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Foreign Policy of Poland towards the Eastern Partnership States before 2023

1. Introduction

The 2004 enlargement of the European Union, involving the accession of ten states, forced the EU to create a special policy towards its new neighbors – the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP). This initiative encouraged the neighbors of integrated Europe to introduce political and economic reforms aimed at strengthening democracy and the free market. For four years, however, the ENP did not yield the expected results. Its main flaw was the fact that it included two groups of states that were very different in political, social and economic terms – the Mediterranean states and the Eastern European states. It was also a mistake that the EU clearly signaled that there was no possibility for these states to join the Union.

The failure of EU policy under the ENP contributed to the intensification of efforts by Polish politicians to increase the effectiveness of EU cooperation with its eastern neighbors. With the support of Sweden, Poland managed to create a new EU initiative within the ENP framework – the Eastern Partnership – aimed at Ukraine, Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus and Moldova. The aim of the Partnership is to deepen cooperation between the EU and its neighbors, while not rejecting the possibility of their future accession. However, whether this initiative can be realized depends on the willingness of all parties involved to cooperate – both the EU Member States and the neighboring states[1].

Poland was one of the initiators of the EastAern Partnership within the framework of the European Neighborhood Policy in 2009, together with Sweden. Nowadays, Poland plays an important role as a bridge between the EU and the Eastern Partnership states. Within the area of Polish foreign policy analysis, liberalism plays a vital role, with its emphasis on domestic politics, decision-making processes, and the interdependence

[1] A. Adamczyk, *The Role of Poland in the Creation Process of the Eastern Partnership*, "Yearbook of Polish European Studies" 2010, nr 13, p. 195.

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of structures and agents. Poland is considered a middle power, and the liberal approach helpfully individualizes, even humanizes, the international state system by opening the "black box" of a generic state unit, allowing a whole range of identities, ideas, interests and institutions to emerge.

The main aim of this article is to determine whether Poland's foreign policy towards the Eastern Partnership states changed after 2023, when the Polish government changed, and to analyze what changes were implemented.

In analyzing the factors that have conditioned Poland's policy towards the EU Eastern Partnership, it is necessary to emphasize that Poland takes a very deep interest in Eastern Europe. The reasons for this are complex, but certain factors affecting how the region is perceived by Polish elites and Polish society should be regarded as particularly important. These factors are interrelated, and their significance at any given time depends on a number of external factors as well. They include the perception of threats to Poland's national security and the political climate in Poland's relations with its individual Eastern European neighbors. Poland's eastern policy is also usually affected by the climate of relations between the West and Russia.

Geographical proximity naturally stimulates Poland's multidimensional cooperation with its neighboring countries to the East: the Russian Federation (although Poland borders only the Kaliningrad Oblast), Belarus and Ukraine. In particular, physical proximity facilitates cross-border cooperation in different forms (today, mostly along the Polish-Ukrainian border), as well as migration and people-to-people contacts in general. Because of geography, political, social and economic turbulences in Eastern Europe cannot be a matter of indifference for Poland. Proximity also affects how the Russian Federation is perceived in Poland, and these perceptions differ from those prevalent in Western Europe, which is located further from Russia. It is worth noting that, in the not-too-distant past, Poland's geographical location was often perceived as a geopolitical curse – being situated between Germany and Russia. The shadow of this idea still hangs over Polish political thinking and encourages an analysis of Poland's foreign policy from the perspective of ontological security.

2. Theoretical Backgrounds of Polish Foreign Policy

Poland is the main country in the post-communist Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) region. In 2019, Poland was classified as the 22nd economy in the world, the 23rd military force globally, and ranked 33rd in the world in terms of quality of life. Poland's economic and political history clearly illustrates the specificity of the CEE region. The country experienced centuries-long domination by the nobility, a prolonged feudal era, periods of political power, and ultimately the loss of independence as a result of the partition of its territory by neighboring states. Poland was affected by numerous wars, including the Northern War, the Napoleonic Wars, multiple national uprisings, and two world wars. After 1945, Poland became one of the largest states within the communist bloc.

In the period 1989–1991, communism collapsed in the countries of the Warsaw Pact, and Poland decisively turned toward the West. Over the course of several years, Poland

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transitioned from a communist system to democracy and achieved membership in NATO (1999) and the European Union (2004). At present, Polish politicians are seeking a new political direction for the coming decades. However, the political elites in Poland have been unable to reach a consensus on the goals and priorities of foreign policy[2].

According to the Polish Constitution, foreign policy is primarily the responsibility of the government (Article 146) and partly of the President (Article 126) (The Constitution of the Republic of Poland, 1997). Parliamentary control over the executive branch is exercised through standing parliamentary committees. Nevertheless, traditions of Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA) research indicate the need for a broader analytical approach. Contemporary politics is shaped by a system of institutions, including legal acts, offices, agencies, decisions, and a wide range of stakeholders who are directly or indirectly involved in developing relations between a given state and other countries.

Currently, there is no consensus in Poland regarding the directions and priorities of foreign policy. At the declarative level, these differences are already visible in the content of the "strategic" documents produced over the past decade. The liberal *Priorities of Polish Foreign Policy, 2012–2016* differ significantly from the conservative *Polish Foreign Policy Strategy, 2017–2021* (2017). It is worth noting that the two dominant currents of political thought – liberal and conservative – formulate almost contradictory diagnoses of Poland's international situation. This divergence translates into a degree of inconsistency within the primary circle of stakeholders and subsequently affects broader policy networks.

According to liberal thinking, European cooperation is of key importance for Poland's security. European states are Poland's main trade and technological partners, and economic development occupies a central place in liberal approaches. Liberals assume that Warsaw's strong economic and diplomatic position would enable Poland to act as one of the European leaders, thereby strengthening its position vis-à-vis Russia. In the field of security, this perspective implies closer military cooperation with NATO and EU member states, as well as considerable openness to American initiatives. A policy broadly consistent with these assumptions was implemented during the first half of the previous decade, when liberals governed Poland in the years 2007–2015. This policy remained largely aligned with the positions of Poland's major European partners and with the administration of President Barack Obama in the United States[3].

According to the theoretical framework, the research will be conducted using qualitative methods based on the liberal theoretical school. The main techniques employed include an analysis of the official websites of the President of Poland and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as well as interviews with current and former ambassadors.

The main research questions addressed in this article are as follows: Has Poland's foreign policy towards the Eastern Partnership states changed after 2023, following the change of government? What are the main changes?

[2] T. Pawluszko, *The Foreign Policy of Poland and the Problem of Political Rationale*, „Teoria Polityki" 2022, nr 6, p. 241.

[3] *Ibidem*, p. 246.

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3. Polish Foreign Policy towards Eastern Partnership States before 2015

Poland's willingness to actively contribute to the formulation of the European Union's eastern policy has been clearly articulated since the negotiations on Poland's accession to the EU began in 1998. In early 2003, shortly after the conclusion of the accession negotiations at the Copenhagen Summit, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Włodzimierz Cimoszewicz, put forward a proposal to establish the Eastern Dimension[4]. The "non-paper" was aimed primarily at Poland's direct neighbours (Ukraine, Belarus, and Moldova) clearly demonstrating Poland's advocacy for their future membership in the EU. The proposal, however, had little impact on policies formulated in Brussels; nevertheless, some Polish suggestions, particularly with regard to Ukraine, were incorporated into the framework of the European Neighbourhood Policy[5]. 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[6]. The Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council (2008) was presented in December 2008. The Eastern Partnership was officially launched at a special summit held under the Czech Presidency in the spring of 2009[7].

