

# 11. Poland: ‘Let’s not get hysterical about Brexit’. The consequences of Brexit for Polish science and higher education. Krystian Szadkowski

Krystian Szadkowski, Center for Public Policy, Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznań

## 11.1. Overview of research conducted

The data for this report was collected between June and November 2017.

### 11.1.1. Type of institution

The interviews were conducted in two different public, comprehensive universities. University A is a flagship metropolitan institution. University B is a medium-sized metropolitan institution with aspirations to become a fully-fledged research university. Both universities are internationally active and invest in international research cooperation, as well as in international presence and recognition. Similarly, both are declaratively interested in increasing the numbers of their international staff and attracting international students.

Table 11-1 [Poland] The institutional profiles of the institutions in the sample.

2016	University A	University B
Number of students	44,389	39,982
Number of international students	2,244*	650****
Number of doctoral candidates	3,200	1,324
Number of international doctoral candidates	283**	42*****
Number of academic staff	3,308	3,048
Number of international academic staff	n.d.	n.d. (13)*****
Total budget	1,368,530,200 PLN (285,110,460 GBP***)	701,686,200 PLN (146,184,625 GBP)
Total income from research	446,363,600 PLN (92,992,416 GBP)	92,123,100 PLN (19,192,312 GBP)
Share of income from research in the total budget	32.6%	13.1%

\* 32 students from the UK in total (14 regular and 18 Erasmus+). \*\* 1 doctoral candidate from the UK. \*\*\* GBP/PLN = 4.80. \*\*\*\* 3 students from the UK \*\*\*\*\* None from the UK. \*\*\*\*\* n.d. on a total number of international academic staff - 13 academic staff from the UK (1 at Faculty of Biology; 3 at Faculty of Neophilology; 9 at Faculty of English).

### 11.1.2. Number of interviews and participant profile

This research report is based on 10 semi-structured interviews and the data collected in the Polish Ministry of Science and Higher Education (MNiSW) and the selected institutions. The institutions were selected using the criteria of meaningful

institutional profile differences, as well as the minimum level of international activity (in general, Polish HEIs are not highly internationalised). The national level interviews were conducted with officials from the Polish Ministry of Science and Higher Education. One of these interviews was conducted in the form of a focus group including three ministerial officials. At each of the universities selected for the study, a representative of the high management structure was interviewed (a vice rector for research and international cooperation). Academic staff come from the fields of psychology, social sciences, English literature and mathematics. Respondents were selected as to illustrate different types of existing cooperation with UK-based institutions/academics: based on a formal project; based on a large formal cooperation scheme; non-formal. One interview was conducted with a UK citizen employed as a full-time scholar (teaching and research contract). There are no interviews with staff in precarious forms of temporary contracts in the sample, as this is not a typical form of employment within the system (with the exception of employment in externally funded research projects, where it usually lasts no longer than the duration of the project but is relatively well paid and protected). The interviews lasted between 20 and 60 minutes, while the average interview took around 25 minutes.

Table 11-2 [Poland] The number of interviewees in the sample.

	Number of interviewees
National level (MNiSW)	5
Institutional leadership	2
Academic staff	5

## 11.2. Present situation

### 11.2.1. Significance of cooperation with the UK

The UK is seen as an important, prestigious and highly efficient research partner (in terms of funding acquisition, as well as research productivity) that the representatives of MNiSW and institutional leaders, as well as individual academics interviewed for this report, would like to cooperate with. However, the cooperation with the UK, at the system level, is somewhat limited (in terms of research and joint projects or publications) or nearly non-existent (in terms of student exchange, especially inflow from the UK or employment of UK citizens as academics within the Polish system).

