Poland and its Eastern Neighbours: Foreign Policy Principles

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Abstract

This article examines the main principles that underpin Polish foreign policy towards its Eastern neighbours, focusing on the attributes of Poland's latest contribution to the European Union's (EU) policies – the Eastern Partnership (EaP). The article argues that the main attributes of the EaP are not only the outcome of Polish security concerns, but are also deeply rooted in Polish national identity. After years of communist rule, Polish national identity has been in a process of reconstruction, not only through the "return to Europe", but also through the re-establishment of closer bonds with its Eastern neighbours. At the same time, the Eastern Partnership provides the means for Poland to redefine its role in the political landscape of the EU and to infiltrate its national identity and ideals into the EU's political reality.

Keywords

Polish national identity; Eastern Partnership; Polish foreign policy

POLISH FOREIGN POLICY, PARTICULARLY WITH REGARD TO WESTERN INTEGRATION and its relations with its Eastern neighbours, has been characterised by wide political consensus and continuity (Cordell 2000; Borkowski 2006; Jasina *et al.* 2007). It is argued here, however, that, since Poland joined the European Union (EU), it has been in the process of redefining its role in Europe. Poland has been described as a "middle power" (Spero 2004), hegemon (Stemplowski 2004) or the American "Trojan horse" (Economist 2005) in the EU. The politics of the Kaczyński brothers, in particular, was criticised for its attachment to the defence of national sovereignty and their historical tone of political discourse, but, as William Wallace (1991) explains, such behaviour might reflect an underlying crisis of national identity.

This article examines Poland's latest contribution to the EU's policies towards its Eastern neighbours – the Eastern Partnership (EaP). The EaP is a significant initiative in the way it reinvigorates the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) by sending a positive signal to three Eastern European countries – Ukraine, Moldova and Belarus – and three countries from the South Caucasus – Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan. At the same time, the EaP provides the means for redefining Poland's role in the political landscape of the EU and to infiltrate its national identity and ideals into the EU's political reality. Furthermore, such an anchoring within the EU may provide Poland with a renewed identity and restore its sense of belonging as there has been a growing need among young Poles "to live in an ordinary country which is not a dike, bastion, barbican or antemurale" (Janion 2004). To explore if and how the approach to Polish foreign policy has been transformed, this article incorporates interviews with six high-level representatives of the Polish governing elite,

including the former Polish Foreign Affairs Minister Adam Daniel Rotfeld and two Undersecretaries of the State at the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA). These interviews provide insights into the changing nature of Polish decision-makers' experiences, practices, values and attitudes towards the Eastern neighbours and Poland's role in the EU.

The democratisation of Poland's immediate neighbours has been the priority of its security policy. According to the National Security Strategy of Poland (2007), the strengthening of democratic aspirations in Ukraine, Moldova and the South Caucasus, and the democratisation of Belarus would reinforce Poland's security. Undoubtedly, this objective played an important role in prompting Poland's latest contribution to the EU's policy towards its Eastern neighbours. Nevertheless, this article argues that the main attributes of the EaP are not only the outcome of Polish security concerns, but are also deeply rooted in Polish national identity. Since the eighteenth century, Poland's politics has been pursued by adhering to one of the opposing paradigms: political realism or political idealism (Bromke 1967). Political realists have adopted a pragmatic approach to Poland's politics, focusing on increasing its internal strength and advocating a *modus vivendi* with their more powerful neighbours. On the other hand, the idealists acted on the basis of the moralistic view that Poland has its rightful place in Europe and its existence is indispensable for upholding a moral order in international politics, including bringing freedom to its Eastern neighbours. They considered Poland's freedom the highest virtue; therefore, they were willing to sacrifice themselves to achieve this. This article examines the main "ideational" principles that underpin Polish policy towards the East that have motivated the EaP, such as the principle of differentiation, the principle of European Standards and the principle of increased regional cooperation.

Theoretical background

The 1989 peaceful revolutions resulted in transformations of the borders of Europe, as well as changes in the value-system with which people had identified (Sztompka 2004: 4). The absence of independent statehood and freedom during the period of communist rule in Central and Eastern European states resulted in the need for identification, confirmation or creation of a national identity and a sense of belonging.

In general terms, the notion of national identity derives from a common language, religion, geographic location, collective memory and cultural practices (Prizel 1998: 16). These components comprise two categories of determinants: the individual's motivations, convictions and beliefs; and the cultural, economic, legal and geopolitical institutional structures in which the individuals are involved (Sztompka 2004: 4). These combined components create a sense of "we" and "them", which results in forging bonds or constructing boundaries.

