

# **Polish alumni of foreign universities – a case of re-aculturation**

**The analysis of Polish graduates of foreign universities upon their return to  
Poland, Polish Alumni Networks and their impact on public service and social  
capital**



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## **Introduction**

According to the recent available data published by OECD, the estimated number of Polish students undertaking various programs of Higher Education abroad stands on roughly 40 000 students. This number is measured annually; therefore it does include as well students enrolled on exchange programs, such as Erasmus, Erasmus Mundus or bilateral exchanges between universities. Focusing on those with permanent enrollment (full-time degree entirely undertaken within a foreign educational unit), the primary destinations include Great Britain (ca. 10 000) and Germany (ca. 8 000), followed by the Netherlands, Denmark, France and Italy. A sharp increase in these numbers has occurred since 2004, when due to the EU accession Poles have become classified as *Home Students*, thus being subjected to the same fees as local students in respective countries. However, this increase in numbers has neither been followed nor come about as a result of governmental programs or comprehensive policies of support. Therefore, preliminarily, it is possible to advance a thesis that the increased quality of public service and education among young Poles, with emphasis on better prospects of receiving support of any kind for foreign education, are indeed to be observed, however the public administration is here a beneficiary of the third sector organisations and their activities rather than of its own comprehensive and institutional strategies. It is possible to observe a significant change of governmental discourse (into a pro-youth and pro-international students), but this has not yet been followed by a set of empirical measures incentivising polish young graduates of foreign universities to return and work in Poland.

## **Governmental approach to students and young graduates of foreign universities**

With regards to the governmental policies supporting financially the students abroad, Poland falls considerably short of these solutions both locally as well as nationally. In terms of hard financial support, the government does not have any scholarship scheme or a fund which could potentially provide students with financial help. What is more, Polish students – unlike students from countries such as Norway, Sweden, Denmark and Great Britain – cannot count with state-based loans to provide funding for tuitions fees

or maintenance costs. In other words, a Polish student during his degree outside Poland cannot count with any official financial support provided by the government.

Within the last 25 years, most of the governments paid only lip service to the matter of higher education. Be that as it may, there has been a noticeable change in approach during the last two mandates of the Civic Platform (PO) governments (2007-present). This government itself paid, at least on the level of rhetoric, a significant emphasis on the situation of Polish students abroad. A partial explanation for that shift in approaches is attributed to the growing and more pressing issues of emigration and aging of society. More and more young Poles were leaving the country every year, with prospects of undertaking studies with best and most prestigious academic institutions on the continent rather than coming back. As a response to this issue, especially the 2<sup>nd</sup> government of Donald Tusk (2011-present) has been strongly advocating a return of young graduates to Poland. The present state of affairs, however, has largely remained on the level of rhetoric and public declarations. The government has not employed a coherent, centralized strategy of incorporating young graduates of foreign universities into the schemes of public administration. None the less, different ministries and administrative units have implemented independent schemes of internships and graduate employment. Examples of such modalities are presented below.

### **Internships, placements and employment – then and now**

According to a brief field preliminary research conducted by means of interviews with Polish students from University of Oxford, University of Cambridge and London School of Economics (as well as other schools listed in relevant section of this paper), who completed trainings and internships of some form within the units of public administration within last 5 years, the hitherto prevailing approach to applying for these positions was based either on informal arrangements or personal inquiries. Students from top universities admit that they were often approached by the ministries themselves, in particular by Ministry of Foreign Affairs (two times mentioned in University of Cambridge and three times mentioned in University of Oxford). Since the preliminary research has been focused on the student population in Great Britain (most accessible data at this stage), the participants attribute the increased interest on behalf

of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to the person of Radek Sikorski, Head of the Diplomatic Service and Oxford Alumnus himself. Consequently, through various student initiatives (which are elaborated further in the paper) such as Science Polish Perspectives, Polish Economic Forum and Congress of Polish Student Societies in the UK, students gained interest from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, manifested first through visits of officials at the universities and visits of student delegations in the Ministry upon special invitation. As this ministry has been the most active (11 students identified thus far), I use this unit as a basic unit of analysis which illustrates the general regularities that appear among students' interest in public service career. I further expand on the first approaches, selection criteria and application process.

### **Ministry of Foreign Affairs**

Through meetings and cooperation on events, students declare that they have established personal, informal connections with officials from the diplomatic service, often on executive positions. These relationships have often resulted in internship offers during the summer vacation periods. Five interviewed students believe that the prestige of the university and the informal ties were features of particular importance for their candidacies and they were given preferential treatment within the application procedure. Moreover, according to undisclosed, informal sources of information from the diplomatic service, diplomatic units within countries where Polish students operate actively were given central indications on providing substantial help (both financially and in terms of know-how) to student initiatives. As a result of these ties and relationships, students completed internships both within home units in Warsaw, as well as on diplomatic placements abroad (including Polish Embassies in London, United Kingdom, Buenos Aires, Argentina and Madrid, Spain).

For students from other universities the process of applying for internship was more bureaucratized and complex. Interviewed students from Aberdeen University (Scotland), Aberystwyth University (Wales), Freie Universität Berlin (Germany) and Maastricht University (Netherlands) declared that in their perception the successful application process was largely possible due to their persistence in email conversations. The general difference appears to be that students from smaller and less prestigious

universities expressed more initial interest and initiative (they have inquired about the possibilities of internships). Students from more prestigious universities were in turn less interested initially and often treated the idea of a summer internship within public administration as an innovative addition to their curriculum, rather than a valuable asset in job-seeking prospects within public service. In fact, students that inquired about internship opportunities themselves, were often representing traditional academic background that is conducive to public service and diplomatic placements, such as political science (4), sociology (1), law (1) and international relations (3). In turn students from more prestigious institutions were recruited to these services despite academic background inapplicable to the requirements of public service (for example, one Cambridge student has been offered a placement in an Embassy with a degree in pharmacology). This leads to a conclusion that the administration responsible for recruitment was driven largely by the prestige of the academic entity a candidate was representing, rather than sharp competences that transpired through the application. In other words, the prestige and reputation of the university plays an important role in the internship recruitment procedure.

