

Matúš Mišík**EASTERN PARTNERSHIP AND THE PREFERENCES
OF NEW EU MEMBER STATES**

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Abstract

This paper tries to shed some light on factors influencing the positions of the new member states of the EU on Eastern Partnership in its initial phase. It utilises an analytical approach developed by Copsey and Haughton (2009) and argues that the two most important factors affecting positioning of newcomers towards the initiative are: perceived size and geography. While the new members were especially keen to support their immediate neighbours, they were using a common policy towards these countries to increase their presence and influence in the region since the initiative helped them to deal with neighbourhood issues they were not able to solve on their own. The paper suggests an amendment to the theoretical approach and proposes an assumption explaining positioning of the member states towards the third countries that better reflect the empirical evidence than the original framework. Moreover, the research showed that Poland differed from the rest of the new EU countries, was much more active and influential and rather resembled the old members. However, due to its not very positive image (caused by its assertive approach and strong effort to play a prominent role within the EU) its influence within the EU was limited and, therefore it proposed the Eastern Partnership together with Sweden that held a much better image.

Keywords: new member states of the EU, Eastern Partnership, preferences

Introduction

The 2008 Polish-Swedish proposal marked the birth of Eastern Partnership (EaP), the EU policy towards 6 East European and South Caucasian countries: Ukraine, Belorussia, Moldova, Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan. The policy was officially launched during the Czech presidency of the EU Council in the first half of 2009 (Král et al. 2009). It was the very first EU-wide initiative by the so-called new member states of the EU (NMS) that entered the Union during the eastern enlargement of the EU in 2004 and 2007 (this paper examines 10 post-communist newcomers, Cyprus and Malta are excluded from the analysis due to their different historical trajectory). The only other similarly important initiative of NMS at EU level concerned security of energy supplies, however, this did not have the form of a concrete proposal and was of a more general nature (Mišík forthcoming). On the one hand, the policy itself is quite well documented (Christou 2010; Iangbein and Börzel 2013; Kostanyan and Orbie 2012; Korosteleva 2011; Kratochvíl and Tulmets 2010; Petrova 2012; Turkina and Postnikov 2012), on the other hand, the preferences of the newcomers who are the principal supporters of Eastern Partnership and their expectations towards this policy have not been a subject of extensive analysis, yet. The main objective of this paper is to

examine these issues and explore the preferences that the new members pursued towards Eastern Partnership during the commencement of the project. The research question asks which factors influenced the support of EaP by new member states.

In order to shed some light on this question, the paper employs an analytical framework developed by Copsey and Haughton (2009). Authors propose specific sets of factors for explaining the stance of EU member states towards integration in different policy areas. This paper focuses on two of them, Foreign Policy and Wider Europe and also tests the proposed assumptions. The paper has two main aims. The first, is an empirical aim to identify the preferences of the new EU members towards EaP during the initial phase of the policy with a special focus on three of them (Slovakia, the Czech Republic and Poland) that are the most active in this area. The second, a theoretical aim is to analyse the explanatory value of framework introduced by Copsey and Haughton (2009) and further develop the approach on the basis of empirical evidence. This paper reacts on call from the above mentioned article to examine its proposals and study the applicability of the assumptions developed on the basis of analysis of older member states by new ones.

The first part of the paper introduces a theoretical framework and research design. It presents details of the approach developed by Copsey and Haughton (2009), explains the selection of the analysed policy and countries and also looks at data used that is based on 47 semi-structured interviews with respondents from NMS, European institutions and think-tanks. The second section analyses the preferences of new members in connection with EaP in the period between 2008 and 2010 when the research was conducted. The third part discusses the results of the analysis from both empirical and theoretical perspectives. It proposes amendments to the analytical framework that would enable it to shed light not only on preferences concerning Eastern Partnership, but also other relations with the third countries. It also claims that Poland differs significantly from the other new member states whilst not fitting perfectly among the old ones. The conclusion summarises the main findings of the paper.

