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ALLIED CONSTRUCTIVE CRITICISM?

THE EU AND CRISES IN ITS IMMEDIATE NEIGHBOURHOOD FROM THE AMERICAN PERSPECTIVE

ABSTRACT

The main aim of the article is to answer the question of how the involvement of the European Union (EU) in its immediate neighbourhood, and in particular the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), is perceived by American foreign policy experts. What aspects of EU activities are assessed positively, and which are the most controversial? Particular attention is paid to the key challenges that the EU has been facing in recent years – the Ukrainian crisis and the political consequences of the so-called Arab Spring of 2011, with a special focus on migration pressure in the Mediterranean region. The analysis focuses how EU roles are perceived by American political actors. As the most important international actor, the views of the United States regarding the EU's activity have a significant influence on what the EU does. The study is based on interviews conducted with experts and political actors of American foreign policy in 2015 and 2016.

Keywords: European Union, European Neighbourhood Policy, foreign policy, United States of America

INTRODUCTION¹

In 2013, as a result of the refusal of the president of Ukraine, Viktor Yanukovich, to sign the Association Agreement between Ukraine and the European Union (EU), mass protests broke out in Kiev, initiating one of the most serious crises in Europe since the end of the Cold War. During these events, in an overheard telephone conversation with the US Ambassador in Kiev that was posted online, a high-ranking representative of the US Department of State expressed her frustration at the EU's inability to react to this crisis by stating quite literally: "f... the EU".² This statement in a private (albeit eavesdropped and publicized) conversation has become a symbol of misunderstandings between Brussels and Washington in the face of the dramatic political challenges on the European continent in recent years. The Ukraine crisis – which brought about perhaps the most profound changes to security relations on the continent – was not the only one. The EU had been troubled by a financial crisis for years, and the institutional difficulties were further deepened by the migration crisis of 2015. This was caused, among others, by the tensions and disturbances initiated by the wave of unrest in North Africa and the Middle East in 2011 known as the Arab Spring. Finally, the Brexit crisis followed the 2016 referendum in the United Kingdom.

The main aim of the article is to analyse the perception of the EU's activities and the reactions of external political actors to crises in its immediate neighbourhood. I employ role theory in order to grasp the challenges to the actorness of the EU in the dynamically changing international relations in Europe and in the world. This theoretical perspective makes it possible to grasp the dynamics of an international actor's activities by analysing the role conceptions that a given actor intends to play in international relations, their interactions with others, as well as the expectations of, perceptions of, and contestation by other international actors.³

The EU aspires to play an important role in international relations. The bloc's presence on the international arena developed after the end of the Cold War, although even from the 1970s the main meta-role of the EC/EU in the world as a civil power began to crystallise.⁴ As the position and tools of the EU as an international actor grew, these

¹ The research on which the analysis presented in this article is based was carried out within the framework of the project *In Search of External Legitimization. The European Union's Enlargement and the European Neighborhood Policy from an American perspective*, conducted at the Centre for European and Mediterranean Studies, New York University (2015-2016) and financed by Kościuszko Foundation. Special thanks also go to Dr Karol Chwiedczuk-Szulc for his constructive comments on the article.

² Ukraine crisis: Transcript of leaked Nuland-Pyatt call, *BBC*, 14 February 2014, at <<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-26079957>>. For more on context of that conversation see S. Glaser, "The Hairs Really Went Up on the Back of Our Necks", *Global Politico*, 5 February 2018, at <<https://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2018/02/05/global-politico-victoria-nuland-obama-216937>>.

³ *Role Theory in International Relations. Approaches and Analyses*, S. Harnisch, C. Frank, H. Maull (eds.), London–New York 2011.

⁴ F. Duchêne, "Europe's Role in World Politics", in Richard Mayne (ed.), *Europe Tomorrow: Sixteen Europeans Look Ahead*, London 1972.

generalized roles were transformed, and context-specific roles were also developed.⁵ This article focuses on analysing the perception of EU roles in the context of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), initiated in 2003 and commenced in 2004. This policy is addressed to the countries of the EU's closest southern and eastern neighbourhood and it focuses on enabling countries with an interest to access broad cooperation with the EU tailored to their individual needs.⁶

The article proceeds as follows: I will first discuss theoretical foundations based on role theory in international relations and discuss the generalized and specific roles of the EU. Afterwards, I will briefly present the basis of the transatlantic cooperation. In the empirical part, the contestation of the EU's roles by American political actors will be discussed.

