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# Policy Paper 4/2015

Polish Foreign Policy – Challenging Years Have Come

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December 2015

## Polish Foreign Policy: Challenging Years Have Come

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**Łukasz Wenerski<sup>1</sup>**

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<sup>1</sup> Author of the analysis works as an analyst of the Warsaw-based [Institute of Public Affairs](#).

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### Key findings

- Whereas Germany and the USA are seen as Poland's most important foreign policy partners and the closest allies, relations with Eastern countries – Ukraine and Russia – are judged as less essential for the pursuit of Polish foreign policy goals.
- Instability in the EU neighborhood, immigration from non-EU countries and energy policy are expected to be the most crucial issues that Poland and the EU as a whole will cope with in the coming years.
- The initiation of the Eastern Partnership is considered the biggest success of Poland's foreign policy since the EU accession, yet Polish eastern policy in general is deemed ineffective and rated as the most profound foreign policy failure since 2004.
- According to the expectations, the EU's future institutional development will be characterized by the rise of "multi-speed" integration and stronger influence of larger member states on the agenda. An increase of supranational cooperation is much less likely to occur.
- EU enlargement is regarded to be off the table. But it is believed that within a decade, the EU may open accession negotiations with at least one of the associated countries.
- The participation in the Visegrad Group is viewed as categorically beneficial for the pursuit of Polish national interests. The group's influence on the EU decision-making is, however, limited, which is largely due to divergent interests of individual countries. To augment the V4's role, the members must strive more for cooperation and a joint approach in foreign policy.
- The current sanctions policy is widely accepted in Poland – the EU sanctions should be maintained until Russia fully respects the Minsk II agreement and withdraws from Crimea.



## Introduction

The following report presents the views held by Polish stakeholders on various aspects of Poland's foreign policy and their assessment of the current state and future development of EU-related and international challenges. The role of Poland in the Visegrad Group and the performance of the V4 in different fields are also analyzed.

The paper is based on an opinion poll conducted between July 20 and September 6, 2015 among Polish politicians, civil servants, researchers/ experts and journalists specializing in foreign policy. In total, 53 persons directly involved in foreign policy making or regularly commenting and evaluating its conduct were interviewed.<sup>2</sup>

### General trends

Since 1989, Poland has always been interested in developing a multi-vector foreign policy. For years, strong relations with European Union countries, especially Germany, were devoted not more attention than transatlantic relations with the USA. But this feature has changed in the last few years - while relations with Germany and the EU in general have gained more importance, the transatlantic cooperation has slightly decreased in priority. Nevertheless, a multi-vector foreign policy still finds support among Polish experts. Berlin is indubitably regarded as Poland's most important foreign policy partner – all the experts mention Germany among the top 5 states crucial to Poland's foreign policy. The USA comes second – 4 out of 5 respondents (84%) confirm that relations with Washington are essential for Poland. More than three-quarters (78%) underline the importance of France for Polish foreign policy, and more than half (57%) point to the United Kingdom. Other countries are considered to be important by less than half of respondents.

The prominent position of Germany comes as no surprise. Nowadays, it appears to be the most significant Polish neighbor, with whom it shares strong political and economic relations. What is more, effective multidimensional cooperation with Berlin has been also instrumental in strengthening Poland's position in the EU.

The high position of France indicates that Polish experts not only recognize the importance of the country itself, but that mutual ties are also valued owing to the common membership in the Weimar triangle. The better state of relations with both Paris and Berlin, the more issues can be discussed and problems solved through the work of this grouping.

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<sup>2</sup> From this point forward, all those consulted will be referred to as experts.



According to the results of the survey, Eastern neighbors occupy a lower rank on the Polish foreign policy agenda. Less than half of Polish experts (43%) pinpoint Ukraine as an important partner and less than one-third (29%) regard Russia as such. However, when directly asked about an overall significance of those two countries for Poland, nearly all acknowledge that the roles played by Russia (98%) and Ukraine (96%) on the international scene are vital for Polish foreign policy.

The coming years will be marked by deep geopolitical changes and Poland has to be ready to face them. Polish experts are absolutely convinced that energy security and instability in the EU neighborhood will be the most significant foreign policy challenges in the next 5 years. Both issues were described as important or somewhat important for the future by all the respondents, and they are generally considered to be priorities of Polish foreign policy also nowadays. Poland is one of the initiators of the Energy Union project – the idea was announced by the Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk in 2014 and was officially launched by the European Commission in February 2015. With regard to its neighborhood policy, Poland continues to focus on the eastern dimension of the ENP, i.e. the Eastern Partnership.

Other prospective issues that were identified as important or somewhat important are armed conflicts and illegal immigration (both 92%), international terrorism (90%), cyber security (83%), upholding international law and norms (79%), and liberalization of world trade (77%). The current situation with refugees massively coming to Europe from warzone territories in Syria is placing the topic of immigration constantly higher on the foreign policy agenda.

Concern for pandemic of infectious diseases (31%) and proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (48%) found themselves at the other end of the chart.

### **Poland and the EU**

Poland is connected to other countries through a network of bilateral, European, and global alliances. Memberships in these structures are meant to guarantee Polish security on the international level and render the potential for economic development.

Beginning in the early 90's, Polish authorities strove to join the EU and NATO, perceived as the two organizations most vital to Polish prosperity and safety. NATO was regarded as a warrant of Polish security, and the EU integration was seen by Poles as “coming back” to Europe, i.e. joining the community that shares the same socio-economical values as post-communist Poland. A vast majority of Polish experts (94%) still consider the membership in the EU and NATO to be crucial to securing Polish national interests.



