

THE ROLE OF POLAND IN THE FORMULATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF EU EASTERN POLICY

Summary. This paper seeks to assess the degree to which Poland exercises power and influence in the European Union after 2009. A theoretical framework brings together the approaches for studying the power and influence of a given Member State that were developed by J. Tallberg (2008), and Cosey and Pomorska (2010). Poland's policy towards Eastern Partnership countries is a case study. It concludes that Polish influence changes during 2009-2022 from low to medium.

Key words: Poland, EU Eastern policy, EaP countries.

РОЛЬ ПОЛЬЩІ У ФОРМУЛЮВАННІ ТА РЕАЛІЗАЦІЇ СХІДНОЇ ПОЛІТИКИ ЄС

Анотація. Ця стаття прагне оцінити ступінь влади та впливу Польщі в Європейському Союзі після 2009 року. Теоретична основа об'єднує підходи до вивчення влади та впливу певної держави-члена, розроблені Таллбергом (2008), Консі та Поморською (2010). Кейсом є політика Польщі щодо країн Східного партнерства. Зроблено висновок, що вплив Польщі змінюється протягом 2009-2022 років від низького до середнього.

Ключові слова: Польща, Східна політика ЄС, країни СхП.

Introduction. As the largest of the new Member States, it might reasonably be surmised that much of the pressure for change of European Union eastern policy should come from Poland, which is why it is the focus of this paper.

J. Tallberg (2008) argues that Member States draw power from three different sources, which are as follows: (i) state sources of power (for example, population, economic strength, administrative capacity and the willingness of a state to focus resources on promoting an issue of

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particular importance to it); (ii) institutional sources of power (the power of the veto and the power of the chair); and, (iii) individual sources of power (the personal negotiating skill of a prime minister or president and the length of time that he or she has been sitting on the European Council). To these fixed factors should be added the variable factors that to a greater or lesser extent vary over time and may to a certain extent be influenced by the European policy choices a given Member State makes. The variable factors are as follows. First is the intensity of a Member State's policy preferences. Second, a Member State's skill at alliance-building, both in terms of more 'strategic' co-operation on what the overall direction of the Union should be. Third, the administrative capacity of a Member State is considered. This plays a crucial role, and is perhaps the most important factor, as skilful diplomats, a consistent and unified policy position as well as a clear brief from the national capital are essential for full and productive engagement with the Brussels technocracy. Fourth, the persuasive advocacy of a particular Member State in building a strong case that argues convincingly why a policy is in the Community interest as a whole and not just an attempt to upload national interests to the European agenda. To logic, empirical evidence and skilful advocacy should be added to credibility of the Member State as an advocate, not just in the given policy area, but also in the eyes of its peers as a 'good European'. Fifth, the receptiveness of other Member States to the proposal in question depends principally on their own policy preferences in a given area, and on whether they feel well disposed to the Member State in question. A sixth and final factor that cannot be overlooked is the domestic political strength of a Member State government at a given point in time.² This schema uses as the ground of the proposed research.

Much of the recent academic research on the dynamics between the EU and its Member States has been on the issue of Europeanization (for example, Vink and Graziano, 2007)³. Less attention was paid to the study of the inside-out relationship, the influence of a given Member State on the EU.

² Tallberg J. Bargaining power in the European council. *JCMS*. N 46(3). 2008. p. 685–708.

³ Vink M., Graziano P. (eds.). *Challenges of a new research agenda. Europeanization. New Research Agendas*. Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007.

