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The Role of Poland in the Creation Process of the Eastern Partnership

Abstract: *The 2004 Enlargement of the European Union, involving the accession of 10 states, forced the EU to create a special policy with regard to its new neighbours – the European Neighbourhood Policy. This initiative encouraged the neighbours of the integrated Europe to introduce political and economic reforms aimed at strengthening democracy and free market. For four years, the ENP has not yielded the expected results. Its main flaw was the fact that it included two groups of states which are very different in political, social and economic terms – the Mediterranean states and Eastern European states. It was also a mistake that the EU clearly signalled that there is no chance for these states to join the Union. The fiasco of EU policy under the ENP contributed to the intensification of the efforts of Polish politicians to increase the effectiveness of EU's co-operation with its eastern neighbours. With the support of Sweden, Poland managed to create a new EU initiative under EPS – the Eastern Partnership – aimed at Ukraine, Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Moldova. The aim of the Partnership is to deepen the co-operation between the EU and its neighbours, while not rejecting their possible accession in future. However, whether this initiative can be realised will depend on the willingness of all the parties involved to co-operate – both the EU Member States and the neighbouring states.*

1. European Neighbourhood Policy

Until 2004, European Union's eastern policy was shaped mainly by strengthening relations with Central and East European candidate countries and by building the strategic partnership with Russia. This limited role of the EU in establishing closer relations with the other countries in this part of Eu-

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rope resulted from the fact that EU politicians focused on the enlargement process and on preparing EU structures to admit such a large group of countries. The fact that Brussels had no closer relations with the other Eastern European states resulted also from the reluctant attitude of the old EU-15 towards a possible further EU integration process, which was caused by limited capability of this structure.¹ However, this does not mean that EU politicians ignored the remaining countries of the region. They kept close relations with Turkey, treating it as a special partner, and they carefully observed the situation in the Balkan states. But other countries – Ukraine, Belarus, Georgia or Armenia – were perceived by the EU from the perspective of building relations with Russia, in accordance with the ‘Russia first’ principle coined by France and Germany.

Even before joining the EU, in 2003, Poland proposed the idea of the so-called ‘Eastern Dimension of the EU’, mainly in order to bring Ukraine closer to European structures. However, the idea had not gained much support, neither in the old EU-15, nor in the New Member States – mainly out of fear that it would antagonise Russia.²

Due to the challenge posed to the EU by the expected new borders after the enlargement, and the resulting risks and benefits, in March 2003 the European Commission prepared a document entitled *Wider Europe – Neighbourhood: A New Framework with our Eastern and Southern Neighbours*³, containing guidelines for the implementation of EU’s foreign policy towards its new neighbours. The document proposed that the EU should aim to develop a zone of prosperity and a friendly neighbourhood (‘a ring of friends’), within which, due to a huge interdependence between the EU and its immediate neighbours, they could promote stability, security and sustainable development. The final goal of creating such a zone would be to work out a level of integration involving ‘*sharing everything but institutions*’,⁴ modelled on the European Economic Area, which includes the EU and EFTA countries. As a result of these ideas, a new initiative was formed in the EU in 2004, called the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP). It was addressed to

¹ K. Pełczyńska-Nałęcz, M. Kaczmarek, *Polityka wschodnia UE i rola Polski w jej kształtowaniu po rozszerzeniu w 2004 r. (EU’s Eastern Policy and the Role of Poland in its Development after the Enlargement of 2004)*, Warszawa 2009, p. 2.

² *Polska i jej wschodni sąsiedzi in: Pięć lat Polski w Unii Europejskiej – raport (Poland and its Eastern Neighbours in: Five Years in the European Union)*, UKIE, Department of Analyses and Strategies, Warszawa 2009, p. 395–400.

³ Communication from the Commission, *Wider Europe – Neighbourhood: A New Framework with our Eastern and Southern Neighbours*, COM (2003) 104 final, 11.03.2003.

⁴ R. Prodi, *A Wider Europe – A Proximity Policy as the key to stability. Peace, Security and Stability International Dialogue and the Role of the EU*, a speech delivered in Brussels, 6.12.2002.

ten Mediterranean countries (Algeria, Palestinian National Authority, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Syria, Tunisia) and to six eastern neighbours of the EU (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine).

