

Poland East-Central Europe and the European Union's Policy towards Russia

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Abstract

This article refers to a possible role Poland and other East-Central European members would be able to play in the European Union and its policy on Russia. Joining the EU the new members have been determined to influence the Community's relations with Moscow yet their aspirations have been confronted with the reality of the EU's decision making mechanisms. The lack of experience and problems with regional coordination have soon limited significance of East-Central Europe in the European Union. The experience gained together with the membership has finally contributed to the new members' understanding of the EU's coalitions of interests. Yet there are still problems with regional cohesion and common East-Central European position. Besides, the EU's policy on Russia remains the game of national interests. Thus, without the solidarity between the new and old members of the European Union the East-Central European influence on the EU-Russian relations might be limited.

Keywords: Poland, East-Central Europe; European Union; Russia; Eastern Policy; Eastern Partnership; Eastern Neighborhood.

1. Introduction

One of the political aims of East-Central European states joining the European Union has been the idea to take advantage of the membership to influence their relations with Russia. In fact, the previous Russia's bilateral cooperation with Poland and other countries of East-Central Europe were generally poor and Moscow has usually been completely ignoring the interests of the region. Thus, the membership in the European Union and the participation in the common EU's foreign policy have been attractive for the new members to improve their contacts with Moscow and to influence the Russia's policy toward the region.

Together with the membership, however, the countries of East-Central Europe have faced a fundamental question of their ability to influence the European Union's foreign relations. It has soon become clear that the answer to the question would depend less on East-Central European political aspirations and more on the position and role Poland and other new members would be able to play in the European Union. In fact, it has been obvious that political ambitions, difficult history and close neighborhood with Russia do not necessarily constitute the basis to convince the whole EU to share the East-Central European point of view. Besides, limited economic potential of the countries in the region, the lack of knowledge of the EU's decision-making mechanisms and difficulties in regional cooperation have negatively influenced the new members' effectiveness in the European Union. Although they have so far gained a lot of new experience yet facing the Union's difficulties with more cohesive policy towards Russia their future role in the EU's relations with Moscow still remains unclear.

The aim of the article is to analyze the position and role the new members from East-Central Europe would be able to play in the EU-Russian relations. It presents general determinants and evolution of the new members' ability to influence the policy of the European Union, including the Community's relations with Moscow. The article refers to the future of the EU-Russian cooperation and formulates some recommendations for more effective East-Central European policy in the European Union. Considering the problems of East-Central Europe the article focuses mainly on Poland, the Baltic States and largely the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary as the countries of the Visegrad Group. Yet the conclusions that have been presented could easily refer to other members of the European Union from the region.

2. Eastern Enlargement of the European Union and the EU's Relations with Russia

The new members joined the European Union that has actively been developing its relations with Russia. After an unstable period of Boris Yeltsin's presidency Brussels has welcomed Vladimir Putin's declarations of democratic and market reforms in Russia with optimism signaling its readiness for assistance. Both sides have been charting ambitious programs and plans, including the concept of four "common spaces" for their long term cooperation and "road maps" to be developed for each of the "spaces" (Gower, 2007).

Yet growing concentration of power in the hands of the presidential office in Putin's Russia (Oliker & Crane et al., 2009) as well as growing assertiveness and imperial aspirations in the foreign policy of Moscow have increasingly affected European-Russian cooperation. It has soon become clear that many of the "spaces" remain empty, with radical asymmetry of expectations and different interests of both sides, and the EU has been more and more afraid about the state of the Russian democracy. The Union's concerns about the limited results of the Russian reforms were reflected in the Communiqué of the European Commission in February 2004 (European Commission, 2004). It doesn't mean, however, that the European Union has lost its hopes for the stable and beneficial relations with Russia, especially in the case of some of its leading members ready to develop their bilateral relations with Moscow irrespective of the Commission's concerns.

Joining the European Union Poland and other East-Central European members have declared their will to develop good relations with Russia both on the bilateral level and as a part of the EU. Having in mind their previous difficulties in dialogue with Moscow, to mention the problems with barriers and unclear conditions in the economic relations, they have regarded the membership as a new and more effective instrument to articulate their interests in the relations with Russia, including the question of their energy dependence on the Russian supplies. Thus, the intention of the new East-Central European members has been to actively participate in a creation of the common EU's policy on Russia and to ensure that this policy would also reflect East-Central European point of view. Some of new members, but especially Poland and the Baltic States, have also been unofficially suggesting that further EU's political and economic concessions to Russia should be based on a more realistic assessment of Russian progress in democratic reforms.