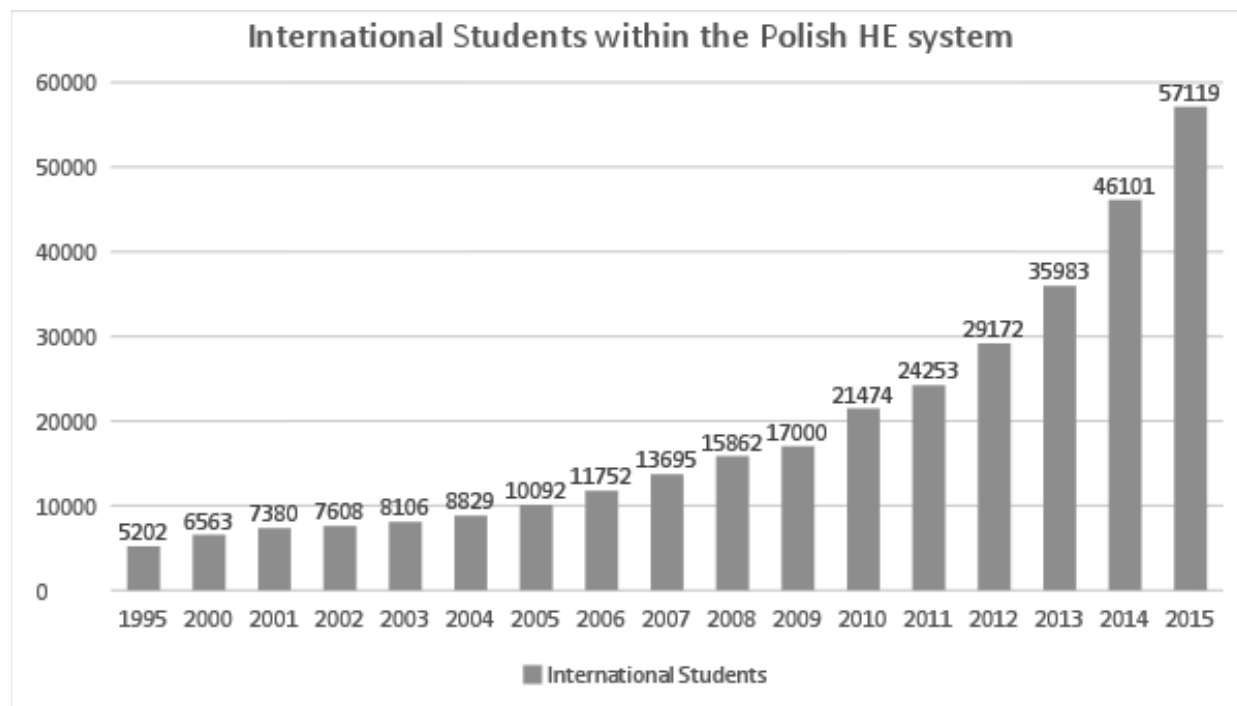
### 11.2.2. Background statistics

#### *International students*

The internationalisation of Poland's higher education system is very limited. In the academic year 2015-2016, more than 57,000 international students were enrolled. Most popular subjects among international students are business and administration (13,100 students); social sciences (11,100 students); medicine (8,200) and services (4,700). More than half of international students (53.6 per cent) come from Ukraine.

While the numbers of international students are systematically growing (see Figure 11.1), their share within the system remains at the level of just 4 per cent. In the winter semester of the academic year 2016-2017, the number of international students increased to 63,356, of which only 339 were British citizens.

Figure 11-1 [Poland] International students' enrolment, all sectors (1995-2015).



Source: GUS 2016: 35

### ***Erasmus and Erasmus+ students***

Since the beginning of its participation in the Erasmus programme, Poland sent out twice as many students and academic employees as those who visited its institutions from abroad.

Great Britain is the sixth most popular destination for Polish students in Erasmus + (after Germany, Spain, France, Italy and Portugal). Between 1998-99 and 2016-2017, out of the 199,981 Polish students who participated in the exchange, 10,811 students chose British institutions as their destination. The 10 most popular destinations are presented in Table 11.3 below.

Table 11-3 [Poland] TOP 10 Destinations in Erasmus – students. 1998-2016.

Ranking	Country	Students in total
1	Germany	36,841
2	Spain	28,317
3	France	18,601
4	Italy	17,359
5	Portugal	13,386
<b>6</b>	<b>Great Britain</b>	<b>10,811</b>
7	Belgium	7,246
8	Denmark	7,144
9	Netherlands	7,052
10	Czech Republic	6,290

Source: MNiSW

British students chose Polish institutions 10 times less often than Polish students chose British institutions. Since 1998, just 1,119 students (out of 93,365 students in total – with the greatest share coming from Spain, Turkey, Germany and France) visited Polish institutions thanks to Erasmus.

Table 11-4 [Poland] TOP 10 Student inflow countries in Erasmus (and the UK). 1998-2016.

Ranking	Country	Students in total
1	Spain	19,916
2	Turkey	18,995
3	Germany	10,517
4	France	9,827
5	Portugal	7,623
6	Italy	6,431
7	Czech Republic	1,910
8	Romania	1,842
9	Slovakia	1,692
10	Lithuania	1,522
<b>16</b>	<b>Great Britain</b>	<b>1,119</b>

Source: MNiSW.

### **Polish students in the UK**

Despite the fact that the British statistical sources (UKCISA) assess the number of Polish students within the UK system at 5,245 students, the Polish MNiSW treat this data as imprecise and indicates that there are even as many as 20,000 students of Polish origin living and studying in the UK. However, as for the number of students with only Polish permanent residence studying in the UK, the number is just 420.

### **International academic staff**

As of 31 December 2016, there were 80,195 full-time employed academics within the public higher education sector. British citizens consist of 84.5 academics (FTE) out of 2,108.5 (FTE) foreigners employed within the Polish public higher education sector.

### **Erasmus and Erasmus+ - Academics**

Great Britain is the eighth most popular destination for Polish academics who participated in the Erasmus programme between 2000 and 2016-17 (after Germany, Spain, Italy, Slovakia and the Czech Republic). 3,143 academics out of a total number of 64,661 who participated in the programme chose British institutions as their host institutions. The 10 most visited destinations are presented in Table 11.5 below.

Table 11-5 [Poland] TOP 10 Destinations in Erasmus – academics. 2000-2016.

