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**The European Union in Polish Matriculation  
Exams in Civic Education (2021–2024):  
Teaching Changes, Representation,  
and Students' Knowledge<sup>1</sup>**

**Unia Europejska w polskich egzaminach  
maturalnych z wiedzy o społeczeństwie  
(2021–2024): zmiany w nauczaniu, sposoby  
przedstawiania i wiedza uczniów**

**Abstract:**

The article, based on Polish matriculation exam worksheets in civic education from 2021–2024, negatively verifies the opinion that the significance of EU-related topics has declined following Minister Zalewska's education reform. The EU was not portrayed negatively in the exams, nor did it change within the exam worksheets. There was an increase in the

<sup>1</sup> The methodological analyses used in the paper were performed in Polish on behalf of the European Policy Research Center of the Academy of Justice. Some of the analyses and conclusions used in the paper were presented by the authors in English at the 28th annual CEPESA conference in Kaunas in October 2024. Certainly, the discussion that arose as a result of the presentation helped us to improve the research problem.

importance of EU-related issues in the 2023 exam format, with this topic either proportionally aligned with EU requirements or overrepresented. Additionally, in these exams, more EU-related requirements could be assessed compared to the 2021 and 2022 exams. Furthermore, the 2023 exam format showed a significant increase in the average performance level on tasks related to EU issues compared to the analysed tasks from the 2015 exam format.

**Key words:** civic education, European Union, youth, matriculation examination, knowledge about the European Union

### **Streszczenie:**

W artykule na podstawie arkuszy maturalnych z WoS-u z lat 2021–2024 zweryfikowano negatywnie opinię o degradacji znaczenia problematyki unijnej wraz z wdrożeniem reformy edukacji minister Zalewskiej. W żadnej z matur obrazy UE nie były negatywne, przy tym nie uległy one zmianie w arkuszach. Mieliśmy do czynienia ze wzrostem znaczenia problematyki unijnej w maturach w formule 2023, przy tym problematyka ta była albo procentowo zgodna z wymaganiami unijnymi, albo nadreprezentowana, przy tym w tych maturach weryfikować można było więcej wymagań unijnych niż w przypadku matur z 2021 i 2022 roku. Dodatkowo, w arkuszach w formule 2023 odnotowano znaczący wzrost średniego poziomu wykonania zadań dotyczących problematyki unijnej w stosunku do analizowanych zadań z arkuszy w formule 2015.

**Słowa kluczowe:** edukacja obywatelska, Unia Europejska, młodzież, egzamin maturalny, wiedza na temat Unii Europejskiej

## Introduction

The matriculation exam in civic education (WoS) is an important element of the Polish educational system, assessing students' knowledge and skills in socio-political issues, human rights, and the functioning of state institutions. The scholarly literature explores a variety of themes related to its structure, results, and impact on civic education. A detailed analysis of the Polish-language literature on the subject shows that these topics do not find wider attention. In the area of interest, we have either

articles discussing the role of civic education<sup>2</sup> or studies analysing core curriculums<sup>3</sup>. The scholarly literature directly focusing on analysing the matriculation exam in civic education is severely limited. The works of Piotr Załęski are devoted to this issue<sup>4</sup>. On the other hand, the publications of foreign authors are dominated by issues linking civic education with political participation or describing the models of civic education in the educational systems functioning in various European countries. The analysis of the content of the core curriculum usually appears in a comparative perspective in the context of the attitude and understanding of democracy, the discourse on national identities<sup>5</sup>, or the impact of migration on national identity<sup>6</sup>. The issues on the European Union as a part of the core curriculum were rarely mentioned in scientific publications as separate analyses, and if analysed – it was not in the context of matriculation exams.

## Methodological approach

In Poland, the issues of the European Union are present in school teaching, and the subject in which this has been done is ‘civic education’ (wiedza o społeczeństwie)<sup>7</sup>. Previous research shows that the level of knowledge and skills of young people in this area was poor in the 2nd decade of the 21st century<sup>8</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> M. Rachwał, *Rola edukacji obywatelskiej we współczesnym państwie demokratycznym. Wybrane zagadnienia*, „Przegląd Politologiczny” 2023, no. 4, pp. 79–90.

<sup>3</sup> V. Kopińska, *Zmiana czy status quo? Krytyczna analiza nowych podstaw programowych do wiedzy o społeczeństwie*, „Przegląd Badań Edukacyjnych/Educational Studies Review” 2017, no. 2 (25), pp. 201–228.

<sup>4</sup> P. Załęski, *Wiedza maturzystów o Unii Europejskiej – analiza na podstawie egzaminu z wiedzy o społeczeństwie w latach 2010–2019*, „Przegląd Europejski” 2020, no. 2, pp. 161–181.

<sup>5</sup> A. Sautereau, D. Faas, *Comparing national identity discourses in history, geography and civic education curricula: The case of France and Ireland*, „European Educational Research Journal” 2022, vol. 22 (4), pp. 555–571.

<sup>6</sup> L. O’Connor, D. Faas, *The impact of migration on national identity in a globalized world: A comparison of civic education curricula in England, France and Ireland*, „Irish Educational Studies”, 2012, vol. 31, issue 1, pp. 51–66.

<sup>7</sup> Due to Minister Zalewska’s adjustment of the reform introduced by Minister Czarnek – even before the conclusions of all the cycles of teaching according to the basics from this reform – the subject in compulsory education was removed. The years of high school students who studied it last will take the matriculation exam in the school year 2024/2025 (high school graduates) or 2025/2026 (technical school graduates).

<sup>8</sup> P. Załęski, *Wiedza maturzystów o Unii Europejskiej...*, pp. 161–181. For the 2015 matriculation exam formula in 2015–2019, the average performance level for tasks on EU institutions was 16%, and for tasks on treaty law and recognition of EU member states – 26%.

In our study, the primary empirical material was the EU-related tasks from the four consecutive years of the civic education matriculation exam (2021–2024)<sup>9</sup>. It also included EU-related requirements from the regulations that are the basis for the creation of this exam – core curricula, as well as exam requirements that are truncated versions of the relevant core curricula (and comments on these acts). Content analysis was used in the analysis of these materials. Supplementary material included nondirective interviews with a member of the teams preparing the core curriculum and examination requirements, and the teams preparing the matriculation exam worksheets<sup>10</sup>.

In 2021 and 2022, high school graduates took the matriculation exam in civic education verifying knowledge of the examination requirements that are an abbreviated version of the core curriculum introduced by Minister Hall's reform<sup>11</sup>, and in 2023 and 2024 – examination requirements that are an abbreviated version of the core curriculum introduced

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<sup>9</sup> The worksheets, grading rules and reports of these midterms were analysed.

<sup>10</sup> Interviews were conducted by the co-author of this article with a member of these teams in the third quarter of 2024.

<sup>11</sup> Examination requirements, see: *Rozporządzenie Ministra Edukacji Narodowej z dnia 20 marca 2020 r. w sprawie szczególnych rozwiązań w okresie czasowego ograniczenia funkcjonowania jednostek systemu oświaty w związku z zapobieganiem, przeciwdziałaniem i zwalczaniem COVID-19* (Dz. U. 2020, poz. 493, z późn. zm.). The core curriculum on the basis of which these requirements were produced, see: *Rozporządzenie Ministra Edukacji Narodowej z dnia 27 sierpnia 2012 r. w sprawie podstawy programowej wychowania przedszkolnego oraz kształcenia ogólnego w poszczególnych typach szkół* (Dz. U. 2012, poz. 977). For commentary to the core see: A. Pacewicz, A. Waśkiewicz, *Komentarz do podstawy programowej przedmiotu wiedza o społeczeństwie* [in:] *Podstawa programowa z komentarzami Tom 4. Edukacja historyczna i obywatelska w szkole podstawowej, gimnazjum i liceum*, no publishing house details, no place of publication, MEN, pp. 112–127, [https://cke.gov.pl/images/\\_EGZAMIN\\_MATURALNY\\_OD\\_2015/Podstawa\\_programowa/Tom\\_4\\_Edukacja\\_historyczna\\_i\\_obywatelska\\_w\\_szkole\\_podstawowej%2C\\_gimnazjum\\_i\\_liceum.pdf](https://cke.gov.pl/images/_EGZAMIN_MATURALNY_OD_2015/Podstawa_programowa/Tom_4_Edukacja_historyczna_i_obywatelska_w_szkole_podstawowej%2C_gimnazjum_i_liceum.pdf) [access: 7th January 2025].

by Minister Zalewska's reform<sup>12</sup>. The matriculation exams of the first two years were conducted according to the so-called 2015 matriculation exam formula<sup>13</sup>, and the exams of the last two years – according to the so-called 2023 matriculation exam formula<sup>14</sup>. Each of these baccalaureate exams was therefore a nationwide external exam, tested according to uniform criteria by district examination commissions in coordination with the Central Examination Commission.

