

TRADING SOLIDARITY FOR SECURITY? POLAND AND THE RUSSIAN-UKRAINIAN CRISIS

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Abstract. *Poland is a strong advocate of Ukraine and seeks its integration into the western institutional framework (first of all EU and NATO). While Poland had a leading negotiating role during the Revolution of Dignity, it became increasingly marginalized in the course of annexation and militarization. This did not lead to a rift between the actors at stake, since a) Berlin satisfied Warsaw's "consultation reflex", b) Poland was able to win on the sidelines of the conflict and garnered support for his security needs, and c) a changing image of Ukraine undermined normative considerations in favor of a more cost-benefit oriented approach. The study shows that Poland's Ukraine policy must be regarded as an extension of the domestic inter-party struggle during election circles. In the course of the takeover of power by PiS, Poland is increasingly inclined to take an assertive stance towards the EU. This leads to Warsaw's structural marginalization and subsequently narrows Poland's aims in the region down to security and regional leadership that has the potential to counterbalance "old Europe".*

Keywords: *Ukraine, Russia, Poland, conflict, war, Donbas, Germany.*

Introduction

On 21 February 2014, after three days of violent clashes between the Maidan protesters and the “Berkut” (special police forces) with more than 100 casualties, representatives of the Yanukovich government and the opposition signed an agreement to de-escalate the conflict that started roughly three months earlier on Kyiv’s central square. The agreement was facilitated by eight rounds of negotiations by the foreign ministers of Germany, France and Poland (Potocki & Parafianowicz 2014). After the last round of negotiations, Polish Minister of Foreign Affairs Radosław Sikorski left the negotiation room and dropped the following statement towards a representative of the opposition: “If you don’t support this, you will have martial law, the army, and you will all be dead.” (Traynor 2014).

The statement indicates that the stakes are very high in regards to Poland’s relation with Ukraine. A stable and democratic Ukraine is regarded as the key to a secure environment in Poland’s eastern neighborhood. Poland was the first country that recognized the independence of Ukraine in 1991. The idea of an Eastern dimension for the EU was put on the political agenda as early as 1998, at the beginning of Poland’s accession negotiations (Shapovalova & Kapuśniak 2011: 2).

During the Orange Revolution, taking place in 2004 after massive election fraud in favor of then Prime Minister Viktor Yanukovich during the run-off of the presidential election, Polish President Aleksander Kwaśniewski successfully negotiated between President of Ukraine Leonid Kuchma, Yanukovich, and Yushchenko (Lang 2011: 103). In 2009, together with Sweden, Poland initiated the Eastern Partnership (EaP), a

comprehensive EU-framework, designed to bring six post-Soviet republics (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine) closer to the *Acquis Communautaire* of the EU. Poland is a vocal advocate for a Ukrainian EU-membership and regards the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement (AA) as the main tool for a prospective accession (Łada & Wenerski 2015: 115-117).¹

Thus, the Polish government had put a lot of political effort into the EaP-Summit in November 2013 and was under much pressure to deliver tangible results. The unexpected refusal of Yanukovych to sign the AA on the eve of the summit and his departure right after the approval of the de-escalation agreement mentioned above constituted a double diplomatic defeat for the Polish side – and provoked Sikorski’s harsh statement.

After the Revolution of Dignity, the Russian annexation of the Crimean Peninsula and its unleashing of hybrid warfare in eastern Ukraine, Poland’s foreign policy is facing serious challenges in a fundamentally changed regional environment. The post WWII security order, reaffirmed in the Helsinki Final Act 1975, was blatantly violated by Russia and provoked different reactions by EU member states and International Organizations. The main question that will be addressed in this article is the following: how does Poland deal with these challenges and what are the implications for Poland’s foreign, economic and security policy? Can the Russian-Ukrainian Crisis² in a way even be regarded as a window of opportunity for certain Polish foreign policy goals? Is the country able to set the political

¹ Part of the AA are the “Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreements” (DCFTA), which can achieve a level of regulatory integration of around 80 percent (Böttger 2014: 96).

² The often used term “Ukrainian Crisis” is not appropriate since it reduces the crisis to a domestic problem and thus neglects the role of Russia in the conflict.

agenda and/or to improve its position on the European or international stage?

The research questions will be addressed against the background of the domestic, regional and international context. On the domestic level, we need to consider the changed political landscape after the coming to power of the right-wing conservative party *Prawo i Sprawiedliwość* (PiS; Order and Justice). On the regional and international level, EU and NATO constitute the “main governance environments” (Godzimirski et al. 2015: 23) for Poland and form the resonance bodies for the Polish discourse on the crisis (Baranowski & Cichocki 2015: 35).

It is an irony of history that the same moment Ukraine’s turn towards Europe is gathering the strongest support since the independence of the country (Kucharczyk & Mesežnikov 2015: 10), Poland as its most important supporter has turned into a Eurosceptic (Kuisz 2016: 206) with a pragmatic and completely disenchanted stance towards an EU that is facing various problems. The removal of the EU flag in the press room after the inauguration of Prime Minister Beata Szydło was regarded as a symbolic change in this regard (Fuksiewicz 2015: 3). PiS regards the EU as an area for power politics of sovereign states rather than a supranational body with far-reaching competencies that delimit this sovereignty (ibid.: 4).

The underlying hypothesis is that while the broad lines and aims of Poland’s foreign policy orientation remain stable, the strategies, instruments and coalitions for achieving the aims change significantly. Whether these changes are limited to the rhetoric/symbolic level or if they have some political implications remains to be seen.

The paper proceeds as follows: after a brief outline of Poland's foreign policy towards his eastern neighborhood and Russia we examine the changed image of Ukraine among Poland's political establishment and society. The section is followed by an investigation of the changes of Poland's foreign policy since the outbreak of the crisis in terms of diplomacy, economic and security policy. The paper then analyses Poland's approach towards the crisis considering its convergence or divergence with the perspectives of other states on the crisis. It finishes with possible scenarios for future developments and summarizes the findings of the research.

Poland, its Neighborhood, and Russia

Since the end of socialist rule and Poland's transformation into the Third Republic³ in 1989, Poland's foreign policy has been based on two reasons of state: First, the "return to Europe", that is the broad integration into western institutions (first of all EU and NATO), and second, the support of the independence and democratization of Ukraine, Belarus and Lithuania (Kapuśniak 2010: 59f; Kucharczyk & Fuksiewicz 2015: 104). The long-term aim of Ukraine becoming an EU member was never questioned by any Polish government (ibid.: 108), as well as a NATO membership of Ukraine, for which Poland pleaded since its own accession in 2004 (Łada & Wenerski 2015: 119).

³ The Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth that existed from 1569 to 1791 is regarded as the First Polish Republic. The Second Polish Republic refers to the re-established Polish state of the interwar period between 1918 and 1939.

The second aim of Poland's foreign policy orientation is the reason for a latent conflict with the Russian Federation (RF). Being the formal successor of the Soviet Union, the RF has – with varying intensity and conflictuality – claimed what it calls its “near abroad”⁴ as its legitimate sphere of influence and as an important part of its foreign policy concept. While efforts to keep its status as a great power were quite subtle under Yeltsin and Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev, Russia's foreign policy was increasingly driven by a ‘neo-hegemonic’ drive after the inauguration of Russian Foreign Minister Yevgeny Primakov in 1996. This coincided with efforts for an eastern enlargement of NATO and EU. Yet, rather than being viewed in terms of hard security threats, the accession negotiations of EU and NATO with the Central- and Eastern European Countries (CEEC) Poland, Hungary, Slovakia and the Czech Republic were viewed with critical reservations only (Łada & Wenerski 2015: 119f.).⁵

During the Orange Revolution, it became apparent that “the two neighbors [have] completely different notions of their own security” (Bil et al. 2016: 13). While Russia considered the Color Revolutions as a threat orchestrated by foreign powers in order to weaken Russia, Poland regarded

⁴ The countries encompassing the post-Soviet space.

⁵ There are three reasons for this. The first reason is the role Germany played in the enlargement process. For Germany, the eastern enlargement was crucial due to geopolitical reasons. Its position in Central Europe (*Mittellage*) made it necessary to achieve strategic depth in the east. Yet, geopolitical terms were not used in public in order not to coin the enlargement in military terms. Instead, the enlargement was interpreted as a new space of stability under Russian involvement in order to counter potential reservation. The German leadership served as the crucial link between the US and the RF and sought an intense involvement of Russia's political actors in the decision-making process (Hoffmann 2012: 127ff.). In 1996, German Foreign Minister Klaus Kinkel visited his Russian counterpart Primakov six times, and Chancellor Kohl travelled to Russia ten times between 1996 and 1997 (Hoffmann 2012: 145). The second reason is that Russia simply lacked the capacities and the power to seriously interfere in the enlargement process. The third reason is that Poland itself was able to convince the NATO members of the advantages of its accession (Łada & Wenerski 2015: 119).

them as democratic attempts and indicators a strong civil society – factors contributing to regional stability (Bil et al. 2016: 13). This clash of interests occurred in the context of an increasingly assertive RF, strengthened in the aftermath of Putin’s coming into power and the rise of prizes for energy resources.

