

Polish labor market - a summary of 25 years of socio-economic reforms on the road from centrally planned economy to the first decade of the European Union membership (1989-2015)

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Abstract. The article tackles the issue of changes that have taken place in the Polish labor market in the period 1988-2015. It also shows political conditions and Polish macroeconomic situation at the beginning of system transformation in 1988 and 1989. The author also presented the Polish labor market in the years 1989 - 2015, the source of the crisis on the labor market and its impact on the socio-economic situation of Poland.

Received:
June, 2015
1st Revision:
September, 2015
Accepted:
December, 2015

Keywords: labour market, transformation, Poland

DOI:
10.14254/2071-
8330.2015/8-3/18

JEL classification: J40, P23

INTRODUCTION - SITUATION OF POLAND AT THE BEGINNING OF THE EARLY POLITICAL AND MARKET REFORMS IN 1989

In the early 1939 Poland entered into an alliance with France and Great Britain. In September 1939 Poland was invaded by Germany (Third Reich) and the Soviet Union (USSR). During World War II (1939-1945), approx. 6 million Polish citizens died and material losses amounted to approx. 258 billion PLN (approx. 50 billion USD) according to the value on 1 September 1939 (Biuro odszkodowań wojennych, 1947, pp. 24, 30) and approx. 838 billion USD according to the value of 8 August 2015¹. Poland also lost nearly 1/5 of its territory. Polish losses included cities important for Polish history and culture, such as Lviv, Vilnius, Brest and Grodno. Poland's industry also lost Lviv – Volyn Coal Basin, Boryslav-Drohobych Oil Basin and majority of Ostrava-Karvina Coal Basin. Poland regained its territory in the west and north of the country with major cities like Gdansk (Danzig), Wrocław (Breslau), Szczecin (Stettin), Opole and cities in western part of Upper Silesia Industrial Region. These cities played a major role in Polish heavy industrial production during the socialist period and were a major source of employment. As a result of military and political activities conducted in 1945-1948 the Soviet Union imposed dominance in the political sphere (the dictatorship of the Polish United Workers Party) and the economic and social situation (centrally planned economy system and favoring foreign trade with the Soviet Union). After the death of Joseph Stalin (1953) leader of the USSR, the Polish authorities received greater autonomy in the area of economic policy and defense. After October 1956 Polish government significantly increased civil and economic liberties. The

¹ USD (1939) = 16,77 USD (2015) on the basis of: <http://www.in2013dollars.com/1939-dollars-in-2015?amount=1>

new Polish leader Władysław Gomułka continued to rebuild the country and tried to develop political and economic cooperation with the United States, France, Italy and Great Britain and other Western countries. One of the successes was the purchase of a license from Fiat, and then start the production and export of a modern car - the Fiat 125p. In December of 1970 Edward Gierek became the new secretary of the Polish United Workers' Party. The new leader significantly increased investment in the economy financed by foreign loans. In the 70s finally rebuild the country from war damages and realized a lot of investment in infrastructure and housing. It also built, among other things: car factory in Bielsko-Biala and Tychy (Fiat 126p), Katowice Steel Works, the refinery and the North Harbour in Gdansk. The increase in foreign debt caused the economic and political crisis. Deteriorating economic conditions led to mass protests and finally to military coup (13.12.1981). The new government led by General Wojciech Jaruzelski tried to carry out economic reforms eg. increasing the autonomy of public enterprises and greater freedom for the cooperative and private economic activity. However, the changes did not result in a significant and rapid improvement in socio-economic situation. In addition, the Polish economy was characterized by high official inflation (62.2% in 1988) and hidden inflation (rationing of food and basic commodities) (Kołodko, 1999, p. 42). Polish foreign debt was in 1989. Approx. 41 billion USD. (Hunter & Ryan, 1998, p. 82) In addition, Poland is also characterized by the strong position of trade unions - both workers' and farmers. At the beginning of the transformation, the level of socio-economic development in the most developed countries of Central Europe (Czech Republic, Slovenia) was comparable with the level of socio-economic development of the poorest countries in Western Europe (Greece, Portugal) (tab 1). Albania, Poland and Bulgaria were in the worst socio-economic situation (Balcerowicz, 1997, p. 360).