In this article, we will verify the thesis – which is a common opinion and is present in a small number of scientific studies – that the degradation of the importance of EU-related issues in the education system began with the coming to power of the Law and Justice party, and the educational reform introduced by Minister Anna Zalewska<sup>15</sup> (therefore, it will be necessary to analyze the relevant core curriculum)<sup>16</sup>. A manifestation of this degradation would be – at least according to the media

<sup>12</sup> Examination requirements, see: *Rozporządzenie Ministra Edukacji i Nauki z dnia 10 czerwca 2022 r. w sprawie wymagań egzaminacyjnych dla egzaminu maturalnego przeprowadzanego w roku szkolnym 2022/2023 i 2023/2024* (Dz. U. 2022, poz. 1246). The core curriculum on the basis of which these requirements were produced, see: *Rozporządzenie Ministra Edukacji Narodowej z dnia 30 stycznia 2018 r. w sprawie podstawy programowej kształcenia ogólnego dla liceum ogólnokształcącego, technikum oraz branżowej szkoły II stopnia* (Dz. U. 2018, poz. 467). For commentary to the core see: P. Załęski, *Komentarz do podstawy programowej przedmiotu wiedza o społeczeństwie* [in:] *Vademecum nauczyciela. Wdrażanie podstawy programowej w szkole ponadpodstawowej. Wiedza o społeczeństwie*, Warszawa 2019, ORE: ISBN 978-83-66047-57-0, pp. 45–65. Tasks in this exam can also apply to the requirements of the subject in the elementary school – at that stage, this basis was not shortened. For the core curriculum see: *Rozporządzenie Ministra Edukacji Narodowej z dnia 14 lutego 2017 r. w sprawie podstawy programowej wychowania przedszkolnego oraz podstawy programowej kształcenia ogólnego dla szkoły podstawowej, w tym dla uczniów z niepełnosprawnością intelektualną w stopniu umiarkowanym lub znacznym, kształcenia ogólnego dla branżowej szkoły I stopnia, kształcenia ogólnego dla szkoły specjalnej przysposabiającej do pracy oraz kształcenia ogólnego dla szkoły policealnej* (Dz. U. 2017, poz. 356). For commentary to the core see: P. Załęski and others, *Komentarz do podstawy programowej przedmiotu wiedza o społeczeństwie na II etapie edukacyjnym* [in:] *Podstawa programowa kształcenia ogólnego z komentarzem. Szkoła podstawowa. Wiedza o społeczeństwie*, no publishing house details, no place of publication, MEN – ORE, pp. 17–23, <https://ore.edu.pl/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/podstawa-programowa-ksztalcenia-ogolnego-z-komentarzem.-szkola-podstawowa-wos.pdf> [access: 7th January 2025].

<sup>13</sup> *Informator o egzaminie maturalnym z wiedzy o społeczeństwie od roku szkolnego 2014/2015*, Warszawa 2013, CKE, pp. 7–86, [https://cke.gov.pl/images/\\_EGZAMIN\\_MATURALNY\\_OD\\_2015/Informatory/2015/Wiedza\\_o\\_spoleczenstwie.pdf](https://cke.gov.pl/images/_EGZAMIN_MATURALNY_OD_2015/Informatory/2015/Wiedza_o_spoleczenstwie.pdf) [access: 7th January 2025].

<sup>14</sup> *Informator o egzaminie maturalnym z wiedzy o społeczeństwie od roku szkolnego 2022/2023*, edited by P. Załęski and others, Warszawa 2021, CKE: ISBN 978-83-66725-29-4, pp. 5–87.

<sup>15</sup> A drastic change in the positioning and presentation of EU issues (in favor of the image of the EU as a threat) occurred in the EU requirements from the basis for the subject History and the Present (which the civic education replaced) of the minister Czarnek. See: Ł. Zamęcki, P. Załęski, *How Right-Wing Populists Influence Citizenship Education—Evidence from Poland*, „East European Politics and Societies: and Cultures” 2023, vol. 37, no. 4, pp. 1314–1336.

<sup>16</sup> This is the opinion to Minister Zalewska's core curriculum – compared to Minister Hall's core – we have in the article: V. Kopiańska, *Zmiana czy status quo?...*, p. 216. In this analysis – critical of both the indicated cores curriculums – only the requirements of the compulsory subject teaching range (without the extended range for high school graduation) were taken into account.

discourse – also the examination requirements, which are an truncated version of Minister Hall’s core (hence we will also analyse these reductions)<sup>17</sup>. To verify the thesis, we also want to analyse the UE-related tasks from the 2021–2022 exams (in the 2015 formula) and 2023–2024 (in the 2023 formula). This will allow us to: 1) determine whether the EU issues occupied a quantitatively appropriate place in the worksheets (according to the thesis, it should be less than in the requirements), 2) check how the EU is presented in the worksheets – whether there are negative images, peculiar Eurosceptic manipulations or – possibly – if there is an evolution of these images in such a direction in the 2023 matriculation exam (according to the thesis, it should occur), and 3) show – through the analysis of the results of EU tasks – the degree of knowledge and skills of the passers in these issues, also in a dynamic perspective (according to the thesis, the results of EU-related tasks from the 2023 formula exam should be worse than the results of analogous tasks from the 2015 formula exam)<sup>18</sup>.

## EU requirements in the core curriculum

The EU requirements in the core curriculum of Minister Hall’s civic education were found in the case of compulsory education mainly in lower secondary school (*gimnazjum*), and were almost absent in upper secondary school (*szkoła ponadgimnazjalna*) in civic education at the basic level. We had most of them in civic education in the extended scope (implemented as an elective subject) in high schools (which end with *matura* exam). In this core curriculum 26 requirements from all levels were related to the EU, which is 6.3% of all 411 requirements<sup>19</sup>. The

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<sup>17</sup> Attempts were made to create an image of a significant reduction in civic and European content, while there were also situations where technical removals were treated as such, thus removing duplicative requirements, even those requirements that were narrower than those left.

<sup>18</sup> Our experience to date dictates that we will verify such a constructed thesis negatively.

<sup>19</sup> One of the EU requirements was placed in the elementary school core curriculum in the propaedeutic subject that integrates history and civic education (*WoS*) – the subject of history and society, 8 requirements were placed in the civic education core curriculum for middle school, 3 requirements were placed in the core curriculum of this subject for high schools in the basic scope, and 14 requirements were placed in the core curriculum for high schools and technical schools in the expanded scope. There were a total of 28 civic education requirements in history and society (implemented during 1 hour in the cycle), while the requirements in the civic education core were: 118 in middle school (implemented during 2 hours in a cycle), 39 in high school in the basic scope (implemented during 1 hour in a cycle) and 226 in high school and technical school in the extended scope (implemented during 6 hours in a cycle).

EU requirements in the civic education core curriculum from Minister Zalewska were found in the case of compulsory teaching in elementary school (szkoła podstawowa), and in high schools. Still, civic education was mostly taught in the extended scope as a subject of choice in high schools. In Minister Zalewska's core curriculum, 24 requirements from all levels were related to the EU, which is 6.7% of all 357 requirements<sup>20</sup>. In both core curriculums the overall number of EU requirements is similar, with a comparison with the overall number of specific requirements and hours allocated to teaching the subject making it impossible to conclude that the importance of this subject is reduced in Minister Zalewska's core (6.3% of 10 hours in cycles is, however, quite a bit less than 6.7% of 12 hours in cycles).

