

Eastern European countries have a special place in Poland's foreign policy. Their stabilisation through the democratisation and structure of the market economy is one of the most important priorities for Poland. Despite some not always reasonable doubts and hesitations, which took place in Polish politics in the 1990s, Poland tried to become a European lawyer to its eastern neighbours since 1989. This position stemmed from the fact that not only the political elite, but also the Polish society saw their democracy as "the best realisation of its own national interests and benefits for Europe"¹.

The influence of Poland on the EU's Eastern policy formation and implementation is not fully studied in the Ukrainian scientific literature. Т. Сидорук should be mentioned as a researcher of Poland's role in the EU's Eastern Partnership. In this direction, the studies of Polish researchers dominate: Б. Чихоцький analysed the paradigms of Polish "Ostropolitik"; Д. Мільчарук,

W. Moscibrodski focused the analyses upon the evolution of the EU's eastern dimension and the Poland's influence on it. The other foreign scholars also analysed Poland as the most active Member States in developing the EU's eastern policy.

After Poland's accession to NATO (1999) and the EU (2004), the East became the main vector of Poland's foreign policy. The role of Poland in relations between the European Union and the countries of Eastern Europe has several factors. The key ones are: historical (good awareness of the Eastern policy, understanding of important cultural aspects), economic (interests in bilateral trade, energy, competition etc.), status reasons (location, Poland's role and influence in the EU), and according to many Polish politicians depend on Poland's ability to assume the role of "provider" in Eastern policy².

With the launch of the European Neighbourhood Policy (hereinafter ENP) in 2003–2004, which defined the format of relations between the enlarged EU and its new neighbours to the East, Poland has continually been emphasizing the necessity to intensify efforts to strengthen relations between the EU and its Eastern neighbours. It has been advocating the "Open Door Policy" of the European Union to the countries of Eastern Europe for many years. Moreover, Warsaw believes that although the EU dialogue and cooperation with Russia is necessary, this should not lead to the perception and evaluation of EU initiatives in the Eastern Neighbourhood in terms of Russian interests³. Poland believes that aid in the socio-political and economic transformations in Eastern Europe must be one of the main objectives of the EU, which cannot be dependent on the development of relations between the EU and Russia alone.

Poland has shown a particular interest in the future development of the relations of the enlarged EU and its eastern neighbours early in its strive to join the European Union in 1998. It was confirmed and clearly outlined in the document of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, adopted in July 2001, entitled "Eastern Policy of the European Union in the Context of its Enlargement to Central and Eastern Europe: the Polish vision"⁴. In December 2002, the Polish Foreign Office detailed the Polish approach to the EU's Eastern policy as a non-paper with Polish proposals for future relations between the enlarged EU with its new Eastern neighbours⁵. This document is provided for future EU membership for the countries of Eastern Europe, which was to serve the main EU policy instrument towards Ukraine, Moldova and possibly Belarus, aimed at encouraging the modernisation processes in these countries. It was obvious that the priority was given to relations with Ukraine, Belarus and Moldova, while Russia was assigned to the secondary role.

The Polish paper emphasises the particular importance of Ukraine to Europe: "As for Ukraine, it is our task in the interest of the enlarged EU's recognition of the country's European choice, which is so important for the stability and security in the eastern part of the continent. Also, in the interest of the Union, to appreciate the long-term direction of Ukraine's European policy on the country's membership in the EU. Although the country's progress in reforms and in some aspects of its internal and external policies causes disappointment, dialogue and the development of cooperation in connection with the provision of assistance appears most effective. Otherwise, it would increase the risks of weakening the reforms and pro-European forces in Ukraine"⁶.

Polish offers were discussed during the debate on the future relationship of the enlarged EU with its Eastern neighbours. This discussion ended in the designing of a concept of the European Neighbourhood Policy, which was implemented in May 2004. However, not being a member of the EU then, Poland had restricted impact on the final format of the EU policy towards its Eastern neighbours.