The sense of nation and national identity plays a vital role in forming a society's perception of its environment and significantly influences the objectives of national foreign policy (Sztompka 2004: 14). In elaborating on the importance of national identity and foreign policy, Ilja Prizel (2004: 19) writes:

> National identity serves not only as the primary link between the individual and society, but between a society and the world. Foreign policy, with its role as protector and the anchor of national identity, provides the political elite with a ready tool for mass mobilization and political cohesion.

A collapse of communism and the 2004 enlargement of the EU lie at the heart of the transformation of the national identities of Central and Eastern European countries, and also offer the means to erase "peculiar and crippled East-European identity" (Sztompka

2004: 4). The popular notion of a "return to Europe" encompassed not only the idea of joining the European structures, but also reaffirmed the European identity of Central Europe. Nevertheless, new EU members have their own visions, programs and policies grounded in their national identities. Therefore, as Peter Katzenstein and Jeffrey Checkel (2009: 214) note, the contested politics of European identity might spill over into many policy domains that will require the adjustment of the old West, and of Brussels, in particular.

Over the years, the EU has been described as a civilian power, a soft power and more recently as a normative power in international relations (Nye 2004; Sjursen 2006; Manners 2009). The EU has profiled itself as a qualitatively different international actor seeking to promote a rule-based international order, instead of traditional modes of power politics. The Treaty of Amsterdam explicitly mentions human rights protection, democracy and the rule of law as the fundamental pillars of EU cooperation.

With regard to the policies towards the EU neighbours, the most effective instrument of the EU's common foreign policy has been the promise of enlargement, conditional on the acceptance by applicant states of the political and economic criteria set out by the EU. The ability of the EU to influence neighbouring states that are not considered EU candidates in the near future has been widely debated as the EU is not able to disconnect from their problems. As William Wallace (2003) noted, "the choice for the EU is therefore whether to export security and stability to these new neighbours, or risk importing instability from them". It is widely acknowledged that stability can be achieved by an export of the norms that the EU promotes such as democratic culture, human rights and the rule of law. Nevertheless, the EU's norm "export" to its neighbourhood through the means of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) to date has been ineffective. The ENP has been criticised for adopting many of the pre-accession mechanisms without the explicit aim of membership for those states participating in the project (Cremona and Hillion 2006). Therefore, without the so-called "carrot", the democratic transformations triggered by the ENP have been slow or non-existent.

The notion of the EU's normative power relates to the norms promoted by supranational institutions, but, first and foremost, it relates to the promotion of norms by the EU members themselves. If the member states also act as "norm advocates" and comply with the norms they propagate, then the EU's norm promotion becomes more convincing (Finnemore and Sikkink 1998). As Martha Finnemore and Kathryn Sikkink (1998) explain, many international norms began as domestic norms and became international through the efforts of entrepreneurs of various kinds. It is argued that militarily weak and economically dependent small states in particular play a significant role in strengthening global codes of appropriate behaviour by acting as "norm entrepreneurs" in the international community (Ingebritsen 2002).

Poland presents itself as a normative actor with a commitment to spreading European norms to the East, as pointed out by Foreign Affairs Minister Radosław Sikorski (2008):

> Protecting human rights as well as the rule of law and democracy have become a Polish passion (…). We would like to make sure that such promotion of democracy is more closely tied to development aid, addressed to countries close to us. This conviction results from the belief that our particular experience in the creation of democratic institutions and economic transformation can be translated into effective support of similar processes in other countries.

Central and Eastern European countries' experiences of communism, their role in peaceful revolutions and transformations toward democracy and a market economy influence their appreciation of values. Poland's national identity may have a significant impact on the

development of EU common policies. It is interesting, therefore, to analyse if and how Poland's national values were incorporated into the EaP.

Poland's national identity

Poles have developed a very strong national identity, despite the fact that Poland, as a state, did not exist for 123 years. Polish national identity has been strongly shaped by its history, geopolitical location, bitter experiences of years of lost sovereignty, as well as its strong Catholicism and specific perception of nationhood. Poland's geopolitical position between two cultural and religious civilisations of East and West, together with nineteenth century anti-Russian uprisings, created a myth that Poland is a gatekeeper of Western values and defender of Western civilisation. This reinforces three important issues. First, Poles regard themselves as belonging to a Western European tradition. Zdzisław Mach (2000: 1) points out that the nineteenth century spiritual and political national elites considered Poland as the "eastern flank of Western Europe". Second, the years of the Iron Curtain divide created an idealised image of Europe among Poles. Third, the nineteenth century Polish national-liberation traditions, based on the belief that each nation has a special universal task to fulfil (the national mission), served as a vehicle for Poland's mission to resist the invasions of Europe and help the Eastern neighbours in "the struggle for freedom and international justice" (Walicki 1982: 78-79).