Russia was also invited to ENP, but Russian politicians rejected the invitation claiming that Moscow had already established separate relations with the EU.⁵ The countries participating in the ENP were explicitly given to understand by Brussels that they did not have any concrete prospects to join the EU. It resulted, among other things, from the fact that neither Turkey nor the Balkan states were covered by neighbourhood policy as potential future members of the EU. The implementation of the ENP was to take into account the principle of differentiation, which meant that EU's partners were treated individually depending on the level of their relations with the EU so far, their economic development and the progress of political reforms towards democratisation.

The main instrument of the ENP are Action Plans consisting in granting financial and technical aid to neighbouring countries in exchange for meeting political and economic conditions defined in the Action Plan.

It seemed that the ENP was perfectly integrating into the processes taking place in the neighbouring countries, the sign of which could be the democracy-oriented 'colour' revolutions in Georgia (2003) and Ukraine (2004). EU politicians believed that the people of the neighbouring countries were keenly interested in introducing democratic rules of law and market economy. It was a chance to ensure '*safety for the EU by forming a ring of stable and well-governed states around it*'.⁶

2. The Eastern Partnership

The enthusiasm among EU politicians related to the introduction and implementation of the European Neighbourhood Policy soon faded. It turned out that the neighbouring countries were not so determined to implement effective political and economic reforms. The democratisation processes which started in Georgia and Ukraine ended in political chaos. In the other countries: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus and Moldova, no essential reforms

⁵ M. Cholewa, *Multilateralne wymiary Europejskiej Polityki Sąsiedztwa (Multilateral Dimensions of the European Neighbourhood Policy)*, "Biuletyn Opinii" No. 27/2009, Fundacja Aleksandra Kwaśniewskiego AMICUS EUROPÆ, Warszawa 2009, p. 3.

⁶ Sz. Ananicz, *Partnerstwo Wschodnie (Eastern Partnership)*, "Indos" No. 17/2009, Biuro Analiz Sejmowych, p. 1.

towards democratisation and political and economic stabilisation were undertaken. Regular conflict in Ukraine-Russia relations concerning purchase and transit of gas and the permanent tension in relations between Russia and Georgia showed how very unstable the eastern neighbourhood of the European Union is. We could ask whose fault it is – is it the neighbouring countries or the ineffectiveness of the European Neighbourhood Policy. Naturally, as usual, both sides are to blame. However, the most essential part are the mistakes made by European politicians. It seems that the European stakeholders have not appreciated the importance and enormity of the EU enlargement process and the challenges connected with shifting EU borders.

By admitting Romania and Bulgaria to the EU, the external border of the EU with Turkey and Ukraine has been extended, and the process of European integration reached the Black Sea, opening new opportunities for cooperation, and resulted in the emergence of many problems in the functioning of the European structures. The enlargement by 12 Member States led to the establishment of new external borders and meeting new neighbours, which a few years before had been located far from the EU's borders, and currently lay just beyond them. The ineffectiveness of the ENP related to the new geopolitical situation caused some fears among European political stakeholders, resulting from the doubts or even anxiousness of EU citizens concerning illegal immigration, organised crime and international terrorism.⁷ It was certainly a mistake in the ENP to 'lump together' all the Eastern European and North African states, which showed that the situation on the eastern borders of the EU was marginalised. The eastern neighbours were also not given any signals that their reforming efforts might, even in distant future, result in accession to the EU.

The ineffectiveness of the ENP forced the Member States to attempt to reform it. Especially the New Member States, led by Poland and supported by the Visegrad Group and the Baltic states, were opting for a change. However, the most essential thing was to gain the support of Germany and France, as the most influential members of the EU.

The European Neighbourhood Policy was planned during the German Presidency, in the first half of 2007. The German government suggested establishing a category of 'EU's European Neighbours' (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine, Belarus) within the ENP in order to show appreciation for their efforts in modernising themselves for the accession to the

⁷ P. Świeżak, *Europejska Polityka Sąsiedztwa. Bilans funkcjonowania na przykładzie Ukrainy (European Neighbourhood Policy. The Assessment of Operation on the Example of Ukraine)*, "Bezpieczeństwo Narodowe" No. 3–4/2007, p. 118.

