The Eastern Enlargement of the European Union: Fears, Challenges, and Reality

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Abstract: This essay focuses on the Eastern enlargement of the European Union (EU) and its impact on internal and external relations. Considering the analyses and forecasts available before enlargement, it presents the real consequences of the process, as well as challenges the EU has faced after the accession of new members from East-Central Europe. The article analyses the most important consequences, including problems in the area of decision-making and management in the EU, social consequences of the enlargement, as well as the effect of the accession of East-Central European members on the international position of the EU. Considering the opportunities, chances, and dangers of the Eastern enlargement for the future of European integration, the article seeks to address the concept of globality in its regional European context.

Keywords: East-Central Europe, Eastern enlargement, EU foreign policy, European integration, labor migration, regional globality, social fears

1 The asymmetry in economic potential between the old and new member countries of the European Union has made the Eastern enlargement the biggest challenge in the history of European integration. Many warnings prior to the enlargement suggested that an enlarged EU would become an ineffective, paralyzed community, lose its chance for further development and face, especially in the case of the wealthiest members in the Western part of the continent, a massive influx of workers from the East.

2 The experience of the first five years after the enlargement, however, has proved that none of the “black scenarios” has materialized. That does not mean that the accession of the new members has not been without difficulties for the EU. The EU has faced several serious challenges; however, the scale of problems has not been as huge and “detrimental” to the activity of the Community as it was assumed before the enlargement. Despite the problems, the enlarged EU still has a chance to remain an effective community at the forefront of the integration processes in the world and with an improved international position. Yet the task is difficult and requires solidarity as well as open dialogue between the old and the new members of the Union.

3 The aim of the article is to analyze the impact of the Eastern enlargement on internal and external relations of the European Union. As it would be difficult to present all the consequences of the process, the article focuses on the main challenges after the enlargement. The analysis refers as a result to problems of decision-making and management of the EU-27, financial perspectives of the Community, challenges related to migration and social consequences of the enlargement as well as the issue of the EU’s ability to formulate cohesive foreign policy goals. Given the Eastern enlargement and its impact on the policy of the EU, the article considers the concept of globality, understood as a snapshot of the current state of European globalization and integration.

4 In considering the future of the European Union and the concept of regional European globality, the analysis indicates that for the first time in many decades the EU has the chance to strengthen the international role of the community and reunify the continent based on common democratic values and rules. It is up to the Europeans to...
take a chance on continued integration; yet it is clear that in the globalizing world, a failure in the process of European integration would most probably mean the gradual marginalization of Europe as a leading actor of international relations.

Although the article focuses on the future of integration processes in Europe, what occurred after the Eastern enlargement of the European Union might also interest readers in other parts of the world, especially in the regions attempting their own regional integration, including North America, Latin America, Africa, and Asia.

**The Eastern Enlargement of the EU**

The fall of the Soviet Union and the collapse of the bipolar order considerably affected the process of European integration. One of the most fundamental challenges was the disappearance of the Eastern Bloc, as the danger of the Soviet aggression served for many years as a uniting factor for the Western community. The next challenge was the unification of Germany, as it was clear for many European countries that the future role and position of the united German state would be stronger and more significant than that of Cold War-era Western Germany. At the same time, the European Union, officially established by the Treaty of Maastricht on 1 November 1993, had to answer broader questions about its international aspirations and role in global affairs, including the future shape of its relations with the U.S. and the newly established Russian Federation.

Yet one of the crucial challenges to the future of the continent was the response to the transformation of East-Central Europe and the aspirations of countries in the region to join the European Union. In fact, the eastern part of the continent had been almost completely excluded from any initiatives of European integration for almost 50 years, as East-Central Europe remained part of the Eastern Bloc dominated by the USSR. The radically different economic and social systems of Eastern Europe were a source of its comparative poverty, as well as political incompatibility with the countries of the Western part of the continent. This situation had caused difficulties and mutual distrust in relations between the two halves of Europe belonging to different Cold War politico-military blocs (NATO and the Warsaw Pact). The suspicions and misperceptions between the Eastern and the Western part of the continent have remained a serious political factor in European integration following the collapse of the bipolar order and it would have been naïve to expect their quick disappearance.