After 2004, Poland, with varying intensity, remained at the centre of the European Union's eastern policy, and as the largest Central European country it exerted a degree of influence in this area. According to the assumptions advanced by successive Polish governments, increasing the security of Central and Eastern European states and strengthening their international subjectivity in the long term would also contribute to enhancing Poland's own subjectivity. In December 2008, the Eastern Partnership (EaP) was approved by the European Commission. A report on foreign policy presented by the Minister of Foreign Affairs, R. Sikorski, in the Sejm in 2009 confirms that Poland did not abandon its pursuit of EU enlargement to the East. Poland's success in this area can be attributed in part to the formation of a new government led by Civic Platform (Polish *Platforma Obywatelska, PO*), which was instinctively more pro-European than its predecessor. In October 2010, President Komorowski noted that the European Union

[4] Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Poland, "Non-paper" presented at the Copenhagen Summit, December 2002, http://www.msz.gov.pl/Non-paper-with-Polish-proposals-concerning-policy-towards-the-new-Eastern-neighbours-after-EU-enlargement-2041.html [accessed 10 June 2024].

[5] M. Natorski, *Explaining Spanish and Polish Approaches to the European Neighbourhood Policy*, "European Political Economy Review" 2007, nr 7, p. 14.

[6] Council of the European Union (2008), *Eastern Partnership — General Facts and Origins*, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eastern_Partnership [accessed 10 June 2024].

[7] M. Klatt, *Poland and its Eastern Neighbours: Foreign Policy Principles*, "Journal of Contemporary European Research" 2011, Vol. 7, Is. 1, p. 6.

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should not halt the enlargement process or close off European integration prospects for Ukraine[8].

Poland's foreign policy toward Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova, Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan within the framework of the Eastern Partnership during the period 2011–2015 was shaped by external factors. The most significant of these were Russia's activities in the region and the limited capacity of the European Union to respond to them. As the Eastern Partnership evolved – particularly with regard to progress in negotiations on association agreements and visa liberalization – Russia sought to expand its sphere of influence and to discourage Eastern Partnership countries from pursuing closer relations with the EU. The principal instruments employed by Russia included economic and security pressure, propaganda, and the instigation of new territorial conflicts[9].

Examples of such actions included the embargoes imposed on Moldovan and Ukrainian goods, the instrumentalisation of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict to influence relations between Armenia and Azerbaijan and the European Union, as well as the annexation of Crimea and the outbreak of the war in Donbas in 2014. Importantly, prior to the outbreak of the trade war with Ukraine in 2013, Russia had not formally expressed any reservations regarding the association agreement in Ukraine's relations with the EU.

The European Union's response to Russian policy in the region was limited. Decision-making processes were prolonged, and the range of available instruments was largely confined to financial assistance, trade measures (including economic sanctions), energy policy, and civil security. These constraints stemmed from the low level of communitarisation of external relations and the requirement for consensus in the field of foreign policy. The EU's focus on concurrent challenges – such as the Arab Spring (2011–2012), the sovereign debt crisis (2011–2013), and migration pressures (2014–2015) – as well as the absence of a clear enlargement perspective for Eastern Partnership states, further reduced its capacity for action.

At the same time, the engagement of Germany, particularly that of Chancellor Angela Merkel, and the Franco-German consensus on the EU's eastern policy had a positive impact on the development of the Partnership. Another important factor was the differentiated level of participation among Eastern Partnership countries, which largely reflected their respective foreign policy orientations. Interest in EU-supported reforms was constrained by the close ties of Belarus, Armenia, and Azerbaijan with Russia. In contrast, although Moldova and Georgia cooperated closely with the EU under pro-European administrations, large-scale structural reforms did not constitute a central priority. Ukraine's foreign policy toward both the EU and Russia remained ambiguous throughout the presidency of Viktor Yanukovych. Ukraine's withdrawal from

[8] O. Brusylovska, *The Role of Poland in Formulation and Implementation of EU Eastern Policy*, [in:] *The formation and peculiarities of the implementation of the European Union's Eastern policy: Scientific monograph*, eds. T. Astramovich-Leik, Ya. Turchyn, Riga 2022, p. 45–58.

[9] C. Bilds, *Russia, the European Union, and the Eastern Partnership*, "ECFR Riga Series", Riga 2015, p. 3–5.

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the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA) component of the Association Agreement in late 2013 represented a turning point for the entire Eastern Partnership. This decision triggered a change of power through the "Revolution of Dignity" and served as a pretext for Russian intervention against Ukraine. In the aftermath of these events, Ukraine focused on strengthening its relations with the European Union[10].

Another important factor was that Eastern Partnership summits were held in Warsaw (2011), Vilnius (2013), and Riga (2015) during this period. Poland and the Baltic States were among the strongest advocates of strengthening relations between Eastern European and South Caucasus countries and the European Union. Poland's presidency of the Council of the European Union in the second half of 2011 was particularly significant for EU policy toward the Eastern Partnership. Internal determinants in Poland were also favourable to the development of cooperation within the Eastern Partnership, owing to the continuity of the Polish government's activities in this area. From 2011, as in the previous term, until November 2015, Poland was governed by a coalition of Civic Platform and Polish People's Party (Polish *Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe, PSL*)[11].

Poland's objectives toward the Eastern Partnership countries in the period 2011–2015 constituted a continuation of the policy pursued by the PO–PSL government since assuming power in 2007. The primary aim was to support independence, strong statehood, and the rule of law in these countries, as well as to promote good relations with Poland. The government maintained that eastern policy should be implemented mainly at the European Union level, owing to the availability of EU resources and the greater potential impact of collective action, compared with initiatives undertaken by individual Member States, both on the Eastern Partnership countries and on Russia's actions. The European Union's objective was to support the processes of political, economic, and social modernisation in the Eastern Partnership region. This approach was intended to foster stability beyond the EU's eastern border and to contribute to the construction of a peaceful pan-European order, thereby enhancing Poland's security[12].

As a result, Poland promoted the European Union's recognition of the pro-European aspirations of the Eastern Partnership countries and the confirmation of the possibility of their future membership. The Partnership was intended to pragmatically prepare eastern neighbours for accession and was based on supporting transformation processes and alignment with EU standards. To this end, the signing of association agreements and Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Areas (DCFTAs), the introduction of visa-free travel, EU assistance in implementing reforms, funding for infrastructure and energy projects, programmes supporting democracy, and the development of cultural and educational exchange were envisaged.

[10] D. Zakrzewski, *Polska polityka wschodnia po wyborach 2015 roku – zmiana czy kontynuacja?*, [w:] *Polityka Wschodnia Rzeczpospolitej Polskiej przed i po 2015 roku,* red. T. Ohanyan, Warszawa 2016.