Theoretical Underpinnings and Research Design

Examining existing scholarship on preference formation of EU member states, Copsey and Haughton (2009) argue that there is „no silver bullet which provides the explanation both for all countries and all policy areas“ (Copsey and Haughton 2009, 269). Moreover, due to the flexibility of some factors which explain choices for Europe we have to bear in mind the ‘temporal dimension’ of preference formation. However, authors claim that there is a way of gaining a complex perspective on this issue. A combination of existing explanations and factors can provide a synthetic framework that is able to deal with these challenges and enables us to study preference formation in intricate detail. They identified five broad areas of policy within the EU: ‘More Europe’/Deeper Integration, Liberalisation, Distributive Politics, Foreign Policy and ‘Wider Europe’: and presented a set of factors that are supposed to explain the integration choices in these areas. Authors claim that the framework should be able to sufficiently explain national preferences of EU member states since it distinguishes between individual policy areas that require different factors for explaining integration strategies. Moreover, the identified areas of policy should cover

all fields of European integration. The framework should be thus able to shed at least some light on preference formation in all policy areas.

Table 1. Chosen policy areas and factors with explanatory power

Policy area	Factors explaining the policy
Foreign Policy	Sense of self-importance or „historical destiny“ Perceived size
„Wider Europe“	Geography Attitudes towards deeper integration Attitudes to immigration

Source: Copsey and Haughton (2009)

This paper deals more closely with two of these areas of policy, which are suitable for answering our research question concerning the preferences of NMS towards EaP. These are Foreign Policy and Wider Europe. Within the first policy area states with a perception of their „greatness“ and feeling of „historical destiny“ tend to have stronger opinions on foreign policy issues, while those that do not have such „self-importance appear to have much weaker preferences“ (Copsey and Haughton 2009: 271). The two factors that are decisive in this policy area are thus A) sense of self-importance or „historical destiny“ and B) perceived size. Copsey and Haughton assume that states, which believe that their duty is to influence the international environment have a tendency to do this much more than states that do not have such a perception in the global arena. Concerning the second factor, perceived size, authors claim that countries „which conceive of themselves as big beasts act accordingly in foreign policy“ (ibid.). The second policy area, „Wider Europe“, refers to „attitudes to enlargement“ (ibid.), it means it explains support or opposition for further widening of the EU and accepting candidates as future members. This is influenced by three factors: a) Geography b) Attitudes towards deeper integration c) Attitudes to immigration. Authors assume that member states are especially keen to support the enlargement of the EU in its geographical proximity, however, the promotion of further enlargement can be negatively influenced by concerns for migration flows and complications of the further deepening of the EU: in other words, its absorption capacity. This paper analyses support of NMS for Eastern Partnership from the perspective of these two policy areas (Foreign Policy and „Wider Europe“) and will examine all five proposed factors (Historical destiny/ Sense of self-importance, Perceived, Geography, Attitudes towards further integration and Attitudes towards immigration).

It is not clear which of these two policy areas is more suitable for our analysis of Eastern Partnership and therefore, we are employing both. Eastern Partnership is not an enlargement policy per se since enlargement of the EU is not its primary goal. However, there are many similarities with this policy, for example an effort to harmonise several sectoral policies of partner countries with *acquis communautaire*. Moreover, some of the EaP countries have clear membership expectations (for example the Ukraine and Georgia). The Partnership is thus not strictly foreign policy and due to the special relations of partner countries

within the EU it is rather difficult to label them as third countries. From our perspective, the policy is a borderline case and is therefore, suitable for studying the applicability of the proposed theoretical framework. The framework claims that it can help us to understand policy choices in all areas of integration and by applying it to a borderline case we can also examine its applicability on issues that do not perfectly fit into its main assumptions. In addition, Copsey and Haughton (2009) admit that there is an overlap between these two policy areas (Foreign Policy and 'Wider Europe') and that their framework needs further modifications on the basis of empirical evidence in order to fully capture the nature of preference formation. By analysing a borderline case we can find evidence supporting the need to modify the existing framework.

Eastern Partnership was chosen for this analysis as a result of it being the very first initiative of NMS (Wojna and Gniazdowski 2009). As noted by our respondent, the newcomers were „more oriented toward the east as such“ (EXP-08-06). Therefore, the new members had stronger preferences towards this policy than in other areas where they were rather followers fighting with several shortcomings, including an insufficient administrative capacity (Láštík 2010) than forerunners determining activities within the EU (Malová et al. 2010). The paper focuses on all post-communist newcomers, but puts special attention on three of them that have been the most active in this area. Poland, together with Sweden, is the founder of the initiative, but also the Czechs claim their part in its creation and not only because they finalised the policy during their presidency of the Council. Poland's focus on Eastern Europe dates back to the pre-accession period as explained by an expert „this was one of its own national foreign policy priorities which it was trying to lobby at EU level [even] before its accession“ to the EU (EXP-08-06). Slovakia has been interested in Eastern Europe and especially the Ukraine for a long time and actually presented a proposal for cooperation with Eastern Partnership countries within the existing Visegrad group in 2004 (Marušiak 2010).

