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## Eastward Enlargement of the European Union – a Success Story or an Unfinished Project? The Polish Point of View<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract:** *This article presents a concise analysis, performed from Poland's point of view, of the genesis, effects and future prospects of the enlargement of the European Union to the east. Initially, the enlargement concerned a group of 11 post-communist states of Central and Eastern Europe, which became members of the EU between 2004 and 2013, and has brought about positive results for both the new members and for the EU as a whole. In the broadly defined east of Europe, however, there is still a group of countries aspiring to EU membership and taking various measures towards this end. The European Union supports these efforts, but has no full and clearly defined policy in this regard. There is much to indicate that the possibilities of further EU enlargement to the east are presently exhausted. The candidate countries are greatly hindered in their striving for EU membership by their complicated internal and international situations, while most EU Member States are distinctly unwilling to accept new members at this time. This will not change even despite the positions of such countries as Poland, which considers the enlargement of the EU to the east vital to its interests, but which so far does not have sufficient stature for its voice to take precedence.*

**Keywords:** EU Enlargement, Poland-EU relations, Central and Eastern Europe, European Neighbourhood Policy, EU's Eastern Partnership

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## Introduction

The European Union has long considered enlargement to the east an important element of its overall foreign policy, as well as the policies of its Member States, which is encapsulated in its so-called eastern policy.<sup>2</sup> The significance of this issue was driven home by the consequences of the crisis that broke out in Ukraine in 2013, in which the EU has become involved. Along with many other issues, this crisis has also raised the question of the effectiveness of this eastern policy, as well as the problem of further EU enlargement in the future.

Without delving too deeply into a broader discussion on the actual effectiveness of the EU's eastern policy, in this specific case it should be pointed out that this crisis, the most serious one Europe has suffered since the end of the Cold War, has become a test of not only the effectiveness of the EU's foreign policy, but even of the cohesion of the entire integration mechanism. The political elites and societies of all the Member States have had to answer a fundamental question: What is more important – the observance and protection of the system of common democratic and human values constituting the foundation of European unity – or cold *Realpolitik* calculations taking into account tangible economic and geopolitical factors which require maintaining good relations with Russia, one of the primary actors of the Ukrainian crisis?

So far this dilemma has not resolved. Moreover, it involves complex issues concerning the relations between the EU and Eastern Europe, which makes this problem even more difficult. Even though, as we shall see later in this article, Europe has always considered these relations important, nevertheless some politicians and representatives of the West European societies have also treated them as a source of problems, or even conflicts. Furthermore, for a long time they used to be in fact dependent on relations with Russia (and earlier with the Soviet Union), and traces of this dependence can still be clearly seen, for example in the way the EU has been dealing with the Ukrainian crisis. Due to the above factors, the development of the principles and objectives of the EU's eastern policy, as

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<sup>2</sup> Following the definition by Olga Barburska, the EU's eastern policy can be described as the '*joint formulation of certain principles, development of institutional solutions, as well as undertaking of specific actions and projects by EU bodies, institutions and Member States as part of their broadly understood relations with the countries of Eastern Europe*'. This policy comprises both certain political concepts and certain legal and organisational undertakings. See: O. Barburska, *Wpływ polskiej dyplomacji na kształtowanie i realizację polityki wschodniej UE* (*Influence of Polish Diplomacy on the Shaping and Realisation of the EU's Eastern Policy*), "Studia Europejskie", No. 4/2013.

well as its implementation, have always been and continue to be a difficult and complex process.

This especially concerns the flagship undertaking of this policy – the initiation, orchestration and implementation of the EU's enlargement to the east. It is not an easy task to formulate an unequivocal evaluation of this enlargement. On the one hand, the very fact that as many as 11 countries from what can be broadly defined as Central and Eastern Europe have become new members of the European Union and have experienced undeniable economic and social development as a result already constitutes a huge success. But on the other hand, some of their achievements in certain fields are becoming ever more controversial. More importantly, there are increasing doubts about the very idea of continuing the enlargement of the EU to the east, and the current crisis in Ukraine – a potential candidate for accession – does not appear likely to dissipate these doubts.

In order to evaluate the history of the EU enlargement processes, as well as the future prospects in this regard, it is necessary to first provide a brief outline of the genesis of the EU's eastern policy, under which these processes have taken and will take place.

## **1. The genesis of the EU's eastern policy**

Throughout the entire post-war period Western European integration structures faced the task of maintaining proper relations with their eastern neighbours. In fact, this was one of crucial directions of their foreign policy, both at the Community level and at the level of individual member states. This is revealed by the many projects and initiatives addressed to the so-called 'socialist countries camp', including the Soviet Union and its Central and Eastern European allies. Examples in this context include the European Communities involvement in the process of détente, initiated by the work of the Conference for Security and Co-operation in Europe, or the policies carried out by individual Western European countries, including in particular the two main engines of the integration process, *i.e.* France and Germany. France favoured pan-European cooperation over *bloc* divisions (in accordance with the slogan "Europe from the Atlantic to the Urals"), while Germany developed its own, quite intensive *Ostpolitik*.

The significance of these issues increased immensely in the wake of the Autumn of Nations in Eastern Europe at the turn of the 1980s/90s. The European Communities at that time had to react to the challenges resulting from the monumental transformations taking place in international relations. More than anything else, this concerned a radical change

in the balance of power on the continent, stemming from the fall of the communist system in the eastern part of Europe. This transforming event was extremely important not only for countries of that region but for the whole of Europe, opening up new opportunities for the development of democracy and for the exercise of people's right to self-determination. One positive manifestation of this change was the victory of democracy in most post-socialist countries in Eastern Europe, and another was the peaceful unification of Germany, although we also witnessed a negative one, namely the civil war in former Yugoslavia.

From the point of view of the European Communities, all this highlighted the need to redefine the principal goals of European integration.<sup>3</sup> In order to stand up to these new challenges, among other things the Communities extended their own legal and organizational formula, in 1992 establishing the European Union (EU) in order to establish a more suitable framework for European processes of integration in the international arena. For the newly-emerged EU, redefinition of its relations with the countries of Central and Eastern Europe became one of its foreign policy priorities. The EU's aim in entering in closer cooperation with these countries was mainly to attain its strategic goal of ensuring peace and security in its near environment (neighbourhood), as well as to control the risk of potential destabilisation in political, economic and social terms in the region. To achieve this goal the EU undertook efforts aimed at defining the future model of its relations with the new democracies emerging from the ruins of the former communist system. A variety of instruments were used to shape the EU's new eastern policy, such as trade liberalisation, economic and financial cooperation, and the development of political relations.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> See: S. Özoguz-Bolgi, *Is the EU becoming a global power after the Treaty of Lisbon?* in: *Global Power Europe – Vol. 1. Theoretical and institutional approaches to the EU's external relations*, A. Boening, J-F. Kremer and A. van Loon (eds.), Berlin–Heidelberg 2013; O. Barburska, *From the establishment of the European Communities to the Lisbon Treaty* in: *Poland in the European Union: Adjustment and Modernisation*, A. Adamczyk and K. Zajączkowski (eds.), Warsaw–Lviv 2012.

<sup>4</sup> See, generally: K. Pełczyńska-Nałęcz, *Integracja czy imitacja? – UE wobec wschodnich sąsiadów* (*Integration or Imitation? – The EU and Its Eastern Neighbours*), "Prace OSW", No. 36/2011; A. Stępień-Kuczyńska and M. Słowikowski, *Unia Europejska a państwa Europy Wschodniej* (*The European Union and the Countries of Eastern Europe*), Warszawa 2008; A. Legucka, *Polityka wschodnia Unii Europejskiej* (*Eastern Policy of the European Union*), Warszawa 2008; Ch. Hillion, *A New Framework for the Relations Between the Union and its East-European Neighbours* in: *The European Neighbourhood Policy: A Framework for Modernisation?*, M. Cremona and G. Meloni (eds.), "EUI Working Paper Law", No. 21/2007; K.E. Smith, *The making of EU foreign policy. The case of Eastern Europe*, Basingstoke 2004.

For the countries of Central Europe, the desire to establish close ties with the structures of Western integration, along with the USA as the principal mainstay of democracy and social and economic progress in the modern world, became both an extraordinarily significant opportunity as well as an indispensable condition for strengthening its economic and political position in Europe. Moreover, this also enabled them to consolidate their freshly-outlined model of a democratic state operating according to the rule of law and the principles of a liberal market economy.