When asked about other organizations, such as the UN, the OSCE or the Council of Europe, Poles' answers were divided between the options “beneficial” and “somewhat beneficial”. Only a handful of respondents believe that membership in these structure is not beneficial for pursuing Polish national interests (2% in the case of the CoE, 4% in the case of both the UN and the OSCE). According to the survey, experts generally regard international alliances as profitable or very profitable for Poland.

Moreover, respondents assume that the significance of certain alliances is going to be augmented in the coming years. Both NATO and the EU are expected to gain in stature – 87% and 75% respectively are convinced of that. Memberships in other organizations such as the UN, the OSCE and the Council of Europe are anticipated to retain their importance for Poland.

The European Union is currently undergoing some very deep changes. The economic crisis, the rise of Eurosceptic parties, incapability to deal with upheavals in the Eastern and the Southern neighborhood, and the current refugee crisis suggest that a shift from the current model of European integration is inevitable. According to Polish experts, the recent developments in the EU may lead to strengthening of national states. Cooperation will be based on particularistic aims rather than an effort to find a general consensus, and the process of deeper integration will be slowed down. More than three-quarters (78%) of respondents believe that in the next 10 years, the EU will be driven by “multi-speed” integration and large member states will increasingly determine the course and define the EU agenda regardless of the opinions of smaller countries. The scenario of strengthening supranational cooperation and power shifting in favor of joint institutions is rather improbable – only 44% of the interviewed believe this will be the case in the next decade, while 54% think that such a development will not materialize.

It seems that the list of challenges the EU faces is rising, not decreasing. Polish experts predict that energy policy (100%), immigration from non-EU countries (98%) and the single market (96%) will be the most important issues for the EU in the next 5 years.

As far as energy policy is concerned, the priority will be given to the Energy Union, a project already mentioned in the report. The main objective of the Energy Union is to create a single European energy market, provide energy security to all EU countries, and ensure that changes in energy systems will be implemented in line with climate goals (i.e. reduction of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, increase of energy efficiency, and implementation of renewable energy sources).

From the Polish governmental perspective, the following goals are the most desirable: diversification of gas routes (now coming mainly from Russia), aggregation of gas purchases from third-party countries, and more engagement of European institutions in the negotiations



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of intergovernmental energy agreements between EU and non-EU countries. Poles also intend to modernize its coal industry, yet ensure that it remains an important part of the Polish energy mix.

As a result of the inflow of hundred thousand refugees and migrants trying to escape war and a dire economic situation in their home countries, the issue of immigration from third countries is becoming one of the most pressing challenges for the EU.

The refugee crisis is intimately tied to the rise of the Islamic State. According to Polish experts (70 %), solidarity with refugees and their acceptance in Poland would serve as one of the best ways how to aid the war effort against ISIS. Even more support can be found for sending humanitarian aid (83%) to the war-affected territories.

Other ways of fighting ISIS received much lesser approval. Slightly less than half (47%) are ready to send Polish troops within an international coalition, one-third (34%) believe that providing weapons could be conducive to the resolution and 30% of respondents are in favor of facilitation of closer cooperation between the West and Russia in addressing ISIS. It should be noted that the opinions of the experts consulted in this research do not necessarily reflect the position of the Polish society regarding immigrants from Africa and the Middle East. Polish society in general is much less inclined towards accepting refugees, and an overt opposition is on the rise. While in August 2015, a majority of the interviewed (56%)<sup>3</sup> agreed that Poland should accept immigrants, September marked a sharp drop in the approval rate – this time 56% of Poles were against such a move.<sup>4</sup>

The issues described above are important for the entire European Union, but at the same time, the behavior of different actors perfectly explains why Polish experts think that a supranational Europe is on the defensive. So far, supranational solidarity mechanisms have been insufficient to resolve current problems. The refugee crisis has revealed the depth of disagreements between EU countries on how solidarity with refugees should look like and what are the best ways to support them. With regard to energy policy, although all EU countries declared their readiness to implement the single market, “energy nationalism” is still present. The stance of Poland, which rather resists common climate targets, and the policy of Germany, which decided to build another pipe of Nord Streams despite protests of Central European countries, are clear examples of this trend.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.polskieradio.pl/5/3/Artykul/1500200,Czy-Polska-powinna-przyjac-imigrantow-Nowe-sondaze>

<sup>4</sup> <http://fakty.tvn24.pl/fakty-ekstra.52/ponad-polowa-polakow-przeciwna-przyjmowaniu-uchodzcow.579058.html>



Among other issues that are expected to be important in the next 5 years, experts mention policy towards the Eastern neighborhood, liberalization of world trade (both 88%), competitiveness of the EU in the world (86%) and the digital economy (80%).

The only issue indubitably regarded as unimportant for the EU in the nearest future is enlargement. More than 86% of respondents are skeptical of its prospective importance within the next 5 years. The readiness to admit new members is definitely low across EU capitals.

If a wider perspective (10 years) is taken into account, Poles (62%), however, suggest that accession negotiations with one of the associated countries (Georgia, Moldova or Ukraine) might be opened. Respondents remain rather skeptical (43%) about the prospective admission of some of the remaining Balkan countries. Only a handful (8%) believe that the EU will admit Turkey within the next ten years.

