
EUROPE WITHOUT RUSSIA AND EASTERN PARTNERSHIP

Пономарева Е., Шишелина Л. Председательство Латвии в ЕС-2015: «Eastern Partnerhsip» вместо или вместе с Россией : аналитический доклад / под ред. О. Гаман-Голутвиной ; Российская ассоциация политической науки. — М., 2014. — 92 с.

(*Ponomareva E., Shishelina L.* Latvian presidency of the EU-2015: Eastern partnership instead of or with Russia : an analytical report / ed. by O. Gaman-Golutvina ; Russian Political Science Association. — М., 2014. — 92 pp.)

The analytical report under review was published rather recently and is extremely relevant. Latvia has not assumed the presidency of the EU. However, the year 2014 has a unique rate of changes in the political situation in Europe and relations between Russia and Europe. By autumn 2014, it became evident that Europe had lost Russia; however, it also meant the end of the Eastern Partnership as we knew it. “The Ukrainian crisis caused by the unsuccessful implementation of the Eastern Partnership diminishes, to a degree, the prospects of the programme itself.”¹

This does not mean a decrease in attention to Eastern Europe and the post-Soviet space. It is more correct to speak of the final stage of the crisis of the Eastern policy formulated by Brussels and Strasbourg, which resulted in a qualitative intensification of confrontation in Europe. “The events that took place in Ukraine in 2013—2014 became the largest geopolitical crisis in the Eurasian space since the beginning of the century. It led to a collapse of Ukrainian statehood fraught with an economic catastrophe and territorial disintegration. This truly tragic situation launched the revision of the whole system of international relations — a dialogue between Russia, the EU, and the USA became impossible in the previous framework.”² These words open the analytical report and they cannot be considered as a conclusion, however, it

¹ *Пономарева Е., Шишелина Л.* Председательство Латвии в ЕС-2015: «Восточное партнерство» вместо или вместе с Россией : аналитический доклад / под ред. О. Гаман-Голутвиной. Российская ассоциация политической науки. М., 2014. С. 7. (*Ponomareva E., Shishelina L.* Latvian presidency of the EU-2015: Eastern partnership instead of or with Russia : an analytical report / ed. by O. Gaman-Golutvina ; Russian Poltitical Science Association. М., 2014. P. 7).

² *Ibid.* P. 3.

is difficult to prove them wrong. One of the key objectives of the report is an attempt to explain the course and causes of these events.

The Eastern Partnership project was proposed by the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of Poland and Sweden — Radosław Sikorski and Carl Bildt on May 22, 2008. It is important that both ministers had acquired a reputation of harsh critic of Russia by 2008. However, this position was not a rarity in Europe. An interesting fact that is, in 2104, both politicians were in focus of public attention in the context of the foreign policy developed by them. In June 2014, a major scandal over the publication of a tapped conversation between Sikorski and ex-Minister of Finance Jacek Rostowski and ex-Minister of Transport, Construction, and Maritime Economy Sławomir Nowak erupted in Poland. In the telephone conversation, Sikorski gave an unusual characteristic of certain aspects of transatlantic and European international relations.

In September 2014, the corrupt nature of C. Bildt's anti-Russian and pro-Georgian policy was in focus of Swedish and international media. Allegedly, a company associated with the Swedish minister received approximately 3 m USD from the President of Georgia, whose accounts and property were arrested in Georgia in September the same year.

Taken together, these circumstances make the Eastern Partnership political wreckage. When defining the Eastern Partnership, the authors are right to stress that it was preceded by other projects that “would make it possible for target states to approach greater consolidation with EU within 20 years without institutional efforts and demanding immediate proofs of future membership.”³ However, a different, extremely stringent variant was chosen. Russia's warnings concerning the inadequacy of these plans to the situation in the post-Soviet space were neglected⁴.

At first sight, the problem of the Eastern Partnership seems to be local. One of the key theses of the Report is that there is a direct link between the current crisis of the whole system of international relations and the Eastern Partnership. This hypothesis is supported by a number of influential international experts.⁵

The study under review, which was edited by O. Gaman-Golutvina, aims

³ Ibid. P. 25.

