ALEKSANDRA ANNA RABCZUN[1]
Poznan University of Economics and Business
ORCID: 0000-0002-1011-623X

DOI : 10.14746/rie.2025.19.11

The Impact of EU Integration on Poland's Foreign Trade from 2004 to 2023

Introduction

International trade (IT) and the trade policy (TP) of the European Union (EU) are fundamental pillars of the modern global economy, exerting a significant influence on the dynamics of globalization and regional integration. From classical economic theories, such as Adam Smith's concept of absolute advantage or David Ricardo's comparative advantage, to contemporary approaches to economic integration, these issues have remained at the center of scientific research and political debate. The EU's Common Commercial Policy (CCP), based on uniform rules and centralized competences at the Community level, provides Member States with the opportunity to represent their interests uniformly on the international stage. It combines liberalization tools, such as free trade agreements, with protective mechanisms, allowing for the maximization of economic benefits while safeguarding the interests of the internal market. Its evolution – from the creation of a customs union in 1968 to today's "deep" trade agreements covering environmental, social, and investment issues – reflects the EU's ability to adapt to a changing global environment.

Poland's accession to the EU in 2004 was a turning point in the development of its trade. Accession opened up access to the single market and an extensive network of EU trade agreements, and integration with the CCP meant not only the removal of customs barriers in intra-EU trade, but also the adoption of uniform rules and instruments in relations with third countries. As a result, Polish foreign trade underwent significant changes, both in terms of volume and geographical and commodity structure.

The aim of this study is to analyze the changes taking place in Polish foreign trade in the years 2004–2023, covering both the dynamics of exports and imports and the evolution of their structure. The study aims to determine how EU membership and the transformation of global trade rules have affected Poland's position in the international division of labor. The analysis is set in the broader theoretical context of international trade and in relation to the CCP tools that shape the directions and pace of trade. The central focus of the article is an empirical examination of the volume and dynamics of Polish trade in the period 2004–2023.

The research hypothesis assumes that Poland's accession to the EU in 2004 significantly increased the value, dynamics, and degree of geographical diversification of its foreign trade, and that these changes were a direct result of integration with the single market and the adoption of the common instruments of the EU's CCP.

Theoretical foundations of international trade

IT is the flow of goods and services between nations, forming the foundation of international economic theory and a tool for analysis when applying models such as comparative advantage, trade gains models, and economies of scale (Krugman, Obstfeld, Melitz, 2018). Over the centuries, many theories of international trade have been developed. Undoubtedly, one of the most important is the theory of absolute costs. Smith pointed out that IT allows countries to specialize in the production of those goods in which they are most efficient (Smith, 1776). A country has an absolute advantage when it can produce goods at a lower cost or with less labor than other countries. By exporting the goods in which it specializes, a country increases its overall prosperity by importing other goods that are produced by more efficient trading partners. Ricardo, on the other hand, proved, in accordance with the theory of comparative advantage, that even if a country has an absolute advantage in all areas, it can still benefit from IT by specializing in the production of those goods that it produces most efficiently – that is, at the lowest opportunity cost (Ricardo, 2001). This allows both sides to benefit when they exchange specialized products according to the comparative advantage model. One of the contemporary theories that explains trade well is the theory of factor proportions. According to the Heckscher-Ohlin model, the structure of IT results from differences in a given country's resources: countries rich in capital export capital-intensive goods, while those with an advantage in cheap labor export labor-intensive goods. Trade allows for the efficient use of resources, in accordance with their relative abundance in a given country.

The two most important concepts in IT are exports and imports. Rymarczyk points out that "exports are the sale of goods and services abroad, which results in foreign exchange inflows to the exporting country" (Rymarczyk, 2012). Misala, on the other hand, believes that it means the transfer of goods and services from one country to another for a fee in order to achieve economic benefits (Misala, 2001). As far as imports are concerned, following Rymarczyk's approach, it can be pointed out that it is the purchase of goods and services abroad, causing an outflow of foreign exchange from the importing country (Rymarczyk, 2012). Świerkocki, on the other hand, points out that it is the process of purchasing goods and services produced in other countries for consumption, investment, or further processing in the purchasing country (Świerkocki, 2007). If country A exports something, it means that it exports it outside its customs borders. Conversely, if it imports, it means that it brings something into its territory.

The measurement of IT is based on an analysis of the value and volume of flows of goods and services between countries, and the primary sources of data are customs statistics, balance of payments, and foreign trade registers maintained by national institutions and international organizations (Krugman, Obstfeld, Melitz, 2018). The most commonly used indicators are the value of exports and imports, the trade balance, and the degree of openness of the economy, expressed as the share of trade in gross domestic product (GDP) (Gorynia, Łaźniewska, 2020). Structural indicators are also used for measurement, such as the share of individual commodity groups, geographical directions of trade, and the degree of concentration of sales and supply markets (WTO, 2023). In a more advanced approach, terms of trade, export competitiveness indicators, and revealed comparative advantage (RCA) indices are also analyzed. These data are collected by, among others, the World Trade Organization (WTO), the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank, and Eurostat, which enables international comparisons and assessment of the dynamics of trade globalization processes.

Historically, trade was one of the first manifestations of interaction between countries, enabling the exchange of goods, technology, and ideas, which contributed to the development of civilization (Findlay, O’Rourke, 2007). In theoretical terms, IT is considered the foundation of economic integration processes, as it promotes specialization, increased efficiency, and closer ties between national economies (Krugman, Obstfeld, Melitz, 2018). Classical theories, such as Ricardo’s theory of comparative advantage, indicate that the free movement of goods allows countries to reap the benefits of exchange, which forms the basis for further stages of economic and institutional cooperation. Contemporary concepts of integration, including Viner’s theory of customs unions, emphasize that the development of trade is both a condition and a result of closer economic ties, leading to the creation of supranational structures such as the EU (Viner, 1950).

Economic integration, which is a category of international economics, refers to the process of deepening economic cooperation between at least two countries through the gradual removal of barriers to such cooperation. As a result, national economies converge and merge, ultimately leading to the creation of a single, integrated economic system (Rabczun, 2024).

Economic integration leads to the creation of integration groups, understood as new economic entities functioning as separate entities in the global economy. These groups comprise at least two national economies. The integration process itself consists in combining the economies of member states, which allows for the exploitation of synergies and translates into increased economic efficiency. The results include higher GDP, technological progress, maintenance of internal and external balance, increased competitiveness, and overall growth in prosperity (Rabczun, 2024).

Within the framework of international relations theory, different types of integration groups are distinguished, which are classified mainly according to the degree of links between member states (Chart 1).

The stages of economic integration, from less to more advanced, include: a partial free trade area, a free trade area, a customs union, a common market, an economic union, a monetary union, and a full economic union. There is also an additional stage of political union, but it is rejected by some economists due to the supra-economic nature of the relations between the entities in such a union.

A partial free trade area involves the removal or reduction of only selected customs or trade barriers between member states. It may apply to selected groups of goods or sectors of the economy. An example of this stage in the European context is the abolition of barriers to trade in steel and coal in the 1950s under the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC), even though other sectors remained protected (Rymarczyk, 2006).