ROLE THEORY AND EU ACTIVITIES IN THE NEIGHBOURHOOD

Role theory is part of the tradition of constructivist analysis of international relations, and it focuses on capturing the interactive and performative aspect of actors' activities in the international arena.⁷ Based on Khalevi Holsti's key work,⁸ this approach assumes that national actors, as well as transnational actors such as the EU, define and conceptualise their roles in international relations based on historical and social considerations, collective memory and national identities. The role conceptualisations are then played out in international relations, and other international actors may contest them, with the result that the role may be transformed.⁹ In this article, special attention will be paid to the aspect of role theory focusing on role contestation: in this case, contestation by an ally. According to researchers, role conceptualisations are also contested internally by political actors. This aspect, however, will not be taken into account in the analysis presented here.¹⁰

⁵ R. Bengtsson, O. Elgström, "Reconsidering the European Union's Roles in International Relations: Self-conceptions, Expectations, and Performance", in S. Harnisch, C. Frank, H. Maull (eds.) *Role Theory in International Relations. Approaches and analyses*, London–New York 2011.

⁶ For more, see D. Bouris, T. Schumacher (eds.), *The Revised European Neighbourhood Policy. Continuity and Change in EU Foreign Policy*, London 2016; S. Gstöhl (ed.), *The European Neighbourhood Policy in a Comparative Perspective: Models, Challenges, Lessons*, Abingdon 2016; E. Korosteleva, *The European Union and its Eastern Neighbours: Towards a More Ambitious Partnership?* London 2012; R. Whitman, S. Wolff (eds.), *The European Neighbourhood Policy in Perspective. Context, Implementation and Impact*, Basingstoke–New York 2011.

⁷ See more in J. Zając, *Role Unii Europejskiej w regionie Afryki Północnej i Bliskiego Wschodu*, Warszawa 2010.

⁸ K. J. Holsti, "National Role Conceptions in the Study of Foreign Policy", *International Studies Quarterly*, vol. 14, no. 3 (1970), pp. 233–309.

⁹ C. Cantir, J. Kaarbo (eds.), *Domestic Role Contestation, Foreign Policy, and International Relations*, London–New York 2016.

¹⁰ S. Harnisch, "Full-spectrum Role-taking: A Two-level Role Theoretical Model", Paper prepared for the Annual Conference of the International Studies Association, Toronto, 26–30 March 2014.

As the EU's competences and position on the international scene have grown, researchers have initiated analysis of its role in international relations. There are many classifications of roles in the literature, and two types of roles are important for this article.¹¹ The first are the actors' meta-role conceptions, otherwise known as general roles, containing a comprehensive vision of the foreign policy objectives that an actor, on the basis of his resources, adopts and plays. The second category consists of sub-roles, which are context-specific for particular policies or geographical regions.¹² Surveys of the roles adopted by the EU show that both categories exist and are characterised in different ways.¹³ Studies on EU roles also underline that when compared to national roles they are less rooted in social relations and less legitimised than national roles, as well as more general in their construction.¹⁴ As Nicole König argues *national role conceptions demonstrate a higher degree of social embeddedness and legitimacy than the more removed European ones*.¹⁵ Secondly, the EU roles merge with national role conceptions and then the roles that are consistent with national roles in general and the issues of perceptions of threats, roles in alliances, etc. in particular become reaffirmed¹⁶. At the European level, roles are mainly *European decision makers perceptions of the responsibilities, long-term functions, and performance of the Union as an international security actor*.¹⁷

There is a debate in the literature regarding the nature of the EU's general roles in international relations. One of the most prominent of these roles – the EU as a civilian power – derives from the concept of non-military force, characterised by an emphasis on the importance of economic and diplomatic instruments in international activities and refraining from military means.¹⁸ Rikard Bengtsson and Ole Elgström argue that the EU's main role is that of a normative power, referring to the concept of the EU as a normative actor aiming at promoting universal values.¹⁹ A normative power is *an actor that influences the thinking of other actors in the international system, rather than acting through coercive means to achieve its goals. The normative great power seeks to pro-*

¹¹ J. Zając, *Rola Unii Europejskiej w regionie Afryki...*

¹² Z. Pietraś, *Pojęcie i klasyfikacja ról międzynarodowych*, Lublin 1989.