It was clear that the European Union could not afford to open its door to countries that were unprepared or unable to prove the efficiency of their democratic systems. On the other hand, the problem for the EU was that clear perspectives for the membership served as incentives for the new democracies in East-Central Europe to continue their difficult and socially disruptive reforms, the successful results of which became crucial for the stability of the whole continent. The answer was the Copenhagen criteria, defined at the meeting of the European Council in Copenhagen in 1993. These rules set general requirements for establishing effective democratic institutions, respect for human and minority rights, and appropriate mechanisms for guaranteeing a market economy. Upon meeting the criteria, the first group of candidates was able to open the accession negotiations in 1998. Ten new members that joined the European Union on 1 May 2004 completed these negotiations in 2002.

Together with the enlargement in 2004, the EU-15 became the EU-25; after Romanian and Bulgarian accession on 1 January 2007, the union became the EU-27. The enlargement from 15 to 27 member states was the biggest in the history of European integration process increasing the number of the EU inhabitants from about 380 to 485 million. The new members were small and medium-sized countries (with Poland as the biggest and the most populous of the new entrants); however, each of the new members has gained the same rights as existing members of the EU. The Eastern enlargement has been the biggest challenge in the history of European integration, not only because of the number of new member states joining the European Union simultaneously, but primarily because of differences in the level of the gross national product (GNP) between the old and the new members of the EU. A comparison of GNP per capita shows that the richest new members have not exceeded 40% of the average EU-15 level and much greater asymmetry is revealed by the comparison with the wealthiest members of the old union.

In fact, previous enlargement rounds, such as the one in 1973, to include the United Kingdom, Ireland, and Denmark, and the one in 1995, to include Sweden, Finland, and Austria, were accessions of states comparable in economic development and wealth. Only the membership of Greece in 1981 and Spain and Portugal in 1986 involved enlargements of countries, which were much poorer at the moment of their accession than the average member of the community. This raised a question of solidarity between the rich and the poorer members, and required additional financial participation of the wealthiest member states to support political and economic reforms in the new member countries. Although the old member countries reacted with hesitation, they finally agreed to such assistance, being aware that it would support democratic reforms on the Continent and help to eliminate threats of
This asymmetry of enlargement, together with fears in Western Europe about social consequences, problems of intra-union management, as well as the ongoing crisis of EU identity have compounded the challenges of the Eastern enlargement. Five years after the enlargement, these issues continue to affect the integration process, thus it is worth focusing on a few of them.

**Challenges to Decision-making in the EU**

Even before accession, it was clear that the Eastern enlargement from 15 to 27 members would impact decision-making and management processes in the European Union, including the potential to paralyze or at least complicate the mechanisms established in the EU-15. Anticipating the enlargement, the old members tried to prepare the internal decision-making mechanisms to include the new members. The Amsterdam and Nice Treaties extended the scope of decisions to be taken based on Qualified Majority Voting (QMV), instead of consensus, and the Nice Treaty established a specific majority system.[4] It granted each of the 27 members a precise number of votes reflecting its demographical potential. The biggest members of the EU – Germany, France, the UK, and Italy – were given 29 votes each, and the smallest ones: Malta and Luxembourg – 3 and 4 votes, respectively. Poland, as the biggest new member, received 27 votes, the same number as Spain. Nevertheless, the rule of unanimity has remained at the core of all decision-making in the EU, especially when it comes to crucial political decisions.

Paul Taylor has argued that the growing divergence of members and their interests after the Eastern enlargement has been a major challenge to the EU governance, pushing the principle of decision-making from consensus to outvoting.[5] Finding a compromise among 27 is clearly more difficult than among the previous 15. However, even after the Eastern enlargement, consensus remains the top value in the European Union. All members agree about the significance of unanimity in the most important issues of the community’s life. Although each of the member states retains the right of veto, it seems that the old members have been able to persuade the new ones that veto must remain an ultimate tool used only in critical situations. Otherwise, the EU of 27 members would follow a path of paralysis or self-destruction. At the same time, it seems that the position and role of a member state in the EU still depends on three factors: its potential to participate in coalitions of political interests, its prestige and its ability to persuade others.