In a broader context, however, the membership in the European Union has certainly been an element of East-Central European members' escape from the Russian zone of influence and an additional guarantee of their security (Unge et al., 2006). Their critical opinions about internal developments in Russia and fears of Moscow's return to imperial foreign policy have at the same time been a reflection of historical experience, which in the case of Poland and Baltic States considers not only the Soviet times but also the period of the tsarist Russia's domination over the region. In fact, history remains a sensitive point in the Russia's relations with East-Central Europe and Putin's positive references to the Soviet period, similar to those defining the collapse of the USSR as the worst geo-political catastrophe of the twentieth century, have seriously irritated the new members. Having in mind that the legacy of the Soviet Union still constitutes an important element of the Russia's self-identity it is not difficult to share Kristi Raik's thesis that Putin's attempts to rehabilitate the Soviet history will certainly not facilitate Russia's reconciliation with East-Central European members of the EU (Raik, 2007). Russia's reactions to the enlargement of the European Union have not been as nervous as those towards the enlargement of NATO yet Moscow has expressed its concerns about the Russian economic losses. Russia has been reluctant to automatically extend the conditions of the economic cooperation with the old EU, as defined in the Russo-Union 1994 Partnership and Co-operation Agreement (PCA), to the new members and only the strong EU's pressure on Moscow inclined Russia to issue a Joint Declaration of 27 April 2004 extending the PCA to the new member states (Joint Statement, 2004).

The most important for Russia, however, has been the geo-political shift of NATO and the European Union towards the Russian borders. It has become a subject of growing Kremlin's anxiety, including the fears of both organizations' interference into the area of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) that Russia treats as the zone of its exclusive interests (Oldberg, 2007). Although Moscow has been aware that the ability of Poland and other East-Central European members to influence the UE's policy on Russia would most probably be limited Kremlin has clearly noted that opinions of the new members on Russian foreign policy have usually been more cautious and much more critical than those of the old EU's countries. Besides, active Polish and Baltic efforts to arouse the Union's interest in closer cooperation with Ukraine have always irritated Moscow as in the Russian political concept Ukraine should stay in the area of Russian influence.

Thus, the new members, but especially Poland and the Baltic States, have shortly faced a Russian propaganda presenting them as unreliable countries unable to constructive cooperation. The propaganda, as a form of preventive measures taken by Moscow, has been addressed to Western societies and elites in order to strengthen their skepticism towards the credibility of the new member states and the Eastern enlargement of the EU as a whole (Oldberg, 2007). Having in mind growing fears in Western Europe about the social consequences of the accession of much poorer countries from East-Central Europe the Russian efforts have indeed found fertile ground. The propaganda campaign has at the same time been accompanied by "traditional" instruments of the Russia's relations with the European Union aimed at differentiating the EU members according to the Russian interests and developing contacts with the most powerful of them, while trying to prevent the others from a real impact on the UE-Russian cooperation.

Yet the ability of Poland and other East-Central European members to influence the European Union's foreign policy, including the EU's relations with Russia, should also be considered against the background of the internal problems in the European Union. The collapse of the bipolar order has considerably changed the previous determinants of the European integration contributing to new ideas of common foreign and security policy but at the same time to growing difficulties in defining the direction of the future integration process. This hesitation has been accompanied by growing re-nationalization in the policy of the member states that may be understood as a focus more on their national interests and less on the Community's values and goals. Besides, the re-unification of Germany and growing German role in the European Union has increasingly been changing the previous delicate balance of power in the French-German core of the European integration and it would be more correctly to talk now about the German-French core of the EU (Taylor, 2008; Wieclawski, 2010).

All those post-bipolar factors have thus contributed to the crisis of the Community's identity and several attempts to improve the effectiveness of the EU's decision-making mechanisms. Although the European Union has finally been able to agree to the Lisbon Treaty (The Treaty of Lisbon, 2007) and the European leaders have noticed the need of more effective instruments to coordinate the foreign relations of the EU it is clear that the common foreign policy of the European Union will remain, at least in the short and medium term, a subject of intergovernmental cooperation and a function of the game of members' interests.