After joining the EU, Poland became actively involved in various activities, aiming at developing the EU's Eastern policy. Warsaw collaborated closely with the other Visegrad countries (Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary) to strengthen the eastern dimension of the European Neighbourhood Policy⁷. These problems often became the subject of much consultation with the Baltic countries⁸. Poland aims to revise and improve the ENP which will take the expectations of the Eastern European countries as well as to convince the "old" EU members to develop closer relationships with the latter into account.

In 2006–2007, the Polish government institutions in Brussels prepared the following documents: "The European Neighbourhood Policy – Eastern Dimension" and "The EU – Ukraine Relations: Polish Proposals",

which emphasised that the format of the European Neighbourhood Policy is unsatisfactory because it includes states of different historical, geographical and civilization ways of development (Eastern Europe and North Africa). While the EU's eastern neighbours are European countries, the neighbours on the South are not⁹. Moreover, Poland required balancing in funding the Eastern and Southern areas of the ENP. In April 2008 the Polish Sejm Speaker B. Komorowski criticised the fact that 70% of the funds for Neighbourhood went to the South¹⁰.

Poland has also repeatedly pointed out differences between Southern and Eastern dimensions of the ENP, in particular, that the latter lacks the mechanisms of multilateral cooperation. Polish efforts in this direction led to adapting Polish-Lithuanian Proposals to develop the Southern and Eastern dimensions of the ENP by European Council in December 2007 through not only bilateral but also by multilateral actions¹¹.

The Polish government continues to advocate for further enlargement with a special focus on Ukraine. President Kaczynski at all occasions stressed that his country was interested in keeping the "Door to Europe" open for Ukraine and for the EU to further enlargement¹². In October 2010 current President Bronisław Komorowski noted that the European Union should not stop the enlargement process and close the Ukrainian the European integration prospects.

The chances of implementation of Poland's intentions towards the Eastern policy increased in 2008, which was caused by the activities of France in the Mediterranean Sea area. In March 2008, after the European Council Meeting, where leaders of the EU member states approved the project of the Union for the Mediterranean, R. Sikorski, Poland's Minister of Foreign Affairs promised to soon submit proposals on deepening ties with its Eastern neighbours within the European Neighbourhood Policy. Poland hoped that it will be easier for it to obtain support of the EU to deepen relations with its Eastern neighbours after the adoption of initiatives aimed at strengthening the Southern dimension of the ENP¹³.

The Eastern Partnership initiative was presented jointly by Poland and Sweden at the meeting of foreign ministers on 26–27 May 2008. It should be noted that in April 2008 the Czech Republic, presented its own initiatives to deepen the Eastern dimension of the ENP, providing strong support for this initiative. Prague also participated in developing a more detailed Polish-Swedish project of the Eastern Partnership, which was submitted to the European Commission in October 2008¹⁴.

Later Poland focused on campaigning for support for the Eastern Partnership initiative in the EU structures and Member States¹⁵. Polish politicians and government officials held intensive consultations with the European Commission aimed at incorporating proposals contained in the Eastern Partnership's project, the European Commission's forthcoming Communication on this issue. Poland also sought to create a "front" of countries that would support the Eastern Partnership. A meeting of the Visegrad Group took place in Warsaw on 24 November 2008 during which Bulgaria, Lithuania, Latvia, Romania and Sweden also participated. The participants were in favour of the EU offering its Eastern neighbours new forms of cooperation within the Eastern Partnership in order to help them get closer to EU norms and standards, to create a free trade zone and start the process of facilitating the free movement of citizens, which will "abolish" the visa regime in the long term¹⁶. Poland also conducted intensive consultations with Germany, France, the United Kingdom and other Member States at different levels.

In the onset, the absence of any mention of the possibility of enlargement to the East in the Eastern Partnership project caused some reservations among some Polish political forces. For example, the largest political opposition party – Law and Justice (Polish: Prawo i Sprawiedliwość) called the project insufficiently ambitious¹⁷. Nonetheless, ultimately none of the Polish political forces opposed the Eastern Partnership.

