

The Arab Spring

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Polish Presidency of the European Union and the Arab Spring

The Arab Spring in 2001 created a new situation, where the surrounding environment of North Africa and the Middle East was forced to react (in different forms) to anti-authoritarian uprisings in the region. This unexpected set of events resulted in two types of responses: On the one hand, they were warmly welcomed in the Western World as the next “democratization wave”¹ and as confirmation of the universal character of the norms and values represented – among others – by democracy, human rights, individual freedoms, etc. On the other hand however, they were unexpected (to the extent that revolutions are usually unexpected), and consequently they “spoiled” existing schedules and agendas implemented by the partner actors towards the region. One of the actors is the European Union, which is deeply involved in collaboration with its southern neighbours. This involvement of the EU consisted of various initiatives and policies addressed to the region, as well as of bilateral relations of individual member states and specific Arab states. Politically, of course, the events of the Arab Spring became a challenge to the EU’s abilities to conduct an effective, coherent and successful external policy, especially related to crisis management and external democratization. However the events were not only a problem for the European Union as a single player, but also for those states responsible for holding the Presidency of the Council of the European Union – organizing the work of the EU in a given period.

The majority of the events related to the revolutions in North Africa and the Middle East happened in the first and second half of 2011 when subsequently Hungary and Poland were leading the EU. As political challenges related to both: 1. southern neighbourhood policies, as well as 2. internal EU structuring of foreign priorities seemed more visible and intensive when Poland was responsible for organizing the Union’s works, this paper will concentrate on the Polish Presidency period – July 1, 2011 to December 31, 2011. On the other hand, a successful Presidency analysis also requires the review of the preparations before the Presidency started. Consequently the whole of 2011 will be looked at, but from the Polish perspective, and not taking into consideration the other presidency.

The aim of this article is to investigate how and why the Polish Presidency of the Council of the European Union reacted to the Arab Spring, and how the Arab Spring influenced both the Presidency’s agenda, as well as its implementation. The author claims that the Arab Spring was a political and organizational problem for the Polish Presi-

¹ S. Huntington, *The Third Wave. Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century*, Oklahoma 1992.

dency. Initially, Poland had planned to draw the Union's attention to the eastern outskirts of the continent and to revive the Eastern Dimension of the common foreign policy, in the form of the Eastern Partnership. Unfortunately, events in the south reoriented the main stream of the EU's interest and led to the situation where this geographical direction became more relevant and where a response to these urgent developments became pressing. Poland faced, then, a dilemma of 1. resigning from its own (eastern) interests in favor of the (southern) priorities which were perceived as dominant in the EU, or 2. standing by their original concept, ignoring the southern neighbors (and then consequently being accused of national egoism as a crucial element in organizing the Presidency agenda).

To sum up the presented hypothesis, this article – applying a realist perspective of international relations – reviews: 1. Polish interests in preparing the Presidency, 2. the political declarations of the Polish Presidential program, and then 3. confronts them with the political and organizational actions and initiatives undertaken by Poland towards the region in relation to the position she held in the second half of 2011.

Presidency of the Council of the European Union after the Lisbon Treaty

The presidency of the Council of the European Union lost several competences that it was equipped with in the pre-Lisbon order. It no longer created the agenda for European Council meetings – this task was overtaken by the President of the Council. The High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, on the other hand, is now responsible for setting the session agenda of the Council of the European Union where foreign ministers meet (the Foreign Affairs Council)². The state holding the Presidency still, however, has a relatively strong possibility of “using the presidency period as a time of several-months of intense publicity for its achievements and all kinds of what it sees as its strengths, whether politically or economically”³.

The presented limitations in developing a presidency based on a nation's own vision were well known to Poland and reflected in the Presidency program. As it stated, “during its Presidency of the EU Council, Poland will attach high importance to close cooperation with the President of the European Council, the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, the European External Action Service which she runs, and the European Commission. [...] In cooperation with the High Representative and the EEAS, the Polish Presidency will endeavor to develop the Common Security and Defense Policy. This is especially important in the context of recent developments in the EU's southern neighbourhood”⁴.

