

EASTERN PARTNERSHIP

The Role and Significance
in the Process
of Transformation
of the Countries
of Eastern Europe
and the South Caucasus

EDITED BY
PIOTR BAJOR



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of Eastern Europe and the South Caucasus**

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Kraków

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ADRIAN TYSZKIEWICZ 

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The Eastern Partnership as a Structural Actor A Geopolitical Perspective

ABSTRACT: The subject of the analysis is to show the institutional meaning of the Eastern Partnership (EaP) presented as a sub-system of the European Union, being one of the two regional pillars of the European Neighbourhood Policy. Reference to general systems theory, in particular to the political metaphor of organisation, which in this case treats the subject of analysis as a (geo)political system, allows the identification of the basic civilisational (Europeanisation, Euro-unionisation), socio-political (standardisation of values and institutional solutions) and economic (liberalisation of flows and generation of modernisation) processes that make EaP a relatively coherent and contained whole. Recalling the theoretical conceptual categories of S.B. Cohen's theoretical categories highlight the centrifugal nature – from the point of view of the geopolitical interests of the Russian Federation – of the impulses unleashed by the EaP, which run counter to the objective tendency for contemporary Russia to restore and maintain its influence in the countries – former republics of the USSR and parallel participants in the EaP (Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan).

KEYWORDS: The European Union, the Eastern Partnership, Eastern Europe, the Caucasus, geopolitics, the Russian Federation

1. Introduction – The Eastern Partnership as an organisation

The geopolitical approach to the division of space-time understood as the natural environment of social activity gives rise to a number of consequences. One is the obvious necessity to adopt a scientific analytical convention that would introduce both an ontological and epistemological perspective. For the purpose of this analysis, which is focused on the reflection on the spatial significance of the European Union's Eastern Partnership (EaP) programme, it was assumed that the aforementioned programme is an organisation manifested institutionally and process-wise (i.e., by means of institutions and interactions of international character which together form a coherent, compact system of political character). Therefore, this reasoning is based on the approach that uses the system metaphor, particularly the geopolitical system as an adequate matrix in explaining the spatio-temporal context of¹ the functioning of the Eastern Partnership.

The use of the systemic model, which is particularly widespread in the organisation and management sciences, stems from the convention present in the discourse since the second half of the 1990s of treating geopolitics as a structure. The approach, proposed by John Agnew and Stuart Corbridge, assumes a holistic study of structured reality through the following categories: geopolitical order, geopolitical economic governance, geopolitical hegemony and primacy, territorial and technological complexes and geopolitical conditions.² This means, as Jakub Potulski stated, that geopolitical research supported by the structural category allows for “a comprehensive analysis of international reality, taking into account such elements as culture, technology, ideology, economy, structure in connection with spatial processes and phenomena that determine the geopolitical structure of the modern world.”³

It follows from the above that striving to treat objective reality as a whole allows for distinguishing its essential elements, important from the point of view of the logic of the existence and functioning of a given organisation. According to Anatol Rapoport, in order to justify the existence of the system, it is necessary to meet the following criteria: the presence of identifiable elements that make up the system, the presence of at least one relationship between the components of the system, the possibility

¹ By introducing the category of “(political) space-time,” I refer directly to the achievements of political geography, where all activities of a political nature can be considered in the context of space as a specific point of reference (social activity space – geographical area – political territory) for the political process expressed in a unit of time.

² J. Potulski, *Wprowadzenie do geopolityki (Introduction to Geopolitics)*, Gdańsk: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Gdańskiego 2010, pp. 58–61.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 63.

of multiplying subsequent, individual system dependencies and their relationships (complexes).⁴ These general characteristics of the system can be detailed through the political perspective, where the key role is played by six categories – among which one in particular corresponds with the main component of the structural understanding of geopolitics (i.e., the issue of geopolitical order understood as an organised system of international management) in which there are equal forces that integrate and disintegrate the system.⁵ It is about analysing and understanding the operation of an organisation (system) as its policy (as highlighted by G. Morgan). Therefore, as the Eastern Partnership is a system composed of certain elements and triggers certain dependencies, it behaves as a political actor aiming to achieve goals under certain conditions of cooperation or competition for specific resources, creates alliances and agreements, and uses various means of expansion to obtain a specific place in the market.⁶ Ultimately, in its operation, the Eastern Partnership releases both strengthening forces, integrating its own system (EU sub-system), but also disintegrating the competitive system animated by the Russian Federation.