¹³ R. Bengtsson, O. Elgström, "Reconsidering the European Union's Roles...", p. 115.

¹⁴ N. König, "The EU in the Libyan Crisis", in C. Cantir, J. Kaarbo (eds.), *Domestic Role Contestation, Foreign Policy, and International Relations*, London–New York 2016.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 158.

¹⁶ L. Chappell, *Germany, Poland and the Common Security and Defence Policy*, Basingstoke–New York 2012.

¹⁷ N. König, "The EU in..." , p. 160.

¹⁸ H. Sjursen, "The EU as a Normative Power: How Can This Be?", *Journal of European Public Policy*, vol. 13, no. 2 (2006), pp. 169-181; M. Telò, *Europe: A Civilian Power? European Union, Global Governance, World Order*, Basingstoke 2005.

¹⁹ R. Bengtsson, O. Elgström, "Reconsidering the European Union's Roles...", p. 115. For more on normative power Europe, see I. Manners, "Normative Power Europe: A Contradiction in Terms?", *Journal of Common Market Studies*, vol. 40, no. 2 (2002); I. Manners, "Assessing the Decennial, Reassessing the Global: Understanding European Union Normative Power in Global Politics", *Cooperation and Conflict*, vol. 48, no. 2 (2013), pp. 304-329.

mote values that are deemed desirable by the actor, and to gain acceptance for these from other parties.²⁰ Finally, in recent years, as the EU has already developed the elements of military capabilities, researchers have proposed conceptualising the role of the EU as a comprehensive power.²¹ In this case, the bloc would use all available instruments to influence other actors, including coercive measures and military force. Other proposals have also been made for treating the EU as a structural power, yet such concepts have not gained much popularity.²²

Researchers are also focusing on identifying more detailed, context-specific roles undertaken by the EU. Taylan Özgür Kaya has identified seven such roles in his analysis of the EU discourse, with the EU as: a power of good; a power of international peace, security and stability; a power of development; a promoter of values and norms; a promoter of effective multilateralism; a UN partner; and a builder of effective partnerships with key actors.²³ A particularly important role for the EU is to contribute to stability, security and economic growth in its immediate neighbourhood, as highlighted in the 2003 European Security Strategy and its successor to the 2016 EU Global Strategy.²⁴ In his analysis of the strategic frameworks used for neighbouring regions, Christian Nitoiu reveals that the main role entails activities for maintaining security in neighbouring regions.²⁵ In her in-depth analysis of the EU's specific roles in the Mediterranean region, Justyna Zajac lists the following roles: as an active player in the resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict; a promoter of confidence-building measures, partnership, security and disarmament; a promoter of economic reforms and sustainable development; and a promoter of democratic values, human rights and intercultural dialogue.²⁶ These roles can be seen as the main specific roles that the EU declares as priorities in regions covered by the ENP, and if modified to fit into the broader ENP framework would entail three main role conceptions: the EU as a pacifier focusing on conflict management, promotion of security and cooperation; the EU as prosperity builder focusing on economic cooperation, reforms and overall development; and finally the EU as promoter of democratization focusing on the promotion of democracy and support for civil society and fundamental values. Such categorisation will serve as a starting point in this article, and the analysis section will present how the EU's role conceptions in its immediate neighbourhood – both in the Mediterranean region and in Eastern Europe – are perceived and challenged in the transatlantic context.

²⁰ R. Bengtsson, O. Elgström, "Reconsidering the European Union's Roles...", p. 115.

²¹ J. König, "The EU in..."

²² S. Keukeleire, J. MacNaughtan, *The Foreign Policy of the European Union*, London–New York 2008.

²³ T. Kaya, "Identifying the EU's Foreign and Security Policy Roles", *Review of International Law and Politics* (Uluslararası Hukuk ve Politika), no. 17 (2009), p. 109.

²⁴ N. Tocci, *Framing the EU Global Strategy. A Stronger Europe in a Fragile World*, London–New York 2017.