EU. These ideas were supported by the Member States, especially Poland and the Baltic states, but Germany explicitly stressed that relations with Russia would remain its strategic goal (France professed the same idea), which tempered the ambitions of Polish diplomacy.

The main issue which affected the shape of EU's eastern policy was the French initiative of establishing, within the framework of the ENP, the Union for the Mediterranean. Initially, the initiative presented by N. Sarkozy was not found interesting by all EU Member States. Northern and eastern countries were afraid that France, standing at the head of the coalition of Mediterranean states, would dominate EU's external policy and the ENP, changing its direction towards building close relations with EU's southern neighbours. France had tried many times before to extend EU's structural aid to Algeria, Tunisia and Morocco. It attempted to gain the support of Poland and the other eastern countries, as without their consent the French idea could not be realised. However, such support required reciprocity. Poland decided to use this opportunity and, in exchange for its support for the French initiative, presented plans for strengthening bonds with the Eastern European neighbours. To keep balance in external relations, in May 2008, Poland and Sweden presented a project of Eastern Partnership within the framework of the ENP – a new form of regional co-operation addressed to Eastern Europe and the South Caucasus. The essence of the new proposal was to gradually get these countries involved in EU policies and programmes and prepare them for integration with the EU market.

The Polish and Swedish project gained the support of the Czech Presidency and the other countries of the Visegrad Group. This coalition was also supported by the small Baltic states: Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia; gaining the support of Germany turned out to be a big success.

The greatest success of the Eastern Partnership was the separation of the Eastern European neighbours from the 'ring of friends' collectively gathered under the ENP and developing a separate policy towards them. The EU's former external policy, directed at all ENP members – Northern African countries, the Middle East and Eastern Europe – proved to be ineffective and did not motivate the reform processes in the eastern countries. The aim of the Eastern Partnership is to encourage non-EU countries to implement political and economic reforms in exchange for larger and more concrete benefits from the EU. The greatest success for the neighbouring countries can be gradual integration with the selected institutions and structures of the EU, but the level of relations will depend on individual expectations and progress in implementing the reforms. *'Deepening relations with the EU depends on the progress of EU's partners in realising such values as democracy, rule of law, respecting human rights and in implementing*

*the rules of market economy, sustainable development and good management.*⁸ What is most important for the partner states results from the assumption that while Eastern Partnership is not a stage on the road to accession, it does not preclude the participating countries from becoming EU Members in the future.

The Eastern Partnership includes the following possible forms of political and economic co-operation:

- creating a political association,
- establishing complex free trade zones,
- liberalising the visa regime; abolishing visas in the long-term perspective,
- unifying values, norms and legal standards,
- strengthening co-operation in the field of energy safety.

An essential change introduced as part of the Eastern Partnership is the development of mechanisms of multilateral co-operation between the EU and its neighbours and between the neighbours themselves. Up to now, the activities within the ENP consisted only in maintaining bilateral relations between the EU and a country covered by the neighbourhood policy but it has not involved stimulating multilateral co-operation. What is new in the Eastern Partnership is that it focuses on the development of multilateral co-operation because it helps solve many problems of the partner states regarding trade, transport or energy. In this respect, the European Commission also names Russia and Turkey as prospective partners in shaping the co-operation between the EU and its neighbours.

Intensifying bonds between the EU and its partners is also related to building a new framework of multilateral institutional co-operation. Every two years, heads of governments and states representing the EU and partner countries will meet at dedicated summits. In addition, the ministers of foreign affairs of the countries involved will meet every year to monitor the progress in co-operation and to draw up future plans and programmes. On the lower level, the officials responsible for reforms and co-operation will meet at least twice a year in Brussels. Their meetings will concern four big thematic blocks: democracy and rule of law; economic integration; energy safety and human relations. The European Commission allocated EUR 600 million for the Partnership in the years 2010–2013. A weakness of the Eastern Partnership against the Union for the Mediterranean is the lack of a permanent secretariat, which could systematically coordinate the co-operation.

⁸ M. Gniazdowski, B. Wojna, eds., *Partnerstwo Wschodnie. Raport otwarcia (Eastern Partnership. Opening Report)*, Warszawa 2009, p. 6.