In terms of practicalities, the Ministry does not have an official internship scheme; however it does possess a general, coherent policy on candidates' recruitment, which is available through the web page ([www.msz.gov.pl/praktyki](http://www.msz.gov.pl/praktyki)). The general requirements include filling out the form on personal data, a cover letter justifying the choice of particular unit (both home and foreign) and a curriculum/resume, as well as declaration of lack of criminal record. No official documents from the academic unit are required, although the name of academic unit is to be written down in the application form. There is no differentiation between student of home universities and foreign universities in the eligibility criteria. The internships are required to last a minimum of 1 month and the maximum of 3 months. A standard student internship (here with no exception) for an undergraduate student (although in Poland, this condition is applicable to all the student, as most of the degrees in Poland are unified, last 5 years and conclude with a master) is unpaid. A graduate internship, in turn, is labelled as a placement and it might be paid, depending on the financial possibilities of the unit.

Although the official application submission and selection criteria ought to be conducted through central administration in Warsaw, even if a given candidate applies to an overseas unit, candidates, especially from prestigious international universities admit they have bypassed the central administration and contacted directly the unit of their interest. Therefore, from students' point of view, without knowing the official selection mechanism, it appears as if it was the foreign unit that was in charge of selection, not the central HR department. After submission of the applications (both electronic and hard copy) – first to the chosen unit, as in candidates' perception, again, this was the unit in charge of making the decision, the foreign unit usually asked to resend the documents to the central office in Warsaw. According to the legal regulations of the ministry, an official confirmation (followed by a positive security check) could only be issued 45 days before the first day of internship in a foreign unit. It needs to be issued by the central ministerial administration, not the foreign unit itself. Therefore there was usually a time lag between the moment of sending the application, a positive preliminary assessment of the foreign unit and the official confirmation on behalf of the ministry. However, on the stage of central clearance and confirmation no case of rejection has been observed. All 11 candidates that were preliminarily selected by their units of interest (according to the interviewees, the unit always accepted candidates if they could provide a working station for them), were subsequently accepted by the Ministry and completed their internships.

This leads to a conclusion that the process of selection for internships and placements although shaped along the lines of official requirements and policies, in practice was conducted informally and favored candidates from prestigious foreign universities, regardless of their academic background.

Moreover, it is also possible to observe significant fluctuations in the process of acceptance students from various years of study. According to the official regulations of the Ministry, the internships are possible to be undertaken in two schemes – the student internship and the graduate student internship. Applications for the former – as the internal regulations stand – are accepted only after having completed at least 3 years of full-time university degree or equivalent. This is justified by the reform in higher education system implemented through the Bologna Process, which aims at unifying the

courses of university degrees across Europe. Due to Poland's submission to this program, most degrees in humanities, although still continued to a master's level by vast majority<sup>1</sup> of candidates, grant a bachelor's diploma after 3 years (however, as said before, the popular perception of a graduate still applies to someone with a master's). Therefore the Ministry does not accept candidates below this threshold of experience. Be that as it may, students of foreign prestigious universities often are exempted from that regulation. Accordingly, 6 interviewed candidates, coming from, respectively: Oxford University, Cambridge University, London School of Economics and Imperial College, London, admitted that they were accepted to their ministerial internship already after completing two (5 cases) or even only one (one case) year of study. These were applications sent to serve in both central Warsaw offices, as well as foreign placements. Similar cases were found among interns of the Ministry of Finance and the National Bank of Poland. On the other hand, students from less prestigious universities – here including Aberystwyth University (Wales), Aberdeen University (Scotland) and Maastricht University (Netherlands) were in each case rejected from the internship schemes precisely on the grounds of not having met the official criteria of having completed at least 3 full-time years of study. These findings result consistent in the argument that prevails in most of this paper's analytical sections – the primacy and comparative advantage of students from prestigious universities. Public administration in their case is more likely to bypass its own regulations, what not only proves the hypothesis that more recognizable academic entities on candidate's curriculum give them an advantage in recruitment procedure, but also demonstrates that such process is highly personalized. Among the interviewed students, three confessed that similar restrictions on having completed the minimum of three full-time years of study were encountered by them whilst applying to private sector institutions, mostly in consultancy industry (McKinsey, Boston Consulting Group). However, in all three cases, the applications to private sector has all been rejected, every single one with the justification of not having met the student experience criterion (3 years of enrollment). This disparity between public and private sector shows that the public administration is much more likely to model and re-shape the application process depending on the given pole of candidates, what might be seen as a sign to attract young skilled students and

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<sup>1</sup> In 2011, out of approximately 113 000 graduates on master's level nationwide, 106 000 accomplished the bachelor degree and proceeded to postgraduate level in the following year.

graduates to public sector at any cost. Private firms, in turn, have mostly a very rigid framework for recruitment and do not give preference to any sort of particular candidates.

### **Ministry of Internal Affairs (Home Office)**

Until 2012, the Ministry of Internal Affairs was not the primary destination of interest for foreign students interested in public service career, losing to Ministry of Foreign Affairs, National Bank of Poland and Ministry of Finance. However, an important change has been introduced with the appointment of Bartłomiej Sienkiewicz (non-partisan) as Minister of Home Affairs in November 2012. Since then, Home Office has become a prime example of the new governmental strategy aimed at bringing young graduates of foreign universities back to Poland. Since summer 2012, the Ministry has put in motion a piloting program of internships directed specifically at international universities students. In comparison to the hitherto existing programs, the Home Office scheme is by far the most structured and transparent, with clear selection and assessment criteria. This program has been heavily publicized in nationwide polish media as well as through students' and alumni associations. Sienkiewicz himself declared a public support to this program as stressed its importance in a public interview with *Newsweek Polska* (15/07/2013). According to his own words, he wants this program to be 'more than just a mere annotation in the curriculum' and young students and graduates are important because 'Poland needs young and intelligent people who would bring a fresh perspective on home affairs, drawing from their experience abroad'. Its main aim is, according to Sienkiewicz, to attract young Poles with prospects of public employment.

