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THE RUSSIAN-UKRAINIAN WAR AND THE EASTERN PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM

INTRODUCTION

The Eastern Partnership (EaP) was launched in 2009 as the EU's policy towards its eastern neighbors. The article aims to look at the policy of the Eastern Partnership from the point of view of the EU's responsibility in the situation of the Russian-Ukrainian war. Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022 constitutes the greatest threat to the security of the European Union in history. The European Union's response to Russia's aggression included economic sanctions, arms supplies to Ukraine, and political support for Kyiv. There is no doubt that regardless of the ending of hostilities, it is impossible to imagine a return to the geopolitical *status quo ante*. This conclusion undoubtedly also applies to the EU's neighborhood policy, especially its eastern neighbors. In response to the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia applied for membership in the European Union, expressing both their attachment to European values and their desire to leave the Russian sphere of influence permanently. The EU's response must be adequate to the changed geopolitical situation. This puts in a new light not only the interests of countries applying for membership but also the interests of the Union itself (Buras, 2022).

The Russian-Ukrainian war in 2022 has become a key moment for the European security architecture. Due to this situation, several key questions have arisen about the future of Ukraine. These questions also refer to the shape of the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) and the future of the Eastern Partnership program. The main research question is the question of the validity of continuing the Eastern Partnership format in the context of the European Commission's recommendation of November 2023 to start negotiations with Ukraine (the "enlargement" package) (*Commission adopts 2023 Enlargement package…*, 2023). There is no doubt that the Russian-Ukrainian war is a turning point in the process of Ukraine's integration with the EU and the Eastern Partnership program. The special period Ukraine found itself in after the Russian attack means that some of the planned activities of the Eastern Partnership had to be modified. In the context of the new geopolitical reality, the Eastern Partnership policy and its implementation mechanisms require a structural revision and the implementa-

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tion of a programmatic approach. The fact that the European Union opened its doors to Ukraine is a new approach to the process of European integration. It also means that the Eastern Partnership's operation principles should change.

The Eastern Partnership Program has become a new development impulse, an opportunity to get closer to EU membership without clear integration prospects, but in the current realities and its current shape, its structure is inadequate to the existing political conditions. If the EU intends to continue to develop this policy, it should adapt the existing model of cooperation with its eastern neighbors to the challenges of today. Even before the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, the countries included in the Eastern Partnership suggested the need to revise existing cooperation mechanisms, especially about the group of countries that had achieved the assumed goals of the Partnership, i.e., signed association agreements and free trade agreements and the introduction of a visa-free regime with the EU (Bazhenova, 2019).

The most important research questions posed in the article include the following: What was and is the impact of the geopolitical factor on the formal and practical implementation of the Eastern Partnership program by the European Union? Will the Russian-Ukrainian war and the resulting emergence of a new geopolitical map of Europe mean a more active role for the EU towards the Eastern Partnership countries? What are the perspectives of the Eastern Partnership?

The following theses were put forward in the article: The impact of the Russian-Ukrainian war on the EU's Eastern Partnership has been significant, in particular, because it significantly impacted the EU's relationship with Russia and should lead to more active involvement of the EU in the situation of its eastern neighbors. The changes brought about by the Russian-Ukrainian war should lead to certain modifications of the Eastern Partnership.

In obtaining an answer to the question about the effectiveness of the Eastern Partnership, it will be helpful to analyze aspects of its shape as constructed in official documents, as well as its practical implementation, so methods of document content analysis, decision-making, and factor were used. A method of analyzing texts of publications by various authors was also used, including scientific articles by Polish and foreign authors. The European Union's eastern policy was an expression of the EU's ambitions clearly defined in documents, which it implements in a soft, normative way, trying to bring about systemic changes in partner countries by promoting European norms and values. The EU's transformative power is understood here as the long-term influence of the European Union on the transformation of post-communist countries into democratic countries with an efficient free market economy and well-functioning institutions (Leonard, 2005; Grabbe, 2005). However, the weakness of democracy in partner countries raises serious doubts about the effectiveness of the EU's transformation activities aimed at adapting European values (Piskorska, 2019). It seems that the transformative potential of the EU, leading to the Europeanization of the Eastern Partnership countries in the spirit of anchoring liberal democracy and a stable free market economy in them, has not been fully realized (Lucas, 2019). Later, a clear, realistic, even geopolitical approach began to emerge, based on the EU's imperial desire to pursue its own clearly defined interests around its borders – stabilizing the region to maintain and strengthen its security in the current conditions of international politics