2. The Eastern Partnership – a strategic extension of the EU's civilisational offer

The idea of the Eastern Partnership, initiated by the Polish Minister of Foreign Affairs Radosław Sikorski leading a group of officials of the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs,⁷ became the second component of the so-called “European Neighbourhood Policy” (ENP) alongside the Mediterranean one, formulated and formally implemented by the European Union since 2004. As noted by Olga Barburska, an initiative involving 400 million people living in a total of 17 countries (stretching from Gibraltar to the Caucasus) was characterised by a combination of essentially different civilisation circles and levels of economic development or political systems.⁸ Since the concept of conducting an integrated foreign policy towards the southern Mediterranean, Central

⁴ Cf.: B. Kaczmarek, *Organizacje. Polityka, władza, struktury* (Organisations. Politics, Power, Structures), Warszawa: Międzynarodowa Szkoła Menedżerów 2001, p. 51.

⁵ J. Potulski, *Wprowadzenie do...*, p. 58.

⁶ Cf.: B. Kaczmarek, *Organizacje...*, pp. 88–89.

⁷ R. Sikorski, *Polska może być lepsza. Kulisy polskiej dyplomacji* (Poland Could Be Better. Behind the Scenes of Polish Diplomacy), Kraków: Społeczny Instytut Wydawniczy Znak 2018, p. 22.

⁸ O. Barburska, *Polityka wschodnia Unii Europejskiej jako część składowa polityki zagranicznej UE* (Eastern Policy of the European Union as a Component of the EU Foreign Policy), Warszawa: Oficyna Wydawnicza Aspra 2018, p. 174.

and Eastern Europe and the Caucasus presupposed the establishment and deepening of sectoral cooperation within the framework of EU public policy, it was necessary to find tangible and effective means of maintaining and deepening this cooperation in the face of civilisational differences and differing visions of the intended effects of the relationship. Such an element became a specific policy of systemic solutions and values that would create, in the areas mentioned above, a civilisational community reflecting the universal value of the cultural heritage of Western civilisation and standardised solutions related to economic policy, the place of the individual and their rights in society or the issue of pluralistic democratic representation.

The above diagnosis is confirmed by the clear position of Radosław Sikorski, the Head of Polish Diplomacy from 2007–2014 (i.e., in the period when the EaP program was initiated and systematically implemented). Sikorski assumed that the European Neighbourhood Policy in the eastern direction is civilisationally justified and logical as it concerns “European neighbours” and not “Europe’s neighbours,” unlike the countries bordering the EU in the south and south-east. Therefore, for this reason, it was declared and desirable to support transformation processes towards achieving a level equal to the EU *acquis communautaire*.⁹

The aforementioned thesis on the civilisational compatibility of the EaP countries is perfectly consistent with Mike Mannin’s fundamental remarks concerning the essence of the European civilisational offer, which in the twentieth century took the form of Europeanisation (only to transform after the fall of communism into broad ‘EU-isation’). According to the aforementioned interpretation, it is an objective phenomenon that the EU uses instruments that trigger civilisational and political influence which, in a broader sense (Europeanisation), implies the existence of a process of ideological, institutional and political transformation generated by the EU understood as a centre of power which is to lead in the member states and others (e.g., associated or cooperating countries, to the achievement of fundamental EU objectives and values). In a narrower, more technical sense, Europeanisation means the pragmatic

⁹ *Informacja ministra spraw zagranicznych Radosława Sikorskiego na temat polityki zagranicznej RP w 2008 r. (Information by Minister of Foreign Affairs Radosław Sikorski on the Foreign Policy of the Republic of Poland in 2008)*. In: A. Orzelska-Stączek et al., *Ministrowie spraw zagranicznych Polski w latach 2005–2015. (Polish Foreign Ministers in 2005–2015)*, Warszawa: Instytut Studiów Politycznych PAN 2016, p. 182; *Informacja ministra spraw zagranicznych Radosława Sikorskiego na temat polityki zagranicznej RP w 2010 r. (Information by Minister of Foreign Affairs Radosław Sikorski on the Foreign Policy of the Republic of Poland in 2010)*. In: A. Orzelska-Stączek et al., *Ministrowie spraw zagranicznych...*, pp. 219–220.