Table 1

Comparison of the level of socio-economic development of selected European countries in 1990. (Sig)

Country	GDP per capita (current USD)	GDP per capita (PPP)	Human Development Index
1	2	3	4
Leading Western European Countries			
France	21.833	17.557	0,779
Germany	22.219	19.054	0,782
Sweden	30.162	20.099	0,807
Switzerland	38.332	26.765	0,829
Poorest Western European Countries			
Greece	9.763	13.367	0,749
Portugal	7.885	11.198	0,708
Leading Eastern European Countries			
Czech Rep.(Czechoslovakia)	3 901	12 731	0,762
Hungary	3 186	7 612	0,701
Russian Federation (USSR)	3 485	8 013	0,729
Slovakia (Czechoslovakia)	2 395	7 697	0,747
Slovenia (Yugoslavia)	8 671	12 392	0,769
Middle income Eastern European Countries			
Belarus (USSR)	1 704	5 229	
Bulgaria	2 377	5 409	0,696
Poland	1 698 (1989)	6 002 (1989)	0,714

1	2	3	4
Romania	1 650	5 193	0,703
Ukraine (USSR)	1 569	6 797	0,705
Poorest Eastern European Countries			
Albania	639	2 843	0,609
Armenia (USSR)	636	2 416	0,632
Moldova (USSR)	972	4 152	0,645

Sources: UNDP, World Bank.

Given the very difficult economic situation, considerable social expectations and favored by Mikhail Gorbachev - the leader of the Soviet Union the Polish authorities have taken a landmark decision to begin discussions of the Round Table and sharing the power with the opposition (elections June 4, 1989). In accordance with the will of the majority of society a large part of the Polish political elite has taken action to abandon the centrally planned economy and change the geopolitical orientation of the Soviet Union (the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Poland) to the countries of Western Europe and the United States. Leszek Balcerowicz – doctor of economics and lecturer from the School of Planning and Statistics in Warsaw – took the post of Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance in the government of Tadeusz Mazowiecki (1989-1991) and Jan Krzysztof Bielecki (1991) . With the support of Polish and foreign economists (including prof. J. Sachs) based on the recommendations of the so-called *Washington Consensus* was developed and it implemented program of socio-economic reforms (ie. Balcerowicz Plan). The aim of the action plan was to achieve macroeconomic stability, the elimination of shortages and changing the structure of the economy through privatization of state enterprises and the change in the legal system. Also continued efforts to develop private entrepreneurship and create a stable banking system, which was initiated by the last communist government of Prime Minister Mieczysław Rakowski in 1988-1989.

POLISH LABOUR MARKET 1988 – 2015

At the beginning of the transformation in 1988 Polish labor market compared to other European countries work was characterized by a comparable level of employment in industry and construction (36,1%), a relatively higher share of employed in agriculture (27.1%) and a relatively lower proportion of employees in services (25.8%) (Leszczyńska & Jezierski, 2010, p. 482). In the survey conducted by the Center for Public Opinion Research (OBOP) in November 1988 only 25% of respondents indicated that they may find itself in a situation of loss of work, and 70% of respondents indicated that this situation is in their case unlikely. For comparison, in November 1989 46% of respondents indicated that they may find itself in a situation of losing their jobs, while only 48% of respondents indicated that such a situation is unlikely for them (OBOP, 1989, p. 3). In 1991 unemployment rate hit 12.2%, which represented a significant surprise to the public, which expected to maintain a typical level of unemployment for the economies of Western Europe for example 4-7 %. Contrary to the expectations of the public and the authorities from 1991 unemployment rate was more than ten percent. Particularly high levels of unemployment persisted in 2002-2004, when the unemployment rate was approx. 20% and the number of unemployed persons exceeded 3 million (Figure 1). Noteworthy is the fact that in the years 1989 - 2013 the number of employed decreased significantly from 17.5 million people to 14.2 million people, which was also confirmed by the lower economic activity of the BAEL (GUS, 2014b, pp. 14, 15, 27).