² Ł. Adamski, *Partnerstwo Wschodnie a polska prezydencja: modernizacja jako wyzwanie dla Europy Środkowej*, “Polski Przegląd Dyplomatyczny” 2011, No. 1, p. 26.

³ Ł. Adamski, *Eastern Partnership and the Polish Presidency*, “The Polish Quarterly of International Affairs” 2011, No. 1, p. 55.

⁴ *Programme of the Polish Presidency of the Council of the European Union, 1 July–31 December 2011*, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Warsaw 2011, p. 14.

Every state holding the presidency executes its competences (and designs in this way the agenda for the Union) by formulating the presidency priorities. Some of them result from the program of the European Commission, others are indicated by the presidency state⁵. Adam Jaskulski emphasizes that several factors influence the process of priorities formulation in the EU, one of them is always international situation⁶. In the following sections it will be shown how Poland designed its Presidency priorities and how communitarian and national interests influenced this process, with a special focus on the events in North Africa and the Middle East.

Poland and the Presidency agenda

The preparations of Poland to hold the Presidency of the Council of the European Union was a long and complicated process, especially with regard to the political agenda. The possibility of leading the Union, even if in limited form (as presented in the previous chapter) was considered an excellent chance for Poland to achieve its own aims in the European context. As a presidency may be implemented in the form of amplifying a state's interests or silencing them, the best strategy always needs to be chosen. Amplifying particular interests may be interpreted by other member states and European institutions as a manifestation of national egoism and negatively influence the perception of a presidency. Silencing them can lead to positive reactions but may result in losing sight of one's own positions and preferences. The formulation of the presidency program combines, then, both national and communitarian perspectives and results in "selling" one's own priorities in the box of the Union's common goodness. As Zbigniew Czachór writes the "presidency is the art and ability of expressing one's own intentions via the common program creation for the whole EU. More directly: the presidency is the skill to hide one's own objectives in the set of common activities of the EU, and consequently it is the ability of avoiding the exposure of particular aims"⁷.

Following this approach, the Polish preparations to the Presidency resulted in the formulation of the Presidency Program. This document contained official priorities for the six months, and was also based at the same time on national interest. To evaluate the Presidency's reaction to the Arab Spring, an analysis of the priorities seems relevant. As they are both formal (in the Program) but also informal (in the background and a part of the internal Polish political agenda) the further analysis will be divided into two subsections: the European agenda of the Presidency and the national (hidden) agenda behind it.

⁵ M. Berent, J. Janowski, P. Karosa, et. al, *Wybór priorytetów polskiej prezydencji*, in: *Prezydencja Unii Europejskiej – przygotowania Polski do sprawowania przewodnictwa w Radzie Unii Europejskiej*, ed. J. Czaputowicz, Warszawa 2010, p. 145.

⁶ A. Jaskulski, *Formułowanie i realizacja priorytetów prezydencji. Mechanizmy, instrumenty i aktorzy*, in: *Priorytety prezydencji Polski w Radzie Unii Europejskiej*, eds. Z. Czachór, T. Szymczyński, Poznań 2011, pp. 88–90.

⁷ Z. Czachór, *Prezydencja w Unii Europejskiej i jej priorytety. Analiza politologiczna*, in: *Priorytety prezydencji Polski w Radzie Unii Europejskiej*, eds. Z. Czachór, T. Szymczyński, Poznań 2011, p. 27.

European agenda

As Patrycja Sasnal remarks “in the general evaluation, the region of the Middle East and North Africa had a marginal role in the Polish foreign policy, it gained importance only temporarily, in the case of conflicts that involved Israel, or before the signing of gas contracts with Qatar. Even in the EU Presidency preparation period, administration representatives were denying the necessity of tackling Middle East issues⁸.”

