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**POLISH PRESIDENCY AND EASTERN PARTNERSHIP:  
ELEVATED HOPES AND FAILED EXPECTATIONS?**

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Eastern Partnership (EaP) was a political initiative proposed by Poland and Sweden in May 2008 with the view to strengthen the eastern dimension of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP). The task carried out in this short analysis is to summarize and assess the political goals and implementation tools aimed at partner countries in the context of the Polish Presidency in the Council of the European Union (EU) in July – December 2011. During the preparations to the presidency it was assumed that the EaP development will become one of the crucial Polish priorities. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) indicated that during the presidency and two years after the inaugural Eastern Partnership Summit in Prague (2009), the time would come for first assessments of policy efficiency to be conducted and new political impulses to be provided. Poland, in its capacity of the presidency, would have a chance to influence new goals of the Partnership.<sup>1</sup>

In order to assess the EaP initiative and the effectiveness of Polish Presidency in terms of reinforcing and initiating impulses for its further development, it seems indispensable to look at the main conditions and weaknesses of the ENP. It was the ENP that constituted the basis for the Partnership offer towards the countries of Eastern Europe and South Caucasus (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine). Main conditions and weakness include:

- Weak impact of the EU in terms of supporting democratic transformation;
- Conditionality principle together with inadequate system of incentives to achieve goals promoted by the EU;
- Conflicting interests between (part of) EU member states and partner states;
- The problematic dimension of multilateral cooperation together with EU negligence of security aspects and conflict resolution in the region;
- Geopolitical realities, where EU relations with EaP countries are largely subjected to relations with Russia;
- The challenge of competition within the ENP between the southern and eastern dimension.

Undoubtedly however, in the years 2006-2011 the attitude of the EU towards relations with the eastern ENP countries has substantially evolved. While the Commission communication from 2006

mentioned neighbourhood countries, the joint declaration from Prague summit in 2009 – partner countries, the Warsaw declaration signed during the Polish presidency in September 2011 clearly spoke about the Eastern European countries. The political goal of the Union was initially to support the reform efforts of the neighbours (2006), but then it evolved towards approximation and creation of necessary conditions to further political association and economic integration between the EU and interested partner countries (2009). Finally, since 2011 the aim is to create a common economic area between partners and the EU. Most importantly, at the Warsaw Summit the member states have acknowledged the European aspirations and European choice of some of the partners. While in 2006 the eastern neighbours were offered the possibility of concluding deep and comprehensive free trade agreements (DCFTA) and visa facilitation agreements for selected categories of citizens, already in 2011 the majority of EaP states were negotiating association agreements, negotiating or preparing for the opening of negotiations for the DCFTA, implementing or

starting to negotiate visa facilitation agreements, while Ukraine and Moldova were already engaged in visa dialogue aiming at full visa liberalization. EU has earmarked 1.9 billion euro for the implementation of the Partnership for the years 2010-2013. As for the new multiannual financial framework 2014-2020 an increase of EU budgetary funding by 37% for the entire ENP (both eastern and southern dimension) is foreseen compared to the current framework (18.18 billion euro as opposed to 11.4 billion euro in 2007-2013).<sup>2</sup>

The analysis of cooperation by means of the above-mentioned bilateral instruments points out to three important elements. Firstly, the most advanced country in terms of all the instruments is Ukraine. However, negotiations of all the agreements with Ukraine had started already before the EaP initiative was realized. As a consequence, Ukraine perceives EaP in terms of little added value to the previously existing ENP arrangements. Secondly, main beneficiaries of the Partnership seem to be the Caucasus states, particularly Georgia, as their relations with the EU have significantly progressed since the Partnership inauguration. Finally, major developments occurred at the turn of the years 2011 and 2012, which could indicate major contribution of the Polish presidency to the opening or closing of negotiations regarding trade and visa policies. In December 2011 negotiations of association agreement, including the free trade agreement, were finalized with Ukraine and the document was finally initialled on 30 March 2012. Also in December 2011 the decision to open DCFTA negotiations with Moldova and Georgia was approved by the Trade Committee of the Council, whereas in March 2012 first negotiation round took place. The same committee approved the start of negotiations with Armenia in February 2012. In addition, in February and March 2012 visa facilitation and readmission negotiations began with Armenia and Azerbaijan.

