

UDC: 327.8

Doi: 10.46493/2663-2675.34(5).2024.59

Andrey Velchev**Doctor of Political Science**Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv**4000, 24 Tsar Assen Str., Plovdiv, Bulgaria*

Influence of Central and Eastern European countries on EU's foreign policy

Abstract. The purpose of the study was to determine the nature and scale of the influence of the states of Central and Eastern Europe on the processes of forming and implementing the foreign policy course of the European Union, considering current international challenges and crises. The paper provides a comparative analysis of the positions of the central and Eastern European countries on key foreign policy issues of the European Union, analyses official documents and statements, and analyses case studies of the main EU crises of recent years to assess the impact of these countries on the establishment of a common position of the Union. It was found that the countries of Central and Eastern Europe have a significant but non-uniform influence on EU foreign policy. An analysis of the positions of CEE countries during the COVID-19 pandemic, the migration crisis, the war in Ukraine and the protests in Georgia revealed differences in their approaches and a certain divergence with the positions of the "old" members of the European Union. In particular, the Visegrad countries have demonstrated a tough stance on migration policy, while the Baltic States have taken a more moderate position. In contrast, there was greater unity in terms of relations with Russia and support for Ukraine, with the exception of Hungary. The study showed that the effectiveness of CEE countries' influence is limited by internal issues, in particular issues of the rule of law and economic convergence. Despite this, these countries have made significant progress in promoting their interests in the areas of energy security and European neighbourhood policy, in particular through the Eastern Partnership Initiative. It was found that in order to strengthen their role in shaping EU foreign policy, CEE countries need to focus on strengthening regional cooperation, developing expertise on key issues and actively using EU tools, in particular, the enhanced cooperation mechanism. The results of the study show that the influence of CEE countries on EU foreign policy is a significant but ambiguous factor that requires further study, especially in the context of domestic political processes and economic interests of these countries

Keywords: diplomacy; international relations; rule of law; economic convergence; populism

Introduction

The European Union (EU) is constantly facing challenges that require a coordinated foreign policy and a unified position of all member states. However, the EU's eastward enlargement in 2004 and 2007 significantly changed the internal dynamics of the organisation, adding new voices and perspectives to the decision-making process. The countries of Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), in particular Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and the Baltic States, have brought with them unique historical experiences and geopolitical interests that often differ from the positions of the "old" EU members.

The need to investigate the impact of CEE countries on EU foreign policy is conditioned by a number of factors. These countries are geographically located on the EU's eastern border, making them key players in relations

with Russia, Ukraine, and other eastern neighbours. Their historical experience of communist rule and subsequent democratic transformation forms a unique approach to security, democratisation and economic development. The growing economic and political weight of these countries within the EU could potentially change the balance of power in decision-making.

The research focuses on identifying and analysing specific mechanisms of influence of CEE countries on the development and implementation of EU foreign policy, especially in the context of modern crises and challenges. In particular, it is important to understand how representatives of these countries position themselves in Brussels during such critical situations as the COVID-19 pandemic, the migration crisis, the war in Ukraine, and the protests in

Received: 27.06.2024, Revised: 22.09.2024, Accepted: 20.10.2024

Suggested Citation:

Velchev, A. (2024). Influence of Central and Eastern European countries on EU's foreign policy. *Foreign Affairs*, 34(5), 59-71. doi: 10.46493/2663-2675.34(5).2024.59.

*Corresponding author



Copyright © The Author(s). This is an open access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License 4.0 (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>)

Georgia. In addition, there is a need for an in-depth analysis of the issues related to these countries' membership in the EU, including issues of the rule of law, democratic standards and economic convergence.

The events in Georgia in the spring of 2024 related to the adoption of the law on "transparency of foreign influence" demonstrate the complexity of cooperation between the EU and the Eastern Partnership countries. R.E. Hamilton *et al.* (2024) analyse in detail the protests that have arisen as a result of the adoption of the law on foreign agents in Georgia. This study highlights the importance of understanding domestic political processes in EU partner countries in shaping an effective foreign policy. However, it raises the question of the role of CEE countries as mediators between the EU and its eastern neighbours.