3. Aspirations vs. Reality: the Position and Role of East-Central European Members in the European Union

The real ability of Poland and other East-Central European members to influence the European Union's relations with Russia seems to rely on the position and role they would be able to play in the EU. This, in turn, depends less on their intentions and more on their ability to influence decision making processes within the Union and its particular structures. In fact, joining the European Union some of the new members, but mainly Poland, have decided to base their policy in the UE more on their formal position reflected by the number of votes or representatives in the EU institutions than on participation in coalitions of interests building consensus in different EU's internal and external affairs. Yet this attitude has illustrated the lack of knowledge how the EU's decision making mechanisms really work and the lack of experience at the first stage of their membership has limited the new members' ability to carry out their political aims. Piotr M. Kaczynski points out in this context that most of the new members' initiatives were poorly prepared and lacking the broader political support they were usually rejected (Kaczynski, 2008).

In the case of Poland, however, the problem of the role the country could play in the European Union has been more complicated – reflecting Poland's bigger territory and its stronger demographic potential (in comparison with the other new members) and, as a consequence, political aspirations not to be a passive consumer of ideas presented by the leading states of the EU. Although the initial Warsaw's readiness to use the instruments of formal objection to defend its point of view in the European Union has been followed by growing understanding of the need to engage in political negotiations, the tendency to block the EU consensus has initially found some supporters in the Polish domestic politics. It has been illustrating the country's dilemma between its potential as the medium size member of the European Union and its real, still limited, influence on the EU's policy (Bielen, 2007).

Furthermore, the East-Central European expectations that, as the neighbors of Russia, they will be able to play the crucial role in developing the Eastern policy of the European Union have not necessarily coincided with the reality. Although neither of the old members of the EU has denied the experience of the new members, most of the old member states have not been enthusiastic to take the newcomers' remarks into account and to risk worsening of their relations with Moscow because of Polish or Baltic fears. Besides, the new members themselves have not been prepared to present coordinated and consisted vision of their role in the European Union as well as a clear concept of the Union's role in the world, including its relations with Russia (Raik, 2007). As a result, the new member states' influence on the EU's foreign policy has initially been more limited than they could expect and even the spectacular Polish and Lithuanian contribution to the peaceful solution of the Ukrainian "Orange Revolution" conflict has not considerably changed this picture. In fact, difficulties with regional consensus and limited ability to formulate common proposals of the EU's policy have been the serious political problem for the new East-Central European members. The illustration of limited efficiency in regional cooperation could be the activity of the Visegrad Group (Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary) initiated in 1991 to strengthen the regional ties, including the common efforts to join the European Union.

Initial Czech and Hungarian anxiety of potential Polish leading role in the region (as the biggest country there) has been accompanied by both sides' reluctance to cooperate with Poland during the accession negotiations (because of too many Polish problems). Finally, joining the European Union the members of the Group have not been able to coordinate their positions with regard to key issues of the EU's policy, including the project of the European constitution (Dunay, 2005). Similar historical experience and growing anxiety of Russia coming back to imperial policy have usually been pointed out as an incentive for closer cooperation between Poland and the Baltic States. In fact, their coordinated reaction towards the Russian intervention in Georgia in summer 2008 and spectacular Polish-Baltic-Ukrainian visit to Tbilisi during the conflict seem to confirm this thesis. Both Poland and the Baltic republics have also been expressing similar, critical point of view on the German-Russian Nord Stream gas pipeline project planned to run along the bottom of the Baltic Sea and to bypass the Polish-Baltic territories. They have regarded the German-Russian project as the potential tool of additional Russian influence on the region, giving Moscow the possibility to leave East-Central Europe without the Russian gas supplies.

Yet the growing potential for the Polish-Baltic cooperation in the area of the policy on Russia has not necessarily been so far accompanied by their common political initiatives and views on the EU's internal and external affairs. An example of difficulties in finding the regional consensus has been the idea of the common Polish-Baltic investment in the new Lithuanian nuclear power plant in Ignalina accompanied by long and unsuccessful debates about sharing the costs of the project. Poland has at the same time not necessarily been a principal political partner for Latvia and Estonia as both Baltic States have been looking for closer cooperation with their Scandinavian neighbors and Germany. The exception is the Polish-Lithuanian cooperation based on their common history, direct neighborhood and the rich infrastructure of bilateral contacts, yet the Polish-Lithuanian tandem is not powerful enough to pursue its political concepts even in the region and the disputes over the Polish minority in Lithuania still influence both states' relations.