This article is based on 47 semi-structured face-to-face expert interviews with representatives of NMS, institutions of the EU and think-tanks (see the Attachment). 34 interviews were conducted with respondents from permanent representations of the new members in Brussels that partly deals with preferences concerning EaP (the aim of the research was to identify all preferences of NMS), institutions of the EU and Brussels based think-tanks. Another 13 interviews were done with representatives of government and experts from Slovakia, the Czech Republic and Poland that focused exclusively on Eastern Partnership. Interviews were conducted between June 2008 and June 2010 during the commencement of the initiative and its first phase. Most of the interviews were conducted in English, the interviews in Prague and Bratislava were conducted in the Slovakian language. The research is based on verbatim transcription of these interviews.

Preferences of new EU member states and their explanations

The second section explores factors that are, according to a theoretical approach proposed by Copsey and Haughton (2009), able to explain the preferences of NMS towards Eastern Partnership. We are analysing five factors within two areas of policy. These are Historical

destiny/Sense of self-importance and Perceived size as two factors explaining choices for Europe in areas of Foreign policy. Next, we analyse Geography, Attitudes towards further integration and Attitudes towards immigration that determine 'Wider Europe' referring to further enlargement of the EU.

Historical destiny / Sense of self-importance

Among 10 analysed new member countries, the factor of historical destiny plays the most significant role in the Polish case, only respondents from two other countries mentioned this issue as a reason for supporting EaP. Interest in the Eastern part of Europe is for Poland not a new agenda and the state was „always very much interested in elevating the countries of our immediate proximity Eastwards“ (WAW-10-01). By the beginning of the 20th Century there were ideas about creating a „belt of independent countries that have good relations with Poland which would be a sort of zone between us and Russia“ (WAW-10-03). However, as explained by an interviewee, this dimension was not the most important one in connection with the Eastern Partnership project. The initiative is supposed to ensure the independence of partner countries, their good relations with Poland as well as their democratisation. The aim of the policy is, according to an expert from a Polish think-tank, „very simple [...] to transform the neighbours to that extent that they will be similar to us. In the sense of democracy and market economy“ (WAW-10-07).

According to a Polish interviewee, there was a significant part of the intellectual circles in Poland that thought that Poland had historic responsibility towards the East and Eastern Partnership was a way to fulfil such a duty. Such ideas were based on the past and went several centuries back when there was a Polish commonwealth including areas of Eastern Europe. Moreover, they had a ‚romantic‘ point of view that the EU abandoned the countries of the Eastern Partnership and the Polish had to bring them back in for „humanitarian“ reasons (WAW-10-05). According to our respondents, there were such idealistic reasons behind the support of Eastern countries in the first place, economic issues that were also present played only a secondary role. The Polish political leaders were within the foreign policy „always interested in bolstering up all these [modernisation] tendencies and they were targeted at building fully pledged viable statehoods eastwards“ (WAW-10-01). With this is in the mind of the Polish politicians whilst talking about how their expertise is the reason behind their interest in the East in general and Eastern Partnership in particular (WAW-10-05). As explained by an expert from a think tank, „Poland has an ambition to point to its expertise“ in Eastern Europe, that it can help the rest of the EU to understand the region and support the partner countries to come „closer to the EU“ (WAW-10-08). However, expertise was mentioned quite often during our interviews not only by Polish respondents, but also by respondents from other NMS. We will come back to this issue later in the paper when discussing geography as a factor in the explanation of support for the EU.

In spite of this, the Polish did not believe that they had to do all the ‚dirty work‘ and the countries of the Eastern Partnership were only supposed to be net recipients of all the advantages of the cooperation within the initiative. On the contrary, Eastern Partnership was only supported to boost and support partner countries' efforts to improve their democracy. As explained by a senior official from the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs,

they did not intend to clean up „Oglias stable[s]“ of the partner countries. He added that, the EaP was only supposed to „plays auxiliary role, it has only to support“ the efforts of the countries of the Eastern Partnership.

