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THE RAISON D'ÊTRE OF POLAND'S EASTERN POLICY WITHIN THE EUROPEAN UNION

The aim of this chapter is to assess Poland's Eastern policy in the context of EU membership from the perspective of Poland's raison d'être in its relations with the countries of Eastern Europe and the South Caucasus. The initial assumption of the text is that Poland's accession to the EU in May 2004 expanded the range of instruments of Polish foreign policy both at the bilateral level, i.e. in contacts between Poland and its eastern neighbours, and at the multilateral level, i.e. within the EU. First, the background of Polish Eastern policy, its goals and objectives, as well as the distinction between the most important interests that form the Polish raison d'être will be presented. Then, the dimensions of the Polish sense of existence in relation to Poland's eastern neighbours will be analysed, as well as their effectiveness, i.e. the ability to realise the goals of this policy.

Key words: *European Union, meaning of existence, Polish foreign policy, Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, Eastern Partnership.*

Introduction . This article aims to assess the raison d'être of Poland's eastern policy in the context of EU membership. The initial assumption of the text is that Poland's accession to the EU in May 2004 has increased the range of Polish foreign policy instruments, both bilaterally, i.e. in contacts between Poland and its eastern neighbors, and multilaterally, i.e. within the EU. Poland has the longest eastern border of the EU, which means that the internal security of other EU states depends on its organizational capabilities.

First, the determinants of Poland's eastern policy will be presented, followed by its goals and objectives, and a distinction of the most important interests in constructing the Polish raison d'état [1, p. 17–23]. Next, the planes of the Polish raison d'état about Poland's eastern neighbours will be analyzed. These will concern priority issues important for the survival of the Polish state in the context of relations with its eastern neighbors, and therefore less attention will be paid to economic, cultural, and social ties with the states of Eastern Europe and the Southern Caucasus, which, although important, were not defined in terms of the Polish raison d'état. This will allow conclusions to be drawn on the effectiveness of Polish eastern policy, within which the following research problems will be addressed: were the assumptions and goals Poland set for itself concerning the eastern countries realized, and to what extent did Poland's membership of the EU influence this?

Research material and methods. To achieve the research objective, various methods and approaches can be used to collect and analyze information, including analysis of academic literature – reviewing the available literature on Poland's raison d'être in its eastern policy; analysis of documents – examining official documents, legal acts, strategies and policies governing Poland's eastern policy; inferring from research the effectiveness of Poland's eastern policy.

Results and discussion. Poland's eastern policy was influenced by centuries of experience, particularly the difficult relations with Russia [2, p. 21]. After the collapse of the USSR, relations with Eastern Europe were subordinated to the realisation of the Polish raison d'état related to joining Euro-Atlantic structures. 'Eastern neighbours', as part of a separate group, appeared for the first time in Foreign Minister Władysław Bartoszewski's expose only in 1995 [3, p. 139]. Polish diplomacy declared good bilateral relations with Eastern Europe, but at the same time offered its 'Eastern speciality' as part of its future EU membership, which manifested itself in its familiarity and experience

in dealing with the region [4, p. 30–45]. Therefore, after the end of the 1990s, Polish diplomacy began to promote the so-called ‘Eastern dimension’, which primarily included countries with the greatest European aspirations, among which Poland, for strategic reasons, singled out Ukraine.

The time of Poland’s accession to the EU on 1 May 2004 also shaped the EU’s concept of policy towards its neighbors. Contrary to Polish ideas, the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) was established in May 2004. European Neighborhood Policy did not envisage a membership perspective for the EU’s neighbors, especially Ukraine. Poland began to look for partners in the EU to increase EU activity in Eastern Europe while promoting ideas of deeper links between the Eastern countries and the EU market and European standards. Together with Sweden, it proposed the EU’s Eastern Partnership (EaP) program in 2008, which was a regional variant of the ENP. The program was an instrument designed to attract eastern states to the EU while promoting the eastern dimension of EU external policy.

Another determinant of Polish policy towards the countries of Eastern Europe and the Southern Caucasus was the so-called ‘color revolutions’ taking place in Georgia in 2003, Ukraine in 2004 and 2013/2014, Moldova in 2009, and Armenia in 2018. In most cases, these changes were in Poland as a process of empowerment of the societies of these countries and as a way of democratization and Europeanisation of Poland’s eastern neighbors, opening up opportunities for their rapprochement with the EU. Disillusionment over difficult and sluggish internal reforms dampened this enthusiasm, and the oligarchic system in the Eastern European and South Caucasus states made it difficult to do Polish business in this part of the world. At the same time, the European Union became the most important trading partner of the Eastern Partnership countries. Only Belarus and Armenia had a higher trade turnover with Russia than with the EU. Poland benefited from this exchange, being the second largest exporter of goods, after Germany, to the Partnership countries.