²⁵ C. Nitoiu, "Framing the EU's policy towards the Neighbourhood: The Strategic Approach of the Seventh European Parliament (2009-2014)", *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, 2016.

²⁶ J. Zajac, *Role Unii Europejskiej w regionie Afryki...*

TRANSATLANTIC COMPETITIVE COOPERATION

Transatlantic relations are the cornerstone of the security of the liberal international order, although cooperation between the US and the EU has not always been smooth.²⁷ Michael Smith and Rebecca Steffenson characterise transatlantic relations as competitive cooperation, where the central element is, on the one hand, the interdependence of two close allies and trade partners, and on the other hand, the rivalry of these actors in world politics.²⁸ The core element of transatlantic relations is economic cooperation, which also develops positively in periods of political turbulence between the EU and the USA.²⁹ In the political dimension, since the end of World War II, the USA has been involved in stabilising and providing economic support for the countries of Western Europe, and a close alliance in the international arena has persisted during and after the Cold War.³⁰ Transatlantic cooperation was also a key element of NATO's allied policy. Following the end of the Cold War and the development of the EU Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), transatlantic cooperation in the field of international relations took on new forms and had to face new challenges. On the one hand, the US maintains close, strategic relations with EU member states (especially the UK, but also for instance Germany and Poland), and on the other hand, it cooperates with EU institutions involved in CFSP and CSDP. As a result, *although in many respects the EU's CFSP and CSDP have been developed because of the USA – as a means of filling the gaps in US policies, or responding to the challenges of successive US administrations, especially during the 1990s and 2000s – they are also severely constrained by the dominance if not hegemony of the 'only superpower' when the questions are those of crisis and conflict, and of the commitment of real resources to the conduct of war or near-war operations.*³¹ Similarly, at the level of bilateral relations, EU member states have different motivations and degrees of involvement in transatlantic relations. This was clearly visible, for example, in the division into countries supporting the US invasion plans in Iraq in 2003 and those that were opposed to it.

In the past decade, however, especially during Barack Obama's administration, US foreign policy has focused on strengthening the participation of Europeans, especially the EU,

²⁷ M. Riddervold, A. Newsome, "Transatlantic Relations in Times of Uncertainty: Crises and EU-US Relations", *Journal of European Integration*, vol. 40, no. 5 (2018), pp. 505-521; J. McCormick, "American Exceptionalism: The Implications for Europe", *Journal of Transatlantic Studies*, vol. 3, no. 2 (2005), pp. 199-215; R. Kagan, *Of Paradise and Power: America and Europe in the New World Order*, New York 2004.

²⁸ M. Smith, R. Steffenson, "The European Union and the USA", in C. Hill, M. Smith, S. Vanhoonacker (eds.), *International Relations and the European Union*, Oxford 2017, p. 389.

²⁹ D.S. Hamilton, J.P. Quinlan, *The Transatlantic Economy 2017. Annual Survey of Jobs, Trade and Investment between the United States and Europe*, Washington 2017.

³⁰ For more, see D. Milczarek, "Stosunki transatlantyckie w sferze polityki zagranicznej i bezpieczeństwa? Polski punkt widzenia", *Studia Europejskie*, no. 2 (2008), pp. 31-56.

³¹ M. Smith, R. Steffenson, "The European Union...", p. 396.

in defending the liberal international order.³² This is part of a trend that has been evident for years in American foreign policy, moving away from the Cold War focus on Europe towards a policy aimed at solving global problems and leaving, in particular, security issues in the hands of those concerned.³³ As Heather Conley said: Americans are not necessarily “terribly” interested in Europe.³⁴ Europeans, especially in the central and eastern parts of the continent, have been concerned about the concept of a shift towards the Pacific (pivot to the Pacific Rim).³⁵ However, this shift mostly results from changes in the international system and the contestation of the international order by such actors as Russia and China. On the other hand, these changes in the international system have brought the US and the EU closer together as defenders of the liberal international order. This tendency, however, has become more problematic under the Donald Trump administration.³⁶

Transatlantic relations have been institutionalised at many levels for decades, from American-European summits to working group meetings constructing a system of ‘transatlantic governance’.³⁷ The key institutions were formed by the Transatlantic Declaration of 1990, the New Transatlantic Agenda of 1995, and the Transatlantic Economic Partnership signed in 1998 and revitalised in 2007. As a result, transatlantic relations are based on a dense institutional network connecting federal authorities in the USA with EU institutions in Brussels. The transatlantic relations are also frequented by non-governmental actors, especially in the area of economic cooperation, forming a system of ‘intense transgovernmentalism’³⁸. In addition, the US has a broad diplomatic network in EU member states, partly constituting an alternative source of knowledge and influence on EU policies through national channels.