3. Positions of Poland and selected EU states concerning the Eastern Partnership

In the European Union, there is a distinct division into states interested in deepening the relations with EU's southern neighbours from Africa and the Middle East and into states which would like the EU to have closer ties to its partners from Eastern Europe and South Caucasus. The leader of the first group is France, supported by Portugal, Spain, Italy, Greece and Cyprus. These states have a rather ambivalent attitude to EU's eastern policy and focus on the risks connected with the southern neighbour, i.e. huge illegal immigration, smuggling, terrorism. These states want the EU policy to be concentrated on the North African risks and expect significant financial support for countering them. This group of states considers other external EU initiatives a certain competition, as they limit the possibilities of financing their priority policy. However, politicians from these states know that if they want their interests to be supported, they cannot block the initiatives of other states.

However, this group is not a monolith. Some of the states are also interested in EU's eastern policies, for instance Greece, which feels threatened by the instable Balkan states and which pursues an active policy in the Black Sea Basin. This group includes states, for which it is only natural to have a positive attitude towards Russia and consider it the main partner in the East. Their policy towards other partners from Eastern Europe is greatly affected by their relations with Russia. These countries are France, Greece, Italy and Cyprus. Among these, France has a special role, for it tries to maintain its role of a regional power and therefore actively participates in the development of both the EU's southern and eastern policy. For a long time, France has consistently followed the 'Russia first' principle and blocked any attempts to intensify the relations between the EU and its eastern neighbours. The Russia-Georgia war, the Russia-Ukraine crisis and the need for the support of Poland and other eastern EU states for the Mediterranean direction forced Paris to verify its position concerning the eastern policy. However, this does not mean that France is a great proponent of the eastern policy. French politicians are much more interested in underlining France's significance as a European power and in controlling the influence of new initiatives of the EU on the relations with Moscow.⁹

States belonging to the second group, i.e. those which strongly support the intensification of relations with EU's eastern neighbours, include the members of the Visegrad Group – Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary – as well as Romania, Bulgaria, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia and Austria.

⁹ *EU Minister At Odds over Energy and Eastern Projects*, 24.02.2009, <http://euobserver.com>

However, this group is also not a monolith. Some of the states are more interested in the Balkan direction, with its constant risks connected with the unstable political and economical situation and with the Alban problem in the broad sense. These are primarily Austria, Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria. It is symptomatic that in June 2009, right after the idea of the Eastern Partnership was presented, Austria and Romania proposed the creation of an EU strategy concerning the Danube Region. In theory, the project is complementary to the Eastern Partnership, but in practice it means that the latter is effectively weakened, as Austria and Romania are interested in intensifying the relations with West Balkan states and in bringing Croatia into the EU. Apart from these states, also Slovenia, the Czech Republic and Slovakia supported this initiative, which impaired the co-operation in the Visegrad Group. The states of the Danube Region consider the Austrian and Romanian project more important than the Eastern Partnership.

Furthermore, some of the states from this part of Europe participate also in another initiative executed under the ENP – the Black Sea Synergy, which has been in operation since 2007. The Synergy involves the following EU states: Bulgaria, Romania, Greece and Cyprus, as well as Russia, Turkey, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia. The EU states involved in the Synergy consider the Eastern Partnership a competition, as it is also financed under the ENP. In fact, each new initiative under the ENP implies a limitation of the funds for the other undertakings.

Another group with a positive attitude to the Eastern Partnership are the northern EU states. Undoubtedly, the support of Sweden, an “old” EU state, for the Partnership had a significant influence on the success of this undertaking. The Polish and Swedish undertaking has also been supported by Great Britain, Denmark and Finland, even though the latter has also initiated another EU project, namely the Northern Dimension, created in 1999.

However, it is the position of the German government that was most important, as it is the most influential regional power in the EU – and it supported the Partnership. As it was the case in France, after the Russia-Georgia war and the Russia-Ukraine gas crisis the politicians in Germany stopped focusing their relations with Eastern European states on Russia. However, this does not mean that the Russian factor has been marginalised. It is still very important in German politics and ‘...Germany is trying to limit the potentially negative impact that this initiative could have on its relations with its major political and economical partner in Eastern Europe’.¹⁰ The Chancellor A. Merkel clearly stated that the Partnership is not aimed against Russia and that it does not exclude Russia from the group of EU’s neighbour

¹⁰ *Partnerstwo Wschodnie. Raport...*, op. cit., p. 39.

states. The reason for Germany's strong support for the initiative is the desire to stabilise the political situation on the eastern frontier of the EU and to prevent further political and economic crises. What is more, Berlin treats the Partnership as an alternative to accession, since the initiative would result in closer relations and since there are unfavourable tendencies in the EU in relation to further accessions.