Ranking	Country	Academics in total since 2000
1	Germany	8,396
2	Spain	7,724
3	Italy	5,913
4	Slovakia	5,184
5	Czech Republic	5,132
6	France	4,043
7	Portugal	3,845
8	<b>Great Britain</b>	<b>3,143</b>
9	Turkey	2,872
10	Lithuania	2,505

Source: MNiSW

Great Britain is the ninth source of academics coming to Poland (after Germany, Turkey, France, Czech Republic and Spain) thanks to the Erasmus Programme. Between 2000 and 2016-2017, out of 29,837 academics that visited Poland within the Erasmus framework, just 1,097 came from British institutions. The top 10 source countries for academics are presented in Table 11.6 below.

Table 11-6 [Poland] TOP 10 Academics inflow source countries in Erasmus. 2000-2016.

Ranking	Country	Academics in total since 2000
1	Germany	4 388
2	Turkey	3 724
3	France	2 832
4	Czech Republic	2 550
5	Spain	2 285
6	Slovakia	1 608
7	Italy	1 538
8	Lithuania	1 293
9	<b>Great Britain</b>	<b>1097</b>
10	Belgium	831

Source: MNiSW.

### **Horizon 2020 – Polish and British cooperation**

Organisations from Poland (543) participated in 889 ALL Thematic Areas in H2020 projects, including 165 co-ordinations. The more detailed data are presented in Table 11.7 below.

Table 11-7 [Poland] Independent Participation of Poland in H2020 Projects.

	Organization Type	H2020 Projects			H2020 Coordinations		
		Participation in Projects	Participation in Proposals	Success Rate %	Num. of Coordinations	Num. of Proposals	Success Rate %
Independent Participation of Poland in H2020	HES	378	3 336	11,33%	49	730	6,71%
	OTH	77	329	23,40%	9	36	25,00%
	PRC	362	4 077	8,88%	63	1 550	4,06%
	PUB	110	398	27,64%	11	46	23,91%
	REC	326	1 787	18,24%	33	363	9,09%
<b>Total:</b>		<b>1 253</b>	<b>9 927</b>	<b>12,62%</b>	<b>165</b>	<b>2 725</b>	<b>6,06%</b>

Source: NCPEURP

Organisations from Poland (355) and the United Kingdom (569) participated in 519 common H2020 projects (all thematic areas), where Polish organisations were coordinating 25 and British organisations 85 of these joint projects. The total number of participants in these joint projects is 1,855 different organisations. The total projects' budget amounted to over €43M. The summary is presented in Table 11.8 below.

Table 11-8 [Poland]. Mutual Participation of Polish and British organisations in H2020 projects.

	Organization Type	H2020 Projects			H2020 Coordinations			
		Participation in Projects	Participation in Proposals	Success Rate %	Num. of Coordinations	Num. of Proposals	Success Rate %	
Mutual Participation of	Poland	HES	231	1 625	14,22%	12	148	8,11%
		OTH	32	150	21,33%		5	
		PRC	152	1 261	12,05%	3	61	4,92%
		PUB	70	214	32,71%	3	9	33,33%
		REC	210	916	22,93%	7	112	6,25%
	United Kingdom	HES	505	3 188	15,84%	53	538	9,85%
		OTH	91	272	33,46%	6	14	42,86%
		PRC	311	1 991	15,62%	11	92	11,96%
		PUB	76	280	27,14%	5	22	22,73%
		REC	177	531	33,33%	10	55	18,18%
<b>Total:</b>		<b>1 855</b>	<b>10 428</b>	<b>17,79%</b>	<b>110</b>	<b>1 056</b>	<b>10,42%</b>	

Source: National Contact Point for EU Research Programmes (NCPEURP).

Table 11.9 below presents the Top 20 organisations from Poland and the United Kingdom in common Horizon 2020 projects.

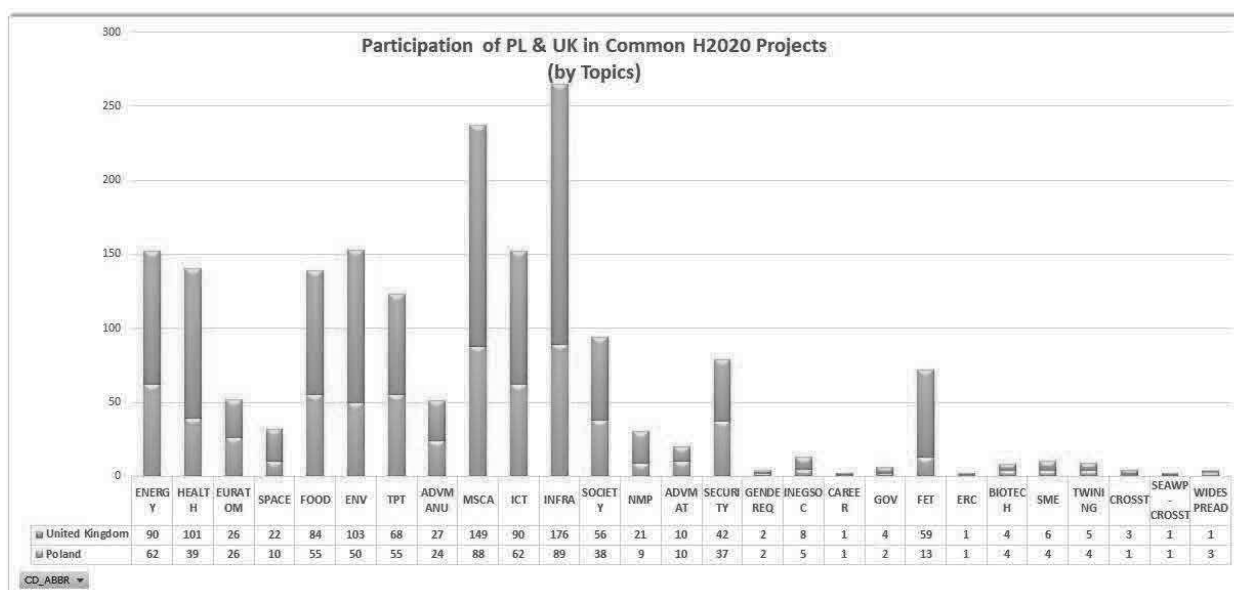
Table 11-9 [Poland] Top 20 Organisations from PL & UK in Common H2020 Projects.