In the first core curriculum in the case of compulsory teaching we have significantly more EU requirements than in the second (12 to 5), with a comparison with the general number of specific requirements slightly reduces this disproportion (in the core curriculum of Minister Hall in compulsory teaching there were 191 specific requirements, and in the core curriculum of Minister Zalewska – 129 requirements; in both cases with 4 hours in cycles)<sup>21</sup>. However, it should be noted that in Minister Zalewska's core, EU issues were significantly reduced in compulsory teaching (although in terms of content to a lesser extent)<sup>22</sup>. In the case of the matriculation exam, however, this disproportion does not matter

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<sup>20</sup> There were 2 EU requirements in the elementary school core curriculum, 3 in the elementary high school and technical high school core curriculum and 19 in the extended high school and technical high school core curriculum. The requirements in the civic education core curriculum were: 65 in elementary school (implemented during 2 hours in the cycle), 64 in high school and technical school in the basic scope (implemented during 2 hours in the cycle) and 228 in high school and technical school in the extended scope (implemented during 8 hours in the cycle).

<sup>21</sup> The problem with Minister Hall's core curriculum was the ability to implement such a number of requirements. See: P. Załęski and others., *Komentarz do podstawy programowej...*, p. 20. Note that with the current "reform" of Minister Nowacka (what has been done so far is a reduction of the foundations of the core curriculum), Minister Zalewska's core was significantly reduced, leaving the number of hours in the cycle unchanged. The paradox is that this involved people from the environment behind the construction of Minister Hall's core curriculum and at the same time criticizing Minister Zalewska's core for excessive restrictions on content during the period of presentation of the latter core curriculum.

<sup>22</sup> This limitation – in addition to being related to the number of hours per subject – also had another reason. In Minister Hall's core in civic education, we have duplications in this regard with the requirements from geography. As we know from a nondirective interview with one of the members of the team designing the core in civic education in Minister Zalewska's reform, this problem was discussed at the beginning of the work on the core curriculum by selected members of the civic education team and the geography team. A kind of separation of the issues was made – so that there was as little duplication between the subjects as possible, so that they were reduced to a methodologically justified minimum.



due to the fact that the specific requirements of the extended range are also tested on it.

Thus, the above reductions of EU issues on the basis of compulsory teaching did not mean a reduction in the entire subject. EU issues are presented more extensively – both quantitatively and qualitatively – in the case of the expanded scope of high school and technical school in Minister Zalewska's core curriculum. In the commentary of the core curriculum, we can read: "The increase is mainly due to the transfer of some content from compulsory teaching (in middle school) to the expanded scope in high school and technical school. [...] Content-wise, the expanded scope of the basis in the case of this block [on international issues – P.Z., A.B.] differs from its predecessor [Minister Hall's basis – P.Z., A.B.] by shifting the emphasis in a direction that allows for a more multifaceted analysis of the functioning of the European Union"<sup>23</sup>. The wording of the EU requirements in Minister Zalewska's core indicates a greater – than in Minister Hall's core – specialization of the language with which they were written. We also have less Euroenthusiasm, e.g. in Minister Hall's core the student was supposed to present only the benefits of EU membership, in Minister Zalewska's core – both the benefits and the costs, but this seems to favor objectivity. An analysis of the EU content from the core from Minister Zalewska's reform (in the case of both scopes of study in high and technical schools) makes it impossible to conclude that the degradation of EU issues in education has already begun in this core.

## EU requirements verified during the exam

For the 2021 and 2022 exam requirements, of the 8 requirements from the core curriculum (Minister Hall) for middle school, 3 were removed, for the basis for the basic scope of high school and technical school, of the 3 – 2, and for the basis for the extended scope, of the 14 – 5. Thus, 38%, 67% and 36% of the requirements were removed, respectively. Of the 25 EU requirements from middle school and all levels of high school graduation, 10 requirements were removed, or 40%. Thus, it should be emphasized that the quantitative calculations indicate that the cuts in

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<sup>23</sup> P. Załęski, *Komentarz do podstawy...*, p. 60.



the core curriculum for the matriculation exam for EU issues were over-represented<sup>24</sup>.

An analysis of the removed EU requirements, as well as a reading of the following pages of the commentary on the exam requirements, show us that some of the removals were superficial or organizational in nature: in the case of the requirements of compulsory education, topics overlapping with the requirements of the expanded secondary school were removed<sup>25</sup>. However, some of the removals indicate that they narrowed down the problems that could be tested on the exam – to quote an excerpt from the commentary: “part [...] of the reduction was related to the belief that on the exam it is sufficient to test the knowledge and skills of the issue at a less detailed level (while the issue – at a less detailed level – remained in the exam requirements). For the reason indicated, the requirements were reduced, among others: P.4.4) and P.4.7), while leaving the slightly narrower requirement R.45.5)<sup>26</sup>[...]. Many of the reductions carried out for this reason relate to the requirements of the *International Relations* block: among others, R.43.2), R.43.5), R.43.6) and R.44.1) – as the issues outlined in requirements G.20.3), G.20.4) and G.20.5) of the core curriculum were deemed sufficient for examination [...]. On the other hand, the recognition of requirement R.45.4) as one that will not be verified in the exam had reasons both in the reduction of the content of the *International Relations* block and in the belief that the problem outlined in requirement G.21.2) is sufficient here,

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<sup>24</sup> In general, 26% each of the requirements from the middle school and basic range of high schools were removed, as well as 15% of the requirements from the extended range of these schools. In the division of the civic education (WoS) into blocks, EU issues were in the *International Relations* block, where, in general, 26% of the requirements were reduced. See: P. Załęski, *Komentarz do wymagań egzaminacyjnych [in:] Egzamin maturalny w 2021 roku. Vademecum nauczyciela. Wiedza o społeczeństwie*, Warszawa 2021, p. 26, ORE: ISBN 978-83-66830-08-0. In the commentary is noted that the order in which the content was implemented and the average results of the tasks in the block on the high school diploma were taken into account when removing the requirements – this, of course, may justify why the international block among the blocks implemented in the high school suffered the most, but it does not explain why EU issues were so drastically reduced.

<sup>25</sup> A casual interview with a member of the reduction team reveals that the team, when removing requirements, had the removal of about 20% of them imposed by the ministry, and the philosophy adopted by the team was to remove 20% of the requirements, but realistically a much smaller percentage of the content. In the interview, it was obtained that during the public consultations, only one entity pointed out that the changes were mainly tidying up, if not – apparent, and therefore realistically slightly reducing the scope of the exam. Minister Hall’s analysis of the core curriculum and examination requirements confirms this picture. Since, as it seems, the creators of Minister Hall’s core curriculum did not have the fullest control over the content of the requirements, introducing duplications that were methodologically unjustifiable, this was a task not as difficult as it might have seemed without the use of content analysis.

<sup>26</sup> The narrower nature of the requirements for the extended scope relative to those for compulsory education points to methodological shortcomings in the core curriculum introduced by Minister Hall’s reform.

as well as in the observation that requirement R.45.3) also refers to this problematic”<sup>27</sup>. An analysis of the removals thus shows that the scope of EU-related issues has been genuinely reduced, but not as drastically as a purely quantitative approach would indicate. Because of the period in which the team was active, the discourse of the consultation comments, as well as media articles, indicated a drastic reduction in civic problematics, including EU problematics.

In the case of the examination requirements applicable in 2023 and 2024, 1 requirement has been removed from the basic scope of the core (Minister Zalewska), and 3 requirements have been removed from the extended scope (34% and 16% of the requirements, respectively). Thus, of the 22 EU-related requirements at all levels of matriculation school, 4 were removed which equals 18%<sup>28</sup>. The quantitative approach shows us an overrepresentation of EU deletions only in the case of the basic range, but a removed requirement, in this case, does not mean the removal of content – since the content of requirement P.VII.9) is contained in the requirements of the extended range [R.XIV.5), R.XIV.6) and R.XIV.7)]. It can be said that in the present case, the EU issues have suffered slightly – in the case of hard content only by EU sectoral policies, which were not present in the previous core (and therefore in the previous exam requirements)<sup>29</sup>.

In the exam requirements verified during the 2021 and 2022 exams, EU-related issues were present in 16 of the 308 requirements, which is 5.2%. In the requirements verified in the 2023 and 2024 exams (exam requirements and requirements of the core curriculum from Minister Zalewska’s reform for elementary school), on the other hand, EU-related issues were present in 20 out of 320 requirements, which is 6.3%. In the

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<sup>27</sup> P. Załęski, *Komentarz do wymagań...*, pp. 27–29.