Nevertheless, the warnings of Taylor remained relevant as the efficacy of decision-making in the enlarged European Union called for additional internal changes. The answer was the Treaty Establishing a Constitution for Europe signed in Rome on 29 October 2004. The new treaty went relatively far in its proposals,[6] yet France and the Netherlands rejected the European Constitution in referendums and the last attempt to improve the internal functions of the EU was the Lisbon Treaty signed on 13 December 2007.

The Lisbon Treaty is effectively a series of provisions initially presented in the European Constitution. It has simplified the EU’s legal procedures and has granted the European Union a legal personality, as well as facilitating coordination of the EU’s policies establishing the posts of the EU President and Foreign Minister.[7] It reflects the objections of some members who stressed the principal sovereignty of the member states, resulting in the deletion of most references that could suggest the character of the European Union as a (super-)state, including the initial names of the new EU representatives. As a result, the new EU Foreign Minister has finally become the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy. Nevertheless, the future of the treaty had been unclear for almost two years, as its execution required ratification in all member countries. After the positive result of the second Irish referendum on 2 October 2009, the Polish president, Lech Kaczyński and the president of the Czech Republic, Vaclav Klaus, finally decided to sign the Treaty. This allowed the Lisbon Treaty to enter into force on 1 December 2009.[8]

In fact, the political turmoil around the EU Constitution and the Lisbon Treaty reflects a deeper crisis with the European Union’s identity, and the Lisbon Treaty itself seems to be a kind of institutional prosthesis until the EU is able to decide which way it is going. In the history of European integration, the theoretical debate focused on a dispute between two general positions: the federalist, which favors the supranational dimension of integration and the unionist, which supports intergovernmental mechanisms of cooperation in Europe. Today, however, it would be difficult to propose any far-reaching federalist initiatives. The current European Union embodies the ideas of the third theoretical position, known as the functionalist, which considers integration as a compromise between transnational and intergovernmental
mechanisms and focuses on pragmatic cooperation. Thus, the most important problem for the European Union in the future remains the improvement of efficiency of the Lisbon Treaty structures. It seems that the rules of unanimity and consensus will remain the basis of decision-making, especially in the case of principal decisions with regard to the EU’s internal and external policy.

Without the Lisbon Treaty, the European Union’s continued progress would not be possible and despite problems, the chance to improve the internal cohesion of the EU has not been lost. It is still likely that in a few years, after the European Union (and first of all its older members) has coped with the “first shock” of Eastern enlargement, it will be easier to propose new institutional reforms. However, there is no doubt that the process of internal reforms will remain a difficult task.

**Balance or Shift of Power in the EU?**

Discussing the internal political processes in the European Union after the collapse of the bipolar order, numerous commentators pointed out the shift in the previous balance of power in the EU based on the integration of the French-German core. In fact, the unification of Germany has broken the previous balance in Western Europe, and despite the declarations of strategic Franco-German partnership, France has increasingly been afraid of the potential of a unified Germany, even if the process of German unification itself has appeared to be more complex and more expensive than was initially expected.

It is not difficult to agree with Bela Plechanovova that the first “enlargement” after the collapse of the bipolar system was the reunification of Germany in 1990. It led to the emergence of a reunified German state as the most populous and economically strongest nation in the European Union, motivated to achieve its rightful political status and role in the EU. Taylor indicates in this context that, together with the collapse of the bipolar order, France has been increasingly anxious that the European agenda will no longer reflect French interests. After the Eastern enlargement, Paris has also faced a number of new members favoring the strengthening of Atlantic links with the United Kingdom and the United States. In the case of Germany, Berlin has been more pro-Atlantic and more pragmatic in relations with the U.S., but first of all Germany has increasingly been aware of its more powerful position in the European Union and therefore more interested in adjustments of EU policies and structures to suit German interests. Berlin has been more prepared than Paris to focus on good relations with new members in East-Central Europe, as Germany has gradually become the main economic partner of the countries in the region with a potential to develop political cooperation.

As a result, the dynamics of Franco-German interactions in the European Union have changed and it might be more correct to reverse the order of names now and talk about the German-French core of the EU than the previous French-German. During the Nice Treaty debates, Paris was able to retain parity and the same number of votes in the European institutions between Germany (82 million of inhabitants) and France (64 million of inhabitants). Yet Berlin’s formal position reflected by the number of votes in different EU institutions is less important than the real political influence Germany is able to exert in the Union via diplomatic means. Thus, the countries of the European Union will have to face growing German political ambitions, as avoiding an open discussion of this issue would be useless. The internal political dialogue in the European Union has to be able to consider German arguments and Berlin has to be willing to take the interests of its partners in the EU into account, including the interests of the new members from East-Central Europe.