⁴ Ibid. P. 21—24.

⁵ *Проблемы и перспективы строительства Большой Европы* : рабочая тетрадь. № 17/2014 / [гл. ред. И.Р. Иванов] ; Российский совет по международным делам (РСМД). М. : Спецкнига, 2014. 64 с. (*Problems and prospects of creating Big Europe* : issue No 17/2014 [ed. by I.R. Ivanov] ; Russian Council for International Affairs. M. : Spetskinga, 2104. 64 p.).

to “identify Latvia’s capabilities and limitations in affecting the development of the political situation in Europe through the Eastern Partnership programme during the country’s presidency of the EU.”⁶

The structure of the work seems to be very logical. The first and rather voluminous paragraph is entitled “The Eastern Partnership programme: The global and macroregional contexts.” Regardless of one’s attitude to the Eastern Partnership, this phenomenon should be considered within the existing approaches to the theory and methodology of international relations studies.

The second paragraph is entitled “Lithuania’s experience of EU presidency: Can it be adopted by Latvia?” The authors of the report emphasise that Lithuania’s presidency, as well as its policy in general, was based on the Strategy for Russia’s Containment published by the Lithuanian conservative leader, Andrius Kubilius, in 2007 and updated in 2014.⁷ The phrasing of the document evokes the memories of closed memoranda of the US State Department dating back to the Caribbean crisis. However, it was authored by Lithuanian politicians in 2014. “Lithuania’s active position on the Ukrainian crisis is explained by the ambition to play a special role in the Brussels-Kiev dialogue, which contributed to the political catastrophe in Ukraine.”⁸ In this relation, Latvia will not repeat Lithuania’s presidency. The catastrophe has already taken place.

The third paragraph addresses the prospects and development factors of the Eastern Partnership programme after the Vilnius summit. “Despite the failure of November 2013, the Eastern partnership programme was chosen as a priority of Latvian EU presidency in the first half of 2015.”⁹

The authors emphasise that, after the Vilnius summit, Europe does not have a single opinion regarding the further development of the programme. Moreover, the situation in Ukraine has come to a deadlock, the policy failed in Georgia, and the situation in Moldova is rather ambiguous. Everything calls for the reconstruction or abandonment of the Eastern Partnership programme.

The report concludes with scenarios for further development of the Eastern Partnership and the situation in Europe. Probably, it is the most interesting and thought-provoking part of the work. Based on the scenario approach, the authors identify the following variants:

Variant 1. “Riga Eastern Partnership”

⁶ Ibid. P. 8.

⁷ Ibid. P. 33.

⁸ Ibid. P. 37.

⁹ Ibid. P. 50.

Variant 2. “Prague Eastern Partnership”

Variant 3. “Vilnius Eastern Partnership”

It seems that the most plausible variant is “a change in the vector of the programme’s development,”¹⁰ i.e. one of the versions of the Riga Eastern partnership. It is rather difficult to predict the further development of the confrontation pattern, since the current level of confrontation resembles that of the Cold War; the next stage can be only a large-scale military conflict.

The work under review combines a comprehensive theoretical analysis and apparent practical significance.

The authors and the academic editor managed prepared an interesting and relevant work focusing on a rather complicated issue. Technically, the problem of the Eastern Partnership is not new for Russian experts. However, it is considered comprehensively and with a significant lag. One has only to wait until 2015 and “compare the notes.”

About the author

Prof. Nikolai Mezhevich, School of International Relations, St. Petersburg State University, Russia.

E-mail: mez13@mail.ru

¹⁰ *Проблемы и перспективы строительства Большой Европы* : рабочая тетр. № 17/2014 / [гл. ред. И.Р. Иванов] ; Российский совет по международным делам (РСМД). М. : Спецкнига, 2014. С. 71. (*Problems and prospects of creating Big Europe* : issue No 17/2014 [ed. by I.R. Ivanov] ; Russian Council for International Affairs. М. : Spetskinga, 2104. P. 71).