Top 20 Organizations from PL & UK in Common H2020 Projects	Num. of Coordinations	Num. of Participations	EC Contribution ↓
The Chancellor, Masters and Scholars of the University of Cambridge [UK]	1	26	19 322 649,30 €
THE UNIVERSITY OF MANCHESTER [UK]	2	20	17 605 939,76 €
UNIVERSITY COLLEGE LONDON [UK]	5	34	13 886 191,35 €
NATURAL ENVIRONMENT RESEARCH COUNCIL [UK]	1	29	11 987 260,04 €
INSTYTUT CHEMII BIOORGANICZNEJ POLSKIEJ AKADEMII NAUK [PL]	1	29	11 414 163,63 €
The Chancellor, Masters and Scholars of the University of Oxford [UK]		25	9 172 651,39 €
SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY FACILITIES COUNCIL [UK]	1	21	8 759 228,74 €
UNIwersytet Warszawski [PL]	2	40	8 449 497,08 €
IMPERIAL COLLEGE OF SCIENCE TECHNOLOGY AND MEDICINE [UK]	2	15	8 278 274,02 €
THE UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH [UK]	3	21	8 106 202,00 €
THE UNIVERSITY OF SHEFFIELD [UK]	5	22	7 464 921,67 €
King's College London [UK]		15	5 592 090,18 €
UNIVERSITY OF NEWCASTLE UPON TYNE [UK]	3	14	4 867 318,00 €
NARODOWE CENTRUM BADAŃ I ROZWOJU [PL]	1	16	4 814 297,09 €
AKADEMIA GÓRNICZO-HUTNICZA IM. STANISŁAWA STASZICA W KRAKOWIE [PL]		23	4 777 957,16 €
THE UNIVERSITY OF NOTTINGHAM [UK]	1	15	3 912 574,11 €
THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS [UK]		12	3 785 228,10 €
UNIwersytet Jagielloński [PL]	1	19	3 775 243,93 €
UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHAMPTON [UK]		12	3 566 566,11 €
UNIVERSITY OF STRATHCLYDE [UK]	1	12	2 793 053,26 €

Source: NCPEURP

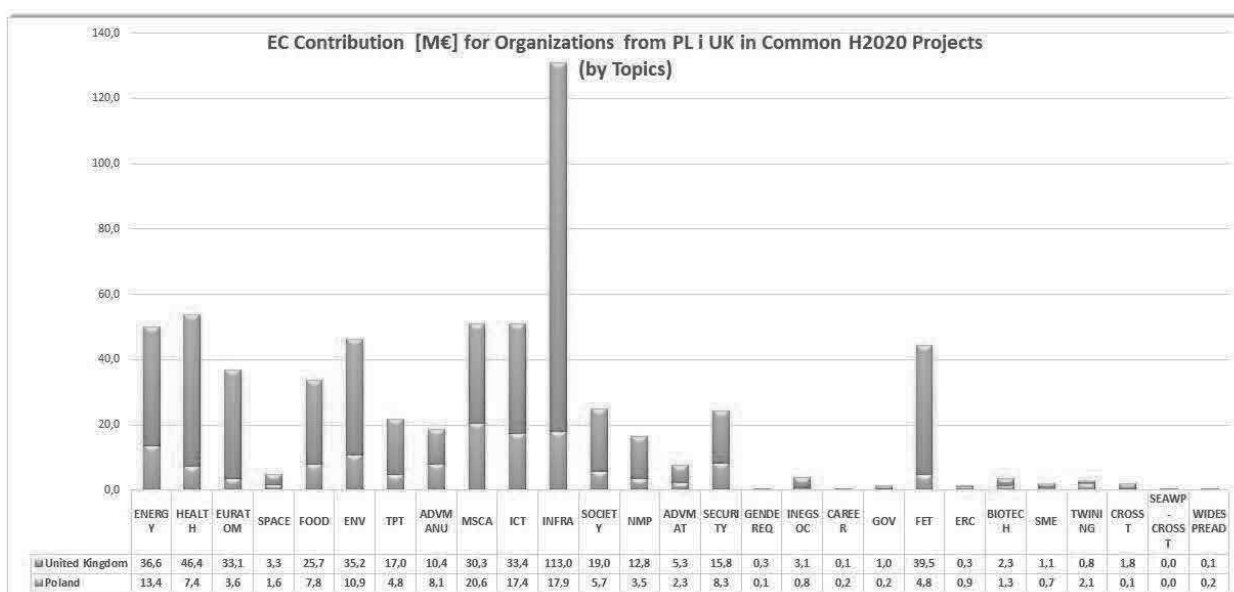
Polish institutions cooperate with British institutions on a variety of topics covered by Horizon 2020 funding streams, with the highest participation of Polish institutions in the following projects: Research infrastructures (INFRA) (89), Information and communication technologies (ICT) (62), Secure, clean and efficient energy (ENERGY) (62), Smart, green and integrated transport (TPT) (55), Food security, sustainable agriculture and forestry, marine and maritime and inland water research (FOOD) (55). Polish and British institutions also cooperate in the Marie Skłodowska-Curie actions (MSCA) (88) with the highest share of EU money received by Polish institutions in: INFRA (€17.9M), ICT (€17.4M), ENERGY (€13.4M), Secure societies - Protecting freedom and security of Europe and its citizens (SECURITY) (€8.3M), Climate action, environment, resource efficiency and raw materials (ENV) (€10.9M) and MSCA (€20.6M). The full data is presented in the two charts below.