METHODOLOGICAL REMARKS

This article provides an analysis of the perception of American political actors that is grounded in role theory, in which the perceptions of decision makers and political

³² J. Goldberg, “The Obama Doctrine”, *The Atlantic*, 17 March 2016, at <<https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2016/04/the-obama-doctrine/471525/>>.

³³ For more see J. Kiwerska, *Rozchodzenie się dwóch światów? Stany Zjednoczone i relacje transatlantyckie 1989–2012*, Poznań 2013; J. Kiwerska, “Europa w strategii Baracka Obamy (2009–2012)”, *Instytut Zachodni Policy Papers*, no. 10 (2013).

³⁴ H. Conley, “What’s Obama’s European Legacy?”, *Politico*, 24 April 2016, at <<http://www.politico.eu/article/what-will-define-barack-obamas-european-legacy-eu-us/>>, 18 September 2017.

³⁵ See H. Clinton, “America’s Pacific Century”, *Foreign Policy*, 11 October 2011, at <<http://foreignpolicy.com/2011/10/11/americas-pacific-century/>>.

³⁶ G.J. Ikenberry, “The End of Liberal International Order?”, *International Affairs*, vol. 94, no. 1 (2018), pp. 7–23; M. Smith, “The EU, the US and the Crisis of Contemporary Multilateralism”, *Journal of European Integration*, vol. 40, no. 5 (2018), pp. 539–553.

³⁷ M. Smith, “The EU, the US and the Crisis of Contemporary Multilateralism”, *Journal of European Integration*, vol. 40, no. 5 (2018), pp. 539–553.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 546.

actors allow the researcher to reconstruct the conceptualisation of roles as well as their contestation. Perceptions are studied in the scholarly literature from a variety of perspectives. The article relies on the definition used in international relations, where perceptions are understood as *a constellation of features that cluster together in a meaningful way [...], focussing on the subjective notions of 'self' and 'other' that mutually shape images and expectations of actors, influenced by various factors (e.g. values, culture, personal experiences)*.³⁹ Scholars working with the paradigm of role theory use a variety of methods, such as analysis of parliamentary discourse, official documents, the media, and interviews with key actors. I selected the interview method because it best serves the purpose of capturing the external contestation and perceptions of an international actor and its roles.⁴⁰ The main objective of the method was to determine which elements of the EU's roles in the immediate neighbourhood were contested and what image of the EU as an actor in the immediate neighbourhood was reproduced. What aspects of the EU's actions were assessed positively, and which were the most controversial?

The research material consists of 20 interviews conducted with American experts specialising in EU foreign policy and with an interest in the immediate EU neighbourhood, working in recognised American think tanks dealing with foreign policy issues or academic centres. Think tanks play an important role in the US political system and have a significant impact on the conceptualization of foreign policy in the country, in particular because of the so-called "revolving door mechanism", whereby administration employees (in this case involved in foreign policy) often work in think tanks and then return to the administration.⁴¹ Respondents came from think tanks covering the entire political spectrum in the USA. The experts were selected based on analysis of think tank websites in order to select those people who were active in the area of American foreign policy in terms of interest in the EU and its external actions. Additionally, I used the snowball method (acquiring information about subsequent experts during interviews) which allowed me to contact further experts.⁴² The interviews were partly structured, although, as in the case of expert interviews, the respondents' knowledge

³⁹ "Analysis of the perception of the EU and EU's Policies Abroad. Final Report", December 2015, p. 13.

⁴⁰ Ibid., C. Cantir, J. Kaarbo, "The EU in..."