The European Neighborhood Policy – Doomed to Fail?

Thus, the idea of an eastern dimension of the EU – which had the intention to bring the neighboring non-member states of the EU closer to the *Acquis Communautaire* (Kapuśniak 2010: 60f.) – stood under a dark cloud. Poland was in a paradoxical situation. On the one hand, it sought to duplicate the stability-oriented security concept with a stress on the regional dimension that Germany had successfully implemented in its own eastern neighborhood. On the other hand, it failed to do so (mainly) because of Germany – which, together with France, viewed the region through a “Russia first”-prism, to the detriment of Poland’s security interests.

As a compromise, the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) came into life in 2004. It was widely regarded as a failure, mainly because of its geographical overstretch (entailing neighbors *in* Europe as well as neighbors *of* Europe), strategic ambivalences and general open-endedness (Lippert 2008: 8). The attempt of Germany during its EU Council Presidency in the first half of 2007 to bring into life a renewed concept was rejected by Poland, since it was supposed to leave Russia’s special bilateral status with the EU untouched (Adamczyk 2010: 196-198).

A new window of opportunity opened in 2007/2008 with the change of the Polish government that – together with the decision of the Obama administration to cancel the missile shield project fostered under the Bush administration – paved the way for a “reset” of Polish-Russian relations. The liberal-conservative *Platforma Obywatelska* (Civic Platform, PO) did not intent to achieve this symbolical recalibration of relations with Russia to the detriment of the relation to Ukraine. Rather, the idea of a new conceptual framework called the Eastern Partnership (EaP) was that it should be based in a multilateral framework under the auspices of the EU rather than on a bilateral basis (Kucharczyk & Fuksiewicz 2015: 105). Although the shape of the EaP was made possible through a deal with France which led to the conceptional division of the southern and the eastern dimension of the neighborhood policy, the main catalyst for the EaP proved to be the Russian invasion in Georgia in August 2008.

This allowed for a common initiative of Poland and Sweden towards the EaP (Politt 2014: 8). Lech Kaczyński, then President of Poland and PiS-member as his twin-brother Jarosław Kaczyński, even flew to Tbilisi during the war and demonstrated together with the heads of the Ukrainian state as well as the Baltics against what he perceived as a clear sign of Russia’s neo-imperialistic ambitions and a game changer (exemplary Dorn 2015).⁶ In such context, it was easy for the Polish leadership to convince the CEEC as well as the Baltic countries of the project. With this broad coalition, it

⁶ In this context, it is interesting to note the “geopolitical prophecy” of Lech Kaczyński during the meeting in Tbilisi. He regarded Georgia as the first victim of Russia’s ambitions, to be followed by Ukraine, the Baltics and – finally – Poland (Bielański 2015: 68).

became possible to win Germany for the project (Adamczyk 2010: 198f.). The founding summit of the EaP took place in May 2009 in Prague.

Poland had proven its “enormous traction in the field of eastern policy” (Lang 2011: 104) and acted as an agenda-setting power for the first time after its EU-accession (Kapuśniak 2010: 61). Warsaw also highlighted its commitment in financial terms and spent EUR 90 mln from the overall budget of EUR 250 mln of the EaP between 2005 and 2013 (Pawlik 2015). The fact that Jerzy Buzek, former Premier Minister (PM) of Poland, was appointed as President of the European Parliament (EP) is regarded as an indicator for Poland’s success within the EU-framework (Lisek & Zalewski 2016). On the other hand, Poland failed to shape some of the main provisions in line with its foreign policy interests. Although Warsaw had always fostered an “open door”-policy for the eastern neighbors of the EU (Kucharczyk & Mesežnikov 2015: 11), “every attempt to insert a statement on EU membership as part of the Eastern Partnership project has failed” (Łada & Wenerski 2015: 117). The EaP also invoked critique from Moscow, which successfully claimed a special framework with the EU outside the EaP. In addition to this, Ukraine itself criticized the format because it deemed its reform efforts as not being appreciated, being thrown together with reform-avoiding countries such as Armenia or Azerbaijan (Meister & May 2009).

The Eastern Dimension in Light of the Financial Crisis

The next phase of the development came in the aftermath of a plane crash in Smolensk (Russia) in April 2010, leading to the death of President Kaczyński and a substantial part of Poland’s political elite (Lang 2011:

102). In the short term, this tragic event led to a new thaw in the Polish-Russian relations, induced by a reconciliatory policy on the Russian side.⁷ This enabled the establishment of a new triologue format between Poland, Germany and Russia, called “Kaliningrad Triangle” (Wenerski 2014: 22). But, in the middle term, the tragedy of Smolensk led to a gradual worsening of the Polish-Russian relation because the official investigation by the Russian authorities was met with suspicion (Łada & Wenerski 2015: 120). In the same time, during its EU Council Presidency in the first half of 2011, Poland declared the deepening of the EaP as one of its priorities. Yet, the moment proved to be less than suitable for this undertaking. First, institutional changes based in the Treaty of Lisbon weakened the agenda-setting power of the Council Presidency as well as the role of the EU Commissioner for Enlargement and ENP. Second, the financial and sovereign debt crisis absorbed a great deal of energy and attention, to the detriment of Poland, which stood outside of the decision-making procedures of the Eurozone governance (Lang 2012: 2f.). But although this could have invoked old Polish fears of being disregarded (*nic o nas bez nas*), Poland was able to get a stance as *Pre-in*, as a prospective member, whose interests must be taken into account *ex ante* (Lang 2012: 3).

Following the complex power-arithmetic of the EU,⁸ the crisis of the Eurozone led to a Polish-German rapprochement that went hand in hand

⁷ Immediately after the plane crash, at prime time, the biggest Russian TV channel showed the film *Katyn* by Polish film director Andrzej Wajda (Wilson 2010). The movie deals with the mass murdering of Polish officers by the NKVD in Smolensk in spring 1940. For a long time, the Soviet leadership blamed the Wehrmacht for the atrocities. Only in 1990, Mikhail Gorbachov recognized the responsibility of the Soviet Union for the mass murders.

⁸ The multiple crisis in the Eurozone turned out to be a catalysator for a Polish-German twin engine. It created a north-south divide within the EU (Weidenfeld 2014: 112), that negatively

with an approximation of their positions towards the EaP as well as towards Russia, whereas Poland followed Germany's stance in the latter case. As a policy report puts it: its eastern policy became more Europeanized (Shapovalova & Kapuśniak 2011: 2). While the German leadership tended to keep its wishful thinking towards a transformation of Russia under Medvedev and introduced the "Partnership for Modernization" under Steinmeier (Wilson 2010), Warsaw was divided over the issue. While the conservatives from the former government still were influenced by impression of the Russian-Georgian War, the liberals from PO and Tusk followed a pragmatic approach, based on economic interests with Moscow (ibid.; Shapovalova & Kapuśniak 2011: 2).

Ukraine Fatigue and European Summit in Vilnius

These considerations proved to be as beneficial for Moscow as they proved to be detrimental for Kyiv. Ukraine (or, generally, the EaP) occupied a less important place in Poland's foreign policy thinking of that time for two reasons. First, a further EU enlargement or deepening was not in Poland's interest due to the Euro crisis (Lang 2011: 13). Poland even postponed the introduction of the Euro for an indefinite time (Komorowski 2011). Second, it became apparent that the transformation dynamic of the main partners in the east, Ukraine and Belarus, had reached its limits, so that Warsaw became increasingly disappointed of the EaP (Wieliński 2015c). Olaf Osica, head of the Centre for Eastern Studies in Warsaw, conceded that "Poland's attempts to bring Democracy to the east have

impacted on the German-French tandem (*Merkozy*). Amidst this background, Berlin regarded Warsaw increasingly as a new "model pupil of Europe", since it followed a similar economic and fiscal policy as Germany and would thus be a natural ally in the enlarged EU (Buras 2011: 13; 15).

failed” (Vidal 2012). This resulted in a “Ukraine fatigue” (Buras 2011: 12) and diminished the EU-membership prospective for Ukraine and Georgia (Krasnodębska 2014: 10).

Amidst this background, the efforts for a completion of the AA between the EU and Ukraine became the most important benchmark for success. Warsaw has even tried to soften the element of conditionality that not only lay at the heart of the negotiations between the European Commission (EC) and Kyiv, but was the constant factor of the EU foreign policy towards its eastern neighborhood (Böttger 2014: 97). Poland had never been a proponent of regime change in Ukraine (Baranowski & Cichocki 2015: 34).⁹ This approach backfired when Polish leaders still adhered to this course despite the Yanukovych regime already having lost its legitimacy after the bloodshed on Bankovska street (Krasnodębska 2014: 12; Szeptycki 2014: 20).