### **Visegrad cooperation**

The functioning of the Visegrad Group and the way it is perceived by Poles is a very complex issue. On the one hand, respondents believe that participation in the Visegrad Group is both important for Poland (78%) and beneficial for pursuing its national interests (80%). Experts are, however, divided on the question whether the V4 plays a constructive role in the EU (48% in favor and 52% against) and definitely oppose (78%) the statement that the group is an influential actor on the EU level.

Answers of experts show that cooperation in culture and education is the only area where activities of the V4 are predominantly (58%) viewed in a positive light. The assessment of the V4 in other fields portrays Polish discontent with the performance of the grouping. A vast majority (85%) are of the opinion that the group's eastern policy has not been successful. Lack of cooperation is especially visible in the case of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict. A good example is the policy of imposing sanctions on Russia for the annexation of Crimea and its military engagement in Donbas – authorities of each country have taken different attitudes towards the issue.

Almost two thirds evaluate the performance of the V4 in defense (65%) and energy policy (63%) in an unfavorable way. More than half of respondents (56%) also regard attempts at coordinating policies within the EU as rather ineffective.

According to Polish experts, difficulties in achieving successful cooperation within the Visegrad Group derive first of all from a divergence of national interests (68%). One-third



believe that the discord on how to approach Russia creates a major barrier to progress in cooperation and 16% underline lack of common goals among Visegrad countries.

The above-mentioned concerns seem to be mutually interwoven, because divergent interests also breed different ideas of how to shape national relations with Russia. Differences in eastern policy have already been touched on. Similar discrepancies are visible in energy policy – while Poland aims to enhance its energy safety by decreasing its dependence on Russian energy resources, Hungary is for the same reason deepening its cooperation with Moscow.

When discussing possible future developments of the Visegrad Group, an overwhelming majority (92%) suggest that Visegrad countries should more often strive for a joint approach. Respondents are also convinced (82%) that the V4 should further extend its cooperation into other fields. The proposition to strengthen the parliamentary dimension of the V4 received a rather lukewarm support (58%). Poles also remain divided on the question of possible enlargement of the group (48% both in favor and against). Less than half of respondents (46%) agree that other V4 members should be the first partners for coalition building when pursuing Polish foreign policy interests.

Experts single out energy (60%) and eastern policy (47%) as the most important issues that Visegrad countries should focus on. In both cases, as previously mentioned, the existing results are considered unsatisfactory. Given the lack of any meaningful successes so far, the slow pace of improvements in cooperation in some fields (such as intra-EU energy policy) and deepening divergences in others (energy policy towards Russia, eastern policy), it seems that positive changes cannot be expected in the nearest future, neither in the sphere of energy (especially its external dimension – relations with Russia), nor in the approach towards the eastern neighborhood.

Respondents also pointed to security (20%), and migration (13%) as other issues that the V4 should preferably devote its effort to. The reason why migration drew relatively little attention (13%) might be connected with the time frame (from July 20 until September 6) when the survey was conducted, i.e. the period when the refugee crisis was just about to become really noticeable. The problem of migration is becoming much more central not only to the EU, but also to individual EU member states. It has become one of the most prominent topics of discussion between V4 countries. So far, authorities of Visegrad states have taken a reluctant stance on the issue. Within the V4, Poland has adopted the most liberal position, expressing its willingness to accept a small number of refugees. Meanwhile, Slovakia, the Czech Republic, and especially Hungary have all strongly opposed mandatory refugee quotas as outlined by EU institutions.





### **Eastern policy and the Russian-Ukrainian conflict**

The Eastern neighborhood is one of the most crucial components of Polish foreign policy. Poland is one of the initiators of the Eastern Partnership, and the results of the research show that experts frequently (25%) pinpoint the initialization of this project as the biggest success of Polish foreign policy since the accession to the EU.

Apart from commencing the EaP, Polish authorities continuously try to be actively engaged in Eastern Europe. Poland promotes interests of EaP countries vis-à-vis the EU and regards its relations with Russia as a key element of its foreign policy. But according to a number of experts, the results that Polish policy towards the east is bringing are not tangible enough. The biggest group (35%) consider precisely ineffective eastern policy the most profound Poland's failure since 2004. Additional 15% are critical specifically of the state of relations with Russia. As it seems, the perception of eastern policy among Polish experts remains rather ambivalent as neither the positive nor the negative view was supported by a clear majority of respondents.

When the Russian-Ukrainian conflict began, Polish authorities openly stated that Moscow's policy towards Ukraine was unacceptable – the annexation of Crimea was condemned as being against international law, and the conflict in Donbas could have happened only with Russia's support, which chose to provide local separatists with weapons and sent its own soldiers to the region.

In response to Russia's aggressive policy towards Ukraine, the EU decided to impose economic and political sanctions on Russia. These included freezing of assets, travel bans, and hindering of economic engagement between Russian and EU companies. As results of the survey show, the current sanctions policy of the EU is widely approved by Polish experts. Overwhelming 87% of respondents argue that sanctions should be kept in force until the Minsk II agreement is fully respected by Russia. A bit smaller (81%) is the percentage of people who believe that sanctions imposed on Russia could be lifted only after Russia completely withdraws from the Crimean Peninsula. Only 2% of Polish experts are of the opinion that sanctions should be abandoned immediately.

A strong sanctions policy is also supported by Polish society in general. According to the opinion polls conducted by the Institute of Public Affairs and Bertelsmann Stiftung in early 2015, three-quarters (76%) of Polish citizens confirm that sanctions should be maintained or even strengthened. Only 6% of the interviewed were ready to ease sanctions. Although the inquiry took place a few months ago - in February 2015 –



no significant changes have occurred in Russian-Ukrainian, Polish-Ukrainian or Polish-Russian relations that could have had a serious impact on the peoples' opinion<sup>5</sup>.