The relations with Germany have been crucial for the new members and especially Poland as the biggest Eastern neighbor of Germany. Despite the difficult history between the two nations, both sides have been trying to find a political modus vivendi in their bilateral relations and a growing level of mutual confidence and predictability based on their successful economic relations, including the fact that Germany remains the main economic partner of Poland receiving 35% of the Polish exports. As both states lacked an opportunity for reconciliation during the Cold War, it seems that the progress in the Polish-German relations has been considerable, although some divergence of opinion still exists, especially with regard to German relations with Russia (Poland is not alone among the new members in this instance).

**Social Fears in Western Europe**

The attitude of the people in the new member countries towards European integration has usually been positive. For example, the result of the accession referendum in Poland showed support for the membership at 77%. A few years after enlargement, support in Poland remains at a high level of about 70%.[12] At the same time, however, enlargement provoked serious fears among Western EU member states. The prospects of the enlargement were a source of anxiety among the people in the old, wealthier members of the EU, including the fears of unemployment and massive immigration of workers from the much poorer countries of East-Central Europe.
Piotr M. Kaczynski indicates that the newcomers were better prepared for enlargement as they expected changes and were forced to prepare for membership. The older members and their societies only faced the challenge of the Eastern enlargement on the day of new members’ accession. [13] This resulted in the spreading of slogans and fears about the “Polish plumber” or “Polish nurse” threatening employment opportunities for native Western Europeans. Few in Western Europe denied the benefits of the Eastern enlargement for democratization, stabilization, and unification of the continent. Yet the Westerners feared that Eastern enlargement would open up questions of management, decision-making and asymmetry in economic potentials, as well as raise the necessity for a broader process of building mutual understanding between the two halves of Europe separated for almost 50 years by the “Iron Curtain.”

The analyses among the experts presented before enlargement were less emotional and rather balanced. It was clear that differences in incomes between the EU-15 and the new members would have a number of undesirable effects on labor markets and remain an incentive for migration. Tito Boeri and Herbert Bruecker indicated that the general effects of the enlargement on the EU labor market would be relatively small, although specific sectors and regions can suffer wage and job losses, especially those related to unskilled workers and regions immediately bordering the accession candidates. [14] At the same time, there were several forecasts regarding the migration potential. Some of them estimated that the immigration from the new members would vary from 6% to even 30% of their total population (1.05 million), but those more realistic indicated that the migration would be around 3-5% or even only 2% in the longer term, taking return migration into account. [15]

In fact, the Eastern enlargement has only partially confirmed the fears of Western European societies and its social consequences have been less serious than expected. At the same time, it has confirmed most of the scholars’ forecasts. According to the data presented by Eurostat for the end of 2008, the total number of the immigrants from the new member states has been around 1.7 million. [16] This does not include short-time seasonal workers, the number of which could be estimated as an additional few hundred thousand with a tendency to slow down because of the current world economic crisis. The most numerous immigrants were Poles (Poland being the most populous new member state) and Romanians working mainly in the United Kingdom, Ireland, and Spain. Polish experts have estimated that the real number of Poles working in the old member countries of the EU has been at the level of 1-1.12 million (out of total 38 million of inhabitants) with a potential of additional 0.6 million of seasonal workers. [17] These numbers may seem considerable, but it would be difficult to treat them as a massive influx of workers from the East.

Several authors have indicated that in the longer term the migration would have a positive effect on filling labor gaps in the old member countries. [18] This has been true in the case of the UK and Ireland. The immigrants from the new East-Central European members have usually found low-paid and low-skilled jobs in trade, service, and construction fields previously ignored by British or Irish workers. The problem for the new members is that many of their citizens competing for low-paid and low-skilled jobs abroad are young, educated, and highly motivated people leaving their home countries for economic and social reasons.