⁴¹ For more, see D.E. Abelson, *A Capitol Idea: Think Tanks and U.S. Foreign Policy*, Montreal–Kingston 2006; J. McGann, R. Weaver (eds.), *Think Tanks and Civil Societies: Catalysts for Ideas and Action*, 4th ed., New Brunswick, NJ 2009; J.G. McGann, *Think Tanks and Policy Advice in the US: Academics, Advisors and Advocates*, New York, NY 2007; J.G. McGann, *2014 Global Go To Think Tank Index Report*, 2015, at <http://repository.upenn.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1008&context=think_tanks>. On the role of think tanks in Europe see M. Góra, "Role of Think Tanks and Experts in Legitimisation of the European Neighbourhood Policy", in M. Góra, C. Holst, M. Warat (eds.), *Expertisation in the European Union*, New York–London 2018.

⁴² Interviews were conducted with experts working in the following think tanks: American Enterprise Institute, American Foreign Policy Council, Atlantic Council, Brookings Institution, Carnegie Council for Ethics in International Relations, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Century Foundation, German Marshall Fund, East West Institute, National Committee on American Foreign Policy, Social Science Research Council, World Policy Institute as well as academic institutions New York University, John Hopkins University. Some of the experts were working in private consulting companies.

and experience were a key part of the survey.⁴³ The experts were employed in think tanks or engaged in expert activities using platforms created by think tanks. Some of the respondents had previously been part of diplomatic services or were about to start their roles in American diplomacy. Some had academic or consulting experience, often combined with activities in think tanks. The selected respondents were also often professional experts in these organisations. The group of respondents is not meant to be representative, although the interviews were conducted in several organisations, including the most important American think tanks dealing with transatlantic issues. It is worth noting, however, that the experts did not present the opinions of their organisations, but their own. The interviews were conducted in 2015 and 2016 in Washington, DC and New York.

AN ALLIED CONTESTATION OF THE EU'S ROLES IN THE IMMEDIATE NEIGHBOURHOOD.

The EU is seen from the outside as a predominantly economic actor, particularly among the American public and experts.⁴⁴ In recent years, however, an important role impacting the dominant image of the EU has been played by internal crises affecting the organisation, such as the eurozone crisis, Brexit, or the migration crisis in southern Europe. In terms of roles in the international arena, the trend towards perceiving the EU as primarily a civilian power remains stable and strong. The dominant feature is the EU's ineffectiveness in global affairs, which significantly impacts its image in the eyes of external others. With time, however, the EU's actorness seems to have settled.⁴⁵ The EU is also relatively rarely perceived as an actor in the area of security, with (some) member states leading the way in this respect.

The perception of the EU in the US, both at the level of public opinion and that of political actors and decision makers, is mostly positive or indifferent. This is largely due to the consolidated perception of the EU as a close (although difficult) ally and economic partner, but also as an actor close in cultural terms and sharing similar values. American public opinion recognises the role of the EU in maintaining peace and stability in the world. As many as 67% of those surveyed believe that the EU is an important actor in this respect. In addition, 70% of respondents perceive EU leadership in international relations as desirable and possible in the near future.⁴⁶ In the American discourse about the EU, NATO comprises an important element which is considered to be the basis for the cooperation of both actors in matters of international security. It

⁴³ L.A. Dexter, *Elite and Specialized Interviewing*, Colchester 2006.

⁴⁴ J. Sperling, "American Perceptions of the EU: Through the Glass, Darkly or through the Looking Glass", in S. Lucarelli, L. Fioramonti (eds.), *External Perception of the European Union as a Global Actor*, Abingdon–New York 2010, pp. 13–31.

⁴⁵ *Analysis of the Perception of the EU and EU's Policies Abroad*, p. 30.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 243.

is also worth noting that one of the main factors responsible for the positive image of the EU and its activities is Americans' widely shared conviction about the community of values connecting them with Europeans and the EU. Common identification with the West is a key element in the construction of an Atlantic community.