The article of N. Copey and K. Pomorska “Poland’s power and influence in the European Union: The case of its eastern policy” (2010) was an exclusion from the common rule. This paper aimed to assess the impact of Poland on the EU, looking in particular at its impact on the Union policy agenda. In doing so, it adopted an intergovernmental approach, looking at the capacity of the national government of Poland to exercise power and influence within the EU. This study concentrated on the area of policy-making that arguably was of greatest strategic interest to Poland: relations with the EU’s eastern neighbours. This choice of topic was further justified by the fact that this was seen by the Polish governments as the field where Poland could have the greatest impact. There was a clear ambition on the part of Polish politicians and the wider foreign policy community in Warsaw to be among those who will shape the Union’s eastern policy, not least because of Poland’s historical experiences with its neighbours, which provided them with a more sophisticated knowledge of the region⁴. In the field of relations with its eastern neighbours Poland has a special interest, and to an extent (in the opinion of the Polish government and experts at least) brings a special expertise to the Union in dealing with the new neighbours in the East, particularly Ukraine. Before the article of Copey and Pomorska there were only some think tank papers on the subject of Polish foreign policy, but no detailed academic research has been carried out in the field of Poland’s influence on the EU’s relations with its eastern neighbours since 2004 to 2009. So, their paper aimed to rectify that deficiency in this field, which is of critical importance to understanding the future trajectory of the European integration project as a whole, as it is directly concerned with the answer to the question of what kind of Europe is wanted and touches on the issue of where the EU’s eventual physical borders may lie⁵.

The aim of the proposed article is to assess the degree to which Poland exercises power and influence in the EU after 2009. The case

⁴ Copey N., Pomorska K. Poland’s power and influence in the European Union: The case of its eastern policy. *Comparative European Politics*. N 8. 2010. p. 305.

⁵ Copey N., Pomorska K. Poland’s power and influence in the European Union: The case of its eastern policy. *Comparative European Politics*. N 8. 2010. p. 306.

study chosen is that of Poland's policy towards EaP countries. Methods of collecting data in media and secondary sources, Internet research, and discourse analysis were used.

The intensity of Poland's policy preferences. After 2004 it was Poland that with varying intensity has been at the centre of the EU's Eastern policy and as the largest Central European country it had influence. According to the assumption proposed by all Polish governments, raising the security of Central and Eastern European countries and the growth of their subjectivity in the long run contributed to the strengthening of the subjectivity of Poland.

In December of 2008 the Eastern Partnership (EaP) was approved by the European Commission. A report on foreign policy, represented by the Minister of Foreign Affairs R. Sikorski in the Sejm in 2009 confirms that Poland has not abandoned the pursuit of EU enlargement to the East. Poland's success can be attributed to a new government being formed by Civic Platform (Polish "Platforma Obywatelska") which was instinctively more pro-European than its predecessor. President Komorowski in October 2010 noted that the EU should not stop the enlargement process and close to Ukraine the European integration prospects⁶.

According K. Longhurst and M. Zaborowski, "in the context of Poland's membership of the EU the Jagiellonian idea can be viewed as being most in evidence in relation to Poland's contribution to the EU's Eastern Partnership. Poland (along with Sweden) played a leading role in formulating the EaP. In many ways the Partnership built upon Poland's existing policy of engagement with the neighbouring states in Eastern Europe. From the vantage point of many European states, Poland is naturally equipped to play some of form of leadership role in Eastern Europe"⁷. A. Adamczyk also stressed, that Poland, as the largest border country in the Eastern part of the EU, should naturally become the representative of EU's eastern policy⁸.

⁶ Informacja ministra spraw zagranicznych w 2009 r., typescript of the 35th sitting of the 6th Sejm of the Republic of Poland / Sejm of the Republic of Poland, 2009. URL: <http://www.sejm.gov.pl>.

⁷ Longhurst K., Zaborowski M. *The New Atlanticist. Poland's Foreign and Security Policy Priorities*. Oxford, 2007. p. 58.

⁸ Adamczyk A. *The Role of Poland in the Creation Process of the Eastern Partnership* / Centrum Europejskie Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego. URL: http://www.ce.uw.edu.pl/pliki/pw/y13_adamczyk.pdf.

So, the importance of the issue for Poland is very high. This is for several reasons, related to the tradition of foreign policy-making, geopolitical location, security perception and economic interests.