For a comprehensive understanding of the European Union's foreign policy, it is necessary to refer to fundamental studies in this area. S. Keukeleire & T. Delreux (2022) offer a comprehensive overview of the EU's foreign policy mechanisms, revealing the complex system of decision-making and interaction between different institutions. Their research provides a better understanding of how CEE countries can influence the development of a common foreign policy through existing EU structures.

The historical context of the development of the EU's foreign policy is revealed in the paper by F. Bindi (2022). The researcher traces the evolution of EU foreign policy approaches, which helps to assess how the accession of CEE countries has affected the traditional course of European diplomacy. This study highlights the need to consider the historical experience of new EU members in shaping modern foreign policy. J. Zielonka (2023) draws attention to the paradoxes of European foreign policy, which became especially noticeable after the EU's expansion to the east. The researcher analyses how different approaches and interests of member countries can lead to contradictory decisions and actions in the international arena. This study is particularly valuable for understanding the difficulties that the EU faces in developing a unified foreign policy position in the context of the growing influence of CEE countries.

An important aspect of the influence of CEE countries on EU foreign policy is the phenomenon of populism. S. Destradi *et al.* (2021) propose a research programme to investigate the relationship between populism and foreign policy. Their paper outlines potential areas for further research that could shed light on how populist trends in CEE countries affect the development of a common European foreign policy. For a deeper understanding of the specific features of the foreign policy approaches of individual CEE countries, it is worth turning to specific national studies. R. Zięba (2020) analyses in detail the foreign and security policy of Poland, which is especially important given the significant role of this country in the region. This study provides a better understanding of the motivations and strategies of one of the key CEE states in shaping a common European policy.

M. Varga & A. Buzogány (2021) examines the foreign policy of the populist governments of Poland and Hungary, focusing on their opposition to EU liberal values. This study highlights an important aspect of intra-European contradictions that affect the EU's ability to shape a

coherent foreign policy. Analysing the process of EU expansion to the east, V. Anghel & E. Jones (2022) draws attention to the phenomenon of "successful failures" – situations in which problems resulting from expansion become catalysts for further integration. This study offers a new perspective on the role of CEE countries in the transformation of the EU and its foreign policy. N. Fuchs-Schündeln & M. Schündeln (2020) examines the long-term effects of the communist past on Eastern European countries. Their study helps to understand how historical experience influences modern political and economic decisions of CEE countries, which is reflected in their positions on EU foreign policy. P. Stubbs & N. Lendvai-Bainton (2020) analyses the phenomenon of "authoritarian neoliberalism" in Croatia, Hungary, and Poland, revealing the complex relationships between the domestic and foreign policies of these countries. This study highlights the need to consider domestic political trends when analysing the foreign policy positions of CEE countries.

These studies form a comprehensive picture of the impact of CEE countries on EU foreign policy, highlighting the historical, political, economic, and social aspects of this process. They point out the need to further investigate specific mechanisms of influence and their consequences for pan-European foreign policy in the context of modern global challenges. Considering the identified gaps in scientific research, the purpose of this study was to analyse and assess the impact of Central and Eastern European countries on the development and implementation of the European Union's foreign policy in the context of modern global challenges. To achieve this goal, the following tasks were set:

1) to explore the positions and strategies of CEE representatives in EU institutions during key crises of recent years, including the COVID-19 pandemic, the migration crisis, the war in Ukraine, and the protests in Georgia;

2) to identify and analyse the main problems related to CEE membership in the EU and their impact on the foreign policy decision-making process;

3) to assess the effectiveness of the CEE countries' influence on EU foreign policy and identify potential areas for strengthening their role in shaping a common European position.

Materials and Methods

The study was based on an analysis of official EU documents, in particular treaties, regulations, resolutions, and decisions of EU institutions. The Consolidated version of the Treaty on the European Union (1992), the Consolidated version of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (1992), and key documents related to EU foreign policy and relations with CEE countries were analysed. Special attention was paid to the analysis of Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council No. 2020/2092 (2020), which reflects the mechanisms of the EU's influence on member states in matters of the rule of law. Official statements, speeches and interviews of political leaders and high-ranking officials of CEE countries and EU institutions have become an important source of information. The speeches and statements of the leaders of Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and the Baltic States, and representatives of the European

Commission and the European Parliament were analysed. This helped to determine the official positions of the CEE countries on key foreign policy issues and their impact on the development of the EU's common foreign policy. Eurostat statistics, in particular GDP per capita at purchasing power parity, were used to assess the economic impact of CEE countries (Household consumption..., 2024). These data helped to assess the level of economic convergence of CEE countries with other EU members and its impact on their foreign policy positions.