In the phase of preparation of the concept for the Polish Presidency in the first half of 2011, the problem of reacting to the events in North Africa appeared in official priorities. It was rapidly concluded that they did not need to be hurriedly reformulated. Instead a “minor adjustment” strategy was applied, seeing the chance to promote solutions attractive for the whole EU, among others by counterbalancing southern and eastern policies⁹.

It is important to notice that unexpected events in the international context of a presidency have on several occasions forced the different states holding it either to modify (or even change) initially accepted priorities, or made it impossible to concentrate on the official agenda. For example, Italy faced the American invasion in Iraq, Ireland in 2004 had to deal with the Madrid terrorist attacks, instead of Eastern Enlargement, Luxembourg was forced to concentrate on the London attacks, etc.¹⁰ The Polish reaction was considered, then, as constructively flexible, which was reflected very quickly in the “Six-Months Program of the Polish Presidency in the Council of the European Union in the second half of 2011”, announced on March 15, 2011. It was stated there that “actions aiming at border protection will be undertaken. We will aim at finishing works on changing the regulation on Frontex (European Agency for the Management of Operational Cooperation at the External Borders of the Member States of the European Union). Frontex shall more effectively support member states in crisis situations, e.g. as those we experience with regard to the events in North Africa and Middle East¹¹”. A planned international conference in December 2011 was announced to discuss the political and economic transformation possibilities for the states of the region¹². Poland declared it would “support democratization and the building of new state structures in the states of North Africa”¹³.

The majority of comments on the rapid Polish reaction in adjusting its Presidency priorities were very positive at that time. Agnieszka Łada reflected, that Poland – by the

⁸ P. Sasnal, *Bliski Wschód bliższy niż Wschód: Polska wobec arabskiej wiosny ludów*, “Polski Przegląd Dyplomatyczny” 2011, No. 1, pp. 9–10.

⁹ D. Jankowski, *Po “arabskiej wiosnie” – “zima” dla europejskiej obrony?*, “Bezpieczeństwo Narodowe” 2011, No. 2, p. 61.

¹⁰ M. Jatzak, B. Słowińska, *Dobór priorytetów przez państwa członkowskie sprawujące przewodnictwo w Radzie UE w latach 2002–2008 – wnioski dla Polski*, in: *Prezydencja Polski w Unii Europejskiej – 2011 r.*, ed. K. Smyk, Urząd Komitetu Integracji Europejskiej “Biuletyn Analiz” 2009, No. 22, p. 58.

¹¹ *Program 6-miesięczny polskiej prezydencji w Radzie Unii Europejskiej w II połowie 2011 r.*, presented on March 15, 2011.

¹² J. Jańczak, B. Przybylska, *Partnerstwo Wschodnie w ramach polityki wschodniej kluczowym priorytetem polskiej prezydencji*, in: *Priorytety prezydencji Polski w Radzie Unii Europejskiej*, eds. Z. Czachór, T. Szymczyński, Poznań 2011.

¹³ *Program 6-miesięczny polskiej...*, op. cit.

fast inclusion of southern elements into the political declarations on the Presidency – showed a communitarian attitude. It turned attention towards a region where it had no interests of its own¹⁴.

The official aims of Poland were formulated and presented in the Program of the Polish Presidency of the Council of the European Union. It differed from the initial ideas of the Polish politicians and experts. Several elements resulting from the current developments, especially in North Africa and the Middle East had to be included in the official agenda.

The main contextual element of the program was the economic and financial crisis and – consequently – further integration was declared to be the cure for this problem. As the Program declared at the very beginning: “The European Union is changing at a pace and scope not seen for a long time. The economic crisis – the underlying cause of these changes – had also demonstrated the strength of European integration. By pulling together, Europe has overcome the shock wave of the crisis”¹⁵. In this introductory section the importance of external policies, especially with regard to the surrounding environment was also emphasized: “Europe also needs to focus more on the international situation and take coherent measures as the economic and political importance of other regions of the world continues to rise The European Union should act with determination in relations with its neighbors”¹⁶.