acceptance of the founding principles of the EU and the application of basic norms (individual dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and human rights).¹⁰

At the heart of this phenomenon is the evolving European identity, which is both an element of discourse and reception within the EU and within the framework of neighbourhood cooperation. It can be considered with the help of indicators that create a conceptual matrix, where we find such elements as a sense of cultural belonging to Europe and the nation-state and political to the EU, a European sense of community expressed symbolically through “we” and the ability to distinguish other non-European cultures, values, practices, etc.¹¹

The process of extending the civilisational influence of Europe/the European Union is thus based on civilisational, socio-cultural and political foundations – which, in institutional projects, take on specific content consisting of assumptions, goals and a range of activities aimed at effective implementation. In this context, the Eastern Partnership programme – understood as a sub-system of the EU – can be compared to an organisation’s development strategy, where one can distinguish its main stages, i.e., mission (here civilisational), vision (defined by the goals formulated and possibly modified by the initiators – the definition of the future desired state) and strategy and implementation activities (a comprehensive plan for achieving the goals using activities at different levels – strategic, operational and tactical).¹²

While the mission of the EaP was outlined above in the context of civilisational, cultural and institutional processes, the vision itself (strategic planning and implementation) requires a broader reference. The vision for the development of the EaP organisation stems directly from the initiators’ ideas and the policies of the management bodies. In the case under consideration, it refers to the formal initiative of Poland and Sweden of May 23, 2008, and the series of positions and decisions of the European Commission between June and December, 2008. This decision package, following the formal announcement of the programme by the Commission on May 7, 2009, at the first Prague Partnership Summit, also included a complimentary strategic plan for the organisation and implementation of the EaP processes and the resulting multi-annual implementation activities.

¹⁰ Cf.: M. Mannin, *Europeanisation as a Past and Present Narrative*. In: M. Mannin, P. Flenley (eds.), *The European Union and Its Eastern Neighbourhood: Europeanisation and Its Twenty-First-Century Contradictions*, Manchester: Manchester University Press 2018, pp. 10–11.

¹¹ N. Siklodi, *Defining Contemporary European Identity/ies*. In: M. Mannin, P. Flenley (eds.), *The European Union...*, p. 37.

¹² Cf.: R.W. Griffin, *Podstawy zarządzania organizacjami (Fundamentals of Organisation Management)*, Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN 2004, pp. 211–219.

In the context of outlining the expected state of affairs (vision), it should be stated that assuming deepened bilateral cooperation with the participant states (where Ukraine was of particular importance), it was declared that integration instruments would be created in the form of a permanent formula for multilateral cooperation convergent with existing regional solutions (here the examples of the Visegrad Group or the Union for the Mediterranean, promoted simultaneously by France as part of the European Neighbourhood Policy, constituted a reference group).¹³ Agnieszka Cianciara is right when she mentions the EaP as a programme motivated above all by a Polish, national perspective resulting from specific assumptions and preferences as well as historical and economic ties to the region – here Eastern Europe.¹⁴ In this context, an obvious reference related to the tradition of political thought would be the idea of the Piłsudski-ites' [supporters of Poland's Marshal Józef Piłsudski's translator's note] concept of the "Międzymorze" (the Intra-Mediterranean Sea), which united the cooperation of the states lying on the Gdańsk-Odessa axis or the "ULB" project [Ukraine, Lithuania, Belarus] proposed by representatives of the post-war political emigration – Juliusz Mieroszewski and Jerzy Giedroyc.¹⁵

It was, therefore, desirable to create a system which would allow countries with EU accession aspirations (Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia) and those wishing to establish

¹³ B. Wojna, M. Gniazdowski (eds.), *Eastern Partnership: The Opening Report*, Warszawa: PISM 2009, pp. 5, 73.