Nevertheless, since Poland regained its independence in 1989, its national identity and its foreign policy have been in a process of transformation. The 2004 enlargement not only connected West and East, but also created new divisions, particularly between the more developed Central Europe and those lagging behind. The years of totalitarian regime caused the ongoing crisis of a sense of cultural identity in Central and Eastern Europe (Najder 2005). However, in Poland the crisis arose from the termination of long-lasting multinational cultural ties that have been further undermined by its inclusion into the EU. Poland's sense of belonging in the EU and the restitution of its national identity are closely linked with its partnership with the Eastern neighbours that are not part of the EU.

There is another aspect of Polish contemporary national identity. As Maria Janion (2004), a prominent Polish sociologist points out, the process of EU accession coincided with the process of a momentous change in consciousness, especially in the minds of young Poles. In Janion's opinion, they are now torn: "They belong neither to the East nor to the West, but are suspended in an ambiguous environment" (*ibid.*). Janion emphasises that this suspension between West and East is also characterised by a sense of exclusion and dispossession. The crisis noted by Janion leads to the reformulation of the Polish identity, belonging and sense of Polishness in the way in which the new intellectual elite deconstructs the romantic-messianistic myth of Polish culture. According to Janion, young Poles currently identify with the words of Polish poet, Antoni Słonimski: "We want to live in an ordinary country which is not a dike, bastion, barbican or *antemurale*. We do not want the historical mission, or leadership, or great power imperialism". The Romantic stereotypes of Polish Catholics and messianistic martyrdom, which dominated the national consciousness, have become obsolete. Patriotism is seen as an obstacle towards the adaptation to the current globalised ("normal") world. Janion's claims are clearly supported by the current governing elite. Polish Foreign Affairs Minister Radosław Sikorski's statements (2009b) explain that Poland is fundamentally different from its previous historical incarnations. According to Sikorski, its present growth potential does not depend on the status of "Jagiellonian" regional power. He appeals to Poles to "descend from a martyr pedestal and remove the crown of thorns" (Sikorski 2009b). Sikorski addresses the matters concerned with Poland's role in the region not by viewing Poland as a regional power, but rather aligned with the EU's most influential members and focused on cooperation. Although Sikorski's approach was criticised for its "political

minimalism" (Cichocki 2009), it illustrates the new and more cautious approach to Poland's position, confirming Janion's (2004) suggestions that Poles are deconstructing the romantic-messianistic myths that, up until now, have motivated Polish foreign policy.

Hence, we arrive at two important issues. The first regards the matter of a Polish sense of suspension, between West and East, and the degree to which it contributes to the formulation of EU common policies. These sentiments are reflected in comments made by Juliusz Mieroszewski, one of the major contributors to *Kultura*: "We will be worth as much in the West as we are in the East" (Jasina *et al.* 2007: 57). It is closely connected with the second issue that identifies the crisis of Polish national identity in terms of wanting to ensure the well-being of Eastern European nations at the same time as it requires the reaffirmation of its Western European credentials.

Poland's role in Europe: elite perceptions of Poland's potential

According to a majority of the representatives of the Polish political elite interviewed for this article, Poland is big and influential. For example, acting Political Director in Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Witold Sobków, is convinced that Poland is currently a regional leader and an expert in Eastern European politics in the EU (interview 1). Sobków's opinion that Poland is an influential player in the EU is shared by Jarosław Bratkiewicz, the Director of the Eastern Policy Department of MFA (interview 2). He notes that Poland's potential comes from its firm politics and its strong national identity, which are different from those of Western Europe. However, there is another aspect to these opinions. Bratkiewicz points out that, although Poland is big and influential, it has to adjust its national interest to that of the whole Union. Both Bratkiewicz and Sobków emphasise the importance of Poland's role as a human rights supporter and active participant in international peace-missions, which contribute to Poland's strong normative character. The values promoted by the European Union are fundamental for Poland's security, in the view of former Foreign Affairs Minister Adam D. Rotfeld (interview 3). He argues that the answer to Poland's security dilemma should come from close international multilateral cooperation and a promotion of international law, particularly in the East. In Rotfeld's view, the EU is not an economic union but first and foremost a union of norms, ideals and democratic values, which need to be "explained" and "exported" to the East by Poland.

According to the Undersecretary of State at the MFA, Przemysław Grudziński, Poland is currently in the process of establishing itself as a middle-range European player, still clarifying realistic ambitions relative to its potential (interview 4). Grudziński emphasises that, until now, Polish foreign policy has been based on obsolete Westphalian assumptions about world politics, with too great attention being paid to geopolitics. Grudziński suggests that Poland has the potential to play the role of an "intelligent agent". The foreign policy of an intelligent agent would be to align its own objectives with the objectives of other players. It would formulate and share concepts and ideas, inspire others to act and would join innovative projects, particularly in the areas beyond its immediate interests. Furthermore, in Grudziński's opinion, reformulating Poland's foreign policy and becoming an intelligent agent would endorse Poland's place in Europe as a middle-man between the West and the East.