Besides Poland, only two other respondents mentioned arguments pertaining to this factor. A Slovakian interviewee expressed his opinion that „we feel as a part of community that has good results historically and we want to be able to say in 20 or 50 years that we managed to create a space where we feel relatively secure. We cannot claim that at this moment“ (BTS-10-01). A Lithuanian interviewee explained that their support for the EaP is rooted in their conviction that this project will help the partner countries, that they „are trying to make them be pro- more European, more civilised, more understandable“ (NCS-08-28).

Perceived Size

Perceived size is, together with geography, the most prominent factor within our analysis. It has very often been used as an argument in explaining support of Eastern Partnership. Countries whose representatives perceive them as small see EaP framework as a way in which they can positively influence their neighbourhood. They would not be able to do this outside of the EaP due to their limited ability to affect the international environment. So for example, a Czech interviewee claimed that the EU gives them the opportunity „to express [their] opinion on topics that would be able to express anyway, but its voice would be irrelevant“ (NCS-10-50). Similarly a Latvian respondent claimed that „as a small country, we should be interested in integration in a stronger core, in a stronger EU institution, because these can help us solve problems that we can't solve ourselves“ (NCS-09-41). In this way, difficult issues like relations with Russia and other Latvian neighbours to the east that are also challenging for other Baltic states, could be solved.

Commenting on EU membership, a Romanian respondent claimed that „to be part of this club, group of member state is of huge benefit. I mean we are with the big voice, we are not alone strategically speaking“ (NCS-09-33). In this regard Romania differs from Poland in that it sees itself as a big EU member state. As explained by an official at the European Commission, Poland is „a case by its own, because it is bigger [and has] more clear regional interests“ (EUIN-08-09). As explained by a Latvian respondent, this is the main difference between Poland that „can bring something“ and other new member states of the EU that „cannot by themselves put an initiative“ (NCS-09-27). Due to its size it „wants to be the centre of gravity in the region“ (NCS-08-18). As a result of this tendency, „Polish leaders stress[ed] national dimension of the initiative“ what made „central European communication a little bit more difficult“ (WAW-10-08). The Polish considered themselves to be part of a Franco-German-Polish axis and this position limited the ability of Visegrad Four in assuming a common position on Eastern Partnership. Moreover for Poland, Eastern Partnership is also about „building their position inside the EU and to have influence on EU agenda of the EU foreign policy“ (WAW-10-03). The Polish wanted to ‚privatise‘ the project and presented it as their own, in spite of long cooperation with other countries of the region on this issue.

However, the perceived size of Poland was not enough to push the initiative passed the EU. As explained by our interviewee, Poland does not have a positive perception within the EU thus it had to be improved by cooperation with other member states. Collaboration with V4 countries was very limited for the above mentioned reasons and Poland looked for another, stronger, partner for the project. EaP was proposed together with Sweden (and backed up by Germany) that was „a proof of ability and of feasibility of the project“ (WAW-10-05). Sweden is, contrary to Poland, considered neutral and technically oriented, it is „respectable and not constrained by particular interests“ (WAW-10-08), it is a country „with a big prestige in the EU“ (WAW-10-07). Therefore to team up with Sweden had a crucial impact on the project. Moreover, Germany also had an important position in the launching of EaP. As explained by a Slovak official, if Germany „support[s] these processes, it means that the whole EU support[s] them“. Without Germany, „we can have many projects [...] but they will not be successful“ (BTS-10-01).

In general, other smaller NMS prefer cooperation with member countries of similar sizes, since these countries are far more similar to them and therefore, cooperation can be more fruitful and mutually beneficial. For example, as explained by a Czech respondent, they like cooperation with member states, that are „of similar size“ and they „do not focus [their] attention on countries like France or Britain, simply because they have different weight, different capacity, agenda, ability [...] and different interests“ (NCS-10-50). An Estonian representative claimed that they „cannot compete with the big ones, even if we say something first“ because „the big beast would take over“. However, „they do not take it too emotionally“ (NCS-08-25). Similarly, a Lithuanian respondent explained that sometimes there is „London and Berlin to decide for us“ which does not bring about the desired outcomes (NCS-08-18). The solution to this problem is cooperation with other smaller member states and therefore, they prefer such members for intra EU collaboration and coalition building.