The study also used reports and analytical materials from international organisations. In particular, the Report of the European Commission No. SWD (2021) 722 final (2021) was analysed, which provided important information on the state of the rule of law in CEE countries and its impact on their relations with the EU. Data from the Global Soft Power Index for 2024 (Jagodzinski, 2024) was also used to assess the diplomatic influence of CEE countries in comparison to other EU members.

To analyse the legal aspects of the CEE countries' influence on the EU's foreign policy, the author examined the judgments of the European Court of Justice, in particular, the decision in Case No. C-66/18 "European Commission v Hungary" (2020) concerning the law on higher education in Hungary. This enabled an assessment of the legal mechanisms of the EU's influence on its member states and their implications for the foreign policy positions of CEE countries. The study compared the positions and strategies of CEE representatives in EU institutions during key crises of recent years, including the COVID-19 pandemic, the migration crisis, the war in Ukraine, and the protests in Georgia. For this purpose, official statements of the CEE governments, resolutions of the European Parliament and decisions of the EU Council were analysed. In particular, the reaction of CEE countries to the law on "foreign agents" in Georgia was studied using statements by the foreign ministers of these countries and the European Parliament Resolution No. 2024/2703 (RSP) (2024).

To assess the effectiveness of the CEE countries' impact on EU foreign policy, specific initiatives and projects proposed by these countries at the EU level were analysed. In particular, the influence of CEE countries on the EU Energy Union and the development of the EU Energy Security Strategy (Draft update proposal..., 2024) was investigated. The role of CEE countries in the development of the Eastern Partnership Initiative and their impact on EU policy towards Eastern Europe and the South Caucasus were also analysed.

To systematise and visually present the results of the study, comparative tables were created that reflect the positions of CEE countries on key foreign policy issues, the level of their economic development, and the impact on the development of EU foreign policy. These tables revealed general trends and differences between CEE countries in their approaches to EU foreign policy. The study drew attention to the domestic political processes in the CEE countries and their impact on the foreign policy positions of these countries. In particular, the influence of populist trends on the development of foreign policy was analysed, using data on the speeches of political leaders and election results in CEE countries.

Results

Positions and strategies of CEE representatives in EU institutions during major crises. The COVID-19 pandemic, which began in Europe in early 2020, has become an unprecedented challenge to the unity and solidarity of the European Union. The countries of Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) have demonstrated different approaches to the crisis, often differing from the positions of the "old" EU members, creating tensions in relations and calling into question the effectiveness of the pan-European response to the pandemic.

According to M. Ceron *et al.* (2021), the response of CEE countries to the COVID-19 pandemic was characterised by a significant discrepancy in approaches and strategies. The researchers note that the lack of a unified European strategy to combat the pandemic has led to fragmentation of responses at the national level, especially noticeable in CEE countries. This has been reflected in various aspects of crisis management, including the introduction of quarantine measures, testing and vaccination policies, and economic support measures.

Hungary, in particular, has caused considerable concern with its approach to crisis management. On March 30, 2020, the Hungarian parliament passed a law granting Prime Minister Viktor Orban emergency powers for an indefinite period. This move was seen as a violation of the principles of the rule of law and democracy enshrined in Article 2 of the Consolidated version of the Treaty on European Union (1992). The European Commission has expressed serious concern about this law, noting that emergency measures must be strictly proportionate, limited in time and subject matter, and subject to regular monitoring (EU warns Hungary..., 2020).

Poland, although less radical, has also shown a tendency to centralise power and restrict civil liberties under the pretext of fighting the pandemic. In particular, the Polish government's decision to hold presidential elections in May 2020, despite the epidemiological situation, has drawn criticism from the opposition and international observers (Jastrzębski, 2024).

The Czech Republic and Slovakia have demonstrated a more cooperative approach to resolving the crisis. These countries actively supported EU initiatives to jointly purchase medical equipment and develop vaccines. For example, the Czech Republic was one of the first countries to join the EU joint procurement mechanism for the purchase of personal protective equipment and medical equipment (McEvoy & Ferri, 2020).