Figure 11-2 [Poland] Participation of Poland and Great Britain in Common H2020 Projects. By topics.



Source: NCPEURP.

Figure 11-3 [Poland] European Commission Contribution (in €M) for Organisations from Poland and Great Britain in Common H2020 Projects. By topics.



Source: NCPEURP

### Joint publications with the UK partners

In 2016, for 45,444 Polish publications indexed in Web of Science Core Collection, there were 3,015 Polish joint publications with one or more UK partners (2,699 - England; 638 - Scotland; 202 - Wales; 67 - North Ireland). The biggest share of joint publications was concentrated in physics and astronomy/astrophysics (Physics 19 per cent; astronomy/astrophysics 11.5 per cent; cardiovascular systems/ cardiology 5.9 per cent; neurosciences/neurology 5.5 per cent; engineering 5.1 per cent; science/technology/other topics 4.8 per cent; oncology 4.6 per cent; computer science 4 per cent; chemistry 3.9 per cent; environmental sciences ecology 3.5 per



cent). While according to the Web of Science the UK (6.63 per cent) was Poland's third publication partner in 2016, after USA (8.44 per cent of publications) and Germany (7.84 per cent), Poland was a nineteenth partner of the UK in joint publications (1.4 per cent).

### **11.3. Main concerns/opportunities**

The main opportunities and concerns regarding Brexit in the context of science and higher education concerned primarily research funding, the UK's participation in the future Horizon 2020 and FP9 projects, as well as the mobility of scientists. These concerns were the same regardless of the level at which they were expressed (national, institutional or individual).

#### **11.3.1. National level**

Although ministerial documents emphasise the importance of maintaining Polish-British cooperation at the current level of intensity, the direct statements of representatives of the Ministry of Science and Higher Education against the background of other respondents interviewed are distinguished by a particular optimism regarding the possibility of a beneficial use of the Brexit opportunity by the Polish system and institutions. The most important opportunities for the Polish system as seen by ministerial officials are:

- *Within the area of funding:* the release of an essential share of EU funding for research (today consumed by British institutions) that could be absorbed, if won on the competitive path, by Polish institutions. More space for Polish institutions as leaders of EU-funded research projects, as well as within the newly established consortia.
- *Within the area of staff and student mobility:* reverse or at least weakening of the brain drain tendency that benefited the UK (or even “the brain seeds drain”, as put by one of the ministerial officials in the context of students who move to the UK). The possibility of return of at least some of the Polish students and staff to Polish institutions.
- *Within the area of cooperation:* potential increase of interest on the part of British institutions to collaborate with EU countries, including Poland.

The most important concerns at the national level are:

- Withdrawal from the European Research Area of some unique research infrastructure that is currently at the disposal of the British institutions.
- Marginalisation of the position of Polish science in cooperation in research areas of crucial importance: health research, military research and space research.
- The unclear legal situation of Polish students in the UK.

### **11.3.2. Institutional level - leaders**

Leaders of the institutions in question expressed far less optimism and extreme caution. As regards Brexit, in the context of the potential concerns for the further cooperation between the Polish and British institutions and researchers, the following issues came to the fore:

- The leaders assume the possibility of some financial turbulence in the currently realised EU funded projects or some negative bias in the assessment of applications where the declared research leader would be a British researcher or institution.
- Doubts about the possibility of acquisition of the same level of research funding within the EU funded programmes if the already existing frameworks of cooperation lack the British partners.

The interviewed leaders could not identify many positive sides to Brexit. One potentially beneficial aspect of the Brexit-caused turbulence is an opportunity to attract researchers who plan to leave the UK (this has been said with the full awareness of the relative unattractiveness of Polish institutions for foreign scholars). Apart from that, the leaders believe that the situation for the Polish institutions will remain more or less as it is after Brexit. The interviewed leader of University A emphasised that the most important cooperation schemes with the well-established British institutions seem to be stable and protected from any negative consequences of Brexit.

