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EASTERN PARTNERSHIP – FOR SECURITY AND COOPERATION

Wojciech Gizicki*

Abstract

On 7 May 2009 a program was initiated under the name of the Eastern Partnership. This proposal from Poland, as supported by Sweden, aims to make the EU's Eastern policy more dynamic. The program is expected to facilitate mutual contacts between the EU and Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine. An important element of it is a multi-dimensional deepening of the relationship between the EU and the above mentioned countries at the political, security, economic and social levels.

Key words: Eastern Partnership, European Union, security, cooperation

Introduction

The weight of the problems faced by countries of Eastern Europe began to be noticeable in the EU in practice after the largest one-time, albeit extended “over instalments” enlargement of 2004 and 2007 with the participation of 10 countries from behind the former “Iron Curtain”¹. It became evident that the shift of the EU border from the Oder to the Bug river would not close but, to the contrary, make even more apparent the need for commencement and maintenance of cooperation with other Eastern European countries that were not, and still are not, ready for EU membership.

This paper makes an attempt to outline some aspects of the EU activities in connection with the necessity to ensure security and cooperation with countries of Eastern Europe. The main, though not exclusive, focus is put on six countries: three from Eastern Europe, directly neighbouring the EU – Belarus, Ukraine and Moldova, and three South Caucasus countries – Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia. They are now key players in the assumed and pursued

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¹ In 2004 - the Czech Republic, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia, Hungary, in 2007 - Bulgaria and Romania.

EU Eastern policy. However, the experience of the last few years, especially since 2010, clearly shows that in addition to the potential benefits and requirements inherent in these countries there are a number of serious challenges and difficulties, not only in the internal but also external dimension, including the conflicts between some of them (e.g. the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh). Hence, not only will a perspective of potential opportunities be presented but also that of potential threats. The *Eastern Partnership* as put in the title of the paper is not restricted only to such instrument of the EU towards its Eastern neighbours. The scope of the analysis undertaken will address broader cooperation, taking into account the needs and possibilities of the EU to influence Eastern Europe. Still, the Eastern Partnership will be treated in a special way.

1 European Security Strategy

The priorities of the EU security policy are set out in the European Security Strategy, adopted on 12 December 2003. It states that there are no probable grounds or possibility of conflict in Europe, which would involve a large number of countries. However, it is stressed that the significant and possible consequences for European security may result from terrorist attacks, increased use of weapons of mass destruction, regional conflicts, the loss of sovereignty of states and organized crime (Czachór, 2004, pp. 248-249). These threats may in part have their origin or maximize in Eastern Europe (Gizicki, 2010), which is a natural pathway for the development of such threats towards the EU. The Strategy clearly says that the EU does not intend to neglect this part of Europe after 2004: "It is not in our interest that enlargement should create new dividing lines in Europe. We need to extend the benefits of economic and political cooperation to our neighbours in the East while tackling political problems there. We should now take a stronger and more active interest in the problems of the Southern Caucasus, which will in due course also be a neighbouring region" (A secure Europe in a better world, 2003). There was also an important indication of support for Euro-Atlantic aspirations of Ukraine and Georgia. The document stated that there were no alternatives to Euro-Atlantic relations².

² "The transatlantic relationship is irreplaceable. Acting together, the European Union and the United States can be a formidable force for good in the world. Our aim should be an effective and balanced partnership with the USA. This is an additional reason for the EU to build up further its capabilities and increase its coherence".

2 European Neighbourhood Policy

The intention to contribute to strengthening of the area of stability, prosperity and predictability in the EU's closest neighbourhood became the reason for the 2003 adoption of the ENP (European Neighbourhood Policy Text, 2003). The EU was strongly interested in supporting fragile states, especially in Eastern Europe, which after enlargement in 2004 became its immediate neighbours. The political objective that can be identified in this document was to "create a virtuous circle by promoting good governance, economic and social development, modernisation and reform, through a new intensified relationship based on shared or common interests and values such as good governance, prosperity, stability and security; democracy, human rights and rule of law; market economy and sustainable development and reforms in key sectors" (Working Together, EC, 2007). The ENP in large part clarifies the strategic objectives contained in the European Security Strategy for the eastern policy, providing at the same time a tool for the elimination of new divisions. This is obviously related to the EU's enlargement to the East. The most important assumption of the ENP is cooperation with countries in Eastern Europe (J. Maliszewska-Nienartowicz, 2007; B. Woźniak, 2007). In addition, the document pointed to many other countries, not necessarily European ones, which largely have to focus their attention on the EU. At the inception of the ENP it was noted that it made the proposal hardly attractive, because some countries such as Ukraine, felt neglected and not very seriously treated, as they were put on a par with Palestine, for instance.