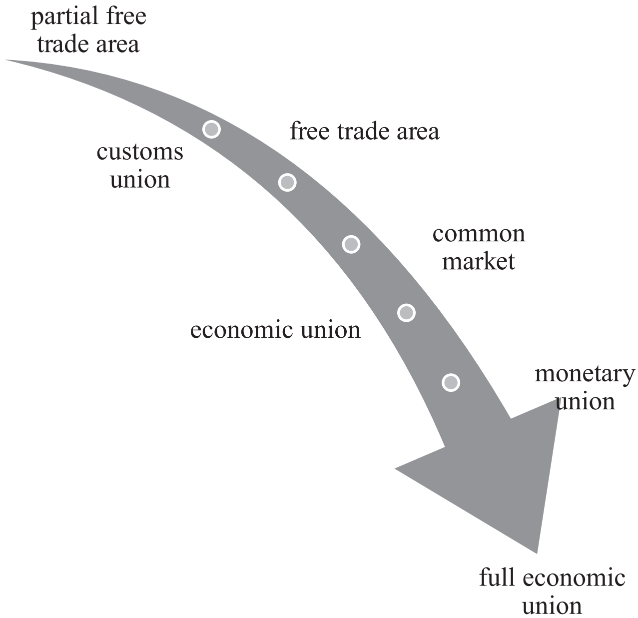


Chart 1. Stages of economic integration development

Source: Own study based on Rymarczyk J. (2006), *Teoretyczne aspekty międzynarodowej integracji gospodarczej*, w: *Pozaeuropejskie ugrupowania integracyjne*, eds. J. Rymarczyk, M. Wroblewski, Oficyna Wydawnicza Arboretum, Wrocław, pp. 17–18.

Within a free trade area, customs duties and fees between members are abolished, but there is no common customs policy towards third countries. In the EU, this stage took place after the signing of the Treaty of Rome (1957) and its implementation by 1968, when internal customs duties between Community countries were completely abolished.

A customs union, on the other hand, involves the elimination of customs duties between members and the introduction of a common customs policy towards third countries. Since 1968, the European Community has applied a common customs tariff to importers from outside the Community (Krugman, Obstfeld, Melitz, 2018). According to Viner’s classic theses, the creation of customs unions generates both trade creation and trade diversion effects, which translate into increased efficiency or potential costs (Viner, 1950).

The next stage of integration is the common market. It is created by combining a customs union with the free movement of goods, services, capital, and people. A European example of this stage is the European Single Market, which was formally launched in 1993 after the entry into force of the Single European Act (1986). Balassa emphasizes that the economic integration processes in the European model of the Common Market contributed to the creation of trade and its shifts within the European market (Balassa, 1967).

Next, we can talk about an economic union based on a common market and a customs union, expanded to include coordination and harmonization of economic policy, including budgetary policy. It should be noted that the EU is a partial economic union – it has budgetary policy coordination (the Stability and Growth Pact), but lacks full budget centralization (Rymarczyk, 2006).

Next, we have monetary union. This is an economic union with a common currency and a common monetary policy conducted by a single authority. An example of this stage in Europe is the eurozone, which has been in operation since 1999 (electronic currency) and 2002 (banknotes and coins), managed by the European System of Central Banks with the European Central Bank playing a leading role.

The theory of economic integration further envisages a full economic union. This is a monetary union with harmonization of other policies, such as taxation and competition. It should be noted that the EU is striving to reach this stage, but there are still significant differences in taxation and economic law. In the Polish context, points out that the birth and development of the idea of economic integration is a constant element of economic reflection, especially in the context of the EU, and that in the future the EU will continue to move in this direction (Machlup, 1986).

The final stage (often questioned) is political union, encompassing full economic union with the transfer of competences in the areas of foreign, social, and economic policy to supranational institutions. The result is something akin to an international government. The EU is not a political union, although elements of a common foreign and security policy do exist (e.g., the High Representative for Foreign Affairs).

The literature on the subject points to two extreme scenarios for the future of European integration: federalization and a return to the concept of sovereign states. Federalization would mean deepening integration towards the creation of a "United States of Europe" with a strong central government and common fiscal and defense policies, as proposed by Spinelli and Rossi (Spinelli, Rossi, 1941), among others. Proponents of this approach, such as Habermas, argue that only further institutional integration will allow the EU to compete effectively with other global powers and cope with transnational crises (Habermas, 2012). An alternative scenario envisages the renationalization of policies and a return to a model of loose cooperation between states, similar to EFTA or the pre-treaty Community, which could result from growing Euroscepticism and social pressure to regain full control over internal policy (Moravcsik, 1998). Researchers such as Zielonka emphasize that renationalization could lead to the political fragmentation of Europe and weaken its position on the international stage, although at the same time it would increase the flexibility of states in pursuing independent economic policies (Zielonka, 2014).

EU trade policy

The EU TP is one of the oldest and most coordinated Community policies. Its origins are closely linked to the creation of the European Economic Community (EEC) and the logic of a customs union: the abolition of customs duties in internal trade and the adoption of a common tariff vis-à-vis third countries. The Treaty of Rome included a commitment to "the progressive abolition of restrictions on international trade," and member states agreed that trade relations with third countries would be coordinated at the community level, in the spirit of GATT principles (Tkachuk, 2016, p. 482; Smith, 2015, p. 286; Moravcsik, 1998, p. 157). In this context, the adoption of a uniform approach to external actions became the foundation of the CCP, whose formal basis gained importance with the creation of the customs union on July 1, 1968, and with the transfer of external trade competences to the Community level on January 1, 1970 (Kuś, 2007, pp. 53–54).

From the very beginning, the CCP was intended not only to coordinate external relations, but also to build a unified EU representation in international organizations and negotiations with partners. The transfer of competences meant that member states could not conclude individual trade agreements or differentiate the level of customs protection; decisions are made at the EU level and are implemented mainly by the European Commission (Kuś, 2007, pp. 55–56). This solution increased the coherence of actions and allowed the EU to act as a single entity on the global stage, which became particularly evident in the following decades as the scope of the Common Foreign and Security Policy’s (CFSP) competences and instruments was expanded (Tkachuk, 2016, p. 482).

An important context for the transformation of CCP was the reform of the global development cooperation system at the turn of the 1980s and 1990s. Ideological approaches were replaced by an emphasis on the effectiveness of poverty reduction measures, with trade and foreign direct investment identified as levers for development. The EU incorporated these principles into its own practice, creating a close link between TP and development policy and treating trade as an engine of growth. This is reflected, among other things, in the 2000 Cotonou Agreement, which combines political, trade, and development components in relations with African, Caribbean, and Pacific countries (Kołodziejczyk, 2016, pp. 55–56). Since the second half of the 1990s, the link between trade instruments and the creation of conditions conducive to the development of partner countries’ economies has been strengthened, which has consolidated the direction of “trade for development” (Kołodziejczyk, 2016, p. 56).

In material terms, the CCP is based on uniform principles covering changes in customs tariffs, trade negotiations (goods and services), intellectual property and direct investment issues, the application of protective measures, and the harmonization of liberalization instruments and export policy (Pera, 2013, p. 178; Barcz, 2008, pp. 390–391; Kawecka-Wyrzykowska, 2012, pp. 216–218). At the same time, TP, as an element of economic policy, takes into account both internal conditions within the EU and external factors, such as the situation in partner countries and the global economic situation (Pera, 2013, p. 178; Jeliński, 2003, p. 128).

The evolution of TP instruments was a consequence of multilateral liberalization: declining customs duties and WTO commitments reduced the importance of traditional import duties, while non-tariff instruments gained in importance. Among these, the EU widely uses anti-dumping and anti-subsidy proceedings, which, alongside other measures (e.g., quotas or sanitary and technical measures), serve to counteract unfair competition and sudden market disturbances (Pera, 2013, pp. 179–180; Kawecka-Wyrzykowska, 2012, pp. 222–232; Evenett, 2011, pp. 24, 31). In this sense, the WTO uses a set of instruments at the intersection of liberalization and protection, attempting to balance the benefits of openness with the protection of internal market interests.