The full picture of the immigration process from the new member states will be available only after the opening of the biggest labor market, Germany. The effects of this change lie in the future as Germany has decided to take advantage of the maximum possible transitional period that expires in 2011. The German labor market remains the biggest in Europe and Germany’s direct borders with Poland and the Czech Republic may be an additional incentive for future immigrants. This transitional period has effectively directed the first wave of immigration from East-Central Europe to Great Britain and Ireland. However, the opening of the French labor market has not drastically increased the number of Poles and other workers from the new member states working there. Besides, following the recent economic crisis many of them decided to come back home, especially those working in construction jobs, although creating an effective strategy to encourage immigrants to return still remains a difficult task for the governments of the new EU members.

All in all, the problem of immigration from the new member countries cannot be ignored and will continue to play a crucial role in the arguments of euro-skeptics, but it appears to be much less serious than initially expected. This is true especially in the context of the recent world economic crisis and growing social protests against the foreign labor force in the UK and other leading countries of the European Union. It may also encourage the old members to devise informal attempts at protectionism, despite the rules of the free movement of labor and capital within the European single market.

**Challenges to the Budget and Financial Perspectives of the EU**

One of the areas of debate before enlargement was the cost of the process. Yet it
seems that the Eastern enlargement of the European Union has not been overly expensive, especially in comparison to the benefits. Several authors have concluded that in the longer term the enlargement would have small but positive growth effects on the whole EU, although lower in the case of the old members and higher with regard to new member states, with forecasts of an additional overall EU growth by 0.5 to 0.7%. However, it is clear that the main benefits of the enlargement are political ones, namely the opportunity to reunify the Continent and in this context, the costs of the enlargement were indeed low (estimated for the financial framework 2004-2006 at 40.16 billion euro, or 1.08% of EU GNP).[19]

However, taking the differences in economic potential and wealth-level between the old and new members into account, it seems impossible to expect that their convergence would be achievable in the short or even medium term. This implies a strong need for assistance funds from the wealthiest countries of the European Union for the development of the new members. Consequently, the problem of financial solidarity between the richest and the poorest in the EU will become much more serious for the future of the Union than any time before, even after the Southern enlargement in the 1980s.

The limited financial resources at the Union’s disposal have led to debates in the EU about its financial perspectives. The member states espouse two contradictory positions. Germany and France, as the biggest donors, have grown reluctant to increase their contributions to the common EU budget. The financial negotiations for the period 2007-2013 included the demand of the biggest net-contributors to limit the EU budget to 1% of the Community’s GNP. The final decisions accepted a ceiling of 1.045%, but the hesitation of the richest members to cover the additional costs of the enlarged EU was obvious. The new members, however, joined the EU with the expectation of financial assistance and solidarity. Knowing that their dynamic development might depend on the generosity of the richest countries of the EU, the new members fear that the grand idea of solidarity might collide with the particular economic interests of the main EU players. Such a division of the EU members into the core of the most developed and wealthiest countries and East-Central Europe as a periphery could threaten European integration.

Yet despite the limited financial resources available in the EU budget, the assistance to the new members has been satisfactory so far. Poland, for example, as the biggest recipient, is receiving a net-support of €60 billion in the period 2007-2013, mainly in the form of structural and cohesion funds. Nevertheless, the most important issue is to keep this level of the assistance in the next financial framework (2014-2020). This will be the key issue of the future debates. The strongest and wealthiest countries of the EU have considered reducing some forms of assistance to new members and favor spending that would focus more on innovation, new technologies, and competitiveness of the EU in the global market. Although it is clear that the EU needs to be more effective on the global scene, it is obvious that the financial resources available in the future EU budget for new technologies and innovation would most probably help the wealthiest members of the Union. The new member states with their less innovative and much poorer economies will not be able to compete for this money.[20]

The Experience of the New Members

The new East-Central European members expected full-fledged participation in the decision-making mechanisms of the EU, as well as respect for their arguments, despite their limited economic potentials. But the political debates just after the Eastern enlargement, which resulted in the new proposals of the European Constitution and the Lisbon Treaty, were problematic for the new members and confronted them with the perspective of the new shape of the European Union only a few months after their accession. The situation was most problematic for Poland – the biggest country in the group of new members, yet a medium-size state in the EU – with its aspiration to play an active political role in the European Union. In the case of Poland, which was to lose some of its formal position in the EU measured in the number of votes in several Union institutions,[21] it was difficult to explain to people why the rules of the membership must be changed so quickly after the accession.

