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THE “EASTERN PARTNERSHIP” PROJECT: DOES POLAND’S VOICE STILL MATTER?

Ivanna MACHITIDZE*

Abstract: *When in the year 2009 Radoslaw Sikorski and Carl Bildt, architects of the Eastern Partnership project, launched the ambitious scheme of bringing the six post-Soviet countries closer to the EU, they could hardly predict that in nearly five years the tremendous diplomatic, political efforts to design an effective soft power approach would find itself on the verge of failure. In this relation, Poland’s role in bringing the EaP countries under the umbrella of the project long before becoming the EU member, however, most productively since joining the organization, could not be underestimated. Despite a complicated historical legacy with some of the EaP members, namely, Ukraine, Belarus and Moldova, Poland together with the Baltic countries turned out to be a vocal proponent of bringing the former ones under the initiative, aiming to empower them with the leverage against Russia’s successful efforts to destabilize the region and preserve domination in its immediate neighbourhood. Nevertheless, taking into account the changes in Poland’s political climate, namely, victory of the Law and Justice Party in both presidential and parliamentary elections of 2015 as well as its pessimist stance towards effectiveness of the Eastern Partnership project, the question arises whether Poland’s voice still matters in the future of the EaP and whether it sees itself as the moving force of the project.*

Keywords: Eastern Partnership; strategy of marginality

JEL Classification: N4, N44

Introduction

Despite being addressed as the irrational one, Vladimir Putin’s foreign policy strategy turned out to stick to the least desired for the EU but definitely not the least expected (Motyl, 2014). The events of the Russian - Georgian August War of 2008 and a sophisticated strategy of introducing the “fifth column” into Ukraine’s politics under Viktor Yanukovych’s presidency reaffirmed the central role of keeping the former Soviet Union members under the close eye of the Russian Federation. Taking into account the disproportionately ambitious objectives in comparison to its limited capabilities, Russia managed to make use of indecisiveness of the newly created states’ political elites, especially their highly corrupted nature, through creating areas of instability in most of them. As a result, claims for the undisputed dominance in the post-Soviet space have been reconfirmed in the year 2013 in the boldest manner since the collapse of the USSR. Eventually, turbulence, marking

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the EU politics throughout the last two years and its unwillingness to spoil relations with its “Big Neighbour”, has made questionable the whole rationale of the Eastern Partnership project.

Notwithstanding complicated historical legacy with such countries of the EaP as Ukraine and Belarus, Poland is perceived to be the initiative’s most staunch supporter among the European Union member states. Since the collapse of the Communist bloc, Poland played central role in the successful outcome of the Visegrad group project and was promoting, however less successfully in terms of any tangible achievements, various Baltic-Black Sea cooperation initiatives (Agh, 1999). Hence, Poland’s active involvement into facilitating Central and Eastern European countries’ integration with the European Union could be hardly disputed. Simultaneously, the countries that joined EU through the same enlargement wave in 2004, as well as Romania and Bulgaria in 2007, have not demonstrated similar enthusiasm of assisting its neighbours to the East in overcoming considerable challenges while coming to terms with the demanding standards of the EU.

The vivid illustration for Poland’s missionary vision of assisting its counterparts to the East became the idea of the Eastern Partnership which was pushed through the institutions of the EU by its two optimists, Carl Bildt and Radoslaw Sikorski. Presently, almost 7 years after, Poland is by far the most staunch promoter and defender of the EaP countries’s pro-European intentions, despite the criticism of the scope of Association Agreements and success of the project as a whole. It seems that Poland could have been also assigned negotiator’s role in the Minsk negotiations aimed at resolving the crisis in Ukraine, as it was done during the Orange Revolution’s Round table negotiations. Nevertheless, former PM Donald Tusk, is presiding over the European Council and Radoslaw Sikorski, the former Minister of Foreign Affairs, is still regarded a high profile political figure, enjoying influence in Europe’s political circles.