Geography

One of the main arguments used by our respondents in explaining support for the new member states of the Eastern Partnership was geography in general and close geographical proximity to partner countries in particular. As a Polish interviewee claimed, „obviously the geographical proximity is crucial“ in connection with the project (WAW-10-07). The focus of the newcomers on the EaP was a „result of proximity of East“ (EXP-08-02). From a Slovakian point of view, „it is absolute logical interest of countries neighbouring with Ukraine and Belarus to stabilise this area“ (BTS-10-01). However, most newcomers prefer the counties that are nearest to them, meaning that they are far more supportive of the Ukraine, Belarus and Moldova, „the really neighbouring countries“ (WAW-10-07). As explained by a Slovakian interviewee „it would be very difficult to operate in Georgia or Armenia, we do not have the capacity, we do not have even embassy there. Therefore we focus on countries that are closer to us“ (BTS-10-01). Accordingly, they wanted Belorussia to be part of the initiative. There were some traditional trade relations with Southern Caucasus countries and some political sympathy, however, „the relationship was not that strong“ (EXP-08-06).

For the very same reason to, Slovenia, Hungary, Bulgaria and Romania the Eastern Partnership is not the most important foreign policy priority and they concentrate more

on the Western Balkans which are much closer to them. However, they use very similar arguments claiming that they share common borders with Balkan countries, understand the area and have long-term contact with them. As explained by a Hungarian official at their permanent representation, „because of our geographical location [...] Western Balkan is a priority“ (NCS-09-32). Another respondent claimed that „Bulgarian interests are very much influenced by the fact that we are the external border of the EU vis-à-vis these countries“ (NCS-09-34).

The other new members, Slovakia, the Czech Republic, the Baltic States and Poland support Eastern Partnership because they believe that they have the capacity to deal with the region and understand its peculiarities much better than „western“ members of the EU. As explained by a Czech interviewee, „the East is much closer to us. We have better knowledge, better possibilities“ (PRG-10-02). Czechs engaged in the eastern dimension of the European Neighbourhood Policy following their entrance into the EU in order to fill the foreign policy ‚vacuum‘ created after 2004. The launch of EaP was set to be during the Czech presidency of the Council as the Czechs wanted to present themselves in „an area in which the presiding country excels at“ (PRG-10-01). A Latvian official also added that „we have more emotional relation with these countries than other European countries“ (NCS-09-41). Slovak interviewee claimed that „we know the area, we know their mentality, we know what they went through, what does it mean“ (BTS-10-01).

Very often, the expertise of NMS in the southern and post-colonial world was compared with the „eastern“ competence of the newcomers. According to a Polish respondent, since Poland „is located eastward [...] we do not come to Spaniards to teach them a lesson how to deal with Morocco or Algeria. They know much better“ (WAW-10-01). On the other hand, „Ukraine or Belarus have their special mentality, but we definitely understand them better than the Netherlands or Portugal“ (BTS-10-01). So while the old EU „was much more oriented in foreign policy area on the post-colonial world, which they know much better [...] we know much better East [...] [it] is much closer to us, we have better knowledge“ (NCS-10-50). Therefore, old members „secured their southern part of the Neighbourhood Policy“ and the new members did the same with the east (NCS-09-37).

The aim of the EaP should be, according to NMS, to bring partner countries closer to the EU, „to have an open space and friendly guys close to your home“ (NCS-09-37). New members „support everything that would bring [eastern partners] closer to the EU“ (NCS-08-13). The area between eastern member states of the EU and Russia is not stable and EaP countries are in a volatile situation, there is often statehood at stake. The aim of the project is to secure their independence. In order to do this, it is, according to our interviewees, important to tie them to international organisation. They promote „bigger EU engagement in the eastern neighbourhood“ (NCS-08-24), because „not only EU has to be safe, but also its neighbours should be“ (NCS-08-23).

Attitudes towards further integration

New member states were in general very supportive of further enlargement of the EU to the East and did not perceive possible future enlargement as a threat to their current status and their benefits from membership. In other words, the absorbent capacity was not

an issue for the newcomers during the period before and shortly after the launch of the Eastern Partnership. We have found support for this claim in answers from respondents from many new members, in spite of the fact that these issues were not mentioned very often during the interviews.