It was expected that Yanukovych would finally sign the AA during the European Summit in Vilnius in the end of November. Poland had put a lot of political capital into Ukraine’s EU-integration and was in danger of losing its credibility as the chief negotiator. When Yanukovych cancelled several official meetings with Komorowski prior to the summit, it was regarded as misgivings (Krasnodębska 2014: 10). Apparently, Poland had overestimated the interest of Kyiv in signing the AA (Buras 2014b: 3), the

⁹ Polish President Aleksander Kwaśniewski was “the only Western leader to visit Ukraine during its international isolation in the later Leonid Kuchma era” (Shapovalova & Kapuśniak 2011: 3). During the Euro 2012, Polish President Komorowski had a hard time persuading his colleagues throughout the EU not to boycott the final game of the EM, which took place in Ukraine (Lowe 2014). Although most EU-representatives did boycott the event, Komorowski participated – together with Yanukovych and Belarusian President Aleksandr Lukashenko (Szeptycki 2014: 20).

more so since Putin's promise for a favorable loan worth EUR 11 Billion diminished the relative merit of the AA (Böttger 2014: 99).

Poland was ready to keep the *causa* Timoshenko¹⁰ out of the negotiation in order to save the AA – contrary to Germany, who wanted to keep a final vestige of conditionality and insisted on the release of Timoshenko (Gotev & Kokoszcyński 2014). Such came to the detriment of Yanukovich, for whom the release of his most vocal political rival would counter every instinct of political self-preservation (Böttger 2014: 97f.).

The pressure to bring home a success story encouraged a harsh stance towards Russia, who in 2010 had initiated the Eurasian Customs Union (ECU) and regarded the AA (and the EaP in general) as a geopolitical project competing for the post-Soviet space (Wierzbowska-Miazga 2013). That is striking, given that Russia was informed about the negotiations and could have communicated its objections in the past. Since such an integration rivalry between the AA and the ECU *de facto* existed, the EU had tried to provide a higher convergence of regulations for both projects, but the proposal came too late in the eve of the EU-summit (Böttger 2014: 99). The conflict escalated after Yanukovich rejected signing the AA and ordered the use of violence against the protest movement that arose in order to ouster him. Judging from Brussels, at this early point of the

¹⁰ Former Ukrainian PM Timoshenko has been in custody since August 2011. Kwaśniewski and Pat Cox, observer on behalf of the EP, were heading the negotiations between the EU, the Ukrainian leadership and Timoshenko about her release. While decision makers in the EU regarded her detention as a proof for the lack of rule of law in Ukraine and thus as the main obstacle for the implementation of the AA, the Polish leadership had a softer stance towards this issue and were able to negotiate exemptions for the Ukrainian side from the obligation to reform (Krasnodębska 2014: 10). However, they still were overruled by Germany and France in its attempt to establish a formal accession perspective for Ukraine (Böttger 2014: 96).

Revolution of Dignity it seemed as if the conception of EaP had failed. The conceptional dichotomy of the EaP and the bilateral Partnership between the EU and Russia further undermined the prospects for a compromise (Böttger 2014: 95; 102).

Changed Image of Ukraine: from Mentor to Partner

The construction of the image of a country is shaped by a mixture of historical sentiments, abstract experiences based on identities, medially conveyed rhetoric and images, stereotypes, as well as tangible interaction with representatives of the country. Moreover, the image is a co-constitutive phenomenon in the sense that the self-image is always implicitly included.¹¹

What can be observed in the last two years is a broader change of the “imaginary” relation between Poland and Ukraine, that is the change from “Poland as a mentor” to “Poland as a partner” or “advisor” of Ukraine, leading to a more pragmatic approach driven by cost-benefit calculations rather than by normative considerations (Łada & Wenerski 2015: 115f.). This goes hand in hand with widely shared beliefs about Poland being

¹¹ Post-structuralists would ask why the construction of a certain image of a foreign country is deemed necessary for the own identity of a country. One example: in 2014, Poland’s Foreign Minister Sikorski told the US based magazine “Politico” that Putin had allegedly proposed to divide Ukraine as early as 2008 so that western Ukraine would go back to Poland. Although the allegations were softened later by the Polish side, and assumed that it was a bad joke, what can be seen is that Russia’s image of Ukraine is that of an artificial state without any right to exist – with far-reaching political consequences. Had Poland had a similar – revanchist – image of Ukraine, the results of this meeting would have gone in a different direction. It also can be seen that a historical constellation (the partition of Poland between the Soviet Union and Germany in 1939) has been used by Russia as an incentive – with the little twist that, as seen in the power-based view of the Kremlin, it is Poland that should be the partner of a new division.

Ukraine's "bridge" or "window" to the west. Similarly, the narrative of Ukraine as a "second Poland" (Okhrymenko 2016) is also still efficacious among the political elite (see, for example Bielecki 2016; Wroński 2015; Polish Press Agency 2015a). In that case, the perpetuation of this image works for both sides: while Poland can still present itself as a success story, Ukraine can boost the belief of western decision-makers in the reformability of the country.

The positive connotation of the image of a bridge is increasingly overshadowed by the process of 're-bordering' the Polish-Ukrainian frontier into the external border of the EU. This has tended to put an end to the identitarian uncertainty of this multiple periphery, has led to a decrease of personal ties between Poles and Ukrainians and further commercializes the travel of Ukrainians to Poland (Szmagalska-Follis 2012: 45; 194). Up to the beginning of the war in Ukraine, the intensive economic activities of Ukrainians in Poland were mostly regarded as beneficial for Poland (Fomina et al. 2013: 8). There are signs that this is changing due to the high numbers of Ukrainians temporarily or permanently working in Poland as economic migrants and the increasing competition on the lower end of the strongly liberalized labor market (Nakhapetyan 2016). In January 2016, Prime Minister Beata Szydło talked about one million Ukrainian refugees in her country (Nakhapetyan 2016). Although the information was quickly debunked, the intent of a negative branding of Ukrainians in Poland was clear.

Images also convey underlying political messages and can be used as a resource for mobilization. The recurrence of the geopolitical concept of

intermarum (*Międzymorze*) is a good example in this regard.¹² On several high-level visits to Ukraine, both then President Komorowski as well as current President Andrzej Duda cited one of Pilsudski's most famous sentences: "without an independent Ukraine, there won't be a free Poland" (Wroński 2015). Duda even more directly referred to the *intermarum* project on the eve of the presidential elections in 2015 (Wieliński 2015b). The citation fragment entails at least three political messages.

First, there is the negative image of Russia as an aggressor, against which a political alliance should be formed. Second, the strategic relevance of Ukraine for Poland is once again reaffirmed – a symbolic-rhetorical act that was highly appreciated by Oleksandr Zinchenko from the Ukrainian Institute of National Remembrance. In a short comment for the Polish newspaper *Gazeta Wyborcza*, he acknowledged that "it is important that each new president of Poland should begin his visit with these words in order to let the events of the 20th century not repeat" (Wroński & Andrusieczko 2015). Third, the message reveals a great deal about Poland's self-image, given that the basic condition of any revival of *intermarum* is that it is realized under Polish leadership.

But the most explicit focal point for the political importance of this image is the dispute between historians, politicians and journalists from both countries over the Polish-Ukrainian conflict in Volhynia and East

¹² *Intermarum* is an idea elaborated by Józef Piłsudski, who was the leading figure of Poland before, during, and after WWI (Kucharczyk & Fuksiewicz 2015: 102). Back then – when the idea was based on a romanticized revival of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth – as well as today the main idea is that of a loose cooperation between mainly Slavic countries, stretching from the Baltics to the Black Sea. While its realization was buried after the death of Piłsudski in 1935, the idea as such survived in Polish emigré circles who published the exile magazine *Kultura* in Paris (Bielański 2015: 67).

Galicia, which persisted from 1921 to 1948, with varying intensity.¹³ Although the dispute about the proper interpretation of these atrocities – called Volhynia Slaughter in Poland and Volhynia Tragedy in Ukraine – has been used as a bargaining chip in Polish-Ukrainian relations for a long time, the discourse has shifted since the outbreak of the conflict. Presently, it takes place not only in the midst of the political establishment (Sutowski 2016), but also in the past-oriented societies of Poland and Ukraine, since people on both sides are directly affected via their family history (Sutowski 2016).¹⁴

In July 2016, the Polish Sejm declared July 11 as a National Remembrance Day for Victims of Genocide by Ukrainian nationalists. In the eyes of Poland, it was a reaction on the events that took place during Decommunization (such as controversial renaming of bridges and streets) shortly before the Polish Memory Day of the Victims of the Volyn Tragedy. Shortly after, a draft resolution – albeit isolated and still in the process – by a single deputy was handed in the Verkhovna Rada in order to classify the actions of the Polish government against Ukrainians between 1919 – 1951 as a genocide (UAposition 2016).

¹³ During the interwar period, the regions were part of Poland (*Kresy*), but whereas ethnic Poles formed only a minority, ethnic Ukrainians posed between 64 and 70 percent. The Polish government of that time pursued an anti-Ukrainian policy of suppression and assimilation, following the logic of national homogeneity despite a given ethnic plurality underpinned with socio-economic, interethnic disparities (Szmagalska-Follis 2012: 174-176). Ukrainians openly resisted and founded the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN) in 1929. The conflict spurred during WWII, leading to the mass killings of approx. 76.000 – 106.000 thousand Poles in Volhynia and Eastern Galicia (Stańczyk 2012) between 1943-44, committed by or with the help of the military arm of the OUN, the UPA. Subsequently, the Polish Home Army (*Armia Krajowa*) and Polish partisans retaliated in several occasions and killed an estimated 20.000 Ukrainians. Nazi Germany massively exploited and fueled the conflict.