It is worth noting that the official statistics do not reflect the real situation on the labor market in the last 25 years, since we were dealing with hidden unemployment in the part of pensioners, and farmers.

In 1989 farmers with individual farms accounted for 23% of total working population (3,7 million people) (GUS, 2000, p. 130). Majority of them (80%) were holding farms less 15 hectares (GUS, 2014b, p. 66). In 2013 farmers with individual farms accounted for 15,6% of total working population (2,3 million people). Ap. 60 % of farmers were holding farms over 15 hectares (GUS, 2014b, pp. 28,66). Polish farmers receive substantial financial support from the government. They pay extremely low premiums for pension insurance (2015: 130 PLN (ap.30 EUR)/per month) compare to entrepreneurs (2015: 1095 PLN (ap.260 EUR)/per month). They are also exempt from income tax (the basic amount of personal income tax (PIT) in Poland is 18%). At the same time they receive from 2004 subsidies for agricultural production and fuel. Poland is also one of the few countries in Europe, which property tax is not charged on the value of the property, but on its surface (f.e. hektar). It also favors farmers with real estate usually of considerable value. Liquidation part of these broad benefits financed by the rest of the population would reveal itself in the statistics of a significant group of people (probably approx. a few hundred thousands) actually unemployed. In fact, government support to farmers was a hidden form of unemployment benefits. Most small farms (less 15 hectares) would not be able conduct normal business operations and pay premiums for pension insurance and income tax. This would significantly increase the official unemployment rate - up to approx. million people.

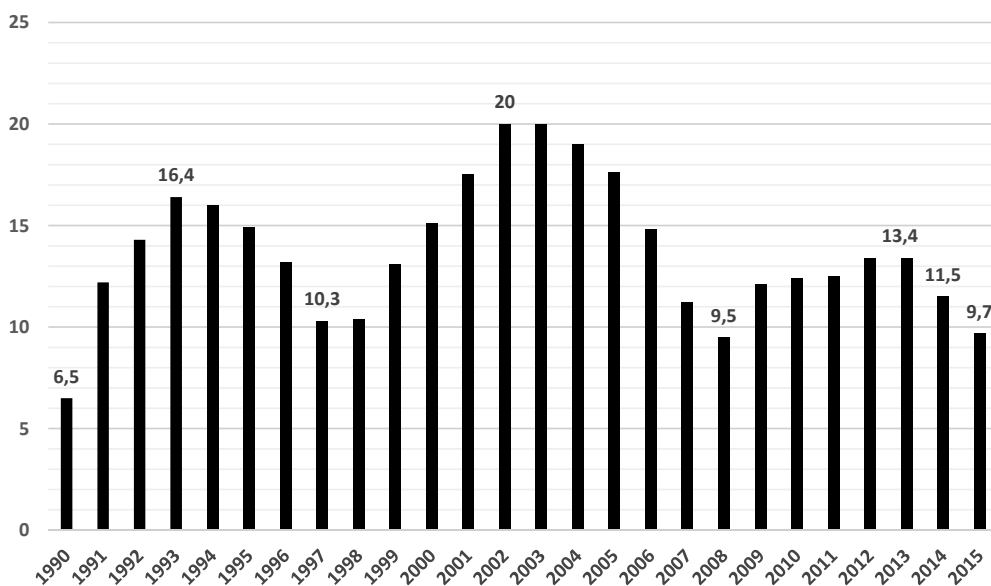


Figure 1. The unemployment rate in Poland in the years 1990-2015 (1990 – 2014 data as at 31 December, 2015 data as at 31 September)

Sources: GUS .