The detailed agenda of the Presidency was formulated in the form of three priority areas:

As the first (and consequently – it may be claimed – the most important), “European Integration as a Source of Growth” was proposed. The document explained that “the Polish Presidency will engage in actions to enhance economic growth through the development of the Single Market (which includes the digital market) and the use of the EU budget to build a competitive Europe. [...] The implementation of the Presidency’s goals hinges, to a great extent, on the Multiannual Financial Framework after 2013. The Polish Presidency, which will begin negotiations on the financial framework on the basis of the European Commission’s proposal, will aim to work out the best possible offer for the whole European Union. [...] The Presidency’s priority is to deepen the Single Market and complete its formation so that its growth potential can be fully tapped into”¹⁷. The content of this priority again reflected the general situation in the European Union and the dominating debate on economic difficulties. Overcoming the crises was probably the most obvious and most politically acceptable aim that Poland could propose.

The second priority was named as “Secure Europe – food, energy, defense”. It was announced that “the stability and security of European citizens is a prerequisite for promoting growth. Building growth will not be possible without ensuring the security and stability of public finances, energy security and measures aimed at enhancing the secu-

¹⁴ Dowgiałewicz: *korekta priorytetów polskiej prezydencji w UE nie jest konieczna*, “Gazeta Prawna”, 11.03.2011.

¹⁵ *Programme of the Polish...*, op. cit., p. 5.

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 5.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 7.

rity and defense policy, stable borders and internal security. The Presidency will strive to assure that this fundamental condition of Europe's continued successful development is fulfilled"¹⁸. Similarly to the previous priority, here, too, Poland could expect wide acceptance for those ideas that seemed to fit perfectly both the Union's and member states' expectations.

Finally the third priority consisted of "Europe Benefiting from Openness". Here the developments in the surrounding environment were strongly reflected and mutual relations between the EU and third countries were visibly stressed. The Presidency states that "the well-being of EU societies depends not only on the internal situation, but also on relations with third countries and the situation outside the European Union. The Polish Presidency will support the EU foreign and security policy aimed at enhancing the EU's international position. The most powerful tool that the EU can wield is its role as a model, a reference point for other countries. The aim should be to extend the area of European values and regulations through further enlargement of the European Union, the development of cooperation with neighboring countries, the promotion of European solutions at global forums, the building of deeper relations with strategic partners and a wise and effective development policy"¹⁹. Initially, one of the Polish Presidency priorities was also to be the development of the Common Security and Defense Policy, especially with regard to military capacities, and deepening the collaboration with the Eastern Partnership states in the field of CSDP²⁰.

In the further parts of the document the EU external policies vision of the Presidency appears in the context of two geographical directions: eastern and southern. The Program tries to combine them, which is reflected in the following statement: "by building deep and comprehensive free trade areas with the Eastern Partnership countries, the EU will help enlarge the areas covered by EU rules and regulations. Recent international development call for a closer look at issues relating to the process of stabilization and democratization the EU's neighborhood"²¹.

However in the east – strongly favored by Poland as a part of the original concept of the Polish Presidency and additionally belonging to the Polish strategic aims in foreign policy – the Eastern Partnership initiative revival was planned with very specifically described elements of this idea: "In relations with countries covered by the Eastern Partnership, the EU will aim to conclude Association Agreements and create deep and comprehensive free trade areas (by finalizing or making substantial progress in its negotiations with Ukraine and Moldova), make progress in the process of visa liberalization and deepen sectoral cooperation"²². And "a impetus for the Eastern Partnership's continued development will be its Summit attended by Heads of State or government from all Member States and partner countries. The Eastern Partnership Summit will map additional objectives for cooperation between the EU and its eastern neighbors. [...] The participation of civil society organizations will be indispensable. A Civil Soci-

¹⁸ Ibidem, p. 9.