(Nixey, 2019). Bosse (2019) argues that, in the course of its development, the ENP and the EaP have been increasingly dominated by security concerns, such as regime stability or state resilience, at the expense of the promotion of the "shared values," such as democracy, the rule of law, fundamental freedoms and human rights. The "values vs. security" debate occupies a prominent place in the existing scholarship on the ENP. A debate is taking place in another strand of the academic literature, relating to the contentious relationship between "soft security" on the one hand and "hard security" on the other hand (Cianciara, 2017). "The ENP and EaP are to a considerable extent underpinned by soft and human security principles" (Kaunert, de Deus Pereira, 2023). From a theoretical perspective, two visions clash in international relations in Ukraine: the liberal one, represented by the European Union and its values, and the neoclassical realism, represented by Russia, which values maintaining its sphere of influence (Zięba, Bieleń, Zając, 2015).

EASTERN PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM

The Eastern Partnership Program as a Polish-Swedish initiative was launched in 2009 by the European Union towards its eastern neighbors, in particular three Eastern European countries: Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova, and three South Caucasus countries: Armenia, Georgia, and Azerbaijan. The Eastern Partnership officially became part of the European Neighborhood Policy at the first meeting of the Eastern Partnership, held in Prague on May 7, 2009, when the Joint Declaration was adopted. The Eastern Partnership aimed to support democracy and political stability, as well as to ensure the economic development of the Eastern Partnership countries (Musladin, 2022). The official strategic goal of the Eastern Partnership, expressed in the founding declaration, is to "deepen and strengthen relations between the EU, its Member States and six partners by establishing a general framework for dialogue based on bilateral agreements, such as, among others, association agreements" (Commission of the European Communities, 2008).

Since the inauguration of the Eastern Partnership, this program has evolved, its priorities have changed, and the European Union's approach to individual cooperation partners has also evolved. There were also many critical voices, both in terms of the formal functioning of the entire program and its practical impact on tightening cooperation with Eastern Europe and the South Caucasus. Between 2009 and 2021, leaders of the EU, EU Member States, and Eastern Partnership countries held several Eastern Partnership Summits, which are held every two years. After the political crisis caused by the presidential elections in August 2020, Belarus suspended its participation in the Eastern Partnership program. Armenia and Azerbaijan remain in the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh, cooperating at the Partnership level, while Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia established the Associated Trio in May 2021 to deepen relations with EU structures, which further tightened Russia's policy in the region.

The lack of prospects for membership in the structures of the European Union meant that the EU had no instruments of pressure on the countries covered by the program. Considering the Partnership countries' internal situation, the possibility of

political and economic cooperation remained an important issue for the EU. One of the important problems for the Partnership was perceiving this project in geopolitical terms – thinking about the Partnership countries in the context of the need to make a choice: either with the EU or with Russia, which is extremely difficult for these countries and involves many complications (Stępniewski, 2017). Security issues, the perception of Russia, and the threats posed by it remained a factor hindering the development of cooperation within the Partnership. The policy implemented by the EU demonstrated the lack of a coherent position towards the eastern neighborhood and relations with Russia (Kozioł, 2020).

The functioning of the Eastern Partnership is and has been dependent on several factors. As the main actors are the European Union and the six partner countries covered by the program, the key factor is the European Union's policy towards Eastern European countries and their reaction to the EU's offer of cooperation. An extremely important factor in the functioning of the Eastern Partnership is also the state of relations with Russia, maintained by the partner countries and the European Union itself (Barburska, 2019a; Barburska, 2019b). Since the collapse of the USSR, Russia has treated the post-Soviet area as its exclusive sphere of influence and a kind of buffer zone separating it from the West. From the very beginning, Russia treated the program with hostility as a major threat to its basic geostrategic interests. Russia's policy towards the Partnership is conditioned by political, economic, civilizational, and cultural considerations. In the post-Soviet area, Russia is implementing a reintegration policy in the form of cooperation structures, thanks to which Russia's dominant position in the region is to be rebuilt; on the other hand, they are used as an instrument to prevent the integration of the countries of this region with Western structures (Cadier, 2019). The area covered by the partnership has become an area of competition between the EU and Russia. The most profound consequences of the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022 concern Ukraine's relations with Russia and the EU, its place in European politics, and the relationship between Russia and the EU (Siddi, 2022; Orenstein, 2023).

