state, which can not be tolerated. Neither by the 100.000 proud polish coal miners, which represent a part of the polish independent culture (Koszowski 2020), nor by the polish representatives. Poland is ready to take its place in a rational transition. We recognize the current ambition of the European commission and are willing to be part of this contingent. Acknowledging the current situation, we put our focus on the concepts of “Clean Coal Technologies (CCT/CPM). Highly efficient prototypes are presented by other developed countries such as Switzerland or the United States. Such activities would ensure the survival of Poland’s indispensable coal companies on the Polish market and secure a “greener future” (Rybak 2019). The term clean coal technologies define all processes and methods that are used to limit the negative impact of coal burning on the natural environment. But as stated before, this requires a massive amount of investment. Investments which can not be bordered only on the shoulders of the polish people. So, if there is a collective interest in being prepared for tomorrow's outcome, it should also be carried collectively. So instead of formulating concepts which definitely favor some states and penalize others, the European commission should create strategies on the base of fairness and social equality.

Vetoing the EC’s climate neutrality goal for 2050 does not mean that Poland will give up on its plan to lower emission (Abnett, 2020). The Climate Minister of Poland had said that Poland still wants to achieve climate neutrality but only at its own pace (Abnett, 2020). Although the country still depends on fossil resources to produce energy, the share of coal dependence was lowered to 78% from 95% between the years 1990 to 2016 (IOS-PIB), while biofuel and renewable energy sources increased 10,5%. Consequently, public environmental investment increased by 25% (World Bank, 2017). However, Poland is still poorer than other countries in Western Europe, and still has gaps in infrastructure and technologies (Strzałkowski, 2018). Despite steady growth in Poland’s economy since 1990 , the GDP per capita still ranks in the bottom 5 of OECD countries (OECD, 2015). Thus, Poland needs additional external assistance to finance just transition.

The new Multiannual Financial Framework MFF presented by Finland proposes less cohesion funds for the years 2021-2027 which results in a 23% lower share for Poland (Ciobanu, 2019) while simultaneously demanding speeding up the transformation of the energy sector. There is an obvious need for more funds - more than what the EU is willing to provide until 2050. An estimate of 900b€ is expected by Poland to fully transform its economy to carbon neutrality and the EU can only provide 100b€ to the whole EU countries which leaves Poland with two options. Either the EU budget will be

significantly increased or the transition will only fully occur after 2050. Poland employs almost half of the 237,000 people who work in the coal industry in the EU; therefore, it's highly likely that Poland will face huge bills with decarbonizing its economy (Abnett, 2020).

On a recent epidemic of the spread of COVID-19, the Polish government announced its concern of the impact of the pandemic on the economy of Poland. The Climate Minister of Poland has said that the crisis is weakening the economy, causing delay in energy transition projects, and companies are not functioning well to fund in investing in new technologies which overall makes it more difficult to meet the EU's climate goal set to 2050 (Abnett, 2020).

However, there are a lot of other roles which Poland can take when it comes to who is able to provide innovative visions for a fair transformation. In some situations, Poland could even take leading positions. The geographical and geopolitical position of Poland has opportunities far beyond the current European understanding. Gigantic Off-Shore parks in the Baltic Sea, adapted to the never-ending resources of the wind and tides. Vast lands ready for reforestation. Futuristic technologies, which could change the whole understanding of man made climate change and how to mitigate this new situation. All these are visions. But Visions need financial support. If the Polish representatives would accept European single-minded vision, none of those concepts, neither the CCT nor the revolutionary transitions, would be possible to achieve. A strong independent Poland is not only necessary for a collective European project, it is also the only way Poland sees its position in such a Union of democratic, sovereign and liberal states.

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