Nevertheless, surveys of political actors and elites show that although a positive image of the EU predominates, the devil is in the details. For example, in the context of the migration crisis, the EU is seen as an inefficient actor whose actions are inconsistent.⁴⁷ The image of the Byzantine nature of EU policies and institutions is widespread in the US.⁴⁸ For American actors, not only is the sui generis nature of the EU problematic, but they also point to the links between the quality of political processes in the EU and the state of transatlantic relations. So far, research on the perception of the EU among American elites has focused on the EU in a general sense, and rarely on specific policies, especially in the external dimension.⁴⁹

The empirical material analysed in this article, which fills in these knowledge gaps, confirms the main characteristics of the EU as described above. The central element perceived in the EU is the economic dimension. Economic relations are identified as the most important within transatlantic relations. However, it is important to note that for all interviewees transatlantic relations were a key dimension of American foreign policy, and in general they were predominantly perceived as mutually beneficial. In addition, all respondents stressed that given an unstable international system, the shared values of both actors are of great importance serving as a safety cushion in times of turbulence. In other words, although the details show differences in approaches to major international threats, the EU is a necessary actor for the US and a guarantor of success not only for US foreign policy, but also for the prosperity of the West itself. The general role of the EU as a civilian power has clearly dominated the perception of American actors, as it has been reproduced for decades. Although the issues of promotion and protection of human rights and democracy are perceived as an important speciality of the EU in international relations, the EU in this regard is perceived similarly to other actors, including the USA, in terms of promoting jointly shared values.

At the same time, the difficulties in mutual relations resulting from the lack of knowledge of the decision-makers or institutional opacity of the EU are characteristic of American perceptions. In particular, the lack of a single real and capable representative of EU foreign policy was considered a hindrance, despite the functioning of the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy since the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty. As a result, as will be shown below, the respondents pointed out that often in order to "bypass" the meanders of European policy, it is more effective to influence it through the governments of the member states. The EU communication policy with political actors in the USA was also criticised for being too technical in nature and lacking a focus in building awareness of the general activities of the EU.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 245.

⁴⁸ A. Wilson, *Ukraine Crisis. What It Means for the West*, New Haven–London 2014.

⁴⁹ See J. Kiwerska, "Ukraina i stosunki transatlantyckie", *Rocznik Integracji Europejskiej*, no. 9 (2015).

The interviews focused on the assessment of EU activities in its immediate neighbourhood in the context of the so-called Arab Spring of 2011 and its consequences, as well as the Eastern Partnership, with particular emphasis on Russian aggression towards Ukraine. Due to the limited framework of this article, the issues of the migration crisis in southern Europe will not be discussed. On a general level, the majority of respondents viewed the ENP in a positive light. In fact, everyone agreed that this was a highly desirable action on the part of the EU. A strong EU seems to be widely recognised in the US as a resource for US foreign policy. Nevertheless, the way in which this policy is implemented has often been severely criticised. One of the respondents even said that in relation to the ENP “it needs to be reset and prepared anew”.⁵⁰ They stressed the ineffectiveness of the instruments, the lack of a concrete offer for ENP countries and, above all, the opaque and unclear nature of EU bureaucracy. The last was also mentioned as an obstacle to building clear cooperation schemes in mutual efforts in stabilisation of neighbourhood regions.

Based on the specific roles of the EU in the neighbourhood as described in previous parts of this article, we can conclude that the dominant EU role in the eyes of American political actors is the function of a prosperity promoter focusing on economic reforms and sustainable development, both in the Mediterranean basin and in Eastern Europe. The role of economic actor is also among the least contested. In this dimension, the convergence of European and American activities in the economic field is strongly emphasised. In this area of EU activities, particular attention is paid to the issue of EU energy policy, especially its external dimension, and in particular in the context of Russia's policy on access to energy sources. The EU is seen as an economic power whose strongest point is the attractiveness of what it offers in terms of its neighbourhood partners in deep and comprehensive cooperation structures. The multi-layered and multi-dimensional nature of EU instruments designed for its neighbours was listed as a main asset.

The EU's second most important role for US actors is its efforts to promote democracy, fundamental values and human rights. Again, the EU and the US are seen to be converging and working towards the same goal, as the common value basis of the two actors is frequently raised. As was often stressed, the EU's greatest strength in the neighbourhood is that it is a model of ‘the good life’ in prosperity, stability and freedom that neighbouring societies aspire to. It is also often the only template to follow for many of these societies. However, this role conception also conceals a contradiction. In particular, the events of the Arab Spring highlighted the weakness of the EU as a promoter of values and normative power, and inconsistency in pursuing these values. The respondents paid particular attention to the Ukrainian crisis, pointing out that despite the broad criticism of the EU's involvement in the crisis itself, as discussed below, in its actions aimed at democratisation, it has become a serious player in this area, so significant that it triggered Russian actions. As seen from Washington, the EU's impact has become significant, despite the limited use of coercive measures. The emergence of the EU as a “benign hegemon” strong enough to interact with assertive powers in the

⁵⁰ Interview, Washington, January 2016.

international arena seems to be one of the most interesting new faces of the EU's actor-ness resulting from the crises in its neighbourhood.