The two pillars of CCP liberalization tools are free trade agreements (FTAs) and the generalized system of preferences (GSP). FTAs take the form of bilateral, interregional, and multilateral agreements; in addition to trade in goods, they increasingly regulate services, public procurement, intellectual property rights protection, capital flows, competition rules, and even environmental and social issues – often going beyond WTO standards (Kołodziejczyk, 2016, p. 60). The GSP, on the other hand, consists of unilateral tariff preferences for developing countries, but following reform, this instrument mainly covers low- and lower-middle-income countries; countries that have achieved a higher income level or have FTAs with the EU, among others, have been excluded from the system (Kołodziejczyk, 2016, pp. 62–63). In practice, the GSP is intended to facilitate exports to one of the world’s largest markets and promote the integration of developing countries into global trade, although its effectiveness as a development tool remains a subject of debate (Kołodziejczyk, 2016, p. 63).

The development of the EU’s network of preferential agreements had a strong historical component: relations with African, Caribbean, and Pacific (ACP) countries had been shaped since the 1960s, and preferences were included in successive agreements – from Yaoundé to Lomé to Cotonou. Initially, these were partial in nature and mainly targeted the former colonies of member states, while also constituting the first step towards the EU’s complex system of trade agreements (Woolcock, 2014, p. 718; Mansfield, Pevehouse, 2013, p. 592; Nacewska-Twardowska, 2014, p. 210). Over time, this practice has expanded in terms of content and geography, and the newer generation of agreements also covers labor and environmental standards and the protection of innovation (Pera, 2013, p. 181).

In institutional and historical terms, the strength of the WTO was determined by the gradual concentration of competences at the Community level. As early as the 1960s, the Community began to function as a “global trading power,” and the Kennedy Round of GATT (1963–1967) became a test of the Commission’s ability to develop common positions and conduct negotiations, although decisions ultimately remained in the hands of the member states (Tkachuk, 2016, p. 482; Moravcsik, 1998, p. 236). The sources of disputes between the Commission and the member states – over who represents the EEC externally – paradoxically contributed to the development of common priorities and practical compromises, and the reduction of common tariff protection after the Kennedy Round reinforced the irreversibility of market integration (Tkachuk, 2016, p. 482; Moravcsik, 1998, p. 236). Further strengthening came with the Single European Act, the Maastricht and Lisbon treaties; after 2009, the TFEU explicitly linked the CCP to the Union’s foreign policy, confirming the objective of a common trade policy as a contribution to the progressive abolition of trade restrictions (Tkachuk, 2016, p. 482).

When measuring the effects of liberalization in terms of rates, a steady decline in the average common customs tariff can be observed – from 8.2% in 1972 to approximately 2–3% today. This has been accompanied by the harmonization of internal market standards and the standardization of non-tariff barriers vis-à-vis third countries – key vectors of the CCP (Tkachuk, 2016, p. 483). When comparing the hierarchy of priorities in agreements concluded by the EU, customs unions occupy the highest place, followed by free trade areas, then unilateral Community preferences, and finally the most-favored-nation clause in trade relations (Goralski, Kardas, 2008, p. 273).

GPA also overlaps with competition policy. In practice, the choice of trade instruments and the shape of competition rules (more liberal or more restrictive) jointly determine the dynamics of sectors and the achievement of economic goals. Openness to external competition can mitigate distortions resulting from the power of domestic monopolists; on the other hand, tariffs or other import restrictions can lead to an increase in the prices of foreign goods and at the same time stimulate domestic supply and employment, although the balance of effects is complex and depends on the market structure (Kuna, 2002, pp. 185, 191–192; Żebrowska, 2008, pp. 375–378).

The strong impact of the CCP on the economies of member states is well illustrated by the case of Poland. Accession meant the full adoption of the CCP acquis: a common customs tariff, non-tariff instruments, quotas, and the subjection of Polish trade to the rules of the single market. This led to a reduction in transaction costs and the removal of barriers at internal borders, but also to the extension of EU anti-dumping and countervailing duties to Poland and its inclusion in the Community quota system. In certain relations (e.g. with the US and Canada), conditions deteriorated temporarily after the withdrawal of GSP preferences, but at the same time, access to the EU’s extensive network of preferential agreements opened up new export and integration opportunities (Kuś, 2007, pp. 58–61). At the sectoral level, integration, reduced transit costs, and better use of production resources have strengthened specialization and the ability of companies to serve extensive European demand, while being aware of the social costs of restructuring and EU measures to mitigate these effects (Sporek, 2016, p. 81).

In terms of the objectives and principles of the CCP, in addition to controlling the volume of exports and imports, it also focuses on maintaining a balanced trade balance, improving terms of trade, ensuring access to raw materials, and supporting structural changes and balance in the labor market. These measures combine the internal dimension (competitiveness and prosperity of the EU economy) with the external dimension (position in the global division of labor) and are based on a set of consistent rules: from changes in rates, through the conclusion of agreements and liberalization measures, to protective measures and a uniform export policy (Kuś, 2007, pp. 53–55). Contemporary practice also confirms the dominant – though not exclusive – liberal trend: the new generation of agreements with key partners covers not only trade in goods and services, but also freedom of investment, protection of innovation, labor and environmental standards, placing trade policy within the broad framework of sustainable development (Pera, 2013, p. 181).

In the debate on the role of trade in European integration, it is also important to note that the main and most enduring driving force was economic interests – especially commercial ones – and not solely federalist ideas. This perspective helps to explain the pace of creation of the common market and the EEC, as well as their resilience to economic fluctuations (Moravcsik, 1998, p. 473). At the same time, the EU’s TP compass remains sensitive to global challenges: economic crises, shifts in the balance of power in world trade, and the growing importance of strategic TP. In the 21st century, interdependence and competition have grown, and the weakening of US dominance has created incentives for more assertive rule-making and selection of Canada–Free Trade Agreement instruments (Puślecki, 2017, p. 137).

From the point of view of methods and organization, the literature points to three categories of the EU’s external economic policy: establishing uniform import regulations, concluding bilateral and multilateral agreements, and pursuing cooperation policies with developing countries (Hix, Høyland, 2011, pp. 305–306; Tkachuk, 2016,

p. 481). In practice, this three-way division is intertwined with the hierarchy of agreement priorities (customs union and unilateral preferences) and with the pursuit of further reductions in tariffs and non-tariff barriers (Goralski, Kardas, 2008, p. 273; Tkachuk, 2016, p. 483).

An important issue is the role of the GSP in EU development policy. Alongside the GSP, which – after narrowing the group of beneficiaries to lower-income countries with high development sensitivity – is intended to support integration with the global market, the EU emphasizes the conditionality of preferences, including respect for human rights, labor and environmental standards, and progress in reforms (Pera, 2013, p. 183; Kołodziejczyk, 2016, pp. 62–63). At the same time, the EU maintains its course of using trade as a lever to stimulate growth and create jobs in member states, which is in line with the overarching goal of the Union’s economic policy (Pera, 2013, p. 184).

External Economic Policy does not operate in a conceptual vacuum. In official EU documents, “foreign economic policy” does not form a uniform, autonomous whole, and in the liberal approach it is sometimes equated with TP. At the same time, as Haliżak points out, TP is a narrower concept than foreign economic policy in the broad sense, although both spheres use similar instruments (Mołdowan, 2019, p. 53; Zabielska, 2013, p. 265; Haliżak, 2002, p. 352). Research on CCP also highlights the institutional and decision-making dimensions – described synthetically, among others, in Mazur’s monograph – and the directions of change in trade policy tools in recent decades, especially in the sphere of “treaty policy” (Czermińska, 2017, p. 171).