[11] E. Kaca, *Poland's Policy towards the Eastern Partnership*, "Yearbook of Polish Foreign Policy" 2011/2015, p. 273.

[12] PRIORYTETY POLSKIEJ POLITYKI ZAGRANICZNEJ 2012–2016, Warszawa, marzec 2012 r., https://www.bbn.gov.pl/download/1/9620/prpol.pdf [accessed 22 June 2024].

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The Polish government assumed that its influence on shaping EU eastern policy and on the development of the Eastern Partnership would increase through an alliance with Germany, as well as through cooperation within the Visegrad Group and with the Baltic States. In order to continuously expand EU partnership activities and to reduce the scale of potential conflicts with southern Member States interested in developing EU relations with North Africa and the Middle East, Poland supported the development of the southern dimension of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) and the Union for the Mediterranean. At the same time, it maintained that this direction of EU action could not be pursued at the expense of cooperation with Eastern Europe and the South Caucasus.

In particular, the Polish presidency of the Council of the European Union was intended to promote the Eastern Partnership. The EaP was also expected to contribute to the development of bilateral relations with eastern neighbours, the protection of the rights of the Polish minority in the region, the promotion of Poland's transformation experience, and the construction of a positive image of Poland. Priority was given to relations with Poland's direct neighbours, especially the development of relations with Ukraine and the pursuit of a policy of democratisation toward Belarus. Bilateral relations with the remaining Eastern Partnership countries were of lesser importance, although Moldova – having the most pro-European government among the EaP states – gained increased significance in the region.

The Polish government sought to persuade its EU partners to adopt a more open stance toward the European aspirations of the Eastern Partnership countries. This was to be achieved by gaining support for deeper integration with the Union and, in the longer term, for inclusion in the enlargement policy. Until the outbreak of the Ukrainian crisis, the Polish government emphasised that, despite resistance among some Member States to further EU enlargement, the Eastern Partnership programme did not exclude membership but rather envisaged it in the long term. This was conditional upon progress in reforms within the EaP countries and a shift in the EU's overall approach to enlargement. This position stemmed from a critical assessment of reform progress and from the limited opportunities to promote the Eastern Partnership in light of competing EU priorities, including responses to the Arab Spring and the economic crisis. An exception occurred at the onset of the Ukrainian crisis, when Polish Minister of Foreign Affairs Radosław Sikorski supported granting Ukraine membership prospects as a means of encouraging its integration with the EU. As the situation evolved, however, the Polish government withdrew from such declarations, arguing that accession would not be possible without the implementation of the association agreement[13].

To encourage openness toward the Eastern Partnership, Poland emphasised the economic benefits of EU enlargement in 2004 and 2007, as well as the considerably greater potential for implementing EU standards in eastern, rather than southern, neighbouring countries. The government sought to include references in the legal documents of the Eastern Partnership to Article 49 of the Treaty on European Union,

[13] E. Kaca, *op. cit.,* p. 273.

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which provides for the possibility of submitting an application for membership by any European state once the relevant conditions are met. Such references were pursued in the conclusions of the Foreign Affairs Council, summit declarations, and association agreements. These efforts, however, encountered opposition from some EU Member States. Although a reference to Article 49 was included in the European Commission's 2011 review of the European Neighbourhood Policy, this formulation was not adopted by the European Council. In the case of the association agreement with Ukraine, Poland's attempt to include a reference to Article 49 was vetoed by the Netherlands. Despite Poland's ambitions, no reference to membership prospects was introduced into the declaration of the Warsaw Summit[14].

As a result, the recognition of the European aspirations and choices of selected Eastern Partnership countries became the compromise formula adopted in EU documents in the period 2011–2015; however, this did not entail any binding obligations on the part of the Union. In the absence of EU consent to incorporate the Eastern Partnership into the enlargement policy, Poland sought approval for a gradual deepening of integration that would go beyond the free trade area. In 2011, the government proposed a new approach to the Eastern Partnership, which resulted in the determination at the Warsaw Summit that the objective should be further integration within the internal market, leading to the creation of a common economic area.

No analytical support was provided by EU institutions to facilitate discussions among Member States, which was likely a consequence of the Union's reluctance to pursue closer ties with its neighbours. In preparation for the Vilnius Summit, Poland reiterated its proposal to establish a European economic area for associated countries. However, owing to the unstable situation in Ukraine and Russia's aggression, the Eastern Partnership faced criticism from some EU Member States, including France and Italy, as well as from parts of the expert community, which ultimately hindered the development of this concept. The Partnership was criticised for insufficient consideration of Russia's role in the region, underestimation of its potential for destabilising actions, formulation of overly ambitious objectives without offering adequate security guarantees for the implementation of agreements, and an insufficient diversification of policy instruments. The EU institutions elected in 2014 were also sceptical toward further development of the Eastern Partnership, although they declared an intention to review the European Neighbourhood Policy and revise its underlying assumptions. In response to this situation, Poland did not put forward far-reaching proposals, focusing instead on demands for increased funding and stronger political support for reform-oriented states, as well as greater pressure in the area of security[15].

[14] Joint Declaration of the Eastern Partnership Summit, Warsaw, 30 September 2011, https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/31798/2011_eap_warsaw_summit_declaration_en.pdf [accessed 22 June 2024].

[15] *Review of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP)*, European Commission (2011), https://enlargement.ec.europa.eu/review-european-neighbourhood-policy-enp_en [accessed 22 June 2024].

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During the Euromaidan revolution in 2014, the Polish government was strongly engaged in Ukrainian affairs. In this context, Radosław Sikorski played a prominent role as a member of the diplomatic triumvirate composed of the foreign ministers of France, Germany, and Poland. In Poland's handling of the Ukrainian crisis, both minimalist and romantic elements of its eastern policy can be discerned. On the one hand, the Polish government clearly expressed support for Ukraine's anti-government protesters; on the other, Sikorski cautioned opposition leaders against overplaying their hand and urged them to reach a compromise with President Viktor Yanukovych. Consequently, Poland supported the government of the newly elected Ukrainian president, Petro Poroshenko[16].

For Poland, Association Agreements and Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Areas (DCFTAs) constituted the main instruments for supporting transformation processes in the region. With a view to advancing their signing and implementation, the government sought to initiate discussions on the Eastern Partnership within the Foreign Affairs Council and in other formats, including informal meetings of foreign ministers, particularly during Poland's presidency of the Council of the European Union. In the period 2011–2013 and again in 2015, issues related to the Eastern Partnership and the political situation in the region were discussed at least three or four times a year in various configurations of the Foreign Affairs Council, and – during the escalation of the crisis in Ukraine – at most meetings of the European Council. With regard to Moldova and Georgia, negotiations on the association agreements progressed rapidly due to the strong commitment demonstrated by both countries. The launch of negotiations on the DCFTA component was agreed at the Warsaw Summit, while the full agreements were initialled in Vilnius.

In light of the Ukrainian crisis, Poland sought the swift signing of the agreements in order to minimise the potential for Russian influence over the associated countries. At the request of the Polish government, the European Council decided to sign the DCFTAs with Moldova and Georgia in the summer of 2014, although the original deadline had been set for the autumn. The European Union also negotiated an association agreement with Armenia; however, as a result of pressure from Russia, Armenia suspended the dialogue in 2013 and subsequently joined the Eurasian Economic Union[17].