¹⁴ A. Cianciara, *Partnerstwo Wschodnie 2009–2014 (Eastern Partnership 2009–2014)*, Warszawa: ISP PAN 2014, p. 36. The author, cited in the source footnote, also points to the operational 'endogenous' reason for the enlargement of the EaP to the South Caucasus as the prospects for pro-democratic changes triggered by Georgia's so-called Rose Revolution – *ibid.*

¹⁵ See e.g.: W. Paruch, *Konsolidacja Państw Europy Środkowej – od Międzymorza do Trzeciej Europy (Consolidation of Central European Countries – from the Intermarium to the Third Europe)*. In: W. Paruch, *Myśl polityczna obozu piłsudczykowskiego 1926–1939 (Political Thought of the Piłsudski Camp 1926–1939)*, Lublin: Wydawnictwo UMCS 2005, pp. 689–703; A. Friszke, *Między Niemcami, Rosją a 'ULB'. Program geopolityczny paryskiej 'Kultury' (Between Germany, Russia and 'ULB'. The Geopolitical Program of the Paris 'Kultura')*. In: A. Friszke, *Przystosowanie i opór. Studia z dziejów PRL (Adaptation and Resistance. Studies in the History of the Polish People's Republic)*, Warszawa: Więź 2007, pp. 346–358; M. Kornat, *Realizm środków, idealizm wizji. O geopolitycznej wizji Jerzego Giedroycia i Juliusza Mieroszewskiego. (Realism of Means, Idealism of Vision. About the Geopolitical Vision of Jerzy Giedroyc and Juliusz Mieroszewski)*. In: J. Kłoczowski (ed.), *Przekłete miejsce Europy? Dylematy polskiej geopolityki*, Kraków: Ośrodek Myśli Politycznej 2009. At: <http://www.polskietradycje.pl/artykuly/widok/310>, last accessed November 11, 2021; M. Urbańczyk, *Idea ULB (Ukraina-Litwa-Białoruś) w myśli Jerzego Giedroycia i Juliusza Mieroszewskiego (The Idea of ULB (Ukraine-Lithuania-Belarus) in the Thought of Jerzy Giedroyc and Juliusz Mieroszewski)*. In: P. Fiktus, H. Małewski, M. Marszał (eds.), *Rodzinna Europa. Europejska myśl polityczno-prawna u progu XXI wieku (Home Europe. European Political and Legal Thought at the Threshold of the 21st Century)*, Wrocław: E-Wydawnictwo. Prawnicza i Ekonomiczna Biblioteka Cyfrowa 2015, pp. 309–322.

and maintain broad, strategic cooperation on a range of issues (Belarus,¹⁶ Armenia, Azerbaijan) – following the example of the Visegrad Group – not only to negotiate with the EU from the position of a collective and therefore stronger partner, but also to strengthen their mutual relations. An additional assumption was to exchange experiences through intensive contact between the EU and the programme countries – and to play a game aimed at shaping the leader of the new region (EaP), who will set the pace of pro-European changes. Ultimately, the accession and sectoral deepened cooperation as a result of EU-EaP relations would become a new element of the geopolitical landscape¹⁷ on the eastern and south-eastern border of a united Europe.

The implementation strategy of the EaP programme presupposed certain standardised steps which would not ultimately result in the signing of an accession agreement as part of the EaP programme package – but through the strengthening of European (EU) economic, legal and political standards – would either enable the eventual pursuit of accession to EU structures or consolidate bilateral, in-depth relations excluding the prospect of membership.¹⁸ Therefore, the initial outlining and then the establishment and long-term implementation of key processes strengthening partnership relations between the EU and the partnership countries – particularly in the areas of trade, energy security, internal affairs, migration policy and environmental issues beyond the sphere of individual participant policies: trade, energy security, internal affairs, migration policy and environmental protection issues that go beyond the sphere of individual participant policies.¹⁹

The assumed bilateral solutions included replacing the existing partnership and cooperation agreements with association agreements, which was made conditional on achieving goals related to the standards of the rule of law, democratic solutions and civil rights, signing in-depth free trade agreements, which were conditional on the earlier accession of countries partnerships with the World Trade Organisation (WTO)

¹⁶ The case of Belarus was subject to doubts from the very beginning, which resulted in the assumption of cooperation at the expert and technical level, which could be deepened under favourable conditions. The Polish-Swedish original proposal also included the Russian Federation as a potential partner within the framework of the European Neighbourhood Policy; European Neighbourhood Policy, *Polish-Swedish Proposal: Eastern Partnership 2008*. In: B. Wojna, M. Gniazdowski (eds.), *Eastern Partnership: The Opening...*, p. 74.