A Bulgarian representative claimed that existing European Neighbourhood Policy framework was not enough and that they supported „more intensive dialogue with Moldova, Georgia and other Black Sea countries“ (NCS-08-05). A Hungarian representative explained that the two most important issues in connection with EaP were visa facilitation and free trade agreements. The same priorities were also the most important for Lithuania. Among the partner countries, Hungarians were especially in favour of membership for those countries, which „are neighbours or [...] are pro-enlargement“ (NCS-08-10). A Romanian respondent even supported his argument for the deepening of the EU by pointing to the development in Eastern Europe. He claimed that „because of our recent history and geopolitical situation, we are strong advocates for the deepening of the EU. Being close to eastern countries, the Black Sea etc, we can see what instability can mean“ (NCS-09-33).

In spite of this generally supportive opinion, there were also negative positions. Czech respondents commented on their dilemma claiming, that „on the one hand, there is this clear Czech proclamation saying that we support Ukrainian or even Turkish membership in the EU, but on the other hand, there is this pragmatic, a bit xenophobic public discourse that shows fear towards the East and perceive it as a source of criminality, jeopardy, instability and terrorism“ (PRG-10-01). A similar opinion was also expressed by an official from the European Commission. He claimed that NMS were very enthusiastic about future enlargement shortly after their entry, however, this was later „replaced by more cautious statements“ (EUIN-08-08).

Attitudes towards immigration

Only very limited evidence from our interviews supports immigration as a factor explaining the stance towards Eastern Partnership. On the one hand, according to an official from the Commission, new members were quite interested in issues related to migration, management of external borders and asylum procedures. However, in connection with Eastern Partnership this issue did not belong among the prominent ones and only very few of our interviewees discussed this subject. For example, for Poland the EaP also posed the question of their minority in Belarus where there is about 400 thousand Polish people. Therefore, the initiative was supposed to, in addition to other issues, improve the lives of the minority. This issue concerned predominantly Belarus, it is not that prominent in the case of the Ukraine where there is only a small Polish minority.

For Slovakia and the Czech Republic, this issue was more important, although it was not as prominent as other aspects of Eastern Partnership. According to a Slovakian respondent, the Partnership should help avoid the „situation from August 2008 [and] to prevent huge migration flows, to solve step-by-step frozen conflicts in these countries“ (BTS-10-02). There are possible migration flows from Eastern countries to the Union since the demography in Europe has negative development and there „is this tendency

[of the inhabitants of the third countries] to come closer to prosperous European area“ (BTS-10-01). However, this is not only the case with Eastern countries, the issue concerns „all directions, definitely including south“. The situation „force you to find solutions and take actions that stabilize your area“ (BTS-10-01). Such claims support the argument that migration is a factor influencing the stance taken regarding Eastern Partnership. However, this was not the general position and was only expressed by one Slovakian respondent. Migration was not explicitly included in European Partnership which was criticized by a Czech interviewee. He claimed that migration „should be the key topic“ because there are many thousands of Ukrainians in the Czech Republic and this issue needs more attention at EU level (PRG-10-01). However, he admitted that the issue was not discussed at Czech national level.

Discussion and Conclusions

Our analysis has brought several insights into the nature of support for Eastern Partnership by NMS as well as into the explanatory value of the analytical framework proposed by Copsey and Haughton (2009). This section is going to discuss these issues and explore which factors were able to explain support for EU newcomers towards Eastern Partnership. Historical destiny, as a factor explaining the stance towards EaP was present predominantly in the Polish case. Representatives of other member states did not stress this issue very often. Poles claimed that it was their duty to help countries in the east because of historical ties with these states. Eastern Partnership could represent such help since it could support the partner countries and their democracy whilst bringing them closer to the EU. A far more important factor seems to be perceived size which was the most commonly mentioned reason alongside geography. Contrary to the assumption presented by Copsey and Haughton (2009), small EU member states without a perception of their ‚greatness‘ were firm supporters of EaP. These countries utilised the policy for improving relations with the states involved in the EaP and Russia or increasing their influence within the Union. Only Poland has the ability to individually shape EU policies and initiatives, other new members have to cooperate in order to have some impact on the EU. Additionally, the smaller newcomers prefer cooperation with states of similar size, as the big countries that behave like ‚big beasts‘ are difficult to cooperate with as they are trying to dictate the conditions of collaboration.