The Baltic States – Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania – have used the crisis to promote their digital initiatives at the EU level. Estonia, in particular, actively lobbied for the introduction of digital solutions for crisis management and coordination between member countries. As noted by L. Hantrais & M.T. Letablier (2020), Estonian experience in e-governance has become a model for other EU countries in developing digital tools to combat the pandemic.

In the context of the economic response to the pandemic, CEE countries generally supported the idea of creating an EU Recovery Fund, but expressed concern about the criteria for allocating funds. In particular, Poland and Hungary insisted that the allocation of funds should not be tied to issues of the rule of law. This led to lengthy

negotiations and compromises that culminated in the adoption of the Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council No. 2020/2092 (2020).

The migration crisis, which peaked in 2015-2016, remains one of the most controversial issues in relations between CEE countries and other EU members. The positions of the countries of the region on this issue are largely determined by their historical experience, demographic situation and political culture. According to V. Metcalfe-Hough (2022), the Visegrad Group countries (Poland, Hungary, Czech Republic, and Slovakia) have taken the toughest stance on accepting migrants and refugees. They categorically rejected the quota system for the distribution of refugees proposed by the European Commission in September 2015 under Article 78(3) Consolidated version of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (1992). This position was contrary to the principle of solidarity consolidated in Article 80 of the same Treaty, which provides for a “fair distribution of responsibility among member states” in the area of border control, asylum, and immigration policies.

Hungary, under the leadership of Viktor Orban, has become a symbol of resistance to EU migration policy. In 2015, the country built a fence on the border with Serbia and Croatia, which was regarded as a violation of the Schengen border code (Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council No. 2016/399, 2016). In addition, Hungary introduced criminal liability for illegal border crossing (Hungary criminalizes border..., 2015), which contradicts international norms for the protection of refugee rights, in particular the Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (1954).

Poland, although less radically, also refused to participate in the quota system. The Polish government stressed the need to strengthen the EU’s external borders and combat the causes of migration in the countries of origin. Poland actively supported the idea of “flexible solidarity”, which would provide for alternative forms of participation in resolving the migration crisis, in addition to accepting refugees. This position is reflected in the Bratislava Declaration (2016), where EU leaders agreed to “flexible solidarity” as a compromise between different approaches to migration policy.

The Czech Republic and Slovakia, although less active in their opposition, also abandoned mandatory quotas for accepting refugees. According to the Judgment of the Court of Justice of the European Union (Grand Chamber) in Cases No. C-643/15 and C-647/15 (2017) these countries, together with Hungary, were found guilty by the European Court of Justice of failing to fulfil their obligations to resettle refugees. The court held that “these member states cannot invoke their duties to maintain public order and maintain internal security to deviate from the implementation of the temporary and exclusive resettlement mechanism”.

The Baltic States took a more moderate position. While they also expressed concerns about mandatory quotas, these countries were more open to compromise and participation in pan-European solutions. For example, Lithuania has agreed to accept a certain number of refugees under the EU resettlement programme, albeit in a much smaller volume than originally proposed.

The position of CEE countries on the migration crisis has led to serious disagreements with the “old” EU members, especially with Germany and France. This has affected the overall ability of the EU to form a unified migration policy and respond effectively to the crisis. As noted by P. Bite *et al.* (2020), differences in migration policy approaches between CEE countries and Western European states have become a major challenge to the EU’s unity and ability to respond to global challenges.

The war in Ukraine, which began with a full-scale Russian invasion on February 24, 2022, was a key factor that affected the foreign policy positions of CEE countries and their relations with other EU members. The geographical proximity to the conflict zone and the historical experience of relations with Russia have led to the special sensitivity of the countries of the region to this crisis. Poland has taken the most active position in supporting Ukraine and countering Russian aggression. The Polish government has consistently advocated tougher sanctions against Russia, increased military assistance to Ukraine, and accelerated the process of Ukraine’s integration into Euro-Atlantic structures. Poland has become a key hub for providing humanitarian aid and receiving Ukrainian refugees. According to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for refugees, as of May 2024, Poland received the largest number of Ukrainian refugees among all EU countries – more than 1.7 million people (Ukraine refugee situation, 2024).