¹⁷ Cf.: R. Sikorski, *Polska może być lepsza...*, pp. 22–24.

¹⁸ Cf.: M. Muftuler-Bac, A. Gorgulu, *Turkey and the European Union: Partners in Foreign Policy Cooperation in the South Caucasus*. In: M. Wilga, I.P. Karolewski (eds.), *New Approaches to UE Foreign Policy*, Abingdon–New York: Routledge 2014, p. 225.

¹⁹ M. Sus, *The High Representative and the European External Action Service. Towards Institutional Coherence in the Eastern Partnership*. In: M. Wilga, I.P. Karolewski (eds.), *New Approaches...*, p. 61.

would additionally be a prelude to the creation of a regional economic community within the EaP; liberalisation of mobility processes related to visa and asylum policy, taking into account the condition of counteracting illegal immigration; strengthening security and energy cooperation through integration within the Energy Community except Azerbaijan, for which integration with the EU market and energy infrastructure are provided. The concept of multilateral cooperation, extended from the original Polish-Swedish proposal, was based on the organisation of multi-level multilateral cooperation (summits of the EU and the EaP states; summits of heads of diplomacy; the organisation of and meetings within the so-called “thematic platforms” with the participation of representatives of the European Commission (EC) and the given EU presidency; working platforms supporting thematic platforms); the organisation of flagship initiatives in the area of border management policy; facilitation for medium and small companies, energy policy – here cooperation in the area of the so-called “southern energy corridor,” renewable sources and the prevention of natural and technological disasters. In addition, the development of interparliamentary cooperation and the creation of a so-called “Civil Society Forum” were foreseen. Sources of funding were to be based on amounts allocated explicitly to the partnership programme and transferred from the so-called “Regional East Partnership.”²⁰

The more than ten-year period of operation of the EaP Program resulted in effects that were separate in terms of meaning. On the one hand, EaP as a sub-system of the EU has initiated and strengthened, especially in the group of so-called “primates” (Moldova, Ukraine and Georgia), standardisation and modernisation processes, consisting in: signing and implementing association agreements and the deep free trade area, as well as easing the visa regime. Effective factors of the established cooperation also include the functioning of forums for intergovernmental cooperation at each level, the existence of five flagship initiatives, facilitating interpersonal relations, especially in the field of youth exchange, and the policy of strengthening access to the cultural, educational and scientific offer (programmes: Eastern Partnership Culture and Common Knowledge and Innovation Space).²¹

The tendency, which is opposed to deepening cooperation and strengthening ties in EU-EaP relations, emerged in the context of the position of Belarus, Armenia and, to some extent, Azerbaijan. The first of these countries, from the very beginning of the partnership initiative, was rightly considered a potential program participant rather

²⁰ A. Cianciara, *Partnerstwo Wschodnie...*, pp. 45–47.

²¹ O. Barbarska, *Polityka wschodnia...*, pp. 206–211; G. Gromadzki, B. Sendhardt (eds.), *Eastern Partnership Revisited. Associated Countries in Focus*, Warsaw: The Stefan Batory Foundation and Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung 2015, pp. 11–13.

than a real partner. The reason for this state of affairs was the authoritarian practices of President Alexander Lukashenko, which resulted not only in the limitation of civil rights and economic stagnation, but also in the fight against the official political opposition by force or any autonomous civic activity (e.g., related to journalistic activity or social self-organisation). Despite the fact that in 1995 a partnership and cooperation agreement was signed with the EU, the agreement has never been ratified. The attitude of the Belarusian authorities also continues to deny the need for reforms in the spirit of democratic rules, human rights, the existence of independent non-governmental organisations and good governance practices. As a result, contemporary Belarus is shifting towards bilateral rather than multilateral solutions, especially in the context of economic cooperation devoid of any element of socio-political changes according to democratic values.²²

