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The scale of internationalisation and Europeanisation of SMEs and their functioning in the spatial systems of the European Union

Skala internacjonalizacji i europeizacji MŚP oraz ich funkcjonowanie w układach przestrzennych Unii Europejskiej

Streszczenie

Artykuł podejmuje nadal dość rzadki wątek badawczy europeizacji firm, zwłaszcza MŚP, przy czym zastosowano w nim klasyczną definicję europeizacji jako szczególnego przypadku internacjonalizacji w obrębie Europy, a właściwie w obrębie Unii Europejskiej. Artykuł zawiera analizę dostępnych danych statycznych ze wszystkich krajów UE, dotyczących skali europeizacji małych i średnich przedsiębiorstw. Ze względu na dostępność danych analizę przygotowano dla lat 2003–2009, co jest poważnym ograniczeniem, jednak takie rozwiązanie pozwoliło na wyciągnięcie rzetelnych wniosków. Celem artykułu jest identyfikacja stanu i tendencji europeizacji oraz internacjonalizacji europejskich małych i średnich przedsiębiorstw, zwłaszcza z perspektywy przestrzennej (terytorialnej). Hipoteza badawcza przyjęta w artykule ma postać stwierdzenia, że intensyfikacja poziomu umiędzynarodowienia europejskich MŚP jest zauważalna w pierwszej dekadzie XXI w. W artykule wykorzystano różne metody analityczne: przegląd literatury, badania typu *desk research*, statystyki opisowe i algorytm Spring-ED (przy zastosowaniu oprogramowania NetMiner v2.6). Na podstawie uzyskanego wyniku można z całą pewnością potwierdzić tezę, że w ostatnich latach proces europeizacyjny małych i średnich przedsiębiorstw przybiera na intensywności.

Abstract

The article undertakes still quite a rare topic of Europeanisation of businesses, especially SMEs, by using the classic definition of Europeanisation as the special case of internationalisation within Europe, and in particular within the European Union. The article contains the analysis of the available statistic data from all EU countries presenting the scale of Europeanisation of small and medium-sized enterprises. Due to the lack of available data, the analysis was restricted to the years 2003–2009, which is a serious research limitation, nevertheless, this approach allows for accurate inference. The research goal of this study is the analysis of the state and tendencies of Europeanisation and internationalisation of European small and medium-sized enterprises, especially from the spatial (territorial) perspective. The research hypothesis is the statement that the intensification of the level of internationalisation of European SMEs is noticed in the first decade of 21st century. The article uses different analytical methods: literature review, desk research, descriptive statistics and Spring-ED algorithm (software NetMiner v2.6). Based on the available data, the hypothesis that Europeanisation processes of European small and medium-sized enterprises gain intensity in recent years can be certainly confirmed.

Słowa kluczowe: europeizacja; handel zagraniczny; internacjonalizacja; małe i średnie przedsiębiorstwa; MŚP; Unia Europejska (UE)

Key words: European Union (EU); Europeanisation; international trade; internationalization; small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs)

Introduction

The European Union, but also the whole Europe, is now facing the major global challenges that primarily relate to economic issues. As stated by H. Sirkin, J. Hemerling and A. Bhattacharya in their world-famous book: *Globality: Competing with Everyone from Everywhere for Everything*, in the recent future the European, American and Japanese firms will compete not only with each other, but will also oppose highly competitive Chinese, Indian, South American, or even African firms – the scenario which is hard to imagine at the moment (Kotler, Caslione, 2009: 29). The forecasts (OECD 2012: 9-10) saying that the “catching-up” economies will reach 60% of global GDP by 2030 (the GDP of China and India are to be higher than GDP of OECD countries by 2060), could radically change the global economic configuration. It can be therefore assumed that the European Union, as well as the processes of Europeanisation are now at the crossroads (Wach, 2014b). Not only it is reasonably close to the forecast for the next two decades (the possible consequences of such a reconfiguration will be felt much earlier), but above all, the situation requires a redefinition and reconfiguration strategy in order to take anticipatory action to support European businesses and European economies (or even the European economy).