In terms of procedural structure, the program commences with submitting the initial application to the central ministerial office in Warsaw. Then selected candidates are invited for a brief visit in the Ministry (the first edition lasted 3 days: 7-10.01.2013), which is labelled as *shadowing*. During this visit, students observe the tasks and procedural framework of everyday office work within different segments. Thus they gain inside knowledge of the Ministry's structure. The first edition of the program (the only upon which the data have been disclosed) included ten participants from different universities, including University of Oxford, University of London, University College

London, New York University Shanghai, University College Utrecht i Université Jean Moulin – Lyon 3. After the shadowing activities, the participants have been divided into groups, assigned to particular supervisor from the ministerial employees and were asked to conduct a case study analysis from various aspect of the Ministry's spectrum of tasks. Importantly, the case studies varied greatly from civic issues, migration and international cooperation to security and matters concerning modern internal threats to national stability. The trainees were subsequently asked to make oral presentations about the outcomes of their case studies and assessed by a board of supervisors. The best trainees were then selected and invited to undertake full-time 3 months long summer vacation internship in the Ministry with a full remuneration.

None the less, in this particular case, the practical outcomes of the program have risen large controversies within polish media. The first two trainees selected for a full-time summer employment have been assigned to positions within the Ministers' office and board of advisors, both of which are legally composed of appointed officials. What is more, they have been allocated these positions without a prior completion of at least one full-time higher education degree, what constitutes a violation of Polish legal requirements for administrative position upon appointment. Eventually, since they were employed through a project-based contract, their salaries did not include income tax and as a consequence their net remunerations was relatively high in comparison with permanent advisees (ca.4 500 PLN according to unofficial journalistic sources, with average public sector salary oscillating around 3 000 PLN). These appointments have triggered a short-lived scandal in Polish public opinion, but this has not discouraged Minister Sienkiewicz from conducting the program further. According to the present state of affairs, the program has encompassed three brief study visits and is ready to embrace a second round of full-time summer trainees this coming June.

Similar programs – although not as structured as the Home Office example and resembling more the example of Ministry of Foreign Affairs have been employed in the National Bank of Poland (NBP), Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Defense and Ministry of Digitalization.

## **Conclusions on employment in public administration**

Although there has been a clear shift in governmental policies aimed at providing a more amicable policies towards polish students and young graduates of foreign universities, the facilitated access to internships and more structured training schemes have not been reflected in an increase in full-time employment that would follow these policies. Out of the 25 interviewed students, only two have inquired about a possibility of full-time employment in public administration and only one has undertaken such. However, it is important to point out that a large share (21) of these students at the time of research were still enrolled on a full-time degree in academia, thus the numbers regarding inquiries for full-time employment remain to be verified in autumn 2014. Most of the students (17) do not categorically exclude a possibility of working for the public service in the future. As a main motivation they indicate the prestige and importance of public service as well as the possibilities of applying their academic background to practical tasks. However, these are flattened by the impediments students and young graduates identify. Those that appear most often are: low salaries (24/25 cases), bureaucratization of the public system (22/25), low possibilities of promotion and career development (22/25), fear of politicization and lack of meritocracy (20/25). In conclusion, students recognize the importance of public service and the social prestige which follows such employment as a matter of principle and most often agree to intern or train for shorter period of time as students. However in a long-term perspective they become discouraged by the general image of politicized and low-paid job without clear career development path, for which they see themselves as overqualified.

### **Successful stories - graduates of foreign universities in public administration**

A second important determinant in the shift aimed at more incentivized policies towards young graduates and students is attributed to the presence of high-profile politicians and members of cabinet who are graduates of foreign universities themselves. Again, a paramount change in this dimension has been brought about by the second government of PO (2011-present). Within this cabinet, politicians with degrees from foreign entities include former Deputy Prime Minister Jacek Rostowski, Minister of

Foreign Affairs Radek Sikorski and former Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Mikołaj Dowgielewicz, Minister of Finance Mateusz Szczurek and Minister of Digitalization Rafal Trzaskowski. Other public officials with profiles relevant to the scope of this research include former negotiator of Poland-EU accession process within UKIE (Office for the Committee on European Integration) Paweł Świeboda (today the director of DEMOSEuropa think tank) and Marcin Zaborowski, head of Polish Institute of Foreign Affairs. Moreover, in order to differentiate the sample of successful returns of young graduates to Poland, the section will be expanded on profiles of graduates who are employed in both public and private sector, however occupying non-executive positions. These profiles will include Grzegorz Lewicki, a columnist of WPROST weekly magazine and Aleksandra Kaniewska, international policy analyst in the Civic Institute in Warsaw<sup>2</sup>

Within the further stage of research (summer 2014), a detailed examination of low-profile public administration employees will be conducted in order to identify younger graduates who only recently have been contracted on a full-time position.

In order to clear the sample, some preliminary remarks will be made. Due to the fact that Jacek Rostowski is a citizen of Great Britain and has undertaken education in Britain in 1960s, mostly due to his mixed origin, his profile remains beyond the scope of this research paper. Radoslaw Sikorski, although also representing the group of alumni that date back to the pre-1989 times, is maintained within the sample as his pro-international orientation has been influential on governmental policies towards young graduates. As a consequence, I focus on younger members of the government and other bodies. Particular importance will be given to graduates who completed their studies after Polish accession to the European Union. I now briefly present the personal profiles of the following alumni of foreign universities:

- **Radosław Sikorski**
- **Mikołaj Dowgielewicz**
- **Mateusz Szczurek**
- **Rafal Trzaskowski**

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<sup>2</sup> Here the Civic Institute ought to be read as a Quango (quasi-non-governmental organisation). Even though the Polish legal framework does not include this type of organisation, the Civic Institute receives substantial donation from public budget for several projects and initiatives.