¹⁴ A survey conducted by the Institute of World Policy in six EU member states noted that “the top list of the Polish citizens’ associations with Ukraine is dominated by ones related to history” (Institute for World Policy 2015).

But the political leadership on both sides was eager to put an end to the political instrumentalization of the past and published a joint reconciliatory declaration during Duda's visit in Kyiv on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of Ukraine's independence. This went well with other reconciliatory attempts, such as the exchange of letters and appeals signed by a broad coalition of politicians, activists and people from the media sphere. What helped most was that the institutes of national remembrance from Poland and Ukraine in the end of 2015 had agreed upon an intense dialogue over their joint history.

This shows that the topic can easily become subject of political mobilization. Given that Ukraine is in the middle of a war against an overwhelming enemy, the abandoning of the self-image as a victim and acceptance of the image of a perpetrator instead (Babakova 2015) might indeed shake the main foundation of "contemporary ukrainianness" (Szmagalska-Follis 2012: 176).

Foreign Policy Changes Since the Outbreak of the Crisis

Revolution and Annexation: Marginalizing the Multilateralist

After the beginning of the Maidan protests in November 2013, Warsaw claimed a leading role in the mediation process based on its experience during the Orange Revolution 2004 (Szeptycki 2014: 19). Polish politicians from all political camps were very present during the protests. Polish Foreign Minister Sikorski spoke out in favor of an easing of the bureaucratic procedures of the EU; conservative opposition leader Kaczyński reaffirmed

Ukraine's prospects for an EU-membership (Krasnodębska 2014: 10f.), and Tusk realized an ambitious shuttle diplomacy that encompassed all key EU partners – a clear sign for the multilateral underpinning of the leading role (Buras 2014b: 2; Kucharczyk & Fuksiewicz 2015: 106f.).

After the escalation of violence on Maidan, the foreign ministers of Poland, Germany and France met in the framework of the Weimar Triangle with Yanukovych and representatives of the opposition to negotiations.

While Poland had been very quick in condemning the use of violence by the regime of Yanukovych, Germany had a rather cautious stance. During his inaugural visit in Warsaw in the end of December 2013, German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier rejected the role of a mediator (Sturm 2013), and the EU, besides rhetorical appeals, stayed inactive. This only changed in the end of January, after the first people were killed on Maidan. On the Ukrainian side, this created the impression that the EU was divided into a value-oriented east and an interest-based west (Krasnodębska 2014: 2; 11).

Shortly after Yanukovych fled Ukraine, the interim government was facing the annexation of the Crimea. In Poland, the annexation evoked strong fears among the populace (CBOS 2015)¹⁵ as well as decision-makers. Poland shares a deeply rooted and historically grown “siege mentality”

¹⁵ In a monthly survey conducted by the Public Opinion Research Center, in March 2014, 72 percent of the respondents acknowledged that the situation in Ukraine poses a threat to the security of Poland. The pattern of the perceived threat strongly correlates with the progress of the war in Ukraine: While the survey registered a low in threat perception during a period of military advancement with the regaining of separatist-held territory in June 2014 (49 percent: threat; 42 percent: no threat), a new high was registered in August/September 2014 – during the kettle of Ilovaisk and the increasing use of heavy equipment on the Russian side (CBOS 2015).

(*Belagerungsmentalität*), that is a fear of loss of sovereignty as well as the condemnation of the geopolitical position between stronger and expansionist powers such as Germany and Russia/the Soviet Union (Frank 2003: 22-27). The day after the annexation, Tusk referred to the conflict in Ukraine as an “existential question” for Poland (Deutsche Welle 2014). Since Poland is the only EU and NATO member bordering both Ukraine and Russia (and her close partner Belarus, for that matter), and the secret Russian invasion in Eastern Ukraine is “politically ambiguous to allies and unclear for international public opinion” (Klus 2014), the threat indeed could not be underestimated.¹⁶

The most important conclusion that was drawn immediately at the beginning of the conflict was that the relation to Poland’s main guarantors of security, the US and NATO, had to be strengthened. Washington’s immediate and harsh response reaffirmed the common assessment of the situation (Rodkiewicz 2014; Buras 2014b: 5);

The fastest reaction came with regards to sanctions against Russian individuals (asset freezing and visa bans), immediately after the illegitimate referendum on Crimea (Böttger 2014: 100; European Parliament 2014: 2). A debate as to whether there might be some truth in the narrative of Crimea belonging to Russia did not take place in Poland (Politt 2014: 5). The

¹⁶ One year prior to the aggression, President Komorowski had made clear in an unofficial doctrine that the priority of the Polish military is the defense of the territorial integrity rather than the deployment abroad (National Security Bureau 2013). The doctrine was partly a reaction to the Russo-Georgian War in 2008 that was regarded by a part of the establishment as a sign for the recursion of a neo-imperialist Russia – a fear that was strengthened in 2009, when Russia held a military exercise in Kaliningrad, where a nuclear attack on Poland’s capital was simulated (Bil et al. 2016: 13). Thus, the beginning conflict in Ukraine was regarded as a proof that the concerns where correct.

sanctions met with comprehensive support from EU member states as well as abroad, but Poland, together with the Baltics, had pushed for even harsher sanctions against Russia (Gotev & Kokoszczynski 2014) and criticized that the conditions for an intensification of the sanctions were subject to interpretation and easy to thwart by Russia (Speck 2014). In order to raise acceptance for the sanctions, Tusk compared the Annexation with the very strong historical analogy of the *Anschluss* (Łada & Wenerski 2015: 123). This helped the Polish trade associations to be not overly vocal as to the prospective costs of the sanctions (Łada 2014: 5f.).

Poland's harsh stance comes as a surprise, given that the conflict has also a strong geo-economic dimension for the country. Russia is Poland's second largest exporter after Germany, and although the export volume only amounts to 12.1 percent of Poland's overall imports, around 75 percent of total imports from Russia are mineral products such as oil and gas. Looking at the total amount of Russian energy in Poland's energy mix, the energy security dimension becomes even more visible. Although Poland's dependency from foreign energy in general is rather low (25.8 percent) compared to the EU-28 average (53,2 percent), it is highly dependent on Russia as a single supplier. Russia provides around 75 percent of the domestic gas consumption and close to 100 percent of Poland's oil imports (Wenerski & Speiser 2015: 130ff.; Baranowski & Cichocki 2015: 36). Moreover, Poland is highly dependent on gas transfer via Ukraine – something that Russia has regarded as a political instrument and repeatedly suspended in the past years (2006 and 2009). Thus, Poland is eager to diversify both suppliers and delivery routes.

Since “EU sanctions are a compromise between the member states’ interest in sanctioning Russia and the negative consequences for their economies” (Wenerski & Speiser 2015: 131), the ability of Poland to act as a regional leader can be measured thoroughly in this field. The negotiations on sanctions must be regarded as a defeat for Poland in that regard (Buras 2014b: 3) because of significant differences in interest. The energy dependence in the Visegrád-Group (Poland, Hungary, Slovakia, Czech Republic; abbr. V4) is higher in the three countries besides Poland, making it harder to exercise leadership. The countries also differ in questions of minority rights or even the assessment of what actually happened in Ukraine (Gniazdowski et al. 2014; Klus 2014). Yet, a coalition of Poland and the Baltic states was able to specify the conditions for a third round of sanctions to implement in case that Russia would invade further parts of Ukrainian territory (Bierling 2014: 262).

The escalation of the conflict and the beginning of a military upheaval orchestrated from Moscow induced the internationalization of the conflict. That enhanced the influence of individually powerful countries such as Germany and France, but also global actors such as the US, NATO and OSCE (Krasnodębska 2014: 12).

This had a mixed outcome for Poland. Warsaw saw no ground for a cautious position towards Moscow and actively kept supporting the new government in Kyiv (Szeptycki 2014: 21). The more nuanced domestic positions in the German political public where met with a certain

indulgence in Poland (Frymark & Kwiatkowska-Drożdż 2014),¹⁷ not least in order to keep a stake in the multilateral format that ran the risk of being undermined by a leading duo Washington-Berlin: “It was the German chancellor who communicated the West’s views and expectations to Russian President Vladimir Putin, and it was she who negotiated on behalf of the EU with U.S. President Barack Obama – despite not having an official mandate to represent all 28 EU member states” (Speck 2014).

The forbearance towards Germany was put into question in the security policy. In contrast to Berlin, the US and the majority of NATO members wanted to enhance the military presence in the eastern flank of NATO (Bierling 2014: 262).¹⁸ It fits this picture that Foreign Minister Steinmeier excluded any NATO accession of Ukraine during a meeting of the Weimar Triangle in the beginning of April. The US positioned itself in the middle and met Poland’s security interests with the announcement that it would permanently deploy its troops in Poland “in the long term” (Buras 2014b: 5).