The issue of concluding an association agreement with Ukraine remained problematic due to the ambiguous attitude of the Ukrainian authorities. This complicated Poland's objective of finalising negotiations on the agreement before the Warsaw Summit and ensuring its signing in Vilnius. During Viktor Yanukovych's presidency, dialogue on this matter was prolonged, primarily because the European Union made the release of Yulia Tymoshenko a condition for signing the document. Despite criticism

[16] Ch. Reeves, *The Jagiellonian Idea and Poland's Eastern Policy: Historical Echoes in Today's Approach*, "Politeja" 2017, Vol. 14, No. 6 (51), p. 141–163.

[17] E. Kaca, *op. cit.,* p. 276.

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of Yanukovych's actions, Polish diplomacy sought to mediate and resolve the conflict between Ukraine and the EU.

On the one hand, the Polish government believed that pressure on Ukraine – to stimulate reforms and to resolve the Tymoshenko case – should be maintained until the last moment before the Vilnius Summit, while simultaneously striving to persuade the EU to sign the agreement in light of Russia's policy in the region. Poland attempted to organise an informal European Council meeting on the eve of the Vilnius Summit, to secure consent for the private placement of EU financial assistance to Ukraine, and to proceed with the signing of the agreement without additional conditions, which was ultimately achieved. From this perspective, Ukraine's withdrawal from the association process following Russian pressure and the offer of a substantial loan combined with reduced gas prices came as a major surprise to the EU.

This development represented a failure of diplomatic efforts on the part of the Polish government, partly resulting from the EU's increasing demands on Ukraine and an overestimation of the attractiveness of its own offer. Moreover, the EU was criticised for underestimating – despite Polish warnings – the scale of the difficulties Ukraine faced as a result of Russian pressure. Ukraine, in turn, was criticised for failing to signal trade problems with Russia and for not submitting an official complaint to the World Trade Organization. Poland also underestimated the potential impact of the loan agreement and gas price reductions offered by Russia to Ukraine in exchange for abandoning the agreement with the EU.

Following the outbreak of the Revolution of Dignity, Poland successfully sought to maintain the EU's offer to conclude an association agreement with Ukraine. After the establishment of a new government in February 2014, Poland worked to ensure that the document was signed as swiftly as possible, which was agreed at the European Council in March. The political part of the agreement was signed in the same month, while the remaining sections were signed in June. At Ukraine's request, however, the economic component was scheduled to be implemented only from 1 January 2016, in order to avoid further economic pressure from Russia[18].

In 2015, presidential and parliamentary elections were held in Poland, resulting in a change of power. Civic Platform lost the elections, and the Law and Justice party (Polish *Prawo i Sprawiedliwość*) assumed power. This shift led to certain changes in the priorities of Poland's foreign policy toward the Eastern Partnership states. "Poland invariably supports the territorial integrity of Ukraine and the sovereignty of its government over the entire territory of the state within its internationally recognised borders. I received the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, Pavlo Klimkin, during my official visit to Warsaw last October. I was the first foreign minister to visit Kyiv after the incident in the Kerch Strait. We also draw attention to the humanitarian situation in

[18] C. Michalski, *Sikorski: Partnerstwo Wschodnie? To naprawdę działa*, https://www.newsweek.pl/swiat/sikorski-partnerstwo-wschodnie-to-dziala/8evv2m3 [accessed 22 June 2024].

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Crimea and the Donbas at the UN forum by organising open meetings of the Security Council"[19].

In relations with Ukraine in the years 2011–2012, the most important objective was the introduction of visa facilitation in connection with the organisation of Euro 2012. Fees for issuing national visas were abolished, a new headquarters of the Polish Consulate in Lviv was opened, and several visa application centres were launched. In the period 2013–2015, efforts focused on improving the situation of the Polish minority. The Centre of Polish Culture and European Dialogue (the Polish House in Ivano-Frankivsk) was opened, construction of a similar centre began in Lviv, and the Polish-Ukrainian Cultural and Educational Centre in Kharkiv was inaugurated. Assistance was also provided to Poles living in conflict areas, including the evacuation of some individuals from the Donbas. In addressing problematic economic issues – such as delayed VAT refunds, difficulties with customs clearance, and an embargo on Polish meat – the partial lifting of the embargo on Polish pork was regarded as progress. Poland also provided Ukraine with expert assistance in the transformation process, particularly in the areas of local government reform and combating corruption. Despite attempts to engage in historical dialogue concerning interpretations of the Volhynia crime, this issue remained unresolved.

Relations with Belarus in the years 2011–2012 remained frozen as a result of EU sanctions. In the second half of 2013, in connection with the gradual release of political prisoners by the Belarusian authorities and the forthcoming Eastern Partnership Summit in Vilnius, Polish diplomacy initiated consultations on the normalisation of bilateral relations and relations between Belarus and the EU. These discussions continued until 2015 and addressed consular issues, trade and investment cooperation – such as the detention of Polish trucks at the border and the functioning of the Intergovernmental Commission for Economic Cooperation – education, and the introduction of local border traffic arrangements. A tangible outcome was the initialling of an agreement on cooperation in the field of education, regulating, inter alia, the rules for sending Polish teachers to Belarus, as well as permission granted by the Belarusian authorities to establish Polish visa outsourcing centres. The rights of the Polish minority in Belarus remained a contentious issue.

In bilateral relations with Moldova, the Polish government primarily promoted good practices in the implementation of reforms, particularly decentralisation of the state. Poland participated in the work of the Task Force for Moldova under the auspices of the Community of Democracies. In 2012, with Polish support and in cooperation with USAID (the United States Agency for International Development), an Information Centre for Local Authorities was established. Following the signing of Moldova's association agreement with the EU, the development of economic cooperation became the main focus. In February 2014, Undersecretary of State Katarzyna Kacperczyk

[19] Minister Jacek Czaputowicz on Polish diplomacy priorities in 2019, https://www.gov.pl/web/diplomacy/minister-jacek-czaputowicz-on-polish-diplomacy-priorities-in-2019 [accessed 22 June 2024].

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visited the Moldovan Ministry of Foreign Affairs accompanied by a group of more than twenty entrepreneurs from the financial, agri-food, municipal, and energy sectors. In the same year, a protocol on cooperation in the field of economic diplomacy was signed, and an agreement on the protection of social security rights of citizens of both countries entered into force. Poland also granted a government loan of €100 million for the purchase of Polish capital goods, which was promoted among Moldovan entrepreneurs in the agri-food sector.

Georgia was the most important partner in Poland's relations with the countries of the South Caucasus. During negotiations on the association agreement in the years 2013–2015, the central issue in bilateral discussions was Poland's transformation experience, particularly in the area of local self-government reform. In 2015, a memorandum was signed establishing the Tbilisi Conference – a series of training sessions and conferences related to Polish support for Georgia's rapprochement with the EU. The signing of the association agreement provided an impetus for the development of economic relations. In 2014, the Polish–Georgian Investment Forum and a meeting of the Polish–Georgian Commission for Economic Cooperation were held in Warsaw.