Analysing the number of people having powers of social benefits also can be seen dynamic growth of persons entitled to pensions in respect of incapacity to work with 2.7 million people in 1988 to 3.5 million

people in 2002 (GUS, 2014b, p. 31), followed by a systematic decline to 1.1 million people in 2013 (GUS, 2014a, p. 282). Especially in the 90s twentieth century connection liberal provisions which can produce the invalidity of a broad social permission to leave the labor market has enabled hundreds of thousands of middle ages people with mild or even simulated degree of disability. Polish labor market is also characterized by relatively low retirement age (2005 and 2009 - 59 years compared to an average EU-27 - 61 years) (EU, 2012, p. 99). This is a result both protective programs for people of retirement age and the possibility of early retirement in certain professions (eg. the miners working at coal mining - 25 years old, uniformed services under 15 years of duty). Encountered the situation in Poland, although shocking for citizens of other countries are eg. 34 - year old pensioners who, after graduating from high school worked 15 years in the human resources department in the Police or Prison Wardens. With effect from 1 January 2013 was introduced pension reform aimed to extend the retirement age gradually to 67 years (for men in 2020, for women in 2040) and extend the period of duty for uniformed services from 15 to 25 years, with a minimum age of 55 years. As a result of the reforms extended the average effective exit age from the labour market (2014 – male 63,9 compare to an average to EU-28: 63,6; 2014 – female 60,2 compare to an average to EU-28: 62,6) (EU, 2015a, p. 66).

Given that a significant part of smallholders ,farmers', ,disabled' receiving a disability pension and early retirees (especially in the age of 34-50 years of age) can be considered as the person actually unemployed and receiving unemployment benefits through the tools of agricultural policy and the system of pension benefits. Attempting this large group (initial estimate of approx. 1-2 million people) in the statistics of unemployed people would require significant adjustments in the unemployment rate up by 10 or 20 percent (worst case). Leaving the issue of hidden unemployment and exists in every economy gray economy in the labor market, and based only on official statistics can certainly say that the Polish labor market was and still is in deep crisis.

SOURCES OF CRISIS

Among the causes of the crisis on the Polish labor market may be mentioned the low level of economic development as well as errors in economic policy pursued in the past 25 years in a democratic and free Poland.

Firstly, the primary source of the crisis on the labor market in the past 25 years was the legacy of centrally planned economic system. It was especially evident in the first half of the 90s. This resulted, among others, the dominant role of centrally planned economy with state-owned enterprises and the lack of legal regulations relevant for the market economy and the lack of a properly functioning business environment (eg. the banking system, justice, registration of business). The significant level of high inflation and concerns about the success of the ongoing reforms also discouraged a lot of foreign investors.

Second, despite a number of positive decisions democratic governments have committed a lot of fundamental errors in economic policy. The basic mistake was too quick opening of the Polish market to imports of foreign products. On the one hand, this prevented the modernization of many enterprises (eg. through the purchase of modern technologies and organizational changes) to market conditions, on the other hand, discouraged foreign investors to locate production in Poland. At the same time, the Polish economy was strongly hit by partial loss of markets in the Soviet Union and other countries of the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA). The second mistake was to not adopt the principle of the inviolability of decisions taken in the field of property before 1989, and consequently does not carry out the enfranchisement of businesses, local government and citizens' properties in its possession. This would avoid the ethically questionable issue of re-privatization and numerous scandals related to this. At the same time it would open

the way to increase the value of companies and increase the attractiveness of the offer to investors, effective privatization of the housing stock to existing tenants. Rapid privatization of housing resources allow, on the one hand to reduce the charges for the premises, on the other hand, the emergence of well-functioning housing communities would give a strong impetus to the development of property management companies and repair and construction companies. Among the shortcomings of economic policy can also indicate too late abolition of official prices on certain products (eg. coal, fuel, energy). This resulted in the occurrence of a situation in which the company bought equipment, materials and external services at market prices and manufactured products sold on the official prices. Another area of shortcomings was the issue of privatization of state-owned farms that little has allowed an increase in acreage of individual farms and an increase in agricultural production. An alternative, and most importantly, a quick way to privatization would sell state-owned farms for food processing plants (eg. dairy cooperatives, distilleries, breweries) and farmers (convenient repayment in installments spread over several years) and municipalization of state farms located in cities.

