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‘Eastern Partnership’ – opening a new chapter of Polish Eastern policy and the European Neighbourhood Policy?

by Agnieszka K. Cianciara

- *Presented jointly by the Polish and Swedish governments, the proposal for ‘Eastern Partnership’ is the first major Polish initiative at the EU forum since accession that has every chance to become a success due to the extensive consultations that preceded its launch as well as its realistic objectives.*
- *‘Eastern Partnership’ constitutes an attempt to place the traditional objectives of Poland’s Eastern policy within the framework of the European Neighbourhood Policy. As such, it is a significant policy reversal as regards the ENP, which was previously criticised in Poland for its alleged ineffectiveness and privileging of the Southern dimension. This reversal is part of a more general attempt by Donald Tusk’s government to ‘Europeanise’ Polish foreign policy through coalition building with both old and new EU members.*
- *Although ‘Eastern Partnership’ has been rather well received within the EU, a number of policy challenges remain in the way of its implementation. These challenges include the need to secure the support of the target countries for the initiative and to achieve concrete results in Ukraine’s progress towards greater integration with the EU. Furthermore, positive results must be secured during the French and Czech presidencies of the EU, and the foreign policy opportunities provided by the upcoming Polish presidency in 2011 must be utilized. Finally, given the unyielding criticism of Tusk and Sikorski’s foreign policy by President Lech Kaczynski and the main opposition party, Law and Justice, constant efforts must be made to maintain domestic support for these policies.*

'Eastern Partnership' initiative

The 'Eastern Partnership' proposal constitutes a brand new initiative by the Polish government aimed at counterbalancing the project of the Union for the Mediterranean advocated by the French president Nicolas Sarkozy. It is also the first major Polish initiative at the EU forum since accession that has every chance to become a success¹. First of all, the project appeared to be well prepared: it took the form of a joint Polish-Swedish proposal in order to avoid the impression that the idea was coming from a single member state. Secondly, wide consultations were conducted, and the preliminary agreement of Germany, Great Britain, Denmark and Czech Republic was obtained. At the same time, France was made aware of the fact that Poland was willing to support the strengthened Mediterranean partnership only under the condition that a similar initiative could be designed for the Eastern neighbourhood. Moreover, one day before the official presentation of the project to the GAERC, the Polish Minister of Foreign Affairs, Radek Sikorski, held a special conference for Brussels-based journalists to explain the details and benefits of the initiative, in order to shape the public opinion of EU member states. Finally, directly before the GAERC meeting on the 26th of May, Sikorski addressed a number of EU officials, diplomats, journalists and lobbyists gathered at a 'breakfast briefing' on the premises of the prestigious European Policy Centre in Brussels².

The contents of the Eastern Partnership proposal

To date, the proposal for 'Eastern Partnership' remains fairly general, with further details to be presented and discussed at the June European Council (concrete projects could be elaborated in Brussels by the end of this year). The principal aim is to strengthen regional cooperation with Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia, Azerbaijan, Armenia, and to a certain extent with Belarus. The project involves visa facilitation, with prospects for visa-free movement, a free trade zone for services and agricultural products (including a date to be fixed for completion of the free trade area), as well as closer cooperation in the fields of transport, the environment and border control. There will be no extra burden on the EU budget, except for what is already earmarked for these countries in the ENP financial perspective for 2007–2013. If necessary, additional funds could also be obtained

¹ The first proposal being the 'energy NATO' (2006), which was not sufficiently consulted with any EU member state, badly received once proposed and rejected immediately afterwards. The second initiative concerned the square root system of voting in the Council of Ministers and was presented in the framework of the negotiations on the new treaty (2007): it was explicitly supported only by the Czech Republic and quickly withdrawn when the extension of the Nice system was proposed by Germany and France.