When comparing the practice of CCP with Poland’s experience, one can see the coexistence of liberalization effects (reduction of transaction costs, access to the single market and preferential agreements) and protective effects (coverage by common trade defense measures, quotas, disputes in the WTO). Integration stimulated specialization and improved production quality, although at the same time it posed image and marketing challenges in Western markets, which diminished in the long term (Sporek, 2016, pp. 80–81). The consequence was a stronger “networking” of Polish exports within the EU’s agreement architecture, with more diverse conditions of access to third markets – better where the EU had preferences and more difficult where preferences had ceased (Kuś, 2007, pp. 58–61).

Ultimately, the CCP appears to be a hybrid policy: on the one hand, it maintains a liberal course and negotiates increasingly broad, “deep” agreements, supporting innovation, research, and growth; on the other hand, it maintains and develops protective instruments needed to address dumping practices, subsidies, or sudden shocks in trade. This duality is not a contradiction, but a response to the structure of interests and economic conditions of the EU and its partners. Hence, EU TP remains both a tool for opening up and regulating trade, and a mechanism for shaping the trade order, in which development goals and social and environmental standards are increasingly becoming an integral part of trade agreements (Pera, 2013, pp. 181–184; Kołodziejczyk, 2016, pp. 55–63). In this sense, the ability of the CFSP to combine liberalization with protection – and to coordinate them with other EU policies – determines its lasting role in building the Union’s position in the global economy.

Sources of data

In the empirical part of the paper, the author use data from The Observatory of Economic Complexity (OEC). The OEC is a research-based platform originally developed at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) as a project by Alex Simoes under the supervision of César Hidalgo, and later expanded by a wider research team as an analytical tool for studying economic complexity and international trade patterns. Rather than producing independent statistics, OEC builds on official trade data reported to the United Nations (UN) and processed within the BACI database, developed by the CEPII research centre. In particular, bilateral trade flows are taken from the UN Comtrade system and then cleaned, harmonised and symmetrised in BACI in order to correct reporting inconsistencies and ensure cross-country comparability. OEC therefore serves as a visualisation and dissemination layer for high-quality, internationally standardised trade statistics, providing consistent time series by country and product group.

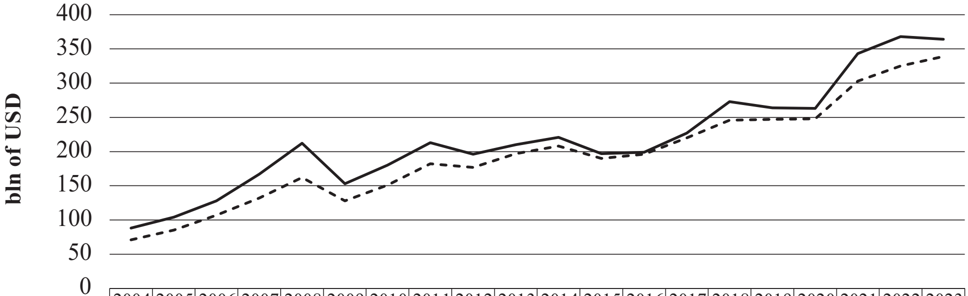
The academic credibility of OEC is confirmed by its extensive use in the scientific literature. OEC-based indicators of export structure and economic complexity have been employed in numerous peer-reviewed studies on trade, development and innovation, including articles in journals such as PLOS ONE and Communications Earth, Environment within the Nature Portfolio. These contributions use OEC data, among others, to construct measures of economic complexity, to analyse countries' export baskets and to derive forward-looking indicators such as the Complexity Outlook Gain. In addition, OEC is referenced by international organisations and knowledge platforms as a recognised visualisation tool for UN Comtrade data and related indicators of economic complexity. This broad research and policy use indicates that OEC is widely regarded as a reliable and methodologically transparent source of trade data, suitable for empirical analyses such as the one conducted in this article.

At the same time, alternative statistical sources considered for this study turned out to be insufficient for the type of long-run, product-level analysis carried out here. Polish National Statistic Agency (GUS) does not provide a standalone, comprehensive database for the indicators examined, but redirects users to international statistical platforms, which in practice leads back to the same underlying UN and OECD data rather than offering an independent, fully usable national series. For the specific indicators and breakdowns used in this paper, Eurostat publishes comparable data for Poland only for a relatively short sub-period (for example, 2012–2021), while the UN Monthly Bulletin of Statistics Online reports Polish trade data for an even narrower time span (for example, 2016–2019). As a result, these sources do not allow the author to construct a consistent series for the entire 2004–2023 period. The OEC database, by contrast, provides a coherent and continuous set of trade statistics for Poland over these two decades, which makes it particularly suitable as the primary empirical basis for the analysis presented in this article.

Polish trade in 2004–2023

As a member of the EU since 2004, Poland had to adapt its TP to the standards of the common EU policy. This had an impact on Polish trade flows with foreign countries in the broad sense. Chart 1 shows the value of Polish exports and imports to Poland in 2004–2023.

Chart 1. Value of Polish exports and imports to Poland in 2004–2023 (in USD billion)



	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
export	71	85,4	107	132	162	128	151	182	177	197	208	190	196	220	246	247	248	303	325	339
import	88,2	104	128	167	212	153	180	213	196	210	221	197	199	227	273	264	263	343	368	364

export import years

Source: Own elaboration based on OEC.

The data in the chart shows that trade changed dynamically during the years analyzed. However, it is worth highlighting a few specific periods and relating them to important economic events. First of all, in the years 2004–2008, i.e. immediately after accession, there was an increase in exports from USD 71 billion (2004) to USD 162 billion (2008) and in imports from USD 88.2 billion to USD 212 billion. Poland’s accession to the EU in 2004 opened foreign markets to Polish products, attracted foreign investment, and increased the competitiveness of our economy. Overall economic growth in Europe was favorable for Polish exports, which further increased their value. However, in the face of the financial crisis (2008–2009), Polish exports fell to USD 128 billion, and imports to Poland also decreased to USD 153 billion. The main explanation for this situation may be, above all, a decline in demand on foreign markets, which is a standard crisis mechanism. In addition, demand in Germany fell sharply, which directly affected our exports (as shown in Table 2, Germany is Polish main trading partner, accounting for over 20% of exports).

Between 2010 and 2014, the economy experienced a post-crisis recovery and the situation on foreign markets stabilized. This resulted in an increase in exports to USD 208 billion in 2014 and imports to USD 221 billion. It should be remembered that after the crisis, the Polish currency was quite weak, which supported the competitiveness of exports (with a weaker currency, exports from a given country are cheaper for foreign countries). In addition, the situation was improved by the absorption of EU funds and the growth of global trade.

In turn, in 2015–2016, there was a slowdown, as exports fell to USD 190 billion and imports to USD 197 billion. The explanation for this phenomenon can be found in lower commodity prices on global markets. Geopolitics and the slowdown in China and Russia were also significant factors. The Russian ruble was in crisis due to Western sanctions following the annexation of Crimea and Donbas, which was also reflected in hydrocarbon prices.

In the following years (2017–2019), trade turnover grew quite dynamically. Exports rose to USD 247 billion (2019) and imports to USD 264 billion. This was facilitated by the favorable global economic situation as well as the recovery in the eurozone (i.e. among Poland’s main trading partners). In addition, internal factors such as strong domestic demand in Poland also played a role. This can be explained by increased social spending, such as the “Family 500+” program, which gave Poles more disposable income to spend on consumption, not only of domestic goods.