A view that might complement Grudziński's considerations is presented by another MFA official, Michał Łabenda (interview 5). He emphasises that the EU's policy-making processes are difficult to understand, even by its own members; hence, they are even more problematic for its non-members, particularly for countries further to the East, such as Georgia. Therefore, Poland should focus on bringing the Eastern neighbours closer to the EU by introducing them to other EU members, and also interpreting the European Union's "way of doing things" to the Eastern partners. The EaP may be regarded as an

instrument that may help Poland to develop this natural potential, and at the same time define Poland's foreign policy objectives.

After five years of EU membership, Poland is still in the process of establishing itself within the EU. The Polish governing elite abandoned the mentality of being a "centre of civilisation" and *antemurale* of Europe and replaced it with the recognition of its place in the world as a mid-size European state. Nevertheless, the Polish governing elite would like to see Poland as a big and influential EU member. Poland's attempt to reconstruct and consolidate its place in Europe after the collapse of communism plays a significant role in formulating its policies towards its Eastern neighbours and its preferences for EU policies towards its Eastern neighbours. Polish decision-makers clearly see Poland's role in the East as a promoter of the EU's norms, translator of the EU's law and an "intelligent agent". The EaP, therefore, serves as a continuation of foreign policy which ensures that Poland is "part of a democratic continuum" (Prizel 1998: 151). It also provides the means for Poland to become an active contributor to EU policies, facilitating the EU's vision of cooperation with the EU's Eastern neighbours on the basis of a normative approach to bilateral and multilateral relations.

The Eastern Partnership

Poland's willingness to actively contribute to the formulation of the EU's Eastern policy has been clearly declared since negotiations regarding Poland's entry into the EU first started in 1998. This is when Minister of Foreign Affairs Bronisław Geremek (1998) emphasised:

> Poland's participation in the Common Foreign and Security Policy, (…) will enhance the EU policy towards its Eastern neighbours, contributing to the development of open and partner-like relations with countries remaining outside the enlarged Union.

In early 2003, shortly after the conclusion of the accession negotiations at the Copenhagen Summit, Minister of Foreign Affairs Włodzimierz Cimoszewicz put forward a proposal to create the Eastern Dimension (Non-paper, 2002). The "non-paper" was aimed primarily at Poland's direct neighbours, Ukraine, Belarus and Moldova, clearly demonstrating Poland's advocacy for their future membership of the EU. The proposal, however, had little impact on Brussels' policies; yet, some Polish suggestions, especially with regard to Ukraine, were included in the framework of the European Neighborhood Policy (Natorski 2007:14). Since the 2003 "non-paper", subsequent Polish governments, regardless of political preference, have attempted to develop the EU policy towards the Eastern neighbours, which would be more flexible than the ENP and adjusted to the specific needs of the Eastern neighbours. Poland particularly emphasised the importance of the "open door" policy towards its Eastern neighbours.

The EaP was first presented at the General Affairs and External Relations Council (GAERC) meeting in Brussels on 26 May 2008. It was officially accepted at the European Council meeting in June 2008 and included in the European Council Conclusions, which set out the task for the European Commission to prepare the project in more detail (Council of the EU 2008:19). The Communication from the Commission (2008) to the European Parliament and the Council was presented in December 2008. The EaP was officially launched during a special summit under the Czech Presidency in spring 2009 (Council of the EU 2009).

The EaP constitutes a new initiative within the ENP, aiming to strengthen the EU's policies towards its Eastern neighbours. It is grounded in the ENP's principle to promote stability and prosperity beyond the EU's borders. The Commission's Communication on the Eastern Partnership (2008) refers to the ideational justification of the EU's engagement in the Eastern neighbourhood:

> The EaP will be based on mutual commitments to the rule of law, good governance, respect for human rights, respect for and protection of minorities, and the principles of the market economy and sustainable development. The level of ambition of the EU's relationship with the Eastern Partners will take into account the extent to which these values are reflected in national practices and policy implementation (European Commission 2008: 3).

Furthermore, since Poland's membership of the EU, one of its priorities has been to ensure that no new division lines emerge along the Polish and EU Eastern borders (Cimoszewicz 2003). Nevertheless, the Schengen enlargement in December 2007 imposed a number of restrictions on the Eastern neighbours, including a visa fee and new, much longer and more complicated procedures. This resulted in long lines in front of the Polish consulates (especially in Western Ukraine) and growing frustration and disillusionment particularly among Ukrainians (Piekło 2008). Therefore, the liberalisation of the Schengen visa regime and the future visa-free agreement for the citizens of Ukraine became paramount issues in the Polish strategy towards its Eastern neighbours.