¹⁹ Ibidem, p. 10.

²⁰ D. Jankowski, *Po "arabskiej wiosnie...*, op. cit., pp. 62–64.

²¹ *Programme of the Polish...*, op. cit., p. 10.

²² Ibidem.

ety Forum of the Eastern Partnership is scheduled to take place in Poland in November 2011”²³.

Activities in the south were also proposed, however their character remained – especially in comparison to those in the east – relatively general. The document declared then that “in the light of the recent developments in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and other countries in the Southern Neighborhood, the Polish Presidency will strive to initiate cooperation based on partnership, focused on supporting democratic transformations, building modern state structures underpinned by constitutional reforms, enhancing the judicial system and security and fighting corruption. In the area of civil society development, it will be important for the EU to support the protection of fundamental freedoms and enhance mechanisms preventing persecution of minorities, including Christians. Along with these measures, economic growth and development and the creation of new jobs, as well as deepening trade relations and facilitating people-to-people travel for specified groups, will also be supported”²⁴.

Concluding, it has to be stated that the Polish Presidency priorities (as presented in the Presidency Program) reflected a high level of sensitivity towards the current situation and the most important challenges facing the EU. The economic and financial crises seem to be the most important ones. Similarly, the necessity of reaction towards southern neighbors’ problems is included, however the Eastern Partnership, which was the original Polish idea and the political interest of this state was much more visible.

National (hidden) agenda

Polish national interests are located very far from the southern outskirts of the EU. Similarly to the crisis problem (Poland was in fact the only “green island” in the Union in 2010 and 2011, and – as a state not affected by the financial and economic crises – formal concentration on this problem was an element of the Polish communitarian approach), involvement in the south was to stress Polish awareness and sensitivity to the common good of the EU as well as to interests relevant for the other member states. What were then the Polish key national priorities, and consequently political (often long perspective) aims? They were the new budget and new relations with the east.

Poland is the receiver of the largest proportion of European development funds in the period 2007–2013. This assistance is one of the pillars of Poland’s rapid but stable economic development following the eastern enlargement, enabling her to experience the most effective civilisational jump in modern history. Ensuring similar support for the next budgetary period is of absolutely crucial importance for continuing those processes in the eyes of the Polish political elites and bureaucracy.

Attracting the Union’s attention to the east is, on the other hand, the geo-strategic priority of Poland. As Łukasz Adamski points, “in the Polish foreign policy debate, the proposition that Poland and the EU must engage themselves thoroughly in the affairs of post-soviet Eastern Europe is widely accepted as an axiom. The argumentation goes

²³ Ibidem.

²⁴ Ibidem.

that the countries in-between the EU and Russia should be provided with independence-boosting assistance and support for the democratic processes unfolding there, and encouragement towards reinforcing the rule of law and carrying through economic reforms²⁵.

By customizing²⁶ the Union and making it more east-oriented, Poland wanted to copy the Finish initiative²⁷ of the Northern Dimension²⁸ and create a platform supporting new eastern neighbors in their transformation efforts. This shall lead – in the Polish strategy – to further enlargements in the east in the (distant) future.

One additional remark has to be made here. The final shape of the 2004 enlargement of the EU was considered by many commentators as a compromise between accepting eastern bloc states and dispelling southern members' fears. As a result, the EU entry of Malta and Cyprus was procedurally linked to eastern enlargement. After 2004, competition between the east and the south become more and more visible. New member states were expecting that “the European Union will become an actor, that cares not only about its Baltic and Mediterranean interest, but also plays an important role in the region of East Europe, where it has visible prestige”²⁹.