Poland, like the other EU Member States who support enlargement eastwards, sees the Eastern Partnership as a pragmatic response to the "enlargement fatigue". From the Polish point of view, if the initiative directly discussed the possibility of EU enlargement, it would not have any chance of being approved by all its Member States¹⁸. In addition, the current format of the Eastern Partnership countries could help the recipients actually become closer to the EU and to prepare them for possible full membership in the future. The Association Agreements, the introduction of free trade area and visa liberalization will play an important role in this process¹⁹. Finally, a report on foreign policy, represented by the Minister of Foreign Affairs R. Sikorski in the Sejm in 2009 also confirmed that Poland did not abandon the pursuit of EU enlargement to the East²⁰.

It seems that Poland, as the largest border country in the Eastern part of the EU, should naturally become the representative of the EU's Eastern policy. Particular stress has been put on relations with Ukraine, which is a new neighbour for the EU, but a traditional partner for Poland, collaborating in being responsible for shaping the EU's relations with its other Eastern partners, e.g. Russia and Belarus, which is sometimes hard²¹.

The Polish government intended to intensify its activity for improving the Eastern Partnership during its Presidency in the second half of 2011. The Polish politicians intended 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 expected that they would be able to convince the countries of the Visegrad Group in particular to strengthen the Eastern direction of the EU policy.

Notwithstanding the aims and hopes for the Polish Presidency, almost all experts and politicians admit a complete Polish defeat in the sphere of the Eastern Partnership, namely, the Eastern Partnership summit, which took place in September 2011 in Warsaw²². European Commissioner for Financial Programming and the Budget Janusz Lewandowski stated that the EU Eastern Partnership Summit could not bring better results. “However, this meeting reminded the EU that Europe does not end on the Bug River... We did everything we could, unfortunately, neither Ukraine nor Belarus helped us”, added the Commissioner²³.

“The Eastern dimension of the Polish Presidency in the EU was important but turned out to be a big political defeat”, said Krzysztof Szczerski, politician of opposition Law and Justice party. Another opposition politician Konrad Szymanski pointed out that Warsaw allowed France and Germany to impose on Poland their position in eastern affairs, which are reluctant to deepen political and economic relations between the EU and the Eastern Partnership countries, namely Ukraine.

Nevertheless, the Polish authorities claimed success in the Eastern policy in the official rapport of the results of the Polish Presidency in the EU: “The established development and strengthening of the Eastern Partnership should be considered as completed. We have successfully carried out the second Eastern Partnership Summit in Warsaw. The participants adopted the Joint Declaration, according to the demands of the presidency: the records confirming the intention to further enhance the integration of partner countries with the EU; recognizing their European aspirations; the pursuit of economic integration with the EU market and to establish a visa-free regime, as well as the deepening of cooperation sector and opening of EU agencies and programs for the citizens of the partner countries”. The document also referred to the commitment of the EU to allocate EUR 1.9 billion from 2010–2013 to achieve the objectives of the Eastern Partnership. This amount was further increased of 150 million euro for the period up to 2013 ... “The unity of the EU concerning the policy towards Belarus during the presidency was maintained”²⁴.

In March 2012, the Polish government adopted the first multiannual foreign policy strategy since 1989 – “The Priorities of Polish Foreign Policy 2012–2016” (Polish „Priorytety polskiej polityki zagranicznej”)²⁵. The strengthening of the influence on Poland’s Eastern policy and the European Eastern neighbourhood was one of the main objectives of this key document²⁶. It was also mentioned that Poland should support the liberalization of the visa regime and creation of free trade areas with the Eastern European states²⁷. Developing relations with Ukraine, as a strategic partner, is of great importance for Warsaw²⁸.

Ukraine was the centre-piece of Poland’s policy towards the Eastern neighbourhood. In the early 1990s, Poland established a strategic partnership with Ukraine and promoted the country’s integration into the EU and NATO. This partnership has not been easy given the ups and downs of Ukraine’s democratic transition and its foreign policy u-turns. Former Polish President Aleksander Kwaśniewski was the only Western leader to visit Ukraine during its international isolation in the later Leonid Kuchma era. In 2004, during the Orange Revolution, Kwaśniewski led international mediation efforts. After the revolution, Poland tried to convince other EU member states to offer Ukraine the prospect of accession²⁹.