24 years since gaining its independence, Ukraine is undergoing the most difficult period in its short history as a sovereign state. The country is economically devastated and a part of its territory is being occupied by Russian-backed separatists or directly by Russia itself. The war in Donbas and the annexation of Crimea have triggered a huge migration wave and more than a million people are recognized as internally displaced. What is more, old entrenched problems such as corruption remain and reforms are being implemented at a slow pace. As a consequence, Ukraine needs extensive support from the international community.

From the perspective of Polish experts, the most feasible methods of support for Ukraine are: development assistance (92%), humanitarian aid (90%) and institution building and technical assistance (86%). According to the OECD DAC data, Poland is one of the biggest donors of development assistance to Ukraine and was ranked 7<sup>th</sup> among Ukrainian bilateral donors in 2012.<sup>6</sup> Humanitarian aid includes support not only for people displaced from Crimea and Donbas, but also for soldiers fighting in the east and for their families. In the case of institution building and technical assistance, Poland tries to be especially active in advising Ukraine on how to effectively introduce decentralization and reform its local administration.

Two-thirds (67%) of Polish experts believe that advocacy of the EU membership perspective is one of the ways Poland can help Ukraine, while half (50%) of respondents argue in favor of providing financial aid. Almost half (46%) of the interviewed expressed their readiness to send military equipment to Ukraine, but only 4% would agree to send Polish troops to back the Ukrainian war effort.

Again, IPA and Bertelsmann Stiftung conducted an opinion survey among Polish society which shows that Poles are in general similarly supportive of providing Ukraine with economic assistance (56% favor this solution), but only one-fourth (25%) is willing to assist the Ukrainian army.<sup>7</sup>

## Conclusions

The coming years are going to be challenging for Polish foreign policy. Poland and the EU as a whole are facing various internal and external problems including the financial crisis, changes in the energy sector, the war in Ukraine, the refugee crisis, the war in Syria and

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.isp.org.pl/site.php?id=25&pub=854&lang=2>

<sup>6</sup> [http://www.pism.pl/files/?id\\_plik=20276](http://www.pism.pl/files/?id_plik=20276)

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.isp.org.pl/site.php?id=25&pub=854&lang=2>



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other territories being occupied by ISIS. From the Polish point of view, all of these issues are of great importance for Poland itself and it has to be actively engaged in resolving them.

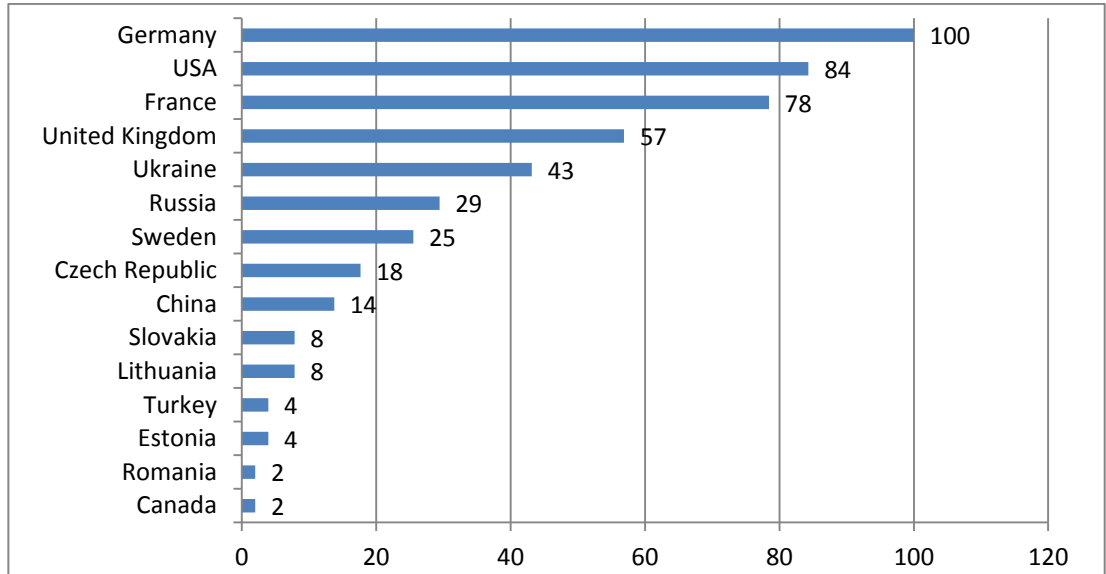
The research shows that Polish foreign policy experts are expecting and even demanding changes in international structures in which Poland participates. As for the EU, Poles notice that the EU is going to differentiate itself internally and follow a path of increasingly multi-speed integration. Larger countries are expected to have a stronger say in outlining the course of the EU. A wide range of problems the EU and its member states have to cope with arouses unwillingness to open itself up to further enlargement.

It is suggested that Poland should enhance regional cooperation, particularly within the Visegrad Group. Polish experts would like to see stronger ties with Slovakia, the Czech Republic and Hungary and a more effective handling of topics that are important for all Visegrad countries. It is only this way that the V4 can finally have a more tangible influence in the EU.