Militarization and Negotiation: Isolating the hawk

The conflict further escalated with the militarization by Russian proxies in eastern Ukraine as of April 2014. Poland began to prioritize

¹⁷ Although German Chancellor Merkel, caught by surprise by the speed of Russia’s annexation of Crimea and Putin’s uncompromising stance, emphatically supported the idea of sanctions (Merkel 2014) and only one day after the fake referendum decided on common sanctions together with the US (Böttger 2014: 100), Foreign Minister Steinmeier seemed to be inclined towards a form of Appeasement 2.0. Warsaw thought that these differences were born out of the domestic need to satisfy different segments of the electorate (Łada 2014: 4f.).

¹⁸ The dispute is based on a differing interpretation of the Founding Act of 1997 between Russia and NATO, which declared that the military alliance would not permanently deploy troops on its eastern flank, with the assumption that the security environment would not change (Busse 2014; NATO 1997). While Poland, together with the Baltics, considers that condition clearly as a given, Germany strongly opposes this view (Łada & Wenerski 2015: 126f.).

questions of defense policy over the crisis in Ukraine and intensified his diplomatic efforts towards the US and towards NATO. Thereby, it assumed its active role in that issue. Instead, Germany became the decisive moderator and networker. Although Berlin failed to set the agenda with its several proposals, it was successful in keeping the diplomatic process going.¹⁹

From the Polish perspective, the start of a series of national roundtable talks initiated by the Ukrainian government in May 2014 was a low point in its diplomatic efforts, given that Poland possessed a lot of experience with this type of reconciliatory tool (Bujak 2014), but it was Berlin and Paris who had urged for this to occur (Speck 2014). Moreover, the experienced former German diplomat Wolfgang Ischinger – whose diplomatic reputation is highly appreciated among Russian diplomatic circles – was appointed to represent the OSCE at the round table.

Yet, Poland was able to gain from the side-lines of the conflict and to act as an agenda-setter. Tusk garnered support for the idea of an Energy Union designed to address EU's energy dependency (Wenerski & Speiser 2015: 136). Such potential is high, since, as a PISM-report notes, Poland “might use the crisis to put the region in the spotlight of EU financing, and

¹⁹ Negotiations on an international contact group with the participation of the OSCE going back to an initiative by Merkel in the beginning of March (Bierling 2014: 260) failed due to different ideas about the format. In the same period of time, Germany proposed a fact-finding mission under the auspices of OSCE, which was downgraded by the Russian side to a weaker OSCE Observer Mission (Rodkiewicz 2014). A high-level meeting between EU, US, Russia and Ukraine in Genf initiated by Steinmeier failed because it entailed a demand for the disarmament of illegal formations in the Donbas and thus would have curtailed Russia's lever on the conflict (König & von Drach 2014).

crediting. Increased regional interconnectivity will boost market development in Poland” (Godzimirski et al. 2015: 27).

President of the United States Obama, who started his tour through Europe in the beginning of June in Warsaw, also spoke out in favor of an Energy Union (Wenerski & Speiser 2015: 136). He announced the so-called European Reassurance Initiative (ERI), worth several billion dollars (Belkin et. al. 2014: 5). In the eyes of the renowned Center for Strategic & International Studies, the program “represents a significant reinvestment in the U.S. military presence in Europe after decades of gradual withdrawal [and] it indicates the administration’s acknowledgement of the growing threat Russia poses to long-term U.S. national security interests in Europe and beyond” (Cancian & Samp 2016).

Poland’s marginal role must be seen against the background of a tightening of the domestic rhetoric due to the upcoming Euro-parliamentary elections. The war in Ukraine and the security-related implications of a neo-imperial Russia where by far the most important campaign issue (Majcherek 2014: 3). The election forecasts predicted a victory of PiS, which led the PO under Prime Minister Tusk to take over the anti-Russian rhetoric of his opponent (Szczurbiak 2014) – and hence made it impossible to act as a neutral arbiter.

Thus, the scope conditions for a marginalization of Poland in the diplomatic setting of the conflict were a given. During the 70th anniversary of the Normandy landing, Germany, France, Ukraine and Russia decided to establish the so-called ‘Normandy Format’ (NF) as a new dialogue form, where Putin and Poroshenko would meet directly (Szeptycki 2014: 21). Yet

the NF had some serious flaws. The wording of the joint statement of the participants of the NF “does not in any way indicate Russia’s role in instigating the fighting in east Ukraine” (Krasnodębska 2014: 13). When Russia increased its military engagement in Ukraine during August 2014, the constructive fault of this became more and more obvious. Steinmeier was perceived as a keeper of neutral distance between the EU and Russia (Speck 2014). France was seen as an actor with a rather Russian-friendly attitude (Krasnodębska 2014: 6f) and already had mediated between the conflict parties during the Russo-Georgian War in 2008 (Larsen 2009: 9). Poland, a longstanding and experienced partner in the region (Szeptycki 2014: 21), was not even invited to be part of the NF (Buras 2014a).

With that, Ukraine had lost its most important proponent within the direct negotiation format, and Germany and France successfully had asserted themselves as chief negotiators (Krasnodębska 2014: 13). Although Berlin was eager to explain that this had rather more practical than political reasons, Warsaw interpreted this as a sign of mistrust (Łada 2014: 8). But it soon appeared that the new format was beneficial regarding the negotiation tactics: Poland often held bilateral meetings with the Ukrainian leadership (Gotev & Kokoszcyński 2014) and informally consulted with Germany, which in turn increasingly took into account Ukrainian interests (Buras 2014a). Meanwhile, Russia was satisfied with the formal absence of Poland in the NF (Krasnodębska 2014: 14).

After the crash of Malaysian Airplane MH-17 – for which Poland, among others, blamed Russia due to the continuation of weapon deliveries (Łada & Wenerski 2015: 123) – the EU extended the sanctions regime on

whole sectors such as finance and trade and imposed an embargo on arms and dual use goods (European Parliament 2014: 2). Earlier that month, the cooperation between EBRD and EIB had already been halted – with the exception of Polish-Russian cross-border cooperation around Kaliningrad Oblast (Wenerski & Speiser 2015: 132). Another effect was that the V4-countries unanimously spoke out in favor of sanctions despite still existing differences (Belkin et. al. 2014: 8).

Russia reacted by adopting retaliatory measures in the form of a ban of agricultural products, especially fruits and vegetables in August, and later extended them to meat, fish, cheese and milk. Given that Poland ranks high among the EU-members worst affected by these measures,²⁰ and taking into account that “the socio-economic impact of Russian counter-sanctions [...] could be a key factor benefiting PiS in the upcoming parliamentary elections” (Baranowski & Cichocki 2015: 37), it comes with surprise that the Polish government did not at any given moment put the sanctions into question. There are two reasons for this. Firstly, Poland’s exports (agricultural, electrical, chemical and metallurgical products) to Russia are highly diversified, and it is easier for those to switch to new markets (Wenerski & Speiser 2015: 130).

After the introduction of the ban, Poland, the world’s biggest apple exporter, selling 70 percent of its overall fruit production to Russia, immediately reacted with a diversification campaign, reaching out to India, Indonesia and the Balkans, and, in autumn, with a domestic consumption campaign (*Jem bo Polskie* – I eat it because it’s Polish). The EU also set up a

²⁰ Poland ranks 4th place among the countries that are potentially worst affected by Russian sanctions, and 2nd in terms of absolute value (EUR 841 million; European Parliament 2014: 4).

program which basically bought up the oversupply which could not be exported to Russia.. Secondly, Poland already has some experience with Russian embargos, and knowing the retaliatory-political nature of these measures, it is more inclined to bear the costs of those and to play the game accordingly. After a meat embargo in 2005, Poland for example tried to hamper Russia's negotiations with EU and WTO (Wenerski & Speiser 2015: 132f.).

Stakes were high for Warsaw during the NATO Summit in Wales in September 2014. Prior to that, NATO General Secretary Rasmussen had advocated the idea of new military bases in CEE (Foxall 2014: 11). But, referring to the 1997 Founding Act, Germany refrained from such actions. Instead, it decided upon the creation of a rotating "Spearhead Force" within the existing NATO Response Force (NRF) – and thus against the permanent deployment of troops in the eastern flank of NATO (Gebauer & Schmitz 2014). Although the Baltic states in general perceived this as a positive process, and Warsaw as well in official terms, commentators and experts rather doubted that this process would substantially enhance NATO's defense capabilities (Kokot 2014). Usually, Poland demanded the permanent deployment of two heavy brigades (around 10.000 soldiers) on its territory alone (Belkin et al. 2014: 9).

The tension between Berlin and Warsaw could partly be lowered by some concessions to the Polish side. Besides the Wales Summit Declaration, which highlighted the will to further strengthen the transatlantic partnership (Godzimirski et al. 2015: 10), it was the deal between Germany, Poland, and Denmark, to upgrade the HQ of the

Multinational Corps in Szczecin from low to high readiness (Baranowski & Cichocki 2015: 37). Moreover, Lithuania, Poland and Ukraine agreed upon the launch of a joint brigade, with the HQ being in Lublin (Agence France Presse 2016).