- **Paweł Świeboda**
- **Aleksandra Kaniewska**
- **Grzegorz Lewicki**

- **Radosław Sikorski**

Born in Bydgoszcz, Poland, currently holding the office of Minister of Foreign Affairs of Poland (2007-present). He undertook education at the University of Oxford, where he came in 1982 to read for the degree in Politics, Philosophy and Economics (PPE). He validated his diploma after graduation, thus he officially holds the titles of BA and MA from Oxford, despite never having enrolled on a postgraduate course (Oxford and Cambridge allow for such validations). The primary ground upon which Sikorski was given the place and financial support to study at Oxford is attributed to the fact he was granted asylum in the United Kingdom as a political dissident – he led the student strikes in Bydgoszcz in March 1981.

During his years at Oxford Sikorski was involved in numerous student activities, including the Standing Committee of the Oxford Union (the oldest debating society in the world) and the Oxford University Polish Society, which he led as president. He was also a member of the infamous Bullingdon Club, where he met and became friends with many prestigious and high-profile British Conservative politicians, including Boris Johnson (mayor of London), David Cameron (Prime Minister) and George Osborne (Chancellor of the Exchequer). After graduation he became a War correspondent in Angola and Afghanistan for Associated Press. Upon his return to Poland after democratic transition, he served as Deputy Minister of National Defence in 1992, initiating Poland's NATO accession campaign. In 1998-2001 he served as Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs and Honorary Chairman of the Foundation for Assistance to Poles in the East.

His profile is particularly relevant to the scope of this research, as he was the first member of the government who became publically recognized through his foreign education – at Oxford University. He initiated the official policy of support for student initiatives, particularly those that focus on Great Britain. Within his two terms in office, numerous initiatives such as the Parliament of Polish Students, the Congress of Polish Student Societies and Science-Polish Perspectives Conference have received substantial financial and know-how support. Sikorski today remains the main advocate of

governmental discourse aimed at encouraging young Poles to return to Poland. This approach was manifested this year, during the VII Congress of Polish Student Societies in the UK that took place in Oxford – Sikorski gave a speech in which he stressed the importance of the transfer of experience and know-how young Poles trained abroad could usher in upon their return.

- **Mikolaj Dowgielewicz**

Mikolaj Dowgielewicz, born in Gorzów Wielkopolski, is currently the Vice-Governor of the Council of Europe Development Bank. He studied International relations at The University of Warsaw and then a joint honours degree in Law and Political Science at Hull University in Great Britain. He first became employed within the structures of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1998, so just a year after his graduation from Hull. Between then and 2000 he worked as a political advisor to the then Minister of Foreign Affairs Bronislaw Geremek (in the same rotation Sikorski was the deputy minister). From that point in his career he became permanently involved in European Affairs, first as an advisor to the Parliamentary Commission of European Law and as a Head of Academic Services in College of Europe Campus in Natolin (a leg of College of Europe in Bruges, Belgium). In 2003 he joined the EU administration, as an advisor to the President of European Parliament Pat Cox and as a spokesperson of the European Commission to Social Communication and Institutional Relations.

He took active role in shaping the new paradigms of Polish foreign policy after the EU accession, taking over the role of the last ever Secretary of State in the UKIE (primary unit of the Polish Government responsible for EU accession negotiations and further EU issues). After the incorporation of UKIE to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 2009 he returned to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, where he served as the secretary of The European Committee of the Cabinet and the secretary of the European Integration Committee. Between 2010 and 2012 he was the deputy minister for European Affairs. He was known as the public face of the European issues during Sikorski's first term in office. More importantly, between 2009 and 2011 he served as the Home Secretary of Polish Presidency in the EU. During this time, the average age of advisors and servants working on the presidency decreased significantly, varying between 36 and 40 years (*Gazeta Wyborcza* 16/12/2012). He supported the ministerial policy of fostering employment among young graduates of foreign universities, publically stating that his

decision to leave for the university in Britain was ‘probably the best one he has ever made’ (Gazeta Wyborcza 29/06/2011). He is seen as one of the most successful technocrats in Polish politics and public service.

- **Mateusz Szczurek**

Mateusz Szczurek (born 1975 in Warsaw) has been appointed as the Minister of Finance in 2013, replacing on this position Jacek Rostowski. Szczurek’s profile is of particular relevance for this research project, as he is the co-founder and former president (2003-2005) of the British Alumni Society (BAS) – the first Polish non-governmental association which unites Polish graduates of all the British higher education institutions, with emphasis on recent graduates and those who completed their degrees in post-transitional times or later (the full profile of BAS will be presented further in the paper). Szczurek holds a PhD in economics from the University of Sussex (UK). Before his ministerial nomination, he was a member of Polish Economic Society and the chief economist of ING Silesia Bank. His appointment as the Minister of Finance was a major surprise to Polish media, as he has not been involved in politics before. His official political affiliation remains neutral. After his appointment he became less involved in alumni networks and student activism, but he remained a member of BAS and supports the network in their initiatives.

- **Rafał Trzaskowski**

Rafał Trzaskowski, born 1972 in Warsaw, joined the cabinet of Donald Tusk as the Minister of Digitalization in 2013, during the same round of governmental changes as Mateusz Szczurek. Within Polish media and popular perception, as well as within his party – PO – he is seen as a prime example of a young, technocratic professional politician educated abroad, on which the party wants to build its future foundations. His first experience with international education started on secondary school, when he left to enroll to a High School program at Cranbrook-Kingswood School in Bloomfield Hills – one of the most prestigious institutions in the country. He first graduated from the Natolin College of Europe (the same institution in which Mikołaj Dowgiałewicz chaired the academic affairs). Dowgiałewicz and Trzaskowski know each other well, as they spent together their final year in Mikołaj Rej High School, upon Trzaskowski’s return from the US, and both led the student parliament there. Upon his graduation in Natolin,