The Baltic States – Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania – have taken a tough stance similar to Poland against Russia. These countries actively lobbied for tougher sanctions, an increase in NATO’s military presence in the region, and comprehensive support for Ukraine. They were among the most active supporters of granting Ukraine the status of a candidate for EU membership, which was implemented on June 23, 2022 by the decision of the European Council in accordance with Article 49 Consolidated version of the Treaty on European Union (1992).

The Czech Republic and Slovakia have also shown strong support for Ukraine, albeit with less radical rhetoric. These countries have provided significant humanitarian and military assistance to Ukraine and supported sanctions against Russia. In particular, the Czech Republic became one of the first suppliers of heavy weapons to Ukraine, transferring T-72 tanks and BVP-1 infantry fighting vehicles in April 2022 (Czech Republic sends..., 2022).

Hungary has taken the most controversial position among the CEE countries. Although Hungary has officially supported Ukraine’s territorial integrity and condemned Russian aggression, Viktor Orban’s government has often criticised sanctions against Russia, emphasising their negative impact on the Hungarian economy. In addition, Hungary has blocked some EU initiatives to strengthen support for Ukraine, in particular, in matters of military assistance. This position has drawn criticism from other EU members and has led to tensions with Ukraine (Duračay, 2023). In general, the position of the CEE countries on the war in Ukraine significantly influenced the development of a common EU foreign policy. On the one hand, the active position of Poland and the Baltic States contributed to the strengthening of EU support for Ukraine and the adoption of a tougher position on Russia. On the other

hand, differences between CEE countries, especially Hungary's position, have sometimes made it difficult to make decisions and reach consensus within the EU.

The protests in Georgia, which broke out in response to an attempt to pass a law on "foreign agents" in early 2023, have become another important test for EU foreign policy and the role of CEE countries in shaping it. These events caused a special resonance in the CEE countries, which have their own experience of democratic transformation and opposition to authoritarian tendencies. According to R.E. Hamilton *et al.* (2024), the Georgian government's proposed bill on "foreign agents" had much in common with the Russian law of 2012 and stipulated that organisations receiving more than 20% of their funding from abroad must register as "foreign agents". This sparked mass protests in Georgia, as civil society and the opposition saw the move as an attempt to restrict democratic freedoms and divert the country from the European path of development.

CEE countries, especially those with experience of "colour revolutions" and democratic transformations, have shown particular sensitivity to the events in Georgia. Poland and the Baltic States were among the most active supporters of supporting Georgian civil society and condemning government actions that could restrict democratic freedoms. The Polish government has shown consistent support for the European aspirations of Georgia and its civil society, especially in the context of protests against the law on "foreign agents". Although there are no direct statements by Polish Foreign Minister Zbigniew Rau on this particular bill, his visit to Georgia on April 27, 2023, which took place shortly after the protests, highlighted the importance of supporting democratic processes in the country. At the press conference, Rau noted Poland's support for the aspirations of Georgian society for freedom, independence, and peace. He said: "Poland will continue to consistently support the European and Euro-Atlantic aspirations of Georgian society, emphasising that membership in the EU and NATO is in the interests not only of Georgia, but also of the entire Euro-Atlantic community". This statement, although not directly related to the law on "foreign agents", reflects Poland's position on supporting Georgia's democratic processes and European integration, which indirectly concerns the issue of the controversial bill. (Koridze, 2023).

Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia, which have close ties to Georgia under the Eastern Partnership, also strongly criticised the bill and called for its withdrawal. Lithuanian President Gitanas Nausėda expressed concern on his Twitter account about the Georgian law on "foreign agents" and the consequences that it may have for Georgia in the process of EU integration (Nausėda, 2024). The Czech Republic and Slovakia took a more moderate stance, but also expressed concern about the situation in Georgia. Czech Foreign Minister Jan Lipavski expressed a clear position on the situation in Georgia, especially regarding the law on "foreign agents". In a social media post on May 15, 2024, he stated that Georgia's adoption of a law on so-called foreign agents, similar to the Russian one, would harm the country's civil society and therefore affect its democracy and the rule of law. Lipavsky stressed that with this legislation and comments from representatives of the ruling