Immediately after the summit, the ratification of the Minsk-Accords in September 2014 looked like a breakthrough at the beginning. And although the truce already broke down after one month, the agreement led to a quietening of the diplomatic front. The reason for that was that the majority of the EU-countries shied away from drawing political conclusions from Russia crossing the red line in the form of further advances into Ukrainian territory (Larsen 2014: 32). Poland was completely marginalized in this process.

Election and Domestication: Reclaiming an Active Role

Donald Tusks inauguration as President of the European Council in December 2014 brought deputy party chairwoman Ewa Kopacz into office. His new position allowed Tusk to act as an agenda-setter and to keep the pressure in the causa on the EU level (Radziszewski 2014). He was especially able to upload his idea of an Energy Union onto the EU level so that Jean-Claude Juncker, since November new president of the EC, ranked it second among his top priorities (Wenerski & Speiser 2015: 136f.). Tusk skillfully used the crisis as a window of opportunity: “Had it not been for the Ukrainian conflict, the security of supplies would have been likely to occupy last place in any list of EU energy policy goals” (Godzimirski et al. 2015: 11).

On the domestic level, Kopacz's first press conference in November 2014 was (mis)interpreted so that she seemed to be inclined to "distance herself from the policies of her powerful predecessor and political patron" (Sobczyk & Wasilewski 2014), to weaken the solidarity ties with Ukraine and to foster a narrowly defined concept of national security instead (Wasilewski 2015). Although this was afterwards recanted (Rzeczpospolita 2014; Pawlik 2015), the circles close to PiS would use this flaw to discredit the PO-government during the upcoming elections.

When analyzing certain actions in light of rising fear among Polish society, resulting in a cautious stance towards the conflict, as well as the prelude of the elections marathon that made the Polish government more responsive towards the society,²¹ it can be said that the stance towards Ukraine did not change in substance, yet became based on sharper cost-benefit calculations and a more cautious rhetoric.

In December, Kyiv decided to abandon Ukraine's nonalignment status in favor of Euroatlantic integration. This evoked a cautious statement by the new Foreign Minister Grzegorz Schetyna that "there is no question about Ukraine joining NATO nowadays. If someone raised this issue, it would create an irreconcilable international problem" (Łada & Wenerski 2015: 118f.). Yet, Warsaw made clear that it would change its stance in case of any prospect for an accession.

Also telling in that regard is the announcement by Schetyna of possible arms deliveries in the course of the bloody rocket attack on

²¹ As a CBOS-survey reveals, in the beginning of 2015, more respondents regarded sanctions as a sufficient instrument, and more respondents insisted that Poland should keep a neutral stance towards the conflict, as compared to the beginning of 2014 (CBOS 2015).

Mariupol in the beginning of 2015, leaving 30 civilians death and more than 100 wounded, spurring a debate on whether Ukraine should be provided with arms or not. Schetyna was eager to downplay the relevance of the offer and pointed to the sole economic background of a possible arms deal (Gazeta Wyborcza 2015). In a similar diplomatic vein, Defense Minister Semoniak repeated that Poland was not eager to deliver arms, but on the other hand would not exclude the possibility *a priori*.

In this situation, Schetyna's call for a strengthening of the sanctions after the attack as well as his line of argumentation, according to which the separatists and Russia are under obligation to implement the Minsk agreement, were a rather inexpensive way of showing solidarity, even though other states see the responsibility for implementation mainly on the Ukrainian side (Łada & Wenerski 2015: 123). Poland was also actively seeking a common stance within the V4 in terms of a strengthening of the sanctions regime (Wenerski & Speiser 2015: 132).

During Duda's presidential election campaign in spring 2015, resulting in his victory, he challenged the *European Mainstream*-approach of Komorowski and claimed that Poland should take a rather assertive stance – an *Own Stream* – towards the EU. This also affected the Ukraine-policy. PiS insinuated that PO had “been constrained by its unwillingness to move too far beyond the EU consensus and act as a counter-balance to the major European powers which are over-conciliatory towards Moscow” (Szczerbiak 2015a). In that vein, Duda stressed the urgency of permanent NATO bases in Poland, claimed that Poland should seek for a more active role in the conflict, and criticized the flaws in the design of the Minsk II Agreement.

Frustration about Poland's marginalization was widespread among conservatives in the political establishment. As the director of the prestigious Polish Institute of International Affairs, Marcin Zaborowski, puts it, "we could have been more lavish towards Kyiv" (Wieliński 2015c).²²

What at first glance seemed like a substantial policy change, on closer examination can be debunked as mainly rhetoric dedicated to the upcoming election circle. The actual difference in the positions was minor.

For example, Foreign Minister Schetyna, already in autumn 2014, had claimed that there should be a new negotiation format which would include Poland (TVP 2014). In May 2015, during the EaP-summit in Riga, Poland was among the few countries that openly supported Ukraine's membership prospect (Łada & Wenerski 2015: 117). The most telling indicator was that the Sejm in May raised the military spending to 2 percent of the overall budget – a raise of around 18 percent within the military budget. The vote came almost unanimously, with altogether four MPs abstaining or voting against (Łada & Wenerski 2015: 126). Nevertheless, the delimitation campaign worked, and the image of Polish politicians as "lawyers of Ukraine" weakened, compared to 2014 (Junko 2015).

The Volhynia Tragedy/Massacre also played a role during the election campaign. In early April 2015, a few hours after Bronisław Komorowski held a speech in the Ukrainian parliament (Verkhovna Rada) on the occasion of the 75th Anniversary of the Massacre of Katyn, the Rada passed

²² He also expressed his dissatisfaction with Poland's absence in the NF as well as its outcome so far. Jerzy Pomianowski, back in 2015 director of the European Endowment for Democracy, expressed a similar view (Zerkalo Nedelii 2015b).

a number of laws that heroized the members of the OUN and UPA as fighters for Ukrainian independence – an act that was perceived in Warsaw as a slap in the face (Kravchuk 2015). Duda called for a stop of the glorification of the UPA and cancelled the first visit of Poroshenko shortly after his election victory on such a short call that the latter had to turn back on his way to Warsaw (Zerkalo Nedelii 2015a).

In August, Duda came up with a precise plan, suggesting that Poland as well as representatives of the EU, the US and the neighboring countries of Ukraine should become part of the NF or otherwise be included into the dialogue on the situation in Eastern Ukraine (Polish Press Agency 2015b). That demand was directed via the Polish press towards the German leadership (Wieliński 2015d), and must be regarded as a kind of blackmailing light, given that fears were quite widespread among Germany that Duda would play the anti-German card during his visit of Gauck in Berlin later that month.

The reactions towards the proposal were flatly negative. Both Russia and Ukraine rejected it (Kravchuk 2015), just as did Germany, mostly due to Poland's "alleged partisanship and radicalism" (Baranowski & Cichocki 2015: 36). The initiative must be regarded as an attempt to accommodate those voters who expected a rather hawkish position in the Russian-Ukrainian Crisis. Meanwhile, Beata Szydło, the PiS frontrunner in the upcoming parliamentary elections, focused on domestic issues, which are the natural subject of the Prime Minister within the Polish governmental system and had far higher prospects of success given that Ukraine as a topic had slowly lost its mobilizing power (Babakova 2015).

The elections resulted in an overwhelming victory of PiS and led to Szydło's nomination as PM. In institutional terms, Poland's overall policy towards the Russian-Ukrainian Crisis now had enough space to implement a possible policy turn. But at the end of the day, the new government provided only a very subtle change, mostly expressed on the ministerial level on behalf of people such as new Foreign Minister Witold Waszczykowski, who restated Poland's ambitions as a regional leader, and who was more explicit about the need to have permanent NATO bases (Waszczykowski 2015a), and who vocally criticized the previous government. He went so far as to declare the foreign policy legacy of PO from 2007 to 2015 as lost years, claiming that an erroneous EaP had led to the Revolution of Dignity, and implying that Tusk had voluntarily refrained from being part of the NF (Waszczykowski 2016a). Simultaneously, to soothe fears of a policy change, President Duda during his first state visit in Kyiv in December 2015 stressed that Poland will keep continuity in his policy towards Ukraine (Wroński 2015).

There, both sides sharply criticized the plan of Gazprom and five Western companies to build North Stream II (Wroński & Andrusieczko 2015). They were supported by a protest note issued by all CEECs towards the EC the same month (Bota et al. 2016). Although this might be regarded as an indicator for a common stance within the V4, the underlying interests were in fact as diverse as usual, with some countries having commercial interests, while others – such as Poland – rather deeming the geopolitical

dimension of the project as important (Buras 2016: 181).²³ Meanwhile, Poland's efforts for diversification paid off, and the LNG-terminal that was built in Świnoujście since 2006 was finished and received its first shipment of liquid gas from Qatargas.

