

The Eastern Partnership 2009–2014

Genesis, functioning, conditions

May 2014 marked five years since the inauguration of the Eastern Partnership. At the end of June 2014 three of the countries most advanced in their collaboration with the European Union, Moldova, Georgia and Ukraine, signed association agreements and/or detailed and comprehensive free trade agreements. This constitutes a milestone on the road to the integration of the post-Soviet area countries with the EU. At the same time, political changes in Ukraine caused increased instability in the direct vicinity of European borders and completely altered the geopolitical landscape, in which the European Union functions. These events inspire to summarize and analyze the successes and failings of the EU policy towards its eastern neighbours. The purpose of this publication is to examine the creation, hitherto functioning, as well as internal and external conditions of the Eastern Partnership. The European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) and Eastern Partnership are presented as the result of negotiations between the member states and the EU institutions, who have different, often times contradicting preferences. The ambivalence in formulation and implementation of policies towards Eastern European and South Caucasus countries is a result of those differing and contradicting interests. It is worth noting that the ambivalence of the Partnership's goals made it possible for the initiative to be passed by all EU member states, was beneficial to those countries which were concerned about relations with Russia and the reactions on Western interference in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) area, as well as favorable to the governments of partner states, which had a liberal approach to the reforms promoted by

the Union in conditions of very restricted application of the conditionality principle. Reflection on the genesis and development of the ENP is aimed at showcasing the processes and tendencies which contributed to the current state of EU policy towards its neighbors and formed the foundation for the establishment and further functioning of the Eastern Partnership. This approach will help answer the questions, to what degree the Partnership is a result of qualitative changes in the neighborhood policy, and whether it reflects historically and institutionally conditioned “path dependency”. In other words, it will enable to approach the studied issue in categories of continuity and change in the functioning logic of the expansion policy, neighborhood policy and the Partnership itself. In what scope are we dealing with a change in the conceptualization of relations with neighbors at the side of EU member states and institutions? What is the added value of the Partnership compared to the neighborhood policy?

The Eastern Partnership is presented as a form of realizing Polish interests in the East and reflects the Europeanization process of Polish foreign policy. This initiative heralded the beginning of a new, conciliatory and pragmatic tactic of Polish diplomacy, able to take advantage of beneficial circumstances: space for creating a counterbalance to the French proposal of Northern neighborhood from the year 2007 and the 2008 war in Georgia. The latter made it possible to increase the pace of work on the initiative and was decisive to the actual rise of support for the Partnership. The standpoints of EU member states became more consolidated, as the need to establish a unified Union policy and broader involvement outside the Eastern EU borders became an apparent and pressing matter for all. The new initiative also began functioning in a new institutional environment, i.e. in conditions established by the Lisbon Treaty. Simultaneously, realization of the Partnership coincided with the financial crisis and the crisis in the euro zone, which again strengthened the feeling of “fatigue” with the expansion and neighborhood policy in the EU countries. Partner countries, especially Ukraine, experienced significant economic problems, which translated to even less motivation to introduce reforms. On the other hand it seems that, for example, in Georgia it was noted that the reforms promoted by the EU will help battle the crisis. In as much as the ENP and the Partnership were a reaction to the pro-Western and pro-democratic changes in the Eastern neighborhood, EU policy to a limited degree contributed to the consolidation of democracy in partner countries. Some of them even experienced a regression in terms

of democracy. EU actions towards the Europeanization of the Eastern neighborhood (transfer of the EU norms and regulations onto local legal framework and administrative practices) strengthen the state's institutions in conditions of unconsolidated democracy, which in turn can lead to the strengthening of (soft) authoritarianism. The economic development and the development (regression) of democracy in partner countries is analyzed in this study in terms of quantity, as well as quality. An analysis of the EU policy towards its Eastern neighbors would not be complete without taking into account external factors. As the Union does not operate in a vacuum, but in conditions of geopolitical competition in an area which is considered to be a natural sphere of influence by Russia, currently revitalized as a superpower under essentially authoritarian rule. The events in the Ukraine which took place at the turn of 2013 and 2014 require attention and thorough analysis in the context of the emerging new global order and the significance of the European Union and NATO alliance on the one hand, and the questioning of their leading position by new superpowers on the other. The Ukraine – Russia conflict perfectly showcases the divisions within the Union and the difficulties of member countries in the formulation and implementation of a unified and effective reaction to international threats.