he received a scholarship position at the Oxford University (1996) and subsequently, after completing his postgraduate studies at University of Warsaw, he completed a visiting fellowship at the Paris European Union Institute, specializing in European Security Studies. He holds a PhD from the University of Warsaw, where he became a specialist in the dynamics of institutional reform in the European Union. He is affiliated with numerous academic institutions in Poland, including Collegium Civitas, College of Europe and University of Warsaw. Trzaskowski is a professional translator and expert in European legal framework. Between 2000 and 2001 he worked as an advisor to Jacek Saryusz-Wolski, the secretary of UKIE. He became known to the wider public during the European Parliament electoral campaign in 2009, when he won a seat in the European Parliament (where he worked before as party's political consultant), despite a distant position on the party list. His electoral campaign was particularly successful and noticeable due to the fact that Trzaskowski, drawing considerably from American style of campaigning, persuaded major public figures, including respectable artists, actors and performers to shoot electoral spots in which they declared support to Trzaskowski. In the clips, they performed unmanageable and herculean tasks under the slogan 'I am doing it for Rafal'. Since then, Trzaskowski became one of the most recognizable faces of the 'young forces' in the party, making himself known as an efficient and qualified MEP, thus differentiating from the majority of other deputies, commonly associated with high wages and an approach to EP as political exile from home politics. Today, after the inclusion in the second Tusk's cabinet, Trzaskowski remains a very prominent and popular figure, whose style of public service draws considerably from his experience at Oxford and Bloomfield Hills.

- **Pawel Swieboda**

Pawel Swieboda, born 1972 in Rzeszow, Poland, is currently the Paweł Świeboda is President of demoseUROPA – Centre for European Strategy. He attended the London School of Economics at the University of London, where he studied politics and international relations, specialising in the European Union issues. Upon his return to Poland, he served as the EU Advisor to the President of Poland in the years 1996-2000. He then headed the Office for European Integration in the Chancellery of the President. His is associated with the political environment of Poland's former President, Aleksander Kwasniewski. According to the informal conversations held with members

of the current diplomatic service, both in Warsaw and abroad, Swieboda is labelled as 'the man who led Poland into the EU'. During Kawsniewski's second term in office in the years 2001-2006, upon the electoral victory of the left party – SLD – he was moved to the governmental sector, where he served as Director of the Department of the European Union in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. His duties there included heading the final round of accession negotiations prior to Poland's entry to the EU in 2004. He is known to have had a paramount impact on the 2004 round of negotiations over the voting system in the European Council, which was famously labelled as '*Nice or Death*'. Swieboda was also heavily involved in the process of institutional adaptation of Poland to the EU framework and for negotiations on the Financial Perspective. Today he leads the DEMOSEuropa think tank and writes as a regular columnist and contributor to papers such as Poland's *Gazeta Wyborcza*, *The Guardian* and *Foreign Affairs*.

### **Conclusions on high-profile graduates of foreign universities**

Drawing from the above presented personal profiles, it is possible now to extract certain commonalities that emerge in a comparative analysis and draw general conclusions about the first wave of Polish graduates of foreign universities that successfully accommodated themselves in high-profile politics and public administration positions. First of all, they all (with the exception of Sikorski, who is not representative for the sample here due to political reasons of his educational stay in Britain) represent the same generation of young Poles who took advantage of the first window of opportunities that was available – the 1989 transition. Moreover, they appear to have undertaken comparable, if not very similar educational and career paths, what resulted in their personal relations being established very early and prevailing during their political careers (as in the case of Dowgielewicz and Trzaskowski). Moreover, they all returned to Poland either within the immediate aftermath of their graduation abroad or soon after. All of them have also undertaken professional experience in accordance with their academic qualifications prior to become professional politicians (Szcurek and Swieboda in fact never became such, despite their involvement in high-profile political affairs). With the exception of Szcurek, they all found employment within the public sector prior to the employment in the private one. They also coincide in the age they began their service (24-25), the institutions they started (Ministry of Foreign Affairs,

UKIE, Parliamentary Commission to European Affairs), as well as positions they occupied (political advisors, legal experts). Taking into consideration these aforementioned parallels, it is possible now to compare these regularities with the current state of affairs.

Despite the fact all the individuals analyzed above – for purposes of typology labelled as First Graduates (to differentiate from Second Graduates, what refers to the graduates of post-EU accession years), received a rather universal, general education in social sciences, they were all allocated to the units responsible for EU negotiations and Polish accession upon their entry to civil service. This might lead to assumptions of two kinds, which remain yet to verify in a further stage of research. The first states that the units dedicated to European Affairs were suffering from the biggest deficiencies in human resources therefore the entry to those units was easiest. Second hypothesis assumes that since the units centered on EU accession were the ones that were most often publically examined and subjected to constant review, both by the media and public opinion as well as foreign partners, the executives of the larger entities (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Chancellery of the Prime Minister), decided to strategically allocate young professional educated abroad to these units. By being on the frontline of interactions with European Union officials, they would be seen as illustrative to the generational change that occurred within Polish civil service, epitomizing the move from the politicized, unskilled communist apparatus towards young, professionally trained and technocratic service. As the First Graduates were too young to be involved in Communist Politics in any way, they were taken for granted as representatives of post-transitional change, even when they manifested affiliation with post-communist political environments (as in the case of Swieboda).

Eventually, it is interesting to conduct a comparative analysis of the first and second waves of graduates. As shown by the above analyzed profiles of successful returning graduates, for the first wave the public employment seemed to have been a primary choice on the job market. Despite lacking primary information and elite interviews conducted with members of that wave, it is possible to hypothesize upon this regularity. Its reasons might be twofold – the relatively high esteem of working in post-transitional public administration symbolizing the democratization and change in quality service or

the simple lack of other opportunities for graduates in social sciences, due to a minimal demand for them on private market and the primacy of the economists and managers. The second wave of graduates, in turn, appears to be exhibiting a different attitude towards public employment. Civil service is still relatively often taken into consideration as an option of stable employment (mostly among graduates and students of less prestigious universities); however it has become appealing largely due to instability of the private market during recession times. Among those students who claim to be taking into account public service as permanent employment, three cases indicated that the higher likelihood of obtaining a permanent contract and thus be eligible to social security, pension fund and welfare benefits is the main incentive against seeking employment on a better-paid position on private market. Factors central to the choices of first graduates – prestige, societal perception, values of democracy – are not included in the reasoning of the second graduates. Therefore it allows for a conclusion that civil service among the subsequent waves of graduates of foreign universities has undertaken a gradual commercialization of its perception. Prior to the accession, it appears to have had a comparative advantage over the private sector not only in size, but also in normative values, which no longer play a significant part in shaping young people's choices in career planning. At present it has been reduced to another actor on the job market, which loses in incentivizing the most talented youth to private sector, mostly due to a high disparity in salaries and career opportunities, including promotion and personal development prospects.