As a result, East-Central European members' difficulties in building their position in the European Union have had their roots not only in the new members' lack of experience. They have also been illustrating the problems with effectiveness and cohesion of regional cooperation as well as the lack of common regional views on the EU's activity. The Russian attempts to differentiate the countries of the region by offering profitable, bilateral projects of cooperation to those of them seen in Moscow as "more constructive" seem to confirm that Russia has been fully aware of the problems in the East-Central European dialogue and Moscow is going to take advantage of them.

4. Poland, East-Central Europe and the EU's Relations with Russia

Joining the European Union Poland and other East-Central European members have faced growing EU's aspirations to play more independent international role. Yet at the same time they have been confronted with growing disputes in the EU between the advocates of more independent European security and defense policy and protagonists of strong transatlantic relations with the United States. Poland and most of the new members have supported the close alliance of Europe with Washington and their pro-Americanism has been criticized by the opponents in the European Union as passive, unconditional and breaking the solidarity of the EU in its relations with the United States. The same critics, however, have hardly mentioned their own special relations with Moscow and the need of solidarity in the Union's policy on Russia.

In fact, both the European Union and Russia have been aspiring to play more important role in the new multilateral order taking shape after the collapse of the bipolar system and prospects of mutual cooperation have been attractive for both sides, including Russia's reluctance to the US unilateral policy shared by several leading countries of the EU. Yet the enthusiastic scenarios of the EU-Russian cooperation have usually missed the fact that the foreign policy concepts of both sides do not necessarily complement each other and despite political declarations the gap between their interests and values has been widening. The foreign policy of Russia has usually been reflecting the classical realistic attitude to the international relations focused on Moscow's interests, international role and influence while the European Union, at least in the case of the Brussels institutions, refers much more to liberal ideas of international cooperation, democratic values and common reaction to challenges (European Council, 1999; Russian Federation, 1999; Wieclawski 2011).

Joining the discussions about the European Union's relations with Russia the new members from East-Central Europe, but especially Poland and the Baltic States, have usually been more sensitive and cautious to Russian rhetoric than the old members of the EU, voicing their anxiety about imperial tendencies in the Russian foreign policy and methods this policy use, to mention the Russia's military intervention in Georgia. Yet the warnings and concerns expressed by the new members have usually been seen by the partners in the EU as exaggerated, politically immature and non-pragmatic.

In fact, the debates on the common policy on Russia have been illustrating clear differences of views existing among the countries of the European Union and limited ability of East-Central European members to influence the common position of the EU. It seems, however, that the debates have revealed more important political problem of a “double voice” reaching Moscow from the European Union as the official position of Brussels has usually been accompanied by several other voices of the most powerful countries of the EU – reflecting their own national interests in bilateral relations with Russia. Graham Timmins describes this tendency as the “two-level game” in which leading members formally call for the common EU actions while pursuing independent policies towards Russia (Timmins, 2007). From the point of view of East-Central European states this tendency is dangerous as the focus of the European Union’s policy on Russia on the aims and interests of the leading members could marginalize the opinions of the weaker ones and facilitate Russia’s attempts to differentiate the EU member states according to the Russian interests. Nevertheless, the “two-level game” has confirmed that the common EU’s foreign policy remains the game of national interests and it would be naïve to expect the new members’ leading role in the European Union’s relations with Russia. Having little experience of effective participation in the EU’s decision-making mechanisms and being the weakest economic partners they have been afraid that their real role in the EU’s foreign activity might be limited to reactions to proposals developed by the leading EU players.

The problem of different voices reaching Russia from the European Union has been present in the EU’s reaction to the Russo-Georgian conflict and East-Central European criticism pointing out the Russian imperialism has not necessarily coincided with much more cautious reactions of the old members of the EU. Fortunately, the European Union has been able to pass the common and compromise statement on the war in Georgia (Extraordinary European Council, 2008) yet facing internal debates it has been clear that the European response must be mild and limited. In fact, Moscow has shortly dismissed the EU’s warnings (Cornel, Popjanevski & Nilsson, 2008) and both sides have been thinking about coming back to “business as usual” policy. Nevertheless, the war in Georgia has confirmed that despite the common political interests Russia and the European Union may differ in almost each area of their political cooperation and Thomas Gomart concludes it saying that “the institutionalization of the relationship has not institutionalized confidence between the partners” (Gomart, 2008).