<sup>28</sup> In general, 5% of the requirements in the basic range and 15% of the requirements in the extended range were removed. In the division of the civic education into blocks, EU issues were in the *International Issues* block, where generally 18% of the requirements were reduced.

<sup>29</sup> A nondirective interview with a member of the reduction team reveals that the team was to make the reductions so that the exams in the aspect of the requirements reviewed were most similar to each other. Comparability of requirements in the quantitative aspect led to the fact that in this case (requirements from Minister Zalewska’s core curriculum) a smaller percentage of requirements were removed than in the previous case (requirements from Minister Hall’s core curriculum). Comparability of requirements in the content aspect led to: 1) the largest reductions in requirements from new topics – those that were not present in the previous core curriculum (which, in the case of the requirements of interest to us, meant significant reductions in the subject of public policies); 2) proportional deletions in the case of requirements from analogous blocks (which meant the largest depletion of the *International Issues* block – analogous to the *Poland, Europe, World* block from the previous basis).

case of the matriculation exams we analysed, this should – by logic and against the verified thesis – mean at least maintaining the number of points possible for tasks on EU-related issues in the 2023 matriculation exam formula compared to the 2015 matriculation exam formula from 2021–2022.

The thesis that in both cases the reduction of requirements hit the EU-related requirements hard was fully confirmed only in the quantitative aspect as to the 2021 exam requirements in relation to Minister Hall's core (although the analysis of the content of the requirements indicates a slightly smaller reduction). In the case of the exam requirements produced based on Minister Zalewska's core, the EU-related requirements were reduced less than the other requirements and less than the other requirements of the *International issues* block.

## EU in matriculation exam worksheets – number and types of tasks

In the 2021 sheet, EU-related issues were covered by three tasks (two single tasks and one from a two-task bundle), for the solution of which 4 points could be obtained (and therefore 6.7% of the sheet's points). Thus, these problems were overrepresented concerning the percentage of EU-related requirements in the exam requirements, which are an abridged version of Minister Hall's core. Only one task dealt exclusively with EU-related issues – recognizing the competencies of EU institutions (Task 28. – closed-ended matching task, 1 point)<sup>30</sup>. In the remaining two tasks, EU-related issues were tested with other ones: one task concerned recognizing countries in connection with their “relationship” to the EU and NATO (task 27.1. – gap/short-answer closed task, 2 points), and the other – recognizing that the source materials about the referendums in the UK (Brexit and Scottish independence) do not refer to the same

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<sup>30</sup> The allocation of individual tasks to types (within the form of closed tasks: multiple-choice tasks, matching tasks and true-false tasks; within open tasks: gap/short-answer closed tasks, short-answer open tasks and extended-answer tasks) was made on the basis of the typical methodological division of tasks with adjustments justified for the civic education matriculation proposed in the monograph: P. Załęski, *Weryfikacja kompetencji obywatelskich polskich maturzystów – analiza na podstawie egzaminu z wiedzy o społeczeństwie z lat 2010–2019*, Warszawa 2021, pp. 26–27.

referendum (task 7. – short-answer open task, 1 point)<sup>31</sup>. It has to be mentioned that in this worksheet, in the task classified under the *Society* block (task 3. – closed true-false task, 1 point) we have the category of European identity<sup>32</sup>.

In the 2022 worksheet, EU-related issues were covered by two (single) tasks, for the solution of which 3 points could be obtained (and therefore 5% of the sheet's points) – the points to be obtained for this issue, therefore decreased and equaled the percentage of EU-related requirements in the exam requirements. Both tasks dealt exclusively with EU-related issues: one – the history of European integration (Task 28. – a closed-ended matching task, 1 point), and the other – the EU institutions (task 29. – a gap/short-answer closed-ended task, 2 points)<sup>33</sup>. We should also add that in this worksheet, the *Law* block task (task 18. – closed-ended matching task, 1 point) included the Lisbon Treaty as a distractor – this task highlighted the functioning of this treaty in the Polish legal system<sup>34</sup>.

In the 2023 worksheet, EU-related issues were covered by four tasks (two each in two bundles), the solution of which could earn as many as 6 points (and therefore 10% of the sheet's points). EU-related issues in the first matriculation exam in the 2023 formula were thus heavily overrepresented to the percentage of EU-related requirements in the requirements, which were an abridged version of Minister Zalewska's core. Two tasks dealt with EU institutions (both from bundle 17: task 17.1. – gap/short answer closed task, 2 points; task 17.2. – open-ended short-answer task, 1 point), one – recognizing EU member states (task 16.1. – gap/closed-ended short-answer task, 2 points) and one – Schengen

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<sup>31</sup> See worksheet: [https://cke.gov.pl/images/\\_EGZAMIN\\_MATURALNY\\_OD\\_2015/Arkusze\\_egzaminacyjne/2021/Wiedza\\_o\\_spoleczenstwie/poziom\\_rozszerzony/EWOP-R0-100-2105.pdf](https://cke.gov.pl/images/_EGZAMIN_MATURALNY_OD_2015/Arkusze_egzaminacyjne/2021/Wiedza_o_spoleczenstwie/poziom_rozszerzony/EWOP-R0-100-2105.pdf), p. 5, [8th January 2025]. See criteria of the assessment: [https://cke.gov.pl/images/\\_EGZAMIN\\_MATURALNY\\_OD\\_2015/Arkusze\\_egzaminacyjne/2021/Zasady\\_Oceniania/EWOP-R0-100-2105-zasady.pdf](https://cke.gov.pl/images/_EGZAMIN_MATURALNY_OD_2015/Arkusze_egzaminacyjne/2021/Zasady_Oceniania/EWOP-R0-100-2105-zasady.pdf), p. 5, [8th January 2025].

<sup>32</sup> Analysis of the task will be presented later in the text.

<sup>33</sup> See worksheet: [https://cke.gov.pl/images/\\_EGZAMIN\\_MATURALNY\\_OD\\_2015/Arkusze\\_egzaminacyjne/2022/Wiedza\\_o\\_spoleczenstwie/poziom\\_rozszerzony/EWOP-R0-100-2205.pdf](https://cke.gov.pl/images/_EGZAMIN_MATURALNY_OD_2015/Arkusze_egzaminacyjne/2022/Wiedza_o_spoleczenstwie/poziom_rozszerzony/EWOP-R0-100-2205.pdf), pp. 20–21. [8th January 2025]. See the criteria of the assessment: [https://cke.gov.pl/images/\\_EGZAMIN\\_MATURALNY\\_OD\\_2015/Arkusze\\_egzaminacyjne/2022/Zasady\\_oceniania/EWOP-R0-100-2205-zasady.pdf](https://cke.gov.pl/images/_EGZAMIN_MATURALNY_OD_2015/Arkusze_egzaminacyjne/2022/Zasady_oceniania/EWOP-R0-100-2205-zasady.pdf), p. 21, [8th January 2025].

<sup>34</sup> The passers were to complete the text: "The only legal act among those presented that has not been promulgated in the Journal of Laws of the Republic of Poland is the act named ....., while the only executive act is the act named ....." They were to identify two relevant legal acts from among the four cited.

area (task 16.2. – open-ended short-answer task, 1 point)<sup>35</sup>. Thus, three tasks did not consider the EU-related issues.

In the 2024 worksheet, EU-related issues were covered by four tasks (all from one bundle, 1 point each), for the solution of which 4 points could be obtained (and therefore 6.7% of the worksheet points) – so the issues were represented analogously to the percentage of EU-related requirements. Two tasks dealt with EU institutions: recognizing an institution by its key competence (task 17.1. – a gap/short-answer closed task) and recognizing a non-EU institution from among the listed European institutions (task 17.4. – a short-answer open task). Closed tasks, on the other hand, concerned: the legal order of the EU (task 17.2. – true-false task) and the history of integration, although history from the 21st century (task 17.3. – multiple choice task)<sup>36</sup>. Thus, the three tasks did not go beyond EU-related topics.