Taking all things mentioned above into consideration, the goal of the paper is to evaluate Poland’s significance for the Eastern Partnership project since its introduction in 2009, determine the origins of Poland’s commitment to supporting the Eastward enlargement and, finally, assess the stance of its current government to the EaP project. The article is divided into the following sections: first of all, I will present the account of the core events leading to the current state of the Eastern Partnership. Secondly, I will discuss the statehood approaches with the view to uncover Poland’s devotion to initiate the project. Thirdly, key transformations will be highlighted in Poland’s attitude towards the EaP since 2009 till now.

1. Poland’s Role in the Eastern Partnership: the Background of the Project

Even before joining the EU in 2004, Poland was already looking forward to promoting the integration projects that could involve the countries of the Eastern Europe such as the non-paper issued in 2003 by the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs (EEAS, 2016). The document was aimed at facilitating multilateral cooperation with the EU between the countries of the post-Soviet Union, namely, Ukraine, Moldova and to a lesser extent, Belarus. After the initial intention of following the “two track” policy with the objective to achieve stable relations with the newly established states as well as Moscow as the center of the former USSR, in the year 1994 Poland passed on to implementing the different task, namely, paying closer attention to such countries as Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova and the Baltic States. Only the latter eventually joined the EU in its unprecedented enlargement wave of 2004.

Upon launching the European Neighbourhood Policy in 2004, Poland’s Foreign Relations Ministry immediately started to cement the future coalition for pushing the project of Eastern Europe’s integration to the EU, as for example, lobbying the political elites of the Visegrad countries (Tyschenko, 2014). Furthermore, Poland’s intention was to narrow down the focus of the European Neighbourhood Policy due to a diverse nature of its participants ranging from Africa and Middle East to Ukraine and Azerbaijan. In this regard, the most effective strategy would have been a different project based on solely Eastern direction, which the EaP turned into since the year 2009. The ambiguous attitude towards Poland’s intentions, according to Copsey’s and Pomorska’s research, were not admitted seriously from the very beginning due to the fact that Poland itself was not the member of the organization and was not yet acquainted with the specifics of the decision-making process inside the EU (Copsey *et al.*, 2014).

Later, having become the full-pledged member of the organization, Poland became convinced that such an ambitious project, aiming to facilitate the development of the Eastern direction only, would be too demanding for the old members of the EU, especially France and Germany, which did not experience the same sentiment towards newly created states as Poland did. Eventually, as the specifics of the decision-making process in the EU demonstrated, achieving the same objective gradually, through small, consecutive steps, would guarantee eventual success of the project in the long-term perspective (Bil *et al.*, 2008). The designation of what will be known as the Eastern partnership would be giving the countries, who demonstrate the will as well as the results of implementing the European standards, the perspective of the EU membership. According to this approach, the former Soviet countries would be preserved from sliding into authoritarianism and

closer integration with undemocratic Russia through a thoroughly built strategy of attracting them to the EU integration project. As it becomes evident later, the Russian Federation will manage to convince Belarus and Kazakhstan to join it in creating the Eurasian Customs Union in 2010.

Having taking into account previous experience, another proposal on rethinking the role of the Eastern Direction project was prepared in the year 2006 by Poland's Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Its peculiar feature was simultaneous recognition of Ukraine's leading role in any integration project with the EU, emphasizing the need to enhance visa liberalisation process with the latter. Despite its great significance, Ukraine was not the only issue on the agenda of the proposal - the document also called upon the European Union member countries to take initiative in resolving the conflicts in Caucasus and Transnistria (Copsey *et al.*, 2014, pp. 425-426). To sum up, the two documents reviewed above, laid ground for Poland's further actions in promoting the final version of the Eastern Partnership. It should be mentioned that the countries of the Caucasus were never abandoned from the similar initiatives, recognising the crucial necessity to cement the democratization process in the post- Soviet space.

The final move in designing the Eastern Partnership Project was implemented through issuing the non-paper in the year 2008. The result was approval of the proposal by the Council and recommendation for the Commission to further elaborate on its development. This was done in collaboration with Sweden. However, according to the evidence of Copsey's and Pomorska's research, the similar proposal advocated by France on the Mediterranean direction, was approved in a much more detailed shape than the Polish-Swedish one (Copsey *et al.*, 2014).