Contrary to all other NMS, Polish representatives perceived their state as a big one and Poland acted accordingly. This made cooperation much more difficult even with its closest neighbours within the Visegrad four (Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Hungary). Romania, another larger new member did not have such a self-perception and was much more inclined to prefer cooperation with other small member states. However, Poland was not able to push through Eastern Partnership on its own. Although it was very influential within the Central European region, its reputation at EU level was poor at that time and Poland struggled with a bad image in Brussels (Copsey and Pomorska 2010). As a result, it needed a partner within the EU in order to push the Eastern Partnership proposal through. To do this, Poland collaborated on the proposal with Sweden which

had a much better image resulting in a greater chance of success in this matter. Sweden was a guarantee of quality.

In line with the theoretical assumptions regarding the enlargement of the EU, new members especially supported countries with the nearest proximity (geographical factor) and this is also the reason behind the promotion of Eastern Partnership. This was also true within the initiative itself: Belarus, the Ukraine and Moldova were much better supported than the Southern Caucasus states. However, due to the very same reason, some of the newcomers (Hungary, Slovenia, Romania and Bulgaria) preferred cooperation with their immediate neighbours: Western Balkan or Black Sea countries. Proximity means that they have close relations with their neighbourhood and they understand the challenges of these countries. It is very similar to the situation of the old members who know their neighbours to the south very well.

The new members were rather supportive when it came to further enlargement to the east and claimed that it would not restrict the ability of the EU to integrate deeper. However, there was not much evidence for this factor found in the interviews. A limited number of statements were also found in relation to the last examined factor: attitudes towards immigration. For Slovakia and the Czech Republic Eastern Partnership was a way to stabilise their neighbourhood and thus prevent undesired immigration. For Poland it was also a question of their minority in Belarus.

To sum up, the two most important factors explaining the position of NMS towards Eastern Partnership were perceived size and geography, in the Polish case, historical destiny/sense of self-importance was also significant. We can draw two main conclusions from this. The first one concerns the explanatory value of the utilised analytical framework. There is a big overlap between the two areas of policy: Foreign policy and Wider Europe, presented by Copsey and Haughton (2009). Therefore, this article proposes to merge these policy areas into one broader area of policy called External relations, with just two factors: perceived size and geography. We assume that member countries support institutionalised cooperation with the countries within close proximity. The large EU member states try to shape external relations according to their preferences, while the small ones prefer coalition-building and utilise this cooperation for increasing their influence on third countries.

The second finding concerning Poland is that of an exemption among new members. It differs in many aspects from other newcomers and also from Romania which belongs amongst bigger EU member states, but does not have such a self-perception. Poland wants to resemble older member states and the assumptions developed by old members and by Copsey and Haughton (2009) fit Poland much better than other NMS. From this point of view, we can thus include Poland among the old and big members. The only challenge Poland has to face in this area is its perception by other member states that ascribe to its rather negative image. This was also the reason why Poland proposed Eastern Partnership together with Sweden which has the opposite, very positive, image within the EU.

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Attachment: List of interviewees

- EUIN-08-08, senior official, European Neighbourhood Policy, European Commission, Brussels, 7.10.2008
- EUIN-08-09, member of the Cabinet of DG Regio, European Commission, Brussels, 4.12.2008
- EUIN-09-11, member of cabinet DG Education, European Commission, Brussels, 3.10.2009
- EUIN-09-12, Deputy Head, Relations with Member States and EEA States, DG Development, European Commission, Brussels, 3.10.2009
- EUIN-09-13, senior official, DG Justice, Freedom and Security, European Commission, Brussels, 3.10.2009
- EXP-08-02, research fellow, Centre for European Policy Studies, Brussels, 6.12.2008
- EXP-08-05, research fellow, European Policy Centre, Brussels, 9.10.2008
- EXP-08-06, research fellow, Centre for European Policy Studies, Brussels, 9.10.2008
- NCS-08-03, ambassador, Permanent representation of Slovenia to the EU, Brussels, 30.9.2008
- NCS-08-05:8, senior officials, Permanent representation of Bulgaria to the EU, Brussels, 1.10.2008
- NCS-08-09, ambassador, Permanent representation of Estonia to the EU, Brussels, 7.10.2008
- NCS-08-10, senior official, Permanent representation of Hungary to the EU, Brussels, 7.10.2008
- NCS-08-13, ambassador, Permanent representation of Latvia to the EU, Brussels, 8.10.2008
- NCS-08-18, senior official, Permanent representation of Lithuania to the EU, Brussels, 15.10.2008
- NCS-08-22, senior official, Permanent representation of Estonia to the EU, Brussels, 1.12.2008
- NCS-08-23, member of the European Parliament, Brussels, 2.12.2008
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