The year 2020 brought enormous turmoil caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. And although the initial panic, lockdowns, and various restrictions gave rise to fears about trade data, at the end of the year Poland recorded a stable level of exports (USD 248 billion) and a slight decline in imports (USD 263 billion). Despite the global downturn, Polish exports quickly recovered thanks to the food, pharmaceutical, and e-commerce sectors.

The years 2021–2022 were marked by an inflationary boom and an energy crisis in Poland due to the war in Ukraine. In 2021, there was a sharp increase in exports to USD 303 billion and imports to USD 343 billion, and in 2022, exports rose again to USD 325 billion and imports to USD 368 billion. These values were mainly caused by an increase in raw material prices (including mainly energy resources – hydrocarbons), inflation caused by the pandemic crisis, and geopolitical tensions following Russia’s aggression against Ukraine. Imports grew faster than exports due to more expensive energy.

In the last year of the analysis (2023), Polish trade was as follows: exports amounted to USD 339 billion, while imports amounted to USD 364 billion. This was mainly due to continued high inflation at the beginning of the year and a decline in domestic demand. The economic slowdown in Europe, particularly in the eurozone, was also a significant factor.

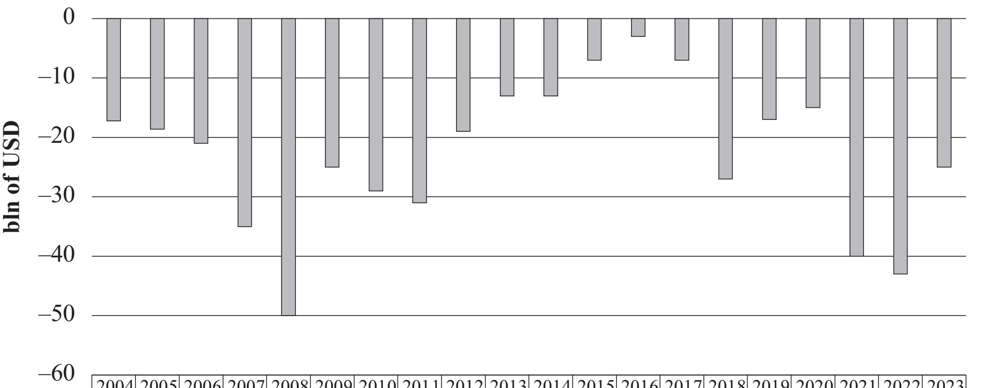
In summary, in the author’s opinion, the strongest factors shaping Polish trade in 2004–2023 were EU accession (2004), the financial crisis (2009), the pandemic (2020), and the war in Ukraine (2022).

Knowing the values of exports and imports, it is possible to check whether Poland was a net exporter or importer. The data in this regard is presented in Chart 2.

The chart shows the net export balance (exports minus imports) in billions of US dollars. Each year, the balance was negative, which means that Poland was a net importer throughout the entire period analyzed (GUS, 2006; GUS, 2009; GUS, 2015; GUS, 2021; GUS, 2023; GUS, 2025; Eurostat, 2025). In 2004–2008, the negative trade balance can be attributed to the dynamic growth of imports of investment and consumer goods after joining the EU and high prices of energy resources (oil, gas). Among the endogenous factors of the Polish economy, the increase in domestic demand and the credit boom should also be mentioned. In turn, the financial crisis in 2009 reduced the deficit because the global recession had a greater impact on imports than on exports (GUS, 2009; GUS, 2015; GUS, 2021; GUS, 2023; WTO, 2023; WTO, 2024).

The years 2010–2014 can be characterized by a decreasing trade deficit. This was mainly due to a revival in exports, an influx of EU investments into Poland, and the modernization of domestic industry. In turn, in the years 2015–2017, trade was almost

Chart 2. Net exports for Poland in 2004–2023



	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
export netto	–17,2	–18,6	–21	–35	–50	–25	–29	–31	–19	–13	–13	–7	–3	–7	–27	–17	–15	–40	–43	–25

years

Source: Own elaboration based on OEC.

balanced. The years 2018–2020 brought a renewed deterioration in Poland’s trade balance. The reasons for this can be found in the trade war between the US and China, which also contributed to the global economic slowdown. Since the end of 2019, trade has been disrupted by the coronavirus pandemic (Eurostat, 2025; WTO, 2023; WTO, 2024).

The years 2021–2023 are associated with a high surplus of imports over exports, which in turn can be explained by the energy crisis. The war of 2022 caused a sharp increase in energy and raw material prices in Europe. The costs of importing LNG from the United States, oil, and coal (from various geographical locations, which further increased transport costs, not only for the raw materials themselves) also rose (WTO, 2023; WTO, 2024; UNCTAD, 2022).

Several key conclusions can be drawn from an analysis of Polish net exports. First of all, the trade deficit is a structural feature of the Polish economy and is related to large imports of energy and components for industrial production (GUS, 2006; GUS, 2009; GUS, 2015; GUS, 2021; GUS, 2023; GUS, 2025; Eurostat, 2025). Even if there are periods of improvement in the trade balance, such as (2015–2017, 2023), they are due to factors that are not entirely dependent on internal economic policy (weakening of the Polish zloty, low commodity prices, or import restrictions due to sanctions). The worst years for Poland’s trade balance were 2008 (import boom before the financial crisis) and 2022 (raw material shock after the war in Ukraine and sanctions). Recent years show that Poland’s foreign trade is very sensitive to global energy prices and geopolitical tensions, which is not optimistic (WTO, 2023; WTO, 2024; UNCTAD, 2022).

In order to better present the changes in Polish TP, it was decided to present two additional indicators. The dynamics show how a given variable changed year-on-year, so when it comes to export dynamics, for example, they show how exports changed year-on-year (whether they grew or decreased in relative terms). In turn, the change shows how a given economic parameter changed in relation to the base year. For example, the change in imports in relation to the base year reflects how imports developed in the analyzed years in relation to the base year. Table 1 presents the dynamics of exports and imports as well as the change in exports and imports. For both variables, the base year was 2004, i.e. the initial year of the analysis, when Poland joined the EU.

Table 1

Detailed indicators of the dynamics and changes in the structure of Polish exports and imports in years 2004–2023

	Dynamics of export	Dnamics of import	Change of export (2004=100)	Change of import (2004=100)
2004	–	–	100	100
2005	20%	18%	120.28	117.91
2006	25%	23%	150.70	145.12
2007	23%	30%	185.92	189.34
2008	23%	27%	228.17	240.36
2009	–21%	–28%	180.28	173.47
2010	18%	18%	212.68	204.08
2011	21%	18%	256.34	241.50
2012	–3%	–8%	249.30	222.22
2013	11%	7%	277.46	238.10
2014	6%	5%	292.96	250.57
2015	–9%	–11%	267.61	223.36
2016	3%	1%	276.06	225.62
2017	12%	14%	309.86	257.37
2018	12%	20%	346.48	309.52
2019	0%	–3%	347.89	299.32
2020	0%	0%	349.30	298.19
2021	22%	30%	426.76	388.89
2022	7%	7%	457.75	417.23
2023	4%	–1%	477.46	412.70

Source: Own elaboration.

The growth rate of Polish exports was highest in the years following EU accession (2005–2008), when it exceeded 20% annually. The financial crisis in 2009 caused a sharp decline in growth, followed by an increase in the index in 2010–2011. In the following years, growth was more moderate, with short declines in 2012 and 2015. After the COVID-19 pandemic, strong growth was recorded again in 2021, while 2022–2023 brought a slowdown. It can therefore be concluded that there were large fluctuations in the dynamics of Polish exports.