The core objective of the Eastern Partnership was to bring six countries of the post-Soviet bloc closer to the European Union by offering perspectives of access to the market of the EU member states through the DCFTA, as well as financial support for major reforms aimed at transformation into fully-fledged democracies together with the visa-free travel regime. However, the project to advance the political association and economic integration itself fall short from offering its participants any viable perspectives of joining the organization in the nearest perspective which caused a lot of criticism (Klatt, 2011, p. 8) Despite the official position by the EU authorities on the fact that the EaP would not harm bilateral relations of each of the states with Russia, the latter immediately moved towards pursuing aggressive policies aimed at pushing the countries of the Partnership to refuse from participating in the project. The Euromaidan events and refusal of President Yanukovich to sign the Association Agreement at the Vilnius Summit in November 2013 turned into what became known as the Revolution of Dignity, with Ukraine losing control over the largest part of the Donbas region and annexation of Crimea (Spiegel, 2014). According to Thomas de Waal, "the

EU cast the partnership as a bureaucratic and economic project, without sufficiently mapping out the politics to prepare for certain contingencies” (Park, 2014). Final results of the Eastern Partnership and the influence it exercises at Ukraine in particular are yet to be seen, and in this respect, a lot depends on the ability of the states actively involved in the Eastern Partnership to demonstrate their political will to carry out necessary reforms.

Visibly enough, the countries of the European Union are increasingly divided in terms of their support for Ukraine’s and other states’ integration perspectives with the EU. While the “Old Members” of the EU assign the foremost priority to stable and balanced relations with Russia, the countries of the Eastern and Central Europe, and specifically those of the Visegrad Group, are supportive of Ukraine with Poland at the forefront (Klatt, 2011). It should be also taken into account that the Eastern Partnership is only the part of wider ENP policy including its Southern direction. The countries like Spain, Italy and Greece are especially supportive of assigning a higher emphasis to the African countries. This argument became especially relevant in the light of the EU refugee crisis. Another competing project for the Eastern Partnership is the Black Sea Synergy (since 2007) which unites the countries of the Black Sea as Bulgaria, Romania, Cyprus, Turkey, Russia, Greece, Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan. Taking into account a high level of competition for the EaP project in general, Poland is considered to be a key actor in making this initiative relevant, especially in the light of criticism on the lack of funds that EaP can offer to the participants.

2. Theoretical Framework

The pattern of relations built by Poland since its independence represents a complicated intersection of the different legacies and state formations it was part of. In a very general approach, the current historical memory of Poland represents mosaics of imperial domination of the Rzeczpospolita with consecutive dependence on the Russian Empire as well as USSR in combination with ideas about Poland’s missionary role in facilitating the development of the countries of its immediate neighbourhood. With the view to shed light at the moving forces for Poland’s “Ostpolitik”, analysis of the visions of nationhood by two core personalities in its history, namely, Josef Pilsudski and Roman Dmowski, would be help to elaborate on strategies undertaken by the post-Communist Poland. Pilsudski was supporting expansion of Poland to the borders of Rzeczpospolita, including Lithuanian, Belorussian as well as Ukrainian territories. He also was inspired by the idea of the Federation of the Eastern European peoples in the area from the Adriatic to the Black Sea in the South and Baltic Sea in the North (Mieroszewski, 1973). This state formation was called upon preserving

those territories from Russia's and Germany's influence which was known as the "Jagellonian concept" of the Polish state. Indeed, since its independence, Poland has been acting from the position of common history of statehood certainly feeling the responsibility to assist the "younger brothers" lagging behind, namely, the western territories of Ukraine and Belarus, which were the constituent parts of the kingdom before its partition by Russia, Prussia and Austro-Hungary.

Along with the "Jagellonian" concept, another competing approach to the Polish statehood was a so-called "Piast" concept which main ideologist and author was Roman Dmowski. The politician and Minister of Foreign Affairs during 1923 was highly critical of Rzeczpospolita and its legacy. Instead, he was emphasizing the German threat for the future of Poland and in perspective Eastern Europe's other independent states. The thinker was emphasizing the fact that because the East European states were not ready for statehood yet, Poland's "Ostpolitik" was still less relevant in comparison to building partner relations with Russia (Noskov, 2012).