Another major concern was that the ENP did not offer and was not supposed to offer, in principle, to lead the way to EU membership, though it did not exclude it outright. The state to which the offer was addressed clearly pointed to this fact, claiming that it could weaken the desire of the authorities and societies of the beneficiaries to engage in the reform proposals on their part and in the actions on the part of the EU itself. Many analysts pointed to the need for concrete offer from the EU: *"EU's strategy for eastern states must be based on a sober and robust analysis of the potential offer, which the EU and Member States can provide. The EU has an advantage, which has not yet been exploited fully. (...) It is the fulfilment of the growing aspirations clearly connected with tighter economic and political relations with the EU. If the EU were to meet these expectations, and while meeting them at the same time meet their own goals for stability and prosperity in its own neighbourhood,*

Brussels would soon be forced to take more decisive action" (Longhurst, 2007, p 78). Still, it seems that this demand has remained unfulfilled. The measures taken are not effective enough. The main task on which the EU insists is promoting economic growth, stability and security. It is a prerequisite for the external surrounding of the EU to be a friendly, predictable and democratic environment. The objectives of the ENP are to be met by the means of bilateral relations between the EU and the countries mentioned in the document. The main emphasis in their framework is put on the political (including security) and economic reforms. However, it is not enough to base cooperation largely on bilateral relations. On the one hand they contribute to the individualization of the offer, to the support for the needs of the particular state, while on the other hand they do not take into account broader multi-dimensional problems and challenges that are common to most countries, especially from Eastern Europe. The problem that may arise on this occasion relates to a potential rivalry among Eastern European countries for a better deal from the EU, addressed to only one of these countries (Dumała, 2009, p. 332). In essence, the point is that in most situations cooperation should be spread evenly, and to apply to all in need of reform and stability in the region. Cooperation at the level of the entire region can maximize the benefits that these countries already have (including energy potential). It will certainly bring benefits to the EU itself, which clearly needs stability in the area of energy supplies. These bilateral agreements define and clarify the EU's relations with the countries of Eastern Europe.

3 Eastern Partnership

Inspired by Poland, and supported by Sweden, on 7 May 2009 the EU launched a program called *Eastern Partnership*. The main task of that initiative was to boost the dynamics of the EU's Eastern policy. The program is expected to facilitate mutual contacts between the EU and Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine. An important element of the EP, which significantly differs from the ENP, is multidimensional and multilateral deepening of relations in the political, economic and social areas. The program is intended to allow citizens of those countries to have direct contacts with the EU by visa facilitation. The countries to which this offer is addressed will receive increased financial assistance, trade preferences, and will have a chance to participate in other projects prepared by the EU. The program provides for the implementation of tasks, among others to promote democratic principles,

stability and energy security. The frequently differing expectations on key issues which should be included in the project come from the EP audience itself. This applies especially to security issues. *The Eastern Partnership is an initiative of strategic importance for the stability and security both in the countries of the eastern dimension of the ENP and the whole EU. Especially the South Caucasus countries expect an increased EU's involvement in conflict resolution in the region. (...) the initiative should be directed primarily to the completion of the impact of the EU as a "soft power"* (B. Wojna, M. Gniazdowski, 2009, p. 10).