Foreign policy during the period of Civic Platform governance reflected the broader foreign policy of the European Union. Among the priorities of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Poland, eastern policy in the years 2007–2015 was primarily oriented toward normalising relations with Russia and encouraging countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States to adopt European values. Although the PO government supported the Piast concept, it became the initiator of the Eastern Partnership programme in 2009, which may be regarded as a continuation of the Giedroyc–Mieroszewski concept, implemented through the resources of the European Union. Georgia was incorporated into the Promethean tradition, being a key state in the Caucasus due to its geographical position: while the largest oil reserves were located in the Baku region, oil processing facilities and a major transit hub were situated in the Georgian port of Batumi. Today, as a century ago, Georgia remains an important node on the Silk Road connecting the People's Republic of China with the European Union via the Black Sea. The country's significance for Poland's security is also substantial, stemming from shared concerns regarding the threat posed by Russia. The modern history of Central and Eastern Europe demonstrates that only through solidarity among states sharing common values can a path toward freedom and democracy be sustained[20].

Poland opened an embassy in Baku in 1998. Prior to that, the Polish Ambassador in Ankara was accredited to Azerbaijan. Since 2004, the Polish Embassy in Baku has been located at its current premises within the historic Old City of Icherisheher. Energy cooperation, including potential contracts for Polish companies such as Grupa Lotos, has dominated relations with Azerbaijan. At the same time, discussions have addressed

[20] I. Tkeshelashvili, *Eastern policy of Poland towards Georgia and further perspectives of Cooperation*, [w:] *Polityka Wschodnia Rzeczpospolitej Polskiej przed i po 2015 roku,* red. T. Ohanyan, Warszawa 2016.

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prospects for economic, scientific, and educational cooperation, as well as visa-related issues affecting representatives of Polish businesses. Political relations with Azerbaijan experienced a particularly dynamic phase during the presidency of the late President Lech Kaczyński, when regular visits by the heads of state took place. In the years 2010–2015, bilateral relations entered a period of stagnation, followed by a gradual rebuilding of high-level political dialogue beginning in 2015. Since then, the President of Azerbaijan has visited Poland twice (in 2015, during the NATO Summit, and in 2017, on a working visit), and a visit by the President of Poland to Azerbaijan was planned for 2019.

Poland supports the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan and seeks to promote its Euro-Atlantic aspirations, including through participation in the Eastern Partnership. During periods of highest intensity, bilateral trade turnover exceeded USD 150 million. Currently, it amounts to approximately USD 100 million, with both countries striving to expand economic cooperation in order to reach record levels of trade exchange. This objective is to be achieved through the implementation of bilateral agreements and the activities of trade offices operating in both countries. A particularly important dimension of cooperation concerns transport, as well as collaboration in other sectors, including construction, agriculture, pharmaceuticals, tourism, and energy. Cultural cooperation implemented by the Polish Embassy in Baku primarily focuses on the promotion of Polish culture in Azerbaijan. It is carried out through thematic events organised in Baku, cultural initiatives conducted within the framework of the European Union, and study visits. The Polish contribution to Azerbaijani culture is also reflected in the architectural heritage of Polish architects, as well as in mutual inspirations in music and the visual arts. Scientific cooperation is implemented by the Polish Embassy in Baku at various levels[21].

It is important to emphasise Poland's role in strengthening Armenia's European integration. Within the framework of the European Neighbourhood Policy, a "road map" for Armenia was developed to facilitate mobility between the European Union and Armenia. The role of the Head of the Chancellery of the President of the Republic of Poland in the years 2010–2015, Jacek Michałowski, was also significant, as he conducted talks with representatives of EU institutions, which resulted in expanded assistance for Armenian civil society organisations. Bilateral cooperation began to develop dynamically after 2011 within the framework of the Eastern Partnership.

In 2011, Poland assumed the presidency of the Council of the European Union, during which numerous international initiatives were organised in Poland. The country actively promoted enhanced cooperation between the EU and the Eastern Partnership states. In the same year, the Eastern Partnership Conference was held, followed by the Eastern Partnership Summit, which marked an important milestone in the development of bilateral relations. Also in 2011, a scholarship programme for students from Eastern Partnership countries, including Armenia, was launched, enabling young people to pursue master's and doctoral studies at Polish universities.

[21] Polska w Azerbejdżanie. https://www.gov.pl/web/azerbejdzan/azerbejdzan [accessed 22 June 2024].

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In 2012, owing to Poland's efforts, Armenia gained access to European Union governmental programmes such as Twinning and TAIEX, in line with the Eastern Partnership initiative. The Eastern Partnership Window programme for civil society organisations was also launched, leading to intensified cooperation between non-governmental organisations from Armenia and Poland. In June 2013, the President of Armenia paid an official visit to Poland, during which issues of Polish–Armenian cooperation were discussed, including negotiations on the prospective Association Agreement between Armenia and the European Union. In the same year, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Armenia, Edward Nalbandyan, visited Poland on three occasions. Until September 2013, cooperation between Poland and Armenia intensified in support of Armenia's European integration. Poland was among the key actors promoting European integration within the Eastern Partnership framework.

In May 2013, Poland reaffirmed its support for civilisational change in Eastern Europe, responding to the aspirations and efforts of the partner countries. At that time, it announced the establishment of a new scholarship programme for outstanding students from Eastern Partnership countries, named after Stefan Banach. On 3 September 2013, Armenian President Serzh Sargsyan announced Armenia's decision to join the Eurasian Economic Union and expressed readiness to sign a corresponding agreement, similarly to its earlier engagement with the European Union. He stated that Armenia's foreign policy principle was "both", rather than "instead of". Following this announcement, all negotiations between the EU and Armenia were suspended, and Armenia was excluded from the Twinning and TAIEX programmes. Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk stated that Poland did not understand this decision but accepted it. Many political analysts argued that the decision had been influenced by the President of the Russian Federation. In any case, this development represented a setback both in Polish–Armenian relations and in relations between the European Union and Armenia.

On 25 November 2013, the Eastern Partnership Summit was held in Vilnius, during which Association Agreements were signed by Moldova and Georgia. At the summit, the President of Armenia requested that the European Commission offer Armenia an alternative agreement compatible with its commitments to the Eurasian Economic Union. During discussions with representatives of civil society organisations in Vilnius, Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk stated that Armenia and Ukraine had chosen Russia. In 2014, the situation in Ukraine became the primary focus of Poland's foreign policy, while the South Caucasus region remained of secondary importance until the end of 2015.

Nevertheless, cultural cooperation between Poland and Armenia remained active. In 2014, an exhibition of works by Hovhannes Aivazovsky was held in Sopot, and exhibitions of Teodor Axentowicz were organised in Yerevan. The opening of the latter exhibition was announced by the spouse of the President of the Republic of Poland, Anna Komorowska. In 2015, Edgar Ghazaryan – who had been actively involved in promoting cultural and economic cooperation between Poland and Armenia – was appointed Ambassador of the Republic of Armenia to Poland. Following his appointment, several initiatives were undertaken to revitalise cultural, economic,

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and regional cooperation between the two countries. In March 2015, the Minister of Culture of Armenia, Hasmik Poghosyan, paid an official visit to Poland, during which the Intergovernmental Implementation Programme in the field of culture, science, and education for the years 2015–2018 was signed[22].