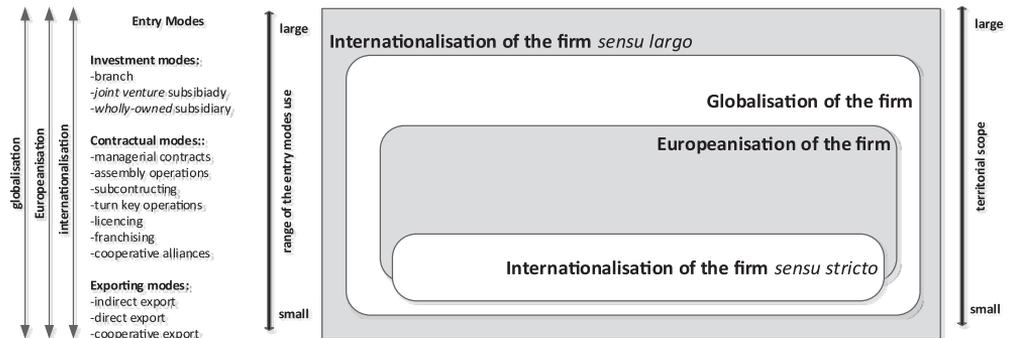
At present, Europeanisation is a very popular notion; however, there is a clear shortage or even fragmentariness of scientific knowledge within this field (Wach, 2013a; Daszkiewicz, 2014). The research into the Europeanisation processes was initiated by the political scientists in 1970s, although the notion itself became popular only in 1990s. It came alongside the realization of the uniform European market. From that moment, Europeanisation is a willingly undertaken research problem in numerous fields and scientific disciplines. Only at the beginning of 21st century, the phenomenon of Europeanisation was noticed by economists, and the research into the economic dimension of the Europeanisation processes are in the initial stage (Wach, 2012; Wach, 2013). With reference to small and medium-sized enterprises, the European Commission, probably for the first time in an official document, used the notion Europeanisation as early as in 1993 (European Commission, 1994: 9).

The research goal of this study is to identify and evaluate the current state of the art and tendencies of Europeanisation and internationalisation of European small and medium-sized enterprises, especially from the spatial (territorial) perspective.

Theoretical Background for the Europeanisation of Businesses

D. Floyd (2001: 109) emphasizes the fact that the majority of market changes, which occurred at the turn of the century, took place because of the Europeanisation processes, which are *explicite* defined as the phenomenon of regionalization processes. On the other hand, D. Coen and Ch. Dannreuther (2002: 116) pay attention to the fact that the processes of bottom-up and top-down Europeanisation bring a whole range of opportunities for firms. However, the authors point out that only active businesses, possessing appropriate resources are beneficiaries of these processes, regardless of their size (both large ones, and the ones from the SME sector). As N. Fligstein (2009: 107) highlights, “majority of the research concerning the European integration focuses only on political and legal processes [...] which is the reason for which researchers overlook the fact how deep the European economy has been reorganized”. The three papers quoted above are among the few in addition to the recent ones postulating to undertake broad and deep research into the enterprise Europeanisation processes. In addition, the bibliometric analysis confirms that the phenomenon of Europeanisation in the economic dimension as a research problem has just begun to be undertaken by economists (Wach, 2008; Wach, 2010; Szkudlarek, 2010; Wach, 2011; Daszkiewicz, 2014). Initially, the issues of the business

Fig. 1. Conceptual Relations between internationalisation, Europeanisation and globalisation - Joint venture subsidiary



Source: (Wach 2012: 184)

Europeanisation were considered from the marketing perspective, and the first works and research within this field were conducted as early as in 1980s, however, the first monographs in English started to appear at the turn of 1980s and 1990s.