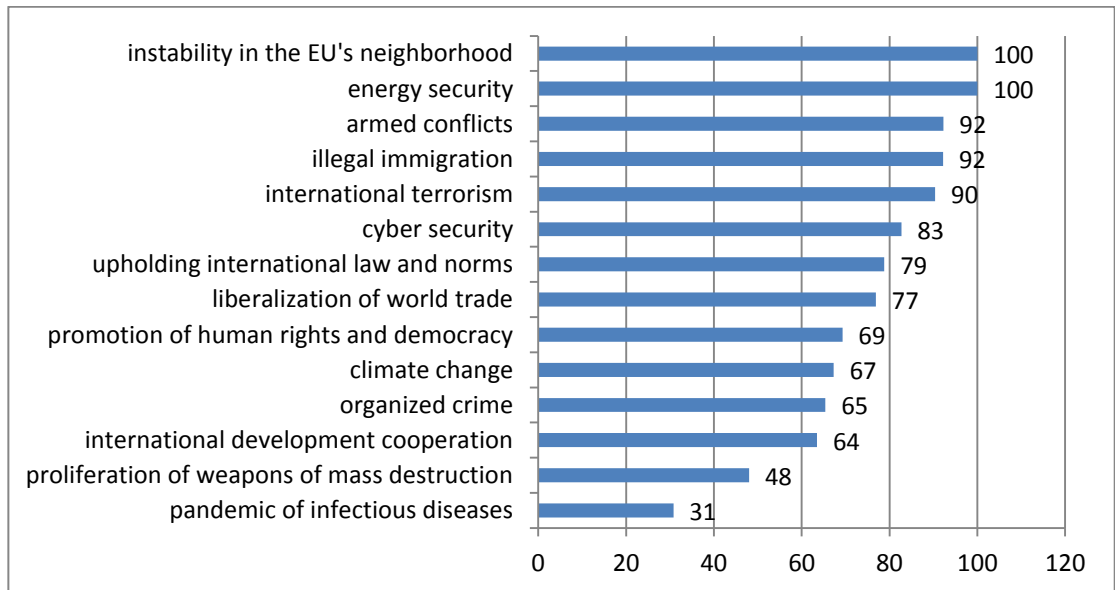
**Chart no. 1 (frequency of response)**

**Which countries are the 5 most important partners for your country's foreign policy?**



**Chart no. 2 (somewhat important and important)**

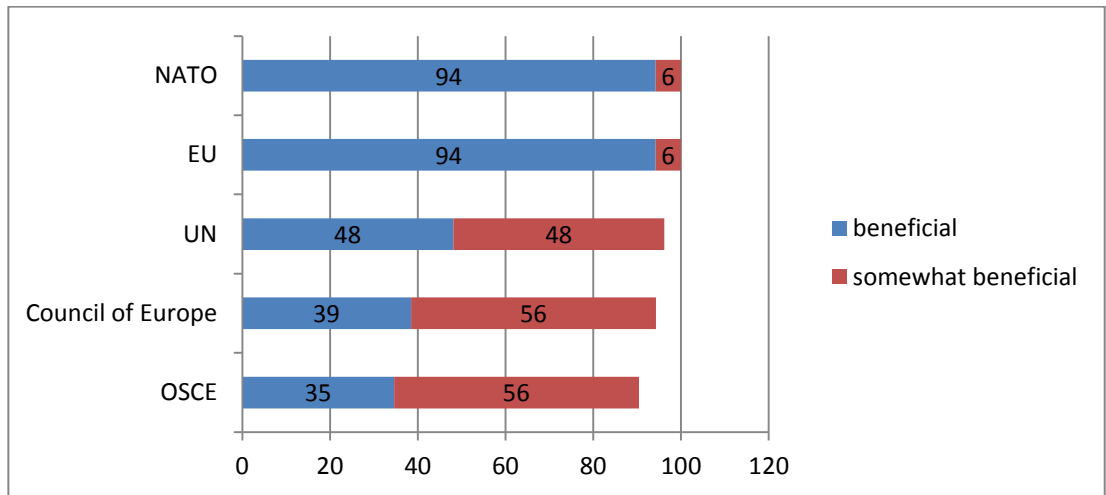
**How important will the following issues be for your country's foreign policy in the next 5 years?**





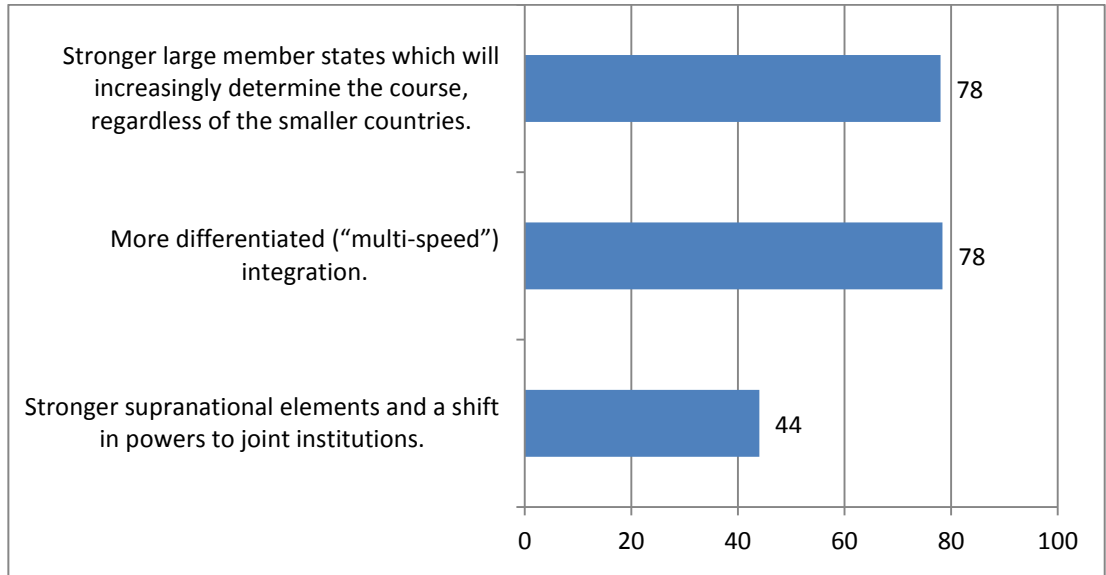
### Chart no. 3 (somewhat beneficial and beneficial)