² Gazeta Wyborcza, 'Polska ofensywa w Brukseli w sprawie EIT i Wschodniego Partnerstwa', 25.05.2008.

from the European Investment Bank and European Reconstruction and Development Bank. Furthermore, no additional institutional arrangement, such as a secretariat in the case of the Union for Mediterranean, is foreseen. Finally, as the initiative builds on the structures of the ENP, the European Commission is to play a major role, with a Commission official appointed as 'special coordinator'³.

Eastern Partnership and the prospects of further EU enlargement to the East

The main question is whether 'Eastern Partnership' advances the issue of membership for at least some of the states concerned, notably Ukraine and Moldova. The document to be presented at the June European Summit will not mention 'a European perspective' for these countries. However, Polish diplomats believe that if EU consents to the project, it may attach more importance to Eastern neighbours and as a consequence the chances for the future membership of Ukraine and Moldova will significantly increase⁴. The whole concept draws on the experience of the Visegrad group, enabling the countries concerned to better integrate within the grouping, while implementing internal reforms and adjusting to EU standards. This helps them to prepare for accession, once 'enlargement fatigue' is gone and the EU is politically prepared to make an offer⁵.

Reactions of the countries concerned

However, the project has raised doubts, not only in some of the EU member states, but also among the partner countries concerned, most importantly in Ukraine. The political opposition in Poland also seems to be relatively sceptical. The initiative is likely to see criticism from Bulgaria and Romania, fearing that their 'baby' – the Black Sea Synergy – could be undermined by the new initiative. Moreover, Spain and Italy might be hesitant to endorse the proposal, due to their strong emphasis on the Southern dimension of the ENP. Finally, uneasiness was raised by the possible reaction of Russia to this reinforcement of EU policy in its region of 'strategic interest'. As regards Ukraine, their diplomatic head, Hennadij Udovenko, reasserted that 'any form of neighbourhood policy without membership perspective cannot be satisfying to us'. Indeed, Ukraine might not see much improvement in the proposal in comparison with the *status quo*. In particular, the Polish proposal implies treating the East as a uniform entity, which is obviously

³ EUobserver.com, 'Poland and Sweden to pitch Eastern Partnership idea', 22.05.2008.

⁴ Jacek Pawlicki, 'Wschodnie Partnerstwo Tuska', *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 21.05.2008.

⁵ EUobserver.com, 'Eastern Partnership could lead to enlargement, Poland says', 27.05.2008.

beneficial in terms of acquiring funds for major regional and trans-national projects. The idea is to balance the bilateral, EU – partner country aspect of the existing ENP. However, Ukraine does not find it beneficial to be put into one basket with countries such as Azerbaijan or Armenia, whose chances for membership are practically non-existent at the moment.

Domestic reactions

The initiative was also received with reservation by the domestic opposition. Pawel Kowal, deputy of the PiS (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość – Law and Justice) party and a specialist on Eastern policy, has criticized the government for taking a timid and unambitious stance at the beginning of the negotiations. According to him, the proposal is certainly not revolutionary and happens to be nothing more than a slight modification of the existing ENP. Moreover, it has not been developed with consultation of the opposition and lacks concrete details as to how and when the objectives of the partnership are to be achieved⁶. However, it is doubtful that these objections are fully valid. Given the realistic objectives of the initiative, the chances for its acceptance without being watered-down are quite high. The strategy of incremental steps towards strengthening EU ties with its Eastern neighbourhood is far more promising than a big-bang approach that nobody will be willing to support. Nevertheless, further details of the proposal are to be seen at the European Council meeting 19–20 of June.

Eastern Partnership as an extension of Poland's Eastern policy after 1989

In order to better understand where Poland stands on the issues of ENP and Eastern policy it seems necessary to take a brief look at the developments after 1989. Particular attention should be devoted to the main ideas and policy actions that were implemented after accession (2004), when Poland could finally act as the member of the European club and actively contribute to the EU Eastern policy.