3.1 Obstacles to the Eastern Partnership from the EU

The European Union puts a heavy weight on forming a stable, predictable and secure space in its immediate vicinity and in the near abroad. The awareness of the risks arising from the existence of unpredictable areas, still far from even basic standards of democracy - politically and socio-economically, is high within the EU (Korosteleva, 2012). Nevertheless, it seems that the real desire to get seriously interested in contemporary problems of Eastern Europe remains in the sphere of positive declarations, with no bold, practical action. The only, although very good and effective, instrument of influence is the economic support. Basically, the EU does not exist today as a political community; it is therefore difficult to pursue the Eastern policy based on other than economic criteria. It is most reasonable to conclude that *the EU should focus primarily on the development of economic relations as a tool to achieve political objectives. (...) Intensification of relations would be seen as profit, and the possible decline - as a loss* (Podraza, 2009, p 24). However, today it is clear that the addressees of the EP themselves, especially Belarus and, to some extent, Ukraine, fail to operate even the economic support mechanisms. Sometimes, paradoxically, a greater willingness to get Europeanized is perceived as a regression or loss. The reason for this is, of course, the relationship between these countries and Russia, namely Russia's policies and plans towards them. Russia is a very important political and economic partner of the EU. The interaction takes place within the solid and fairly frequent "summits", meetings of high-level politicians. The main role for Russia is played there by Vladimir Putin. An important tool of the relationship is an agreement on strategic partnership signed by both parties. Russia is the EU's main partner in the East. Simultaneously, the Kremlin's policy, focused on making lively contacts with the EU, is associated with the Russian authorities' (Putin's) declared recognition of the EU's future role in global security. In addition, one of the major challenges associated with the

laying of mutual relations is the issue of energy security. This follows, of course, from the ties that economies of many EU countries have with energy supplies from Russia. Today we know well that mutual good contacts on the Brussels - Moscow line were not hindered even by, in principle, the over-activity of Russia in Georgia in 2009. Therefore, the effective implementation of the EP is not helped by the lasting, and often increasing, Russia's desire to play a dominant role in the region. EU capacities in this respect are very or even completely limited.

The EU has not spared funds in support of the EP. The EU Budget for 2010-2013 provided for support of the countries involved in the project worth around 600 million Euro. These funds, because of their level, may not guarantee a complete success in achieving the intended effects; yet they comprise special purpose expenditure only for the needs of the EP. It is hard to predict how this issue will be treated in the new 2014-2020 budget perspective. The overall situation of the EU budget in the current crisis does not inspire optimism in this regard. A considerably reduced funding for the project can significantly reduce its rank and the chance to support the projected reforms in the beneficiary countries. EU's financial needs are high, and the EP has a competitor in North African countries undergoing revolutionary reform. Knowing the political preferences in allocation of spending by the largest countries of the Union, one can be confident that Eastern Europe will lose the competition for financial support precisely to North African countries. The only opportunity may lie in the fact that it will be possible to increase the total budget of the ENP.

The EU countries show different levels of activity and interest in the project. Southern European states keep a distance, focusing, especially after the events in North Africa, on the Mediterranean region. The initiators of the EP, Poland and Sweden, indicate that the project is extremely important, strategic element of the EU's foreign policy. Some Central European countries and the Baltic States officially declare support for the initiative. The practice, however, is not always so optimistic. An example of this may be the attitude of the Visegrad Group, where most countries have a common border with Ukraine, a major player of the EP (Gizicki, 2009a). Due to the strategic divergences such as no common border (Czech Republic), another vision of energy policy and attitude to Russia (Slovakia and, until recently, Hungary), the Visegrad Group countries are now not able to take a common position on the Eastern policy. In fact, except Poland, the other V4 countries are afraid of greater involvement in the Eastern processes because of possible differences within the EU (a threat to

internal consistency, attitude to Russia). The lack of joint action and well-developed position of V4 towards the Eastern policy, as exemplified by Polish-Swedish, rather than the Visegrad, cooperation for the launch of the EP, is not conducive to the credibility of Czech Republic, Poland, Slovakia and Hungary either towards the other members of the EU and recipient countries of the EP. Also, this weakens the voting power within the EU and towards Russia.