### **Successful graduates – profiles of non-executive graduates with mixed employment**

As mentioned in the introduction to this section, in order to differentiate the sample and allow for more generalizable conclusions, the analysis of the successful profiles of foreign graduates who returned to Poland will now be enlarged of profiles of second-wave graduates with mixed (private and public position, often simultaneously held) employment record. Due to the early stage of research and inability to conduct in-depth interviews with candidates, two profiles have been preliminarily selected for analysis, due to facilitated contacts through alumni organizations (BAS and Oxbirdge Society of

Poland). Further research in this section ought to be carried out in order to identify more low-profile graduates

- **Grzegorz Lewicki**

Grzegorz Lewicki is a graduate of European Studies of Society MA at Maastricht University and Philosophy of Science MSc at London School of Economics. Currently he is undertaking doctoral research on philosophy of science and civilization at Jagiellonian University in Cracow. After graduation in 2011, he returned to Poland and became an editor of the science section of WPROST, one of the Poland's most widely read weekly magazines. However, parallel to his enrollment on doctoral program and journalistic work, he still serves as report writer and expert for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, specializing in International relations, as he holds an MA (distinction) in this topic from Jagiellonian University as well.

- **Aleksandra Kaniewska**

Aleksandra Kaniewska is a graduate of MSc in modern Japanese Studies at St Antony's College, Oxford University (2008). Before her return to Poland, she served as UK and International Affairs correspondent for *Dziennik*, one of the Poland's biggest daily newspapers. After few years of freelance journalistic and reporting experience, Kaniewska started working in The Civic Institute (*Instytut Obywatelski*), a Warsaw-based NGO and public policy-oriented think tank, co-sponsored by the governmental administration. Parallel to her employment in the Institute, she still works as freelance policy analyst (with focus on Japanese and Asian affairs) for major private and corporate clients.

## **Conclusions - a mixed model of employment**

There are interesting conclusions to be drawn from these two profiles. As the chronology of their careers demonstrates, both these cases represent polish graduates who began their studies after the polish accession to the European Union in 2004. Moreover, they both represent a model of career development which seems to be gaining momentum and popularity among the most recent graduates, which compromises simultaneous private and public employment. As the private sector in

Poland has grown significantly over past years, with emphasis on the growing presence of multi-national corporations and firms requiring expertise in Polish market, social science graduates are given more opportunities for freelance expert tasks for corporate clients. What is more, Poland-based firms are expanding on foreign markets, especially in Russia, Ukraine, Czech Republic, Sweden and Germany, what subsequently implies a greater demand for skilled graduates with working knowledge of English and expert knowledge in public affairs. Eventually, the positions being granted to young graduates within public administration itself appear to have changed its structure as well. Unlike the previous waves of graduates, the most recent ones are often being directly placed on expert positions, which do not always require a full-time physical presence in the office, but rely on analytical, report-writing skills and depend on given needs of the public unit which contracts these graduates. Such a setting fosters mixed employment, as it does not constraint the employee with rigid work schedule and allows for more flexibility. Also, according to the opinions gathered through informal conversations with both experienced members of public administration as well as young graduates with mixed employment, the perception of plural employment in the eyes of public administration has changed. In the immediate aftermath of the transition the executive members of civil service (directors, heads of departments, chiefs of staff) were very reluctant to allow their employees to differentiate their professional affiliations and every single attempt of such action had to be first consulted with respective executive member or supervisor. Today, on the contrary, multiple professional affiliations do not exclude from public employment, but rather positively influence the perception of the employee, who thus demonstrates considerable skills in areas such as time management and multi-tasking. Such an evolution appears to be a win-win setting for both parties – the public administration and the young graduates. The former benefits from experts with more diversified portfolio and range of experiences, who additionally do not rely entirely on the income provided by the public administration, thus they are likely to be motivated by other, non-material values and provide a fuller, more detailed expertise. Moreover, the network-shaped model of experts pursued by the public administration indicates its growing professionalization, as its tasks are directly addressed by experts in given areas as oppose to an omnipresent in the pre-democratic times model of full-time employee being ‘an expert in everything’. The young employees, in turn, are given more flexibility in their career development, whilst being assured a certain degree of social security

through the public sector employment. The results of such model of administration-graduates relations shall be examined by means of in-depth primary research on subsequent stages of this project.

### **Alumni and Students Organizations – primary unit of connection**

Within this section, subject of analysis will be non-governmental organizations and alumni associations centered on providing a platform for common action for polish graduates of foreign universities. I extract here and examine in detail five units which serve as information providers and run scholarship schemes aimed at increasing the presence of polish students on best European and North American academic entities, especially through mentoring schemes and financial support.

- **The Federation of Polish Students in the United Kingdom**



Set up in March 2013, the Federation is a UK-based organization which aims to be an umbrella structure gathering together all the Polish Student Societies existing on British (thus English, Scottish and Welsh) universities. The first idea of launching the Federation (according to the interviews conducted with its founders and members of the executive board) dates back to 2010, when during the III Congress of Polish Student Societies in Glasgow the heads of largest Polish Student Societies – Oxford, Cambridge and London University – decided to create a structure which will not only unify various Polish student initiatives in the UK, but also serve as a liaison in partnership projects with various actors from Poland. At the moment, within the structures of the federation there are 25 independent Polish Student Societies, what – according to the Federation’s own estimations – provides a network of over 3000 Polish Students being directly or indirectly (through own respective societies) involved in their actions. The governing body of the Federation comprises of the President – Krzysztof Bar (Doctoral Candidate, Oxford University) and the executive board, which includes representatives from different British universities, in order to differentiate the representation of the student body and avoid the primacy of the ‘big, prestigious entities’, here with emphasis on Oxford, Cambridge and London Universities. In total, the executive committee includes 15 members appointed by the core committee

every year and additionally, 25 presidents of the respective Student Societies comprise a board of advisors to the executive committee.