4. Polish Foreign Policy towards Eastern Partnership States before 2023: Changes in Policy due to a Change of Power

The state of Polish–Ukrainian relations in terms of practical cooperation has been assessed as good, and even very good in the areas of military cooperation, security policy, and energy. In 2018, trade between the two countries increased by 9 per cent compared to 2017. A significant number of Ukrainian citizens work in Poland, while Polish consular services issued nearly 850,000 visas in the preceding year. Almost 40,000 Ukrainian students were also studying in Poland. One condition raised by the Polish side concerned the lifting of the ban on the exhumation of the remains of the Polish population, which Poland regarded as incomprehensible in light of civilisational standards and international norms. Poland expressed its expectation that appropriate decisions would be taken by the Ukrainian authorities in this matter.

Within this policy framework, Poland focused on maintaining a firm and unified stance toward Russia, alongside a potentially ambitious agenda in relations with the Eastern Partnership countries. In 2019, Poland was actively involved in commemorating the tenth anniversary of the Eastern Partnership. In response to Russia's military build-up near Ukraine, on 31 January 2022 Poland announced its decision to supply Ukraine with weapons, ammunition, and humanitarian assistance, in view of the growing threat of a Russian invasion. On 17 February 2022, the British–Polish–Ukrainian trilateral pact was announced. On 23 February 2022, following Russia's escalation of tensions and its recognition of the self-proclaimed Donetsk People's Republic and Luhansk People's Republic in Russian-occupied eastern Ukraine, Polish President Andrzej Duda visited Kyiv together with the President of Lithuania. During the visit, they jointly declared solidarity with Ukraine and called for international sanctions against Russia.

On 24 February 2022, the day of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the Sejm (the Polish parliament) adopted by acclamation a resolution condemning the Russian aggression. On 20 September 2023, Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki announced that Poland would not supply Ukraine with weapons beyond those previously agreed, amid rising tensions between the two countries over Poland's ban on imports of Ukrainian grain. The dispute arose after Ukrainian grain intended for transit through Poland was sold on the Polish market, adversely affecting domestic producers. Following a speech by Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky at the United Nations General Assembly, in which he accused Poland of turning the grain dispute into a form of "political theatre", Prime Minister Morawiecki warned President Zelensky against insulting the Polish nation.

[22] T. Ohanyan, Eastern *Policy of Poland towards Armenia before and after 2015*, [w:] *Polityka Wschodnia Rzeczpospolitej Polskiej przed i po 2015 roku,* red. T. Ohanyan, Warszawa 2016.

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On 6 November 2023, several dozen owners of Polish transport companies blocked three major Polish–Ukrainian border crossings in protest against what they described as unfair competition from Ukrainian transport firms. Under a temporary wartime EU agreement, Ukrainian trucks were permitted to operate within the EU without standard transport permits. By 19 November, approximately 3,000 – mostly Ukrainian – trucks were stranded, forming queues extending up to 30 kilometres from the border crossings, with waiting times reaching about one week. On 27 November, the blockade was extended to a fourth crossing. By February 2024, the protests had expanded to all major border crossings, including railways, and demonstrators spilled grain from rail transport onto the ground. The blockade developed into a serious crisis. On 27 February 2024, approximately 10,000 farmers marched in Warsaw, demanding a ban on food imports from Ukraine.

Following discussions in February 2025 regarding the possibility of a reduction in U.S. support for Ukraine, Polish Minister of Foreign Affairs Radosław Sikorski declared that Poland would continue to support Ukraine. A public debate emerged between Sikorski and U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio concerning the provision of Starlink services to Ukraine during the conflict. Sikorski emphasised that Poland was covering the costs of Starlink and argued that Ukraine should continue to be provided with access to the system for its operational needs[23].

President of Poland Andrzej Duda also announced that Poland would continue to support Ukraine. On Tuesday, Duda stated that "in the Russian–Ukrainian war, Poland is on Ukraine's side – without any ifs or buts," while calling on Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky to approach peace negotiations calmly. Speaking to reporters in New York, Duda emphasised that this position was not only "a matter of human decency" but also a vital national interest for Poland. He further noted: "I told President Zelensky that you came into politics from a business background, so you should speak to President Trump in a business-like manner and try to set terms in which both sides can benefit"[24]. An analysis of speeches by Polish politicians, as well as intergovernmental documents and the *Tasks of the Foreign Policy of the Republic of Poland for 2024*, indicates that Poland's foreign policy toward Ukraine has not changed since 2023[25].

In the period preceding and following the 2020 presidential election in Belarus, numerous anti-government protests took place across the country. The Belarusian authorities responded with a violent political crackdown, involving widespread

[23] Musk and Rubio spar with Polish minister over Starlink in Ukraine, https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cy87vg38dnpo [accessed 22 June 2024].

[24] Poland's Duda advocates for renewed US aid to Ukraine amid tensions, https://www.polskieradio.pl/395/7784/Artykul/3492652,duda-urges-renewed-us-support-and-negotiations-for-ukraine-amid-tensions [accessed 22 June 2024].

[25] Informacja ministra spraw zagranicznych o zadaniach polskiej polityki zagranicznej w 2024 r., https://www.gov.pl/web/dyplomacja/informacja-ministra-spraw-zagranicznych-o-zadaniach-polskiej-polityki-zagranicznej-w-2024-r [accessed 22 June 2024].

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human rights violations, which Poland strongly condemned. Following Alyaksandr Lukashenko's alleged victory and sixth presidential term, the European Council decided on 19 August that the elections had been neither free nor fair and therefore did not recognise their results. Poland and Lithuania were among the first countries to officially support the Belarusian opposition. In response, Lukashenko declared that Belarus had closed its borders with the European Union and deployed additional guards and troops.

In August 2021, following a sudden influx of refugees arriving from Belarus, Poland deployed approximately 15,000 troops to secure its eastern border. A standoff subsequently developed between the armed forces and border guards of both states, with refugees caught in between. Poland accused Belarus of conducting hybrid warfare, while Poland itself was accused of forcibly pushing migrants back across the border. By 2022, Poland had completed the construction of a state border barrier between the two countries. In the same year, several monuments commemorating the Polish Home Army in Belarus were deliberately destroyed.

Poland considers the existence of an independent Belarus to be a cornerstone of the international order in Central and Eastern Europe, and more broadly in Europe. Under the current conditions, bilateral relations are focused on practical neighbourly cooperation, to the extent made possible by the readiness of the Belarusian authorities. In the previous year, an interministerial agreement was signed on the maintenance of road bridges on the Polish–Belarusian border, and visa-free tourist traffic was introduced in the regions of the Augustów Canal, Brest, and Grodno, as well as at Minsk airport. Polish authorities have expressed hope that Belarus will return to discussions on a local border traffic agreement, which would enable more intensive contacts between borderland communities.