In these new circumstances the countries of Central Europe were also forced to make a historical choice: either to engage in closer relations with Russia (which would most probably result in restriction of their sovereignty), or start integrating with the West, more specifically with the structures of Euro-Atlantic integration – the European Union and NATO. Closer relations with the Community structures was rightly seen in the Central European countries as an initial stage in the process of establishing official ties with the European Union, and thereafter for some of them to seek to become Member States thereof.<sup>5</sup>

With regard to the aspirations to achieve this strategic objective, two distinct groups of states formed relatively quickly. The first, consisting of the states of the so-called ‘socialist bloc’ and the post-Soviet Baltic republics, opted for closer ties with the West and began the lengthy process of adjusting their economies, politics, defence, etc. to European standards, a process which lasted for almost two decades. As a result, between 2004 and 2013, eleven of the states in this group became members of the European Union, and joined NATO along the way.

The second group of the newly-formed countries from Eastern Europe included the post-Soviet Ukraine, Belarus and Moldova, later joined by such countries as Armenia, Azerbaijan or Georgia. These countries proved less stable in political terms, less economically developed, and their political systems differed considerably from Western standards. While they have expressed at least some interest in integration with the EU, they were and still are to a considerable extent politically and economically dependent on Russia. Therefore they do not want to risk their relations

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<sup>5</sup> See: *Balkan and Eastern European Countries in the Midst of the Global Economic Crisis*, A. Karasavvoglou and P. Polychronidou, Berlin–Heidelberg 2013; B. Lajos, *Accidental occidental: economics and culture of transition in Mitteleuropa, the Baltic, and the Balkan Area*, Budapest 2013; *Eastern and Central Europe: Politics and Economics*, S.D. Eanuzzi and A.V. Montrony (eds.), New York 2012; S. Stuart, *The International Political Economy of Transition: Neoliberal hegemony and Eastern Central Europe’s transformation*, London 2012; *Central Europe on the threshold of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Interdisciplinary perspectives on challenges in politics and society*, L. Czechowska and K. Olszewski (eds.), Newcastle upon Tyne 2012.

with Russia – in fact they cannot risk them, which of course makes their attempts to integrate with the EU much more difficult. Another factor, which complicated the situation even more, was the fact that Russia also established cooperation with the EU, mainly in the area of the economy. And on the top of all that, the policy of the European Communities/European Union has not always been clear and consistent: they first had to decide whether the region of Eastern Europe was important to them and whether they indeed wanted to re-establish and redefine their relations with it.

It should be emphasised that, initially, these relations evolved in an atmosphere of anxiety on the part of Western Europe with respect to the further process and, even more importantly, the long-term effects of systemic transformation in the east. What was feared most of all was political destabilisation and economic chaos, with its potential negative impacts upon the condition of the entire continent.<sup>6</sup> Nonetheless, the European Communities managed to overcome these fears rather quickly and entered into treaty-based ties with the new democracies, in some cases even before official systemic changes took place therein. Namely, over the period from 1988 to 1992, agreements on commercial and economic cooperation (known as first-generation agreements) were signed with a group of seven Eastern European countries, including Poland.

Another step consisted of making more far-reaching agreements providing for more advanced forms of external relations i.e. association agreements with the Communities (second-generation agreements). The association agreements, called Europe Agreements, differed from those signed earlier in that they added a political dimension to the previous stage, which was largely confined to economic issues. The first Europe Agreements were signed on 16 December 1991 with Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia i.e. the countries which expressed the most determination in their aspirations to integrate.<sup>7</sup> It was in fact quite revealing that while the agreements did not mention potential future membership for

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<sup>6</sup> This sort of apprehension is manifested in the proposal put forth by the French Prime Minister Edouard Balladur (known as Balladur's plan) for concluding a Pact for Security and Stabilisation in Europe to ensure peace and security, inviolability of borders and the protection of national minorities, mainly in the Central and Eastern part of the continent. While the pact was signed in 1995, its only practical effect was the conclusion of relevant agreements between Hungary and Slovakia.

<sup>7</sup> For more, see: D. Papadimitriou, *Negotiating when others are watching: explaining the outcome of the association negotiations between the European Community and the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, 1990–1991* in: *Understanding the European Union's External Relations*, M. Knodt and S. Princen (eds.), London 2003.

the associated states, Poland declared such an intent. Subsequent association agreements were made in 1993 with Romania and Bulgaria.<sup>8</sup> Over the years 1993–1995, agreements on trade and economic cooperation were concluded with Slovenia and the new Baltic states, and in 1994 special agreements were made with Russia, Ukraine and Moldova. Furthermore, most of these countries were adopted as member states of the Council of Europe (membership in that organization may be regarded as a sort of certification guaranteeing that the criterion of democracy was met).<sup>9</sup>

These events did not happen in a political or economic vacuum. The issues of enlargement of the European Union's membership should be analysed in the context of the overall circumstances influencing the way the EU operates. A crucial aspect in this regard is the existence of divergent interests within the great body of integration.

## **2. Attitudes in the EU towards the eastward enlargement**

As mentioned above, the most powerful Member States, mainly France and Germany, have always played a crucial role in the development and implementation of the European Communities'/European Union's eastern policy. Their attitudes toward this policy, especially with respect to their relations with the Soviet Union (later Russia), were largely similar. Both countries have always been proponents of having as good and close relations with the dominant eastern power as possible, i.e. whilst the Soviet Union used to be their ideological and military opponent during the Cold War period, at the same time it was still regarded as a very important political and economic partner by both states. As a result, an emphasis on relations with Russia prevailed for a long time in the eastern policy of the European Union and its Member States. This situation only began to change when the priorities of the Union's foreign policy began to focus on extending EU enlargement to include the former communist states from Central Europe.

While considering this problem, one has to remember one crucial fact, often overlooked or even hidden for political and propaganda-related

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<sup>8</sup> One special case in this context was the accession to the European Communities of the former German Democratic Republic, inasmuch as on 3 October 1990 it became an integral part of German Federal Republic and it was decided at the summit in Dublin in April of that year that the application of simplified adaptive procedures was enough, instead of formal accession.

<sup>9</sup> In this context the Russian Federation's membership in the Council of Europe may be considered rather doubtful, as this country's ruling formula is rather referred to as 'democratorship' i.e. a sort of dictatorship with only a skin-deep front of real democracy.

reasons. Namely, at the beginning the European Union was quite far from the idea of accepting the Central and Eastern European countries as its Member States. The concept was left to mature for quite some time before it was approved, which explains a great deal of the hesitation and inconsistencies seen in the EU attitudes and policy.

In the debate on this subject the major issue became whether it was better to deepen the already existing structures of integration first (i.e. without the participation of the envisioned 'new' member states), or to first enlarge the area of the EU (thus allowing the new member states to participate in deepening the integration process). This was known as the 'deepening or widening' debate. In the end pragmatic reasons prevailed by combining both attitudes, as it became obvious that they were dialectically interrelated – it was the enlargement that required the institutional reforms, as without them it would not have been possible.

All in all, this means that the concept of the EU's eastward enlargement was never at any single moment, nor is it today, accepted universally and unconditionally throughout the European Union. Apart from various international and internal political considerations, also relevant in this context are the differences existing in terms of the fundamental, strategic political and economic interests pursued by the individual Member States.

From this point of view, two informal blocks within the EU may be distinguished, led by two above-mentioned pivotal EU powers i.e. Germany and France. With respect to the issue of enlargement – unlike their attitude towards Russia – these countries followed divergent assumptions, stemming from their dissimilar geo-strategic interests.

Accordingly, on one hand we had to deal with the 'EU's Eastern Bloc' led by Germany – a country quite resolute in its support for the enlargement as it hoped to see the Union's centre of balance shifting eastwards, thus further strengthening its position (which was dominant anyway).<sup>10</sup> On the other hand was a Southern bloc led by France, which – for reasons quite opposite from Germany's – approached the issue of eastward enlargement much less favourably, which can be considered quite natural in that it had very specific and vivid interests in a different region of Europe, namely in the Mediterranean.

Fortunately, this situation didn't create an irresolvable contradiction, potentially leading to serious tensions, let alone conflicts. In fact, both

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<sup>10</sup> One symbolic manifestation of German aspirations was the decision to move the capital of united Germany from Bonn back to Berlin, situated just a few dozens of kilometres from the Polish border.