In the 1994, Ph. Harris and F. McDonald (2004: 73) were among the first to define the enterprise Europeanisation as its internationalisation within the European Union. They both emphasized the fact that the integration processes intensify the Europeanisation of enterprises, making it more comprehensive than the internationalisation processes occurring likewise outside the integrating Europe. These authors also stressed that the Europeanisation of companies is a complex and evolutionary-based learning. According to them, the Europeanisation of companies have similar implications as the internationalisation of firms. On the other hand, the implementation of more advanced forms of expansion in the case of the Europeanisation can occur much earlier (faster) than in the case of internationalization – “[...] more complex modes of entry such as direct foreign investments may begin early in the Europeanization process [...]” (Harris, McDonald, 2004: 73). Similarly – as in the case of the internationalisation (Daszkiewicz, Wach, 2012: 12), the Europeanisation can be defined as the internationalisation of a business in Europe (the European Union), specifically in the spatial scope of the Single European Market (SEM), consisting today of 32 countries (EU-28, EEA-3 and Switzerland as an observer). So in that sense, the concept of the Europeanisation is not only narrower than the internationalisation, but also due to the trends of the internationalisation of businesses in the modern economy, it creates favourable conditions for the functioning of firms in the markets of all EU member states, which per se contributes to the internationalization in the European dimension.

The process of internationalisation of a firm is the broadest concept, since it can be assumed that globalisation and Europeanisation are special cases of internationalisation. All these terms include all activities, levels and degrees of all operations performed by specific entities abroad including, exporting, contractual and investing modes (Fig. 1).

Research Material and Methods

As mentioned above, the **research goal** of this study is to analyse the state and tendencies of Europeanisation and internationalisation of European small and medium-sized enterprises, especially from the spatial (territorial) perspective. **The research hypothesis** is the statement that the intensification of the level of internationalisation of European SMEs is noticed in the first decade of 21st century. The article employs different analytical **methods** such as literature review, desk research, descriptive statistics and Spring-ED algorithm (software NetMiner v2.6).

Based on the observations of these phenomena and their interdependencies, as well as cause-and-effect processes, we can conclude that the effect of Europeanisation of small and medium-sized enterprises is visible, and it is obviously positive. The economic inference, however, requires as complete accuracy as possible together with full and comprehensive statistical data. The available statistical data on internationalisation, including Europeanisation of SMEs are not systematically collected either by the European Commission or by the Eurostat. It is possible to examine this issue and infer only from very sparse data, which were made available by the Commission at different time intervals and prepared using different methodologies, as a result a comparative analysis is very difficult to conduct, frequently even impossible from the scientific perspective. The dynamic analysis would be the desirable research approach, however, due to incomparability of data, it is basically impossible, with a few exceptions, which are applicable for two periods only (2003 and 2009), as in the studies performed in these two separate periods, the same methodological assumptions were applied, but only for a part of the data¹. Further analysis, conducted especially for this study, used only secondary data made available by the European Commission (due to the lack of the primary data). Data was collected in the form of survey questionnaires using the managerial perception and was the only available data on the subject. However, it is worth noting that the existing literature on the subject, being incidental and very fragmented, makes generalizations based on such data. For the analysis, the data from the following secondary research are used:

1. *ENSR Survey 2003* conducted on the sample of $n = 7837$ in 19 different European countries (E-19), including the EU-15 plus Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland (EIM, 2004; Hessels, Kemma, 2008).
2. *Gallup Survey 2006*² carried out on the sample of $n = 7283$ in 30 European countries (E-30), including in the EU-27 plus Iceland, Norway and Turkey (Gallup, 2007).
3. *EIM / GDCC Survey 2009* carried out on the sample of $n = 9480$ in 33 different European countries (E-33), including EU-27 plus Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, Croatia, Turkey and Macedonia (EIM, 2010).
4. *EIM / GDCC Survey 2009/2010*³ conducted on the sample of $n = 6649$ in the Member States of the EU-27 (EIM, 2011).

The analysis presented in this study was created based on available secondary data from reports prepared for the European Commission, but the inference and conclusions drawn from the data analysis can be treated as the added value.

The limitations in the adopted research methodology are mostly related to the accessibility of statistical data. An analysis of the scale of internationalisation and Europeanization of the SMEs in the European Union was possible to be conducted for two statistical periods only, the years 2003 and 2009. Since there are no regular data within this scope, it was necessary to make certain analytical simplifications.