At the regional level, Poland has been a leader in implementing programmes under the European Neighbourhood Instrument. According to budgetary criteria, the Poland–Belarus–Ukraine Programme for 2014–2020 was the largest cross-border cooperation programme in the European Union. In 2021, Belarus suspended its participation in the Eastern Partnership. As Russia's principal ally in its war against Ukraine, Belarus has become a major factor destabilising the security situation in the region. The widespread violation of fundamental human rights by the authorities in Minsk remains a serious concern, as evidenced by the growing number of political prisoners and the persecution of members of the Polish national minority. At the same time, the activity of Belarusian democratic opposition circles has intensified, with these groups seeking to represent Belarusian society in dialogue with the West.

In 2025, presidential elections were again held in Belarus, resulting in another victory for Lukashenko. Poland, in line with other EU Member States, did not recognise the outcome of these elections. An analysis of the actions of Polish political leaders and official documents indicates that Poland's foreign policy toward Belarus has not undergone substantial modification.

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Poland is also seeking to strengthen cooperation with Moldova by supporting reforms of its administrative structures and economy. It continues to explore new avenues of cooperation with the countries of the South Caucasus – Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan – and remains active in Central Asia. Kazakhstan, given its leadership position in the region, significant economic potential, and growing international importance, is Poland's principal partner in Central Asia.

Poland supports the European integration aspirations of Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia, all of which have expressed their willingness to join the European Union. At the European Council summit in December 2023, EU Member States decided to open accession negotiations with Ukraine and Moldova and to grant Georgia the status of a candidate country.

Poland supports Moldova's pro-European orientation and advocates stronger engagement by the European Union in political dialogue with Chișinău, aimed at resolving the frozen conflict in Transnistria. Poland is also working to further develop dialogue with Azerbaijan and Armenia, while closely monitoring political developments in both countries. More broadly, Poland has consistently expanded its contacts with states of the South Caucasus and Central Asia, adhering to the principles of respect for territorial integrity, sovereign equality, and the right of states to choose their own political and social development paths. Poland seeks to build constructive political relations and develop economic cooperation with its partners in the region, including through participation in transport corridors linking East and West and by expanding the presence of Polish enterprises.

Russia's war against Ukraine, which began in February 2022, has intensified security concerns throughout the Black Sea region, increased militarisation, and led to a significant decline in economic activity as a result of military operations in the Black Sea and in areas of Ukraine neighbouring Moldova. These developments have prompted a reassessment of European security policy and the consolidation of efforts by Western states to counter Russia's actions. They have also contributed to greater coherence between the positions of Moldova and Poland in condemning Russian aggression and have compelled both countries to intensify efforts to counter hybrid warfare and Kremlin-led attempts at political destabilisation and the undermining of democratic processes in Moldova and its European aspirations.

Poland has provided unequivocal support to Moldova in the areas of security and defence, including energy and information security and the countering of cyber threats. It has offered and continues to offer political backing as well as financial and technical assistance. In the context of the war in Ukraine, representatives of both countries regularly meet within multilateral frameworks to discuss international support and military assistance for Ukraine.

In 2023, Moldova and Poland jointly participated in numerous multilateral formats, including the Ramstein format, which brought together representatives of 54 countries; the Munich Security Conference, attended by delegations from approximately 150 states; the second summit of the European Political Community held in Moldova; the Salzburg

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Summit; the NATO Summit in Vilnius; the Three Seas Initiative Summit; and other international meetings. These engagements contribute to strengthening a shared vision of a common European future[26].

Poland consistently supports Georgia's territorial integrity, as well as its European and Euro-Atlantic aspirations. In the previous year and at the beginning of the current visit to Tbilisi, President Andrzej Duda, together with the Marshals of the Sejm and the Senate, Marek Kuchciński and Stanisław Karczewski, paid official visits to Georgia. The Parliamentary Assembly of Poland and Georgia was also established. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs organised a joint visit by the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of Poland, Lithuania, and Latvia, together with the Deputy Prime Minister of Ukraine, to Georgia on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of President Lech Kaczyński's historic visit to the country alongside other regional leaders. It is also noteworthy that, as of 1 January 2018, the Polish Embassy in Tbilisi has been serving as a NATO Contact Point Embassy[27].

Relations between Poland and Georgia deteriorated after 2023. It would be inaccurate to claim that the change of power in Poland directly caused a shift in Poland's foreign policy toward Georgia. In 2023, Georgia adopted legislation concerning non-governmental organisations, which was described as a "Russian law" by opposition politicians in Georgia and by representatives of several EU Member States. President of Georgia Salome Zurabishvili vetoed the law; however, the Georgian parliament overrode the veto and adopted the legislation. In response, numerous European politicians travelled to Tbilisi to express support for demonstrators protesting against the law.

In 2024, parliamentary elections were held in Georgia, and according to the official results, the ruling party, Georgian Dream, won the vote. The Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs responded to the outcome with the following statement: "The integrity of the elections has been questioned by President Zurabishvili and the Georgian opposition. Numerous reports confirming violations of electoral procedures and the unprecedented use of administrative resources by the ruling party undermine the principles of freedom and equality of the electoral process, as well as the credibility of the election results. We sincerely believe that Georgia is part of Europe and that the Georgian people deserve to fulfil their aspirations – to secure a European and Euro-Atlantic future for their country. Unfortunately, what we witnessed during the elections of 26 October does not bring Georgia closer to the EU and NATO, but instead moves it further away. Poland will continue to support Georgian democracy and the free will of its people. We recall that Georgia was once a leader in the reform process, and we hope that it will return to this path"[28]. An analysis of the political situation in Georgia and the reactions of the Polish

[26] O. Milewski, N. Stercul, *Stan gry Polska–Mołdawia*, Warszawa 2024, https://wei.org.pl/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/Stan-Gry.-Polska-Moldawia.pdf [accessed 22 June 2024].

[27] *Government Information on Polish foreign policy in 2018 (presented by the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Poland Jacek Czaputowiczat a sitting of the Sejm on 21 March 2018)*, "Yearbook of Polish Foreign Policy" 2018, p. 20.

[28] MFA statement on parliamentary elections in Georgia**,** https://www.gov.pl/web/diplomacy/mfa-statement-on-parliamentary-elections-in-georgia [accessed 22 June 2024].

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authorities indicates that Poland's foreign policy toward Georgia has indeed changed; however, this shift is directly linked to the actions of the Georgian government rather than to domestic political changes in Poland.

Political relations with Azerbaijan were particularly dynamic during the presidency of the late President Lech Kaczyński. During this period, regular visits by the heads of state of both countries took place. In the years 2010–2015, bilateral relations experienced a period of stagnation, while a gradual rebuilding of high-level political dialogue began in 2015. Since then, the President of Azerbaijan has visited Poland twice (in 2015, during the NATO Summit, and in 2017, on a working visit), and the President of Poland paid an official visit to Azerbaijan in 2019.

Poland supports the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan and seeks to promote its Euro-Atlantic aspirations, including through participation in the Eastern Partnership. Azerbaijani–Polish relations have been developing successfully in the political, economic, and energy spheres, as well as in other areas of cooperation. Poland's interest in and attitude toward Azerbaijan are consistently reflected in its support for Azerbaijan's integration with Europe. Mutual visits by heads of state, bilateral talks, and signed agreements play a significant role in further strengthening relations between the two countries.