Thirdly, the crisis in the labor market is also associated with low innovation of the Polish economy. It is characterized by, on the one hand, the low level of expenditure on R&D (less than 1% of GDP) and a small share of financing the expenditure on R&D by firms (up from 24.1% in 1995 (GUS, 2001, p. 280) to 37,3% in 2013 (GUS, 2015, p. 248). Also, the annual rankings of innovation Innovation Union Scoreboard compiled by the European Commission regularly include Poland among several weakest economies in terms of innovation (EU, 2007, p. 7) (EU, 2015b, p. 5). Poland relative innovation performance has declined from 58 % of average EU to 56 % in 2014 (EU, 2015a, p. 65). Creation of several large state-owned corporations (for example in the automotive, pharmaceutical, shipbuilding, armaments, aerospace, telecommunications and electronics, information technology, energy, mining and steel) with R&D centers in 1989 could support innovation and have a positive impact on the labor market in 1989. Carried out in subsequent years, the consolidation measures brought economic success (eg., PGNiG, PGE, Orlen, LOTOS, KGHM) and the significant inflows from privatization. It should also be noted that substantial budgetary resources are allocated within the framework of applied research at the small research grants, without requiring the completion of the project implementation of the market, resulting in a significant cost to the budget, the increase in the number of scientific publications, but traces benefits for the economy and development of the country. From the point of view of the labor market would be more efficient funding fewer projects with business partners, which would lead to the implementation of innovative technologies or products. Can also pay attention to the small government effectiveness in attracting foreign investors in high-technology sectors (eg. nanotechnologies, space technology, biotechnology, bioengineering, genetics).

Fourth, despite numerous reforms in both education and employment services does not fully meet the expectations of students, employers and job seekers. Many employers (49% in 2008, 33% in 2014) cannot find suitable candidates to work despite the high level of unemployment (ManpowerGoup, 2014, p. 11). In Poland, we have no strong links between: the education system, policy of attracting investors, public investments, job centers and social assistance centers. An example is the lack of a unified database of jobs in the structures of the wider public administration, eg. schools, hospitals, state-owned enterprises, national parks, offices. As a result, the state is not able to carry out effective measures to improve the situation of the unemployed or poor citizens. In 2015 Supreme Audit Office in its report criticized the operation of public employment services for example training programmes, internships, public works or intervention jobs are not very effective in activating the unemployed. (NIK, 2015)

Fifthly, after a period of dynamic deregulation and market liberalization in the early 90s. systematically increasing list of regulated professions. In 2011 in Poland was approx. 334 regulated professions. Restrictions on access to exercise certain professions involve a lot the negative economic and social consequences for example a lower level of employment, competitiveness and innovation in sectors covered by the regulation,

Wide range of regulation of access to the professions is the cause of the increase in prices and a decline in availability of services for the poorest members of society. Since 2013 Polish government eliminated or reduced barriers to access to 142 professions. Since 2014 legislative work is underway on further liberalization of access to the 104 professions.

Sixthly, in 2004 Poland joined the European Union. It was a huge success. However, despite numerous political declarations Poland has decided not to take steps to adopt the common currency Euro, which would strengthen the competitiveness of Polish enterprises and reduce the currency risk for both companies and for citizens (eg. loans denominated in foreign currencies). Five Central and Eastern Europe countries joined the euro area: Slovenia (2007), Slovakia (2009), Estonia (2011), Latvia (2014) and Lithuania (2015). Serious discussions on the adoption of the euro currency are taking place in Croatia, Bulgaria and Romania

CONSEQUENCES OF THE CRISIS

In Poland in the past 25 years has increased the level of wealth (GDP per capita in purchasing power parity in Poland increased from 32% of the EU average in 1989 to 59% of the EU average in 2013 (Orłowski, 2015, pp. 41-42)). But the consequences of 25-year-old crisis on the labor market are considerable, both for the state and citizens.