The EaP is an attempt to make up for the shortcomings of the ENP, which was criticised for its faulty design and which adopted many of the pre-accession mechanisms without including the explicit aim of membership for those states participating in the project (Cremona and Hillion 2006). It was also an attempt to eliminate any new divisions between the EU and its Eastern neighbours. According to the draft proposal submitted by Poland and Sweden in May 2008, the EaP aims to complement the ENP in the area of bilateral cooperation, but primarily facilitates multilateral cooperation (Polish-Swedish Proposal 2008). On the bilateral level, it establishes a clear relationship based on joint ownership of responsibilities, including the upgrading of contractual relations towards Association Agreements. On the multilateral level, it provides EU expertise and financial support, which particularly results in meeting the political and security objectives of the cooperation.

According to a Polish MFA official from the Department of the European Union, negotiations to put in place deep and comprehensive free trade areas, progressive visa liberalisation and the enhancement of cooperation in the areas of security and energy security remain the most important objectives of the EaP (interview 6). Furthermore, the official added that, during the negotiations with the Commission over the EaP, Poland emphasised the importance of the EU's financial support for infrastructure development. The Poles argued that there was a need for tangible signs of cooperation with the EU before the Eastern partners could commit to the reforms.

The EaP does not provide a clear promise of membership, but it might be perceived as an accession track. As pointed out by Polish Foreign Affairs Minister Radek Sikorski, "we all know the EU has enlargement fatigue. We have to use this time to prepare as much as possible so that when the fatigue passes, membership becomes something natural" (EUobserver 2008a). The Poles express their willingness to support the Eastern neighbours' political and economic transitions through the framework of the EaP, which is designed to stimulate initiative and action from the Eastern partners. Adam Daniel Rotfeld emphasises that the EaP, through the export of policies and rules targeting corruption, for example, provides the means for better transparency (interview 3). In his opinion, the lack of a strong financial contribution to the EaP by the EU members, which has been perceived as an impediment for the successful development of the policy (Cameron 2009), is not seen as a disadvantage because it provides a stronger motivation for the Eastern partners to take the initiative. Rotfeld explains that flooding these regions with EU money would not resolve their problems; the EaP, on the other hand, allows for the stimulation of action and initiative.

The Polish government promotes the EaP as a very dynamic and active policy. One month after launching the EaP, it organised the first multilateral platform meeting with the representatives of all partnering countries including the EU member states, the Council Secretariat, and the European Parliament, chaired by the Commission (European Dialogue 2009). The meeting set detailed work plans and timeframes for implementing the EaP initiatives within the four thematic platforms. Andrzej Cieszkowski, from the Polish MFA, explains that these plans are concrete; therefore, their successful realisation is more likely (*Gazeta Wyborcza* 2010). For example, the Integrated Border Management Programme targets not only the borders with the EU, but, first and foremost, the infrastructure development of the Ukraine-Moldova border and the Ukraine-Russia border (*ibid.*). This initiative has been provided with a specific budget. Cieszkowski claims that these activities not only intend to improve border management, but in fact aim to engage the EU in the region and bring these countries closer to the EU's standards. Such an approach illustrates Poland's clear vision of the implementation of the EaP. Poland has been motivated by rational objectives in promoting the EaP, but there are also some "ideational" principles underlying this policy.

There are three elements of the EaP that may be characterised as "ideational" principles underlying Poland's foreign policy objectives: first, the principle of differentiation, which refers to the importance of the recognition of the Eastern neighbourhood as an independent region, different from the Southern neighbourhood and characterised by Western European values; second, the implementation of foreign policies based on "European standards"; third, based on Poland's own transformation experiences and its successful integration with Western structures, Poland's encouragement of the development of strong multilateral ties among the Eastern partners, facilitating the building of new economic, political and social connections. Each of these principles will be analysed in more detail below.

The principle of differentiation

The need to differentiate between the South and the East was included in the Polish-Swedish proposal on the Eastern Partnership (2008) and was later incorporated by the European Commission into the policy itself. According to the Communication (European Commission, 2008), the principle of differentiation lies at the heart of the policy and will be taken into account in the context of bilateral relations in line with partners' objectives and capabilities. This approach is important because it will permit the design of individually tailored Association Agreements and further documents accommodating milestones and benchmarks appropriate to the specific circumstances of each country. According to the Communication, the principle of differentiation will also be used in region-specific projects in the case of multilateral cooperation. This has merit, particularly in the implementation of the flagship initiatives concerning energy and infrastructure that will need to consider the geographic location of the Eastern partners, differentiating between Eastern Europe and the South Caucasus.