In addition, memories of the partitions Poland experienced throughout the Second World War, when Germany and the Soviet Union divided its territory based on the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact of 1939, left a deep trauma for the Polish people making them feeling responsible for sharing their experience of statehood with Eastern Europe. Six years after, with the victory of the Allied Powers, Poland inherited some of the German Lands that became part of its territory as well as a "liberated country" under the Soviet sphere of influence. In this relation, if other European countries could underestimate the potential of Russia to obstruct Ukraine's move westward through such old-fashioned moves as annexing certain parts of territory, it was not Poland that ignored Russia's revisionist stance.

In line with Pilsudski's views on the advantages of the federalized political system judging from the conviction that Poland manages to fully restore its independence and return the previous influence in Europe's international affairs, in 1960-s, Paris-based political-literary journal in exile "Kultura"s leading figure, Jerzy Giedroyc together with another high-profile journalist, Juliusz Mieroszewski, were advocating an opportunity to reconcile with Russia under the condition that it abandons its ambitions of dominance in the Eastern and Central Europe and recognizes the priority of the Western-type standards of core values and human rights (Snyder, 2012). Future events, especially those after the collapse of the Soviet Union, would prove the overestimation of Russia's ability and, first of all, its will to transform itself into a member of the civilized part of the Western world.

In comparison to the Jagellonian and Piast approaches, the Giedroyc-Mieroszewski's paradigm assigned much higher importance to the region called "ULB", namely Ukraine, Belarus, Lithuania area, recognizing the necessity to reject the claims for the territorial control over these lands and give

them a chance to enjoy the privileges of using the right for national self-determination and independence in the framework of the newly created states. It should be mentioned that after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Poland adhered to the latter approach, combining at the same time the most prominent features of the Jagellonian doctrine and Giedroyc’s updated version of it. Juliusz Mieroszewski was critically disposed to a narrow alternative of the Polish or Soviet dominance. The same criticism was expressed on behalf of the Head of the Institute of the Eastern European Studies of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine, Jaroslaw Pelenski (Bovdunov, 2016).

In line with reviewed concepts of the Polish statehood, criticism of the Civic Platform leaders, especially former Prime Minister Donald Tusk, by Jaroslaw Kaczynski was precisely the former’s intention to improve relations with Germany and Russia. The country in the core of the EU, Germany, sees its relations with Russia as strategic one, however, is also interested in stabilizing the Eastern border for the EU. Especially in the light of Russia’s aggressive actions in the East of Ukraine, the position of European states, including Germany, seems to be directed at achieving the solution that comforts Europe through the vision of “democratic elections” carried out in the Occupied Territories, pressuring Ukraine to accept the solution even without any guarantees that the separatist troops are fully withdrawn (Getmanchuk, 2015). The current mood of adaptation to the new realities became visible at the Riga Summit of 2015 where the core discussions were turning around the Ukraine issue which makes it sometimes seems as Ukraine-EU summit with participation of witnesses.

Apart from the above-mentioned concepts of Poland’s statehood and its foreign policy, another explanation providing the theoretical framework for Poland’s enthusiasm for the EaP is the *strategy of marginality*. Makarychev utilizes the case of Finland as well as Sweden as the countries that extended the Northern dimension of the EU integration project to Russia. Furthermore, both countries proved themselves as the supporters of the idea of Eastern Partnership together with Poland (Makarychev, 2004). The core proposition of the marginality theory is that the countries on the orbit (edge) are able to use their location on the intersection between one project and another one with the view to bring the “outsiders” closer to understanding of the benefits of joining the undertaking. Importantly enough, Poland does fit the case as this country does not put forward other foreign policy objectives outside of the West or suggesting any viable alternative to being part of the West, however, at the same time Poland is the country that shares with Ukraine the painful memories of the Communist past, albeit not inside the Soviet Union. Taking all factors mentioned above into consideration, Poland perfectly fits into the theory. Here, the division between the “hard” and “soft” regionalism is necessary to be drawn with the hard regionalism stemming from the top-down, state-centred approach and soft regionalism allows for the grassroots to be in the core of activity. Poland

stands out as the country that is able to benefit from being located on the intersection of a few regions, namely, the Western, Central and Eastern Europe as well as having access and sharing the Baltic Area.