The whole process was to increase Polish security by weakening Russian influence in Eastern Europe. The idea of the Eastern Dimension was expressed already in 2003 by the Polish Foreign Minister Włodzimierz Cimoszewicz and proposed officially by two new member states, Poland and Lithuania³⁰. After difficulties in implementation, the idea reappeared in the form of the Eastern Partnership proposed jointly by Poland and Sweden in 2008³¹. The Eastern Partnership Summit was to be organized during the Hungarian presidency, finally it was postponed to the Polish one. Consequently Poland devoted a lot of resources in upgrading the project³², accelerating it and pushing it into dynamic implementation during its presidency³³.

From this perspective the Arab Spring was not only outside the Polish national priorities but created additionally a serious threat to the possibility of achieving the planned goals by attracting the Union's attention to the south and creating geopolitical

²⁵ L. Adamski, *Eastern Partnership...*, op. cit., p. 52.

²⁶ H. Ojanen, *How to Customize Your Union: Finland in the Northern Dimension of the EU*, Northern Dimension 1999.

²⁷ T. Tiilikainen, *Europe and Finland. Defining the Political Identity of Finland in Western Europe*, Adlershot, Brookfield USA, Singapore, Sydney 1998.

²⁸ J. Jańczak, *Northern Dimension of the European Union*, in: *The Experiences of the 1995 Enlargement of the European Union*, eds. J. Jańczak, T. Szymczyński, Berlin 2003.

²⁹ B. Piskorska, *Wymiar wschodni Unii Europejskiej – komplementarny czy konkurencyjny dla pozostałych kierunków polityki zagranicznej Unii?*, “Środkoeuropejskie Studia Polityczne” 2009, No. 1–2, s. 203.

³⁰ J. Jańczak, *Efektywność proponowania i wdrażania Partnerstwa Wschodniego przez Polskę wewnątrz Unii Europejskiej*, in: *Partnerstwo Wschodnie. Wymiary realnej integracji*, eds. M. Zdanowicz, T. Dubowski, A. Piekutowska, Warszawa 2010.

³¹ *Partnerstwo Wschodnie – raport otwarcia*, eds. B. Wojna, M. Gniazdowski, Polski Instytut Spraw Międzynarodowych, Warszawa 2009.

³² M. Arcipowska, B. Wojna, *European Neighbourhood Policy: How to Reconcile EU's Offer with Neighbour's Expectations?*, PISM Policy Paper No. 20/2011.

³³ K. Longhurst, B. Wojna, *Asserting the EU's Mission in the Neighbourhood – The Recommendations for an Effective Eastern Partnership*, PISM 2011

competition in the decision where to concentrate the financial and political resources of the EU.

However those arguments still did not have to be decisive for the Polish response to the events in the south. The long-term strategy of achieving national aims was based on creating the image of a reliable, successful and constructive member state. Poland was trying – using the Presidency – to contrast its own picture with the unsuccessful Czech or Hungarian presidencies or the economically problematic Greece or Spain. Poland wanted to be, then, a reliable partner, effectively using European funds (the “green island argument”) and constructively contributing to the integration process by silencing national interest and understanding other member states’ needs (involvement in the Arab Spring). So paradoxically the Arab Spring (from the Presidency perspective) was an opportunity to strengthen the Polish position in the EU and create a political debt in southern member states that could be used for supporting the Eastern Partnership.

Arab Spring and the Presidency reaction

After analyzing the Polish preparations for the Presidency by defining the interests and contextual factors and presenting the final shape of the Presidency aims with regards to the Arab Spring, as reflected in the official priorities, the next step will be to investigate how they were implemented and if additional Polish initiatives with regard to the region were exercised. This part will be divided into two subsections: the European reaction and Polish activities.

European reaction

As the reactions of the European Union and its member states are analyzed in detail by other contributions in this volume, this text indicates only the most crucial contextual elements of the other players’ initiatives.

As Beata Wojna stresses, “The Policy of the European Union towards North Africa and Middle East is a history of many ambitious initiatives [...]. Unfortunately, implementation of those initiatives usually was completed with tiny results”³⁴.