The analysis showed that EU issues were not limited in the worksheets, with either the percentage of points possible to earn for such tasks being analogous to the percentage of EU requirements, or the issues were over-represented (in 2021 and 2023, thus in the years beginning to test the requirements which are abbreviated versions of the respective core curriculum)<sup>37</sup>. In turn, looking at the number of EU-related tasks in the worksheets, we can note an increase in the number of these tasks in the 2023 matriculation exam formula.

## The EU in matriculation exam worksheets – task topics

In the analysed worksheets, the source material twice consisted of characteristic provisions concerning EU institutions (task 29 of 2022

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<sup>35</sup> See worksheet: [https://cke.gov.pl/images/\\_EGZAMIN\\_MATURALNY\\_OD\\_2023/Arkusze\\_egzaminacyjne/2023/Wiedza\\_o\\_spoleczenstwie/MWOP-R0-100-2305.pdf](https://cke.gov.pl/images/_EGZAMIN_MATURALNY_OD_2023/Arkusze_egzaminacyjne/2023/Wiedza_o_spoleczenstwie/MWOP-R0-100-2305.pdf), pp. 20–21, [8th January 2025]. See the criteria of the assessment: [https://cke.gov.pl/images/\\_EGZAMIN\\_MATURALNY\\_OD\\_2023/Arkusze\\_egzaminacyjne/2023/Wiedza\\_o\\_spoleczenstwie/MWOP-R0-100-2305-zasady.pdf](https://cke.gov.pl/images/_EGZAMIN_MATURALNY_OD_2023/Arkusze_egzaminacyjne/2023/Wiedza_o_spoleczenstwie/MWOP-R0-100-2305-zasady.pdf), pp. 21–23, [8th January 2025].

<sup>36</sup> See worksheet: [https://cke.gov.pl/images/\\_EGZAMIN\\_MATURALNY\\_OD\\_2023/Arkusze\\_egzaminacyjne/2024/Wiedza\\_o\\_spoleczenstwie/MWOP-R0-100-A-2405-arkusz.pdf](https://cke.gov.pl/images/_EGZAMIN_MATURALNY_OD_2023/Arkusze_egzaminacyjne/2024/Wiedza_o_spoleczenstwie/MWOP-R0-100-A-2405-arkusz.pdf), pp. 20–21, [8th January 2025]. See the criteria of the assessment: [https://cke.gov.pl/images/\\_EGZAMIN\\_MATURALNY\\_OD\\_2023/Arkusze\\_egzaminacyjne/2024/Wiedza\\_o\\_spoleczenstwie/MWOP-R0-100-2405-zasady.pdf](https://cke.gov.pl/images/_EGZAMIN_MATURALNY_OD_2023/Arkusze_egzaminacyjne/2024/Wiedza_o_spoleczenstwie/MWOP-R0-100-2405-zasady.pdf), pp. 24–25, [8th January 2025].

<sup>37</sup> The highest increase in points (relative to the previous year) possible for EU tasks occurred in 2023, the first high school graduation sheet in the 2023 formula. Paradoxically, the highest decrease in points (relative to the previous year) possible for EU tasks occurred in 2024, the year of the change of government to a pro-EU team.

and task bundle 17 of 2023). In the 2022 worksheet, these were the regulations on, in turn: the European Council, the Commission, and the Council<sup>38</sup>, while in the 2023 worksheet – the European Parliament, the European Court of Justice, and the Commission<sup>39</sup>. In tasks 29. (of 2022) and 17.1. (of 2023), the passers were required to identify the indicated institutions and write their names. In turn, the instruction for task 17.2. (of 2023) was: “Explain the difference in the legitimacy of the institutions to which the cited legal provisions apply” (the relevant legal provisions indicated this difference: after all, it was explicitly stated that the members of Parliament – unlike the other institutions – are elected by popular vote). Both the cited legal provisions and the instructions for the three tasks indicated here cannot be reliably interpreted as bearing negative images of the EU institutional system. On the other hand, the choice of legislation concerning the Parliament, as well as the instructions for task 17.2 (from 2023), emphasize the full democratic legitimacy of this institution, which, in the context of the opinion about the deficit of such legitimacy in the EU, can be interpreted as presenting a positive picture of the institutional system of this organization.

Twice the source material for the tasks was material relating to the legislative process in the EU. In task 28. of 2021, was a diagram of the legislative process in the ordinary legislative procedure, while the material for the entire task bundle 17. of 2024 was an excerpt from a regulation, in which we have information about the adoption of the act in such

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<sup>38</sup> The following institution-specific provisions were chosen. “Provisions on institutions 1: [I]t vests the Union with the necessary impulses for its development and determines general political directions and priorities. [...] It [the institution] consists of [among others] the heads of state or government of the Member States, as well as its president [...]. Provisions for Institution 2: [W]e shall promote the general interest of the Union and shall take appropriate initiatives to that end. It [...] Executes the budget and manages programs. Performs coordination, executive and management functions [...]. Provisions for institutions 3: [P]eople shall, in conjunction with the European Parliament, perform legislative and budgetary functions. It performs policy-setting and coordination functions [...]. [Its] composition [...] shall include one ministerial-level representative from each Member State [...]”

<sup>39</sup> The following institution-specific provisions were selected. “Institutional Provisions 1: [P]eople shall, jointly with the Council, exercise legislative and budgetary functions. It performs political control and consultative functions in accordance with the terms of the Treaties. [...] The [institution] shall be composed of representatives of the citizens of the Union [...] elected for a term of five years by direct universal suffrage [...]. Provisions relating to the institution 2: [O]ur body shall, in accordance with the Treaties, [inter alia] deal with complaints brought by Member States [and] on the interpretation of Union law or the validity of acts adopted by the [Union] institutions. The judges and advocates-general [of this institution shall be] appointed by mutual agreement [...] for a period of six years. Provisions concerning the institution 3: [N]oversees the application of Union law [...]. Executes the budget and manages programs. Carries out coordination, executive and management functions, in accordance with the terms of the Treaties. The [...] term of office [...] shall be five years. [Members shall be] elected on the basis of suggestions made by the Member States [...]”



a procedure. In the first of the tasks, the names of three institutions had to be assigned to the markings on the diagram: the passers were required to identify the institution initiating the procedure (the Commission) and the institutions adopting the act (the Parliament and the Council). The first question was also checked in task 17.1. (of 2024)<sup>40</sup>. As already mentioned, in task 17.4. (of 2024) it was necessary to choose a non-EU institution from among those indicated in the quoted excerpts from the regulation, and these were the institutions of the Parliament, the Council of the EU, the Court of Justice and the Commission, and the EU body established by the regulation (the European Data Protection Board<sup>41</sup>), as well as the European Court of Human Rights. The discussed excerpts from the regulation included in the 2024 sheet were also used to create task 17.2. – a task in which the passers were to determine the truth of two statements about the EU legal order: “1. The legal act, excerpts of which are posted, is directly applicable in all member states of the European Union.” (true) and 2. “The legal act, fragments of which are posted, is part of the so-called primary law of the European Union” (false). Both the materials indicated in this paragraph and the instructions for the four tasks in question cannot be reliably interpreted as being characterized by negative images of the EU institutional system. It seems that the reference in the excerpt of the regulation (which is the material for bundle 17 of 2024) to the leading European body protecting human rights (the European Court of Human Rights) can be considered to be conducive to a positive image of this organization – because it emphasizes the fact that the EU respects the jurisprudence of this non-EU body<sup>42</sup>.

The above-indicated excerpts of the regulation from task bundle 17. of 2024 were also used to create a task on the history of European integration (task 17.3.), which tested knowledge of the chronology – the passers were to indicate when the legal acts mentioned in the material (the Charter of Fundamental Rights and the Lisbon Treaty) came into

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<sup>40</sup> It should have completed the sentence, “The regulation, excerpts of which are included, was adopted at the request of ..... – the EU institution that initiates the legislative process for acts of this type.”

<sup>41</sup> These are some of the quoted excerpts from the regulation: “Article 68.1 The European Data Protection Board is hereby established as a body of the Union”. The instruction for this task was: “Justify that not all the institutions and bodies indicated in the cited passages of the Regulation are part of the institutional system of the European Union”.