Armenia, despite some clear modernisation trends resulting from the effects of the EU easing customs tariffs, visa restrictions on passenger traffic or having an air traffic agreement or – in particular – the Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement (2017), is unable to take serious steps due to the seeking a balance in relations both with the EU and Russia, which is a guarantee of security. In particular, it concerns the permanent Armenian-Azerbaijan conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh – the next edition of which took place in 2020, ending with Armenia's clear defeat and strengthening (not only Azerbaijan's position territorially, but also Russia's actual omnipotence in the context of its military presence and the principles of the functioning of the new *status quo*).²³

Azerbaijan can be assessed as the country least interested in broad participation in the regulations resulting from the EaP. The authorities in Baku show interest in strengthening energy relations with the EU thanks to gas supplies directly from Azerbaijan via the Southern Gas Pipeline. The issue of trade with the EU is no less important, especially in the context of energy resources. Despite some progress regarding, for example, judicial reforms and the fight against corruption, resulting from the signing of the so-called "Partnership Priorities" in 2018, Azerbaijanis are not interested in evolving the political system in a European spirit, which is reinforced not only by Russia's influence, but also by strong ties with Ankara – which is forming a new formula of Pan-Turkism.²⁴

²² E. Kaca (ed.), *The Eastern Partnership Vision after 2020*, Warsaw: PISM 2019, pp. 24–25.

²³ Cf.: W. Górecki, *Górski Karabach: kapitulacja Armenii, sukces Rosji* (Nagorno-Karabakh: Armenia's Capitulation, Russia's Success), October 11, 2020. At: <https://www.osw.waw.pl/pl/publikacje/analizy/2020-11-10/gorski-karabach-kapitulacja-armenii-sukces-rosji>, last accessed November 12, 2021.

²⁴ Cf.: E. Kaca (ed.), *The Eastern Partnership Vision...*, pp. 27–28.

3. Geopolitical contraction – the Russian Federation in pursuit of the restoration of the western and southern frontiers of the former empire

In the introduction to the brilliant and extremely valuable sketch in the field of popular geopolitics, Tim Marshall noted that taking into account geographic (physiographic) conditions, especially related to the topography, is one of the geopolitical axioms of contemporary Russia. He expressed it in a specific way, stating that: “If God created mountains in Ukraine, the vast plains of the Central European Plain would not be such an ideal place for the frequent attacks carried out against Russia. But in the present situation, Putin has little choice but to take control of the plains to the West. This is true of all nations, big and small. Leaders are trapped by the territory they control. Its shape limits choices and space to make decisions more than you might think.”²⁵

The above intriguing statement corresponds to the geographical and systemic (i.e., geopolitical) view of international relations presented by Saul Bernard Cohen, the founder and promoter of the holistic theory of multipolar regionalism. In one of his last texts, this recently deceased eminent representative of humanistic geography stressed that international reality is reduced to a system that renews itself as a matter of principle and according to the rules, where interconnected entities and phenomena function in parallel with the entry of new elements and the exit of old ones. The system is, therefore, in principle, open, receptive to change, which determines its survival and development, as opposed to a geopolitically closed system, which inevitably faces regression.²⁶ Thus, referring to the case of the Eastern Partnership, it can be concluded that for the European Union (existing institutionally and in terms of process [system]), the formula of developing cooperation in Eastern Europe and parts of Caucasus brings new development impulses (input elements), which processed in the form of systemic strategic and operational initiatives produce final effects (output elements), enriched conditioning reproduction of the cycle. The problem is that the gain of a powerful geopolitical player (the EU) is transformed, on the basis of a zero-sum game, into the loss of an equally significant world power (i.e., the Russian Federation).

²⁵ T. Marshall, *Więźniowie geografii, czyli wszystko, co chciałbyś wiedzieć o globalnej polityce (Prisoners of Geography: Ten Maps That Tell You Everything You Need to Know About Global Politics)*, Poznań: Zysk i S-ka 2017, p. 11.

²⁶ S.B. Cohen, “Evaluating Systemic Geopolitics – A Twenty-First Century View”, *Geopolitics*, vol. 15, no. 1 (2009), pp. 162.