The meandering of Polish foreign policy cannot be properly understood without careful consideration of its historical and geopolitical burden, in particular with regards to Russia and Ukraine. The term 'Eastern policy' is itself deeply embedded in the historical ideas of Polish emigration and opposition intellectuals, such as Jerzy Giedroyć and Juliusz Mieroszewski. Originally, the policy concerned Ukraine, Lithuania, Belarus, and the Soviet republics whose territories partially belonged to

⁶ Pawel Kowal, 'Wschodnie Partnerstwo Sikorskiego', 26.05.2008, <http://pawel-kowal.salon24.pl>

Poland before the 2nd World War. This strategic concept implied reconciliation and the rejection of imperial ambitions as well as territorial claims by both Poland and Russia. The integrity and independence of the three neighbours was to be recognized and guaranteed. After the fall of communism the main paradigm for the traditional 'Eastern doctrine' remained influential, although it could no longer serve as a basis for strategic choices due to changed geopolitical circumstances.

The concept of an Eastern policy has been used constantly in Polish foreign policy discourse since 1989, but its contents seem to have evolved over time and it has not been uniformly employed towards its target countries. Poland's ambition has always been to promote democracy and economic development in Eastern Europe, while exporting the success of its own transformation process. At the same time, each state has been treated separately, and therefore it is difficult to find a common denominator. During the 1990s particular attention was paid to Ukraine and often to Belarus, with Moldova and Georgia occasionally mentioned, whereas the rest of Caucasus and Central Asia was often forgotten. A fundamental factor that adds to the complexity of any strategy towards the East is Russia and its ambitions in the region, which are now realized through economic rather than political domination. Poland seems to be Russia's natural adversary in the region, and bilateral relations have never been easy. Russia's permanent inability to come to grips with its own past as well as with the history of relations with its neighbours does not facilitate constructive dialogue and cooperation.

EU enlargement to the East and the creation of the ENP

The European Neighbourhood Policy was conceived on the eve of the so-called 'Eastern enlargement' of the EU in order to support democratic transformation and economic development in the immediate neighbourhood. The ENP aimed at integrating and consolidating EU actions towards its neighbouring countries. It was meant to become a crucial element of EU foreign policy, while securing EU borders with a 'ring of friends'. The original proposal was tabled by the UK and Denmark in April 2002 in the form of the 'New Neighbours Initiative' that was originally directed exclusively towards the East, covering Ukraine, Belarus and Moldova.

As a candidate state, Poland took an active part in the process of elaborating EU policy towards new Eastern neighbours after the enlargement, notably by means of a 'Non-paper' presented at the Copenhagen Summit in December 2002. In this document the Polish government proposed an integrated policy consisting of 3 pillars: community, governmental (both bilateral and multilateral) and non-governmental. Special attention was given to Ukraine, stipulating that the level of its relations with the EU should be equal to those of EU-Russia. The project

envisaged 5 areas of cooperation: enhanced political dialogue, assistance in the transformation process, development of economic cooperation, energy cooperation and cooperation in justice and home affairs.

However, the European Commission soon came under intense pressure from France and Spain to expand the project towards the Mediterranean and integrate the Barcelona Process into the new framework. In addition, the ENP Strategy Paper from May 2004 also included the Southern Caucasus. The Western Balkans and Turkey were excluded from the process, as they already enjoyed the status of candidates or 'potential candidates'. This differentiation has fuelled negative perceptions of the ENP in Poland. Although participation in the ENP does not formally exclude future accession, the widespread belief is that it does *de facto* define the frontiers of Europe⁷. Finally, relations with Russia have been designed within a separate formula of 'strategic partnership' to be realized within the framework of 'four dimensions'.