3. The “Two Track” Policy as the Pretext for the Eastern Partnership Project

Based on the ideas of Giedroyc and Mieroszewski, the Polish foreign policy in the East was far more sophisticated than an ordinary balance of powers approach. From proclaiming its own independence till a complete demise of the communist bloc, Poland was pursuing a thoroughly weighted combination of maintaining relations with the Soviet Union and separately with the Soviet republics, especially, Ukraine, Belarus, Lithuania and Russia. Secondly, foreign policy strategy towards the above-mentioned countries was founded on Poland’s successful case of resolving the “borders issue” with Germany after the latter became unified (Snyder, 2012, p. 291).

Krzysztof Skubiszewski, Poland’s Minister for Foreign Affairs in 1989-1993, was the architect of the foreign affairs realm in the transition period, taking as a guidance Giedroyc’s and Mieroszewski’s vision, namely, belief that creation of the Polish state and not the unification of the Polish nation on the expense of territorial integrity of its neighbor countries must be regarded of the highest value. The minister preferred utilizing state interest in counterweight to the national interest. Skubiszewski’s significant contribution to the “Eastern Program” by “Kultura” was giving priority to the European institutions and the European idea which was not present in Giedroyc’s and Mieroszewski’s thinking (Pomorska, 2014). Another important difference was his belief in practical importance of the international law which was regarded as the guarantee for peaceful resolution of possible conflicts based on the national grounds inherited from the past.

The third dimension for Skubiszewski’s foreign policy before the dissolution of the Communist bloc was relations with the opposition groups to the Communist party inside of each Soviet republics. In this regard, arranging contacts with dissidents were of special importance. In case of Ukraine, their establishment was the most successful due to the fact that the Polish diaspora in Ukraine decided to support Ukraine’s struggle for independence. In terms of the movement that was supported by the Polish, its title was the “Rukh”, one of Ukraine’s prominent political parties throughout the 1990s. Thus, Poland became the first state to officially recognize the independence of Ukraine in December 1991. Therefore, due to the extent of support for Ukraine’s first moves on its independence path, Polish-Ukrainian relations were developing with such an impressive pace.

While marginality strategy together with the “Jagellonian” and “Piast” approaches to the Polish statehood provide a strong explanation for Poland’s support for the EaP, the paradigm offered by “Kultura” was reiterated by Lech Walesa as well as Alexander Kwasniewski while building Poland’s foreign policy agenda during their presidencies (Klatt, 2011, p.10) However, in contrast with Poland’s consecutive leaders, whether Civic Platform or Law and Justice party-led governments, Poland throughout the 1990s was criticized for its ambiguity in terms of attempting to support the newly created states, as Belarus, Baltic States, Ukraine, Moldova and at the same time being influenced by inertness of the Polish foreign policy after decades of dependence on the Moscow–projected line of behaviour. Its demonstration was Poland’s inability to include Ukraine as one of the prospective members of the Visegrad group as well as failure to create a military-political bloc union between Ukraine and Poland.

In the same vain as Poland was practicing the “two directions” policy with the Soviet Union, upon collapse of the USSR, its government launched the process of developing active relations with the EU which in the year 1992-1993 looked unrealistic. Poland’s intentions were evaluated as too ambitious due to the fact that EU itself was still skeptically reviewing enlargement to the East. Despite this fact, Poland turned out to be predictive and the policy of supporting the nation-states in the Eastern Europe together with developing the European standards policy improved relations between them. Hence, this factor explains Poland’s active interest in the Eastern Partnership project, the former was willing to launch the integration process having already arranged territorial as well as minorities issues with its neighbors to the East.

Poland’s strategy of promoting the European standards assigned a foremost preference towards achieving immediate and multilateral understanding between the countries in the framework of their existing borders. However, the most significant factor was that strategy of Europeanization was not introduced from the outside or was not itself initiative of the EU member countries. Poland took over the case to resolve the conflicts before Europe would become aware of them and even before those conflicts would turn into obstacles for its EU membership perspectives. Another very significant intention of the newly independent Poland was adhering to the priority of the European norms over the other possible alternatives which became especially relevant in terms of Ukraine’s refusal to sign the Association Agreement in November 2013, the Revolution of Dignity of 2013 and current crisis in Ukraine. According to Timothy Snyder, Poland’s foremost intention was convincing the other countries at its Eastern borders that introducing the European model and standards should be regarded as the most important priority to be fulfilled (Snyder, 2012, pp. 318-322).