Is the membership of your country in the following international organizations beneficial for pursuing its national interests?



### Chart no. 4

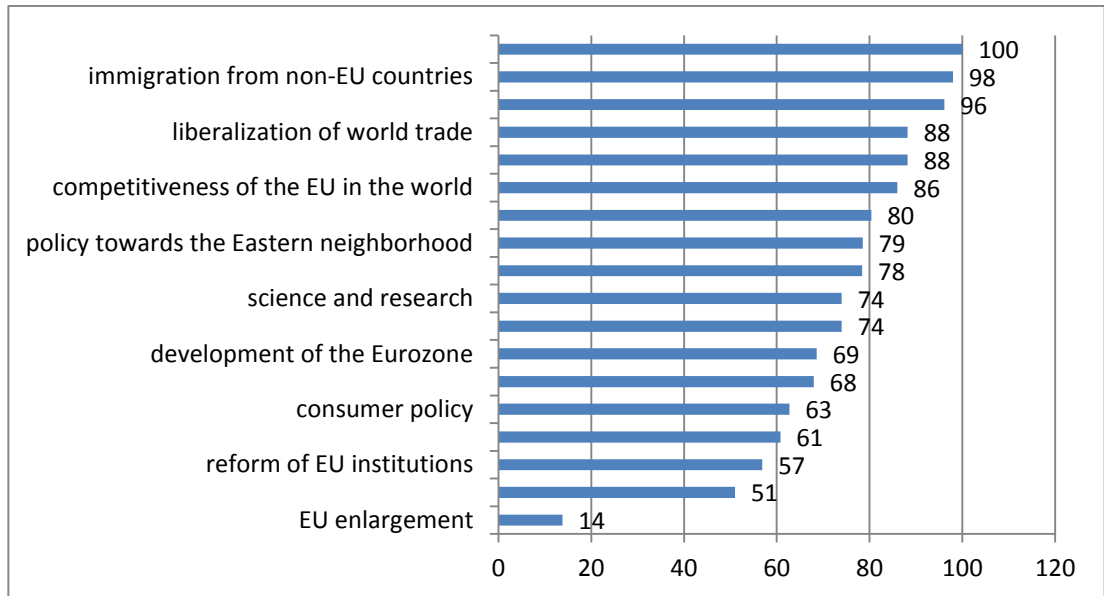
What do you think will characterize the development of the EU in the next 10 years?