However, Ukraine’s domestic developments complicated Poland’s mission. First, the “Orange” pro-European government was torn apart by personal conflicts and did not deliver the promised reforms. Then, President Victor Yanukovich elected in 2010 reversed even those limited democratic achievements that had been implemented. With unfortunate coincidence, during the first visit of Polish President Bronislaw Komorowski to Ukraine, the constitutional court annulled amendments made to Ukraine’s constitution in 2004, thereby re-strengthening presidential powers.

Following the latest changes of Presidents in Warsaw and Kiev, Polish-Ukrainian relations are not as close as in the past. High level political contacts diminished since the time of Lech Kaczyński and Victor Yushchenko, who reportedly met over forty times within five years, both compensating for their lack of contact with Russia. Victor Yanukovich has not been particularly keen on deepening Ukraine-Poland strategic relations. Instead, he invested primary diplomatic effort in raising Ukraine’s profile in Brussels, Berlin and Paris, as well as with Russia and China. He paid an official visit to Poland only a year after his inauguration, in February 2011³⁰.

These developments have provoked media talk of “Ukraine fatigue” in Poland. Notwithstanding the cooling of relations, this is an exaggeration. No other country in the EU has such an enduring interest in Ukraine or invests so much political capital in promoting Ukraine in the EU. Poland has not changed its strategy towards Ukraine, but rather its tactics. Given the enlargement fatigue in the EU – particularly due to opposition from France and Germany – Poland has focused on the need for Ukraine to improve its practical short term relations with the European Union – while referring to Treaty Article 49 as a long-term factor. Such pragmatic priorities include finalising the EU-Ukraine talks on the Association Agreement and free trade, visa free travel and increased EU aid.

Poland's relations with Belarus' authoritarian regime are limited and Warsaw's leverage on Belarus is miniscule. Poland has used the EU to pursue its goals, above all that of encouraging Belarus' democratisation and its linkages with Europe. Belarus was included in the EaP's multilateral track, while extension of the EaP bilateral benefits was subject to Belarus' progress on democracy. Before Belarus' elections in December 2010, the Polish and German foreign ministers travelled to Minsk to offer President Lukashenka EUR 3 billion in EU aid in exchange for a free vote.

After the crackdown against the opposition in Minsk, the EU was obliged to return to a policy of sanctions. In addition, Poland restricted travel for Belarusian power-holders, provided asylum for many of the persecuted opposition and civic activists, and increased support to non-state actors. In 2011, EUR 5.5 million, or one fifth of all Polish aid, will go to Belarus, mainly for democracy assistance projects. Lukashenka accused Poland (and Germany) of fomenting a coup d'état in his country and launched new sanctions against Polish-minority NGOs and journalists in Belarus. The problem of the Polish minority in Belarus has increasingly become an EU problem.

Poland is one of the strongest advocates of a visa free travel regime for EaP countries. The introduction of a visa regime between Poland and its immediate neighbours in the East after the former's EU accession, and further restrictions as a result of Poland's accession to the Schengen area, have created the risk of a new 'curtain' falling across Eastern Europe. When the EU Council discussed the issue of introducing a visa free travel regime with Russia in 2010, Poland insisted that the EaP countries should be treated equally.

Among EU member states, Poland has the largest consular network in Ukraine (six general consulates) and in Belarus (three). The latest was opened in April 2011 in Sevastopol, becoming the first consulate of an EU country in Crimea. Meanwhile, the Polish consulate in Lviv is the largest in Ukraine; it issued a record number of 300,000 visas last year. In 2011, Poland, along with the Czech Republic and Slovakia, abolished national visa fees for Belarusians in order to support the civic society. Warsaw argues that similar steps should be taken at the EU level, along with increased EU support to the civic society in Belarus. In the case of Ukraine, fees for national visas have been lowered from EUR 35 to EUR 20.

Many Polish politicians and experts dealing with Eastern Europe in recent years dispute what the Polish strategy in the region should be. The current debate on the Polish Eastern policy may result in the formation of a new paradigm of the politics.