Isolation and Demystification: Heading Towards Inward Leaning Security

Since the beginning of 2016, two phenomena can be observed. The first one is a rising gap between Ukraine and Poland, based on a rise of 'Ukraine fatigue' in Poland due to the government crisis in Ukraine that led to the approval of Poroshenko's trusted friend Volodymyr Hroisman as Ukraine's Prime Minister (Bielecki 2016). Polish society has become increasingly critical towards the help the Polish government offers its neighbor in terms of financial aid. For example, the EUR 100 Mln credit line is criticized by some, suggesting that the money should be used domestically for pensions and wages instead (Babakova 2015).

Even the long-awaited DCFTA that came into force in January did not change this perception substantially. The reasons for this are manifold. Ukraine is on the margin of economic importance for Poland. In 2013, it was the 8th biggest export destination and occupied the 21st place among Poland's importers. Two years later, Ukraine ranked 18th in exports and 23rd in imports (Płonka 2015), with only the level of FDI staying almost constant (Wenerski & Speiser 2015: 134f.). From the Polish perspective, the DCFTA

²³ Two months earlier, the companies had agreed on the details of the project. In Poland, the construction of North Stream I in 2005 had invoked fears of a Russo-German rapprochement and was labelled a second "Hitler-Stalin-Pact". Accordingly, Germany was regarded as lacking solidarity, since the expected revenues on the Russian side from the new pipeline would by far exceed the imposed costs of the sanction regime and the whole project would contrast with the diversification strategy of the Energy Union. In addition, Ukraine would lose around EUR 1.8 Billion in transit fees (Schuller 2015).

is a rather meagre conditional instrument in terms of Ukraine's reform-ability, and with its introduction, the political effect fell flat. Such a result would have been unexpected prior to the Revolution of Dignity, when the AA was one of the few political pawns, but for Poland it is clear that "meaningful relations with Ukraine are not constituted by trade only" (Sek 2012).

The second phenomenon is a rising gap between Poland and the EU, based on the fact that the space for manoeuvre after PiS came to power was mainly used to demonstrate an anti-federalist (or Eurosceptic) stance towards the EU, not only in words (Wroński 2015; Wieliński 2016), but also in deeds, such as the annulation of the appointment of five judges for the constitutional tribunal that led to the initiation of a rule of law-procedure by the European Commission. This, in turn, has had some serious repercussions for Ukraine in Europe, because it has led to a loss of trust in the reform-ability of Ukraine – why should it succeed when even in Poland, the transformatory and post-communist role model, the constitutional situation could deteriorate as fast as it has (Bielecki 2016)? – and diminishes Poland's importance as Ukraine's lawyer within the EU.

This came amidst the background of a stronger focus on security issues. In January, the Polish government announced the creation of a national guard. Starting with three brigades in this year, the troops are a direct response to Russia's hybrid warfare since "national guards with local knowledge will be able to distinguish between any friend and foe they might encounter in time of crisis" (Day 2016).

In that vein, the upcoming NATO summit in Warsaw in July has grabbed a significant amount of attention and has induced decision-makers to formulate their expectations in the public sphere: Waszczykowski published a lengthy article for The New York Times, where he reiterated that the result of what he called the ‘Warsaw Package’ should “go much further [than the NATO summit in September 2014], including a permanent NATO presence in Poland” (Waszczykowski 2016b). Similarly, Deputy Defense Minister Tomasz Szatkowski reminded the public that “the defense ministers of the NATO countries agreed upon the enhancing of the military presence on the eastern flank” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2016a) during another run-up meeting of the NATO Defense Ministers in February this year.

In terms of coalition-building, Poland was only partly able to convince other actors of his position. During a run-up preparation summit in Bucharest, Poland demanded that NATO would decide upon permanent structures in its eastern flank and that it should refocus on territorial defense (TVN 24 2015). While the participants of the summit – nine members of NATO’s eastern flank, from the Baltics to Romania – issued a joint statement, no other NATO member reacted (Smolar 2016). Interestingly, during the months before the Warsaw Summit, Poland had watered down its expectations: during a visit to Washington, Duda said that “whether the presence of NATO troops in our country is permanent or rotating is of ‘secondary importance’” (Polish Press Agency 2016). This clear departure from the earlier position can be explained with the pressure to present the outcome of the Warsaw Summit as a success.

The summit indeed was a triumph. Moreover, in organizing what was the probably most important NATO summit since the end of the Cold War, Poland demonstrated leadership and called for an equal status within the alliance (Waszczykowski 2015b) – an indicator for Warsaw’s rising self-confidence that is fed up with “second-class” membership in NATO (Dorn 2015). Following a conclusion issued by Duda, it provided Poland with a “‘real allied force’ on its territory, capable of protecting it any time a threat emerges” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2016c).

Four points shall be highlighted as an outcome: First, the commitment of the US to deploy a heavy brigade with a HQ in Poland, consisting of four battalions to be stationed in Poland and the Baltics on a rotational basis. Although it is not the full-fledged military basis which constitutes Poland’s maximum security aim, it is, as Edward Lucas notes, “still a symbolic and physical reminder of the alliance’s commitment to territorial defense” (Lucas 2016). Second, the Head of the Ministry of National Defense, Antoni Macierewicz, announced the rise of the military budget to three percent of the GDP (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2016b) in order to raise the number of soldiers from 115.000 to 150.000 in 2017. Third, the alliance agreed upon the enhancement of Ukraine’s military capabilities via reforms and common standards. Although Ukraine was not named as a potential candidate, the open-door policy of the alliance was confirmed during the summit, and the cooperation between NATO and Ukraine is a de facto implementation of certain standards that bring the membership closer in incremental steps (Szeligowski 2016: 1). Fourth, Poland demonstrated its commitment in various NATO activities that go

beyond its eastern flank (DefenseNews 2016). By that, Poland wanted to express solidarity in the broader context, and Defense Minister Macierewicz underlined that “although the threat from the east is the most important for us, we understand and will participate in the effort to defend the southern flank” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2016b).

Poland was also successful at other fronts. In August, it was announced that North Stream was not going to be built for the time being, since each gas supplier was to use existing pipeline infrastructure – an impossible undertaking taking into account the route of the pipeline through the North Sea. Moreover, the Polish Office of Competition and Consumer Protection (UOKiK) objected to the project, arguing that it would cement Gazprom’s position on the EU energy market (De Jong 2016).

Poland and the EU

Convergence in Threat Perception, Divergence in Interests

National perspectives on the Russian-Ukrainian Crisis have converged to the perspective of Warsaw rather than *vice versa*. This is especially true for the rather negative view of Russia and the renewed importance of defense policy. The commitment of all NATO members to raise the defense budget to two percent of GDP throughout the next 10 years is a telling indicator in that regard. Yet, the countries still differ in their threat perception and in the political conclusions to be drawn. While Germany, for example, does not regard Russia as an existential threat and speaks out in favor of dialogue with Moscow, for Poland, deterrence is the key to success (Łada

2016: 5). The Baltic states are the strongest advocates of this view, within the V4 the threat perception is overlaid by diverging interests in foreign, security and economic policy as well as ideological underpinnings (Cichocki 2016: 199; Kucharczyk & Mesežnikov 2015: 195-197), and southern EU-members such as France, Italy or Spain are rather ambivalent as to whether Russia should be regarded as a threat as well as who is to blame for the violence in eastern Ukraine (Pew Research Center 2015: 16-18).

But even if perceptions do somehow converge, that does not mean that political priorities do as well. The EU has had to deal with multiple crises.. Inside the EU, there are clear disintegrative tendencies, the Refugee Crisis at its southern flank and the Russian-Ukrainian Conflict on its eastern flank. Due to limited capacities in problem-solving, countries tend to process them in line with their immediacy. While for Germany the Refugee Crisis ranks higher on the political agenda (Bil et al. 2015: 18), in France it is the struggle against terror (Buras 2016: 180).

The development of a *status quo*-oriented EU has always been fostered by external shock and crisis (Godzimirski et al. 2015: 7). Thus, it should be asked whether the crises bear opportunities for Poland. From this perspective, the *Brexit* could prove beneficial for Warsaw, at least in security terms. The UK has always been the strongest adversary of the deepening Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP), that would, in the view from London, ultimately lead to a European army and undermine the *NATO first*-paradigm. Since UK will leave the EU, but stay in NATO, the military commitment there will continue – additionally the *Brexit* paves the way for a deeper cooperation between Germany, France, and Poland

towards a Defense Union. Here, the instrument of Permanent Structured Cooperation might be used in order to foster closer cooperation.

How does the relation to NATO relate to this? The defense alliance seems to have overcome their identity crisis and has refocused on their traditional task of territorial defense. Poland welcomes this reorientation, yet fosters a multidimensional concept of security oriented towards two tangents: the commitment to peace (who wants peace as we understand it?) and the guarantee for peace (who can enforce peace?). Accordingly, the PiS-government seeks to enhance its own security capabilities, fosters the security ties towards the US, and only then relies on NATO (Łada 2016: 23; Buras & Balcer 2016). Thus, it “has to strike the right balance between investing in European defense capabilities and enhancing its own military capacity to defend its territory and borders, especially in a situation when NATO’s Article 5 commitment to collective defense is not automatically implemented” (Godzimirski et al. 2015: 25).