Germany and France have very many shared interests in Europe and have always been engaged in a strategic alliance as the two principal 'locomotives' of the integration processes. Having said that, it remains obvious that they have perceived the crucial issue of enlargement of the EU in different ways, a fact which has always created (and probably will continue to create in the future) specific political, economic, military and other types of consequences.

In consequence of all this, the specific state of the EU's eastern policy, and in particular its attitude toward eastward enlargement, has been and still is the result of a number of various factors. The most important ones involve clashing interests, both between the EU as a whole and its individual member states as well as between the member states themselves, especially the most powerful among them. What, then, did the process of the EU's eastward enlargement look like in practice?

### **3. Path to membership**

#### **3.1. From co-operation to negotiation on accession**

One of the reasons why the EU's enlargement to the east is so important is that the perception of the entire eastern policy of the EU, both that of politicians and of the general public, has been dominated, at least in a sense, by the enlargement process, which has become a symbol or even embodiment of this policy.<sup>11</sup> Naturally this approach is not without reasons, but neither is it fully justified, since this policy has many more aspects than just enlargement.

First of all, we should bear in mind how severely formal is the 'path' of a country to becoming an EU member. It first requires the conclusion of various bilateral agreements (such as the aforementioned first generation agreements), followed by expanded agreements in the form of association agreements, and only towards the end of the path are there actual accession negotiations, which eventually can lead to full membership. This sequence naturally concerns only those countries that express a desire to join the EU, and it should be kept in mind that many others remain, and will remain at their own behest, at the pre-accession stage.

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<sup>11</sup> See: texts by D. Milczarek: *Eastward Enlargement of the European Union – Polish Perspective* in: *Poland and Turkey in Europe – Social, Economic and Political Experiences and Challenges*, A. Adamczyk and P. Dubel (eds.), Warsaw 2014; and *Twenty Years Later – Central European Countries' Foreign and Security Policy on the Crossroad* in: *Central Europe – Two Decades After*, R. Riedel (ed.), Warsaw 2010.

In examining the context of the issues discussed herein we need to take into account the chronological and historical context. It is well known that 11 post-communist states from Central and Eastern Europe have already gone down the entire path towards membership, and as of 2013 this 'chapter' of EU enlargement can be considered officially closed. There is, however, still the aforementioned group of other Eastern European countries which have become more or less involved in developing cooperation with the European Union, some of whom have expressed the desire to become members of the EU.

While their chances to fulfil this goal will be discussed later in the article, at this point it should be emphasised that we are dealing with here with two clearly divergent processes – on the one hand, the candidate countries, in cooperation with the EU, take their own measures towards accession under the process of EU enlargement, and on the other hand, there are those which are involved in other, different policies initiated by the EU. This concerns primarily the European Neighbourhood Policy, which will also be discussed later in the text, and the Eastern Partnership, neither of which (and this is very important!) officially offer a path to EU membership for the recipient countries. This differentiation between these two currents in the relations between the EU and Eastern Europe is mainly formal, because in practice they simply 'merge' into the EU's 'eastern policy'. Nonetheless, we have to remember that *de iure*, the EU enlargement policy is a separate 'path' towards European integration, one that doesn't officially go through the institutional and legal framework of the European Neighbourhood Policy or the Eastern partnership. All these somewhat casuistic divisions do not change the fact that the problems of accession to the EU by the new Eastern European countries have a large influence on the shape of the political debate on the current and future fate of European integration.

From the historical point of view, the countries which early on enjoyed the best chance to become EU member states were those of the Visegrád Group: Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary.<sup>12</sup> While some differences between them became evident regarding the level of their determination to pursue accession (Slovakia in particular revealed evident hesitation at various stages), it was very clear that Poland was always in the lead in the process. In April 1994, just a couple of months after Poland gained full status as an associated state,

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<sup>12</sup> At the same time, these countries undertook efforts toward integration among themselves under the Central European Free Trade Agreement (CEFTA) established in 1993. Since 1998 Slovenia, Romania and Bulgaria have also been members thereof.

the Polish government filed an application for Poland's accession to the European Union.<sup>13</sup>

Another important event in this process took place at the 1993 summit in Copenhagen, when the EU Member States made a crucial political decision concerning the accession of Central European states to the European Union. According to the so-called 'Copenhagen criteria' adopted at that summit, candidate countries had to meet a set of specific conditions in order to be eligible to apply for accession. The key conditions included being fully democratic, rule of law, full respect for human rights, as well as having a market economy capable of facing competition in the Community Single Market.

The problems remaining to be solved included finding appropriate rules and practical ways to achieve that goal. To help in this respect, the European Commission prepared special documents, in particular a report on the strategy of integrating the Central and Eastern European states, approved in 1994, in which specific tasks were defined, as well as the 'White Paper' adopted in 1995, specifying the requirements demanded of the candidate countries. At the same time important decisions were made on financing the process of the EU enlargement,<sup>14</sup> as well as on monitoring the state of preparation of candidate countries.

The financial and economic aid which the EU provided in various forms, and the corresponding efforts by candidate states to adapt their political, economic and social structures (including, in particular, legislation) to the Community standards, began after several years began to yield the expected outcomes. In 1997 the European Commission prepared (in a special document entitled 'Agenda 2000') a so-called *Avis*, which included comprehensive and insightful evaluations of the candidate countries' potential and abilities to satisfy the requirements for the EU membership. It was on that basis that the members of so-called Luxembourg Group (Poland, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Slovenia and Hungary) were invited, in March 1998, to start their negotiations on accession.

### 3.2. From negotiation to membership

From the formal point of view, the process of negotiation on membership in the EU primarily relies upon the provisions of the Treaties.

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<sup>13</sup> See: *On the road to the European Union. Applicant countries' perspective*, D. Milczarek and A.Z. Nowak (eds.), Warsaw 2003; H. Tendera-Właszczyk, *Rozszerzenie Unii Europejskiej na Wschód. Polska na tle innych krajów (The European Union's Enlargement to the East. Poland in Comparison to Other Countries)*, Warsaw 2001.

<sup>14</sup> Associated states benefited from a number of aid programmes, including the PHARE programme and European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD).

Pursuant to Article 49 of the Treaty on European Union: '*any European State which respects the values referred to in Article 2 and is committed to promoting them may apply to become a member of the Union*'. The values referred to in Article 2 are defined in the following way: '*The Union is founded on the values of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities. These values are common to the Member States in a society in which pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity and equality between women and men prevail*'.

This demonstrates that the commencement of negotiations on accession was by no means an obvious or automatic process. Instead, it was based on a profound assessment of the candidate countries and depended on them meeting many conditions, including in particular the Copenhagen criteria. Another significant event in the context of the EU enlargement was the signing, in February 2001, of the Treaty of Nice. It brought about not only better opportunities for the development of integration under the EU, but most of all enabled the effective adaptation of the Community structures to future enlargement(s). The key changes made in the Treaty of Nice concerned modification of the principles regarding the organizational form, activities and decision-making procedures of the Community bodies – something without which the EU could not have operated effectively following the future enlargement(s).

As the first stage of the negotiations on accession, a review was carried out of the conformity of candidate countries' legislation with the *acquis communautaire*. Known as 'screening', this included the aligning of the so-called 'spheres of legislation' referring to specific issues, such as industry, agriculture, competition, transport, *etc.* Those aligned first were the areas regarded by both parties as not requiring further negotiation. From there on, the process proved much more complicated, especially insofar as Poland – the candidate country with the largest demographic and economic potential – was concerned. The most controversial areas in this context were agriculture and environmental protection, with the issue of transitional periods (i.e. delayed application of the *acquis communautaire* – sought by both parties) also constituting a troublesome area. For example, Poland sought a transitional period with respect to the purchase of real property in Poland, while the EU Member States sought a delay in application of the free movement of labour.

As the result of a decision made at the EU summit in 1999 in Helsinki, the process of enlargement was extended by the issuance of an invitation to negotiate to the next group of Central and Eastern European countries, known as the Helsinki Group – namely Bulgaria, Lithuania, Latvia,

Romania, Slovakia and Malta. Most of these countries aspired to complete the process together with those of the previous Luxembourg Group.<sup>15</sup>

Despite serious economic disparities between the Member States and the candidate countries, the process of negotiation went smoothly and reached successful completion. For example, in the case of Poland it took 57 months, which was relatively long compared to the similar process prior to the previous 1995 round of the EU enlargement (13 months), but rather short when compared to the negotiations with Portugal (80 months) or Spain (76 months).