Polish discontent with the ENP

The ENP has often been criticised in Poland as ineffective or inadequate in its actions. Critics have also pointed out the tensions that exist between the ENP and the national policies of member states. Member states often act individually in pursuit of their own national interest, without respecting the need for common action and solidarity. Moreover, critics complain that the Southern dimension of the ENP is much more privileged over the Eastern dimension. In this perspective, the appreciation of the East in the new ENP budget for the period 2007–2013 is hardly recognized⁸. Critics of the ENP also seem to neglect the fact that the existing weaknesses of the neighbourhood policy are deeply rooted in the dualistic nature of EU external action. Both the member states and EU institutions manage EU foreign policy. Member states do have conflicting interests and they would never subordinate them completely to common interests, as defined by EU institutions. However, such conflicts do not only concern the biggest member states, France and Germany, as it is often claimed in Poland. The recent agreement between Russia and Bulgaria on the South Stream pipeline clearly shows that the spirit of European solidarity is also severely neglected in the new member states. Therefore, the ENP may appear ambitious in its assumptions, but it is relatively weak and inconsistent in its responses towards actual political challenges.

⁷ Paweł Świeżak, 'Europejska Polityka Sąsiedztwa – bilans funkcjonowania na przykładzie Ukrainy', *Bezpieczeństwo Narodowe*, I–II 2007, p. 122.

⁸ The question of whether this common argument is well-founded is discussed in detail in: Agnieszka K. Cianciara, *Does the Strengthened European Neighbourhood Policy Restore the Balance Between Southern and Eastern Partner Countries?* ("A&O", No. 2, February 2008, www.isp.org.pl).

Polish eastern policy after 2004

The year 2004 should be regarded as an important turning point for the Polish Eastern policy for two reasons:

■ Firstly, with the EU accession process already completed, Poland had to shift its foreign policy paradigm from 'adjusting' to 'making choices'⁹. This shift also implied integrating Polish interests and objectives into EU policies, while reaching agreement with other member states promoting their own conflicting interests.

■ Secondly, the Ukrainian Orange Revolution (XI–XII 2004) provided Polish political and diplomatic elites with a major opportunity to mediate and influence the resolution of the political conflict following the manipulated elections. It also provided an opportunity to promote the European aspirations of Ukraine, and to establish Poland as veritable EU specialists on the Eastern neighbourhood. The role of President Aleksander Kwaśniewski and Polish members of the European Parliament was crucial in placing the Ukrainian case high on the EU agenda. In fact, it is still being perceived as the most constructive and successful European initiative of Polish representatives following the enlargement.

Despite intense lobbying coming from both Poland and Baltic states, the Union's reaction to the 'revolution' was rather careful and did not meet the high expectations of President Victor Yushchenko and his enthusiastic Polish advocates. No declaration was issued with regard to the possible future EU membership of Ukraine. The previously agreed Action Plan that aimed at implementing ENP priorities in Ukraine was not opened for renegotiation with the new pro-European government. This timid approach of the Commission and the Council of Ministers was widely criticized in Ukraine and Poland. Despite all of this, the Action Plan was complemented with an annex, which notably envisaged:

- Negotiating a new and strengthened free trade agreement,
- Active support for Ukraine's membership in the WTO,
- Possible recognition of Ukraine as a functioning market economy (which is one of the Copenhagen accession criteria and actually took place at the EU-Ukraine summit in December 2005),
- Strengthened cooperation in the fields of energy, transport and visas,
- Increased access to European Investment Bank funding¹⁰.

⁹ Jan Rokita, 'Polska polityka zagraniczna – ile kontynuacji, ile zmian', a speech given in Centrum Stosunków Międzynarodowych, 14 April 2005.

¹⁰ <http://www.delukr.ec.europa.eu/page36474.html>

From the Polish point of view this offer was hardly adequate, and therefore discontent with the ENP formula intensified. The EU seemed to be interested only in developing relations with Russia, at the expense of other Eastern countries that were struggling to free themselves from Russian domination. According to critics, the EU lacked both vision and courage. On the other hand, Polish decision-makers had a clear tendency to underestimate certain important factors that contributed to the EU's lukewarm reactions to the Orange Revolution:

- EU 'enlargement fatigue' and its possible impact on the Constitutional Treaty referendum in France (failed anyway in May 2005) and other member states,
- Serious doubts about the unequivocally pro-European path of Ukraine (confirmed to a certain extent by Victor Yanukovich's victory in March 2006 parliamentary elections),
- The EU already felt trapped with the controversial accession process of Turkey and wished to avoid the repetition of such a situation in the future.