Skill at building alliances. Poland is actively involved in various activities, aimed to develop the EU's Eastern policy. Warsaw collaborates closely with other Visegrad countries (Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary) to strengthen the eastern dimension of the European Neighbourhood Policy. These problems often became the subject of much consultation with the Baltic countries. Poland aims to revise and improvement the ENP that it will takes into account the expectations of the Eastern European countries as well as to convince the "old" EU members to develop closer relationships with the latter.

Idea that 6 countries – Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova, Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia – are not neighbours but part of Europe was in the core of the creation of EaP. The EaP initiative itself was proposed in the summer of 2008 by Poland and Sweden. Poland focused on campaigning for support the EaP initiative in the EU structures and Member States. Poland was successful in persuading other Member States of the desirability of a more coherent EU-policy towards the East. Polish politicians and government officials held intensive consultations with the European Commission aimed at incorporating proposals contained in the project of the EaP, the European Commission's forthcoming Communication on this issue. Poland also sought to create a "front" of countries that would support EaP. November 24, 2008 in Warsaw, a meeting of the Visegrad Group took place where Bulgaria, Lithuania, Latvia, Romania, and Sweden also participated. The participants were in favour of the EU to offer its Eastern neighbours new forms of cooperation within the EaP in order to help them get closer to EU norms and standards, to create a free trade zone and start the process to facilitate the movement of citizens, which in the long term will abolish the visa regime⁹. Poland also conducted intensive consultation with Germany, France, The United Kingdom and other Member States at different levels. But for some Western European countries Poland looks as a problem in

⁹ Joint Statement of the Foreign Ministers of the Visegrad Group Countries and of Bulgaria, Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia, Romania and Sweden. Warsaw, 24 November 2008. URL: <http://www.visegradgroup.eu>.

The formation and peculiarities of the implementation of the European Union's Eastern policy

relations with Russia, while for others it is not a very significant player in European politics.

EaP was a big success for Poland, but rather rare example when its ideas were adopted thanks to the support of other EU newcomer countries. As for such countries as France and Germany, for them it was a forced measure and in subsequent years they hampered the activity of the program.

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 made their first attempts at encouraging other states to strengthen their relations with the Eastern neighbours at the Budapest summit. They expected that they would be able to convince in particular the countries of the Visegrad Group to strengthen the eastern direction of the EU policy. Notwithstanding the hopes for Polish Presidency, almost all experts and politicians admit a complete Polish defeat in the sphere of EaP¹⁰. European Commissioner for Budget J. Lewandowski states that the EU Eastern Partnership Summit, which took place in September 2011 in Warsaw, could not bring results. "Eastern dimension of the Polish Presidency in the EU has been important but turned out to be a big political defeat", said K. Szczerski, politician of opposition party "Law and Justice". He added that in the case of the Association Agreement between Ukraine and the EU had to step progression and regression occurred. Another opposition politician K. Szymanski pointed out that Warsaw allowed imposing itself French and German position in eastern affairs, which are reluctant to deepen political and economic relations between the EU and EaP countries¹¹.

Therefore Poland's skill at building alliances is still should be named low. There are several reasons for this; however, the most significant factor is what could be classed as serious damage done to the Polish-German relationship under the Law and Justice-led coalitions.

Administrative capacity. Given that the EU is first and foremost a technocracy, the ability of a Member State's civil service to co-ordinate

¹⁰ Савицький Ю. Польща підсумовує півріччя головування в ЄС / Радіо Свобода, 2009. URL: <http://www.radiosvoboda.org/content/article/24434202.html>.

¹¹ Що принесло Україні головування Польщі в ЄС. URL: <http://galinfo.com.ua/news/101317.html>.

European policy among line ministries is of vital importance, as is the quality of the diplomatic service that is tasked with negotiations in Brussels. It took 3 or 4 years of membership for Poland to achieve what was described as the necessary ‘maturity’ in the EU to begin to even think about how to exercise influence over the other Member States. One of the reasons was high rotation of the officials involved in the coordination of the European policy of Poland, as many left or were dismissed after the elections or were employed by the European institutions. But situation improved from 2008 when Office of the Committee of European Integration was created. Plus the role of the Polish MFA (from whose personnel many of the staff at the Polish Permanent Representation in Brussels is drawn) slowly changed after the recruitment of younger staff to the Department of the EU, but in turn led to the emergence of a severe “generation gap” within the ministry. Another problem is the difficulty of recruiting outstanding graduates to the Polish civil service in general and to the MFA in particular. Starting salaries in 2009 were around 40 per cent of those in the private sector, and unemployment was no longer high enough for the job security offered by the bureaucracy to have much appeal.