Among the actions of the Federation that are most relevant for this paper's analysis is the project of *Good Practices* (Dobre Praktyki), which is to be implemented in the academic year 2014/2015. Although the framework of the project is only sketched at the time of conducting this preliminary research, its main idea centers on contacting the top employers on polish market, initially from the private sector, but with prospects of including the public administration in future years as well and run graduate and internship schemes for polish graduates of foreign universities. According to the interviews with committee members, the first edition of the program is most likely going to be run in partnership with the Boston Consulting Group, which is designed to serve as facilitator for accessing other large private employers in Poland. The main motivation behind running this program is a significant deficiency of structured and paid internship and graduate schemes existing in Poland. This deficiency applies not only to the public sector (as presented above), but also to the private firms, which – unless they are simply local branches of multinational corporations – are very reluctant to run internship schemes and if such schemes are in place, they are most likely to be unpaid. Due to a rather limited capacity in human resources and finances, the Federation is not able to carry out this program independently, therefore further promotion and sponsorship actions are carried out in order to increase the organization's capacity and insertion into the polish market and network of connections.

- **The Kings Foundation (TKF)** 

TKF is an independent, non-profit NGO based in Warsaw, Poland. It has been established in March 2013 (therefore it is parallel to the Federation and accordingly, the partnership of the two organizations on a number of initiatives is highly visible) and its main purpose includes running the mentoring scheme through a network of Ambassadors on different top-class world universities, who provide voluntary advice to polish high school graduates who aspire to enter these academic entities. According to the statistics obtained through TKF's official secretariat, as for March 2014 the Foundation enjoys the support of 153 ambassadors, who have been all recruited on basis of interpersonal,

highly informal connections and on voluntary basis. The Ambassadors do not receive monetary remuneration or any other form of material compensation for their service for TKF. Therefore their membership is not restricted by means of any formal contract or similar legal act. As a consequence, it is then possible to classify TKF as an NGO working on mostly normative basis, whose members agree to dedicate their own time guided by the same set of principles and led by the aim to increase the presence of polish students abroad. The largest academic units where TKF is represented include Oxford University and University College London, both of which include 22 Ambassadors. In total, TKF is visibly present through its Ambassadors on 23 universities worldwide – 7 in the USA (including major schools from the Ivy League, such as Harvard, Brown, Princeton, UPenn and Cornell), 10 in the United Kingdom (including Oxford, Cambridge, Edinburgh, Warwick and various colleges and schools of the University of London), 5 universities in other European counties (among which are Science Po in Paris and the Technical University in Zurich) and one university in Asia (National University of Singapore). All of these Ambassadors are either current students or recent graduates of their respective universities. Within its first year of activities, TKF has – through its Ambassadors – included over 150 high school graduates in their mentoring scheme. The main areas of interest indicated by high school students, especially during the first stages of mentoring, included help with personal statements, mock interviews for university admission processes, clarification of financial issues and funding opportunities. As the first full academic year of TKF's existence has not come to an end yet, the Foundation is unable to provide statistics on detailed number of students who were successful in their application process and have been previously mentored through TKF scheme. Moreover, it is very difficult to quantify the impact that TKF's Ambassadors have had on these candidates. However, according to estimations from interviews with TKF Ambassadors and executive officers, over 20 students have received offers to study at the universities affiliated with TKF.

The Foundation operates on an undisclosed budget, entirely dependent on private sponsorship and donations. Its strategic partners include Polish Student Societies on the American and British Universities, therefore a close cooperation with the Federation of Polish Student Societies comes as a logical consequence.

- **The Ivy Poland Foundation**



The Ivy Poland Foundation, established as a broad initiative aimed at running fundraising schemes and improving the financial conditions of Polish students aiming to study at world's best universities, emerged as a secondary body from the structures of Harvard Club of Poland. Established in 2013 by Krzysztof Daniewski (MBA HBS 1999), president of Harvard Club of Poland, is the Poland's first private Foundation which runs sponsorship programs for Polish students on various levels (graduate, undergraduate, doctoral, MBA, MPP). The fundraising is conducted largely through entrepreneurial meetings with both private and public sector CEOs and executive officers. The annual budget of the Ivy Foundation is undisclosed (further research on that matter will be conducted), however it is known that the strategy of sponsorship puts emphasis on providing some financial support to a larger share of candidates as opposed to cover full expenses of a very small, selective group of students. The Ivy Poland Foundation is well known for its accessibility and transparent selection process. Due to its institutional involvement, as well as President Daniewski's personal presence during student events (such as the Congress of Polish Student Societies in the UK), despite its name, Ivy Foundation has significantly expanded on the British educational market.

The application procedure for a candidate to receive financial support is relatively clear and well-structured. Within its design, the Foundation offers support for selected degree schemes in four main areas of study:

- ❖ Ivy Poland Public Administration
- ❖ Ivy Poland Business
- ❖ Ivy Poland Law
- ❖ Ivy Poland Science and Technology

Each of these aforementioned categories expands on a number of specific degrees and course that Ivy Poland offers support in. As said before, it operates within a number of academic entities in both USA and Europe, with strong emphasis on the British market. Partner universities include all the Ivy League Schools, as well as UCLA, Stanford,

Berkeley, Georgetown, Chicago, Northwestern, New York University, Turfs, Johns Hopkins University, Washington University, Michigan and many other American schools, as well as Oxford, Cambridge, LSE, UCL and King's College, London. The application process begins with the candidate contacting the Ivy Foundation first. The basic requirement for the application to be proceeded is the official letter of acceptance/offer to study within one of the programs or at one of the partner schools the Foundation supports. Subsequently, the candidate is invited for an interview in which he presents himself and describes motivation to undertake his/her studies. The evaluation is made upon candidate's performance in the interview and his/her overall accomplishments.