Assessing the first period after the Eastern enlargement, Piotr M. Kaczyński maintains that the economic consequences of the enlargement have been clearly positive. The new members developed rapidly and much faster than anticipated. However, he finds that the political dimension of the enlargement is more difficult to assess. After an initial period of passivity, the new members, especially Poland and the Czech Republic, became more assertive in the EU, which led to some conflicts between the governments of these countries and EU authorities. At the same time, the new member states mainly reacted to the ideas coming from the Western part of the EU. Their political initiatives, if any, were usually poorly prepared and rejected.[22]

Now, a few years after the enlargement, Poland and other new members understand more clearly that it is not only the number of votes that decides their position and ability to influence decision-making processes in the EU. They have gained practical...
experience and become more familiar with the real political mechanisms, including the rules of effective coalition building and compromise. Dirk Leuffen has described it as a process of "socialization" in which the new members learn how to handle the formal and informal rules and norms in the European Union. From his point of view, this socialization should be considered as a medium-term process.[23]

36 The experience gained during the five years after the enlargement seems to confirm that the period of socialization will be shorter rather than longer. The recent Polish-Swedish proposal of Eastern Partnership[24] to strengthen cooperation with several Eastern neighbors of the enlarged European Union, supported by the rest of the EU members, illustrates that new members can effectively contribute to successful initiatives, or at least be important partners of successful initiatives presented together with some old members. As a result, the accession of the new countries from East-Central Europe has not been as "detrimental" to the EU management as it was sometimes suggested in Western Europe before the enlargement.

Eastern Enlargement and Regional Globality

37 It is helpful to look at the process of European integration through the lens of regional globality. If one views regional globality as a conceptual tool for understanding the current situation of the EU in the globalization processes all around the world, it is possible to provide a fuller analysis of the future of European integration. Wolf Schäfer indicates that "a singular global future does not exist today" and what people encounter is "the imagination of possible futures "ten from different local positions".[25] This is certainly true in the case of the EU. Taking the advancement of the integration process in Europe into account and comparing it with the limited progress of similar processes in other regions of the world, shows a relatively high degree of regional globality for Europe.

38 Considering the EU within the conceptual framework of globality, one can say that the European integration has furthered globalization on the continent. Ironically, as Europe lost its global eminence after the Second World War, Western Europe embarked on an unprecedented process of integration, which eliminated not only economic barriers, but also completely transformed the hitherto highly fragmented political, cultural, and social space of Europe. Important elements of this are the common currency and supranational institutions of governance that have shifted some power from the national governments to the EU. After the end of the Cold War, the European integration process has emphasized the socio-cultural unification of the continent. Taylor points in this context to a catalogue of common European values that include the priority of human rights, multilateralism, and a specific social sensitivity.[26]

39 The European integration began with the integration of the Western part of the continent. The recent Eastern enlargement has given Europe for the first time a chance to unify the whole continent and reconcile the previous Cold War enemies. It has created the opportunity to extend Western stability and well-being to the eastern parts of Europe, to facilitate mutual understanding and build a common European identity. In fact, the reconciliation of the nations in Europe is of utmost importance. In the central part of the continent the process of European integration has for the first time in several decades unified Germans, Poles, Czechs, Slovaks and other nations in the same community of common values and goals.

40 However, the integration process is still difficult and far from complete. The negotiations over the Lisbon Treaty have confirmed that. The lasting debates between the intergovernmental and supranational visions of the EU do not signal fundamental changes in the governance of the EU-27 in the short term. Yet the Eastern enlargement has clearly contributed to the future of Europe and enhanced Europe’s regional globality. Even if the European integration will not lead quickly to a more deeply integrated community with new institutional and governance forms, the Eastern enlargement has already strengthened common democratic values and the sense of a regional European identity.