The Union’s involvement in the region was intensified after the Maastricht treaty and establishing the Common Foreign and Security Policy. In 1995 the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership was initiated (with the participation of Morocco, Tunisia, Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Israel, Lebanon, Syria, Turkey, Cyprus, Malta and the Palestinian Autonomy), in 2004 the European Neighborhood Policy was initiated and finally in 2008 Union for the Mediterranean was announced³⁵.

The European Union perceived protests in the North African states in their initial phase as a threat, undermining the relative stability that had been constructed during the

³⁴ B. Wojna, *Unia Europejska wobec arabskiej wiosny: problemy i dylematy nowego partnerstwa*, “Sprawy Międzynarodowe” 2011, No. 3, p. 7.

³⁵ J. Zajac, *Role Unii Europejskiej w regionie Afryki Północnej i Bliskiego Wschodu. Aspekt metodologiczne*, “Przegląd Europejski” 2011, No. 1, pp. 29–30.

previous years, usually asking for compromises from local dictators. Also the member states reactions were skeptical³⁶.

In the first part of 2011 the answer of the EU to the events in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya was far from coherent. The relatively active position of Catherine Ashton resulted in her two visits to the region, as well as political and economic declarations on the problem. However France, Spain, Germany, Italy and the United Kingdom separately prepared their own statement in February 2011, revealing a complicated set of interests within the Union³⁷. In Libya, France's individual and interventionist approach was confronted with the moderate German position, which additionally undermined the unity of the EU and made a joint reaction difficult and ineffective³⁸. Finally, the military intervention (Odyssey Dawn) in this state, conducted by France and the United Kingdom, continued this tendency.

As a reaction to the developments in Libya, the European Commission's humanitarian aid was accompanied by member states' contributions. Poland offered 75,000 Euro (compared to over sixteen million Euro transferred by the United Kingdom)³⁹.

Polish activities

Implementation of Polish priorities in relation to North Africa and Middle East was manifested in several forms. It should be stressed, however, that general involvement in this set of challenges was more limited than official declarations stated. It was based mainly on specific activities of a political character, often at the same time improving Poland's image as an active player and contributing to the main aim – development of the eastern dimension.

First, Poland tried to act as a “democracy expert”, being able and willing to assist new democracies in the southern region to implement democratic reforms. According to Patrycja Sasnal, the situation from this perspective was very advantageous for Poland. “A state that underwent a model transformation process, and which is now one of the stronger European Union states, [would] hold the Presidency in the period when that sort of model (successful transformation) is the one desired for Tunisia and Egypt”⁴⁰.

Following this approach, as early as in March 2011, the Polish Foreign Ministry sent a mission to Tunisia. Its aim was to investigate local circumstances as well as the possibilities of transferring Polish experiences in the process of formation and consolidation of the new system. In April, the legendary Polish Solidarity leader and former president, Lech Wałęsa, visited this state. The next delegation was headed by Speaker of the Senate and former Solidarity opposition activist, Bogdan Borusewicz. Two weeks before the Polish Presidency started, Polish Foreign Minister Radosław Sikorski visited

³⁶ B. Wojna, *Unia Europejska wobec...*, op. cit., p. 8.

³⁷ D. Jankowski, *Po “arabskiej wiosnie...*, op. cit., p. 58.

³⁸ J. Dobrowolska-Polak, *Partykularna polityka państw Unii Europejskiej wobec interwencji w Libii*, “Przegląd Zachodni” 2011, No. 3, p. 112.

³⁹ D. Jankowski, *Po “arabskiej wiosnie...*, op. cit., p. 60.

⁴⁰ P. Sasnal, *Bliski Wschód bliższy...*, op. cit., p. 10.

both Egypt and Tunisia⁴¹. Sikorski was the first European diplomat in Bengazi, and Poland was the first state to move its embassy to this town. Additionally Poland hosted revolutionaries from Tunisia and Egypt who participated in the 30th anniversary of the first Solidarity summit, and met with former opposition activists and current politicians.

