



## Poland's Power and Influence in the EU

Nathaniel Copsey was awarded £22,464 by the ESRC in 2007 for a project running from 2008–10 on the capacity of Member States to exercise power and influence in the EU by uploading their national policy preferences to the EU agenda. This project looks at the case of Poland and its eastern policy.

Poland is the largest of the Member States that joined the European Union in the enlargements of 2004 and 2007. With half the total population and economic weight of the accession countries, in some respects the eastern enlargement of the EU was a 'Polish enlargement'. The expansion of the Union from a predominantly west European club of 15 Member States to a pan-European Union of 27 diverse Member States was expected to have a major impact on the governance, politics, policies and overall agenda of the EU – a core aim of CEELBAS is to investigate these changes. As the largest of the new Member States, much of the pressure for change was expected to come from Poland. In consequence, the time is ripe for an in-depth consideration of the European aspect of Poland's foreign policy, with a particular emphasis on Poland's impact on the making of EU policy towards its eastern neighbours – identified as a major priority on the Polish government's EU agenda.

### Furthering the Agenda: Research on Poland's Power and Influence in the EU

Whether the European Union will 'widen' or 'deepen' over the next 10 to 15 years is a question of vital significance to scholars and practitioners working on European integration. This project focuses on two under-researched issues that stand out as particularly important to determining the future direction of the EU. First, will the EU be 'wider', specifically what kind of relationship will the EU have with its eastern neighbours: Russia, Ukraine and Belarus – what could be called 'EU Eastern Policy'. Second, will the EU be 'deeper', that is how will the relationship between the EU and its Member States evolve in the medium to long term. The project aims to shed light on both of these crucial areas by looking at the impact of a new Member State on the making of policy towards the EU's eastern neighbours. It will explore the proposition that the enlargement of the EU has had a profound effect on the EU's relations with its new neighbours. The case of Poland has been chosen since of all the new Member States, it has the greatest ambitions in shaping policy towards the Union's eastern neighbours. The interaction between the EU and its Member States in the formation of policy towards the eastern neighbours cannot be assessed purely through a case study of Poland's impact. Consequently, the proposed research will not be carried out in isolation, but also feed into research on the impact of the six largest Member States (the UK, Germany, France, Italy, Spain and Poland) on the making of policy towards the eastern neighbours.

The project seeks to investigate the influence of Poland on the European Union's policy towards its eastern neighbours, and, in doing so, to contribute to the wider scholarly debates on both how policy towards Russia, Ukraine and Belarus is made, and also the broader question of the evolving nature of the relationship between the European Union and its Member States. The focus of much of the academic research on the EU and its Member States has been on the issue of Europeanization, both as a concept and as a process (Olsen, 2002). Despite all the attention that has been given to Europeanization, the kind of research that has usually been carried out has been in the form of outside-in studies, that is the downward impact of the EU on its Member States, with less attention being paid to the study of the inside-out relationship, that is the influence of a given Member State on the European Union. Leading scholars of the relationship between the EU and its Member States have identified this deficiency as the most pressing question for future research on the governance of the European Union (Bulmer and Lesquesne, 2002). This project aims to take up this challenge and assess the impact of Poland on the European Union. In doing so, it adopts an intergovernmental approach, looking at the capacity of the national government of Poland to exercise power and influence within the European Union. Power is understood in a one- and two-dimensional sense (Lukes, 2005), that is in a one-dimensional sense, as impact on decision-making in the EU 'on issues where there is an observable conflict of (subjective) interests', together with the two-dimensional sense of power, that is the ability to exercise influence, persuasion and coercion to secure a particular outcome. The third dimension of power (Lukes, 2005) (shaping subconscious preferences norms and values) will not be employed since Poland has been a Member State for too short a period of time to assess any meaningful change – moreover, this third dimension of power is very difficult to assess empirically. Liberal intergovernmentalist (LI) theory (see Moravcsik, 1991, 1993, 1998, p. 5) suggests that the outcome of decisions on the road to European integration can best be explained through the relative power of Member States and the intensity of their preference for a particular policy choice. Moravcsik argues that two kinds of factors are crucial in understanding how policy preferences are formed in a given Member State: economic and geopolitical, of which Moravcsik believes the former to be the most important. Some scholars have questioned whether LI can explain European integration entirely, arguing that Moravcsik 'does not capture the complexity of preference formation' (Kassim and Dimitrakopoulos, 2004), although conceding that LI is the 'most ambitious of the attempts to explain ... the dynamics of the [European integration] process' (p. 243). The