The increase of competition in the labor market and high unemployment rate is also reflected in the personal and economic situation of citizens. Many Poles in order to improve their competitive position in the labor market have taken higher education and began learning foreign languages. At the same time growing bargaining power of employers, a lot of workers accept less payment and long working hours under the highest (35%) in the European Union the percentage of people employed in futures contracts (NBP, 2014, p. 37). As a result, many people postponement of decisions on purchasing goods, becoming independent, start a family or birth of a child, an increase of mental illness and suicide or decide to permanently emigrate (figure 2). A lot of people since 2004 have migrated temporarily to work in other countries. At the end of 2013 outside the country 2,2 million people worked mainly in United Kingdom, Germany, Ireland, Holland, Italy and Norway (GUS, 2014c, p. 2). Low fertility rate and permanent and temporary migration significantly affects the negative demographic situation and discourages the development of the Polish internal market.

Among the costs incurred by the state structure can be replaced, among others, the costs of social welfare (including unemployment benefits) and activation of the unemployed. Crisis situation on the labor market also causes pressure to increase costs of social welfare (including unemployment benefits) and activation of the unemployed and level of employment in the public sphere. For an efficient state it is necessary to the functioning of an efficient administration and activities in the domain of public goods (security and defense, justice, education, culture, water supply and sewage disposal, power generation, highly specialized hospitals, key companies of the Treasury). However, the total number of employees in the public sphere (approx. 3.3 million people employed in 2013 (GUS, 2014a, p. 239) shows that in many cases the state is entering (or not yet withdrawn) in areas that in normal market economy are the domain of private business (eg. property management on behalf of private, primary health care, agriculture and food production, furniture).

Prolonged lack of work and lack of pension contributions may also result in relatively lower pension in the future (in the pessimistic scenario minimal pension co-financed by the state budget). You can also note the emergence in Poland, the second generation of people permanently dependent small but stable income from social welfare (with English. Social dependency).

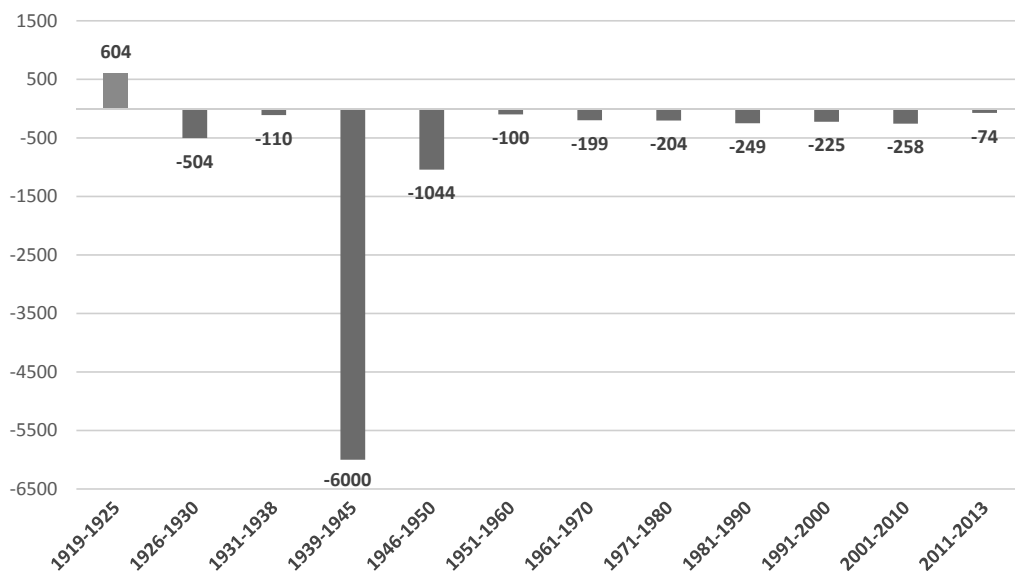


Figure 2. War losses (1939-1945) and permanent international migration (immigration-emigration) in Poland in the years 1919-2013 (thousands of people)

Sources: GUS.