In this respect, Poland was different from the other countries of the former Communist bloc, as Hungary and Romania, which were waiting for conditions to be put forward by the European Union in order to resolve conflicts between themselves. Other cases, as Yugoslavia, which throughout the 1990s became the scene for ethnic cleansing and genocide, as well as Russia that was ignoring the position of the Western institutions while intervening in Chechnya, Caucasus and Moldova. As a result, the chain of “frozen conflicts” destabilizing the post-Soviet space emerged in the initial years after the demise of the USSR, lasting till the present days.

4. Poland’s Role in the Eastern Partnership: Current State of Affairs

As mentioned in the context of the theoretical framework, whereas the Jagellonian approach was envisaging Poland’s future foreign policy priorities through a close control over the former parts of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, namely Ukraine and Belarus, the “Piast” approach aimed at decreasing Germany’s influence with Russia’s support. While the latter vision was mostly influential during the interwar period, the Jagellonian paradigm recognised the fact that the transition towards the Western values would be problematic for the countries of the Eastern Europe, therefore, the Polish guidance would be obligatory. This type of behaviour can be characterized as the messianic vision of Poland’s role in terms of civilizing the other countries to the East, at the same time building the bridge between the Western and distinctive Slavic values. Therefore, the traces of the Jagellonian approach can be observed in Poland’s dedication to the idea of the Eastern Partnership. Moreover, the “Law and Justice” party was also actively supporting the messianic vision of Poland’s foreign policy throughout their electoral campaign in the year 2005.

Taking into account the theoretical approaches to the Polish statehood and its foreign policy priorities mentioned above, Poland expects to benefit from the six EaP members becoming closer to the European Union. Significant importance as Ukraine’s ally in transition towards the Western direction Poland deserved during the Orange Revolution when President Kwasniewski offered his support in mediating the conflict between the opposition in the face of the “Our Ukraine” bloc and Leonid Kuchma, the former President. Together with Georgia, Ukraine became to be considered as the country that would become core of the Eastern Partnership project after the events of the Russia-Georgia war in August 2008 and Russia-Ukraine gas dispute of December-January 2008 (Reichardt, 2015). Another influential factor for Poland being at the forefront of the Eastern Partnership project is that its participant countries are among those who would turn into the most perspective markets for

Poland’s burgeoning economy and because of already available close trade relations, comparatively cheap prices for the Polish production that would be beneficial.

When Poland under the leadership of Donald Tusk made restoring the relations with Russia as one of the core policy priorities, there were doubts that the Eastern Partnership project would be assigned a second-rate priority, however, this proved to be not the fact (Shapovalova and Kapuzniak, 2011) Indeed, PM Tusk was aiming at making Poland the linchpin between Russia and the EU, because worsening of relations with Russia, as it took place previously under the Law and Justice party government, would have influenced Poland losing the necessary leverage as the country on the border. Poland was pursuing this type of policy before, being engaged into promoting the Southern Dialogue during Lech Walesa’s presidency as well as being involved in dialogue with Russia as well.

Upon the launching of the Eastern Partnership project, Poland was given more space in promoting the initiative, while holding the Presidency at the Council of the European Union. The timing for the EaP to be paid more attention at, was influenced by the events in the Northern Africa and the Middle East through what became to be known as “Arab Spring” and the chaos that the wave of uprisings against the authoritarian regimes took place. However, Poland managed to turn these events into one of its successes. Emphasis on the support for democracy in the countries of the Eastern Partnership resulted in establishing the Endowment for Democracy (“Eastern Partnership - European Endowment For Democracy”, 2016) The current Polish government and presidency represented by Andrzej Duda and Beata Szydlo does not refrain from criticizing EU authorities of underestimating the importance of Ukraine and Eastern direction in general for the future viability of the organization. These declaration take place in the light of unprecedented probe into the Polish judicial reform on the subject of its adherence to the EU core principles and standards (BBC, 2016) The most alarming sign for Poland’s actions as seen itself indivisible member of the organization was Duda emphasizing that “EU as a union of nation-states that cooperates especially in the economic field, without interfering in matters that should remain in the area of national sovereignty,” (EurActiv, 2016)