proposed research will assess empirically the assumptions of LI in order to judge its usefulness for understanding: (a) preference formation in Poland, and, following on from this, (b) how Poland exercises power and influence in the European Union.

An additional logic for the choice of policy field is that a project that sought to measure Polish preference formation and the influence of Poland on every aspect of EU policy-making would be very difficult to operationalise. Therefore this study narrows the focus down to a more manageable sub-field, and concentrates on the area of policy-making that arguably is of greatest strategic interest to Poland: relations with the EU's eastern neighbours.<sup>[1]</sup> This choice of topic is further justified by the fact that this was seen by the Polish government prior to enlargement as the field where Poland could have the greatest impact. This does not mean that relations with its eastern neighbours are the sole concern of Poland within the European Union. Poland's principal interests within the EU centre mainly on: the acquisition and absorption of its fair share of regional and structural funds; the maintenance of the common agriculture policy (CAP), particularly the prevention of the renationalisation of direct income payment to farmers; as well as the promotion of Poland's own interests in the east, both with regard to the EU-Russia relationship and through the European Neighbourhood Policy.<sup>[2]</sup> The spotlight in this study is cast on the third of these areas for the following reasons. First, regional and structural funds are of far too great an interest to almost every Member State of the Union for Poland to have much of an individual impact in this field. This is also true for the CAP. However, in the field of relations with its eastern Poland has a special interest, and to an extent (in the opinion of the Polish government at least) brings a special expertise to the Union in dealing with the new neighbours in the East, particularly Ukraine, as a result of the close bilateral partnership it has formed with that country in the form of its much-vaunted 'Strategic Partnership' (Wolczuk and Wolczuk, 2002). With the exception of some think tank papers on the subject of Polish foreign policy (e.g. Smolar, 2006; Longhurst and Zaborowski, 2007), no detailed and thorough academic research has been carried out in the field of Poland's influence on the EU's relations with its eastern neighbours since 2004. This project will rectify that deficiency and stimulate other scholars' interest in this field, which as indicated above is of critical importance to understanding the future trajectory of the European integration project as a whole.

A brief review of Poland's policy objectives with regard to Ukraine, Belarus and Russia is essential. On Ukraine, during the first year of Poland's membership of the EU, the Orange Revolution provided an opportunity for President Kwaśniewski to share his considerable expertise on, and inside knowledge of, Ukraine with Javier Solana – thus demonstrating Poland's capacity to influence the EU in this field (Copsey, 2005). Following the liberal intergovernmentalist approach, Poland is likely to exercise the greatest influence in the EU on those policy areas where its preferences are the most intense (Moravcsik, 1997, 1998). Therefore, if Poland to exercise any particular power and influence over one policy domain in the European Union, it is likely to be in the field of relations with the EU's eastern neighbours. Yet if the headline foreign policy goal for Poland in relations with Ukraine is to secure a membership *perspective* for Ukraine, then it has clearly not only not achieved this goal, but, moreover, is extremely unlikely to do so in the medium term.