Research Results and Discussion

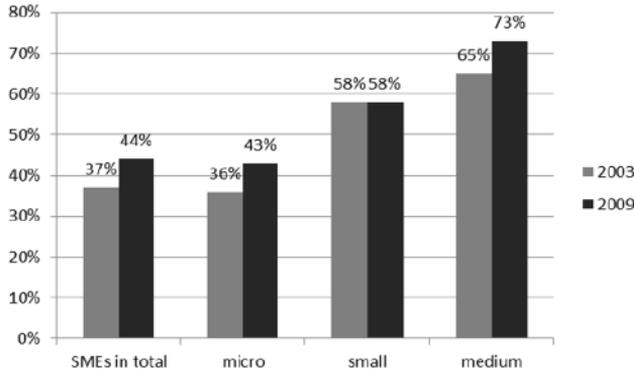
Small and medium-sized enterprises play a key role in the European economy. There are about 23 million such active firms, which represent 99.8% of all European businesses, providing two thirds of all jobs in the private sector in the EU and producing 59% of value added.

¹ These studies of 2003 and of 2009 were carried out for the European Commission by the same external research entity, thus the results are very comparable.

² The use of these results is limited, because they are not comparable, and the results are highly puzzling not only in comparison to other studies, but also in relation to the existing primary data.

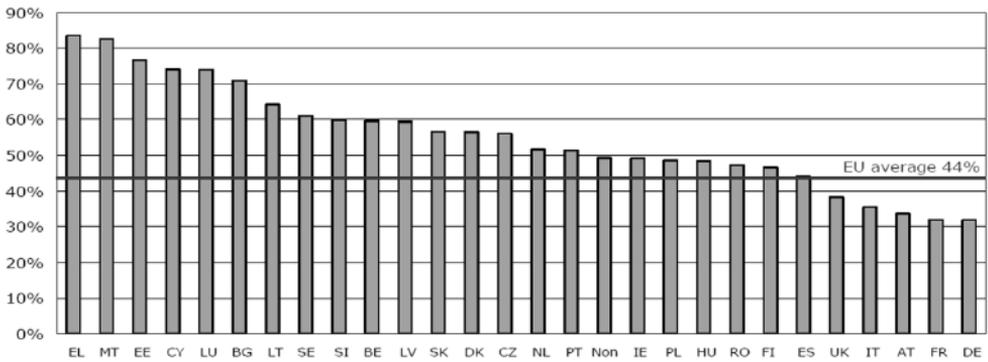
³ This is the continuation of the previous research project (EIM 2010), in the form of in-depth studies of selected aspects only (EIM 2011).

Fig. 2. The level of internationalisation of European SMEs according to their size classes



Source: own calculations and compilation based on ENSR Survey 2003 (EIM, 2004) and EIM/GDCC Survey 2009 (EIM, 2010).

Fig. 3. The level of internationalisation of European SMEs by country



Source: EIM/GDCC Survey 2009 quoted in (EIM 2010: 25).

Recent studies conducted in 2009 show that 44%⁴ of European SMEs that are internationalized, used at least one form of internationalisation⁵, which means an increase of as much as 19% compared to 2003. It is clear that the level of internationalisation depends on the size of the firm and it increases with the size of the firm (Fig. 2). In the observed period, the largest growth occurred among microenterprises (an increase of almost 19%) and medium-sized enterprises (about 12%), while among small firms remained unchanged. It is reasonable to conclude that the observed (2003 and 2009) period noted an increase in the internationalisation of European SMEs.

It seems particularly interesting to analyse the internationalisation index of European SMEs in relation to the individual member states (Fig. 3). The least internationalized SMEs are from Germany, but also from France and Austria, while the most internationalized are from Greece and Malta. The calculations⁶ in the field of descriptive statistics reveal some additional information: the median coincides with the index for Latvia; lower quartile is consistent with the level

⁴ As explained earlier, the survey covered 33 different European countries, the rate of 44% applies to the EU-27, while for the other six surveyed countries is higher and amounted to 49%.

⁵ It takes into account the import as one of the forms of internationalisation.