The weakness of the administrative capacity of the Polish state is visible when we understand that only in March 2012 Polish government adopted the first multiannual foreign policy strategy since 1989 – “The Priorities of Polish Foreign Policy 2012–2016”. The strengthening of influence on Polish eastern policy and European eastern neighbourhood was one of the main objectives of this document. Here was also mentioned that Poland should support the liberalization of visa regime and creation of free trade areas with Eastern European states. Developing relations with Ukraine, as a strategic partner, has a great importance for Warsaw¹².

According Ch. Reeves, in the case of Ukraine “this resulted in the Russian seizure of the Crimean Peninsula and an uprising in two

¹² Priorytety Polskiej Polityki Zagranicznej 2012-2016 / Ministerstwo Spraw Zagranicznych, Rzeczpospolita Polska. URL: http://www.msz.gov.pl/pl/polityka_zagraniczna/priorytety_polityki_zagr_2012_2016/.

eastern provinces”¹³. But T. Rostoks wrote that “it would be wrong to blame the EaP policy for the current crisis in Ukraine, but it is clear that Russia’s perceptions of this policy have changed over the past 10 years. At the time of the ENP’s inception, Russia’s attitude towards this policy could be characterized as benign neglect, but the attitude changed later when it became clear that EaP countries would actually have to choose between closer ties with the EU and with Russia. Unfortunately, the perception in Russia was that the EaP was presenting countries in Eastern Europe with strategic choices which do not go in Russia’s favour. Presented with a real possibility of losing Ukraine, Russia chose to keep as much as possible of the country and weaken the remaining part of it”¹⁴.

During the Euromaidan revolution in 2014 the Polish government was heavily engaged in Ukrainian affairs. On this occasion, it was R. Sikorski who played a prominent role, as he was a member of a triumvirate composed of the French, German and Polish foreign ministers. In their handling of the crisis in Ukraine, one can discern both the minimalist and romantic elements in Poland’s approach to the East. On the one hand, the Polish government clearly came out in support of Ukraine’s anti-government protesters; on the other, Sikorski cautioned opposition leaders not to overplay their hand, and urged them reach a compromise with President Yanukovich. So, Poland has supported the government of the new Ukrainian president, P. Poroshenko¹⁵.

In the case of Belarus Polish governments have attempted to assume the role of an honest broker between Belarus and the EU; and there has been a desire on the part of Warsaw to strengthen trading relations between the two states. A complicating factor is that Belarus is generally viewed as being Europe’s last dictatorship, under the leadership of A. Lukashenko. Moreover, the external policies of Belarus have tended to be oriented towards Russia, to the extent that it is widely regarded as being a Russian satellite. For these reasons, the Jagiellonian civilizing mission – which in contemporary

¹³ Reeves Ch. The Jagiellonian idea and Poland’s Eastern Policy: Historical echoes in today’s approach. *Politeja*. N 6(51). 2017.

¹⁴ Rostoks T. Geopolitical Transformations and the EU Eastern Partnership Policy. *Eastern Partnership: On the Way to the Riga Summit*. N 1. 2015. p. 17–26.

¹⁵ Reeves Ch. The Jagiellonian idea and Poland’s Eastern Policy: Historical echoes in today’s approach. *Politeja*. N 6(51). 2017.

terms means democracy promotion and economic liberalisation – has not been well received in Minsk. In 2010 accusations were made that the Polish government was supporting the government's opponents¹⁶.

To conclude, the administrative capacity of the Polish state is still controversial but rather changes from low to medium.