However, the Harvard Club of Poland, which acts here as a umbrella organization providing know-how and extensive network of connections and advice, especially on fundraising schemes and programs, prior to fostering the emergence of Ivy Poland Foundation has established another competition, called *Road to Harvard* (Droga na Harvard). First run in 2010, it has been initially a competition for young Poles on various levels of study (from secondary school, high school to doctoral levels of research), in which candidates wrote personal statements/essays and were interviewed by the Harvard Club of Poland board of examiners in order to undertake a week-long study visit to Harvard University. With time, however, the program has expanded both in number of participants and in financial endowment and now it has grown to offer not only a study trip, but also a subsequent mentoring advice and financial support for those candidates, who eventually decide to apply to Harvard University. Every year 4 finalists of the competition are being sent to Harvard campus to explore the facilities and learn about the teaching methods and courses offered. Subsequently, the Harvard Club of Poland provides all necessary information, mentoring scheme, alumni contacts and fundraising help in order to facilitate the application process for Harvard and other Ivy League Schools. This year, the first three winners of the competition from 2010 and 2011 successfully graduated from Harvard University (Harvard College and Harvard Business School), with their studies being significantly supported by Harvard Club of Poland.



- **British Alumni Society**

The British Alumni Society (BAS) was established in 1999 and remains the oldest non-governmental organisation facilitating foreign studies to polish students that exists on the polish market. Its origins date back to the initiatives of the British Government, which – through the Embassy in Warsaw and the various educational entities of the British Council, aimed at constructing a platform of experience exchange and subsequent financial support and scholarship schemes for young polish pupils and students who wanted to undertake studies in British High Schools, Comprehensive Schools and Universities. Various initiatives and institutional bodies that have taken part in the esbalishment of BAS include British Embassy in Warsaw and numerous british charities and donors, including the Chevening Scholarships, British Council Scholarships and Know How project. Today BAS has over 550 members: both Poles and British nationals residing in Poland, who have studied at university level or participated in other educational schemes in the United Kingdom.

The main activity of BAS is the scholarship scheme run among polish pupils from secondary schools (gimnazjum, age 13-16, prior to high school enrollment), who want to complete their secondary education in a British school, with a likelihood to sit A-levels examinations and continue their education further on a British University. BAS scholarships are run on biannual basis, as the full length of the program and financial support is of two years. It works with a selected number of High Schools that accept BAS scholars. Since its inauguration in 2010, 32 pupils from Poland have been sent to British schools and completed them, most with honors and excellence awards. A number of BAS scholars continued their education in Britain, receiving offers from Oxford, Cambridge and King's College London, as well as from presitgeous US universities, such as Princeton.

BAS without a doubt enjoys the widest and most recognizable network of advisors and members among all the organisations analysed here. Among its members and advisors there are several internationally known figures, such as Jerzy Buzek, Chairman of the European Parliament; Radosław Sikorski, Poland's Minister of Foreign Affairs; Jacek Vincent Rostowski, the former Minister of Finance; and Marek Belka, a director at the

IMF and the newly- elected President of National Bank of Poland. The ex-officio Honorary President of BAS is the British Ambassador to Poland. As written in the previous section, Mateusz Szczurek, BAS's former president, has been recently appointed as Poland's Minister of Finance.

- **The Oxford and Cambridge Society of Poland (Oxbridge Society of Poland)**

The Oxbridge Society of Poland was established in 2001 by Professor Zbigniew Pelczynski OBE, a graduate and professor of Political Philosophy at Pembroke College, Oxford University. Its purpose is to re-unite alumni of the universities of Oxford and Cambridge who are resident in, or regular visitors to, Poland. However, according to the present state of affairs, Oxbridge Society of Poland is a purely alumni-centred organisation which does not involve in any significant structural social actions. Contrarily to BAS, Ivy Foundation and TKF, it does not interact with future candidates to any of the two universities. Neither does it possess detailed statistics or information about the career developments of Polish Oxford and Cambridge Alumni. Among its regular activities dominant are rather symbolic events, such as annual alumni Christmas dinner and guest speakers meetings. The Society provides a platform for informal networking, however it does not engage in any organised structural programs. The prestige of the Society has been established by its opening address of Radoslaw Sikorski and most importantly, by the presidency of Wladyslaw Bartoszewski (former Poland's Foreign Affairs Minister, a war hero, Warsaw Uprising and Auschwitz survival), who headed the society during its first four years.

### **Conclusions – the alumni organisation network in Poland**

As demonstrated by means of the above presented case study analysis, the network of non-governmental organisations of Polish foreign universities alumni has expanded significantly during last ten years, with an enormous acceleration after the year 2010. What becomes apparent is the close relation – both formal and personal – between these different bodies. They support the same initiatives, work largely with the same groups of student representatives and volunteers (some of the TKF Ambassadors are also Ivy Poland Foundation consultants and Federation's Executive Officers), but each of them is guided by a different specific goal and operates on a different dimension and scale. The programs they offer varies from direct financial help, through scholarship schemes with

placements and funding provided up to mentoring and know-how advice. Given this set of regularities, it becomes apparent that the network not only expands in size, but also begins to engage in ambitious structural programs which have a common aim of increasing the presence of Polish students on foreign universities. It is important to highlight that in these tasks, the network largely substitutes the state, whose activities in that field are, as mentioned above, almost non-existent. Therefore, to conclude, it is possible to confirm the initial hypothesis that the increased quality of public service and education among young Poles, with emphasis on better prospects of receiving support of any kind for foreign education, are indeed to be observed, however the state is here a beneficiary of the third sector, not the other way round.

**Further research on subsequent stages of the project:**

Further research on subsequent stages of the project will include detailed statistical analysis of the population of Polish graduates who returned to Poland, with emphasis on those who – as for now – occupy low profile, minor positions with state administration. Detailed interviews (according to availability) will be conducted with graduates whose profiles have been presented above, as well as with Presidents and CEOs of the Alumni Network organizations, in order to expand the analysis of their projects. Further research on recruitment patterns among private sector and the perception of graduates of specific (prestigious or less known) universities will also be carried out. The research team welcomes any feedback, advice and subsequent contributions for the future stages of this research project.

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