The third role of the EU, as a pacifier – an actor in the resolution of conflicts in the immediate neighbourhood – is the one most criticised and questioned within transatlantic relations. First of all, the EU is perceived as the sum of its member states, with very weak – if at all existing – crisis management at the EU level. The internal divisions and conflicting interests of EU member states in the eyes of American actors make it practically impossible for the EU to act together in crisis situations requiring determination, acting under pressure of time and common political will. Although the EU's role as a promoter of confidence-building and security measures is recognised, its effectiveness is perceived predominantly in situations of de-escalation of conflicts. Specifically, the EU's participation in stabilising the post-conflict situation in the states of former Yugoslavia has often been cited. Another issue raised is the problem of the EU's bias. These doubts can be heard in particular with regard to the Middle East conflict. In general, US actors perceive the dominant role of US foreign policy in conflict resolution. The EU is only viewed as a secondary actor, although its support is seen as strengthening influence on conflicting parties. In the context of the Ukrainian crisis, it was clearly stressed that during the tense events of 2014, the US side often had to circumvent the CFSP institutions and conduct diplomatic dialogue directly with member-state capitals. In this context, it is worth noting that one of the most important American allies in Europe in terms of cooperation on the Ukrainian issue was Germany, and Angela Merkel in particular. It is also important to recognise (although the interviews were conducted before the referendum on the UK's withdrawal from the EU) that David Cameron's government was perceived as weak, and the role of the UK in the EU in general was perceived as diminishing and, as a result, not meeting American needs for a strong ally within the EU structures. There was a clear correlation between the declining position of the UK and the growing position of Germany.

Importantly, especially in the context of the Ukrainian crisis, the tensions within American foreign policy was often raised, especially in terms of building relations with Russia. The respondents emphasised the changes in recent years in the approach to the Russian Federation and the deep internal divisions among experts dealing with Russian affairs in the United States. In this respect, questions of uncertainty were often raised concerning not only the directions of the US's own policy towards and cooperation with the EU, but also the reading of changes within Russia. These topics have become even more topical under the presidency of Donald Trump.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The United States continues to play a major role in stabilising relations in Europe, perhaps much more so than in Barack Obama's original plans to transfer these matters to Europeans' own hands. This was certainly due in large part to the aggressive

Russian actions against Ukraine, which required a return to full engagement in Europe, not least because the EU was unable to cope, at least in the initial phases of the conflict.

This research confirms the overall picture of the EU and its international activities that emerges from the analysis of the literature on the subject. The EU is perceived predominantly as an economic actor, and its other capabilities – especially military – remain secondary in importance. Secondly, the main strength of these relations lies in similarities in the fundamental values to which both actors subscribe in international relations. However, the analysis presented in this article also shows the dynamics of the EU's image, especially when it focuses on specific EU actions. Although the EU's role as an economic and, to a lesser extent, normative actor has been confirmed, American actors have begun to recognise that these activities also have security implications. With regard to both the Arab Spring and the Ukrainian crisis, it was stressed that the systematic, long-term focus of EU actions on civil society and democracy have contributed to the processes taking place there. Unfortunately, in both cases – in the eyes of US actors – the EU failed when it had to react quickly and decisively to rapidly changing circumstances and to outbreaks of conflict.

Finally, it is worth noting that the research was conducted before the 2016 elections in the USA, and that the new administration of President Donald Trump, especially in the area of relations with European allies and Russia, has been involved in unprecedented perturbations. During the first months of this administration, divisions emerged among American experts regarding how best to build relations within NATO and attitudes towards negotiated agreements with the EU (TTIP). However, the reflection on the extent to which American foreign policy has changed after 2017 goes beyond the scope of this article.

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