<sup>42</sup> Here is an excerpt from the regulation in which European Court of Human Rights indicated, “Where a legal basis or legal act is referred to in this regulation, [such] legal basis or such legal act should be clear and precise, and its application foreseeable to those subject to it – as required by the case law of the Court of Justice [...] and the European Court of Human Rights”.



force. Possible answers concerning the periods were created in such a way as to simultaneously test knowledge of the enlargements of the European Union<sup>43</sup>. A task testing the issue of chronology in the history of integration in a multifaceted way also occurred in the 2022 sheet (task 29.). In it, in turn, the source material consisted of two maps (map A. showing the European Communities after the 1986 enlargement and map B. showing the European Union after the 2004 enlargement) and a timeline, on which the time intervals were marked out by indicating legal acts (interval 1. – between the Single European Act and the Maastricht Treaty, interval 2 – between the latter and the Amsterdam Treaty, interval 3 – between the latter and the Nice Treaty, interval 4 – between the latter and the Lisbon Treaty, and interval 5 – after the latter)<sup>44</sup>. Less complex skills were required in two further tasks on the history of integration, for which the source material were maps. In task 27.1 of 2021, the material was a contemporary map of the Balkans (on which all post-Yugoslav states were numbered 1–7). In it, the passers were supposed to add the name of the relevant country and the number with which it was marked on the map to each of the three descriptions (each of which contained 4 pieces of information, with the EU being relevant to either one or two of them)<sup>45</sup>. Even simpler methodologically was task 16.1. of 2023, in which to each numbered country on the map (the numbers marked Ireland, Norway, and Estonia) one had to add the name of that country and indicate whether it was a member of the European Union. This map and the information about the travel of EU citizens to the countries marked on it were also the material used to create the second task of this bundle (task 16.2.), for which the instruction was: “Indicate the person who will be subjected to regular border control upon arrival in the destination country. Justify

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<sup>43</sup> The distractors were answers A. (“after the accession of Austria, and before the accession of Slovenia”), B. (“after the accession of Slovenia, and before the accession of Romania”) and D. (“after the accession of Croatia, and before the withdrawal of the United Kingdom”), and the correct answer is C. (“after the accession of Romania, and before the accession of Croatia”).

<sup>44</sup> The passers were to complete the sentence, “Map A. became obsolete in the period numbered ....., while map B. became current in the period numbered .....”.

<sup>45</sup> Here are the descriptions constructed for the task. “Description A. Parliament proclaimed the independence of this country in 2006. Since 2010, it has been a candidate for membership in the European Union. In 2017, it became a member of NATO. The euro is the means of payment in it. Description B. This country declared independence in 1991. It has been a member of NATO and the European Union since 2004, and has been a member of the Eurozone since 2007. Description C. This country declared independence in 1991, but government control of its entire territory became a reality in 1995. It has been a member of NATO since 2009 and the European Union since 2013”.

your answer”<sup>46</sup>. Both the materials indicated in this paragraph and the instructions for the five tasks in question cannot be reliably interpreted as having negative images of the EU. Of course, it can be pointed out that distractor D. in task 17.3. (of 2024) did not have to include information about Britain’s withdrawal from the organization<sup>47</sup>. However, it should be added that task 16.2. (of 2023), as well as the indicated travel information from the source material, showed the opportunities for citizens resulting from their country’s membership in the Schengen area<sup>48</sup>.

Now let’s look at the aforementioned task 7. from the 2021 sheet, which required recognizing and justifying that the information about the Brexit referendum and a photograph about the referendum on Scottish independence refer to different issues<sup>49</sup>. Of course, it can be argued that such a task connotes negatively from the perspective of European integration, but two points should be emphasized. First, it referred to facts. Secondly, the text emphasized the slight predominance of supporters of leaving the EU, while explicitly stating that in Scotland and Northern Ireland the result was against<sup>50</sup>. It should be added at this point that the 2021 sheet included a task not testing EU knowledge, but indicating European identity (the aforementioned task 3.). It presented data from opinion polls on a representative sample, which are not strongly in favor of European identity – they show its decline and the fact that it does not apply to more than half of the Polish population. However, a comparison of the material presented to the passers with the graphical representation of the survey in the CBOS publication shows that the results were presented in a more favorable way for European identity in the matriculation exam worksheet – as the categories “for a Pole and a European” and “for a European and a Pole” were summed up, the

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<sup>46</sup> Here is the information constructed for the task. “Information 1: Angel is a citizen of Spain. He wants to visit friends in one of the island countries of Western Europe. Information 2: Anna is a Polish citizen working in Brussels. She is going on a business trip to one of the Scandinavian countries. Information 3: Henrik is a citizen of Italy. He is going on a visit to his father’s family living in one of the Baltic States”.

<sup>47</sup> However, then the possible answers would not be constructed analogously.

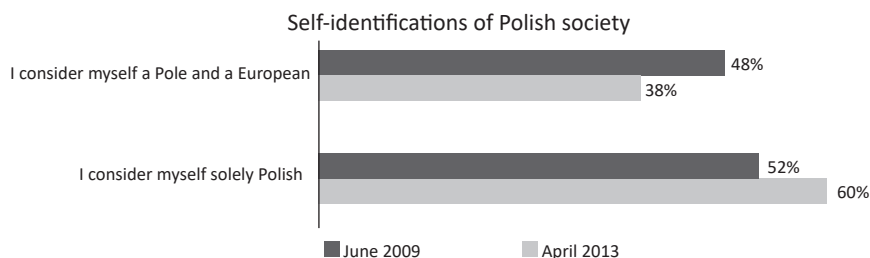
<sup>48</sup> In Poland, the country’s membership in the Schengen zone connotes membership in the EU. In the CBOS surveys of 2014, 2019 and 2024, responses on the issues of “[t]he opening of borders, freedom of movement, the Schengen area, lack of visas and the benefits of being able to travel” were indicated as one of the two biggest pluses of Poland’s EU membership. See: *20 lat członkostwa Polski w UE*, „Komunikat z Badań CBOS” 2024, no. 43, pp. 8–9.

<sup>49</sup> The instruction for the assignment was: “Decide whether the photograph and the text refer to the same referendum. Justify your answer”.

<sup>50</sup> The text stated: “With a high level of voter turnout (72.2%), 51.9% of voters voted to leave the EU and 48.1% voted to remain in it. In Scotland and Northern Ireland, opponents of leaving the EU won a majority – 62% and 55.8%, respectively”.

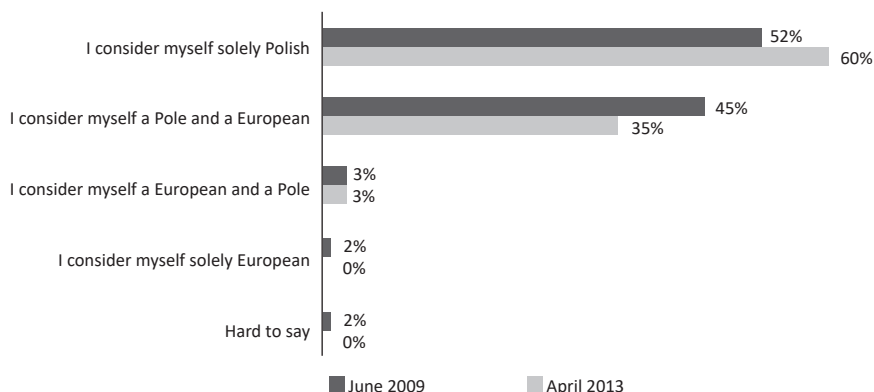
order of identification was changed and the almost non-existent purely European identity was left out.

Figure 1. Source material for task 3 (from 2021)



Source: [https://cke.gov.pl/images/\\_EGZAMIN\\_MATURALNY\\_OD\\_2015/Arkusze\\_egzaminacyjne/2021/Wiedza\\_o\\_spoleczenstwie/poziom\\_rozszerzony/EWOP-R0-100-2105.pdf](https://cke.gov.pl/images/_EGZAMIN_MATURALNY_OD_2015/Arkusze_egzaminacyjne/2021/Wiedza_o_spoleczenstwie/poziom_rozszerzony/EWOP-R0-100-2105.pdf), p. 3.

Figure 2. Self-identification of Polish society in the CBOS report



Source: *Instytucje i obywatele w Unii Europejskiej*, „Komunikat z Badań CBOS” 2013, no. 56, p. 7.