The most difficult issues in the process of negotiation included: the Union's reluctance to bear significant financial outlays on direct payments to agriculture in the candidate countries, apprehension in the 'old' Member States about cheap labour from Central and Eastern Europe, as well as the restriction on the free movement of capital regarding the purchase of real property, which was postulated by the candidate countries. An undeniable weakness of the negotiation process was the lack of real cooperation between the candidate countries – there was even a sort of competition between them, measured by numbers of completed negotiation chapters. This in fact undermined their positions compared to the old Member States, which generally assumed shared attitudes.

Negotiation with ten candidate countries finally came to an end in December 2002, during the summit in Copenhagen. The group was composed of: Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Slovenia, Cyprus and Malta, while Bulgaria and Romania continued on with the process. The Accession Treaty was ceremonially signed on 16 April 2003 on the Acropolis in Athens. From that point on the process of its ratification by the parliaments of the Member States started, while in the candidate countries (except for Cyprus) the ratification procedure took place via referenda, in which their citizens resolutely declared themselves in favour of EU accession. In Poland the referendum was held in June 2003.

What proved to be a problem during the accession process were the controversies surrounding various provisions of the Constitutional Treaty that the EU was trying to adopt around the same time. Considerable differences of opinion emerged, especially with respect to decision-making in the Council of the European Union. The proposed abolishment of the voting regime established by the Treaty of Nice in favour of the 'double

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<sup>15</sup> For more, see: *Negocjowanie granic: od 'UE-15' do 'UE-27': rozszerzenie wschodnie Unii Europejskiej: Grupa Helsińska* (Negotiating on Borders: From EU-15 to EU-27: European Union's Eastern Enlargement. The Helsinki Six), T. Szymczyński (ed.), Poznań 2009.

majority' voting system met with strong opposition from Poland, which considered this change detrimental to its vital national interests, while Germany and France strongly supported the idea. Both sides proved to be inflexible. Poland was unreasonably popularizing the catchphrase 'Nice or death', while Germany and France expressed no interest in reaching a compromise. As a result, the summit held in Brussels in December 2003 ended in a fiasco, as – contrary to what had been expected – the Constitutional Treaty was not signed. Fortunately, the situation changed in 2004, when the impasse was finally broken and a compromise Treaty was signed, although in the end it was never ratified nor entered into force.

The date of official accession of the ten 'new' Member States of the European Union was fixed at 1 May 2004. However, the entire process of eastward enlargement did not finish on that day: on 1 January 2007 Romania and Bulgaria became EU Member States, followed on 1 July 2013 by Croatia.<sup>16</sup> Considering that only two out of the 13 new member states (Cyprus and Malta) are not situated in the Central and Eastern Europe region, it is indisputable that the entire process, which took around 20 years to reach completion, was indeed targeted at the eastern part of the continent.<sup>17</sup>

#### 4. Consequences of the eastward enlargement

The processes of the eastward enlargement between the years 2004–2013 seriously transformed the European Union, both by opening up new opportunities for development and eliminating historical residues. The adoption of a large group of post-communist states as new Member States (together with the parallel process of NATO enlargement) exemplified the final break from the Yalta order in Europe, as it really meant the inclusion of most countries of the continent into the processes of Euro-Atlantic integration. This basic fact alone – although many other important aspects exist – is enough to decisively demonstrate the enormous

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<sup>16</sup> See: A. Szymański, *Rozszerzenie UE po 2007 roku – analiza uwarunkowań procesu (EU Enlargement after 2007 – Analysis of Circumstances Behind the Process)*, "Studia Europejskie", No. 2/2012.

<sup>17</sup> It should be pointed out that the process of the EU enlargement in question was not the only one. In 1995 Sweden, Finland and Austria became EU Member States, but their accession resulted from endeavours initiated before the Autumn of Nations and wasn't regarded as an element of an 'Eastern' enlargement. This perception, by the way, is somewhat controversial as Austria, after all, certainly may be classified as a Central European country, while Finland is obviously situated in Eastern part of the continent. In any case, their accession lends credence to the earlier observation that the centre of balance of European integration shifted from Western toward the Central part of Europe.

historical importance of the events which took place in Europe over the recent quarter century.<sup>18</sup>

The European Union thus ceased to be an élite club of wealthy states, as the economic and social problems the new members suffered from became the problems of the entire organization.<sup>19</sup> Accordingly, the enlargement also brought with it some threats, since the addition of so many new Member States constituted a very serious challenge to the Community policies and structures. This resulted in part from the fact that the 2004 enlargement was the largest single round of enlargement in the history of the European Communities/European Union, thus bringing a growth in numbers alone capable of threatening the inner organizational cohesion of any integration structure. The very fact of expanding to include such a large number of Member States may complicate communication, negotiations of common approaches, implementation of joint actions, creation of effective structures and decision-making mechanisms, etc.

Another crucial problem is that the newly-acceded Member States mostly represent historical experiences quite different from what was known in the West, as well as a different political and cultural heritage, accompanied by generally lower level of social and economic development. In this way they bring their own new and specific elements into virtually all the spheres of functioning of the EU, thus creating a new political quality. Accordingly, the European Union has faced a complex set of new challenges, concerning both continuation of the work on deepening its own processes of integration and absorption of the resources and potential of the new Member States before it would become possible to consume the benefits stemming there from. The task is undeniably very ambitious and very difficult at the same time. In order to achieve the sought-after aim, it is necessary to undertake a number of various types of efforts, from proposing broad visions and political concepts through to the adoption of specific legal acts and economic solutions.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> See: *Europe after enlargement*, Y. Stivachtis and M. Webber (eds.), Abingdon 2013; *The New Member States and the European Union: Foreign policy and Europeanization*, M. Baun and D. Marek (eds.), New York 2013; *Après Enlargement: Legal and Political Responses in Central and Eastern Europe*, W. Sadurski, J. Ziller and K. Zurek (eds.), Florence 2006.

<sup>19</sup> This concerns, for example, unresolved problems of corruption and organised crime, especially in Bulgaria and Romania, or increasing anti-democratic and nationalist tendencies (Hungary), as well as growing populism in politics (in, *inter alia*, Poland). While these tendencies coincide in many aspects with the overall lower quality of the functioning of political systems in the entire EU, some of their manifestations are specific to the new Member States.

<sup>20</sup> For more, see: *Democracy promotion in the EU's neighbourhood: from leverage to governance?*, S. Lavenex and F. Schimmelfennig (eds.), Abingdon 2013; *The EU and its*

The EU has had to undertake a number of reforms in order to be able to effectively operate under the new conditions, which involve increased numbers and deepened gaps between its Member States. Rather than being of just an institutional nature, such reforms have also had to extend over some Community policies. This has mainly concerned the Common Agricultural Policy (the reform of which started in 2003) and the cohesion policy, intended to ensure the smooth achievement of the EU's goals and avoid conflicts among Member States.

The consequences of the global financial and economic crisis that erupted in Autumn 2008 have constituted another strong impulse for further transformation. While its effects proved particularly severe for the euro area, the tensions caused by the crisis could threaten the cohesion of the entire European integration project. Eventually, the European Union has managed to take certain remedies, e.g. in the form of structural reforms that include the establishment of a series of new EU institutions to monitor and control the finance and banking spheres in order to prevent the emergence of similar severe crises in future.<sup>21</sup>

However, the lack of agreement on further reforms could have far-reaching consequences for the EU in the form of implementation of integration models variously called 'multi-speed Europe' or 'Europe à la carte', i.e. differing levels of advancement of the integration process within the EU, which could even result in its actual split.<sup>22</sup> This effectively means that the EU Member States enjoying a high level of economic development (generally most old Member States, i.e. those preceding the 2004 round of enlargement) are free to undertake a variety of initiatives deepening their integration in many specific areas, to which newly-adopted Member States may not be invited due to their inferior level of economic development. Such a scenario would certainly prove disadvantageous to the new Member States, including Poland.

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*neighbours: values versus security in European foreign policy*, G. Noutcheva, K. Pomorska and G. Bosse (eds.), Manchester 2013; E. Korosteleva, *The European Union and its Eastern neighbors: towards a more ambitious partnership?*, London 2012; D. Milczarek, *Eastern Dimension of the European Union's Foreign Policy* in: *Eastern Policy of the European Union: Role of Poland, Case of Ukraine*, A.Z. Nowak, D. Milczarek, B. Hud' and J. Borkowski (eds.), Warsaw 2008.