Persuasive advocacy. Before 2014 Poland was not able to convince its partners that its policy on Russia or Ukraine truly represented the Community interest and not a narrow Polish national agenda, so, its persuasive advocacy was low. In other words, it appeared that Poland was simply trying to upload its national policy preference onto the EU agenda without sufficient modification.

But after Russian occupation of Crimea and Donbas crisis the situation starts to change slowly. The persuasive advocacy of the Polish state changes from low to medium during 2014–2022 and has possibility to be even higher after the beginning of the Russian war against Ukraine in 2022. Polish diplomats have successfully 'played the Brussels game' and employed the rhetorical device of the European discourse.

Receptiveness of other Member States. Receptiveness of other Member States is low. Polish attempts to build more active politics in the region met with resistance of other Member States because the objective circumstances – a lack of instruments for EU activities in conflict resolution. The EU has not played the role of mediator in any of the conflicts in the EaP countries. Concerning the Nagorno-Karabakh and Donbas conflicts, the EU preferred the role of an observer rather than an active player. It can be argued that some of the countries, Azerbaijan, and Ukraine, are the ones challenging Russia's order and its dominance in the region. Azerbaijan does it by unfreezing the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and regaining part of its territory, and Ukraine – by a significant pro-Western turn in its policy.

Before 2022 the EU focused on economic, social, and expert support despite the all efforts of Poland to change the agenda. For years, the EU has paid little attention to conflict resolution in its immediate neighbourhood, because some MS feared Russia's reaction and accepted its special

¹⁶ Reeves Ch. The Jagiellonian idea and Poland's Eastern Policy: Historical echoes in today's approach. *Politeja*. N 6(51). 2017.

position as a guarantor of peace in the region. This was conditioned by several challenges faced by the EU, the lack of a common position on the issue of the EaP countries and Russia itself within the MS, as well as the strengthening of Moscow's assertiveness¹⁷.

Since 2009 this region has become an arena of acute geopolitical rivalry between the global power which is Russia and Poland which aspires to the rank of a regional power. As J. Mieroszewski wrote, the aim of competition in this area is to gain an advantage, not good neighbourly relations between Poland and Russia. For both countries the "acquisition" of the territories of Ukraine or Belarus was a strategic challenge. Therefore, the decisive external factor influencing the shape of Poland's Eastern policy was the policy of the Russian Federation that aimed at destabilizing the integration process of Eastern European states. It also had a significant impact on the logic of reasoning of contemporary international relations. It was also a reference to the doctrine of J. Giedroyc which combined Polish-Russian relations with independence and the right to self-determination of countries such as Ukraine and Belarus and international security of Poland. However, excessive concentration on the Russian Federation and attempts to defend Ukraine, Belarus and other post-Soviet states against Russian policy provoked accusations from the old EU member states that "Polish governments wrongly assumed that the countries of Eastern Europe want to integrate with the EU and the North Atlantic Alliance, regardless of the costs they will bear"¹⁸.

For the period after 2009 the negative influence of the European media (albeit partly justified) played a key role towards receptiveness of other Member States. Some of the criticism levelled against the PiS government in the European media was deserved; the way in which the Polish government came under constant attack over a sustained period of time could be seen as indicative of the fact that not all the media coverage was unbiased.

¹⁷ Legucka A., Włodkowska A. The Eastern Partnership as a Contested Neighbourhood. *Studia Europejskie – Studies in European Affairs*, N 4. 2021 p. 47–48.

¹⁸ Chojan A. From strategy to improvisation – Poland's eastern policy in 2016–2018. *Yearbook of the Institute of East-Central Europe*. Vol. 16, N 4. 2018. p. 108–110.

But in Revolution of Dignity 2013 and especially in 2022 we can see that Poland was not along but in close contact with Baltic countries. Today this “quartet” is quite successful. However, Poland often found itself directly opposed to the policy preferences of other key Member States on policy towards the eastern neighbours: notably Germany and France and this problem needs to be more in focus of Warsaw.