### **11.3.3. Institutional level - academics**

At the individual level, the potentially harmful effects of Brexit outweighed its possible benefits for the researchers and their co-operations. The most critical concerns included:

- Restraints on individual mobility caused by a potential tightening of regulations regarding the movement of people. Its negative consequences were emphasised both in the context of exchange students and of doctoral students as well as everyday research work (study visits, participation in conferences).
- Loss of a robust leading partner in applications for funds in European programmes.
- Difficulties in planning short-term and long-term research cooperation (matching partners in projects). The fact that British partners leave the leading position in consortia may have severe impact on the theoretical or methodological profile of research projects.

At the individual level, the benefits of Brexit were mentioned cautiously or not mentioned at all. This cautious attitude is well illustrated by the following excerpt from an interview with one of the researchers:

The Brits are the beneficiaries of the enormous amount of money from the European Commission, which is why I think Brexit could be a chance for the semi-peripheral countries. If the British could not

get the research money and their contribution is not so huge that taking it away would pose a dramatic challenge for the EU research budget, but I think that it would be short-term gain, we could be gaining from that for two or three years - but the free exchange of ideas and projects is far more important than that at the moment (Interview 6, University B - Staff).

#### 11.4. Plans and strategies

At the national level, the MNiSW supported the launch of two major initiatives that aim at increasing the level of internationalisation (combined with scientific excellence) of the Polish science and higher education system.

The first is the Discuri Centers joint initiative of Polish National Science Center (NCN) and German Max Planck Society (MPG) to establish Max Planck Institutes at 10 selected Polish institutions.<sup>76</sup> The aim of this programme is to establish centres of excellence in Poland and to integrate them into the Polish institutions. The call for the first round of applications has already been announced and the first centres should be opened in the second half of 2018. The centres will operate in close cooperation with German universities or research institutions and their aim is to strengthen the already robust (by Polish standards of international cooperation) scientific exchange between Poland and Germany. The ministerial official commenting on the rationale behind this initiative said:

The truth is that the Max Planck has exploited Germany to the very end, indeed, so it counts that cooperation with Poland could bring some additional benefits to it. However, on our side, it is important to use the know-how of this 'Factory of Nobel Prizes'. This is true - Max Planck is a structure for producing Nobel Prizes, to produce centres of excellence in Poland. We hope to have a full Institute of Max Planck in Poland. Maybe within seven years or so this could be possible. (Interview 3, MNiSW).

The second initiative is the establishment of a National Agency for Academic Exchange (NAWA – Narodowa Agencja Wymiany Akademickiej)<sup>77</sup> a ministerial agency to control the overall academic exchange process in the country. The institutional template for this agency is the German DAAD. The agency will be fully operational in March 2018. NAWA's mission is to enhance the potential of Polish science and higher education through international exchange and cooperation. This is supposed to be achieved through the realisation of four distinct aims: 1) *Reinforcing the scientific excellence* through international mobility programmes for research and teaching staff and return programmes for Polish scientists; 2) *Internationalising Polish universities and scientific institutions* through short-term mobility programmes, programmes supporting the internationalisation of education and increasing the organisational potential and promotion; 3) *Promoting Poland as a*

---

<sup>76</sup> More information: <https://www.ncn.gov.pl/dioscuri/>

<sup>77</sup> See. Full text of Strategy of NAWA in English: <https://nawa.gov.pl/images/NAWA.pdf>

*country offering interesting educational and research opportunities through international mobility programmes for students, scholarship programme for the youth from the Polish diaspora and promotion of science and higher education; and 4) Promoting the Polish language and culture through promotion of the Polish language, history and culture.*

These efforts to increase the level of internationalisation of the system were commented on by one of the ministerial officials:

It is exactly the reason why we have opened NAWA. Poland, as a part of EU, has the opportunity to act through attracting foreign scholars and through looking for such ways that allow Polish institutions to inhabit the niche left by the Brits (Interview 1, MNISW)

At the institutional level, leaders emphasised limited capacity to act on a large scale. However, even within this limited capacity, rectors are eager to try at least to attract some of the scholars who are willing to return to continental Europe after Brexit. As put by one of the interviewed leaders:

If there is a hard Brexit, and a lot of people will leave the UK system, then my University will for sure try to somehow 'fight' for these people. Even if just for Poles who work at British institutions today and might seek a new place for themselves. (Interview 2, University A – Leader).

The individual academics involved in research consortia with British institutions and planning to continue the collaboration are already discussing changing the leadership in the further applications in H2020 and FP9 projects. Some concerns are present, but they are not perceived as game changers. As suggestively put by one of the interviewees involved in a multinational COST project and planning a draft of further application for EU funding:

We have not thought yet about throwing away the Brits like a rotten egg but the situation looks like this: if the Brits are able to come on board, we'll take them - if not, we sail without them. Nobody cries because we will not have any political power to change a thing. However, we cannot think about giving up our plans and ideas. (Interview 6, University B – Staff)

## **11.5. Brexit in relation to concurrent changes and trends**

### **11.5.1. Cooperation/competition**

Respondents' opinions about the future of cooperation or increased competition in the European Research Area after Brexit do not make up a coherent picture. Too many essential variables were still unknown to the interlocutors, which is why their statements, also in this matter, were sometimes close to speculation. A significant problem hindering this task, even more, was the unknown future status of Great Britain in the context of the form and principles of its presence (or its complete absence) in the European Research Area.