<sup>21</sup> For more on said reforms, see: K. Zajaczkowski, *Międzynarodowy potencjał gospodarczy Unii Europejskiej w dobie wyzwań globalnych* (*The International Economic Potential of the European Union in the Age of Global Challenges*) in: *Unia Europejska jako aktor na scenie globalnej. Razem czy osobno?* (*The European Union as an Actor in the Global Arena. Together or Separately?*), B. Góralczyk (ed.), Warszawa 2014, pp. 138–143.

<sup>22</sup> Such a possibility was taken into account by the so-called opt-out clause included in the Treaty of Amsterdam.



The need to implement the necessary reforms, or even the emergence of certain problems cannot, however, change the generally positive evaluation of the effects of the EU's enlargement to the east. One of the primary arguments for this is that both the old and the new members of the EU have received notable benefits. The enlarged European Union, now counting more than 500 million inhabitants, has become the largest integration group in the world, creating new possibilities for economic and social development. This has been achieved through increases of the returns to scale, for example in terms of the pool of the qualified workforce, the potential of the internal market (the largest and most absorptive in the world in terms of purchasing power) or export capability. It is not by chance that since 2004 the European Union has been producing approximately 1/4 of the entire global GDP, overtaking even the USA. Furthermore, the EU has also become the largest global exporter and importer of goods and services – to mention only some of the most important macroeconomic factors.<sup>23</sup>

Moreover, the new Member States have proved quite successful in adapting to the requirements of both the EU specific policies and the single market. Poland is a particularly good example of a country which from the very beginning has benefited enormously from its membership, in both political and economic terms.<sup>24</sup> Polish society, business and authorities not only proved able to use the massive EU funds made available to them to achieve significant development-related goals, but also to launch a kind of commercial and economic thrust upon the Union markets. While admitting the existence of the phenomenon of mass labour emigration of Poles to the West (somewhat controversial as a matter of fact),<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> The enlarged EU's share in the global trade in goods is 16%, and in the global trade in services – 26%. It should also be noted that the EU is the main trade partner of 80 countries in the world, while the USA has the same relation to only 20. For more, see: *The EU in the world 2013 – a statistical portrait*. Eurostat Statistical Books, Eurostat, Luxembourg 2012, p. 18; *Why the European Union is an essential trade partner*, European Commission, Brussels 09.10.2012; *International Trade and Foreign Direct Investment. 2013 edition*, Eurostat, Luxembourg 2013, pp. 11–12. See also: D. Milczarek and K. Zajackowski, *Unia Europejska we współczesnym świecie: olbrzym gospodarczy, polityczny karzeł? (European Union in the World: Economic Giant, Political Dwarf?)* in: *Polska w procesie integracji europejskiej: dekada doświadczeń (2004–2014) (Poland in the Processes of European Integration: Ten Years of Experiences (2004–2014))*, K.A. Wojtaszczyk, M. Mizerska-Wrotkowska and W. Jakubowski (eds.), Warszawa 2014, pp. 177–190.

<sup>24</sup> See: *Poland in the European Union: Adjustment and Modernisation*, A. Adamczyk and K. Zajackowski (eds.), Warsaw–Lviv 2012; *Poland in the European Union: First Experiences. Selected Political, Legal and Social Aspects*, D. Milczarek and O. Barburska (eds.), Warsaw 2008.

<sup>25</sup> Labour migration of Polish people (especially the young and well-educated) to old EU Member States may be regarded as negative as an outflow of the society's vital forces,

one should point out such economic successes as having achieved a very strong position in the export of various kinds of products.<sup>26</sup>

In evaluating the results of the eastward enlargement for the entire EU, other factors, perhaps not as easily measurable but important all the same, should also be taken into account. In truth the new Member States have played the role of pumping some fresh blood into the EU, which has strengthened the social and economic, and perhaps also political systems of the 'old' EU. While the consequences of the appearance of the newcomers from the east are still evaluated variously, it seems undeniable that old, rich and satisfied Western Europe has really needed some fresh developmental impulses. Under the conditions of progressing globalisation and increasing competition on the global scale, such a new injection of energy from the Eastern European societies, still developing but at the same time ambitious and hungry for success, may turn out to be very helpful to European politics and the economy, struggling in ruts for many years now.

## 5. The eastward enlargement: what next?

When we examine the possible further enlargement of the EU to the east from a purely pragmatic point of view, there seems to be much to indicate that it is necessary, or at least reasonable, to keep working towards that end. At the same time, it should also be noted that the concept of eastward enlargement is becoming an increasingly broad category, as it now covers more than just the countries located strictly in the region of Central and Eastern Europe. With most countries of the region having already become members of the EU, the potential candidates for accession include, apart from Ukraine, also some countries from neighbouring regions – states of the Balkans, Turkey, as well as some states of the Black Sea Region and the Caucasus.<sup>27</sup>

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but it is also a factor favouring social mobility and creative approaches. In fact, this phenomenon provokes different reactions: for example, in France a demagogic campaign, indeed verging on hysteria, was launched against Polish plumbers or nurses; whereas in Germany and especially in the United Kingdom (where Poles have become the largest national minority) we are witnessing more positive attitudes. For more, see: M. Pacek and D. Milczarek, *Post-accession Polish migrations in: New neighbours – on the diversity of migrants' political involvement*, A. Dziewulska and A.M. Ostrowska (eds.), Warsaw 2012.

<sup>26</sup> The main Polish export products are those of the agricultural and foodstuffs industry, car industry, and furniture and household equipment. In some sectors, like production of the means of urban transport, windows or sea yachts, Polish manufacturers have actually become leaders in the European market.

<sup>27</sup> This also means that, contrary to what numerous critics of the European Union seem to claim, EU membership is still an attractive prize for many countries from Europe and the surrounding regions.

The question of which countries can be classified as candidates for EU enlargement to the east is controversial. The problem, like many other issues concerning the entire eastern policy, is ambiguous and may be subject to various interpretations. According to one, which is as justified as any other, this category can be defined very broadly and simply includes all those countries that are potential candidates for EU membership and that are not located in Western or Northern Europe or on the southern coast of the Mediterranean.<sup>28</sup> 'EU enlargement to the east' thus becomes a very capacious category as it treats 'Eastern Europe' – and this should be strongly emphasised – definitely more as a geopolitical than strictly geographical concept. One of the justifications for this approach is the obvious fact that there is no concept of 'enlargement of the EU to the south' in academic literature or in political discourse. Consequently, the candidates for membership cannot be divided only according to geographic criteria. (Just as there is no concept of EU enlargement to the west or the north, although we cannot yet rule out the possibility of future accession of, for instance, Switzerland, Iceland or Norway).

The introduction of various categories within the group of potential candidate countries is also not justified by the varying levels of development of these countries on their path to future accession. In fact, until they are formally members of the European Union, any scenario, including even the breaking off of the accession process, is possible, and in this sense all the candidates are in a similar situation. (As proved by the case of Iceland, which even started accession negotiations in 2010 but suspended them three years later on its own initiative; also the negotiations with Turkey are encountering many troubles, as mentioned above, and the outcome is very uncertain.) It seems, therefore, that attempts to arbitrarily 'pigeonhole' the various participants of the EU enlargement process to the east (some only from Eastern Europe, others only from the Balkans, etc.) have no substantive justification.

What could prove helpful in shaping the relations between the EU and countries of Eastern Europe are new instruments, including a very important one in the form of the European Neighbourhood Policy.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Potential candidates in the Mediterranean region are Israel and Morocco – the latter even already submitted a formal application for membership of the EU in 1987.

<sup>29</sup> From voluminous literature, see, e.g. *Europejska Polityka Sąsiedztwa Unii Europejskiej* (European Union's European Neighbourhood Policy), M. Pietraś, K. Stachurska-Szczesiak and J. Misiągiewicz (eds.), Lublin 2012; I. Lyubashenko, *Europejska Polityka Sąsiedztwa Unii Europejskiej wobec Europy Wschodniej* (European Union's European Neighbourhood Policy toward Eastern Europe), Toruń 2012; T. Casier, *European Neighbourhood Policy: living up to regional ambitions?* in: *The foreign policy of the European Union. Assessing Europe's role in the*

Established in 2003, it has in fact a more extensive scope, covering the Mediterranean as well, but still it largely refers to Eastern Europe. This policy is meant to contribute to the formation of zones of security, democracy and welfare on the peripheries of the EU, however it offers its partners no prospects for accession. The EU's eastern policy, being one of two principal components of the ENP (alongside the Mediterranean policy), is itself divided into the so-called strategic partnership with Russia and an important new instrument, the Eastern Partnership.