In Russia, the Eastern Partnership programme was interpreted as competing with Russian integration proposals relating to the ‘near abroad’ [5]. Therefore, Russia, although invited to join the EU’s Eastern Policy programme, did not join the EU’s European Neighbourhood Policy and was given the special status of ‘strategic partner’ in its dealings with the EU from 2003. In the first years after Poland’s accession to the EU, Polish relations with Russia did not receive EU support. One example was the Russian meat embargo, introduced in 2005. At that time, Polish diplomacy blocked EU-Russia talks on a new Partnership and Cooperation Agreement in order to force the EU to respond to the actions of the Russian authorities. Subsequent Russian actions, including the so-called gas war (turning off the natural gas tap) with Ukraine in 2006 and the armed conflict in Georgia in August 2008, slowly began to convince EU politicians of Polish concerns about Russia’s international activity in the EU neighbourhood. As authoritarian tendencies in Russia deepened, assertiveness in the country’s foreign policy grew. The Russian authorities began to preach anti-Western slogans related to the antagonism between ‘East and West’. These trends were confirmed by the Russian aggression against Ukraine in 2014, the annexation of Crimea and hostilities in eastern Ukraine (in Donbas). As a result of these, the EU introduced a series of personal and sectoral sanctions against Russia and established the principle of ‘selective engagement’ with the country. The maintenance of the European Union’s sanctions regime towards Russia had an impact on Polish policy towards the country. On the one hand, it meant maintaining the EU’s tough stance towards Russia on respecting the principle of territorial integrity of states and not recognising the annexation of Crimea. On the other hand, EU sanctions were associated with the introduction of a Russian embargo on the agricultural products of Polish producers.

Among the internal determinants of Poland’s Eastern policy, one should mention the successive changes of government in Poland. In different periods after Poland’s accession to the EU, the Polish authorities emphasised somewhat differently the needs related to the realisation of the Polish *raison d’état* in contacts with the countries of Eastern Europe and the Southern Caucasus. Depending on

the changing circumstances, one can distinguish at least three periods in which different assumptions were made in the implementation of Polish eastern policy objectives. In 2004–2008 – these were mainly postulates for democratisation and Europeanisation of the Partnership countries. The Polish authorities were convinced that the rapid Europeanisation of the eastern states would ensure the proper development of the region. In the subsequent period (2009–2014), after the Russian-Georgian war and the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, assumptions evolved from dialogue with Russia and the need to democratise the Partnership to perceiving Russia as a threat to European security. In contrast, between 2015 and 2024, the security and stabilisation of the eastern neighbourhood became the most important for the Polish *raison d'état*, with a simultaneous strong emphasis on identity and historical issues.

In eastern policy, Poland's *raison d'état* is based on three fundamental interests: 1) respecting and preserving the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the eastern states, 2) limitation of Russia's imperial policy and 3) democratisation and Europeanisation of the EaP. The main objective of Poland's Eastern policy was to promote the stability, sovereignty and territorial integrity of these states in the face of increasing pressure and then military aggression from Russia. Poland intended to achieve this goal by seeking to bring the EaP countries closer to the EU. The assumptions of Poland's eastern policy stemmed from the ideas of both Józef Piłsudski and the output of the Paris-based "Kultura", including its main thinkers Jerzy Giedroyc and Juliusz Mieroszewski, hence it is often referred to as the 'Giedroyc-Mieroszewski doctrine'. Mieroszewski is also believed to have been the originator of the notion of a 'Polish Eastern Policy', which was an alternative to the German *Ostpolitik* of the 1970s [6, p. 70–83]. In contrast to West Germany, which saw the USSR as a monolith, Mieroszewski promoted seeing other – than Russian – nations in this space. This can be compared to the contemporary approach of the EU towards the states of the former USSR, which for many years tended to favour contacts with Russia, overlooking the aspirations of the other eastern states.