Polish Eastern policy under the Law and Justice Government

Throughout 2005, the declining leftist government of Poland seemed too weak to deliver major new initiatives in the international arena. In fact, the first opportunity to define the Eastern policy in the new European environment was given to the conservative – populist government led by the Law and Justice Party, following their victory in the 2005 presidential and parliamentary elections. Indeed, President Lech Kaczyński soon announced the opening of a whole new chapter in the history of Polish foreign policy and a complete break with former practices.

According to the Kaczynskis, Polish national interest was particularly threatened by German hegemony in the EU. Germany could not be perceived as a reliable partner and certainly not as an ally for Poland with regard to Eastern policy. Germany's relations with Russia, as materialized in the North Stream pipeline project, were self-evident in this respect. The EU's lack of support for Ukrainian membership was seen as another sign of short-sighted submissiveness towards Russia. Moreover, the ENP, ill-designed and failing to respond adequately to Ukrainian aspirations, had to be treated with a great deal of reservation.

Consequently, cooperation with other member states is *a priori* rather difficult¹¹. Poland was obviously willing to discuss its priorities with all EU partners, but it was

¹¹ Compare: Anna Fotyga, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Key points of the Speech, 'Europe as a Global Power', Conference of the European Union Institute for Security Studies and European Centre Natolin, 19 May 2006.

practically impossible to find understanding for its priorities without compromising the national interest. In the end, the only credible ally for the Eastern policy was Lithuania.

The Kaczynski government declared the urgent need for energy diversification. Cooperation with Ukraine on an alternative pipeline was a top priority, and Poland would be more active in the Caucasus region and Central Asia. According to PiS decision-makers, the Russian embargo on Polish food products clearly showed that Russia did not apply the principle of equal partnership towards Poland, a member of the European Union. With EU reluctance to show any solidarity, Poland had no other choice but to veto the EU mandate for negotiating the new Partnership and Cooperation Agreement with Russia. The Polish government claimed that the new tough stance towards Russia proved to be successful, as the EU, faced with the wave of conflicts fuelled by Moscow with Estonia and Lithuania, finally demonstrated much-needed unity in its dealings with Vladimir Putin.

According to Anna Fotyga, the Minister of Foreign Affairs in the PiS government, an intensive political dialogue with Ukraine was conducted at all levels: between both presidents and the governments. Poland claimed to be an advocate of Ukraine's European aspirations'¹². As the reform momentum created by the Orange Revolution weakened, Poland was convinced that Ukraine needed additional external stimulus – in the form of an association agreement that would pave the way for the future membership¹³.

Some of the 'achievements' of the PiS government in Eastern policy are particularly worth of mention. Due to its hostile attitude towards cooperation with Germany, the PiS government easily dismissed the German presidency as not attaching enough importance to the Eastern dimension of the ENP¹⁴. It neglected the project of 'ENP plus' at the heart of the 'Neue Ostpolitik', which was the main goal of the Presidency, next to the revival of the Constitutional Treaty¹⁵. The PiS government did not support the initiative, despite the fact that it was more favourable to the East in terms of funds redistribution than the final Commission proposal of a 'strengthened ENP'.

Another example of PiS failure in the area of Eastern policy is the case of visas for Ukrainians, when Poland was preparing for joining the Schengen zone. Hungary and Slovakia managed to prepare suitable solutions well in advance, whereas the PiS government was working on legislation at the last moment and then handed the

¹² Anna Fotyga, Information of the Foreign Minister on Polish foreign policy priorities to the Sejm, 11.05.2007, www.sejm.gov.pl

¹³ Anna Fotyga, Key points of the Speech, op. cit.

¹⁴ 'Informacja dla Sejmu i Senatu o udziale Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej w pracach UE w okresie 01-06.2007 (podczas Prezydencji niemieckiej)', 10. 2007.