The analysis undertaken of the content of the tasks in the 2021-2024 civic education matriculation exam worksheets in terms of EU issues allows us to conclude that the EU was presented in the worksheets mainly through an institutional prism (six out of 13 tasks; one task each in the 2015 formula worksheets and two tasks each in the 2023 formula worksheets) and the history of European integration, including EU member states (four tasks; one task in each worksheet). One task was related

to the Schengen area (task 16.2 of the 2023 formula), one to the EU legal order (task 17.2 of the 2024 formula), and one to the withdrawal from the EU (task 7 of the 2021 formula). Thus, only one – the last mentioned – task presented an issue that should be considered negative from the perspective of European integration, but a kind of softening of such perception was achieved by including material on European identity in the worksheet. We should also add that the EU-related topics and the image of this organization did not change noticeably in the various formulas of the matriculation exam, including in the 2024 worksheet – the only year of the years covered by the analysis in which Poland is not governed by a team originating from the Law and Justice party.

### EU in matriculation exam worksheets – task performance levels

The average performance level for the EU tasks in the 2021 worksheet was 18%<sup>51</sup>, at the same time it was lower than the average for the entire worksheet (28%) and slightly higher than the average for the tasks of the *International Relations* block (16%)<sup>52</sup>. The most difficult task was the 28th (on the competence of EU institutions in the legislative process) – despite its closed nature, the level of its performance was only 14%. Similarly poorly recognized member states or those aspiring to integrate with the EU and NATO (task 27.1., performance level 16%)<sup>53</sup>. The best performers coped with task 7 – the task on the British referendums, but

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<sup>51</sup> Thus, the level of performance of EU tasks in this worksheet is similar to that of the 2015-2019 matriculation exam. However, it should be added that it marked a drastic decline from the previous year – after all, the average for tasks on this subject in the 2020 sheet was 35%. At that time, it was higher than the average of the entire worksheet (29%) and the average for tasks from the international relations block (32%). However, both these data and the analysis of the tasks indicate that the decisive factor in such a result of the EU tasks in the 2020 sheet was not so much the knowledge and skills of the passers, as the construction of the tasks.

<sup>52</sup> See: P. Załęski, A. Rabiega, *Sprawozdanie za rok 2021. Egzamin maturalny: Wiedza o społeczeństwie*, pp.17–20, [https://cke.gov.pl/images/\\_EGZAMIN\\_MATURALNY\\_OD\\_2015/Informacje\\_o\\_wynikach/2021/sprawozdanie/EM\\_wos\\_sprawozdanie\\_2021.pdf](https://cke.gov.pl/images/_EGZAMIN_MATURALNY_OD_2015/Informacje_o_wynikach/2021/sprawozdanie/EM_wos_sprawozdanie_2021.pdf), [10th January 2025].

<sup>53</sup> From the matriculation exam report for solutions to this task we can read: “Some realizations indicate not only deficiencies in the detailed knowledge of the passers about changes in the political map of Europe and the membership of countries in key international organizations [...], but also [...] a lack of orientation in the political map of Europe”. P. Załęski, A. Rabiega, *Sprawozdanie za rok 2021...*, p. 22.

its level of performance (27%) was still lower than the average of the sheet<sup>54</sup>.

The performance level of the Union tasks on the 2022 worksheet was the worst in the history of the civic education high school matriculation exam. The average for the Union tasks was 13%, which was more than twice as low as the average for the entire sheet (30%) and quite a bit lower than the average for the tasks from the *International Relations* block (21%)<sup>55</sup>. The most difficult task turned out to be the 28th (which tested the question of the history of integration quite multifacetedly, although referring directly to chronology) – despite its closed nature, the level of its completion was 11%. Similarly, the recognition of the EU institutions was poor (task 29., the level of performance was 14%) – and this despite the rather characteristic wording of the provisions of treaty law<sup>56</sup>.

The average for EU tasks on this 2023 worksheet was 29%, which was more than twice as high as that of the previous year (an increase of 16 percentage points)<sup>57</sup>. It is also worth noting that all the EU tasks were open tasks, which are generally more difficult for passers than closed tasks. However, the indicated average was quite a bit lower than the average of the entire worksheet (42%) and the average for tasks from the *International Issues* block (35%)<sup>58</sup>. Only the task on Schengen membership proved to be very difficult in the 2023 worksheet – the level of

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<sup>54</sup> A look into the grading rules (in which it was allowed in types 2., 3. and 4. of the answer to recognize only one of the referents) reinforces the idea that the knowledge and skills of nearly 3/4 of the passers are sparse in this area.

<sup>55</sup> See: P. Załęski, E. Górczak-Ulman, *Sprawozdanie za rok 2022. Egzamin maturalny: Wiedza o społeczeństwie*, pp.16–18, [https://cke.gov.pl/images/\\_EGZAMIN\\_MATURALNY\\_OD\\_2015/Informacje\\_o\\_wynikach/2022/sprawozdanie/EM\\_wos\\_sprawozdanie\\_2022.pdf](https://cke.gov.pl/images/_EGZAMIN_MATURALNY_OD_2015/Informacje_o_wynikach/2022/sprawozdanie/EM_wos_sprawozdanie_2022.pdf), [10th January 2025].

<sup>56</sup> In the report on matriculation exam was written: “The level of performance of task 29 [...] indicates the problems of most high school graduates in recognizing the institutions of the European Union. Some of the wrong answers of the passers were related to their insufficient knowledge of the competencies of these institutions [...]. However, there were also answers indicating a lack of orientation in the entire institutional system of this organization”. P. Załęski, E. Górczak-Ulman, *Sprawozdanie za rok 2022...*, pp. 20–21.

<sup>57</sup> However, it should be emphasized with these results that this worksheet was solved only by high school graduates, and therefore several thousand fewer than usual (technical school graduates achieve weaker baccalaureate results, especially with civic education).

<sup>58</sup> See: P. Załęski, K. Niwiński, *Sprawozdanie za rok 2023. Egzamin maturalny: Wiedza o społeczeństwie*, pp. 19–20, [https://cke.gov.pl/images/\\_EGZAMIN\\_MATURALNY\\_OD\\_2023/Informacje\\_o\\_wynikach/2023/sprawozdanie/MWOP\\_wos\\_sprawozdanie\\_2023.pdf](https://cke.gov.pl/images/_EGZAMIN_MATURALNY_OD_2023/Informacje_o_wynikach/2023/sprawozdanie/MWOP_wos_sprawozdanie_2023.pdf), [10th January 2025].

completion of task 16.2. was in fact 18%<sup>59</sup>. The easiest for the passers was the first task of this bundle – the level of performance of this task (checking the knowledge of political map of Europe and the membership of countries in the EU) was 42%. Tasks on the identification of EU institutions (task 17.1.)<sup>60</sup> and differences in their legitimacy (task 17.2.) were solved at the level of – respectively – 24% and 22%<sup>61</sup>.

On the other hand, the average for EU tasks in the 2024 sheet was 25%, at which it was quite lower than the average of the entire sheet (35%), but higher than the average for the tasks of the *International Issues* block (22%)<sup>62</sup>. Tasks on the institutional system of the EU proved to be very difficult in this worksheet: 17.4., the performance level of

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<sup>59</sup> The report on this matriculation reads: “Task 16.2 – the most difficult test task on the sheet – tested the knowledge of the passers on the basic issues of citizens’ rights related to their country’s membership in the Schengen area and the membership composition of the Schengen area, as well as knowledge of the political map of Europe. Errors were made by the passers in connection with deficiencies in any of these issues (or in several). There were answers indicating knowledge of the map and orientation to the Schengen area, but at the same time ignorance of the Schengen member states [...]. Many answers equated membership in the European Union with membership in the zone [...] or considered that the entitlements associated with the zone were the result of membership in the EU [...], often making mistakes related to membership in this supranational organization [...]. In some of the works, the errors already indicated overlapped with ignorance of the political map [...]. Finally, there were realizations from which it can be concluded that the passer did not read the instruction with understanding”. P. Załęski, K. Niwiński, *Sprawozdanie za rok 2023...*, p. 32.