Contemporary Russia explicitly recognises deepening EU cooperation and integration initiatives as a threat not only to its historical centre (the cradle of civilisation) but also to its ecumene (i.e., the most inhabited and developed area) lying largely in the European part of Eurasia. It is about the territorial, sub-systemic through the EaP initiative, rapprochement of both the EU and NATO to the centre of the state, taking place through a new, separate organisation of parts of the so-called “near abroad” (i.e., the non-Russian Republics of the former USSR). Nine out of the 15 former federal republics are formally covered by forms of cooperation with the EU and NATO, including six within the EaP itself. Thus, the Russian Heartland is exposed to the potential loss of the space-time closest to the formal boundaries, which is, in fact, a resource correlated with quantitative and qualitative material and human factors. This is all the more important as all these factors constitute the power of a given entity combined with a specific strategy.²⁷ Following the logic of the sphere of influence, the possibility of losing even part of the influence in the immediate surroundings unequivocally affects the adverse change in power and, therefore, the ability to project power.

The Russian Federation, defined as a reborn superpower, is partially in the Thucydides trap because in order to regain its position in the international system, it undertakes reintegration initiatives of a political, military and economic nature (CIS, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, the Eurasian Economic Union, the Collective Security Treaty Organisation) in line with the models of state integration western. As a result, the areas of systemic contact between Russia and the West, such as part of Eastern Europe or the Caucasus region – which since the fall of communism have created an area open to the influence of various systems – may turn into a Cohen’s Compression Zone (i.e., an area of partial breakdown and strong competition and clash between regional powers) which, in this case, also have the status of world powers (Major Powers). So far, both Eastern Europe and the Caucasus constitute the western branch of the so-called “Eurasian Convergence Zone,” the position of which is determined by the temporary status resulting from the actual role of the buffer between geostrategic realms,²⁸ subject to the dominant influence of the major world powers. Therefore, to achieve a revival of influence reaching as far as the Bug River line in the West and the strategically important Bessarabia (Moldova), which secures access to the Black Sea and enables control over the eastern part of the Balkan Peninsula, the

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 158.

²⁸ Eurasian Continental Realm, Maritime Realm, South Asia, East Asia – S.B. Cohen, *Geopolitics. The Geography of International Relations*, Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield 2009, p. 230.

Russian Federation has three instruments at its disposal: ideology, ethnic-demographic context and strategic presence.

The first of the elements mentioned above refers to the idea of neo-Eurasianism, developed on the basis of the development of Russian political thought, understood as a counterbalance to the liberal world of the West, where the alternative to the individualism of the individual are the values of the social community, and the ideal of a strong and efficient power and counteracting the tendency to dominate any power are to be long-term stabilisation. In this context, Russia uses the idea of the so-called "Third Rome," known from the times of the Romanov empire, constituting an independent, alternative civilisation, defining and controlling social and political relations in a large part of Eurasia.

The ethnic pressure factor is essentially based on the presence in the former republics of the USSR of a huge Russian-speaking²⁹ population of around 18 million people, who openly declare Russian nationality or consider Russian culture to be close to or identical with their own. Thus, the justification for actions aimed at the absorption of a given territory, such as the eastern regions of Ukraine or Transnistria, is based on pointing to the traditionally strengthened presence of the Russian population in such a territory, which justifies the further assumption that the Russian *ecumene* extends beyond the part of the borders of the Russian Federation in a given direction. The case of the annexation of Crimea, fully in line with the above assumption, is furthermore an example of resorting to the matrix of formal and legal legitimisation of aggression used in the 20th century by referring to the institution of a local vote/referendum as a basis for the decision of the central Russian authorities. The occupation and incorporation into the USSR of the Eastern Borderlands of the Second Polish Republic, named for the purposes of the formal legalisation of aggression in 1939, "Western Belarus" and "Western Ukraine" is a largely legitimate analogy, taking into account the Great Russian interpretation of the national idea, in which Ukrainians and Belarusians were ethnic groups within the native Russian community.