¹⁵ More on 'ENP plus' in: Iris Kempe, 'A New Ostpolitik? Priorities and realities of Germany's EU Council Presidency', Center for Applied Politics Research, Bertelsmann Group for Policy Research, No. 4, August 2007.

problem over to the next government, allowing for major problems at the borders and Poland's loss of reputation as a credible partner for Ukraine.

Is the PO-PSL government opening a new chapter in the Polish Eastern policy?

The PiS foreign policy was openly and severely criticized by the opposition and most foreign policy experts and this criticism seems to have contributed to the defeat of PiS during the early elections held on 21 October 2007. The victorious coalition of Civic Platform and the Polish Peasant Party (PO-PSL) announced a new chapter in foreign policy.

PO is undoubtedly more enthusiastic towards the process of European integration. As Prime Minister Donald Tusk asserted, Poland is determined to actively promote its own vision of EU development, as a key actor in the European arena. At the same time, cooperation within the Union has to be strengthened¹⁶. With regards to the neighbourhood policy, Foreign Affairs Minister Radek Sikorski continued to advocate the traditional Polish position, also shared by PiS, that in the East the EU deals with European neighbours, whereas in the South – with the neighbours of Europe. Also, the Eastern dimension of EU foreign policy should remain the Polish *spécialité de la maison*¹⁷. Although these facts seem to point out that there is some continuity between the policies of the Kaczynski and the Tusk government, the latter's policy differs from its predecessor's in both style and substance.

Focus on coalition-building and new European initiatives

PO has clearly demonstrated a more active and alliance-prone approach in European policy. At the December 2007 European Council, Poland and Lithuania proposed more focus on the multilateral framework of the ENP, thus shifting attention away from the purely bilateral dealings of the EU with each partner. According to Donald Tusk, Poland's role as a leader of cooperation within the Eastern dimension had been recognized and confirmed unanimously¹⁸. The launch of a new and reinforced form of cooperation between Visegrad (Poland, Czech Republic, Hungary and Slovakia) and the Baltic States had also been announced during the summit. The seven partners declared the wish to come up with

¹⁶ Donald Tusk, Exposé in the Sejm, 23.11.2007

¹⁷ 'Informacja ministra spraw zagranicznych o założeniach polskiej polityki zagranicznej w 2008 roku', 15 posiedzenie Sejmu w dniu 7 maja 2008, www.sejm.gov.pl

¹⁸ 'Polska polityka wschodnia po szczycie UE', *Gazeta Wyborcza* za PAP/IAR, 14.12.2007.

common positions and strategies before each European summit. This structured, long-term collaboration includes a regional energy strategy to be concluded at the summit organized in Poland, probably in September 2008¹⁹. Moreover, Poland actively responded to the French proposal of creating the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM), a reinforced project for the Southern dimension of the ENP. At the March 2008 European Council, Donald Tusk agreed on a compromise to establish UfM on the condition that a similar proposal would be considered for the East. An intense consultation process with Paris, Berlin, Stockholm and Central European capitals has been launched with a view to achieve progress on this matter during the June European summit²⁰.

Towards a strategic partnership with Germany?

On the other hand, German partners expect that the Eastern policy could finally become one of the most important common long-term interests in Warsaw and Berlin's foreign policy²¹. A common strategy in this respect could be envisaged, which would undoubtedly give greater weight to Polish priorities and interests in the East, while providing them a broader European context. This should be facilitated by the fact that the PO government has been welcomed in Berlin with great relief and hope for the active and constructive role Poland could play again at the EU level, after two years of isolationism and open conflict²².