Domestic political strength. In 2009 the absence of any mention of the possibility of enlargement to the East in the EaP project has caused some reservations among some Polish political forces. For example, the largest opposition political party “Law and Justice” called the project insufficiently ambitious¹⁹. The outbreaks of inactivity in Polish Eastern policy were already visible in the electoral program of 2014, and later in 2015–2021. After 2015 the decrease in the intensity of undertaken activities is very visible. It is, therefore, not entirely consistent with the vision of development of Central and Eastern European region proposed by the United Right Wing Club as well as from the perspective of membership in the EU. Eastern European region proposed by the United Right Wing Club as well as from the perspective of membership in the EU. As K. Pełczyńska-Nałęcz writes, “the Polish authorities do not seem to care about the consequences of their passivity at the European level. Meanwhile, Poland’s withdrawal from the active shaping of Eastern policy causes a weakening of the lobby of the EU foreign policy acting in favour of this direction”.

The gap that left after Poland had to be quickly filled which made the significance of Germany in this area even more important. In a situation where there are no effective players in the EU’s Eastern policy, the policy itself becomes either weaker or compliant with the German vision. This, in turn, fits the assumptions of Russian foreign policy which does not treat the EU as a single and cohesive subject, but as a set of countries and chooses several partners to cooperate with. It is much easier to talk to the authorities in Berlin about much more reliable relations than to 27 EU countries when at least few of them (Poland, the Baltic States) take a confrontational attitude towards Russian politics²⁰.

¹⁹ Non-paper z polskimi propozycjami w sprawie przyszłego kształtu polityki rozszerzonej EU wobec nowych wschodnich sąsiadów. *Polityka rozszerzonej Unii Europejskiej wobec nowych sąsiadów*. Warsaw : Fundacja im. Stefana Batorego, 2003. P. 93–107.

²⁰ Chojan A. From strategy to improvisation – Poland’s eastern policy in 2016–2018. *Yearbook of the Institute of East-Central Europe*. Vol. 16, N 4. 2018. p. 116.

Till 2022 Poland's capacity to fulfil the "civilizing" aspect of its mission towards the East has weakened. This is mainly due to several actions that the current government, led by PiS, have taken regarding its reforms of the judiciary and a growing perception in Europe and beyond that the government is curtailing press freedom. This has resulted in Poland's reputation as being an upholder of democratic values and the rule of law being eroded in the eyes of many European states. One consequence of this is that the European Commission has threatened to activate Article 7 of the European Union Treaty, which could lead to drastic cuts in EU funding to Poland. Given that many outsiders believe that Poland's democratic institutions are in a somewhat fragile state, it seems likely that many outsiders will not view Poland as an entity which is endowed with the resources to effect democratic change in Eastern Europe²¹.

As mentioned above, the policy area is one of broad consensus among all political parties, and the aims of Poland's eastern policy are fairly cohesive and clear. The score on this criterion is only medium as opposed to high because of the way that none of the governments of Poland between 2010 and 2022 has been able to count on the support of the opposition for their European policy. The situation is changing only after February 2022.

Conclusions. 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 re-establish itself firmly 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.

The influence of Poland and the other new Member States will increase over time, but before 2022 Poland remained on the fringe

²¹ Reeves Ch. The Jagiellonian idea and Poland's Eastern Policy: Historical echoes in today's approach. *Politeja*. N 6(51). 2017.

when it comes to setting the EU agenda and achieving their desired outcomes in EU negotiations. To sum up, in 2011–2022 the intensity of the European Union's engagement in the EaP countries has weakened compared to the 1990s and the first decade of the 21st century. The EU was ill-prepared to deal with Russia's reaction to this supposedly low-key policy. Among the causes of this result was the lack of activity from Polish side during 2015–2021. Over the post-Cold War period Poland has never been so weakly present in Eastern Europe. However, we should not assume that the authorities in Warsaw give up on the Eastern policy and new stage of activities starts from February 2022. Success of Ukrainian politics of Warsaw will mean success of its eastern and wider European politics.

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The formation and peculiarities of the implementation
of the European Union's Eastern policy

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