Russia's aggressive policy in the region, most clearly embodied in the Russian-Ukrainian war, has repeatedly stood in the way of the effective implementation of the goals of the Eastern Partnership. This was reflected in the reserved attitude of some EU countries towards the future accession of eastern neighbors to this structure, as well as in the degree of involvement of the post-Soviet countries themselves. In the case of Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Belarus, Russia's actions resulted in a change of course and readiness for enhanced cooperation with a strong eastern neighbor at the expense of relations with the EU. In the case of pro-Western countries such as Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine, attempts to become independent from Russian domination have often turned out to be very costly, as evidenced by the war in Georgia in 2008 or the annexation of Crimea from Ukraine in 2014. Therefore, the geopolitical factor determined and still determines not only the external actions of individual countries covered by the Eastern Partnership but also the attitudes of their partners from the European Union (Cross, Karolewski, 2021).

Analysts included the greatest weaknesses of the Eastern Partnership, among others:

– conceptual weakness – it included politically and economically diverse former Soviet republics, different speed levels,
– no perspective of EU membership, does not provide for the resolution of territorial conflicts (the Partnership is not a platform for solving these problems),
– the Partnership initiative was not designed against Russia, but the intensification of EU activities in the post-Soviet space is perceived by Russia as interference in the Russian sphere of influence.

RUSSIAN FULL-SCALE INVASION OF UKRAINE IN 2022 AS A TURNING POINT

The Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, was a breakthrough in the EU's eastern policy. The new approach is manifested in the withdrawal of cooperation with Russia in key sectors and the imposition of unprecedented sanctions aimed at maximizing its costs of waging war, military support for Ukraine, as well as ensuring prospects of EU accession for countries such as Moldova and Ukraine (Kaca, Kozioł, 2023). In response to the invasion by Russia, the EU began providing Ukraine with political, humanitarian, and economic support, as well as military assistance. The EU's response has also gone further than sanctions. "In what EU High Representative Josep Borrell has called the 'belated birth of a geopolitical EU', the EU made a significant leap forward on security and defense by supplying, for the first time in its history, military support to a third country at war covered under the European Peace Facility (EPF)" (Bosse, 2022). In the context of the Eastern Partnership policy, most importantly, the EU decided in 2023 to start accession negotiations with Ukraine. This sparked a debate about modifying the Eastern Partnership. Some analyses announced the end of the Partnership as an initiative, and some called for its complete reconstruction, justifying that it was necessary due to the new geopolitical context and the international situation after Russia's aggression against Ukraine. This context arose due to two factors. First, the outbreak of war confirmed that hard power and geopolitics matter again. Secondly, some of the Partnership countries applied for EU membership, which undermined the basic principles on which the Partnership was based. The first principle was based on the EU's role as a normative force in international relations, and the second was that the Partnership did not offer the prospect of EU membership (Crombois, 2023).

The Russian-Ukrainian War led to significant reevaluations of EU policy. As we can read in the Eastern Partnership Annual Work Plan for 2023: "Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine has fundamentally changed the geopolitical landscape in the region. […] The ensuing membership applications and the subsequent decision to grant Georgia, the Republic of Moldova (hereinafter Moldova), and Ukraine an EU membership perspective, and Moldova and Ukraine candidate status, has transformed the nature of the EU's engagement with the three countries, bringing them to a new level of cooperation" (*Eastern Partnership…*, n.d.). "Against this background, Member States and partner countries were united in their calls for the continuation of the Eastern Partnership (EaP), albeit in a more flexible, streamlined format, focusing on

the areas in which regional cooperation offers added value, […] We are currently in a period of transition. It is, therefore, key that the approach to the EaP remains flexible and able to adjust to changing realities. A fundamental, long-term overhaul of the EaP is not planned at this stage" (*Eastern Partnership…*, n.d.).