Ability of the EU to Formulate its Foreign Policy

41 On the global scene, the end of the bipolar system has been accompanied by the growing international aspirations of the European Union and its will to participate in the creation and shaping of the international order. The Union’s concept of a Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) has become crucial in this regard. However, its real effectiveness was problematic in the EU of 15 and finding a foreign policy consensus has become even more difficult in the EU of 27.[27] The foreign policy of the European Union has always been a reflection of the game of interests among its members, including the interests of the leading ones. This does not mean that the EU cannot conduct a coordinated foreign policy. The cooperation among the member states in the foreign policy area is complex and consensual decisions are more difficult to reach than those that deal with economic or social problems of the European integration.
The logic of the integration processes in Europe and the corresponding growth of Europe’s regional globality seem to indicate that an economically integrated Community with expanding mechanisms for political cooperation must eventually result in some form of coordinated foreign policy. The EU’s road to a single foreign and security policy is likely to be long and difficult. Besides, facing the historical shift of the center of world affairs from Europe to the U.S. and increasingly Asia, the European Union has no choice but to advance its globality and develop all the common mechanisms necessary for playing an effective global role.

Together with the collapse of the USSR, the European Union has had to answer at least two fundamental international questions: the question of its relations with the U.S. (the only superpower in the post-bipolar world) and with Russia, the successor of the Soviet Union. Growing aspirations of the EU-15 to play a more independent international role reflected the will of several leading old members to pursue a more independent policy towards Washington and develop EU’s own security policy – in the form of the European Security and Defense Policy established in 1999 as a part of the CFSP.[28] The members favoring stronger links with the U.S. have not supported this, and the enlargement to the East has changed the previous balance of power in the European Union and strengthened the camp favoring stronger Euro-Atlantic cooperation.

The future shape of the EU’s politico-military ties with Washington was a subject of heated debates in the EU, including a fierce dispute over the U.S. operation in Iraq. The rift among the EU members was deep and even after attempts to mitigate the internal divisions, the European Union still remains divided about the form, scope, and intensity of its ties with Washington. However, it is difficult to support the thesis that the Eastern enlargement itself has been the main source of tensions between the pro-Atlantic and pro-European camps in the European Union. The divisions of opinion in the EU clearly existed before the new members’ accession. Therefore, the argument that the new members are playing the role of American “Trojan Horse” in Europe is not justified.

The geopolitical East-Central European interest in close ties with the United States has its roots in the long perception of the U.S. as a symbol of freedom and democracy. The relatively numerous Polish communities in the United States have played a role too, but most important is the feeling that only NATO and the U.S. can guarantee and protect the security of Poland and other countries in the region. The potential dangers of a neo-imperial Russia loom large. The prevailing impression is that a strong European Security and Defense Policy will remain a long-term political project and that emphasis on national interests by the strongest members of the EU will lessen commitment to the transnational goals of the community. Thus, the new members concluded that close ties with the USA are vital and that NATO guarantees the security of the region.

It is worth mentioning, however, that after the integration with the European Union, the East-Central European pro-Americanism has been successively tempered by a rising level of European self-identification in the region together with a growing support for European integration and interest in European affairs. From the Polish or East-Central European perspective, NATO and the U.S. are still the pillars of security in the region, but the membership in the EU has raised the level of confidence in the European community and its abilities. This pro-European gain has been accompanied by a slow, but noticeable disappointment with U.S. policy towards East-Central Europe.[29]

Differences of opinions among the member states have been typical also in the European Union’s relations with Russia. Graham Timmins has defined it as the “two level game” in which the leading countries of the EU have called for a common and coordinated policy on Russia, while pursuing independent bilateral relations with Moscow according to their national interests.[30] The new East-Central European members in the EU have usually been more cautious and critical than the old countries of the EU as regards the internal situation in Russia and its foreign policy. They stress the limited results of democratic reforms in Russia, European dependence on Russian oil and gas supplies, as well as on Moscow’s policy of promoting its interests by dividing the members of the European Union by offering profitable bilateral cooperation to selected countries of the EU.[31] So far, the ability of the new members to influence the Union’s policy towards Moscow has been limited.