In the area of economic relations the European Union has been interested in stability of raw material supplies from Russia and the Russian side has been interested in the stable European market for its gas and oil. Yet the intention of the European Union has been to combine the economic cooperation with Russia with harmonization of the business rules and liberalization of the Russian energy market (European Commission, 2007). This idea, however, has largely failed as the energy sector plays the crucial role not only in the Russian economy but also as the instrument of the Russian foreign policy, to include the Russian attempts to use the gas and oil supplies as potential political and economic leverage on the neighboring countries (Oliker & Crane et al., 2009). Discussing the economic relations with Moscow Poland and other East-Central European members have been declaring their interest in developing the EU-Russian cooperation. Yet they have been indicating many practical problems with their access to the Russian market and they have usually been more skeptical about the Russia’s readiness to liberalize its energy sector. On the contrary, as the countries dependent on Russian oil and gas supplies more than other members of the European Union they have been afraid about possible energy pressure Moscow could exert on the region. The Russian-German project of the Nord Stream gas pipeline, that has been initiated despite the critical voices of Poland, the Baltic republics and several Scandinavian countries, has inflamed the fears contributing to further disputes within the EU.

In fact, dependence on Russian oil and gas supplies has become the crucial economic and political factor not only for East-Central Europe but also for the whole European Union as the biggest Russia’s trading partner and the main consumer of Russian raw materials. Some observers have been indicating that the EU’s dependence on Russian supplies is balanced by Russia’s dependence on the European Union as the market (Fantini, 2007) yet the returning Russian-Belorussian and Russian-Ukrainian disputes over the gas transit, leading to cuts of supplies to the EU, illustrate that this balance may be fragile and that the raw material export is the crucial instrument in the Russian foreign policy. Nevertheless, the energy security debate within the European Union has confirmed that its energy policy remains a function of particular interests of the member states. Although the Commission has proposed some valuable projects of investment in clear energy and developing the EU’s internal energy market through the energy interconnectors (European Commission, 2006) yet the idea of energy solidarity has been confronted with different national interests and it is difficult to expect the common EU’s energy policy to be developed in the short perspective. Thus, the Polish proposals of enhanced or even allied mechanisms in the European Union’s energy cooperation (Bobinski, 2007) has had little chance to be accepted in this regard.

5. The Future Role of East-Central European Members in the European Union's Policy on Russia

Joining the European Union (and previously NATO) Poland and other countries of East-Central Europe would like to feel sure that together with the membership they have completely left the area of the Russian interests and Moscow has accepted that none of them is going to be considered as a part of the Russian zone of influence. They would like to rely on solidarity of other members of the EU and to be sure that the strongest members of the European Union are not going to sacrifice the new members' interests for stable and correct relations with Russia. Even if the reactions of the new member states to the Russian foreign policy might sometimes be too sensitive the issue of solidarity within the European Union becomes crucial for the future of the Community and its relations with Moscow.

The key to the Polish and East-Central European effectiveness in the European Union, including the EU's policy on Russia, lies in the position and role the new members would be able to play in the Community's structures. This would require the ability to effectively participate in the EU's decision making mechanisms to promote East-Central European interests. This ability remains limited yet the lesson the new members have learned after the accession helps them to understand that their participation in consensus seeking and coalitions of interests is much more effective than the policy of isolation. Self-isolation and passiveness in the case of the new members may lead to their marginalization within the European Union, irrespective of their ambitions. The recent Polish concept of the Eastern Partnership, aimed at strengthening the EU's cooperation with the countries of its Eastern Neighborhood and presented together with Sweden (Canciara, 2008), seems to illustrate the new Polish attitude understanding the need of the broader support for any political initiatives in the European Union.

Poland and other East-Central European members should at the same time take much greater care of their image in the European Union and focus more on creating their own picture as credible partners ready to articulate their point of view but open for negotiations and compromise. It seems that facing unfavorable Russian propaganda showing them as countries making problems to the EU-Russian relations the new members have so far devoted too little attention to the Public Relations' aspects of their diplomacy as well as political losses the bad image may cause. It is clear, however, that the creation of the international image must be the strategy and planned policy rather than *ad hoc* new members' activity. In the area of regional cooperation the more consistent position of the region the better for regional interests in the European Union. Thus, the East-Central European members should strive to strengthen their regional solidarity and to build the widest regional coalition of interests possible to present their point of view in the EU. Nevertheless, this task remains very difficult as even more promising cooperation between Poland and the Baltic States has so far faced some serious obstacles. On the contrary, further difficulties in regional relations might encourage the states in the region to ignore the need of the common regional solutions and to focus on their particular interests. This is the scenario the region should certainly avoid.

