

## **POLAND'S FOREIGN POLICY TOWARDS UKRAINE AND BELARUS: THE SUMMARY OF A DECADE (2005-2015)**

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The paper deals with the issue of Poland's Eastern policy after joining the European Union. It focuses on relations with Ukraine and Belarus, the closest Poland's neighbours. According to all conceptions of Poland's foreign policy that were announced after regaining sovereignty by Poland in 1989, its Eastern direction remains one of the most important. The membership in the EU has brought many hopes for a "new opening" in relations with Poland's Eastern neighbours.

The paper is a critical summary of the results of a decade of membership in the EU in that field. The paper consists of some parts: it discusses changes in Poland's foreign policy towards Eastern Europe after the biggest enlargement of the EU in 2004, then presents bilateral relations with Ukraine and Belarus, and general conclusions. The author states that despite of some successes Poland, failed to achieve its main goals. There was no clear conception of relations with both partners. Despite of very good atmosphere of Ukrainian-Polish relations after the Orange Revolution, various declaration of strengthening cooperation, there was no real effects in that field. After 2010 bilateral contacts consistently lost their dynamics. Regarding Belarus, Poland continued ineffective critical policy, accusing Belarusian authorities in undemocratic tendencies. Poland's attempt to be a European leader in Eastern policy also generally failed. Polish-Swedish initiative Eastern Partnership Programme, that was launched in 2009, is not in the focus of all members of the EU. It is seen as a tool of anti-Russian politics, while some EU members favours relations with Russia then with Ukraine or Georgia.

The author concludes, that Polish diplomacy is facing strong need of a new formula of relations with Eastern neighbours. It should respond to new geopolitical challenges, be more clear and attractive for Ukraine and Belarus.

*Key words:* Poland's foreign policy, Eastern Partnership, Ukraine, Belarus

Accession to the European Union, as well as to the North Atlantic Treaty, was Poland's main geopolitical goal from the beginning of its political transformation in the early 90s. Its efforts in this respect were crowned by two symbolic events. In March 1999, Poland, alongside the Czech Republic and Hungary, became a full member of NATO, and in May 2004, Poland was amongst the 10 countries that contributed to the biggest enlargement of the EU since the EU was founded.

Polish membership in the EU has brought a partial redefinition to Poland's foreign policy, especially towards its eastern neighbours. The changes regard not the aims of the foreign policy, but rather, its ranges and methods. Poland's Eastern policy has obtained a new context as Poland's eastern border has become the new eastern border of the EU and NATO, a place of geopolitical contact with Russia and the Kremlin integration structures: the Commonwealth of Independent States and the Collective Security Treaty Organization (Tashkent Treaty).

Generally, in scientific papers and within public discussion, it is emphasized that Poland has achieved much in its policy towards Eastern European partners. Although some criticism has been made regarding some specific issues and decisions made by the Polish authorities, there is a generally positive opinion concerning Poland's Eastern policy. The following paper is an attempt to summarise a decade of Polish policy towards Ukraine and Belarus, which

followed the EU enlargement in 2004. It contains general remarks about the successes and failures of this policy, as well as comments about bilateral relations with the above-mentioned countries.

### **Poland's Eastern Policy in the European Union**

Since the end of the 80s and the beginning of the democratic changes in Poland, Polish diplomacy has been based on the legacy of «Kultura» (published in the Paris Polish Political Journal, edited by Jerzy Giedroyć and Juliusz Mieroszewski), that postulated reconciliation between Poles, Ukrainians, Belarusians and Lithuanians. This concept was implemented throughout the 90s and led Poland towards Ukraine and Belarus as a normative power, one that set the standards, values and conditions of bilateral cooperation [6, p. 131]. Poland aimed to show its eastern neighbours desirable Polish reforms which might bring them closer to uniting with Europe, and stressed Poland's affection towards European values. In the long-run, after joining the EU, it was thought that such a position would result in Poland becoming a European expert and a leader in relations with eastern neighbours.