Strategic presence beyond the formal borders of the Russian Federation is the basis of the force – classic and hybrid in the formula and used means of reacting to the actions of other countries or organisations, perceived in terms of threats. This is why the military presence in Belarus (manoeuvres of joint forces, leasing military infrastructure) or in intentionally destabilised regions, to which a quasi-state formula is imposed (e.g.,

²⁹ At the end of the existence of the USSR, according to publicly available statistical data, 21.8 million Russians were to live in the non-Russian republics of the federal state, of which nearly 30% in Ukraine – T.A. Kisielewski, *Schylek Rosji (The Decline of Russia)*, Poznań: Rebis 2007, p. 21.

the Moldovan Republic of Transnistria or the Luhansk People's Republic), as well as a typical strategic game aimed at neutralising the power of the opponent (military presence in Abkhazia and North Ossetia). The military presence in Abkhazia and North Ossetia, in the context of its influence on Georgia, form a canon of Russia's contemporary use of military force as an important part of the general 'hard-power' to counter foreign influences and concentrate its own political and civilisational offer. As S. Cohen aptly observed, it was hard to expect Russia, which was rebuilding its power on the basis of its raw materials policy, agricultural and export potential, its key location in Eurasia and the authorities' determination to regain world rank, to ignore NATO's penetration of areas close to the Russian core.³⁰

4. Summary and recommendations

The Eastern Partnership programme, defined as a sub-system of the European Union and shaped within the framework of the European Neighbourhood Policy in the eastern direction, is to a large extent a civilisation offer resulting from the processes of Europeanisation and Euro-unionisation, which, apart from the internal context, were directed at a part of former Soviet states. The offer, which includes elements related to the political system (transparency, the rule of law, support for grass-roots civic initiatives), the social and economic system (removal of customs barriers, restrictions on the movement of persons, promotion and assistance for entrepreneurship), as well as culture and science (youth exchanges, cultural forums), aims to extend not only the values, but also the civilisational influence of the West to countries with a partly different, often imposed political culture. Apart from the obstacles resulting from the individual interests of a given country (e.g., Azerbaijan) and the sphere of implementation difficulties depending on the condition of civic culture (general consent to corruption or poorly developed ethos of self-organisation of society), the Eastern Partnership encounters resistance seeking to rebuild its own influence in the area of the so-called "near abroad" of the Russian Federation, which promotes a qualitatively different political and civilisation offer, supported by economic and military activities causing increased tension in parts of Eastern Europe and the Caucasus. Thus, the sub-system of the European Union's Eastern Partnership clashes with the influence of Russia, based on the formulas of the institutional reorganisation of a large part of the former

³⁰ S.B. Cohen, "Evaluating...", pp. 158–159.

USSR (e.g., the Collective Security Treaty Organisation) and military interventions resulting from presence in strategically important areas (e.g., Moldova or Belarus). Given the geopolitical circumstances, it would – therefore – be reasonable to consider the following actions:

- a. in the sphere of creating security conditions conducive to integration processes within the Eastern Partnership - strengthening the relations between the European Union and the North Atlantic Alliance in the field of intelligence, counter-intelligence and material cooperation – especially in the context of combating Russian disinformation and propaganda.
- b. in the economic sphere - deepening [under the programme] relations that fundamentally evaluate the economic system and, as a result, the political system of partner countries (intensification of trade, supporting modern industries, such as IT, consultancy on modernisation and stabilisation in the financial sector, targeted (project) grants to support the modernisation of infrastructure, including critical infrastructure components (e.g., energy), including clear requirements and support for regulations emphasising the role of private initiative in entrepreneurship).
- c. in the social and educational sphere - strengthening activities for personal exchange – especially in the field of youth contacts and dialogue of economic spheres and NGO activists, which significantly affects the exchange of experiences, development of civic attitudes and joint ventures in the area of education, business and social campaigns.
- d. in the sphere of information policy, the creation [by the EU] of a coherent and intensive information policy concerning the promotion of European values of civilisation and a policy of strengthening bilateral and multilateral cooperation, pointing to mutual benefits in accordance with the “win-win” principle.

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The publication contains a collection of articles devoted to the most important aspects related to the process of transformation of the countries of Central and Eastern Europe and the South Caucasus under the Eastern Partnership program. The book covers the results of a research project by an international team of scientists who present their findings on the policy of European integration, the role and importance of the Eastern Partnership in the process of change, and give recommendations for its implementation and activities in the future.



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