Paradoxically, imports showed even greater volatility than exports – in 2007–2008, they grew faster (up to 30%), which indicates strong domestic demand in Poland. The 2009 crisis brought a decline in the index, which was greater than in exports. In 2018–2021, imports grew dynamically again, reaching 30% in 2021. The year 2023 ended with a slight decline, reflecting weaker domestic economic conditions.

In turn, the export change index rose steadily to a record high of 477 in 2023, which represents an almost fivefold increase. The largest increases occurred in 2005–2008 and in 2021 after the pandemic. A decline in value was recorded only in crisis years (2009, 2015). It can therefore be concluded that, in the long term, exports were the main driver of growth in the Polish economy.

As for the import volatility index, it also increased more than fourfold, to 413 in 2023, but its trajectory was more varied. Strong increases occurred in 2007–2008 and 2018–2021, when domestic demand was high. During periods of crisis (2009, 2012, 2015), there were clear declines or stagnation. Ultimately, the growth rate of imports was slightly lower than that of exports, which improved the trade balance in recent years, as shown in Chart 2.

The final element of the analysis of Polish trade is an analysis of the main trading partners. Table 2 presents Poland’s three largest trading partners (in terms of trade value) in terms of Polish exports and imports to Poland in each year of the analysis.

Table 2

Largest trading partners in terms of exports and imports for Poland in 2004–2023

	Export			**Import**		
	largest trading partner	**second largest trading partner**	**third largest trading partner**	**largest trading partner**	**second largest trading partner**	**third largest trading partner**
2004	Germany	Italy	France	Germany	Italy	Russia
2005	Germany	France	Italy	Germany	Russia	Italy
2006	Germany	France	Italy	Germany	Russia	Italy
2007	Germany	United Kingdom	France	Germany	Russia	Italy
2008	Germany	Italy	United Kingdom	Germany	Russia	China
2009	Germany	France	United Kingdom	Germany	China	Russia
2010	Germany	France	Italy	Germany	China	Russia
2011	Germany	France	Italy	Germany	Russia	China
2012	Germany	Czech Republic	France	Germany	Russia	China
2013	Germany	Czech Republic	France	Germany	Russia	China
2014	Germany	United Kingdom	Czech Republic	Germany	China	Russia
2015	Germany	United Kingdom	Czech Republic	Germany	China	Russia
2016	Germany	United Kingdom	Czech Republic	Germany	China	Italy
2017	Germany	United Kingdom	Czech Republic	Germany	China	Italy
2018	Germany	United Kingdom	Czech Republic	Germany	China	Russia
2019	Germany	United Kingdom	Czech Republic	Germany	China	Italy
2020	Germany	United Kingdom	Czech Republic	Germany	China	Italy
2021	Germany	Czech Republic	France	Germany	China	Italy
2022	Germany	Czech Republic	France	Germany	China	Italy
2023	Germany	United Kingdom	Czech Republic	Germany	China	Italy

Source: Own elaboration based on OEC.

When it comes to Polish exports, Germany clearly dominates as the main trading partner (GUS, 2025). This means that Germany is a key recipient of Polish goods and services, which testifies to the very strong economic ties and integration of Poland with the German economy. Therefore, Poles should not be happy about the economic slowdown in Germany, especially in German industry, as it immediately affects the Polish economy.

In the first years of the analysis (2004–2006), Italy or France ranked second among Poland’s trading partners in terms of exports, while since around 2007 the United Kingdom has often been in second place (especially after 2007 and in most years until 2023), with the Czech Republic or France temporarily taking this position in 2011–2013 and 2021–2022 (GUS, 2025; Eurostat, 2025). In turn, France and the Czech Republic dominate in third place, and in several years also Italy or the United Kingdom. In the last decade (since around 2012), there has been a noticeable increase in the role of the Czech Republic and the United Kingdom as important export partners, which may indicate a diversification of Poland’s export destinations, while Germany remains strongly dominant (GUS, 2025; Eurostat, 2025).

Germany also dominates imports to Poland (GUS, 2025). As with exports, Germany has been Poland’s largest import partner throughout the entire period analysed. The second largest partner in this respect in 2004–2007 was Italy or Russia, and since 2008 China has occupied second place for most of the time, which indicates the growing importance of China as a supplier of goods to Poland (GUS, 2025; Eurostat, 2025; PFR, 2025). In 2004–2008 and 2010–2013, the third largest partner was most often Russia or Italy. Russia and China should be noted in particular in the geopolitical context. Russia, currently in third place in terms of imports, maintains a significant position, albeit with noticeable fluctuations, while China has been steadily climbing to second place since around 2008, reflecting the global trend of China’s growing influence as a manufacturer and exporter (GUS, 2025; Eurostat, 2025; PFR, 2025).

Several conclusions can be drawn from the analysis of trading partners. First of all, Poland has strong economic ties with Germany in terms of both imports and exports, which is confirmed both by OEC data and by official statistics of GUS and Eurostat (GUS, 2025; Eurostat, 2025). This arrangement demonstrates the high level of integration of production and supply chains in the EU region. The Czech Republic and the United Kingdom are becoming increasingly important in exports, which may indicate a search for alternative markets. It is also significant that both countries are not in the euro area, which may be related to a desire to diversify in case of a future crisis of the common currency. In terms of imports, China is becoming an increasingly important supplier, partially replacing Russia and Italy (GUS, 2025; Eurostat, 2025; PFR, 2025). Russia’s presence on the list of major partners, especially in imports, is significant, but it can be noted that its position is sometimes unstable (e.g. the growing role of China). Geopolitical events (e.g. sanctions, conflicts) may affect these relations in the future, as was the case in 2015, when the value of imports from Russia to Poland fell dramatically as a result of sanctions imposed in response to the attack on Ukraine (GUS, 2025; PFR, 2025).

Summary and conclusions

In summary, IT is one of the key mechanisms driving economic development and integration between countries, and its theoretical foundations – from Smith’s absolute advantage, through Ricardo’s comparative advantage, to Heckscher–Ohlin’s factor proportions theory – are still applicable in contemporary analyses. Through the exchange of goods and services, countries can specialize in the production of goods in which they are most efficient, which promotes prosperity and the efficient use of resources. This process also remains the foundation of economic integration, leading to further stages of cooperation – from free trade areas to economic unions – and strengthening political and institutional ties.

The EU’s CCP, one of the oldest and best coordinated areas of Community action, plays a central role in shaping relations with external partners. It combines liberalization instruments, such as FTA and tariff preference systems, with protective mechanisms – including anti-dumping and anti-subsidy measures – which allows it to balance the benefits of openness with the protection of the internal market. Its evolution from a customs union in 1968 to a modern network of “deep” trade agreements demonstrates the EU’s ability to adapt to global economic changes.

Poland’s experience after joining the EU clearly illustrates the dual nature of this policy: on the one hand, the removal of barriers and reduction of transaction costs has strengthened exports and integration with the EU market, while on the other hand, the adoption of EU protective measures has required structural adjustments. The CCP therefore remains a tool for both opening up and regulating, integrating economic objectives with the requirements of sustainable development, environmental protection, and social standards. Thanks to this, the EU maintains a strong position in the global trading system, combining economic interests with the shaping of international order.