The “two level game” and lack of a common attitude towards Russia illustrate the broader constraints in the foreign policy of the European Union. Further lengthy internal debates over the goals, priorities, and efficiency of the Union’s external relations are necessary. The Lisbon Treaty has provided a small step forward by coordinating EU foreign policy in one hand. The High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy merges the two previous institutions responsible for external relations (High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy and External Relations Commissioner), but again, this can only be a step on the longer road toward a cohesive foreign EU policy.
Yet despite the problems with the coordination of the European Union’s foreign policy and the political ambitions of some leading countries, it is clear that only the Union as a whole, with its common economic and political potential, is able to play a serious role on the global scene. EU foreign policy will always be the result of internal political games, yet the first experience after the Eastern enlargement has confirmed that a common position trumps the single voices, even those of the strongest countries of the EU. Thus, the principle of solidarity among the members of the European Union remains a core value of the Community. It requires the continuing integration of Europe and the development of a common European foreign policy, which can only advance the regional globality of Europe.

Conclusions

The impact of the Eastern enlargement on internal and external relations of the European Union has not been as “catastrophic” as it was sometimes feared before enlargement. The increase from 15 to 27 member countries, as well as the considerable economic asymmetry between old and new member countries, have created some management problems for the EU, but they have not paralyzed it.

The Lisbon Treaty, which the enlarged European Union has finally been able to ratify, is bound to improve the decision-making mechanisms in the EU as well as the coherence of its internal and external policies. However, the Treaty is only a first move in a direction that has not yet been precisely defined. The European Union must now focus on strengthening its current institutions and instruments. The new members have quickly learned the Union’s rules and procedures and to put political compromise before majority of votes. Thus, the consensus principle has retained its core value in the EU.

The social consequences of the enlargement have appeared less serious than feared in the Western part of Europe. The immigration of workers from the new member states has been limited. Yet in the current economic crisis, even the limited inflow of foreign workers remains a sensitive social point for many of the old members. The Eastern enlargement has contributed to debates in the European Union about the financial perspectives of the Community and the reluctance of the biggest net-contributors to cover additional costs of further EU activities.

Although the Eastern enlargement has not caused the European Union to fail, it will take a long time to optimize cooperation among the 27 member states. With the ratification of the Lisbon treaty, the EU has avoided the dangerous debate over the concept of a “multi-speed” integration, which would allow the most developed members to tighten their cooperation irrespective of the will of others to join in. This concept would break European solidarity, concentrate the cooperation among the leading states of the EU, and marginalize the new members as the weakest countries of the Union.

Considering the European integration within the framework of globality, the ongoing integration seems to be a clear manifestation of growing regional globalization. The case of Europe exemplifies the elimination of barriers and establishment of new governance practices in line with advanced regional globality. The value of the integration process is the prospect of a new regional identity based on reconciliation among the European nations. The Eastern enlargement has opened the way to a real unification of the continent. After the experience of two World Wars on its territory, it behooves Europe not to lose this chance. Thus, solidarity between the old and new members remains the key to a successful future of the Community. Europe’s relatively high regional globality invites comparison with other world regional globalities.

Finally, the Eastern enlargement has improved the international position of the EU. Only an integrated European Union equipped with effective decision-making mechanisms and a cohesive foreign policy can play a great international role. However, the road towards a strong foreign policy for the EU is still long and difficult, as illustrated by the rifts in the members’ opinions about Europe’s best position vis-à-vis the United States and Russia.

Notes


[2] The Eastern enlargement comprised Poland, Hungary, Czech Republic, Slovakia,
Slovenia, Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia as the East-Central European countries that joined the EU in 2004. Two other countries of the broader East-Central Europe – Romania and Bulgaria joined the EU in 2007. The enlargement of 2004 also comprised Malta and Cyprus as the countries of Southern Europe.


[20] See for example “New EU economic plan to disadvantage of Poland?” thenews.pl, 03.03.2010 (accessed 15 March 2010).

[21] The European Constitution changed the rules of Qualified Majority Voting focusing not on the previous number of votes allocated to each country but on the
“double majority” of countries representing the majority of the population in the EU and, in fact, stressing the role of the strongest members of the EU.

[22] Piotr Maciej Kaczynski, “The Fifth Enlargement of the EU, Five Years On: The Case of Poland and the Czech Republic,” op. cit, p. 3-4, 15.


[27] For further details about the CFSP, see “Foreign and Security Policy.” Europa: Gateway to the European Union (accessed 15 March 2010).


[29] See the initial Polish and Czech reactions to president Obama’s decision to change the concept of the anti-missile shield project, for example “Mixed Reactions in Europe to the U.S. Missile Defense U-Turn.” Time.com (accessed 15 March 2010).