party, Georgia began to move away from EU membership. In addition, he noted that the Czech Republic condemns the Georgian government's use of violence against demonstrators in recent weeks (Willoughby, 2024). Hungary, unlike other CEE countries, refrained from directly criticising the Georgian government. This reflects the general trend of Hungarian foreign policy towards non-interference in the internal affairs of other states, especially when it comes to issues related to civil society and democratic freedoms. The reaction of the CEE countries to the protests in Georgia has demonstrated their ability to influence the development of a common EU position on events in the Eastern Partnership countries. The active position of Poland and the Baltic States contributed to the fact that the EU took a tougher position on the draft law on "foreign agents".

On April 22, 2024, the European Parliament adopted a resolution condemning the attempt to pass a law on "foreign agents" in Georgia and calling on the Georgian government to withdraw the bill. The European Parliament Resolution No. 2024/2703 (RSP) (2024) noted that the adoption of such a law would be incompatible with EU values and standards and would contradict Georgia's aspirations for European integration. The Venice Commission in its urgent opinion also expressed serious concerns about this law. The commission concluded that the restrictions imposed by law on the right to freedom of expression, freedom of association and privacy were incompatible with the requirements of legality, legitimacy, necessity in a democratic society and proportionality, and with the principle of non-discrimination set out in international and European standards. The commission stressed that the law poses a serious risk of stigmatisation, silencing and eventually eliminating associations and media outlets that receive even a small part of their funds from abroad. This can negatively affect open information public debates, pluralism, and democracy. The Venice Commission strongly recommended that the Georgian authorities repeal the law in its current form due to its fundamental shortcomings and significant negative consequences for fundamental freedoms (Georgia urgent opinion..., 2024).

It is important to note that the reaction of CEE countries to the events in Georgia reflects their own understanding of democratic processes and the importance of civil society. As noted by R.E. Hamilton *et al.* (2024), CEE countries that have themselves gone through a complex process of democratic transformation see support for civil society and independent media as a key element in strengthening democracy in the Eastern Partnership countries. This position of CEE countries also reflects their desire to strengthen their role in shaping EU Eastern policy. By supporting democratic forces in Georgia, these countries not only defend their values, but also strengthen their influence in the region, which they consider strategically important for the security and stability of Europe.

Thus, the reaction of CEE countries to the protests in Georgia demonstrates their growing role in shaping EU foreign policy, especially in relation to the Eastern Partnership countries. Their position contributed to a more active and principled EU response to the events in Georgia, emphasising the importance of democratic values and the rule of law in the EU's relations with partner countries. For a comprehensive understanding of the positions

and strategies of the central and Eastern European countries regarding the key crises that the European Union faced during 2015-2024, a comparative analysis of their reactions was carried out. The results of this analysis are

presented in the form of a table that clearly demonstrates the variety of approaches of CEE countries to solving global challenges and their impact on the development of EU foreign policy (Table 1).

Table 1. Comparative analysis of CEE responses to key EU crises (2015-2024)

Crisis	Poland	Hungary	Czech Republic	Slovakia	Baltic States
COVID-19 pandemic	Centralisation of power, restriction of freedoms	Emergency powers of the government, violation of democratic norms	Cooperative approach, support for EU initiatives	Cooperative approach, support for EU initiatives	Promotion of digital solutions
Migration crisis	Rejection of quotas, strengthening borders	Tough anti-immigration policy, fence construction	Rejection of quotas, moderate rhetoric	Rejection of quotas, moderate rhetoric	Moderate position, limited participation in relocation
War in Ukraine	Active support for Ukraine, tough stance on Russia	Criticism of sanctions, blocking EU initiatives	Support to Ukraine, provision of military assistance	Support to Ukraine, provision of humanitarian assistance	Active support for Ukraine, tough stance on Russia
Protests in Georgia	Active support for protesters, criticism of the law	Refraining from direct criticism	Moderate concern, call for dialogue	Moderate concern, call for dialogue	Active support for protesters, criticism of the law

Notes: COVID-19 – coronavirus disease of 2019; “Baltic States” – Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania; “fence” – refers to the border barrier built by Hungary on the border with Serbia and Croatia; “law” – refers to the law on “foreign agents” proposed by the government of Georgia

Source: compiled by the author

Table 1 clearly demonstrates the variety of challenges that CEE countries face in the context of their EU membership. It emphasises that despite their shared past and geographical proximity, these countries have different levels of problems in the areas of the rule of law, economic convergence, foreign policy priorities, and the impact of populism on foreign policy. This creates a complex dynamic in relations between “new” and “old” EU members, requiring flexible and individualised approaches to solving these problems at the Union level.