The Eastern Partnership was launched in response to a Polish initiative, with the support of Sweden.<sup>30</sup> Officially inaugurated in 2009, it covers six countries: Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia. The principal objective behind the various forms of aid provided under this project is to support democratic systemic transformation in the addressee countries and to help them develop close ties with the EU, among other things through the conclusion of association agreements with the EU, also involving the creation of free trade zones. Although the above-mentioned instruments do not directly offer membership in the European Union, nonetheless such a prospect is taken into account, with respect to at least some partners.

The key problem in this regard, however, is not the position of the potential candidates nor the functioning of the individual EU policies, but the lack of political will within the EU, where the idea of further enlargement is highly controversial. Most old Member States manifest far-reaching conservatism towards this issue, favouring closer integration within the recently-enlarged EU rather than any further enlargement. One factor that may be decisive in this respect is an obvious political, economic and social sense of fatigue with the extensive wave of recent enlargements. This is accompanied by fears of potentially negative consequences of subsequent accessions, justified by the – sometimes demagogically bloated – negative assessments of the most recent accessions of new

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world, F. Bindi and I. Angelescu (eds.), Washington 2012; *The European Neighbourhood Policy's challenges/Les défis de la politique européenne de voisinage*, E. Lannon (ed.), Frankfurt am Main 2012; *The European Neighbourhood Policy: A Framework for Modernisation?*, op.cit.

<sup>30</sup> See: Ministerstwo Spraw Zagranicznych (Ministry of Foreign Affairs), *Partnerstwo Wschodnie (Eastern Partnership)*, Warszawa 2012; *Między sąsiedztwem a integracją. Założenia, funkcjonowanie i perspektywy Partnerstwa Wschodniego Unii Europejskiej (Between Neighbourhood and Integration. Assumptions, Functioning and Prospects for the European Union's Eastern Partnership)*, A. Szeptycki (ed.), Warsaw 2011; *Partnerstwo Wschodnie. Wymiary realnej demokracji (Eastern Partnership. Dimension of Real Democracy)*, M. Zdanowicz, T. Dubowski and A. Piekutowska (eds.), Warszawa 2010; L. Jesień, *Eastern Partnership – Strengthened ENP Cooperation with Willing Neighbours*, "PISM Strategic Files", No. 3/2008.

member countries, which are adjudged to have been poorly prepared for membership. Such accusations are addressed especially to Bulgaria and Romania. Additional arguments for this way of thinking have been provided by the crisis in Ukraine, which started in late 2013 and early 2014 and concerned yet another potential candidate for EU membership.<sup>31</sup>

On the other hand, some of new Member States, and Poland in particular, resolutely declare themselves in favour of further enlargements. This results mainly from their well-perceived geo-strategic national interest in the areas of politics, economy and security. To put it clearly, it is in Poland's interest to have a group of stable and friendly, or, better still allied states across Poland's eastern border, preferably European Union Member States, or at least countries connected by close relations with the EU. This sort of attitude stems from, among other things, Poland's historical experience, which teaches it to take proper care for the country's eastern relations, including in particular security measures protecting itself against any Russian imperial actions or advances.<sup>32</sup>

In these circumstances, what are the real prospects for further enlargement of the European Union to the east? As mentioned above, the group of potential new EU members from the east of Europe includes Ukraine, as well as – if the category of Eastern Europe is treated more broadly – Turkey, the Balkan countries and some states of the Black Sea Basin. What is important here is that all potential candidates are struggling with more or less serious problems which hinder their prospects for accession.<sup>33</sup>

## 6. Candidates with problems

### 6.1. The Ukrainian crisis

At present, the most serious problems concern the potential accession of Ukraine – a country of considerable geopolitical importance to

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<sup>31</sup> As shown by a public survey conducted in 2011 by the German Marshall Fund, more than half of the surveyed Europeans perceive EU enlargement as a problem rather than a chance for development – cf. R. Sadowski, *Partnerstwo w czasach kryzysu. Wyzwania dla integracji europejskiej państw Europy Wschodniej* (*Partnership During the Crisis. Challenges to European Integration of Eastern European Countries*), "Punkt Widzenia", No. 36/2013, pp. 38–39.

<sup>32</sup> For more, see: *Polityka wschodnia Polski. Uwarunkowania – Koncepcje – Realizacja* (*Poland's Eastern Policy. Conditions – Concepts – Implementation*), A. Gil and T. Kapuśniak (eds.), Lublin–Warsaw 2009.

<sup>33</sup> See: R. Kalytchak and A. Semenovych, *European Union Enlargement – An Unfinished Business?* in: *Introduction to European Studies. A New Approach to Uniting Europe*, D. Milczarek, A. Adamczyk and K. Zajączkowski (eds.), Warsaw 2013.

the entire Eastern Europe. The crisis that broke out in Ukraine in 2013 was directly connected with its European aspirations. Since becoming independent in 1991, Ukraine has shown a more or less strong pro-European orientation, supported by some of its Western neighbours, especially Poland.<sup>34</sup> The complex and unstable political and socio-economic situation, however, led the efforts towards obtaining EU membership – undertaken by a considerable share of the political class and the society – to encounter some serious obstacles.

The direct reason for the outbreak of the crisis in 2013 was the social discontent caused by the fact that President Viktor Yanukovich decided not to sign the association agreement with the EU that Ukraine was to conclude at the November summit of the Eastern Partnership in Vilnius. This in effect would have meant an actual end of the process of integration between the EU and Ukraine, and therefore it caused a sharp reaction from the pro-European Ukrainian opposition, supported by a large share of the society, especially in the western part of the country. This sparked anti-government protests in many towns and cities, and the protest at Maidan square in Kiev became the most recognisable symbol thereof. The failed attempts of the authorities to end the protests through the use of force led to an even stronger response from the opposition, which resulted in numerous casualties on both sides.

All this showed both the scale of the support for the idea of integration with Europe as well as the magnitude of the opposition to the political and economic situation in the country, which was falling deeper and deeper into crisis. The conclusion of an agreement between the opposition and President Yanukovich in February 2014 also failed to resolve the situation. Both sides accused each other of failing to fulfil their commitments and, in the end, Yanukovich was removed from office and fled to Russia. The situation was seriously complicated by the fact that the overthrown president enjoyed the support of a considerable share of the Ukrainian society. This was especially true of the eastern and southern parts of the country (including Crimea), where pro-Russian sentiments prevailed, and where pro-European and pro-EU sentiments were much less strong than in the western part of the country.

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<sup>34</sup> Poland was the first country that officially recognised the independence of Ukraine. See texts by: O. Barbarska, *Wpływ polskiej dyplomacji...* (*Influence of Polish Diplomacy...*), op.cit. and *Between East and West. European Dilemmas of Ukraine* in: *Eastern Policy of the European Union: Role of Poland, Case of Ukraine*, A. Z. Nowak, D. Milczarek, B. Hud' and J. Borkowski (eds.), Warsaw 2008. See also: *Rola Polski w kształtowaniu polityki wschodniej Unii Europejskiej na przykładzie Ukrainy* (*The Role of Poland in Shaping the European Union's Eastern Policy – Example of Ukraine*), J. Borkowski (ed.), Warszawa 2006.

At the same time, it should be firmly stressed that the European Union played a key role in persuading the antagonists to reach an understanding and end the bloodshed. After a period of initial passivity, the EU started sending clear signals of support for the protesters and condemned the brutal actions of the authorities. Poland played a particularly important part – the Polish diplomatic corps as well as the entire political class and the society provided broad support for the actions of the Ukrainian opposition. The most important manifestation of this support was actual political assistance, including a broad diplomatic offensive undertaken by the Polish government in order to obtain the support of the EU and its Member States for the aspirations of the Ukrainians towards the EU and freedom. These efforts led, among other things, to a mediation mission to Kiev composed of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of Germany, France and Poland – a mission that eventually greatly contributed to the ceasefire in February 2014.

Rather than delve into further discussion of Ukraine's difficult and complex internal situation, it is sufficient here to point out that the process of its integration with the European Union has reached a critical point. On one hand, if the new Ukrainian authorities commence and keep implementing long-term political and economic reforms in accordance with European standards, leading to greater integration with the EU, it will probably be possible for Ukraine to join the EU in future. On the other hand, however, even the realisation of this positive scenario (not to speak about the continuation of the current governance model) would not guarantee automatic accession – Ukraine has much to catch up on in terms of systemic transformation and it is impossible to predict when it would be able to meet the EU's accession criteria.