Furthermore, the EU's initiative directed specifically at Eastern European countries and the South Caucasus offers a "commitment from the EU to accompany more intensively partners' individual reform efforts" (European Commission 2008: 3) and empowers them as individual, independent partners, not parts of a Russian sphere of influence. As Christophe Hillion and Alan Mayhew (2009: 7) point out, these countries are prepared to commit to EU norms and fulfill the expectation of fully integrating into the EU internal market. It derives from their motivation to complete the transformations begun after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

The importance of this particular approach for Poland was emphasised by Polish Foreign Affairs Minister Radosław Sikorski, who pointed out, "To the South, we have neighbours of Europe. To the East, we have European neighbours (...). They all have the right one day to apply [for EU membership]" (EUobserver, 2008a). The minister's statement highlighted the need to differentiate the EU's approach to its Eastern neighbours from those in the South, such as Morocco, resulting not only from their geographical proximity, but first and foremost "because their citizens consider themselves European by virtue of common experience and culture" (Sikorski 2009a).

Although Poland's objectives regarding the EaP were strongly influenced by Poland's discontent with the ENP and its advocacy for the "open door policy" towards the Eastern neighbours, it may be argued that the principle of differentiation underlying the EaP also derives from Poland's own struggle for differentiation from the post-Soviet monolith in the 1990s and its effort to return to Europe. From Poland's point of view, the disappearance of the West-East division enabled Poland to re-establish itself as a Central European country. It is important to note that the term "Central Europe", referring to Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia, had already been coined in 1950 by Oskar Halecki (1950), yet this region was commonly perceived in the West as a Soviet sphere of influence and an ideological and political monolith. Thus, for the newly independent states of Central Europe, it was important to differentiate their separate character and status in relation to Eastern Europe. As Roman Kuźniar (2001: 28) points out, even several years after the fall of communism, there was a tendency in the West to describe the Central and Eastern European groups of countries collectively as Eastern Europe. The need to be perceived as Central Europe, characterised by Western values, is still very strong among Poles. Historical experiences and the process of transformation also legitimate the Polish political elite's demand for the commitment of all EU members in the form of the EaP. The "principle of differentiation" included in the EaP provides some new credibility for the EU to act as a normative player, which understands the individual needs of its Eastern neighbours and takes into account their different strategies in adjusting to the EU's requirements.

The principle of differentiation aims at more focused, regionalised financial EU support and also re-focuses the EU's attention towards these particular neighbours in a political sense. This has twofold importance for Poland. First, it increases Poland's role in the EU as the leader and designer of the policy and the "specialist" of the Eastern neighbourhood. Second, it provides deeper engagement by the EU in the East, which may result in faster and deeper reforms, leading one day to EU membership.

The principle of "European standards"

The principles that inspired the creation of the EU are the cornerstone of its policies. However, it is worth mentioning that, although Poland was excluded from the process of building the European Union after 1945, these values and norms had been at the root of Polish culture and remain an important part of Polish European heritage. The Polish school of law dating back to the beginning of the fifteenth century has been rooted in basic values characteristic of the European cultural heritage. Furthermore, Poland's Constitution of 3 May 1791 is generally regarded as Europe's first, and the world's second, modern codified national constitution, following the 1788 ratification of the United States Constitution.

With regard to the Eastern neighbours, Polish Foreign Affairs Minister Krzysztof Skubiszewski, in the early 1990s, defined and introduced "European standards" in bilateral relations with the Eastern neighbours (Snyder 2003: 257-258). Skubiszewski was determined to balance bilateral relations with the Soviet Union (later Russia) with the recognition of the independence of post-Soviet republics. Timothy Snyder (2003: 257)

points out that this policy contributed to the creation of nation states in Eastern Europe. Snyder argues that Poland was not only introducing European norms in Central and Eastern Europe, but also defining them. The introduction and definition of norms applied particularly to minority rights and territorial integrity, which, as Snyder (2003: 258) explains, were still contested in the EU. The policy of "European standards" comprised the introduction and consolidation of European norms as guiding principles in building new, independent states in Eastern Europe (*ibid.*). The "European standards" policy has also been utilised in current Polish foreign policy by Sikorski who, in his 2008 policy statement, emphasised that protecting human rights, as well as the rule of law and democracy, have become a Polish passion (Sikorski 2008).