⁶ Own calculations based on EIM / GDCC Survey 2009 (EIM, 2010).

of internationalisation of the Spanish SMEs, while the upper quartile falls almost in place as a result achieved by the Bulgarian SMEs. The index of 47% for Polish SMEs is quite high; what is more, it is located in the second quarter, only slightly above the arithmetic mean (which is the same as the bottom quartile). This is consistent with the opinions of circulation and the national test results, the degree of internationalisation of Polish firms, especially SMEs, that is low. However, relative assessment of the position of Polish SMEs in the background of European firms may be more optimistic. The data must be seen through the prism of the size of the economy, and hence absorption capacity of the domestic market. The presented data shows, which is basically obvious to the perceptive observer, that the indexes of internationalisation are high in smaller economies (except for Bulgaria), and lower in larger economies (except for Austria and Hungary). Apparently, it is correlated with the openness of their economies. Analysis of the rate of internationalisation of Polish SMEs against the six largest EU economies proves the opposite result. This perspective leads to the conclusion that the Polish SMEs are the most internationalized of firms from G6 countries (SMEs that occupy subsequent positions are in Spain, the United Kingdom, Italy, France and finally Germany). In turn, the three most internationalized industries, in which SMEs operate, are the wholesale, mining and manufacturing industries (EIM 2010: 28). Providing a complete assessment of the degree of internationalisation of Polish SMEs, requires however comprehensive research, but statistics available in this area unfortunately do not allow for unambiguous assessment.

In 2009, the total export-import activities were conducted by slightly more than 16% of SMEs (export or import 38%), and other forms of internationalisation were used for almost 10% of surveyed SMEs (Table 1). The highest percentage of SMEs that engaged in export activity was recorded in Estonia (almost 55%, but also in Denmark and Sweden (oscillated

Table 1. The level of internationalisation of European SMEs according to the entry mode

Criteria	2003	2009 ^a	2010 ^b	Change 2003/2009	Change 2009/2010	Plans 2009	Plans 2010
Internationalised	37%	44%	42% ^c	+19%	-4,5%	–	–
Non-internationalised	63%	56%	58%	-11%	+3,5%	–	–
import	30%	30%	29%	0%	-3%	3%	2%
export	18%	26%	25%	+44%	-4%	4%	3%
technical cooperation	3%	8%	7%	–	-12%	4%	3%
active subcontracting		8%	7%	–	-12%	4%	3%
passive subcontracting		7%	7%	–	0%	3%	2%
FDI, including subsidiaries	3%	2%	2%	–	0%	4%	3%

^a Numbers do not add up, because the entrepreneur could choose more than one form of internationalisation.

^b Differences in the results of 2009 and 2010 carried out by the same entity are within the statistical error, and difficult to interpret.

^c Data from 2010 should be approached with the special caution. For example, in the report on page 13 the specified value is 42%, and on page 44 the value for the same indicator is 40%.

Source: own calculations and compilation based on *ENSR Survey 2003* (EIM, 2004), *EIM/GDCC Survey 2009* (EIM, 2010) and *EIM/GDCC Survey 2009/2010* (EIM, 2011).

around 40%) and the lowest in Cyprus (about 7%). For the Polish SMEs the rate was almost 30% and was higher than the EU average (the last one amounting to 25%). In the future, export activities are to be taken by 3% of SMEs, and the import by additional 3% (EIM, 2010: 15). In 2003, cooperation with foreign partners among SMEs was noted by 3% of respondents, and only 3% of SMEs had the foreign subsidiaries. In 2009, the contracting was used by 8% of the surveyed SMEs, and 7% cooperated with foreign contractors, while additional technical subcontracting was applied by 8% of the surveyed SMEs. The foreign direct investment was made by two of the surveyed SMEs. These data are comparable, since the figures, numbers and statistics for the EU-15 in this area are naturally higher than for the EU-27, what is more, there are even higher if you take into account the large corporations (UNCTAD, 2011).

This international activities discussed above, in the vast majority, concern Europeanisation of firms, because the rates are much lower taking into account only the markets of third countries, which in 2009 resulted in import activities among 14% of SMEs and export activities among 13% and subcontracting among only 2% of studied firms (EIM, 2010: 16). In turn, according to the studies in 2010⁷, as much as 46% of European SMEs were active internationally only in the Union, 9% only outside the EU and 45% in both cases, the EU and beyond (EIM, 2010: 46).

