



10TH CONGRESS OF POLISH ECONOMISTS ECONOMISTS FOR DEVELOPMENT

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The beginning of the year is always a good time to look ahead to changes which it is likely to bring in the economy and public life. The world is experiencing an economic slowdown. Some countries are on the verge of recession, their GDP is shrinking. In highly developed countries there is a growing risk of long-term stagnation, low or zero growth. One of the reasons is the syndrome of excess, wasteful overproduction of many products and services which do not find buyers. Demand is unable to keep up with supply, though at the same time many social needs are not met. This shows that economic growth does not guarantee sustainable and harmonious development, which means economic development accompanied by social progress, i.e. the improvement of ordinary citizens' quality of life, and progress in the area of environmental protection. Such a development model is referred to as the three-pillar approach to sustainable development, but in my opinion the term sustainable, harmonious development is more appropriate in this case. Equilibrium is a momentary state, while counteracting imbalances leads to progress. This sustainable, harmonious, three-pillar social and economic development was the focus of the 10th Congress of Polish Economists, which was held in Warsaw on November 28-29, 2019.

The Congress of Polish Economists, which is organised every few years, is treated as an important event dealing with the fundamental problems of the Polish economy and economic sciences. A total of 500 participants attended the 10th Congress. Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki addressed the plenary session. Each time the Congress meets under the patronage of the Polish President. Academics such as Jerzy Hausner, Grzegorz W. Kołodko and Andrzej Sławiński who have held high state functions as prime ministers and deputy prime ministers in the past, participated in the debates. The rectors of schools of economics and other universities also took part in the event.

The tradition of the congress dates back to 1887, when Polish economists and lawyers living on Polish territories under Russian, Austro-Hungarian and Prussian rule, organised the First Congress of Economists and Lawyers in the city of Krakow. Significantly, following World War II, subsequent congresses were organised in breakthrough

years for Poland. The Congress of Polish Economists took place in December 1950 in preparation for the Congress of Polish Science which was held the following year. The next three Congresses were held in the watershed years of 1956, 1971, 1981. In the past two decades, the congress was organised in 1993, 2001 and 2007. Those were the years when a change of government occurred. This also applies to the 9th Congress of November 2013, which coincided with a major cabinet reshuffle.

The role of the Congress of Polish Economists is not to tell the government what to do. But all congress debates are guided by the assumption that looking ahead is a good way of dealing with the present. It is thus a forum for exchanging views on the state and future of the economy and economic sciences among practitioners and theoreticians, economists who represent various centres and schools, and representatives of related sciences. Differences of opinion are welcome, for they serve as an inspiration, they make people think. This also holds true about politicians. They encourage deeper, comprehensive analysis, lateral thinking, free from the pressure of day-to-day decisions, which in the case of the main actors of Poland's public and economic life, is of special importance.

At present, a difficult challenge for many countries, including Poland, is to steer the economy toward a new model, in which the GDP growth fetish will cease to be the ultimate goal, to be replaced by sustainable, harmonious social and economic development. The framework of the post-GDP economy model, i.e. post-growth economy, is gradually emerging. It is all the more important to shape such a model because of the digital revolution, also known as the fourth industrial revolution, which does not always fit into the GDP growth model. The well-known disadvantages of GDP –including equal treatment of socially desirable goods and services and of undesirable anti-rival goods, disregarding negative social and ecological consequences– are compounded by new problems which stem from the fact that the GDP growth model does not adapt to the technological and civilizational changes which the fourth industrial revolution brings. Examples of phenomena which are not adequately reflected in the GDP include the sharing economy, which is developing rapidly thanks to the Internet, the growing phenomenon of zero marginal cost, etc. It is thus interesting to ask whether the GDP as a touchstone is a thing of the past. This was one of many questions which were examined at the 10th Congress of Economists. A full report from the Congress debate is available on the website of the Polish Economic Society. •



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