The main problems associated with the membership of CEE countries in the EU. The accession of CEE countries to the European Union in 2004 and 2007 marked a historic moment of reunification of the continent after decades of division. However, this process has also revealed a number of significant problems that continue to affect the relationship between the “old” and “new” EU members, and the overall dynamics of European integration. One of the most pressing issues related to the membership of CEE countries in the EU has been compliance with the principles of the rule of law and democratic standards. This problem was particularly acute between 2015 and 2024, when a number of countries in the region experienced trends to limit the independence of the judicial system, freedom of the media and civil society.

Poland has become one of the most striking examples of this trend. In 2015, after the Law and Justice party came to power, a number of judicial reforms were initiated, which, according to the European Commission, threatened the independence of the judicial system. In particular, the law of the Republic of Poland of 20 December 2019 (Law of the Republic of Poland..., 2020) caused serious concern in Brussels. The European Commission, in its 2020 rule of law report, noted that “reforms carried out since 2015 have increased the influence of the executive and legislative powers on the functioning of the judiciary, thereby weakening judicial independence” (Report of the European Commission No. SWD (2021) 722 final, 2021).

In response to these actions, the European Commission initiated a procedure against Poland under Article 7 Consolidated version of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (1992), which provides for the possibility of imposing sanctions on a member state for serious violations of EU values. On December 20, 2017, the Commission activated this procedure for the first time in the history of the EU, declaring “a clear risk of a serious violation of the rule of law in Poland” (Decision of the Council of European Union No. 2017/0360, 2017).

Hungary has also been the target of criticism from the EU for violating democratic norms. In particular, the higher education law passed in 2017, which effectively forced the Central European University to move most of its activities from Budapest to Vienna, was seen as an attack on academic freedom. The European Court in Judgement of the Court of Justice (Grand Chamber) in Case No. C-66/18 (2020) held that this law violated EU law, in particular Article 13 of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights on academic freedom and Article 49 of the TFEU on freedom of establishment.

These cases demonstrate the growing tension between some CEE countries and EU institutions regarding the understanding and implementation of the rule of law principles. As noted by A. von Bogdandy *et al.* (2021) in their study, problems with the rule of law in CEE countries revealed the limitations of existing EU mechanisms for protecting democracy and questioned the effectiveness of the European integration process as a tool for democratisation.

Economic convergence between “old” and “new” EU members remains one of the key challenges of European integration. Although CEE countries have made significant progress in economic development since joining the EU, the gap in living standards and economic productivity is still significant. According to Eurostat, in 2023, GDP per capita at purchasing power parity in Bulgaria was only 55% of the EU average, in Romania – 85%, in Poland – 77%

(Household consumption..., 2024). These figures, while showing significant progress since joining the EU, still point to a significant gap in economic development.

The problem of economic convergence is closely related to the issue of the efficiency of using EU funds. According to a 2023 study by the European Chamber of Accounts, despite significant investment from the EU, the efficiency of using structural funds in CEE countries remains lower than the EU average (Special report..., 2023). This indicates the need to improve the distribution and control mechanisms for the use of European funds. In addition, the economic crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, and the 2022-2023 energy crisis related to the war in Ukraine, have further exacerbated the economic challenges for CEE countries. According to the European Commission's 2024 forecast, the pace of economic recovery in CEE countries may be lower than the EU average, which may lead to a slowdown in the process of economic convergence (European economic forecast, 2024).

The foreign policy priorities of CEE countries often differ from the positions of the "old" EU members, which creates additional challenges for the development of a unified foreign policy of the Union. These differences are particularly noticeable in relations with Russia, policies towards Ukraine and other Eastern Partnership countries, and in approaches to migration policy. For example, the position of Poland and the Baltic States on Russia is much tougher than that of countries such as Germany or France. This was reflected, in particular, in the discussions around the Nord Stream 2 project. Poland has consistently opposed this project, seeing it as a threat to Europe's energy security (Poland and Lithuania..., 2019). Differences in assessments of energy cooperation with Russia between CEE countries and some Western European states create obstacles to the development of a unified EU energy policy.