In the context of deep trade agreements a question arises about the economic benefits for partners' development. Is the import of the EU model of economic and regulatory governance as well as adoption of major parts of the *acquis communautaire* designed for developed countries an adequate strategy for economies of poor states facing severe structural problems? The economic and political development indicators point to the enormous amount of tasks and efforts that partner countries are

confronted with on their way towards approximation with EU laws and standards. For instance, Ukraine is one of the most corrupted countries in the world (152 among 180 countries in the index of Transparency International), but also one of the countries where it is most difficult to do business (152 out of 183 countries in the Doing Business 2012 ranking by the World Bank). Moreover, none of the Eastern Partnership countries is ranked as free and democratic by the Freedom House index.<sup>3</sup>

This context is important when assessing the initiatives and activities undertaken by the presidency. During the Polish term first plenary meetings of the Parliamentary Assembly EURONEST and Conference of Regional and Local Authorities of Eastern Partnership (CORLEAP), as well as EaP Business Forum took place. The proposal of the European Endowment for Democracy (EED) voiced by Polish minister of foreign affairs R. Sikorski in February 2011 was quickly labelled "the flagship of the Polish presidency". Although the very

idea was included by the Commission in the ENP review from May 2011, details of the Polish proposal stirred controversies and opposition both from the member states and EU institutions. Consequently, the endowment was not created before the end of the presidency. Moreover, recommendations for the Council approved by the Foreign Affairs Committee of the European Parliament in March 2012 concerned only and exclusively the possible creation of the EED.

The multilateral meetings taking place during the Polish presidency were resulting rather from the EU rolling agenda taken over by the presidency than convened on its own initiative. For the time being, it is difficult to draw definitive conclusions on success of CORLEAP or Business Forum as effects of discussions and exchange of best practices can only be evaluated in the long run. The first plenary session of EURONEST, an initiative of huge importance to Poland, ended up in failure. It can only be hoped that with time the progress of Europeanization would allow for a more constructive role of the assembly in partners' relations with the EU and between themselves. Finally, the fate of the European Endowment for Democracy is still uncertain and it would be difficult to include it among the successes of the presidency.

The Eastern Partnership Summit in Warsaw was awaited with high expectations from partner countries hoping for new initiatives and incentives from the Polish presidency. In particular, a road map for visa liberalization and concrete declarations on future funding increase were expected. Meanwhile, the purely symbolic role of the summit became a source for disappointment and frustration among the partner countries' elites as they were waiting for a new opening in relations with the EU, especially at the time when the presidency was held by the member state that was assuming the role of initiator and promoter of the eastern dimension of the ENP.<sup>4</sup> However, it has to be noted that expectations of the partners towards the EU are not uniform at all:

- Ukraine persistently requests a membership perspective;
- Georgia expects more involvement of the Union in the field of regional security and its own territorial integrity;
- Armenia sees a chance for breaking its geopolitical isolation;
- Azerbaijan rejects the asymmetric conditionality principle and regards the EaP merely in terms of reinforcing its position as an international energy player;
- Belarusian regime is not interested in cooperation at the political level.<sup>5</sup>

Meanwhile, the EU hoped that five partner countries would support the declaration condemning the political situation in Belarus. It also expected the Ukrainian authorities to adequately resolve the case of political trial that the former prime minister Julia Timoshenko was facing. Moreover, there was no accord from the member states to include in the preamble of the association agreement with Ukraine any mentioning of long-term membership perspective. As a result, the declaration on Belarus was signed by EU member states only, whereas the association agreement was neither signed during the Warsaw summit nor during the EU – Ukraine summit in December 2011.

As to the Polish eastern policy, it appears to have undergone a transformation process from enthusiasm in 2008-2009 with regard to the "new opening" and European acceptance of the EaP proposal to frustration in the years 2011-2012 in relation to internal opposition within the EU and negative developments in Belarus and Ukraine. Poland failed to convince EU partners to include in the Warsaw joint declaration provisions stipulating that inadequate progress in democratization should not prevent the visa liberalization process. In practice, this would mean withdrawal from the "more for more" principle enshrined in the Commission communication from May 2011 and previously promoted by the Polish government. Poland argued that visa liberalization should be considered as a tool for democratization and not as a reward for carrying out the required reforms.<sup>6</sup>

It should be noted that EaP goals, instruments and progress achieved are conditioned by the context of geopolitical competition in two spheres: firstly, competition between southern and eastern dimension of the ENP and secondly, competition between EU and Russia within the power game in the post soviet space. In 2008 the Russian-Georgian conflict accelerated the implementation of Polish-Swedish proposal of Eastern Partnership, thus shifting the attention of the entire Union towards the East, which resulted, considering the intra-EU interests' differences, in the "biggest common denominator". However, at the beginning of 2011 the outbreak of the so-called Arab Spring shifted European involvement again, this time towards the Mediterranean, subjecting the ENP review to the southern concerns.