When the accession to the EU was approaching, Polish authorities started to modify their concept of relations with post-Soviet countries. They assumed that the enlargement of the EU would not only bring about a desire to develop relations with Russia, Ukraine, Belarus and other countries, but that it would also create new conditions for Poland's diplomacy in general.

In 2003 and 2004, Polish diplomats were convinced that after the enlargement of the EU, Poland's involvement in Eastern Europe would expand and Poland's political and economical relations within the region would improve [3, p. 103-104]. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Włodzimierz Cimoszewicz) declared in January 2003 that, «we are joining the EU not to turn away from our eastern partners. On the contrary, we want to make the inheritance of our relationship with Eastern Europe one of our «trump cards» in the EU» [12]. At the same time, Poland proposed launching an «Eastern Dimension» as a platform for developing relations with any future neighbours of the EU. The Polish initiative started the 2002 European discussions concerning the neighbourhood policy, which was initially called the «Wider Europe – Neighbourhood» framework. Within this framework, it was planned that each neighbouring country would establish individual action plans with the European Commission as new formula for multidimensional cooperation and tools to attract parties to EU influences. Later, this framework developed into the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), aimed at covering all EU neighbouring countries (not only Eastern Europe) [4; 8, p. 332]. Poland engaged in developing the eastern dimension of the ENP, promoting long-term relations with Ukraine and Moldova and continuing the dialogue with Belarus under the condition of liberalization within the regime [2, p. 57].

Poland's involvement in the eastern dimension of the EU Neighbourhood

Policy can be considered a response to the weakening of its regional position caused by its accession to the Euro-Atlantic structures [24, p. 5]. Polish authorities were seeking opportunities to confirm Poland's aspirations to become a leader in relations with Eastern Europe. However, the ENP was perceived as a substitute for EU foreign policy, based on the 'carrot and stick' mechanism. It did not fulfil the expectations of the neighbouring countries, and was criticized for its unattractiveness and its demands towards EU members. Thus, it was not the focus of basic interests of neighbouring countries [9; 23, p. 204].

In the first half of 2008, the Polish-Swedish initiative to boost European policy towards post-Soviet countries was announced. It was called the «Eastern Partnership», and was thought to be a complementary element for the Northern Dimension and Union for the Mediterranean [15]. The main goals of the Eastern Partnership included:

- a) Creating a free-trade area on the basis of bilateral treaties
- b) Deepening cooperation with partner countries, modernizing their political systems and economies
- c) Deepening cooperation in the field of migrant policy and the European labour market
- d) Proposing new agreements for Eastern Partnership countries, which should lead to an association with the EU [23, p. 208-209]

Poland's authorities, being guided by a demand to improve the country's security by strengthening the neighbouring states (especially Ukraine), considered the mechanisms of European neighbourhood policies as an element of geopolitical rivalry between the EU and Russia. Due to dislike and the lack of mutual confidence in Poland-Russia relations, the ENP and the Eastern Partnership were considered by Polish authorities as strategic tools to be used for geopolitical reasons [10; 17, p. 60-62]. Poland called its Western European partners to be involved in its attempts to democratize Belarus, to support the Euro-Atlantic aspiration of Ukraine, to oppose Russia's geopolitical ambitions, and to ensure energy security for Central European countries. Poland's activities were not without reason: the Eastern Partnership was adopted in May 2009 as a result of fears regarding the political and economic stability of Eastern Europe and the EU caused by the war in Georgia in August 2008, and Russian-Ukrainian gas conflicts.