When asked about the future of the relations between the European systems after Brexit, one of the researchers said:

I'm sure there will be continuous race for resources but we're in neoliberal competitive academia. So it's a race to the bottom anyway. So there's always be a competition, no matter if it will go up or down. (Interview 10, University B – Staff).

The competition is seen here as a general rule that regulates academic life. In such an interpretation, Brexit is completely irrelevant to the weakening or strengthening of competition between countries after the UK leaves the EU. An opinion of the high representative of the ministry seems to be suggesting that the increased pool of available funds for research after the UK leaves the EU may also be distributed with Poland's participation, as part of the process of expanding cooperation with the researchers from the leading countries:

I will say very brutally - the biggest players are not able to consume more funding. So, the fact that the Germans want to cooperate with us does not follow from the fact that they just have a liking for Poland, but that they are not able to win anymore for themselves on their own. They are already able to take more only as part of the partnership because they already have everything. The same applies to France (Interview 3, MNiSW).

Another representative of the MNiSW seemed to think in the same direction, but his optimism concerns the future of Britain's relations with Europe after Brexit. As he stated:

In the context of Brexit, the United Kingdom will open itself a little more than before to European universities, but probably in the first place this will be German and French partners (Interview 5 - MNiSW).

This optimism is not shared by the representatives of the academic staff, one of whom emphasised repeatedly that the United Kingdom outside the European Union is just another serious competitor (next to China, USA, Russia), which will grow quite unnecessarily because “*for very long time now there is no place in science for the idea of nations*” (Interview 4, University B - Staff). These mutually exclusive positions on the new relations are primarily due to the considerable uncertainties surrounding the conditions of Brexit.

## **11.6. Future perspectives**

### **11.6.1. Effect on attractiveness of EU research**

The effects of Brexit on the attractiveness of the EU as a research area were considered by interlocutors above all in relation to the outside of Europe and especially with regard to China and competition for Chinese researchers. In their opinion, Europe is perceived mostly as a unified region, and from a global point of view, Brexit may be perceived as an opaque and unclear process of little importance.

However, it opens up a chance for the countries of Central and Eastern Europe – a chance to open up the perspectives of cooperation with East Asian countries and systems.

The metaphor of the “gate to Europe” was deployed all over the interviews. This gateway until now has been the United Kingdom (in terms of access to the European labour market after obtaining a British diploma or access to European research funding). In the predictions of the respondents, in the face of Brexit, the United Kingdom will inevitably lose this function. It may be overtaken by one of the leading European countries (notably Germany or France). Smaller advantages in the situation of dispersing the potential (e.g. foreign students or research resources) that have been taken up by the United Kingdom so far can also be obtained by the countries of the Central European region.

Another issue is the loss of research potential which now constitutes a significant counterbalance in research competition with regions such as the USA, China or Japan. “*This critical mass of the UK is crucial in this process*” (Interview 2 - University A, Staff) - without it, Europe can move from the position of a global leader and thus become a less attractive place from the point of view of foreign researchers who previously treated it as one of the most important destinations where they could develop their careers.

### **11.6.2. What are the implications for EU initiatives?**

The interviewees did not put much emphasis on the direct consequences of Brexit in the current financial perspective of EU research programmes. The representatives of the university leadership and the Ministry of Science and Higher Education emphasised that they relied on the assurances of the British government that current financial commitments in European projects will be respected. The uncertainty in relation to the planning of future projects in cooperation with institutions in Great Britain was best expressed by the leader of University A:

Today, to put it clearly, when I think about the coordination of projects, especially those in the Horizon 2020, where the University A is supposed to be posited as the coordinator, I do not encourage the researchers to pick Great Britain to be a strong partner in the project, because I expect some turbulence related to Brexit. Because I expect, I do not know, the loss of funding opportunities, and I'm also afraid that these projects may be assessed differently. A bit worse judged because of the uncertainty associated with Brexit. That is why I think that today entering large scientific projects with British universities can be risky. (Interview 2, University A - leader).

A similar approach was expressed by researchers who are currently realising international projects financed from European funds with the participation of British partners and are planning to continue this cooperation in the future.