Although norms and values existed in the Central and Eastern European countries before the Association Agreements with the EU, European conditionality prompted a further massive transfer of rules and practices from the EU to the candidate states. Nevertheless, the EU's promotion of "European standards" in its current Eastern neighbourhood has been contested as EU-centred, demanding compliance without any "hard" incentives (Emerson *et al.* 2005). Furthermore, the EU has been criticised for its "contemporary western European pragmatism", which has prioritised good relations with Russia while pursuing a "disillusioned" policy towards the post-Soviet states without any motivation for the nations struggling to find the turning point in their new political existence (Riabczuk 2007: 365). Democracy building is not a natural and spontaneous concept, but rather an historical process involving institution building in symbiosis with society (Rieu and Duprat 1995). Such a process needs to be underpinned by European moral values (Riabczuk 2007: 365). Such moral values may come from experience with transformations and the specific national identities of Poland and other Central and Eastern European countries, which would strengthen the EU's democratic culture and its approach towards "European standards". Poland and other new EU member states have successfully brought to the EU's attention its role in the neighbourhood, increasing the political actions of the European Parliament, the European Commission and the Council, as displayed, for example, during the 'colour revolutions' in Ukraine and Georgia (see also Killingsworth *et al.* 2010; Pisarska 2008). The role of Central and Eastern European countries in peaceful revolutions and transformations toward democracy and a market economy influence their appreciation of values in the design of foreign policies. Additionally, one of the essential parts of successful democracy promotion is understanding the particular conditions of the country to which they wish to export it. Poland's location and historical links are adequate to assume that it is the most suitable to design the democracy model that the EU wants to promote there.

Poland's normative justification of the EaP particularly applies to Poland's way of promoting the EaP in an alliance with Sweden. For Poland, which claims that the protection of human rights, the rule of law and democracy have become a Polish passion, Sweden was a first-class partner that also promoted a normative approach to foreign policy. In the opinion of one Polish Foreign Affairs Ministry official (interview 6), Sweden's reputation as a "moral superpower" at a time when a value-based foreign policy merits attention increased the status of the EaP and simplified the process of obtaining support for the policy among all EU members. Sweden presents itself as a supporter of a soft power approach towards the Eastern neighbourhood. The then Swedish Minister for EU Affairs Cecilia Malmström (2008) emphasised the Swedish appreciation of the EU's soft power standing for the EU's ability to shape the world on the basis of its ideas and values. With regard to the countries included in the ENP and in the absence of the promise of membership, the Swedish Minister believed that engaging in political work adapted to each individual country, cultural exchange, and a more liberal visa policy, among other things, would stimulate democratic and economic change.

It is noteworthy that Poland's idea to promote the EaP in partnership with Sweden was a great tactical move, as Sweden had more experience in dealing with the EU system and was perceived as an established EU member. Sweden thus ensured that the project met all the EU's formal and informal requirements, which Poland, as fairly new to the system, might not have been aware of. Furthermore, the EaP proposal presented together with Sweden avoided the assumption that it was directed against Russia - Sweden had no historical burden in relation to Russia and has an independent energy sector.

Nevertheless, the soft power approach, based on the application of European norms involving EU principles, has become the cornerstone of the EaP. This normative justification of the EaP provides the basis for bilateral and multilateral relations between the EU and the Eastern partners. It also delivers a powerful political message by showing partner countries attractive development prospects and by treating them as "independent entities and not pawns that are organically linked to Russia" (Sikorski 2009a). Furthermore, the EaP creates the possibility for Russia to participate in local projects, especially in the Kaliningrad region. Russia has rejected a previous form of the ENP, but there is no such attitude towards the idea of the EaP (OSW 2009). Furthermore, according to the Director of the Eastern Policy Department in MFA, Jarosław Bratkiewicz (interview 2), Russian officials from the Kaliningrad region have been very interested in establishing closer cooperation. Similar reactions have been observed among Belarusian officials (interview 6). Should both Russia and Belarus want to join initiatives under the EaP, they would be required to comply with the "European standards" included in the formal contracts (Bernatowicz 2009: 9).

Increased regional cooperation

According to the draft proposal submitted by Poland and Sweden in May 2008, the EaP aims to complement the ENP in the area of bilateral cooperation. Also, more importantly, it facilitates multilateral cooperation. To deepen bilateral cooperation, the project proposed developing a road map towards a visa-free regime and the signing of a series of deep and comprehensive free-trade agreements leading to the creation of a Free Trade Area (FTA). The proposal also suggested launching bilateral projects in economic, environmental and social areas, including smaller projects on student exchange and the supply of energy (EUobserver 2008b).

With regard to multilateral cooperation, the proposal suggested not only fostering regional links by encouraging regional cooperation between the EU member states and the six EaP partners, but also fostering links among the Eastern partners themselves. This cooperation would be based on the implementation of concrete projects (flagship initiatives) on a voluntary basis by each interested country. As one of the officials from the Polish MFA pointed out, the main idea behind each project is to design a road map with realistic implementation schedules providing each partner with clear steps to achieve a specific goal; this goal would be set individually for each country involved (interview 6). According to Michał Łabenda, the Deputy Director of the Department for the Eastern Policy, attached to the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the flagship initiatives may be initiated by the partnering countries (interview 5). In this respect, the EaP differs from the ENP framework, where the initiative lies only with the European Commission. It is an important step forward in relations with the EU, as it enables Eastern partners to bring to the attention of the EU matters that are the most important for them.