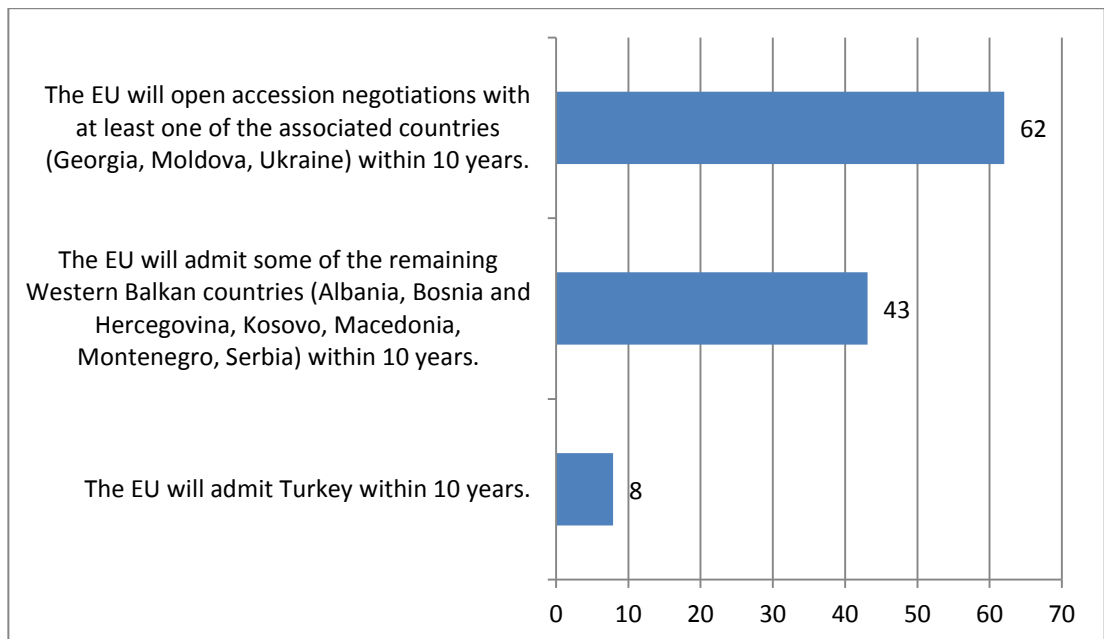
**Chart no. 5**

**How important will the following issues be for the EU in the next 5 years?**



**Chart no. 6**

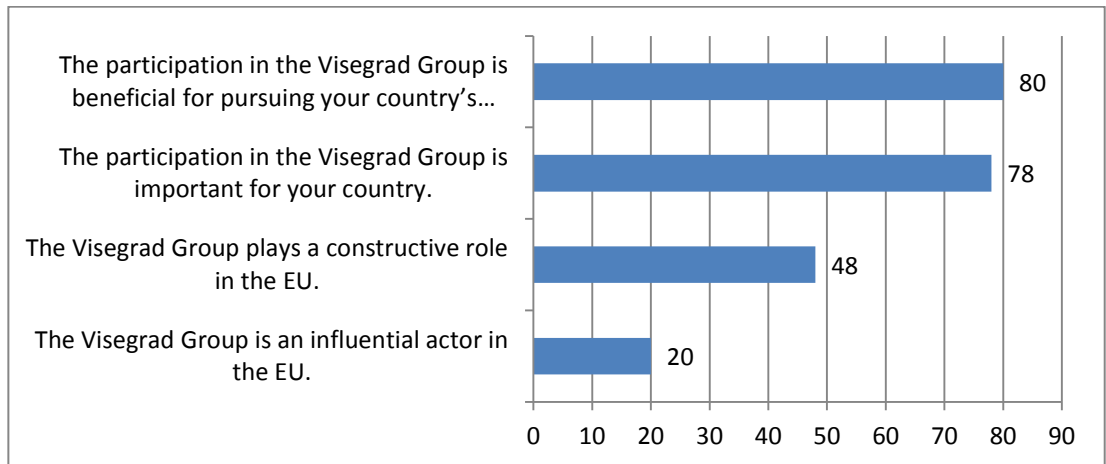
**How do you think the EU enlargement process will develop in the future?**





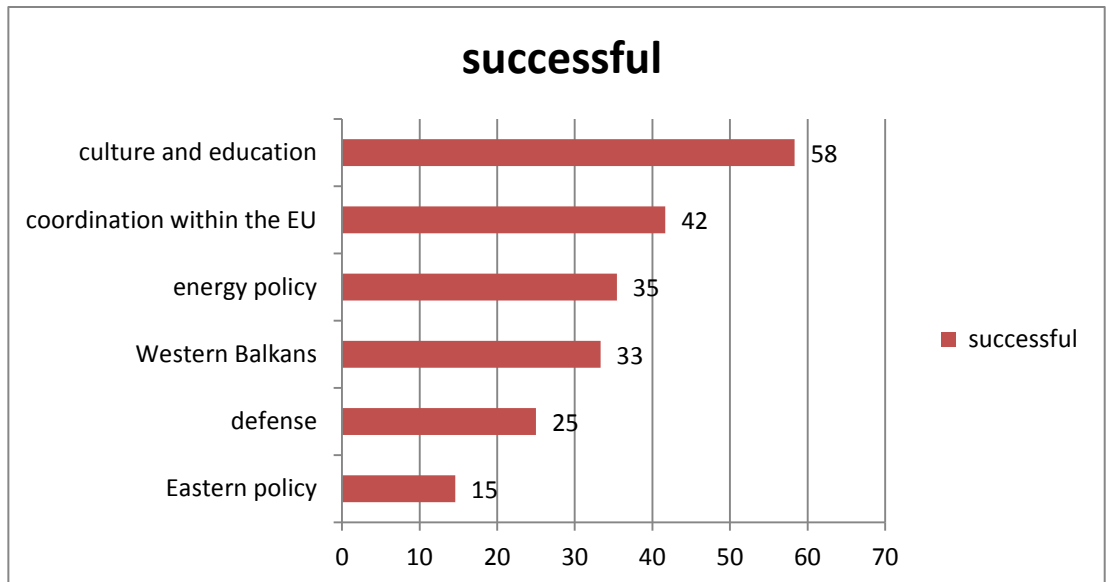
### Chart no. 7 (somewhat agree and agree)

To what extent do you agree with the following statements about the role of the Visegrad Group in the European Union?



### Chart no. 8

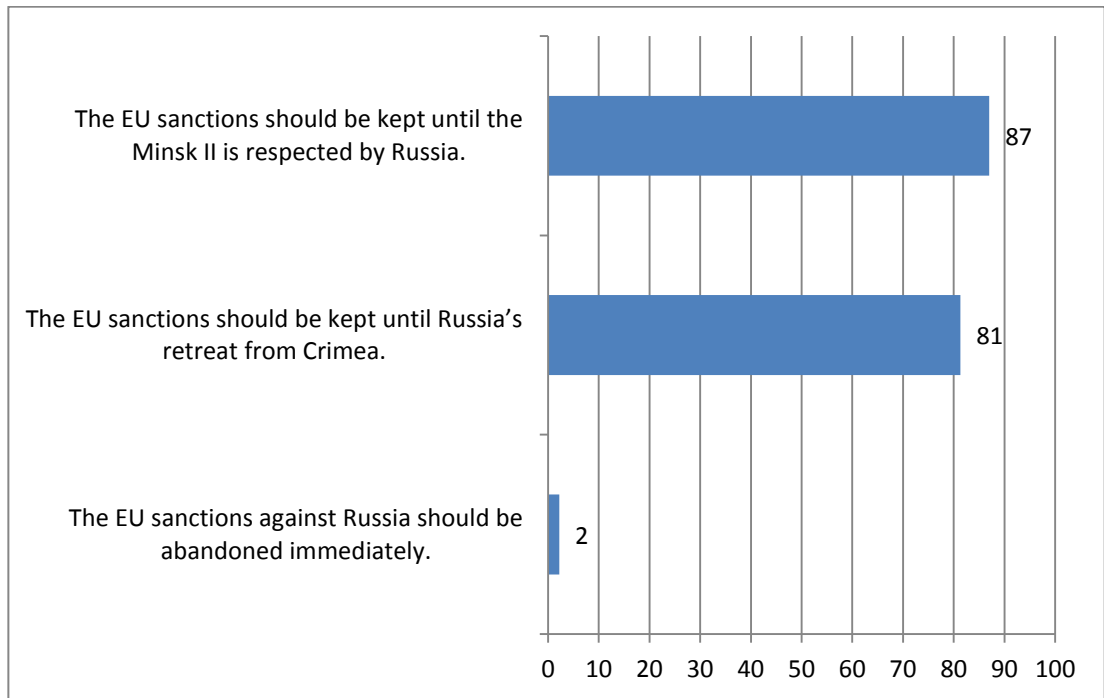
Evaluate the performance of the Visegrad Group in the following areas.