There is an ongoing debate in the European Union about the future of the Eastern Partnership. The discussion within the EU concerns the program's continuation (Dempsey, 2022). The positions of the Member States are related, among others, to their attitude to enlargement policy. Countries supporting EU enlargement in its eastern neighborhood, including Poland, Sweden, the Czech Republic, and the Baltic states, believe the Partnership should be continued, but its content should be modified. Ukraine and Moldova could use mechanisms for implementing association agreements (e.g., the Association Council) in the accession process (Krastev, 2022). Russia could use the EU's withdrawal from the Partnership to escalate its aggressive regional policy. Supporters of the Partnership also argue that the format contributes to political dialogue between Armenia and Azerbaijan and plays a large role in supporting civil society, especially in Belarus. Countries skeptical about enlargement do not officially question the Partnership but prefer the development of a looser format of EU cooperation with the countries of the eastern neighborhood. In light of the discussion on Ukraine's accession to the EU, France, with the support of, among others, The Netherlands, Austria, and Italy, proposed the creation of a new initiative – the European Political Community (EPC). She postulated that due to the changed security architecture and the impasse of enlargement policy, an intergovernmental format of cooperation with the EU's neighboring countries is needed, where the most important strategic issues for the EU will be addressed. The European Council accepted this idea with the reservation that the EWP would not replace the enlargement policy (Kaca, 2022). Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine expect the Partnership initiative to be adapted to new needs. They officially maintain their participation in the Partnership but want further integration with the EU internal market. Most likely, the EU will decide to continue the Partnership but will adapt it to the new situation.

CONCLUSIONS

The Eastern Partnership program has often faced criticism of its effectiveness and a harsh assessment of the areas that need to be reformed to improve its image somehow. When formulating conclusions about this tool, it is worth taking into account not only formal aspects included in specific frameworks and agreements. These measurable goals have been achieved or not, but also the fundamental impact of the geopolitical factor, which has an extremely strong impact in the post-Soviet area, determining not only the external activities of individual countries covered by the Eastern Partnership but also the attitudes of their partners from the European Union. Russia's aggressive policy in the region, most clearly embodied in the Russian-Ukrainian war, has repeatedly stood in the way of the effective implementation of the goals of the Eastern Partnership. This was reflected in the reserved

attitude of some EU countries towards the future accession of eastern neighbors to this structure, as well as in the degree of involvement of the post-Soviet countries themselves.

The Eastern Partnership was supposed to be an important instrument of the European Union's external policy towards its eastern neighbors. It was established to connect the eastern neighbors more closely with the European Union, balance Russia's influence in the region, and maintain the countries' determination to pursue a pro-European path and thorough reforms. These goals were partially achieved. There are tangible benefits in terms of political association, economic relations, and regulatory convergence. However, the program has not turned out to be one of the strategic successes of the EU, as its founding fathers had hoped, and the eastern neighborhood region has not become either more stable or more secure. Security threats that are a source of concern for six countries on the EU's eastern border have not been removed, and no help has been provided to resolve existing territorial disputes in the region. The very idea of the Partnership – originally a Polish-Swedish initiative – was a good step towards stimulating reforms and increasing prosperity in the former Soviet republics. However, the effects of the EU's transformation impact should be assessed ambivalently. There are some successes and failures of the EU's external policy towards the region. It should, therefore, be stated that the assumption of convergence with EU standards, derived from the enlargement policy, was by definition positive. However, the importance of local political elites has been underestimated, as they are reluctant to carry out reforms and inhibit development, which, as a result, did not take place at the desired pace (Piskorska, 2019).

There is no doubt that the Eastern Partnership has failed to achieve many of the goals it set for itself. After signing association agreements with Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia, the impression emerged that the Eastern Partnership was more about managing relations between the EU and its partners than an ambitious political project. Military, financial, and political assistance for Ukraine, which is fighting for its survival, is of key importance. However, a necessary and no less important part of the EU's response to the dramatically changed geopolitical situation must be the redefinition of its neighborhood and enlargement policy. Today, the EU cannot allow a business-as-usual policy in this area. Russia's aggressive policy, directed against the entire European security order and therefore against the fundamental interests of the EU, means that the issue of integration of its eastern partners cannot be perceived solely in the context of economic and social challenges. Integration will be of key importance from the point of view of the entire future European order and the new self-identification of the European Union as a geopolitical actor. The policy towards those eastern neighbors whose societies and elites express their will to join the EU is thus gaining paramount importance for the EU's foreign policy.