The Polish-Swedish proposal placed special emphasis on the development of multilateral relations, not only between the EU members and the Eastern partners, but also among the partners themselves. It was also included in the final Communication on the EaP by the Commission:

> [The EaP] will provide a forum to share information and experience on partners' steps towards transition, reform and modernisation and give the EU an additional instrument to accompany these processes. It will facilitate the development of common positions and joint activities. The multilateral framework will foster links among the partners themselves and will be a natural forum for discussion on further developments of the EaP (European Commission 2008: 8).

Poland's support for the development and strengthening of regional connections between the Eastern partners derives once again from Skubiszewski's success in building effective regional links in the 1990s. Since 1989, Poland has become an active initiator and participant in regional cooperation. Such cooperation helps build new economic, political and social connections, and also helps to lessen burdens of the past through dialogue on different levels. It helped Poland avoid isolation and undermined the creation of divisions in Central Europe. While Poland in the 1990s was focused on building close relations with the West and also recognising its independent Eastern neighbours, Skubiszewski's "dual-track policy" ensured the establishment of constructive relations with Russia. It was based on ideas from *Kultura*, grounded in a belief that the traditional Polish geopolitical dilemma resulting from its location between Germany and Russia might be overcome by promoting non-threatening behaviour and democratic values, while also having a close relationship with all its neighbours. Skubiszewski's policies contributed to building a new security architecture in Central-Eastern Europe and strengthened stabilisation across the region. This, in turn, helped Central European states integrate into NATO and the EU. The multilateral framework of the EaP presents similar potential to solve regional problems and prepare the Eastern partners to join Western structures.

Conclusion

Poland's geopolitical location and its historical experiences constitute a very influential part of Polish national identity. After years of communist rule, Polish national identity has been in a process of reconstruction not only through the "return to Europe", but also through the re-establishment of closer bonds with its Eastern neighbours. Re-anchoring with Europe, re-establishing national identity and pride, and a new patriotism have also been important elements of balance in a globalised world (Wolf-Powęska 2007: 10).

Poland is still in a process of establishing itself within the EU. Poland's attempt to reconstruct and consolidate its place in Europe after the collapse of communism plays a significant role in formulating its policies towards its Eastern neighbours and its preferences for EU policies towards its Eastern neighbours. Polish decision-makers clearly see Poland's role in the East as a promoter of the EU's norms, translator of the EU's law and an "intelligent agent".

The EaP initiative constitutes an important part of Poland's attempt to re-establish itself firmly in Europe through positioning itself as the lynchpin between the West and the East in both a normative sense (the promotion of values) and institutionally (establishing policies). For most Poles, a truly integrated Europe can only be achieved when Pope John Paul II's message that Europe has two lungs and that it will never breathe easily unless it uses both of them is fulfilled (Pope John Paul II 1988). Removing the division line between the EU and its Eastern neighbourhood and ensuring the well-being of Poland's Eastern neighbours is part of Poland's national identity. The EaP, therefore, creates an opportunity for Poland to determine the EU's common policy drawing from Poland's "ideational" foreign policy principles. But, contemporary Poland also seeks to combine its national identity and ideals with political reality. Poland's membership in the EU has had a profound impact on Poland's politics. Poland's decision-makers realised that becoming a big and influential EU member is possible through negotiation and understanding of the

EU's policy-making processes. This contends that the consensus between political realism and idealism in Poland's foreign policy may be possible to achieve through the advancement of European norms and values in Polish foreign policy.

The Polish political and intellectual elites have attempted to reconcile their perception of Poland as a big and important state with the realistic objective of implementing their national objectives in the EU. By pursuing foreign policy based on normative objectives and on the active promotion and implementation of normative principles through multilateral means, Poland may become a normative middle-size state and a norm entrepreneur in Eastern Europe, which, in turn, might strengthen the EU as a normative foreign policy actor.

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List of interviews

(1) Interview with Witod Sobków, Acting Political Director in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Warsaw, 24 October 2008.

(2) Interview with Jarosław Bratkiewicz, Director of the Department for the Eastern Policy of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Warsaw, 23 September 2008.

(3) Interview with Adam Daniel Rotfeld, Melbourne, 5 October 2009.

(4) Interview with Przemysław Grudziński, Undersecretary of State in the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Warsaw, 29 October 2008.

(5) Interview with Michał Łabenda, Deputy Director of the Department for the Eastern Policy of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Warsaw, 24 October 2008.

(6) Interview with a representative of the Department of European Union (DUE) of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Warsaw, 6 October 2008.

<div align="center">***</div>

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