The period during which the Law and Justice Party was in power and Lech Kaczynski was the president brought with it a conservative policy towards Poland's European partners, sceptical attitudes towards tightening integration (namely, the Treaty of Lisbon) and the worsening of relations with Russia. On one hand, the Polish authorities emphasized the strategic role of the alliance with the United States and its crucial position in Poland's security policy. On the other hand, they called for the EU to become more engaged in security issues, especially in the context of the energy security of Eastern Europe. For example, the «Nord Stream Pipeline» project, that connected Russia with Germany, was

met with irritation and anxiety in Poland as its ideas demonstrated that German partners preferred their own economic interests to European solidarity. Poland's foreign policy was constrained due to the contraries between declared aims of the EU, the practice of its members and the activities of Russian diplomacy. As a result, Poland started to be treated as a country that impedes cooperation between the EU and Russia. This problem was also a relevant factor in political conflict between the ruling party and the opposition in Poland.

Some hopes for a reset in Poland's policy towards the EU and its Eastern European partners emerged when the Civic Platform won a parliamentary election in late 2007. The new prime minister, Donald Tusk, and minister of foreign affairs, Radoslaw Sikorski, declared their ambitions to contribute to reshaping the EU's Eastern policy. Special attention was also given to bilateral relations with Ukraine and Belarus [11; 16, p. 31].

Growing relations between the EU and Russia after 2009 reduced European determination for an association of Eastern European neighbouring countries. This was a result of the economic crisis witnessed by almost all countries, as well as a rebirth of authoritarian tendencies in some post-Soviet countries (including Belarus and Ukraine after Yanukovych came into power in 2010). At that time, Russia had advanced its own integration processes, including a Custom Union, which could unify Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Russia.

Since 2010, the Eastern policy of Poland has started to take into account European mechanisms, referring its own interests and aspirations to the policies of other countries. Poland stopped promoting its idea to unify the whole of Europe within the EU and NATO structures, which would have resulted in an open confrontation with Russia. Contrary to the previous period, there appeared a bitter reflection concerning Poland's achievements in its relations with its eastern partners, which were said to be a «trap of unreasonable expectations», «the ultimate farewell with illusions (and) unfulfilled hopes» [1, p. 75-92]. Foreign policy was accused of having a lack of long-term vision, and observers added that there was a strong need to work out a new formula for relations with Russia, Ukraine and Belarus.

In the last two decades, the hopes of Poland's foreign policy have not come true. Thus, democratization in Eastern Europe has met with significant problems and the EU has not successfully attracted the former Soviet Republic. In general, the past 10 years of Poland's policy towards Ukraine, Belarus and Russia should be evaluated with criticism. This is firstly because the conviction about European solidarity was unjustified, and so was the uniform attitude of EU members in such matters as energy security, democracy in Belarus, prospects for Ukraine's membership in the EU, and Russia's aggressive politics against Ukraine. Members of the EU did not share Polish enthusiasm for supporting the efforts of Eastern European countries in cooperating with the EU (mainly through the Eastern Partnership). Secondly, absolutization of the idea of democratization for Belarus and Ukraine and the geopolitical influence of

Russia in the region has led to a misinterpretation of current political events. Poland did not use the potential of its bilateral relations with Belarus and Ukraine, but rather added empty discussions about Lukashenko's authoritarian regime. This reflected the failures of Poland's diplomacy on a European level, through which Poland was considered to be biased and Russophobic.

Seeking reasons for this situation, Warsaw-based expert Roman Kuźniar concludes that Poland does not have any significant goals and interests in Eastern Europe that could have a good impact on bilateral relations with Ukraine, Belarus and Russia. Poland only has negative goals, based on cold-war bias and fears about Russia and the possibility of an agreement between Western European countries and Russia without Poland [18, p. 185].

### **Summary of relations with Ukraine**

In the past decade of Poland's membership in the EU, Ukraine occupied a special place within Polish foreign policy. This was mainly the result of hopes evoked by the «Orange Revolution» in 2004. The period when the «Orange Team» was in power can be characterized as a time of permanent internal political conflict and, on an international level, Ukraine was still balanced between the EU and Russia, as it tried to develop relations with both partners.

