

Bridges to the East

Poland and the European Foreign Policy by 2020

Jannis Koasidis*

One of the substantial changes on the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) agenda after enlargement was a growing importance of the EU's Eastern neighbours. Poland, since joining the European Union in May 2004, has shown its clear ambitions to actively influence European Foreign Policy. Polish diplomats perceive the CFSP rather as an opportunity than a constraint to the national policy. The article briefly addresses the main issue of special importance for Polish diplomacy within the European framework: the policy towards the Eastern neighbours. The main motives behind it can be listed as the historical experiences, geographical situation and security aspects. This area will most probably remain the focal point of Polish interest till 2020.

New Challenges in a New Geopolitical Situation

Within the European framework, the policy forms part of a European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) – not on the agenda before the enlargement – which has been subject to heavy criticism. It has been argued that it does not sufficiently confront “the ghost of enlargement”, seriously address problems affecting neighbouring states or achieve coherence with relations to them (Smith 2005).

By 2020 Poland, together with its European partners, should have established an effective policy towards their common neighbours. The country's historically tragic geopolitical location can now be turned into Polish advantage in a wider European context (Skubiszewski 2005; Bielecki 2005). In order to achieve this, Ukraine, Belarus and Moldavia should be fully included in a cycle of European values and its civilisation model. But such a situation would not be a success without embedding Russia into the strategic partnership with the EU so that its “divide and rule” policy could be turned into cooperation with the EU as a whole.

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The Broader Lobby

The Polish credo in relation to the Eastern policy of the EU has been: "Let's not close the door behind us". It derives from the concern that a magnet of benefits, stemming from the European integration, is an extremely powerful factor of democratisation and development. Poland needs to create a more powerful lobby for its Eastern policy. An example was set by the actions of Polish diplomacy during the "Orange Revolution" in Ukraine. In the future, Poland should strongly cooperate not only with its usual partners – the Visegrad Group and the Baltic States – but also with Germany and France, the key players in Europe. Another chance to raise the Eastern policy on the CFSP agenda is to closely cooperate with Finland regarding its concept of the so-called "Northern Dimension". Any competition between the two would be counterproductive for European Eastern policy. This fact has been recently acknowledged by Polish decision makers.

It is crucial not to allow Russia to skillfully play on French or German particular interests – often ipso facto giving the country a tool against the vital interests of the majority of new member states. European partnership could also help avoid tensions with Russia, which happened to Poland as a country willing to lead an active Eastern policy and located in such proximity of a specific border, dividing two different systems and styles of politics (Reiter 2005). As stated by the former Polish Foreign Minister Włodzimierz Cimoszewicz, "terminating the European and transatlantic integration processes on the river Bug brings a threat of permanent peripherisation of Eastern Europe, deepening the civilisation delays of this area; whereas, for Poland [this] means remaining for years (...) the frontier state".¹ Last but not least, Europe needs to decide whether it wants democracy and human rights in the "Wider Europe" (also Belarus, Chechnya), or whether it considers a friendship with the Kremlin of higher significance. Creating a CFSP that would be more communitarian and less intergovernmental could make the EU politically strong enough to speak up with one voice towards Russia in this area, instead of being hypocritical in the name of good economical relations.² On the other hand, putting gas and oil trade negotiations on the community level would mean that Russia would no longer be able to put single countries under pressure.

¹ Cimoszewicz, Włodzimierz (2004): Polska w zamęcie świata, in: „Gazeta Wyborcza”, 12.06.2004.

² Kostrzewa-Zorbas, Grzegorz (2004): 11 problemów w stosunkach Polska-Rosja, Warszawa 30.09.2004, <http://www.global.net.pl/15812.xml>.

Honest Policy Means Efficiency

A prospective membership has been, so far, the strongest and most effective tool of European diplomacy. The present difficulties in developing an effective policy towards Ukraine or Belarus, are a result of unsolved dilemma regarding delimiting Europe's future borders. Can the EU influence the internal processes in these states without the promise of accession?

Poland is convinced that the EU should not leave countries, like Ukraine, Moldova or Belarus, alone. They need support in the process of civil society building or launching academic and professional contacts with the EU countries. But on top of that, they need a clear signal from the EU regarding any possibilities of future accession. Also, it is crucial to foster the process of media democratisation in Belarus, support the democratic movements, and isolate regime servants more strictly – the dictatorship will then fall much sooner than 2020. We should not forget that the peaceful transformation in Central and Eastern Europe was so successful because from the very beginning it was anchored in values (Bielecki 2005). The often irrational fears of European societies should not make the EU stop thinking about its future. The EU should not close its door ultimately but show its Eastern neighbours clearly that if they make an effort, they can be awarded. The pro-Western, democratic and pro-market choice of the region's states, including Georgia or Azerbaijan, would be given clear support. Otherwise, we risk putting them definitely into the arms of Russia, now trying to recover its former power.

Overall, Poland is very likely to play a constructive role in the development of the CFSP. Therefore, its activities have to be based on a wider coalition of states, against national particularisms among the EU members and respecting the consensus-building. Only an effective and honest policy towards Europe's Eastern neighbours can help to overcome the division into a "better" – democratic, wealthy and strong – and a "worse" Europe. Poland remembers how many positive changes occurred as a result of such a European perspective. The transformation in Central-Eastern Europe throughout the past 15 years results now in year-by-year savings worth more than the whole EU budget. Hardly ever have there been expenditures spent in a better way. This should be convincing.

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