The Russian-Ukrainian war emphasized the need and responsibility of the EU towards its neighbors to the east. The impact of this war on the EU's Eastern Partnership has been significant, in particular, because it significantly impacted the EU's relationship with Russia. Changes in the EU's relations with the eastern neighborhood countries – caused by the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022 – have undermined the justification for continuing the Eastern Partnership. The program has fulfilled its

function but is no longer an adequate tool for Eastern policy. Due to the changing geopolitical situation in the eastern neighborhood, the EU's approach to the Partnership countries had to be modified. Ukraine received the prospect of membership, and at the EU summit in December 2023, it received the green light to start accession negotiations. The integration path will encounter serious obstacles: legal, political, and economic. Integration proposals for Ukraine should be combined with a plan to assist in post-war reconstrucon.

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ABSTRACT

The article aims to present the EU Eastern Partnership program in the context of the Russian-Ukrainian war. The Eastern Partnership program was launched in 2009 and covered six former Soviet republics: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine. Ukraine achieved all the main goals of the Partnership, which did not provide any prospects for membership in the European Union. The situation changed in 2022 with the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine. One of the effects was Ukraine submitting a formal application for EU membership in 2022, and in 2023, the EU decided to start accession negotiations with Ukraine. The article aims to diagnose the effects and perspectives of the Eastern Partnership program in connection with the architecture of international relations and security in Europe. The most important research question is: Will the Russian-Ukrainian war and the resulting emergence of a new geopolitical map of Europe mean a more active role for the EU towards the Eastern Partnership countries? The following theses were put forward in the article: The impact of the Russian-Ukrainian war on the EU's Eastern Partnership has been significant because, in particular, it significantly impacted the EU's relationship with Russia and should lead to the more active involvement of the EU in the situation of its eastern neighbors. The changes brought about by the Russian-Ukrainian war should lead to certain modifications of the Eastern Partnership because, in the current situation, this program is no longer an adequate instrument of the European Union's eastern policy. Methods of content analysis of documents and publications, were used in the article.

Keywords: Ukraine, Eastern Partnership, European Union, European Neighborhood Policy

WOJNA ROSYJSKO-UKRAIŃSKA A PROGRAM PARTNERSTWA WSCHODNIEGO

STRESZCZENIE

Artykuł ma na celu przedstawienie programu Partnerstwa Wschodniego UE w kontekście wojny rosyjsko-ukraińskiej. Program Partnerstwa Wschodniego został uruchomiony w 2009 roku i objął swoim zasięgiem sześć byłych republik radzieckich: Armenię, Azerbejdżan, Białoruś, Gruzję, Mołdawię i Ukrainę. Ukraina osiągnęła wszystkie główne cele Partnerstwa, które nie dawało żadnych perspektyw członkostwa w Unii Europejskiej. Sytuacja uległa zmianie w 2022 r. wraz z rosyjską pełnoskalową inwazją na Ukrainę. Jednym z efektów było złożenie przez Ukrainę formalnego wniosku o członkostwo w UE w 2022 r., a w 2023 r. UE podjęła decyzję o rozpoczęciu negocjacji akcesyjnych z Ukrainą. Artykuł ma na celu diagnozę efektów i perspektyw programu Partnerstwa Wschodniego w zmienionej architekturze stosunków międzynarodowych i bezpieczeństwa w Europie. Najważniejszym pytaniem badawczym jest: Czy rosyjsko-ukraińska wojna i wynikające z niej powstanie nowej mapy geopolitycznej Europy oznaczają aktywniejszą rolę UE wobec państw Partnerstwa Wschodniego? W artykule postawiono następujące tezy: Wpływ rosyjsko-ukraińskiej wojny na Partnerstwo Wschodnie UE jest znaczący, w szczególności dlatego, że w wyraźny sposób wpłynął na stosunki UE z Rosją i powinien prowadzić do bardziej aktywnego zaangażowania UE w sytuację swoich wschodnich sąsiadów. Zmiany, jakie wywołała rosyjsko-ukraińska wojna, powinny doprowadzić do pewnych modyfikacji Partnerstwa Wschodniego, gdyż w obecnej sytuacji program ten nie jest już adekwatnym instrumentem polityki wschodniej Unii Europejskiej. W artykule zastosowano metody analizy zawartości dokumentów i publikacji.

Słowa kluczowe: Ukraina, Partnerstwo Wschodnie, Unia Europejska, Europejska Polityka Sąsiedztwa

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