In Eastern Europe the competition factor is constituted by actions of the Russian Federation, especially in the field of energy policy. The latter plays a strategic role with regard to Russian economic growth and enhancing the international position of Russia as an independent player in the emerging multipolar order.<sup>7</sup> To achieve these goals Russia constructs alternative pipeline routes by-passing the current transit countries in Central and Eastern Europe and attempts to take the control over Belarusian and Ukrainian transmission systems. Moreover, Russia tries to push Ukraine towards custom union and Eurasian Economic Area by means of economic pressure. Ukraine's eventual consent would be equal to rejection of the economic integration process with the European Union.

Consequently, postponing the finalization of the association agreement by the EU might result in leaving Ukrainian authorities without much choice left. It is therefore argued that European Union should in this case consider some relaxation in the execution of the conditionality principle.<sup>8</sup> In fact, the EU might wish to reflect more realistically on the cost-benefit analysis that the Ukrainian authorities must carry out at the time of catastrophic economic situation and lack of accession prospects with the EU. It is probably in this direction that the Union's consent to initial the association agreement on 30 March 2012 should be interpreted.

**Footnotes:**

- 1) Interview conducted by the author in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Poland for the purpose of a project carried out in the Institute of Public Affairs, Warsaw, 18.12.2008; I. Niemczycki „Rola polskiej

- prezydencji w promowaniu polityki wschodniej Unii Europejskiej”, Prezydencja Polski w Unii Europejskiej – 2011 rok, Biuletyn Analiz UKIE, nr 22, 11.2009.
- 2) See: European Commission, „On strengthening the European Neighbourhood Policy”, COM(2006) 726 final, Brussels, 4.12.2006; Council of the European Union, „Joint Declaration of the Prague Eastern Partnership Summit”, Brussels, 7 May 2009, 8435/09 (Presse 78); Por. Communication from the Commission, “Eastern Partnership”, COM(2008) 823, Brussels, 3.12.2008; European Commission, High Representative of the European Union, „A new response to a changing Neighbourhood”, Joint Communication, Brussels, 25.05.2011, COM(2011) 303; Council of the European Union, „Joint Declaration of the Eastern Partnership Summit”, Warsaw, 30 September 2011, 14983/11, Presse 341;  
[http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/how/finance/mff/financial\\_framework\\_news\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/how/finance/mff/financial_framework_news_en.htm) (access: 22.03.2012).
  - 3) [http://transparency.org/policy\\_research/surveys\\_indices/cpi](http://transparency.org/policy_research/surveys_indices/cpi);  
<http://www.doingbusiness.org/~media/FPDKM/Doing%20Business/Documents/Annual-Reports/English/DB12-FullReport.pdf>; <http://www.freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world> (access: 22.03.2012).
  - 4) Por. K. Wolczuk, “Perceptions of, and Attitudes towards, the Eastern Partnership amongst the Partner Countries' Political Elites”, Eastern Partnership Review no 5, Estonian Centre of Eastern Partnership, 12.2011, p. 10.
  - 5) D. Rinnert, “The Eastern Partnership in Georgia: increasing efficiency of EU neighbourhood policies in Southern Caucasus?”, Working Paper FG 5, Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik (SWP) Berlin, 03.2011, s. 20; Wolczuk, op. cit., p. 9-10.
  - 6) „Notatka informacyjna po spotkaniu Ministrów SZ państw Grupy Wyszehradzkiej, Estonii, Łotwy, Litwy, Danii i państw Partnerstwa Wschodniego, Praga 5 marca 2012”, Ministerstwo Spraw Zagranicznych, Warszawa, 13.03.2012.
  - 7) R. Zięba, “Współczesne stosunki polsko-rosyjskie: uwarunkowania, problemy, implikacje”, Przegląd Politologiczny, Uniwersytet im. Adama Mickiewicza w Poznaniu, nr 3/ 2011 (Rok XVI), p.. 39-40.
  - 8) M. Emerson, „The Ukraine Questions”, CEPS Commentary, Centre for European Policy Studies, 04.04.2012.

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