The most important factor is that Ukrainian authorities did not take the advantage, and neither did pro-European euphoria take radical measures for transforming and tightening cooperation with the EU. A large amount of Ukrainian elites were not interested in that. Thus, they would be forced to fight against bureaucracy, clientelism, corruption and informal mechanisms of policy-making. Polish politicians did not see Ukrainian specificity of political culture and the geopolitical situation. Ukrainian multi-vectoral foreign policy, as well as closer relations with Russia when Victor Yanukovych and the Party of Regions were in power in Ukraine, were understood by Polish politicians to be a contradiction to *raison d'Etat*. For some representatives of the Polish political elite, it was hard to understand that Ukrainian national interests could be defined in any other way than Polish practice [19, p. 270].

The most painful factor for Poland's Eastern policy was the problem of strengthening the EU influences in Ukraine. Warsaw encouraged Ukraine to make efforts to associate with the EU, and demanded from Brussels a clear «European road map» of Ukraine [13; 14, p. 230]. When considering the frequency of Polish declarations supporting Ukraine, the bilateral cooperation between both countries was not astonishing.

No significant crucial steps were made for the Polish and Ukrainian energy sectors. Both countries failed to resolve common problems of the diversification of energy sources. The planned pipeline from Brody in Ukraine to Plock in Poland, where a big refinery is located, was not built. No significant decisions were made during the Energy Summits in Cracow and Vilnius.

The spectacular resignation from signing association documents by Ukraine

during the Vilnius Eastern Partnership Summit in November 2013 was a prestigious defeat for Polish diplomacy, but not for German or French [20]. Western European countries were very careful when promising Kiev future membership in the EU. This was evidenced by the many problems that occurred during the negotiation process and demands to respect civic freedom by Ukrainian authorities. Yanukovich's announced resignation from association with the EU confirmed the comments of Poland's minister of internal affairs: that policy towards Ukraine was «pretty but catastrophic».

Polish attempts to include Ukraine in the European zone of influence certainly contributed to the revival of pro-European enthusiasm in Ukrainian society, and pushed people to the streets of many cities during the so-called «Euromaidan». Current conflict in Eastern Ukraine and the de facto war with Russia blurs Ukrainian perspectives for European integration. It is within Polish interest to support Kiev in the process of democratic transformation and modernization. The consolidation of Ukrainian statehood, decentralization, self-government reforms and transparent policy-making processes will have a positive impact on the country, and in the future will facilitate integration with the EU.

### **Summary of relations with Belarus**

For many years, despite having many common interests, Poland has not had a vision for relations with Belarus [7, p. 275-278]. A huge impact on Poland-Belarus relations in the last decade (especially since 1996), has been made by the Polish policy of «critical dialogue» with the authoritarian regime of Alexander Lukashenko. Moral accusations regularly made against Belarus by Warsaw practically destroyed the possibility of renewing full bilateral contacts. This tactic pushed Poland into a dead-end. Thus, the Belarus regime is still an antidemocratic policy. Furthermore, this tactic deprived Poland of the opportunity to influence Belarusian authorities. Apparent evidence of this was the de facto liquidation of the Union of Poles in Belarus by the regime, under the suspicion that the union was supporting the Belarusian democratic opposition. Due to limited bilateral contacts with neighbouring countries, Poland lacked the tools for a proper reaction to this situation.

It is worth noticing that other EU countries do not share Poland's radical attitude towards Belarus. After many years of neglect, in 2009 the Belarusian leader re-entered European politics, paying visits to Italy and the Holy Sea. Bilateral relations developed between Lithuania and Minsk, and Lithuania therefore replaced Poland as the European expert in Belarusian matters and mediator between the EU and the country. This, as well as the Belarusian role in signing the ceasefire in Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts in 2015, shows the potential importance of the country within European politics.

Despite formally joining the Eastern Partnership, Belarus plays a marginal role in this structure. Lukashenko's agreement to participate in the Polish-Swedish initiative, despite Russian geopolitical interests, should make Polish

politicians see that since 2000 Belarus has been trying to shake off Russian patronage. Belarusian-Russian gas conflicts and milk wars makes the Russian factor of guaranteed stability transform into a potential source of crisis for Lukashenko's regime [22, p. 285].