Polish–Azerbaijani relations have historical roots and have traditionally developed on friendly terms. Today, Azerbaijan and Poland cooperate across a wide range of fields. Polish companies are engaged in cooperation with Azerbaijan in sectors including energy, industry, transport, and agriculture. Given Azerbaijan's substantial energy resources, the implementation of energy projects enabling the transport of Azerbaijani gas to Europe is of particular importance. Through such initiatives, Azerbaijan contributes to ensuring its own energy security while also strengthening cooperation with European partners[29]. Azerbaijan reacted strongly to the visit of the President of Poland to the EU observer mission at the border between Armenia and Azerbaijan. In response, the Polish Chargé d'Affaires in Azerbaijan, Michał Greczyło, was summoned to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Baku. During the meeting, the Azerbaijani Ministry of Foreign Affairs expressed an official protest against the visit of President Andrzej Duda to the Armenian–Azerbaijani border[30].

Poland has actively supported Armenia's deeper integration with the European Union. As a strong advocate of the Eastern Partnership (EaP), Poland has encouraged closer economic and political ties between Armenia and the EU. Following Armenia's decision to strengthen cooperation with the European Union amid deteriorating relations with Russia, Poland has emphasised the need to accelerate the implementation of the Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement (CEPA) between Armenia and the EU. Poland has expressed concern over Armenia's security challenges, particularly in the context of tensions with Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh and ongoing border

[29] Rufat Baghirov, Stosunki bilateralne pomiędzy Polską a Azerbejdżanem, https://ruj.uj.edu.pl/entities/publication/342e15fe-9df8-46e8-8475-143ea311561f [accessed 22 June 2024].

[30] Polish ambassador summoned to Azerbaijan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, https://aze.media/polish-ambassador-summoned-to-azerbaijans-ministry-of-foreign-affairs/ [accessed 22 June 2024].

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disputes. As a NATO member, Poland has engaged in diplomatic efforts to support Armenia's security interests within the framework of European cooperation. While Poland does not provide direct military assistance to Armenia, it supports EU-led initiatives aimed at stabilising the region, including the EU monitoring mission along Armenia's border with Azerbaijan.

Poland has also sought to expand economic cooperation with Armenia, particularly in sectors such as information technology, agriculture, and infrastructure. In 2024, discussions between Polish and Armenian officials focused on increasing trade volumes and investment opportunities. The Polish government has further advocated Armenia's participation in EU-funded programmes designed to promote economic resilience and diversification. Poland continues to support Armenia's involvement in European initiatives, including the Eastern Partnership and broader regional cooperation frameworks. As Armenia reassesses its foreign policy orientation away from Russia, Poland has positioned itself as a reliable EU partner advocating Armenia's European integration prospects.

In 2025, the President of the Republic of Poland, Andrzej Duda, paid an official visit to Armenia. During the visit, he stated that "Poland will take over the presidency of the Council of the European Union, and the issue of bringing Armenia closer to the European community – as a great nation with a history of many thousands of years and a European state – is of great importance"[31]. The visit underscored the mutual desire to strengthen political and economic ties between Poland and Armenia, as well as between Armenia and the European Union. As part of the visit, President Duda also visited the Yerevan Stock Exchange, whose majority shareholder is the Warsaw Stock Exchange.

5. Conclusions

Following the 2015 elections, when the Law and Justice party (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość) assumed power, only limited political changes were introduced in Poland's foreign policy toward the Eastern Partnership states. Georgia, Belarus, and Ukraine emerged as priority countries for Polish foreign policy. After the presidential elections in Belarus in 2020, as well as the Ryanair aircraft incident, Poland joined EU sanctions imposed on Belarus. The political course adopted after 2020 has not changed following the 2023 elections, when the Civic Coalition formed the government.

Poland has been one of the strongest supporters of Ukraine since the Russian invasion in 2022. Both before and after 2015, Ukraine has remained a key priority of Polish foreign policy. After 2023, however, a crisis emerged in Polish–Ukrainian relations concerning the transit of Ukrainian agricultural products through Poland, as large-scale protests by Polish farmers led to the blocking of border crossings with Ukraine. Following the incident involving Donald Trump and Volodymyr Zelensky and the announcement of a possible suspension of U.S. support for Ukraine, Poland declared that it would continue to support Ukraine.

[31] President Andrzej Duda in Armenia, https://www.president.pl/news/president-andrzej-duda-in-armenia,94817 [accessed 22 June 2024].

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After the adoption of the so-called "Russian law" in Georgia, it can be argued that Georgia was, to some extent, removed from the priorities of Poland's foreign policy. Following the parliamentary elections in Georgia, Poland expressed concerns regarding electoral irregularities and questioned the credibility of the election results.

During the visit of the President of Poland to Armenia, his visit to the EU observer mission triggered a negative reaction from the Azerbaijani side toward Poland. In response to the research question, it can be concluded that only minor changes have occurred in Poland's foreign policy and that shifts in priorities have been limited. The most notable changes concern relations with Georgia and Ukraine. Poland's foreign policy toward Armenia, Moldova, Belarus, and Azerbaijan has not undergone significant modification.

Abstract: Poland has consistently displayed a strong strategic interest in Eastern Europe, shaped by a set of interrelated factors that influence how the region is perceived by Polish political elites and society. The most salient determinants include perceptions of threats to national security and the political climate in Poland's relations with individual Eastern European neighbours. Poland's eastern policy is also conditioned by the broader state of relations between Russia and the West, which affects both regional stability and the scope for EU engagement.

This article examines whether Poland's foreign policy toward the Eastern Partnership states changed after 2023, following the change of government, and identifies the main areas in which any shifts in priorities and instruments occurred. The study employs a qualitative research design grounded in the liberal theoretical tradition, drawing on the analysis of official documents and political statements.

Keywords: Foreign Policy, Eastern Partnership, Eastern Policy, International Relations.

Polityka zagraniczna Polski wobec państw Partnerstwa Wschodniego do 2023 roku

Streszczenie: Polska konsekwentnie wykazuje strategiczne zainteresowanie Europą Wschodnią, wynikające z powiązanych ze sobą czynników wpływających na sposób postrzegania tego regionu przez polskie elity polityczne oraz społeczeństwo. Do najważniejszych determinant należą postrzeganie zagrożeń dla bezpieczeństwa narodowego oraz klimat polityczny w relacjach Polski z poszczególnymi państwami Europy Wschodniej. Na kształt polskiej polityki wschodniej wpływa również ogólny stan relacji między Rosją a Zachodem, który oddziałuje zarówno na stabilność regionalną, jak i na zakres zaangażowania Unii Europejskiej.

Celem artykułu jest ustalenie, czy po 2023 roku, w następstwie zmiany rządu, doszło do zmian w polityce zagranicznej Polski wobec państw Partnerstwa Wschodniego, oraz wskazanie głównych obszarów ewentualnych modyfikacji priorytetów i stosowanych instrumentów. Badanie oparto na jakościowej strategii badawczej zakorzenionej w liberalnym nurcie teoretycznym, wykorzystującej analizę dokumentów oficjalnych oraz wypowiedzi politycznych.

Słowa kluczowe: polityka zagraniczna, Partnerstwo Wschodnie, polityka wschodnia, stosunki międzynarodowe.

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