In its main points, the Giedroyc-Mieroszewski doctrine is still valid, despite the changing circumstances [7]. According to it, the basis of the concept of Polish eastern policy was support for Ukraine, Lithuania and Belarus (now extended to all EaP states), recognition of the borders of post-war Europe, which meant refraining from territorial revisionism. The key, however, was its anti-imperialist character and curbing Russian expansionism. Contrary to popular opinion, Paris Culture did not aim to break relations with Russia. The key, however, was the independence of the countries of the common neighbourhood, because by strengthening the sovereignty of the ULB, Russia would have limited revisionist possibilities and thus would be more ready for talks and dialogue with Poland. At the same time, Paris-based "Kultura" was convinced of the possibility of democratising Russia and the need for contacts not only with the leaders of the state, but above all with civil society.

For these reasons, within the framework of EU membership, Polish diplomacy emphasised the democratisation and Europeanisation of the Partnership countries while promoting the idea within the Union that only the prospect of membership for the eastern countries was an effective method for them to reform towards EU standards. This was to enable the inclusion of Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia in particular in the processes of political and economic modernisation under the auspices of the EU, thus contributing to the expansion of the zone of stability in Europe and enhancing Poland's security [8].

Since the annexation of Crimea in 2014, Poland has begun to see Russia's politics as the most important threat to its security, as well as to the stability of the Central and Eastern European region. In May 2017, a document entitled *The Polish Defence Concept* stated that 'we are convinced that by 2032 Russia will pursue an aggressive foreign policy (...) and will remain the main source of instability in the neighbourhood of NATO's eastern flank' [9]. These demands were reiterated in the *National Security Strategy* in May 2020, which emphasized that 'the Russian Federation also conducts activities below the threshold of war (of a hybrid nature), carrying the risk of conflict' [10].

Kazimierz “lists three areas for the realisation of the Polish *raison d'état* in the framework of Poland's EU membership. These include: 1) issues of external security, 2) sovereignty and territorial integrity, and 3) issues relating to the preservation of Polish national identity [11]. In the case of Poland's eastern policy pursued within the EU, these three planes must be supplemented by developments in Eastern Europe and the Southern Caucasus.

External security issues in Poland's eastern policy were concerned with countering challenges in the neighbourhood related to, *inter alia*, regional conflicts (Ukraine, Nagorno-Karabakh, Transnistria, Abkhazia, South Ossetia), authoritarian tendencies in the EaP states (persisting in Azerbaijan, Belarus), which, in the case of some states in the region, contributed to social opposition – leading to ‘color revolutions’ (in Georgia, Ukraine, Moldova and Armenia). One of the leitmotifs of Polish foreign policy was the conviction that increasing Poland's external security would be facilitated by the democratisation of the EaP states, as well as support for the democratic opposition in Russia.

Due to the failure of the EU's eastern enlargement, and in view of the moderate progress in internal reforms in the EaP states, Polish diplomacy focused primarily on ensuring external security from Russia and stabilising the EaP states. Strengthening the eastern flank within NATO and strongly advocating sanctions against Russia became a priority. At the same time, it was crucial to bring about the signing of an association agreement with Ukraine, Georgia and visa liberalisation with Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova.

Within the second arena of the Polish *raison d'état*, that of sovereignty and territorial integrity, it is the EU that clearly takes the position of respecting borders in Europe. As a result of the annexation of Crimea by Russia in 2014, which Poland did not recognise and the EU introduced sanctions against the Russians responsible, and, like Poland, pursues a policy of non-recognition of border changes in Europe. At the same time, Russia's aggressive policy and use of force in international relations became the pretext for the authorities in Poland to abandon the local border traffic with the Kaliningrad region in 2016. Although Poland's local and regional authorities were reluctant to discontinue the local border traffic with Russia, which had brought economic benefits to both sides since 2012. However, the Polish authorities' fear of the threat of Russian aggression confirmed the legitimacy of securing the state border, additionally in view of hybrid actions from Belarus on the Polish-Belarusian border.

Issues related to the preservation of Polish identity became important in the third period of the Polish Eastern Policy (2015–2020) both in relations with Ukraine and Russia. The Law and Justice government paid more attention to historical issues, especially different interpretations of the Volhynian massacre, the activities of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army and, in the case of Russia, the commemoration of the Katyn massacre, among others. Poland reacted negatively to the adoption by the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine in April 2015 of the so-called decommunization package of laws prepared by the Ukrainian Institute of National Remembrance. One of the laws recognised members of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army as fighters for Ukraine's independence, while providing for legal liability for publicly insulting or undermining the legitimacy of the actions of those recognised as such [12].