### **11.6.3. Changes in the EU landscape**

There was general agreement among the interlocutors that Brexit creates the prospect of severe shifts on the European research map and opens the door to the emergence of a new European research leader. In this position, the interlocutors would primarily see the largest European systems, like Germany or France (but in some instances smaller, dynamic countries like the Netherlands, Denmark or Spain were mentioned as well). While the perspective of institutional leaders and the academic staff were limited to the above observation, representatives of the Ministry of Science and Higher Education pointed to an opportunity for the consolidated Central European area, from which universities could “*fight for a larger piece of financial cake*” and recover some of the researchers who left the country and moved to Great Britain for their system. However, as one of the representatives of the Ministry of Science and Higher Education said soberly, there are serious material obstacles for this consolidation:

We have a severe problem, but this is the EU policy which financed the more or less the same infrastructure in the last distribution of structural funds in all CEE countries. It was widely known what the easiest way to get money was. Therefore the countries of our region did exactly the same, and at the moment there is no possibility for real cooperation. We are competitors. The competition is huge. The basic problem is that there is a huge opportunity, provided we can create our own strength. Such attempts are being made as we speak (Interview 3, MNiSW).

Institutional leaders or academic staff confronted with the idea of a possible strengthening of the Central European region's position subjected it to serious doubt, pointing out that cooperation in science is not based on political interests and decrees.

## **11.7. Academic labour/mobility - staff perspectives**

### **11.7.1. Non-national staff**

UK citizens employed at Polish institutions on research-teaching contracts are a minor group. They consist of only 84.5 FTE out of 2,108.5 (FTE) foreigners employed within the Polish public higher education sector. The representative of this minority interviewed for the purpose of this research summarised his fears as regards to Brexit as following:

I think, I called it a time of insecurity. To start with. I have never been particularly worried about what will happen on this personal level, because I have been here 9 years, I pay taxes, I have a house here, I'm married to a Pole. That's less than an issue. So, for example, I'm thinking about taking Polish citizenship. Now the reason I do that is not that I have any particular affiliation with the Polish country but more that I want to be part of the European Union. So that's one thing on my actual to do list - to apply for Polish citizenship so that I

will have professional and personal access to Europe that I don't want to lose by only having a British passport (University B - Faculty, British citizen).

As confirmed by interviews with both institutional leaders, Brexit has absolutely no influence on the staff policy of their institutions. UK citizens can enjoy full benefits of stable employment at Polish institutions but, as emphasised by the institutional leader of University A, “*they are free to go back to the UK*” as no rector has any power to stop them.

## **11.8. Transversal questions**

### **11.8.1. Gain / loss in UK staff and students**

Both employees and students (Erasmus or full cycle) from the United Kingdom have currently marginal importance for the Polish system, as well as for the institutions under study. In the systemic context, the Ministry of Science and Higher Education is addressing several grants and scholarship programmes to attract academic staff – the “Polish returns” programme will be launched as part of the NAWA agency, to financially support researchers planning to transfer their research to Polish institutions. A common argument used in the interviews in favour of today's attractiveness of the Polish system is the wide availability of the “state-of-the-art” research infrastructure, built and mostly unused to its full potential.

However, all respondents were fully aware that the relative unattractiveness of regular employment in the Polish system works against the chances of success of all the above-mentioned activities. The representative of the University B leadership shared in this context a bitter but realistic observation regarding foreign employees at Polish universities:

What also worries me is not only that these foreign researchers are scarce in our institutions, but generally that those who come here are not, I would say, front researchers. These are rather people who have either the years of their scientific splendour behind them or people who are definitely not in the premier league (Interview 7, University B – leader).

### **11.8.2. Advocacy/lobbying on Brexit**

On the side of ministerial officials, there was no wish for specific negotiations related to higher education and Brexit. The officials expressed the opinion that this kind of negotiation could be against the Polish *ratio d'état*, as Poland could possibly gain something from the new arrangements of the EU research area organised without the UK. As put by one of the ministerial officials:

Looking from a perspective of our interest a specific clause for science and higher education in Brexit negotiations would not necessarily be beneficial, as we have something to gain here, to strengthen the Polish system and our higher education and science



are ready for students and researchers' intake, and we can calmly deal without Brits (Interview 3, MNiSW)

Moreover, the representatives of the MNiSW also complained about the complete lack of postulates formulated by the Polish universities with regard to the Brexit negotiations. The Polish academic community's lack of interest makes it difficult for the Ministry to efficiently negotiate or lobby for the benefit of Polish institutions at the EU level.

### **11.8.3. How high is the confidence in the Brexit negotiations?**

Ambiguity and uncertainty as to the direction and the final effect of Brexit negotiations in general, as well as the consequences of Brexit in the context of science and higher education, in particular, were expressed by all respondents. This influenced the way the narrative was conducted during the interviews. Some of the participants formulated their responses in conditional mode: "if it came to hard Brexit, then I would consider X" etc. The overly speculative nature of the study (investigating the consequences of something whose shape is not known to anyone at the moment) also discouraged some of the potential participants in the study, becoming in some cases a declarative reason for refusing to participate in the study. The vast majority of participants did not have any kind of confidence in Brexit negotiations. A good summary of the sober stance on Brexit shared by the interviewees was expressed by one of the ministerial officials:

Let's not get hysterical about Brexit. Great Britain is leaving the European Union, but there are bilateral contacts, and the EU does not have such exclusive competence in matters of science and higher education. This is the domain of the Member States. The EU provides funding, but it does not really have any rights. It seems to me that it will depend on the will of the capitals - whether to continue cooperation or not to continue it at all. And that's it (Interview 3, MNiSW).