<sup>60</sup> The matriculation report regarding this task indicates: “There were realizations in which high school graduates incorrectly recognized one, two or all institutions, while using the names of existing EU bodies in their answer [...]. Unfortunately, not infrequently some of the terms used were invented by the passers [...] or were the names of international organizations [...]. Finally, there were realizations in which high school graduates did not follow the command – they did not give the names of institutions, but – for example – tried to specify their functions”. P. Załęski, K. Niwiński, *Sprawozdanie za rok 2023...*, pp. 33–34.

<sup>61</sup> In the context of the earlier narrative on task 17.2, as well as its grading rules (which imply that it was enough to state that parliament is elected by popular vote, and other institutions are not), the last value is somewhat surprising. Also in the matriculation exam report regarding this task, it was emphasized that *the legislation that is this material contained information on the elements of how each institution is created*. It also noted there: “The low level of performance on this task was generally due to a lack of understanding of the concept of legitimacy [...]. The answers attempted by high school graduates were attempts in which various functions, tasks or duties of [...] institutions were indicated (generally laconically), with inappropriate use of source material evident in some such realizations [...]. There were also answers in which the passers correctly identified the issue of the composition or appointment of the institution, but wrote so laconically that these answers could not be considered to explain the differences in the legitimacy of EU institutions”. P. Załęski, K. Niwiński, *Sprawozdanie za rok 2023...*, p. 35.

<sup>62</sup> See: P. Załęski, B. Andrzejewska, *Sprawozdanie za rok 2024. Egzamin maturalny: Wiedza o społeczeństwie*, pp. 20–21, [https://cke.gov.pl/images/\\_EGZAMIN\\_MATURALNY\\_OD\\_2023/Informacje\\_o\\_wynikach/2024/sprawozdanie/sprawozdanie\\_matura\\_2024\\_wos\\_F23.pdf](https://cke.gov.pl/images/_EGZAMIN_MATURALNY_OD_2023/Informacje_o_wynikach/2024/sprawozdanie/sprawozdanie_matura_2024_wos_F23.pdf), [10th January 2025].

which was only 14%<sup>63</sup> (which poorly demonstrates the knowledge of the passers on the system of protection of human rights of the Council of Europe<sup>64</sup>), and 17.1. – performance level of 19%<sup>65</sup>. The remaining two tasks were closed tasks, in which a randomly selected answer should generate a performance level of 25%. Interestingly, the passers achieved a lower value (21%) in the case of task 17.3. (the barrier was probably to check two elements of the history of integration – the expansion of the EU and the entry into force of key legislation). At a decent level was solved only task 17.2 – its performance level was 46%.

The performance levels of the EU tasks in each of the worksheets were significantly weaker than the average of the worksheet. In half of the cases (2021 and 2024), these tasks were solved at a higher level than all the tasks from the *International Issues* block. The average performance levels of the EU-related tasks in 2021 and 2022 (testing the mastery of the requirements on the basis of Minister Hall's core) were 18% and 13%<sup>66</sup>, respectively, and in 2023 and 2024 (testing the mastery of the requirements on the basis of Minister Zalewska's core) – 29% (for high school graduates only) and 25%, respectively. The average level of completion of EU tasks in the 2021–2022 matriculation exams was 16%, while for the 2023–2024 matriculation exams this value increased by nearly 70% and reached 27%. The increase is also evident in the basic breakdown of the form of tasks, with an increase of 21 percentage points in closed tasks

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<sup>63</sup> The matriculation report regarding this task reads: "Very often in the answers pointed to the European Data Protection Board mentioned in the material and argued that it is a body, and not – an institution, and therefore narrowed the meaning of the phrase institutional system [...]. Sometimes the wrong, because EU, institution was chosen without formulating a justification [...] or the name of such an institution was written next to the name of the relevant institution [...]. There were also answers in which a non-EU institution was correctly selected, but nevertheless no justification was given for this choice – it was not explained that it was an institution produced in a system of human rights protection other than the EU". P. Załęski, B. Andrzejewska, *Sprawozdanie za rok 2024...*, p. 34.

<sup>64</sup> We have to indicate that in the quoted passages of the act we have the name of the European Court of Human Rights.

<sup>65</sup> In the matriculation report regarding this task we can read: "among the most common incorrect answers were the Council (EU) and the Parliament, and thus prescribed from the source material any of the names of the constituting bodies [...]. There were also answers pointing to other [...] EU institutions and bodies [...]. Finally, there were realizations in which the names of bodies of other international organizations [...] or the names of international organizations were written in". P. Załęski, B. Andrzejewska, *Sprawozdanie za rok 2024...*, pp. 32–33.

<sup>66</sup> It should be noted that such poor results (especially in 2022) were obtained despite the previously indicated reduction of the Union requirements tested in the exam. Attempts to show that in some of the passers such results (also in the context of the cited results of the Union tasks from the 2020 matriculation exam) could have been caused by a kind of rationalization of the learning process (in connection with the reduction – less preparation of students for this subject matter) would require research, the carrying out of which (several years after these matriculation exams) does not seem realistic.



(an average of 13% in the 2015 matriculation formula and an average of 34% in the 2023 formula), and 9 percentage points in open tasks (an average of 17% in the 2015 matriculation formula and an average of 26% in the 2023 formula)<sup>67</sup>. Thus, it can be concluded that the level of knowledge and skills regarding the EU is significantly correlated with the applicable curriculum core or exam requirements tested, with the correlation being in the opposite direction than one would expect based on popular opinion. In addition, the increase in the level of performance on EU-related tasks in the 2023–2024 matriculation exams (relative to those in the 2021–2022) is similar to – although slightly higher than – the increase in the averages on the worksheets discussed here (in the 2023 formula compared to the 2015 formula)<sup>68</sup>.

## Conclusions

The positive verification of the thesis concerns only the differences – mainly quantitative – between the requirements of Minister Hall’s core curriculum and the examination requirements produced in connection with COVID-19, which are an abbreviated version of that core. The attrition of EU requirements in compulsory teaching in Minister Zalewska’s core curriculum (compared to Minister Hall’s core) was not significant from the perspective of our research problem, since in the matriculation exam the requirements of the extended subject are also verified (and these were more in Minister Zalewska’s core).

It should be emphasized that more EU requirements could be verified in the 2023 matriculation exam formula than in the 2021 and 2022. This fact, as well as the greater number of tasks and points to be earned for their completion in the previous matriculation exams, not only negatively verifies the thesis, but indicates that we were dealing with the opposite phenomenon to that occurring in popular opinion – an increase in the importance of EU issues in the matriculation exams in the 2023 formula,

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<sup>67</sup> As it is indicated, only the data from the 2023 baccalaureate formula confirms the typical regularity: closed tasks are easier for passers than open tasks.

<sup>68</sup> 2015 formula worksheets discussed here averaged 29% (28% in 2021 and 30% in 2022), while the average to date for the 2023 formula worksheets is 39% (42% in 2023 and 35% in 2024). Thus, EU issues are not the only or one of the few from which tasks are performed better by high school graduates implementing Minister Zalewska’s core curriculum (than those who implemented Minister Hall’s core).

while these issues were either percentage-wise in line with EU requirements or overrepresented in all analysed worksheets.

The analysis presented here makes it impossible to conclude that the images of the European Union were negative in any of the matriculation exams worksheets, and the only manipulation that could be sought was to reinforce the image of European identity in Polish society. The EU is presented in the worksheets mainly through an institutional prism or the history of European integration. It cannot be reliably substantiated that these images have changed in the worksheets of the years analysed.

An important conclusion is related to the degree of knowledge and skills of the passers in the field of EU issues – to the level of performance of EU tasks in the worksheets. The 2023 formula worksheets showed a significant increase in the average level of performance of such tasks compared to the corresponding tasks of the 2015 formula worksheets from 2021–2022 (as well as the 2015 formula worksheets from 2015–2019, in which the requirements of the entire core of Minister Hall could be verified). At the same time it does not seem that the main reason for this increase is the difference in task construction. We are not able to demonstrate a cause-and-effect relationship here, but this clear correlation – at the same time inverse to the assumption in the thesis – between the results of the EU tasks and the core curriculum (and the exam requirements created on their basis) should be emphasized.

Thus, the article shows that the degradation of the importance of EU issues in the civic education subject did not begin with the Minister Zalewska's reform, and did not take place during the period of the reform.

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