Despite the efforts to enhance regional solidarity, the East-Central European members should be interested in strengthening the European Union, its institutions and decision-making mechanisms. As developing states taking advantage of the European integration they should be interested in the EU becoming more and more effective both in economic and political areas, including its common foreign policy. It is clear that the foreign policy of the European Union has so far been the reflection of different national interests and it would be difficult to expect a considerable change of its current character. Yet there are several proposals in the Lisbon Treaty to improve this cooperation, to include the establishment of the European External Action Service, that have finally entered into force and that should be implemented in practice (The Treaty of Lisbon, 2007).

Considering the future of the European Union's cooperation with Russia it is in the interest of the whole EU to ask the fundamental question whether the Union has so far achieved its central aims in its relations with Russia to strengthen Russian democracy, market economy and civic society. Concentration of power and limitation of civic freedoms in Russia seem to confirm the limited results of the Russian democratic reforms as well as different perception of values between Brussels and Moscow. Thus, one of the further possible scenarios is a more pragmatic approach of the EU focused on concrete and mutually beneficial areas of cooperation (Gower, 2007). Yet any scenarios involving the special relations between Russia and selected, the most powerful members of the European Union would be dangerous for the new East-Central European members and the idea of solidarity among the old and the new member states will certainly be the key to the effective EU's policy on Russia.

Furthermore, the previous Ukrainian “Orange Revolution” and the recent war in Georgia have confirmed that the European Union’s engagement in cooperation with the countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) will inevitably be received by Moscow as the interference in the Russian zone of “privileged interests” and the EU crossing this line will face serious Moscow’s reluctance and counteraction (Rukavishnikov, 2007). Thus, the effective Eastern policy of the European Union, which has strongly been advocated by Poland and the Baltic states, must be a result of solidarity and much more coordinated efforts of the whole Community, despite the difference of opinions on Russia existing within the EU.

Similarly, the growing dependence of the European Union on the Russian supplies of oil and gas should finally lead to the question about the real energy solidarity among the EU members. It is clear that the cooperation with Russia is in deep interest of the European Union. Nevertheless, the next question is to what extent the EU, dependent on Russia in the strategic energy sector, is going to be considered by Moscow as the real partner for cooperation and what instruments of response the European Union would be able to use if Moscow one day decided not to respect the formal agreements made with Brussels? It seems that the EU has not yet answered that question but together with the accession of Poland and other East-Central European members the answer has become much more urgent and important.

6. Conclusions

For Poland and other East-Central European states the membership in the European Union has been an opportunity for more stable economic and social development. In the area of foreign affairs it is the chance to participate in the common foreign policy of the EU, including the Union’s policy on Russia. In fact, the participation in the broader community of the European Union gives the countries in the region the opportunity to influence the foreign policy of Moscow much more effectively than in the case of their bilateral relations with Russia.

Yet the new members’ aspirations concerning the position and role they would be able to play in the European Union have soon been confronted with the real mechanisms of decision-making and game of national interests existing in the EU. The lack of experience of participation in the coalitions of interests and difficulties in coordinated regional position have negatively influenced the new members’ effectiveness in the European Union, including the EU’s policy on Russia. Besides, the European Union has so far had a lot of problems with the common attitude towards Russia reflected by the “two-level game” in the policy of the leading EU’s states and the Russian attempts to differentiate the members of the European Union according to Moscow’s interests.

Nevertheless, despite the initial lack of experience Poland and other East-Central European members have been more and more pragmatic, understanding the mechanisms functioning in the European Union and determinants of successful political initiatives in the EU. It seems that the more cautious attitude of East-Central Europe towards the Russian foreign policy has also contributed to growing European Union’s awareness of the challenges accompanying its relations with Moscow, including the EU’s dependence on Russia in oil and gas supplies. Yet it is still difficult to talk about coordinated position of the countries in the region as well as cohesive European Union’s policy on Russia. Thus, the idea of solidarity is the key to both the future of the European Union, its relations with Moscow and the new members’ effectiveness in the EU.

It is clear that the membership in the European Union itself is not a guarantee of spectacular recovery in the new members’ relations with Moscow. It also does not guarantee their independence from any potential Russian attempts to interfere in the political and economic processes in East-Central Europe. The membership, however, does give the opportunity of participation in the common foreign policy of the European Union, the Community the interests of which Russia cannot ignore. To influence the EU’s policy on Russia Poland and other members from the region must be active as only active, considered and regionally coordinated participation in the decision-making mechanisms within the European Union will guarantee their efficiency and the EU’s respect for the East-Central European point of view. It is difficult, but possible.

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