A more pragmatic approach towards Russia

Donald Tusk has also decided to adopt a very pragmatic approach in relations with Russia. He declared his willingness to engage in dialogue on the construction of American anti-missile defence system in Poland in order to show that in no way is it directed against Russia. Another step was to withdraw the Polish veto on opening OECD membership negotiations with Russia. These signs of trust and goodwill were welcomed in Moscow and the embargo on Polish food products was partially lifted. Prime Minister's Tusk official visit to Moscow in February 2008 paved the way for some further improvement in mutual relations. At the same time, Poland would no longer block negotiations on the new Partnership and Cooperation Agreement with the EU, as European Commission guaranteed EU

¹⁹ <http://www.kprm.gov.pl/s.php?id=1512>

²⁰ Dominika Pszczółkowska, 'Polska promuje w UE Wschód', *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 29.04.2008.

²¹ 'Nadzieje przed szczytem UE-Rosja', 25.10.2007, www.dw-world.de

²² See also: Krzysztof Bobiński, 'Poland's post-election foreign policy – a turning point?', Institute of Public Affairs, November 2007.

solidarity and support in energy issues²³. This policy of *détente* was heavily criticized by the former government's officials, who accused Donald Tusk of favouring relations with Russia over the strategic partnership with Ukraine. However, it is worth underlining that the attempt to improve relations with Russia resulted in the strengthening of the Polish position within the EU and consequently enabled Poland to exert more pressure on Russia than in the past, when Poland acted unilaterally. On the other hand, Poland is an important partner for Russia only in so far as it is an important player in the EU itself.

Ukraine: going beyond declarations?

During his visit to Kiev in March 2008, Donald Tusk asserted that Polish-Ukrainian relations are at the core of Polish foreign policy. An agreement on small border movement was finally signed, ending the regrettable situation Ukrainians faced, when Poland entered the Schengen zone. Other concrete measures included:

- A protocol of intention on bilateral cooperation concerning the process of Ukrainian integration with the EU, which should bring added value to Polish efforts aimed at promoting Ukraine within the Union;
- An agreement on cooperation in matters of civil service, which may help Ukraine in meeting EU good governance standards and thus contribute to the ENP Action Plan objectives.

It seems therefore that the Tusk government has decided that Poland has to support Ukraine in convincing other EU member states of Ukraine's European commitment, which is reflected in concrete results and successful reforms.

Backlash at home

The political consensus on foreign policy in Poland seems to belong to the past. PO was extremely critical of PiS's 'new paradigm' in foreign policy, and now PiS is going so far as to claim that the current government has 'ruined' all its achievements and that the progress attained in the East is gradually being 'destroyed'. They claim that under Tusk, Poland is returning to 'clientelistic politics', seeking patronage from Germany. As the opposition leader, Jaroslaw Kaczynski, put it: 'this

²³ Informacja ministra spraw zagranicznych, op. cit.

is unrealistic politics, reflecting a lack of basic competence in foreign policy'²⁴. However, such criticism could be dismissed as evidence of a purely political battle for internal purposes based on electoral calculations aimed at winning support of nationalist and euro-sceptic elements of public.

Conclusions: key challenges for Polish Eastern policy

The new government has indeed used the favourable momentum created at the very beginning of its term in order to engage in a constructive dialogue both within the EU and with Russia. At the same time, critics point out that bilateral relations with Ukraine have been neglected. Some analysts have even gone so far as to declare that Polish-Ukrainian relations are ruined and that Donald Tusk has lost Ukraine²⁵. But as the current government argues, any progress on the European perspective for Ukraine can only be achieved in Brussels and other European capitals. The recent Central European coalition has the potential to become a powerful advocate for Eastern neighbours. With the project of 'Eastern Partnership', Poland is trying to place itself among other big EU players. Nevertheless, details of a credible and comprehensive strategy of the PO-PSL government with regards to the ENP have yet to be seen.