Furthermore, we have to take into account the existing international determinants, the principal one being the policy of Russia, which actively supports the strong anti-European faction in Ukraine and wishes to keep the country in its direct sphere of influence, referring to the centuries-long close ties between the two nations and the tradition of joint statehood. Russia's annexation of Crimea in March 2014 and its provision of broad support to the rebels who are attempting to bring about the secession of Ukraine's eastern regions constitute some of the most direct manifestations of this neo-imperial policy, which has led to the outbreak of a bloody civil war.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> One of the tragic episodes of this conflict was the fatal crash of a Malaysia Airlines airliner in July 2014, shot down by pro-Russian separatists. This crime has made the conflict even more international and became one of the main reasons for the EU and several

A problem in this context is the ambivalent attitude of the European Union, which for years has been unable to work out a single, coherent position.<sup>36</sup> Some of the Member States, while not excluding the possibility of Ukraine's future membership in the EU, nevertheless observe the Ukrainians' hesitation and, wishing to avoid any friction with Russia, refuse to support any quick moves towards this goal. A further argument against such determined moves are the huge funds required to provide effective assistance to the Ukrainian economy. Despite the official declarations of the EU that it would provide assistance, and even despite taking certain limited steps in this direction, the EU, still weakened by the economic crisis, is simply unable and unwilling to provide these funds on its own.

As a result, the idea of further enlargement to the east and Ukraine's accession does not enjoy the support of the entire EU, and some Member States openly oppose it (these being, among others, most of the Mediterranean countries, as well as some of the new members from Central and Eastern Europe, such as the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Bulgaria, and especially Hungary).<sup>37</sup> As a matter of fact, Poland is the only Member State that strongly supports Ukraine's EU-membership aspirations.<sup>38</sup> As a result, contrary to what the Polish diplomacy was expecting, no united front of the new EU members was established to deal with the Ukrainian crisis, and Poland's only allies in this regard are the Baltic states, which are worried and unsettled by Russia's show of imperialism.

On the other hand, however, we have to admit that the 'door to Europe' is still open to Ukraine, as proved by the signing and follow-up ratification (in September 2014) of the association agreement between the EU

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other states to impose further political and economic sanctions on Russia, to which Russia reacted by imposing counter-sanctions.

<sup>36</sup> See: B. Hud', *Eastern Policy of the European Union: Step by Step Towards Ukraine* in: *Introduction to European Studies. A New Approach to Uniting Europe*, op.cit.; D. Milczarek, *Eastern Dimension of the ENP – a New Challenge for the European Union. The Case of Ukraine* in: *The European Neighbourhood Policy: A Framework for Modernisation?*, op.cit.

<sup>37</sup> In the Ukrainian crisis, Hungary in fact has supported Russia. The possible reasons for this are the growing anti-democratic tendencies in Hungary as well as the increasing Euro-scepticism of the Victor Orban government, and as a result ever-growing closer economic ties to Russia, especially in the field of energy.

<sup>38</sup> See, generally: O. Barburska, *Wpływ polskiej dyplomacji... (Influence of Polish Diplomacy...)*, op.cit.; E. Latoszek and A. Kłos, *Partnerstwo Wschodnie jako nowa forma współpracy Unii Europejskiej z państwami trzecimi (Eastern Partnership as a New Form of the European Union's Co-operation with the Third Countries)* in: *10 lat członkostwa Polski w Unii Europejskiej. Ocena i perspektywy (Ten years of Poland's Membership in the European Union. Appraisal and Perspectives)*, E. Latoszek, A. Stępnia, A. Kłos and M. Krzemiński (eds.), Gdańsk 2014.



and Ukraine.<sup>39</sup> For Ukraine, joining the uniting Europe should constitute a clear priority and a historic opportunity for civilisational progress. This opportunity might, however, be squandered due to Kiev's policies, which are not always coherent and reasonable.<sup>40</sup> While the Ukrainians' desire to maintain good relations with their very special and important neighbour Russia is understandable, the situation they find themselves in nowadays should induce them to make the historical choice between the European Union and the Russian Federation. Of course this choice is a very difficult one, but Ukraine is facing it whether it wants to or not. The outcome of this dilemma – which, of course, does not have to involve a complete severing of contacts with one of the partners – will be very important not only to the parties involved, but also to the rest of the Eastern Europe and, to a certain degree, to the entire European Union as well. For Ukraine is important to Europe and Europe is important to Ukraine.

## 6.2. The Turkish dilemmas

Yet another controversial issue is the potential membership of Turkey in the European Union. As previously mentioned, the accession of this country falls under 'enlargement to the east' only if we assume the broad understanding of this notion, i.e. that it encompasses the Balkans and the Black Sea Basin (we should keep in mind that Romania, Bulgaria, Slovenia and Croatia are already members of the EU, while many other countries of the region have applied for accession).

Turkey has already been associated with the European Communities for more than four decades, and in 2005 it started official accession negotiations. These negotiations, however, have been effectively suspended,<sup>41</sup> as the country's candidacy gives rise to considerable doubts, which, generally speaking, concern the vast historically-determined differences between Turkey and its European partners in areas such as religion, culture, politics, economy, etc.

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<sup>39</sup> The significance of this move was, however, diminished by the simultaneous decision to put off the implementation of the mutual free trade agreement until the end of 2015.

<sup>40</sup> A good example of the imprudent and undemocratic actions of the new government was that, soon after it took power, it issued several laws aimed against the use and teaching of Russian. This step was very badly received in eastern Ukraine, where people generally speak Russian, and served as a pretext for separatism.

<sup>41</sup> The accession negotiations with Turkey have not been formally suspended but are in fact frozen, which is shown by the fact that only one negotiation chapter has been closed so far, and negotiations on 12 other have officially been blocked by Cyprus and France.

Suffice to say that – as the critics of Turkey’s candidacy emphasise – it is hard to imagine that the largest EU Member State could be a Muslim country representing a totally different civilisation.<sup>42</sup> This could give rise to numerous serious difficulties, for example problems with the social and cultural integration of the new EU citizens, as proven by the already existing problems caused by the millions of Muslims who already live in Europe. Turkey’s accession would also entail the need for the EU to find the vast funds necessary to even out the underdevelopment of many regions of Turkey and some sectors of the Turkish economy – especially the relatively backward agricultural sector.

It seems, however, that the most significant problem is the functioning of the Turkish political system, which is not fully consistent with the European standards of democracy. The main problem is not even the tremendous role played by the army, which is on a scale no longer paralleled in Europe. While the army has served as a guarantor of the country’s secular and pro-European course, it also governed the country on several occasions through brutal military dictatorships. The main issue is, in fact, the non-observance of the principles of a modern state and human rights. These violations include, among others, the lack of full freedom of speech and lack of independence of the judiciary, as well as attempts to force upon the society – contrary to traditions of secularism – the norms of the Islamic sharia law, limiting especially the rights of women. A telling illustration of the lack of full political freedom can be seen in the attempts made by the Islamist government of Prime Minister (and now President) Erdogan to use force to suppress social protests against his policy, which have been taking place with varying intensity since 2013.

Another barrier to the establishment of closer relations with the European Union is Turkey’s foreign policy.<sup>43</sup> One of the main problems is the Cyprus issue, which has remained unresolved for 40 years. Apart from Turkey, which continues to occupy the northern portion of the island, the conflict involves two EU Member States, namely the Republic of Cyprus

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<sup>42</sup> This would mean, for example, that the Turks (and surely many Islamists among them) would constitute the most numerous group of members of the European Parliament, with all the consequences that this fact would entail for the spirit and letter of the decisions made by this body.

<sup>43</sup> For more, see: texts by A. Adamczyk: *The Influence of Turkey’s International Problems upon the Process of its Integration with the European Union* in: *Poland and Turkey in Europe – Social, Economic and Political Experiences and Challenges*, A. Adamczyk and P. Dubel (eds.), Warsaw 2014; and *Trudne sąsiedztwo – wpływ relacji Turcji z sąsiadami na proces akcesji do Unii Europejskiej* (*Difficult Neighborhood – Impact of Turkey’s Relations With Its Neighbors on its Accession process to the European Union*), “*Studia Europejskie*”, No. 4/2013.

and Greece (which has tense relations with Turkey for other reasons as well). The consent of both these Member States would be needed for their long-standing adversary to accede to the EU, and at the moment it seems that the 'Cyprus knot' is not going to be untied anytime soon.