3.2 Obstacles to the European Partnership from the countries of Eastern Europe and South Caucasus

Equally serious constraints in the effective achievement of EP objectives are those resulting from internal and external policy conducted by the countries to which the project is addressed. The problems in Belarus are connected with the political regime, which questions the validity of the European, democratic direction of change. President Lukashenko decidedly rejects the conditions imposed by the EU. Close cooperation with (i.e. total dependence on) Russia keeps Belarusian authorities at rest, while the regime's way of exercising power effectively (so far) limits the efforts of the society. All this evidently precludes the chances of use of the EP potential by Belarus. In a situation where almost all Belarusian decision-makers are prohibited to enter the the EU and Belarus ignores the debate of the Eastern Partnership Summit, both in Prague and Warsaw (only sending an ambassador to Poland!) it is difficult to be optimistic in the near future.

The chance offered by the "Orange Revolution" was wasted by Ukraine long ago. The conflict between the main actors in Kiev Maydan, former Prime Minister J. Tymoshenko and former President V. Yushchenko, helped the pro-Russian V. Yanukovych win the presidency. Ukraine under his rule explicitly returns to the Russian sphere of influence, though Yanukovych himself emphasizes the importance of cooperation with the EU. However, it is difficult to expect that in the near future the signing of an Association Agreement with Ukraine could be realistic. Even if this happens, it will stay at a level of a declaration with a dubious weight. The scope of reform that needs implementation in Ukraine is so vast that it requires a long period of time to implement. Also, the political court case of J. Tymoshenko and sentencing her to seven years in prison does not add credibility to Ukraine at all. This case is a fundamental criterion of EU's building confidence in the Ukrainian authorities and reflects the standards that are still present in this country. Ukraine is a key

partner of the EU in Eastern Europe. The prospect of membership is not unrealistic for it. However, it is Ukraine itself that must clearly decide on its European future, declaring willingness to integrate both within the EU and NATO.

Moldova still faces serious problems of internal nature. The scale of the danger, especially in Transnistria, is extremely high. This conflict is in opposition to the European aspirations of Moldova. The country is characterized by severe retardation in reaching the democratic standards, which, like a possible resolution to the conflict in Transnistria, calls for greater EU interference. Finally, support is required for the energy sector, which is still totally dependent on Russia. All this does not allow us to treat Moldova as a quick candidate for closer cooperation with the EU. The EP is thus undoubtedly an opportunity for this country; albeit one that requires strong motivation on the part of both players.

The Southern Caucasus for few years now has been one of the major geo-strategic areas, especially in terms of energy security. Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia have faced a great opportunity to install political and socio-economic reform offered by the EP. Still, the Europe-oriented ambitions are shadowed by security problems (Gizicki, 2009b). The main problems connected with Armenia relate to the dispute (nearly a threat of another war) with Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh. This conflict has lasted for over 20 years now and still did not reach the final solution to which both parties could agree. Another problem of this country is represented by the relations with Turkey, coming from the tragic history (the massacre of Armenians). Armenia is also much less able to modernize than Azerbaijan, which has become a regional energy superpower. The support that Azeris need touches mainly on the development of the standards of a modern, democratic state. The most complicated political situation has been observed recently in Georgia. The country that in 2003, thanks to the so-called Rose Revolution, returned to the democratic way of change had to face Russia in 2008. The price of the military conflict was the loss of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Georgians are definitely interested in Euro-Atlantic integration, with both the EU and NATO. Hence stem Georgia's problems in relations with Russia, which sees that country as its sphere of influence. Intensive contacts with the EU, a chance for which is offered by the EP, may contribute to the normalization of the internal situation of this small country, which has great courage in the process of Europeanization. The problem is that it needs continuous support and assurance of cooperation from

the EU.

Conclusion

EU's eastern policy is an important mechanism of cooperation, addressed to the countries of this part of Europe. Its success can only come from the systematic cooperation between the EU itself and the countries of Eastern Europe. Both sides need determination in this regard. Unilateral involvement is not enough to overcome the above-mentioned problems. So, what should be done to make this tool for cooperation more effective?

First, the provisions contained in EU documents should be consistently implemented.

Second, the financial and political support to interested countries in Eastern Europe should be maintained.

Third, the relations with Russia should be regulated, both from the perspective of the EU and Eastern Europe.

Fourth, the Eastern European countries themselves must make the necessary reforms and demonstrate greater willingness to engage in integration processes. These are only selected necessary measures that require implementation.

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