At the time of the first non-communist government in Poland in 1989 and by 2009, a paradigm Polish Eastern policy proposed by J. Mieroszewski in the article entitled "Polish Ostpolitik", which was published in Jerzy Giedroyc's journal "Culture" in 1973³¹ was accepted. J. Mieroszewski argued for the suspension of mutual disputes and conflicts between Poles, Russians, Lithuanians, Belarusians and Ukrainian, provided recognition for the Polish post-war eastern border and the final right to the others, mentioned above, their independence when the Soviet Union will collapse. The ideas of J. Mieroszewski–Giedroyc became basic in the relationships between modern Poland and Ukraine, Lithuania and Belarus³².

However, the Eastern policy, based on the specified doctrine, left an unresolved issue: how to promote strengthening the independence of the former Soviet republics and also promote Polish-Russian reconciliation. The experience of the past twenty years has shown that the more insistently Poland supports countries in Eastern Europe, the greater the crisis in relations between Warsaw and Moscow becomes.

Current discussions on the format of Poland's Eastern policy caused changes in the political climate in Europe. Bartosz Cichocki, Analyst at the Polish National Security Bureau (polish "Biuro Bezpieczeństwa Narodowego") cites four factors that led to these changes. First, the process of political and economic changes in Eastern Europe and South Caucasus has hopelessly stalled, this is why the fulfilment of the criteria for EU membership by the countries seems unreal in the near future. Secondly, the European Union and NATO have no agreement on the question of joining the new members, making it difficult to support the Polish perspective and the need to maintain an "open door" for the further enlargement eastwards of these organisations. Thirdly, the U.S. is reducing its presence in Europe and does not show an active interest in the need for further reforms in the post-Soviet space. Fourth, Russia has proven it is ready to use military force for the sake of their regional claims (Georgia as an example)³³.

B. Cichocki believes that in the current debate about the form of Poland's Eastern policy participants have divided into "traditionalists" (supporters of the Mieroszewski–Giedroyc paradigm) and "pro-Europeans" (opponents of this paradigm). Law and Justice, the largest political opposition party in Poland tends to "traditionalists" and the ruling Civic Platform party is opponent one.

The main points of the "traditionalists" are that the improper attention to Poland's Eastern policy will result in the loss of status positions in the international arena. Poland should not be limited by the role of the architect of the Franco-German project in Europe. The "European perspective" is the only incentive that can encourage reforms in Eastern Europe. Failure to provide such a perspective would lead to social and economic instability in

the region and the drift towards the participation in reintegration projects in the post-Soviet space with Moscow. The Eastern Partnership should be considered as a step towards the joining the EU; Europe will take Poland into consideration only as a regional leader; Russian neo-imperialism is a challenge for Poland's security and needs a strict reaction³⁴.

The "Pro-Europeans" defend the fact that the influence of Poland on the international arena does not depend on the nature of relations with Ukraine, Belarus or Georgia, but depend on the relations with Russia. Any compromise policy of the EU is stronger than the most ambitious national policy of Poland (for example, the Eastern Partnership); the Western political and economic model will not be accepted by Eastern neighbours in the near future³⁵.

Conclusion

Poland's attempt to reconstruct and consolidate its place in Europe after the collapse of communism plays a significant role in formulating its policies towards its Eastern neighbours and its preferences for EU policies towards its Eastern neighbours. Polish decision-makers clearly see Poland's role in the East as a promoter of the EU's norms, translator of the EU's law and an "intelligent agent". The EaP initiative constitutes an important part of Poland's attempt to firmly re-establish itself in Europe through positioning itself as the lynchpin between the West and the East in both a normative sense and institutionally. Poland's decision-makers realised that becoming a big and influential EU member is possible through negotiation and understanding of the EU's policy-making processes. This contends that the consensus between political realism and idealism in Poland's foreign policy may be achieved through the advancement of European norms and values in Poland's foreign policy.

The Polish political and intellectual elites have attempted to reconcile their perception of Poland as a large and important state with the realistic objective of implementing their national objectives in the EU.