Although the NATO Summit in Warsaw was a success for Poland, the Polish leadership is still sceptical towards the possibility of deterring Russia and to deploy NATO troops fast enough in case of an invasion (Buras & Balcer 2016). In addition, after Trump became the new US president, there are fears that NATO (and US, for that matter) security guarantees will cease to exist.

To conclude, Poland will increasingly rely on its own capabilities in terms of security. Simultaneously, it is expected that the cooperation between NATO and EU will enhance on a practical level (e.g. more pooling and sharing). While differences between the countries in threat perception

and political priority will hamper the emergence of a common European strategic culture, the enhanced cooperation of willing actors in the field of defense and security might in the future increase the incentive of other countries to join, given they see some tangible success.

Structural Marginalization or Regional Leadership?

But such developments are not decided alone in the isolated field of security and defense. Poland's position within the EU as the most important focal point for governance is undergoing a process of structural marginalization, observable in those policy fields that will stay in the focus in the middle term such as asylum/migration, freedom of movement as well as fiscal and monetary policy (Buras 2016: 183). While representatives of the former government for some time had argued in favor of joining the Euro – and eventually regarded the Russian-Ukrainian Crisis as an argument for faster accession (Buras 2014b: 5), Prime Minister Szydło, building on a consensus that formed in the course of the financial crisis, put an end to this path in the beginning of 2016 (Cichocki 2016: 195f.).

Here, the political costs of the *Brexit* are clearly visible. The UK, as the biggest EU-member outside the Eurozone and integration-scepticist, always made sure that it is not sidelined in the decision-making process, what allowed countries with a similar attitude – such as Poland – to bandwagon, as it were (Cienski 2016). Now, things look slightly different. As Marcin Zaborowski from the Center for European Policy Analysis notes, “Poland as a non-euro member probably won't get any invitation to be part of the new core of Europe” (ibid.).

Another factor of marginalization is based on the rising normative gap between the EU and the Eurosceptic PiS-government, which negatively impacts the relation with the Commission as the traditional ally of the new EU member states. This might become evident in the end of 2016, when the financial framework of the EU will be reviewed. In the middle term, “the key questions for Poland will be whether this political and institutional framework will be [...] sufficient to protect Poland’s interests” (Buras & Balcer 2016). It remains to be seen whether Euroscepticism will remain a largely rhetoric artefact (and a derivation from domestic politics), or whether deviance from the European consensus will lead to more radical steps (Szczurbiak 2015b).²⁴

As a result, Poland searches for new models of cooperation in\and outside existing organizations and established formats (Baranowski & Cichocki 2015: 37; Tomkiw 2016), “on the North-South Axis from Scandinavia through the Baltic republics, Romania, and Ukraine to Turkey”

²⁴ In any case, the assertiveness negatively impacts the relation with individual member states. Germany is an instructive case in this regard. First, the Weimar Triangle is an important format where both Germany and Poland informally discuss urgent topics together with France. Second, for Poland, Germany is the main instance mediating standpoints and concerns between a V4 under Polish leadership and the Weimar Triangle. Third, Germany is regarded as a kind of hegemon within the EU, being partly responsible for the broad EU consensus that Poland wants to deviate from. While Tusk, during a historical speech he gave 2011 in Germany, acknowledged that he fears German inactivity more than German power (Sikorski 2011: 9), and the Polish Foreign Ministry then referred to the country as the most important bilateral partner (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2012: 17), the new Foreign Minister Waszczykowski in his foreign policy outline degraded Germany to a trading partner, and “forgot” to hint on his central role in NATO and EU (Smolar 2016) and vocally criticized the postmodern “German” lifestyle. This, in turn, has drawbacks on the EU level. Not only did it lead to irritation in Washington as to whether their military presence in Germany was not negatively affected by the deteriorating relation between Berlin and Warsaw, but also reduced the prospects of a German-Polish tandem within the EU, as well as the room for compromise between the V4 and Germany. The benefit of that could be observed in September 2015 during a meeting of EU Internal Affairs Ministers, with Slovakia, the Czech Republic and Hungary voting against the redistribution of refugees and only Poland voting in favor, preventing an open conflict within the EU (Cichocki 2016: 199; Buras 2016: 182).

(Buras & Balcer 2016), in order to counterbalance “old Europe”. The focus here will lie not exclusively on CEE, although the already mentioned geopolitical concept of *intermarum* – and thus the turn towards the east – will further unfold under the new leadership (Szczzerbiak 2015b). One possibility could be to strengthen the “Eurasian” dimension of its foreign policy in form of the Chinese New Silk Road project which aims towards the strengthening of economic ties between Europe and China under exclusion of Russia (Buras & Balcer 2016).

So far, there are two promising approaches in this regard. First, to foster the cooperation within the V4 in a narrowly defined defense cooperation, and second, to deepen the coordination within the countries of the eastern flank of NATO with the idea of a biennial “watchdog-summit”, according to Duda with the aim to “analyze security situation and implement the decisions taken at the NATO summit in Warsaw” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2016d). The next summit of the so-called Bucharest Format will be held 2017 in Warsaw.

Conclusion

The aim of this paper was to see how Poland deals with the challenges that arose from the Russian-Ukrainian Conflict and whether it was able to benefit from the crisis in order to achieve its foreign policy goals. The study carved out four phases of Poland’s performance in the course of the conflict, with a significant change occurring in between.

During the first phase, Poland was able to use its long-term experience in the region and his status of an advocate of Ukraine to establish itself as a leading actor with a strong multilateral reflex. This approach is mainly a continuation of the pre-Maidan approach of the PO-government. Poland's political actors throughout the political spectrum performed well and repeatedly echoed the message that Ukraine is Europe.

Poland's stake in the conflict diminished in the second phase, in the course of the annexation of Crimea and the beginning of the conflict in eastern Ukraine. This caused an internalization that enhanced the influence of individual countries. Poland became increasingly marginalized in the process. Not only that, with its staunchly pro-Ukrainian position impeded to act as a neutral arbiter, countries such as Germany or France with experience in negotiating similar conflicts with Russian involvement were preferred as mediators. Yet, Poland was still deemed important enough to evade complete marginalization.

Even in the NF, where Poland is not represented, Berlin kept informal consultations with Warsaw, be it because Germany knew about the importance of Poland's "consultation reflex", be it because it actually considered Warsaw's influence on the negotiation setting as important.

The more Warsaw became marginalized, the more it deemed the oblique sidelines of the conflict as important. It was able to set the agenda in the case of the Energy Union designed to address EU's energy dependency – a policy aim whose relevance became confirmed in the course of the conflict. In particular, the question of defense policy became prioritized. The NATO Summit in Wales must be regarded as a defeat for

Poland, since Germany's position prevailed in the end. The concessions to Poland (and the Baltics) were only partly able to compensate.

During the third phase, this conflict was strongly domesticated due to the election marathon taking place in Poland. Warsaw succeeded in uploading its idea of an energy union, thus using the conflict as a window of opportunity. Amidst the background of a harsh dispute between PO and PiS, the overall policy of Kopacz towards Ukraine did not change in substance, yet became based on sharper cost-benefit calculations and a more cautious rhetoric. This changed in the course of the incremental takeover of power by PiS, starting with the election of Duda in spring 2015. The new Head of State challenged the *European Mainstream*-approach of Komorowski and claimed that Poland should take a rather assertive stance towards the EU. The effect on the Ukraine-policy was that Poland reclaimed an active role and blamed the PO-government for Poland's marginalization. Yet, the activism proved to be rather rhetorical than substantial, since the actual difference in the positions was minor.

Finally, the last phase (still ongoing) is marked by an increasing turn in the EU-policy of PiS, with serious repercussions for Ukraine. If the constitutional situation could deteriorate that fast as in the transformatory role model of Poland, does it make sense to hope for the reform-ability of Ukraine? Simultaneously, Poland placed a stronger focus on security issues, not least because of the NATO summit in Warsaw. There, Warsaw was clearly able to set the agenda and to improve its position, with the commitment of the US to deploy a heavy brigade with a HQ in Poland

stopping short of reaching the main aim of a permanent basis on NATO's eastern flank.

In sum, the starting hypothesis (foreign policy aims: stable; strategies, instruments and coalitions: change) can be partly confirmed. The main aim – to achieve a maximum of security – significantly gained relevance in the course of the conflict and the rising fear of the continuation of Russia's invasion. Poland seems to be in the middle of a new consensus build about NATO and rather traditional security concepts. It came close to receiving a permanent base on NATO's eastern flank. Yet, a more inward looking (or: isolationist) Poland is inclined to self-reliance and a multidimensional concept of security. This also impacts on another aim, since such a Poland is less inclined to integrate a matured, yet reform-abiding Ukraine into western institutions.

Hereby, it itself deviates from the EU-consensus that defined its *raison d'être* for decades. Given these are not rhetorical games for domestic reasoning, in the middle-term, the structural marginalization within the EU will increase the need to find new strategies, instruments and coalitions. It remains to be seen whether Poland will be able to establish itself as a regional leader in CEE and beyond.

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