Table 2

Comparison of the level of socio-economic development of selected European countries in 2014. (Sig)

Country	GDP per capita (current USD)	GDP per capita (PPP)	Human Development Index	Unemployment
1	2	3	4	
Leading Western European Countries				
France	42 736	38 850	0,884	10,3
Germany	47 627	45 615	0,911	5,0
Sweden	58 887	45 143	0,898	7,9
Switzerland	84 733 (2013)	56 939 (2013)	0,917	4,4
Poorest Western European Countries				
Greece	21 682	26 098	0,853	26,5
Portugal	22 080	28 326	0,822	14,1
Leading Eastern European Countries				
Czech Republic	19 553	30 444	0,861	6,1
Estonia	19 719	26 335	0,840	7,4
Latvia	16 037	23 337	0,810	10,8
Lithuania	16 444	26 642	0,834	10,7
Slovakia	18 416	27 584	0,830	13,2
Slovenia	23 962	29 917	0,874	9,7

1	2	3	4	
Middle income Eastern European Countries				
Croatia	13 507	21 242	0,812	17,3
Hungary	13 902	24 498	0,818	7,7
Poland	14 422	24 882	0,834	9,0
Russian Fed.	12 735	25 635	0,778	5,6 (2013)
Poorest Eastern European Countries				
Armenia	3 646	8 137	0,730	16,2 (2013)
Georgia	3 670	7 852	0,744	14,3 (2013)
Moldova	2 233	4 982	0,663	5,1 (2013)

Sources: UNDP, World Bank, Eurostat.

Despite the crisis in the labor market the implementation of numerous reforms resulted in improvement of living conditions and income of Poles and reducing the distance between Poland and other European countries (table 1 vs table 2) for example:

- the ratio of German and Polish GDP per capita PPP dropped from 3,17 in 1989/1990 (19 054:6 002) to 1,83 in 2014 (45 615:24 882),
- the ratio of Portuguese and Polish GDP per capita PPP dropped from 1,86 in 1989/1990 (11 198:6 002) to 1,14 in 2014 (28 326:24 882),
- the ratio of Hungarian and Polish GDP per capita PPP dropped from 1,26 in 1989/1990 (7 612:6 002) to 0,98 in 2014 (24 498:24 882),
- the ratio of Polish and Moldavian GDP per capita PPP increase from 1,44 in 1989/1990 (6 002:4 152) to 4,99 in 2014 (24 882:4 982).

It is significant that Poland overtaken Hungary considered by some Poles as a model for social and economic policy.

CONCLUSION

In the years 1989-2015 crisis on the Polish labor market manifested itself through a high-level official and hidden unemployment, a substantial share of the public sphere and high level of emigration. The reasons for the difficult situation on the labor market were serious war losses (1939-1945), the general low level of socio-economic development of the country, the faulty system of centrally planned economy, the economic collapse during the late period of rule of Edward Gierk (1975-1980), and not entirely appropriate economic reforms implemented by democratic governments (1989-2015). The implementation of numerous reforms resulted in improvement of living conditions and income of Polish citizens and reducing the distance between Poland and developed countries of the European Union, for example German and Hungary.

However, despite numerous reforms (the development of infrastructure, constantly improving business environment, elimination of inflation, restoring credibility of Poland in the international arena, and membership in the OECD and the European Union,) the Polish government failed to reduce high levels of unemployment and emigration. Perhaps in the long term (until 2030) dynamically developing Polish private sector, and further economic reforms accompanied by the support from the European Union will reduce the negative situation on the Polish labor market.

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