The EaP, which had originally been envisioned as the creation of a buffer zone between Russia and the EU, had been „a catastrophe”, according to the words of Poland’s new Minister of Foreign Affairs Witold Waszczykowski (Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum, 2016). It definitely seems that Poland’s pursuing of the “reset” policy with Russia together with the emphasis on its Europeanisation direction brought gains in the influential and strong message that the EaP could offer to the countries of the former Soviet Union. Current government found itself in an uneasy position of being locked between its unwise policy of Euroskepticism and anti-Russian stance which considerably decreased Poland’s ability to influence the formation of agenda inside the EU.

Right after the inauguration ceremony President Andrzej Duda announced that it is Estonia that would become the country of his first official trip, the small country in the nearest proximity to Russia which Duda accused of being “alarming due to a rebirth of the imperial spirit, of imperial nostalgia that threatens other neighbours” (Cienski, 2015). In turn, Petro Poroshenko after the uncontested victory in the presidential elections of 2014, made his first official visit to Poland with the view to demonstrate that Ukraine does recognize Poland’s contribution on its difficult path to Europe. However, the difficulty lies in the fact that the Eastern Partnership is the project that united too different countries under the single title of being post-Soviet. Poland’s success in introducing transitional reforms, putting it on the democratic path and turning it into the success story of the newly accessed members does not guarantee the same story for the Eastern Partnership countries. Moreover, out of six members of the project three of them, namely, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Belarus, do not exhibit any interest in actively pursuing the initiative which reaffirms the point that the objective of the project was not achieved. Another problematic point stressed by current Polish leadership in the face of Andrzej Duda is that conviction that the successful Eastern policy can be carried out only through the European Union channels is criticized due to the fact that the most decisive incentive for the countries to join the initiative is not offered to them, namely the European Union membership.

Conclusions

Poland will continue to be a core facilitator and supporter of the Eastern Partnership due to the fact that there is a general consensus between its political elites that realize, without the project’s existence EaP countries’ fragile transition process as well as those achievements that took place in terms of transforming the public opinion in favour of a pro-European one, creation of the DCFTA as well as progress in introducing the visa liberalization policies in Ukraine and Georgia, while Moldova already enjoying free access to the EU territories under the specified conditions, would fail.

Uniqueness of the Polish position can be regarded as the direct consequence of its statehood vision in the beginning of the XX century, before Poland fell under the Soviet sphere of influence. Having carrying out the analysis of the place the so-called “Ostpolitik” occupied in the foreign policy priorities of Poland since the collapse of the Soviet Union, we can indeed observe that the marginality theory provides a strong explanation for why Poland is so active in pursuing the rapprochement between the EU and the Eastern European countries. There is also a strong evidence for the “Jagellonian” and “Piast” theoretical approaches competing with each other, the former being supported by the Kaczynski administration in terms of overall distrust to both Germany and Russia

and putting more emphasis at defending the traditional, conservative Christian values. In this relation, even the violation of certain democratic principles on which the EU rests may become acceptable. The Civic Platform representatives, on the contrary, are more leaning towards the “Piast” approach suggesting that Poland should not harm its relations with Russia as its strategic partner, however, this building of relations should not occur on the expense of Eurosceptic moods and turning away from Poland’s active participation in the EU institutions.

Despite the varying nature of the theoretical approaches, Poland’s support for the idea of enhancing support for the East European countries and their European integration seems to be reaffirmed by every single administration coming to power. However, the shape of this strategy directly depends on whether the political party and political elite promoting these policies consider itself as part of the EU. In the light of the Law and Justice party having returned to the forefront of the political arena, Poland reaffirmed its support for the priority of the Eastern direction in its foreign policy, especially support for Ukraine and Georgia. However, there is a strong evidence that Poland’s belief in the Eastern Partnership is been fading. The same reciprocal trend can be observed in the EU core decision-making circles regarding the doubts that Poland manages to keep its influence with the view to having a say in the current EaP project or decide its fate in the future unless certain changes occur.

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