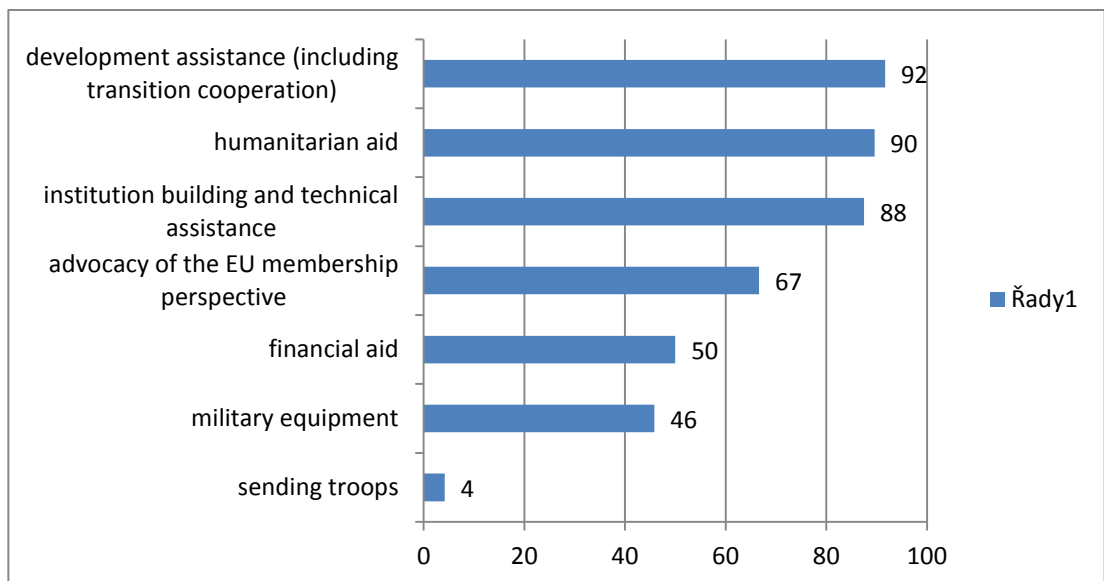
**Chart no. 9**

**To what extent do you agree with the following statements about the EU sanctions against Russia?**



**Chart no. 10 (frequency)**

**What kind of support should your country provide to Ukraine?**

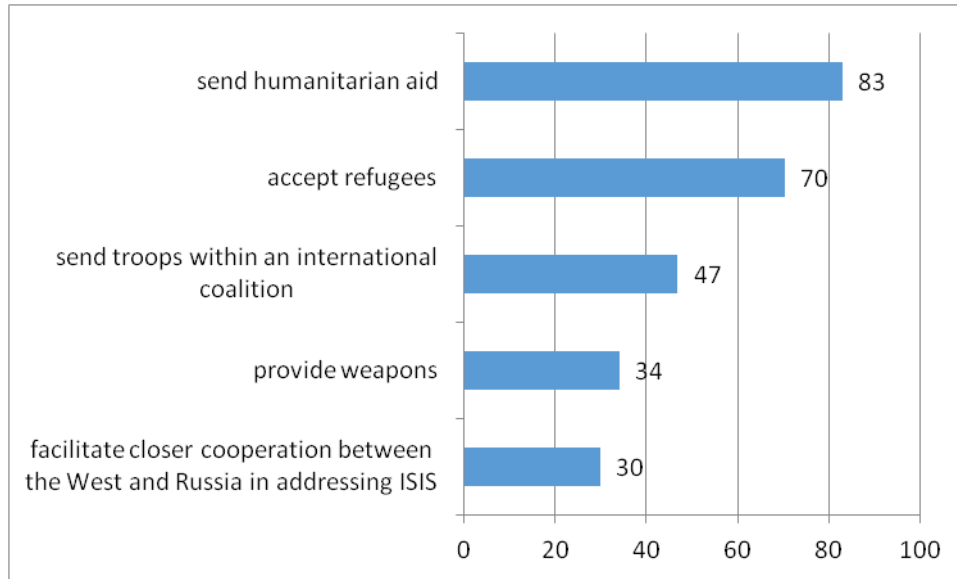






### Chart no. 11 (frequency)

#### What activities should your country undertake in the fight against ISIS?





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