The Polish approach described here was already revising the dominant EU policy of “security by stability”, that had led to series of concessions towards dictators in Northern Africa and the Middle East prior to 2011. Polish “stability through democracy” better corresponded to the new circumstances and was additionally more effectively equipping the EU in relations with the East.

Second, despite playing the role of transformation expert, the Polish Presidency was unable and unwilling to create a more visible impetus in the EU policies towards North Africa and the Middle East. On the one hand, Poland presented several declarations related to the region, for example, in August 2011 Poland officially called on the Syrian authorities to stop attacking their own citizens. It also declared support for Syrian regime victims in the EU, as well as for democratization. On the other hand, however, political initiatives were undertaken by other states. For example it was France, and not Poland, who organized the summit on Libya.

Third, in some fields Poland supported the interests of the other member states in relation to the consequences of the Arab Spring. For example, due to the growing wave of immigration⁴² in June 2011 Poland backed the possibility of temporary limitations of Schengen provisions.

Fourth, the form of the Polish reaction to the Arab Spring contributed to a more general model of collaboration between different actors within the EU with regard to the functioning of the presidency. Radosław Sikorski reached an agreement with Catherine Ashton on the Presidency representing her in specific situations. Consequently, as an example, the Polish foreign policy vice-minister Mikołaj Dowgiewlewiez informed – on behalf of the High Representative – the European Parliament on the situation in Syria, Libya, and so on in September 2011.

Fifth, Poland undertook its own initiatives that were addressed towards North Africa and the Middle East, but which were applicable also the eastern neighbors. That was a way of combining national and joint interests. One of them was the “European Endowment for Democracy”. Despite the fact that six member states of southern Europe called for a new model of distributing financial support from the European Neighborhood Policy (more recourses would be devoted to the southern neighbors, less to the eastern), Poland managed to persuade its partners of another idea. Consequently the “European Endowment for Democracy” was designed as an instrument of financial support for development of democracy in EU neighbors, useful in both geographical dimensions. This initiative of Radosław Sikorski was accepted by the European Commis-

⁴¹ Ibidem, p. 11.

⁴² B. Przybylska-Maszner, *Border Crisis in Lampedusa – the Symbol of a Failed Policy of the EU Borders Externalization*, in: *De-bordering, re-bordering and symbols on the European boundaries*, ed. J. Jańczak, Berlin 2011.

sion and member states leaders. It was to be financed by the EU and member states, supporting non-governmental organizations and specific projects.

Conclusion

As Aleksander Smolar states, “the events in North Africa removed [in the Polish-led European Union] the relevant priority, which was the Eastern Partnership”. At the same time however, despite the threat of marginalization of eastern policies, the Polish Presidency managed to strengthen both the southern dimension as well as the European Neighborhood Policy in general (with consequences for the Eastern Partnership)⁴³.

Poland reacted rapidly and very constructively to the events in North Africa and the Middle East. This happened despite the fact that this region was outside Polish national interests and was even colliding with its preferred eastern dimension. This reaction was much stronger at the level of political declaration (as reflected in the Presidency program) than in the implementation of proposed initiatives. The latter usually contained solutions that could serve not only the southern, but also eastern neighbors. Consequently, on the one side, Poland managed to relatively effectively hide its national interests behind a communitarian approach. On the other, however, the visible outcomes of the Polish involvement in the south are rather small. The Presidency managed, then, to achieve relatively significant support for the Eastern Partnership by strengthening European policy addressed to neighboring states in the context of the Arab Spring.

⁴³ J. Kucharczyk, A. Łada, *To nie był spokojny rejs: Sześć miesięcy polskiej prezydencji w Radzie UE*, “Gazeta Wyborcza”, 15.12.2011.