Since 2004, as a member of the EU, Poland has aligned its TP with common EU standards, which has contributed to a significant increase in both exports and imports. Between 2004 and 2008, exports grew from USD 71 billion to USD 162 billion, while imports rose from USD 88 billion to USD 212 billion. This growth resulted from the opening of markets to Polish products, the inflow of foreign investment and EU funds, as well as the increased competitiveness of the Polish economy. The global financial crisis of 2008–2009 caused a decline in exports to USD 128 billion and in imports to USD 153 billion, mainly due to reduced demand in foreign markets, particularly in Germany – Poland’s main trading partner in both exports and imports. The years 2010–2014 marked an economic recovery, with exports rising to USD 208 billion and imports to USD 221 billion, supported by a weaker currency and continued EU funding.

In 2015–2016, trade growth slowed due to lower commodity prices and geopolitical tensions, whereas 2017–2019 saw a dynamic expansion in trade (exports reaching USD 247 billion and imports USD 264 billion), driven by global economic recovery and strong domestic demand, partly fuelled by the “Family 500+” social programme. The COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 led to a stabilisation of exports and a slight decline in imports. In 2021–2022, rising commodity prices and inflation linked to the war in Ukraine drove exports and imports to record levels (exports of USD 325–339 billion, imports of USD 343–368 billion). In 2023, trade slowed again due to high inflation and reduced demand.

Throughout 2004–2023, Poland remained a net importer, largely due to high imports of energy and industrial components. The trade deficit is a structural feature of the Polish economy, strongly dependent on global energy prices and geopolitical developments. Over the analysed period, exports increased fivefold, while imports grew more than fourfold, underscoring the critical importance of foreign trade to Poland's economic growth.

In terms of trade partners, Poland's economy remains closely tied to Germany, which dominates both export and import flows, reflecting the deep integration of production and supply chains within the EU. At the same time, diversification of trade directions is evident – in exports, the roles of the Czech Republic and the United Kingdom have increased, while in imports, China has gained importance, gradually replacing Russia and Italy. Russia's presence among Poland's main trading partners, especially in imports, remains significant, although its position is unstable and highly sensitive to geopolitical events such as the sanctions imposed after its aggression against Ukraine. This structure of trade and trading partners shows that Poland seeks to capitalise on strong ties with its key partner (Germany) while mitigating risks through the exploration of alternative markets and suppliers.

The analysis clearly confirms the research hypothesis formulated in the introduction. Poland's EU membership since 2004 has had a substantial impact on the value and dynamics of its foreign trade, as well as on increasing its degree of geographical diversification. The study period recorded a marked rise in the share of EU countries in Polish exports and imports, accompanied by an expansion of trade flows to non-EU markets. These findings demonstrate that integration with the single market and the application of the EU's CCP mechanisms created conditions conducive to the growth of Poland's trade and strengthened its position in the international division of labour.

Bibliography

Balassa B. (1967), *Trade Creation and Trade Diversion in the European Common Market*, "The Economic Journal", vol. 77, iss. 305.

Barcz J. (2008), *Przewodnik po Traktacie z Lizbony. Traktaty stanowiące Unię Europejską. Stan obecny oraz teksty skonsolidowane w brzmieniu Traktatu z Lizbony*, Wydawnictwo Prawnicze Lexis Nexis, Warszawa.

Czermińska M. (2017), „Krakowskie Studia Międzynarodowe", vol. 14(4).

Mazur G. (2017), *Wspólna polityka handlowa Unii Europejskiej*, Difin, Warszawa.

Evenett S. J. (2011), *Trade Tension Mouth: The 10th GTA Report*, Global Trade Alert, CEPR, London.

Eurostat (2025), *International trade in goods – Statistics Explained*, Luxembourg.

Findlay R., O'Rourke K. H. (2007), *Power and Plenty: Trade, War, and the World Economy in the Second Millennium*, Princeton University Press, Princeton.

Goralski W., Kardas Sz. (eds.), (2008), *The European Union: Origins, Structure, Acquis*, Warsaw.

Gorynia M., Łaźniewska E. (eds.) (2020), *Kompendium wiedzy o handlu międzynarodowym*, PWN, Warszawa.

GUS (2006), Rocznik Statystyczny Handlu Zagranicznego 2006, Warszawa.

GUS (2009), Rocznik Statystyczny Handlu Zagranicznego 2009, Warszawa.

GUS (2015), Rocznik Statystyczny Handlu Zagranicznego 2015, Warszawa.

GUS (2021), Rocznik Statystyczny Handlu Zagranicznego 2021, Warszawa.

GUS (2023), *Statistics Poland*, "Yearbook of Foreign Trade Statistics of Poland 2023", Warsaw.

GUS (2025), “Foreign Trade Statistical Yearbook of Poland 2025” [Rocznik Statystyczny Handlu Zagranicznego 2025], Statistics Poland, Warszawa.

Habermas J. (2012), *The crisis of the European Union: A response*, Polity Press, Cambridge.

Haliżak E. (2002), *Stosunki międzynarodowe w XXI wieku: Systemy – uczestnicy – przedmiot badań*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe Scholar, Warszawa.

Hix S., Høyland B. (2011), *The political system of the European Union* (3rd ed.), Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke.

Jeliński B. (2003), *Polska polityka handlu zagranicznego w warunkach członkostwa w Unii Europejskiej*, Uniwersytet Gdański, Gdańsk.

Kawecka-Wyrzykowska E. (2012), *Wspólna Polityka Handlowa oraz ekonomiczne aspekty swobodnego przepływu towarów w UE*, in: J. Barcz, E. Kawecka-Wyrzykowska, K. Michałowska-Gorywoda, *Integracja europejska w świetle Traktatu z Lizbony. Aspekty ekonomiczne*, PWE, Warszawa.

Kołodziejczyk K. (2016), *Handel jako kluczowy instrument polityki rozwojowej UE*, „Studia Europejskie”, vol. 20(1).

Krugman P. R., Obstfeld M., Melitz M. (2018), *International Economics: Theory and Policy*, Pearson Education, Harlow.

Kuna A. (2002), *Polityka handlowa a polityka konkurencji*, „Acta Universitatis Lodziensis. Folia Oeconomica”, vol. (158).

Kuś A. (2007), *Wspólna Polityka Handlowa UE a pozycja Polski na arenie międzynarodowej*, „Biuletyn Stowarzyszenia Absolwentów i Przyjaciół Wydziału Prawa KUL”, vol. 2(2).

Machlup F. (1986), *Integracja gospodarcza – narodziny i rozwój idei*, PWN, Warszawa.

Mansfield E. D., Pevehouse J. V. W. (2013), *The Expansion of Preferential Trading Arrangements*, “International Studies Quarterly”, vol. 57.

Mołdowan A. (2019), *Zagraniczna polityka gospodarcza UE w obliczu nowych wyzwań: modele, cele i interesy*, „Przegląd Europejski”, vol. (2).

Moravcsik A. (1998), *The choice for Europe: Social purpose and state power from Messina to Maastricht*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca.

Nacewska-Twardowska A. (2014), *The evolution of European Union Preferential Trade Agreements*, “Ekonomia Międzynarodowa”, vol. (8).

Pera B. (2013), *Zagraniczna polityka handlowa UE po wybuchu globalnego kryzysu gospodarczego*, „Studia Ekonomiczne”, vol. (172).

PFR (2025), *Kompendium handlu zagranicznego Polski – kwiecień 2025 r.*, Warszawa.

Puślecki Z. W. (2017), *Current Trends in Foreign Trade Theory and Policy*, “Polish Political Science Yearbook”, vol. 46(2).

Rabczun A. (2024), *BRICS: rola, ekspansja i przyszłe możliwości*, „Przestrzeń, Ekonomia, Społeczeństwo”, vol. (24/II).