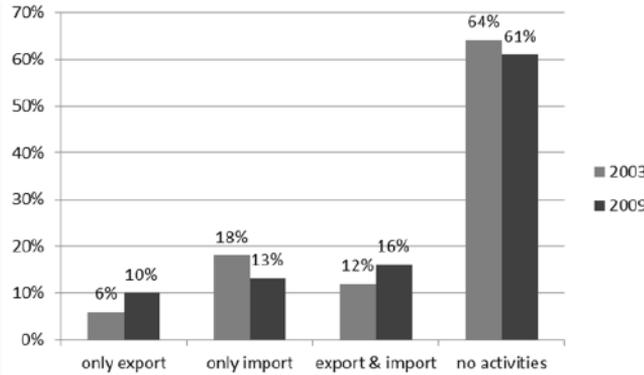
Analysing the fundamental dimension of the internationalisation of SMEs, which is international trade; very interesting trends can be observed (Fig. 4). In the observed period (2003-2009) the percentage of European SMEs, which led only import activities decreased, while the percentage of surveyed SMEs that either led only export activities, or dealt with both exports and imports increased. The data should be welcomed positively, because they militate in favour of the statement that the intensification of the level of internationalisation of European SMEs can be noticed in the first decade of 21st century.

In terms of international trade, the interesting analysis of spatial networks of SMEs on the background of trade within the EU member states is presented in the studies of *Gallup Survey 2006* (Gallup, 2007). In diagram (Fig. 5), the main directions of the trading links are marked by arrows, at the end of which, the numerically determined the strength of the relations are expresses. The diagram analysis shows that Bulgaria is not only the main export destinations within the Union. The inner circle are the countries that are the main markets for European SMEs, they are the United Kingdom, Germany, France, Spain, the Netherlands, Austria and Italy. The second circle defines the other countries that have strong trade relations these first circle countries (Poland is positioned among them). The last circle includes countries, which are rather small economies, in which the volume of trade is relatively low compared to countries with the first two circles. For example, Slovakia, despite the fact that it is one of the most open economies in Europe, its trading volume is relatively low.

The analysis was carried out using the software NetMiner v2.6, based on a square matrix of trade relations in the EU. Schematic extracted by the Spring-ED algorithm, which is based on the concept that the pushing-repulsive forces are provided on each pair of adjacent non-nodes and the neighbouring nodes are placed close to each other. Number of calls as a result of the analysis was 246, the average network density is 1.35 (Gallup, 2007: 49).

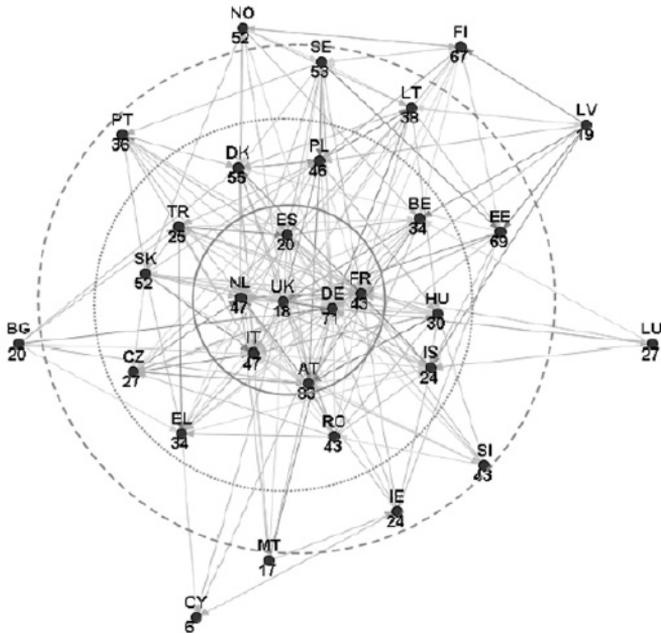
⁷ Data from 2010 must be approached with the caution, partly they are new studies, and partly based on data from previous studies, as indicated in the report, but there are discrepancies in the data, there are usually discrepancies of 1 percentage point, which is likely due to rounding, but it distorts the comparative analysis in this paper.

Fig. 4. The level of internationalisation of European SMEs from the international trade perspective



Source: own calculations and compilation based on *ENSR Survey 2003* (EIM, 2004) and *EIM/GDCC Survey 2009* (EIM, 2010).

Fig. 5. International trade networking structure of European SMEs – Spatial Europeanisation



Source: *Gallup Survey 2006* quoted in (Gallup, 2007: 49).