A declaration by the Belarus multi-vectoral foreign policy includes developmental relations with the EU and Poland [5, p. 9-22]. The common interests of Belarus and Poland are in many sectors, including the energy sector, where both countries are facing the same problems. Some of these problems could be resolved through bilateral cooperation with the participation of other countries like Ukraine and Lithuania.

In relation to Belarus, Poland has used almost all available tools and methods, including attempts to dissolve the regime and encourage cooperation with the EU, and introducing sanctions for representatives in Belarusian authority [21, p. 4]. None of the aims of these tools and methods have been reached. Furthermore, Poland has become an object of Belarusian propaganda, its main enemy heated by various accusations [25, p. 213-215]. The main victims of these activities are Polish minorities in Belarus, who suffer the consequences of the disastrous relationship between both countries. Since Lukashenko is still in power, it is hard to work out a new paradigm for Polish policy towards his regime.

## **Conclusion**

After a long period of forcing visions of democratization and Europeanization on its eastern neighbours, Polish diplomacy has begun changing its priorities in the last few years. Almost all efforts that had been made in this field proved fruitless. Poland was not strong enough to force the EU and its Eastern European partners to cooperate in all fields, and it had no coherent action plan that was accepted by all.

In the last decade, Polish policy has led to conflicts with other EU members who have other priorities and interests. Critics of Poland's activity in Eastern Europe could state that Poland pretended to be the only country making rules in the region. Only in last few years, especially after the Ukrainian crisis in 2014-2015, have Polish political elites realized that their influence within the politics of Eastern European countries is limited. Ukraine and Belarus are shaping their own foreign policies and need the support and cooperation of Poland, rather than mentoring, rebukes and complaints about democracy.

There is no doubt that the effectiveness of Poland's policy towards Eastern Europe in the last decade was weakened by ideological conflicts between the ruling party and the opposition. This conflicts reflected mainly on relations with Russia and Ukraine, two countries whose significance and importance within international relations require well-prepared and consistent consequent agendas of bilateral relations. Poland's Eastern policy influenced the perception of Poland in the EU. In this situation, when in many other matters member states

presented various opinions incoherent with Polish policy, attempts to force European partners to make decisions led to unsuccessful activities.

The Eastern Partnership can be a sign of Polish contribution to the development of the EU's Eastern policy. Modest effects when promoting this model for cooperation shows that Poland's membership in the EU has not significantly increased its potential in Eastern policy. Poland's hopes to obtain the status as the European expert of post-Soviet countries, and to be an accelerator of cooperation with this region, turned out to be exaggerated. After a decade of membership in the EU, Poland's Eastern policy is in strong need of reformulation and current achievements within this field need to be reviewed. Dynamically changing situations, serious risks within the system of European security and the aggression that can be witnessed in East Ukraine should be incentives to redefine Poland's policy towards this region.

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## **МЕСТО УКРАИНЫ И БЕЛАРУСИ ВО ВНЕШНЕЙ ПОЛИТИКЕ ПОЛЬШИ. ИТОГИ ДЕСЯТИЛЕТИЯ 2005-2015 ГГ.**

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Данная статья посвящена вопросу восточной политики Польши после вступления в Европейский союз. Внимание сосредоточено на ближайших соседях Польши: Украине и Беларуси. Рассмотрены перемены во внешней политике Польши после расширения ЕС в 2004 году, представлены итоги двусторонних отношений с Украиной и Беларусью и обобщены итоги. Отмечается, что несмотря на отдельные успехи, Польше не удалось реализовать главных целей. Польская дипломатия стоит перед вызовом выработки новой концепции взаимоотношений с восточными соседями.

*Ключевые слова:* внешняя политика Польши, Восточное партнерство, Украина, Беларусь