In response to Ukraine's historical policy, the Polish Sejm and Senate adopted resolutions in July 2016 recognising the Volhynia massacre as genocide committed by Ukrainian nationalists against citizens of the Second Polish Republic (in a similar Sejm resolution from July 2013, the Volhynia massacre was termed an ethnic cleansing with signs of genocide). Previously, Poland had rejected Ukraine's proposal to prepare a joint assessment of the Volhynia massacre and to establish a remembrance day on 17 September (marking the Soviet Union's aggression against Poland). Poland demanded that Ukrainian authorities condemn the crimes of the UPA (Ukrainian Insurgent Army) and cease the use of the organisation's symbols in public spaces. Due to differing interpretations of the Volhynia tragedy, it was impossible to reach an agreement, and thus a “factual resolution of the Volhynia memory conflict” could not be achieved [13, p. 33].

Similarly, historical disputes with Russia have intensified, particularly regarding the period of the Second World War. At the end of 2019, Russian President Vladimir Putin made false claims about Poland's involvement in the outbreak of the war, falsely asserting Polish cooperation with Hitler. This was another manifestation of the historical dispute with Poland, which had reacted to the Polish authorities' removal of so-called memory monuments (monuments of "gratitude" to the USSR on Polish territory). Additionally, it was a response to the European Parliament's resolution—backed by Poland – on the significance of European historical memory, which, in September 2019, referred to the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact and the current denial by Russian authorities of the agreement between the Nazis and communists. Poland rejected all accusations related to Russia's historical manipulation and began actively combating disinformation about the Second World War.

Conclusions. In foreign policy, effectiveness is assessed by analysing the achievement of its objectives. Considering the most important of these – those reflecting Poland's national interest – the results of Poland's Eastern policy can be evaluated as partially positive. Among the successes of Polish diplomacy within the framework of EU membership is the establishment of the Eastern Partnership programme. The success of this initiative should be viewed not so much in institutional terms, but rather in conceptual ones. Thanks to Polish diplomacy and its promotion of the Partnership states (in line with the Giedroyc-Mieroszewski doctrine), the European Union came to recognize that, besides Russia, there are other states in the post-Soviet space with whom cooperation is worthwhile. Of course, Russia's revisionist policy and the revival of its imperial ambitions to reclaim its "sphere of influence" also contributed to (for some, primarily) the changing perception of this region among EU states. A manifestation of Russia's imperial policy is a aggression against Ukraine.

The war in Ukraine demonstrates that the effectiveness of ensuring Poland's security can be assessed in two ways. On the one hand, Poland's military support for Ukraine has succeeded in curbing aggression not only against Poland but also other European states. This resulted in decisions by NATO to further strengthen its eastern flank, thereby enhancing Poland's defensive potential. On the other hand, aggressive actions in the foreign policy of the Russian Federation have not yet been eliminated, which hinders the improvement of regional security around Poland. Belarus and Russia will continue their efforts to weaken and destabilise European states, which means that Poland's Eastern foreign policy will focus on deterrence and strengthening both its own and its allies' defensive capabilities.

Under favourable circumstances, Poland will intensify its involvement in the Eastern Partnership, particularly with regard to Moldova, to maintain the pro-European trajectory of this state, as well as in the South Caucasus. Both the Russian and Belarusian regimes are committed to a prolonged war in Ukraine, as wartime mobilisation fuels the consolidation of their neo-totalitarian systems of governance. Therefore, the pursuit of Poland's national interest in Eastern policy will be forced to adapt to Russia's confrontational and escalatory strategy.

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Агнешка Легуцька. Сенс східної політики Польщі в рамках Європейського Союзу

Метою цього розділу є оцінка східної політики Польщі в контексті членства в ЄС з позиції існування Польщі у відносинах з країнами Східної Європи та Південного Кавказу. Початкове припущення тексту полягає в тому, що вступ Польщі до ЄС у травні 2004 року розширив спектр інструментів польської зовнішньої політики як на двосторонньому рівні, тобто в контактах між Польщею та її східними сусідами, так і на багатосторонньому, тобто в рамках ЄС. По-перше, будуть представлені передумови польської східної політики, її цілі та завдання, а також розмежування між найважливішими інтересами, що формують польський сенс існування. Далі буде проаналізовано площини польського сенсу існування щодо східних сусідів Польщі, а також їх ефективність, тобто здатність реалізувати цілі цієї політики.

Ключові слова: Європейський Союз, сенс існування, польська зовнішня політика, Росія, Україна, Білорусь, Східне партнерство.

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