Poland's expertise in relations with the EU's eastern neighbours, and desire to influence policy towards them, extends to two more states: Belarus and Russia. On Belarus, Poland – together with the Baltic states – has consistently argued for a policy of deeper engagement with civil society in that country, and more controversially, for dialogue with Belarus's authoritarian President Lukashenka. Nonetheless, the EU has begun to talk to more junior officials in the Belarusian administration (Interview, RELEX, 25 May 2007), although whether this was as a result of Polish mediation remains to be investigated. Thus, if we take Poland's headline policy goal on Belarus to be engagement with its government on liberalisation and democratisation, it has not succeeded in this objective. The EU's relations with Russia are a more complicated field for Polish diplomacy in the Union, since all the larger Member States with foreign policy aspirations – France, the UK and Germany – have their own agendas with regard to that country. Thus Poland's claims to expertise in relations with Russia are not necessarily heeded. However, rather interestingly, if the Polish headline policy goal on Russia is understood to be achieving 'protection' from Russia through solidarity with the other Member States, it appears to have achieved that goal through a combination of exercising its veto on talks about the replacement for the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) with Russia, as well as winning the support of the German Presidency of the Union in its dispute over meat exports to Russia.

Following on from this brief analysis of Poland's headline goals in the field of the EU's relations with its eastern neighbours, it appears that Polish policy has been largely unsuccessful where it has tried to upload new foreign policy initiatives (a membership perspective for Ukraine, engagement with the Belarussian government) onto the EU agenda. Further, the tentative evidence of Poland's influence on policy towards Russia appears to show that Poland only exercises negative influence on policy towards Russia (i.e. the veto on the replacement for the PCA) because the other Member States appear to have entrenched national interests that are too far removed from the Polish perspective. If this is to be explicable through LI theory, then Poland either does not have sufficiently strong policy preferences in the field of relations towards the eastern neighbours, or its political weight in Brussels is simply not strong enough. The latter of these two appears to be the key factor.



Before turning to the hypotheses that spring from the above analysis that this project will test, it is worth noting that policy towards the EU's eastern neighbours is an unusual domain that is neither foreign policy nor enlargement, nor can the relationship be subsumed under the heading of neighbourhood policy since Russia does not participate in this. Whilst the role of the Commission in formulating policy in this area has been studied (Kelley, 2006), as has the functioning of the policy, (Cremona, 2005; Cremona and Hillion, 2006) the role of the Member States has been subject to less academic scrutiny. Decisions on relations with the eastern neighbours are subject to unanimity within the EU, which has a serious effect on the way in which power and influence may be exercised in this field. That said, the hypotheses the project will investigate are as follows:

### **Preference Formation<sup>[3]</sup>**

H1: *Economic factors are more important than geopolitical factors in the formation of Polish policy preferences in the EU.*

H2: *The influence of Polish business on policy towards to the eastern neighbours is high, and the policy preferences of the Polish government in Brussels reflect this.*

### **Exercising Power and Influence**

H3: *Poland's policy preferences towards Russia are incompatible with those of large Member States with heavy political weight (e.g. France and Germany), therefore its capacity for uploading policy preferences is low.*

H4: *The greater the level of threats and coercion exercised by the Polish government in relations with Russia (e.g. the veto of talks on a new PCA), the greater its level of power and influence will be, since this is a policy area that is subject to unanimity.*

H5: *Given that Poland has a relatively weak political weighting in the EU, the more Poland takes into account the preference intensity of the other Member States in the field of relations with the eastern neighbours (e.g. French opposition to a membership perspective for Ukraine), the greater its level of power and influence will be.*

If you are working on a similar project or are interested in my findings, I would like to hear from you: [n.copsey@aston.ac.uk](mailto:n.copsey@aston.ac.uk)

### **Furthering the Agenda: Events**

[1] Cited as the second priority of the Polish government in the EU after 'International Conference' (i.e. a Europe of nation-states). See: «<http://www.msz.gov.pl>» and «[http://www.poland.gov.pl/The\\_priorities\\_of\\_Polish\\_European\\_policy\\_459.html](http://www.poland.gov.pl/The_priorities_of_Polish_European_policy_459.html)».

[2] *Ibid.*

[3] Derived from Moravcsik (1991, 1993, 1998).