Moreover, there are other international problems as well. Given Turkey's growing economic, political, military and cultural potential, it has been showing an ever greater ambition of achieving – as the Ottoman Empire once had – the status of a regional and supra-regional power. However, while initially the Turkish authorities followed the principle of avoiding any problems in their relations with their neighbours, now there are several serious conflicts (e.g. with Syria, engulfed in a civil war) or at least tensions in their foreign relations, as evidenced by the obviously deteriorating relations with Israel, which used to be a close ally of Turkey. If Turkey joins the European Union, this will bring the EU structures much closer to the explosive conflicts of the Middle East, in which Turkey is involved in various ways.

On the other hand, it should be noted that, as stressed by the proponents of Turkey's accession, it could also result in many notable benefits to the EU. The country's huge social, economic and political resources would strengthen the overall potential of the EU. Furthermore, for the entire post-WWII period Turkey has been a very loyal and valuable political and military ally of the West in its confrontation with the communist bloc, and it still maintains the second largest army – after the USA – in NATO.

Hence in our concern over all the negative geopolitical implications of Turkey's accession to the EU, we should not underestimate the potential positive consequences of this move, which would include, first of all, strengthening security, stability and development in the close neighbourhood of the EU, as well as showing that the EU is able to open itself politically and mentally to other regions and cultures. This would constitute a visible encouragement to the other countries in Europe's neighbourhood to make greater efforts towards the 'Europeanisation' of their policies, seen not as a submission to foreign domination but rather as achieving better standards of democracy and socio-economic development.<sup>44</sup>

Nonetheless, the consequence of the controversies mentioned above is that Turkey is unlikely to be permitted to join the EU in the foreseeable

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<sup>44</sup> For more on this topic, see: B. Piskorska, *Europeizacja (Europeisation) państw sąsiedzkich Unii Europejskiej na przykładzie Europy Wschodniej (Europeisation of the EU's Neighbours on the Example of Eastern Europe)* in: *Europejska polityka bezpieczeństwa i integracji (European Security and Integration Policy)*, K. Budzowski (ed.), Kraków 2010.

future. The positions of the EU Member States are divided and the two most influential EU members, Germany and France, are very sceptical about Turkey's membership. Even if numerous other Member States (including Poland) officially support Turkey's efforts, the European societies – especially from the western part of the continent – are not likely to accept another enlargement to the east that would include Turkey. It seems that the best solution would be to develop a new format of relations which would be based not on full membership, but rather on much closer association or so-called gradual integration.<sup>45</sup> All this, however, means that one of the most serious challenges which the EU's foreign policy and the entire organisation will have to face sooner or later will be the need to make binding decisions concerning the future of the EU's relations with Turkey.

### **6.3. The Balkans and the Black Sea Region**

As regards the countries from the Balkans, already in 2003 the EU essentially expressed its political consent to admit them to the EU. A special support mechanism (the Stabilisation and Association Process) was even established for this purpose. There are, however, numerous problems preventing the positive conclusion of the negotiations with Balkan states such as Serbia, Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Albania and Kosovo. Their main common problems concern the extreme levels of corruption and organised crime, as well as violations of the principles of democracy and the rule of law in the functioning of their political systems. Problems of this kind, resulting from the general specificity of the Balkans, coincide with additional difficulties specific to each of the candidates.

For example, in the case of Macedonia, the problem is an unresolved and rather peculiar dispute with Greece over the country's name.<sup>46</sup> This is one of the reasons why no official negotiations have been commenced with this country, although it has an official candidate status. For Serbia, the main barrier was its lack of cooperation with the International Criminal Court in The Hague, appointed to preside over the war crimes trials resulting from the civil war in former Yugoslavia, and this issue was resolved only in 2011. Although the accession negotiations with this

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<sup>45</sup> For more, see: C. Karakas, *Gradual Integration – An Attractive Alternative Integration Process for Turkey and the EU*, "European Foreign Affairs Review", No. 3/2006.

<sup>46</sup> In Greece's opinion, the historical name 'Macedonia' can only be applied to the territory under its control.

country started in 2014, relations with Kosovo, a former province of Serbia and now a quasi-independent country, continue to be a serious obstacle because they still have not been fully regulated.

The other countries are in various stages of accession talks with the European Union: Montenegro started the accession negotiations in 2012, Albania has official candidate status, while Bosnia and Herzegovina has not yet even obtained this status. Among all these countries, Kosovo undoubtedly has the least chance of actually becoming a member of the EU. Five of the present Member States have not recognised Kosovo's independence<sup>47</sup> and international peacekeeping forces continue to be stationed there due to the unstable internal situation and the ongoing threat of ethnic conflicts. The EU participates in this peace mission and, additionally, provides this country with considerable aid, without which it would not be able to function. Given this, it is rather hard to imagine Kosovo becoming a member of the EU in the foreseeable future.

A potential enlargement of the European Union far to the east, in certain cases going beyond the traditional borders of Europe, could include some of the countries involved in the Eastern Partnership. Moldova seems to be most advanced on the path to accession. Despite its difficult internal situation and its external problems (the conflict in Transnistria) it is attempting to implement the systemic reforms recommended by the EU. These efforts have already yielded visible results, including the signing of an association agreement with the EU and the abolishing of visas in the movement of persons. Similar efforts, including the signing of an association agreement, have also been undertaken by Georgia. Despite its political turbulence and economic problems, Georgia is exhibiting a strong political will to join the Euro-Atlantic integration structures (the EU and NATO), with an additional incentive being in reaction to its strained relations with Russia. However, due to the international problems of the two countries and their relatively low level of socio-economic development, it is rather unlikely that either Moldova or Georgia will become a member of the EU in the foreseeable future.

The situation of the other participants of the Eastern Partnership is a different story altogether. Leaving aside the specific case of Belarus,<sup>48</sup> it should be noted that Armenia has actually initiated a process of freezing relations or even moving away from the EU. It has obviously decided that

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<sup>47</sup> These are: Spain, Greece, Cyprus, Romania, and Slovakia.

<sup>48</sup> Belarus is the beneficiary of programmes implemented under the Eastern Partnership (it even participates in some of them to a certain extent), but the official Belarusian authorities reject participation in the Partnership.

integration with Russia would be in its best interests, although officially it has not severed its ties with the EU. Azerbaijan's position is also rather ambivalent. On one hand, the country maintains economic and political relations with Russia, but on the other hand it is also trying to reach an understanding with the EU, e.g. by expressing readiness to participate in the establishment of the Southern Gas Corridor, which is to connect Europe to the Caspian gas deposits. Additionally, these two countries have problems with maintaining the standards of democracy in their political sphere, which naturally influences their perception by the EU. All this means that these countries neither actually want to join the EU, nor do they have any real chance to do so.

## **Conclusions**

To make a concise summary, it can be said that the process of enlargement of the European Union to the east has been the end result of the long, laborious and difficult systemic transformations and adjustments to European standards undertaken by the 11 post-communist countries from Central and Eastern Europe which have become member states. Their efforts resulted in full membership in the EU and other Euro-Atlantic integration structures, bringing many significant and sometimes even spectacular benefits in the fields of policy, international security, and socio-economic development.

Meanwhile, there is a group of countries in the broadly defined 'east of Europe' – from the Balkans through to the Black Sea Basin and to the Caucasus – some of which show similar aspirations and make more or less effective efforts to achieve them. The European Union, in turn, while supporting these efforts politically, organisationally and financially, does not have a clearly defined policy in this regard. The reason for this is, most generally speaking, a series of factors resulting from the variety of interests of the EU and of its individual Member States, especially the most powerful ones.

Currently, everything indicates that there is no possibility of continuing the process of EU enlargement to the east in the near future. This does not mean that there is no will to do so, nor that the situation will never change, but the present circumstances are simply too unfavourable. Apart from the fact that practically all the countries aspiring to EU membership suffer from difficult and complex internal and international situations, the most decisive factor seems to be the clear reluctance of many, if not most, of the present EU Member States to admit new members from the east to the organisation in the near future. Furthermore, it also does not

seem that the present situation can be changed by the arguments of new Member States such as Poland, which considers enlargement to the east in its vital interests, but which so far has not achieved a sufficient position and potential to be able to convince the entire EU of the merits of its point of view.