Ricardo D. (2001), *On the Principles of Political Economy and Taxation* (Original work published 1817), Batoche Books, Kitchener.

Rymarczyk J. (2006), *Teoretyczne aspekty międzynarodowej integracji gospodarczej*, in: *Pozaeuropejskie ugrupowania integracyjne*, eds. J. Rymarczyk, M. Wroblewski, Oficyna Wydawnicza Arboretum, Wrocław.

Rymarczyk J. (2012), *Międzynarodowe stosunki gospodarcze*, PWE, Warszawa.

Smith A. (1776), *An inquiry into the nature and causes of the wealth of nations*, W. Strahan and T. Cadell, London.

Smith M. (2015), *The EU as an international actor*, in: *European Union: Power and Policy-Making*, eds. J. Richardson, S. Mazey, Routledge, London.

Spinelli A., Rossi E. (1941), *Manifest z Ventoten*, Ventotene.

Sporek T. (2016), *Polsko-niemiecka wymiana handlowa w latach 2005–2015*, „Studia Europejskie", vol. 20(3).

Świerkocki J. (2007), *Światowy system handlu-istota i przyczyny rozwoju*, „Acta Universitatis Lodziensis. Folia Oeconomica", vol. 204.

Tkachuk A. (2016), *Common Commercial Policy of the European Union and its significance to the world trade. TTIP case study*, „Rocznik Integracji Europejskiej", vol. (10).

UNCTAD (2022), *Annual Report 2022: Rising to the Challenge*, Geneva.

Viner J. (1950), *The Customs Union Issue*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, New York.

Woolcock S. (2014), *EU Policy on Preferential Trade Agreements in the 2000s: A Reorientation toward Commercial Aims*, *"*European Law Journal", vol. 20(6).

WTO (2023), *World Trade Statistical Review*, World Trade Organization, Geneva.

WTO (2024), *Global Trade Outlook and Statistics – April 2024*, Geneva.

Zabielska I. (2013), *Zagraniczna i międzynarodowa polityka ekonomiczna*, in: *Polityka gospodarcza (zagadnienia wybrane)*, eds. R. Kisiel, R. Marks-Bielska, Uniwersytet Warmińsko-Mazurski w Olsztynie, Olsztyn.

Zielonka J. (2014), *Is the EU doomed?*, Polity Press, Cambridge.

Żebrowska I. (2008), *Polityka handlowa po wejściu Polski do Unii Europejskiej*, „Zeszyty Naukowe Ostrołęckiego Towarzystwa Naukowego", vol. (XXII).

Summary

The article analyses the evolution of Poland's foreign trade between 2004 and 2023, set within the broader framework of the European Union's (EU) Common Commercial Policy (CCP). International trade remains a key driver of global economic integration, shaped by classical theories such as Smith's absolute advantage and Ricardo's comparative advantage, as well as modern concepts of economic integration. Poland's accession to the EU in 2004 marked a turning point in its trade development, providing access to the single market and the EU's extensive network of trade agreements. The study examines changes in trade volume, dynamics, and structure – both geographical and product-based – to assess the impact of EU membership on Poland's position in the international division of labour.

A descriptive approach was applied, combining a review of the literature with statistical data from OEC to identify trends and structural shifts in Polish exports and imports. The analysis reveals that EU integration led to a substantial increase in trade value, stronger ties with EU markets, and gradual diversification towards non-EU destinations. The period studied includes key external shocks such as the 2008–2009 global financial crisis, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the economic repercussions of the war in Ukraine, each leaving a distinct imprint on trade flows.

The findings confirm the research hypothesis, showing that Poland's EU membership significantly boosted the value, dynamics, and geographical diversification of its foreign trade. While Germany remains Poland's dominant trading partner, the growing role of other EU members and China highlights an ongoing diversification strategy. The study contributes to the literature on trade integration by offering an in-depth analysis of a post-transition economy's trade trajectory within the EU framework, providing insights into the interplay between policy alignment, market access, and external shocks in shaping trade patterns.

Key words: trade, export, import, European Union, Common Commerical Policy, Poland

Wpływ integracji UE na handel zagraniczny Polski w latach 2004–2023

Streszczenie

Autorka w artykule analizuje ewolucję polskiego handlu zagranicznego w latach 2004–2023, osadzoną w szerszym kontekście Wspólnej Polityki Handlowej Unii Europejskiej. Handel międzynarodowy pozostaje kluczowym czynnikiem napędzającym globalną integrację gospodarczą, kształtowanym zarówno przez klasyczne teorie, takie jak przewaga absolutna Adama Smitha czy przewaga komparatywna Davida Ricardo, jak i nowoczesne koncepcje integracji gospodarczej. Przystąpienie Polski do UE w 2004 roku stanowiło punkt zwrotny w rozwoju jej wymiany handlowej, zapewniając dostęp do jednolitego rynku oraz rozbudowanej sieci unijnych umów handlowych. Badanie obejmuje zmiany w wolumenie, dynamice i strukturze handlu – zarówno w ujęciu geograficznym, jak i produktowym – w celu oceny wpływu członkostwa w UE na pozycję Polski w międzynarodowym podziale pracy.

Zastosowano podejście opisowe, łącząc przegląd literatury z analizą danych statystycznych pochodzących z bazy OEC, w celu identyfikacji trendów oraz zmian strukturalnych w polskim eksporcie i imporcie. Analiza wykazała, że integracja z UE doprowadziła do znaczącego wzrostu wartości handlu, zacieśnienia powiązań z rynkami unijnymi oraz stopniowej dywersyfikacji w kierunku rynków pozaunijnych. Badany okres obejmuje istotne wstrząsy zewnętrzne, takie jak globalny kryzys finansowy w latach 2008–2009, pandemia COVID-19 oraz gospodarcze konsekwencje wojny w Ukrainie – każdy z nich wywarł wyraźny wpływ na przepływy handlowe.

Wyniki potwierdzają postawioną hipotezę badawczą, wskazując, że członkostwo Polski w UE znacząco zwiększyło wartość, dynamikę oraz stopień geograficznej dywersyfikacji handlu zagranicznego. Choć Niemcy pozostają głównym partnerem handlowym Polski, rosnące znaczenie innych państw UE oraz Chin podkreśla trwającą strategię dywersyfikacji. Artykuł wnosi wkład do literatury na temat integracji handlowej, oferując pogłębioną analizę trajektorii handlu gospodarki posttransformacyjnej w ramach UE oraz dostarczając wniosków na temat wzajemnych powiązań między dostosowaniem polityki, dostępem do rynku a wstrząsami zewnętrznymi w kształtowaniu wzorców handlowych.

Słowa kluczowe: handel, eksport, import, Unia Europejska, Wspólna Polityka Handlowa, Polska

Author Contributions

Conceptualization (Konceptualizacja): Aleksandra Anna Rabczun

Data curation (Zestawienie danych): Aleksandra Anna Rabczun

Formal analysis (Analiza formalna): Aleksandra Anna Rabczun

Writing – original draft (Piśmiennictwo – oryginalny projekt): Aleksandra Anna Rabczun

Writing – review & editing (Piśmiennictwo – sprawdzenie i edytowanie): Aleksandra Anna Rabczun

Competing interests: The authors have declared that no competing interests exist (Sprzeczne interesy: Autor oświadczył, że nie istnieją żadne sprzeczne interesy): Aleksandra Anna Rabczun

Article submitted: 21.08.2025; article accepted: 25.09.2025.
Data przekazania tekstu: 21.08.2025; data zaakceptowania tekstu: 25.09.2025.