The results of the studies from 2009 reveal that most European SMEs want to internationalise their activities mainly outside EU markets. European and North American emerging markets are still a strategic challenge for European businesses, especially SMEs. According to the Eurostat data, the value of total exports of the Union into twelve key markets (e.g. China, Japan, Russia, India, and Brazil) in 2010 amounted to 261.6 billion Euros, of which 134.6 billion Euros accounted for SMEs. Depending on the country of destination and SMEs domination, this share is estimated at the level 39 to 62% (EIM, 2011: 20).

In 2009, foreign direct investment, which is basically the most advanced form of the business presence in foreign markets, was taken on by only 2% of European SMEs, which generalized to the entire population amounts to approximately 500,000 SMEs (EIM, 2010: 21). The dependence of the size of the business and the decision on foreign investments is particularly evident. For medium-sized enterprises, this ratio was 16%, while for small 6% and 2% for microenterprises (EIM, 2010: 8).

Conclusions

On the basis of the above presented analysis of the level and trends of Europeanisation and internationalisation of European small and medium-sized enterprises, as well as on the basis of theoretical and empirical analysis carried out by different authors the following conclusions can be drawn:

1. The processes of European integration and EU policy are likely to develop and the Europeanisation of small and medium-sized enterprises intensified their internationalisation processes. It has been observed particularly in recent years, while comparing the data in this field a decade ago, or even two decades, that the significant progress in this regard can be noticed.
2. The overall level of internationalisation of European SMEs clearly increased and is now around 40-44 %, and it is very varied spatially from 32% to 86% depending on a particular member state. It is higher for SMEs from smaller economies and lower for those from larger economies. This negative correlation is closely related to the openness of their economies. Against this background, the Polish SMEs with a rate of 47% investments places itself slightly above the EU average. If we take into account the potential of the national economy, it is by far the highest rate among the six largest EU countries.
3. The ongoing process of European integration, the abolition of internal tariff, non-tariff and quasi-tariff barriers contributed to the flowering of the internationalisation of European SMEs within the single European market, which makes up 76% of their volume of exports (83% in the case of the EU-12 and 76% for the EU-15). The main markets for EU SMEs are the five largest EU economies (UK, Germany, France, Spain, and Italy) as well as the Netherlands and Austria. On average internationalised European SMEs achieved almost 90% of total turnover from operating on the single European market. Therefore, the thesis about the ongoing process of Europeanisation of EU SMEs can be proved.
4. Only 13% of EU SMEs are internationally active outside the EU. Among the destinations outside the EU, the most popular among European SMEs are the non-EU European countries, but also North America, Middle East, North Africa and Russia. The strategic challenge for European SMEs is the emerging markets. The share of SMEs in export activity to the 12 key countries is substantial, but the increase in importance of emerging countries in the international arena is forecasted, and thus sharpened competitive game will be the primary challenge for EU SMEs.
5. The positive correlation between the level of internationalisation of European SMEs and their sizes can be observed. The larger the business is, the more internationalized it is. The share in export, import and subcontracting among medium-sized enterprises is at least twice as high as in the case of microenterprises. Medium-sized businesses are three times more active in technical cooperation than the microfirms. This relation, however, with higher statistical significance, is especially observed in the case of foreign direct investment (2% micro, 6% small and 16% medium-sized enterprises).

6. Internationalisation remains the domain of large firms, although European SMEs are catching up this gap. Nowadays, still 56% of all small and medium-sized enterprises in the EU are not involved in any international activities that are at the decline of the ratio of 11% compared to 2003. Comparing the export activities of European and American SMEs, a clear advantage of the former can be observed. In the U.S., exporting SMEs constitute about 30% of the volume of total exports (USITC, 2010).
7. The analysis of empirical observations let to believe that European SMEs sequentially reach the next steps to intensify its presence in the European markets in line with the stages model of internationalisation proposed by J. Johanson and J.E. Vahlne (1977). The empirical data shows the ongoing transition from the simplest forms (e.g. imports) to the more complex ones. In addition to the simple forms of internationalisation, the quantitative change in European SMEs to intensify cooperation with foreign partners, especially through subcontracting and technical cooperation, can be perceived. The latest research results show that 16% of medium-sized enterprises made foreign direct investment.

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