● *Eastern neighbourhood*

Poland should demonstrate a truly positive attitude towards the ENP as a concept, while discussing its deficiencies with EU partners. It should also actively promote intra-EU alliances for more focus on the immediate Eastern neighbourhood that includes Ukraine, Belarus and Moldova. The initiative involving the Baltic and Visegrad countries was clearly an important step in the right direction. The proposal of Eastern Partnership has the potential to bridge the gap that the East is suffering from, particularly in comparison with other initiatives such as the Northern Dimension and Black Sea Synergy. In the aftermath of the agreement on the 'Union for the Mediterranean' it is absolutely imperative for Poland to secure EU member states' support for this initiative. Indeed, the government has realized that such an opportunity to reform the ENP in favour of Eastern neighbours may not appear again in the next few years.

● *Ukraine*

The priority to support Ukraine's European aspirations remains entirely valid. It seems that Poland is finally backing declarations of support with concrete structured measures that aim at helping Ukraine to deliver positive arguments to the EU. In the

²⁴ 'Szef PiS o polityce zagranicznej rządu', *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 08.05.2008.

²⁵ Bohdan Osadczyk, 'Jak Donald Tusk przegrał Ukrainę', *Rzeczpospolita*, 28.01.2008.

long run, Poland should aspire to the role Germany once played in the Polish integration process with the EU. In the short-term, close cooperation with the European Commission on the new ENP Action Plan for Ukraine is necessary, as the Commission is to propose new initiatives that Poland could influence by favouring Ukrainian preferences. The question of Schengen visas is a clear example of concrete cooperation that was lacking for a long time. However, Poland also needs to take into account the persistent political division of Ukraine and changes in subsequent governments' attitudes towards EU and Russia respectively.

● *Russia & energy policy*

Intense dialogue with Russia is a pragmatic necessity. However, in all areas of potential conflict, Poland has to be assured of support from the EU, both from the Commission and the member states. Russia cannot be allowed to play out the differences between EU members.

A clear strategy towards the North Stream pipeline project has to be defined. Poland needs to decide whether to join the environmental argumentation of the Nordic states, or whether to participate in the project and build a branch from the main pipeline to Poland. The first strategy could be supplemented by exerting pressure on the Commission competition authorities to look at Gazprom's increasingly monopolistic position in the EU market, strengthened by the recent agreement with the Bulgarian government on the South Stream pipeline. In this case, Poland should also consider whether to seriously engage in the Ukrainian initiative to invest in the White Stream pipeline that would transfer gas from Turkmenistan, through Azerbaijan and Georgia to Ukraine, in the framework of a Trans-Caspian project²⁶. Not only does the latter offer an opportunity for true energy diversification in Europe, but it also provides a strategic framework for EU cooperation with the Caucasus states and Central Asia. Moreover, it places Ukraine at the heart of EU politics and could be an important argument for the future association process.

● *French and Czech presidency of the EU*

Poland has to consider the presidency rotation in the EU and its impact on the Eastern dimension. After the Slovenian presidency, with its focus mostly on the Balkans, the French presidency is bound to concentrate on the Mediterranean. However, it is the Czech presidency in the first half of 2009 that might significantly contribute to the realization of Polish Eastern priorities. Regular dialogue and intense diplomatic effort within the new '7-Group' is absolutely crucial in this respect.

²⁶ Ukrainian Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko announced her proposal to build the White Stream pipeline during her visit to Brussels on 29 January 2008. Andris Piebalgs, EU Commissioner responsible for energy policy confirmed that Ukraine should play an important role in the context of energy diversification.

- ***Forthcoming Polish presidency***

Poland is to hold its presidency only in 2011. This timing provides significant opportunities related to the new budget perspective for the ENP. On the other hand, provided that the Lisbon Treaty enters into force, the Polish presidency will face the need to cooperate with the permanent President of the European Council. This involves clear constraints, but should also be perceived in terms of new opportunities, if the dialogue with the President is properly and timely structured.

- ***Dealing with potentially problematic areas of institutional and political nature***

Last but not least, dualism in foreign policy between the government and the President will remain a serious challenge for the cohesion and effectiveness of Polish Eastern policy. Efforts have to be made to explain these policies to the public and to secure domestic support despite strong criticism from the parliamentary opposition.

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