Poland particularly wants to get involved in the shaping of the eastern dimension of the EU, mainly through active participation in the Eastern Dimension. The Poles especially wish to prevent building new barriers and divisions at the EU's eastern border. It is the Central European states that are predestined to set an example in shaping positive relations with EU's eastern neighbours. During the accession process, Poland and other states faced difficulties, conditions resulting from the process of adjusting to the requirements from the EU and with a lot of prejudice on the part of Western European politicians. This experience made Poland more aware of the problems faced by the eastern neighbours in the process of transformations suggested by the EU. The fact that Poland understands the situation of the neighbouring states encourages it to adopt an active role in eastern policy. Understanding the problems of these states can help the EU offer more concrete action plans and further help.

The Polish government particularly focuses on eradicating the scepticism towards the aspirations of Ukraine to European Union membership, which circulates in Europe. This scepticism results mainly from the poor knowledge about this country and from treating it as instable and non-democratic. Poland would definitely want to play a similar role with respect to the new EU neighbours as Berlin has played with respect to Warsaw during the last enlargement. It is the ambition of Polish diplomats to serve as advocates in the process of bringing Ukraine and the EU closer to each other. The Polish government, just as the German government earlier, is making efforts towards organising economic resources which could help it in financing the most important political and economic reforms.

When the aggressive Russian policy in Caucasus weakened the bond between Germany and Russia, Poland tried to use this situation. The government in Warsaw strengthened the role of Poland, trying to form a coalition of states within the EU, composed mainly of Central and East European countries, criticising Russia's actions and ready to co-operate within the framework of the eastern dimension of the EU.

It seems that Poland, as the largest border country in the eastern part of the EU, should naturally become the representative of EU's eastern policy. Particular stress has been put on the relations with Ukraine, which is a new neighbour for the EU, but a traditional partner for Poland, collaborating in

many areas. However, it does not mean that Poland does not feel responsible for shaping EU's relations with its other eastern partners, e.g. Russia and Belarus, which is sometimes hard.

The Polish government intends to intensify its activity for improving the Eastern Partnership during its Presidency in the second half of 2011. The Polish politicians intend to make their first attempts at encouraging other states to strengthen their relations with the eastern neighbours at the Budapest summit concluding the Hungarian Presidency of the EU. They expect that they will be able to convince in particular the countries of the Visegrad Group to strengthen the eastern direction of the EU policy. Sweden also supports the efforts of Poland. The representatives of Poland and Sweden have sent letters to EU politicians, in which they proposed some ideas for modernising the Eastern Dimension by means of combining the Partnership with other European policies, for instance the cohesion policy.¹¹ They have also proposed a discussion within the EU on adding new fields of co-operation, e.g. police co-operation, immigration and asylum policy, or foreign policy and security matters. For Poland, its Presidency of the EU will most certainly be a form of a test, which will show how effective our government is in realising and intensifying the Eastern Partnership.

Conclusion

The success of the Eastern Partnership depends chiefly on the will of the EU Member States to co-operate and in their external partners.

The effectiveness of the Partnership is still hampered by the fact that the states are not clearly promised accession in return for the difficult political and economic reforms which they would have to introduce. Doubtless, implementing transformations in the neighbouring states will take a long time and without a clear reward they are up in the air. The effectiveness of EU policy will also depend on whether the Member States will distance themselves from relying on Russia's opinion in building the eastern dimension of the EU. It should be considered a success that Eastern European and South Caucasian states have been separated from the whole group of states subject to the ENP, as this means that in future the Member States could provide these states with a promise of accession without promising it to neighbouring states from the Black Sea Basin.

¹¹ Interview with Mikołaj Dowgiewic, the Secretary of State for European Affairs and Economic Policy in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, „Wprost”, 10.07.2010.