The issue of migration policy also remains a source of controversy. The Visegrad Group countries (Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovakia) consistently oppose mandatory quotas for the distribution of refugees, which

contradicts the position of most of the "old" EU members. This situation led to the adoption in May 2024 of a New Covenant on migration and asylum, which provides for a more flexible approach to solidarity in migration issues (Pact on migration..., 2024).

The rise of populist sentiment in CEE countries has a significant impact on their foreign policy and relations with the EU. Populist governments often use Euroscepticism rhetoric to mobilise electoral support, which creates additional tension in relations with Brussels. Hungary, under the leadership of Viktor Orban, has become the most striking example of this trend. Orban has repeatedly criticised EU policies, particularly on migration and the rule of law. In a speech on March 15, 2024, dedicated to the national holiday of Hungary, V. Orban said that Brussels is trying to limit the sovereignty of member countries and impose other people's values on them (Hungary's Orban..., 2024). Similar trends are observed in other countries in the region. As noted by S. Destradi *et al.* (2021) populist governments in CEE countries often use anti-European rhetoric as a tool of internal mobilisation, which makes it difficult to form a unified EU foreign policy. This situation poses serious challenges to the unity of the EU and its ability to respond effectively to global crises. The rise of populism in CEE countries may lead to further fragmentation of the EU's foreign policy and weakening of its position in the international arena.

In order to systematise and visually present the main problems associated with the membership of Central and Eastern European countries in the European Union, a comprehensive analysis of key aspects of their integration was carried out. This analysis covers the period from 2015 to 2024 and focuses on four main areas: the rule of law, economic convergence, foreign policy priorities, and the impact of populism on foreign policy. The results of this analysis are presented in the form of a comparative table, which allows assessing the situation in each of the countries under study and identify general trends and differences between them (Table 2).

Table 2. Comparative analysis of CEE responses to key EU crises (2015-2024)

Problem	Poland	Hungary	Czech Republic	Slovakia	Baltic States
Rule of law	High level of tension, procedure under Article 7 of the TEU	High level of tension, violation of academic freedoms	Moderate problems	Moderate problems	Low level of problems
Economic convergence	GDP per capita: 77% of the EU average (2023)	GDP per capita: 74% of the EU average (2023)	GDP per capita: 93% of the EU average (2023)	GDP per capita: 71% of the EU average (2023)	GDP per capita: 84-89% of the EU average (2023)
Foreign policy priorities	Tough stance on Russia, support for Ukraine	Softer position on Russia, criticism of sanctions	Moderate position	Moderate position	Tough stance on Russia, support for Ukraine
Influence of populism	Significant influence on foreign policy	Very high influence on foreign policy	Moderate impact	Moderate impact	Low impact

Notes: GDP – Gross domestic product; Article 7 TEU – Article 7 Consolidated version of the Treaty on European Union (1992).

Source: compiled by the author

This table clearly demonstrates the variety of challenges that CEE countries face in the context of their EU membership. It emphasises that despite their shared past and geographical proximity, these countries have different levels of problems in the areas of the rule of law, economic

convergence, foreign policy priorities, and the impact of populism on foreign policy. This creates a complex dynamic in relations between "new" and "old" EU members, requiring flexible and individualised approaches to solving these problems at the Union level.

Evaluating the effectiveness of CEE countries' influence on EU foreign policy. Since joining the European Union in 2004 and 2007, the countries of Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) have made significant progress in promoting their regional interests at the EU level. These successes are particularly noticeable in the areas of energy security, European neighbourhood policy, and EU enlargement. One of the key achievements of the CEE countries was the strengthening of the EU's attention to energy security issues. According to D. Baltag & I. Romanyshyn (2023), the CEE countries, especially Poland and the Baltic States, played a crucial role in shaping the EU Energy Union, emphasising the need to diversify energy sources and reduce dependence on Russian gas. This is reflected in the EU Energy Security Strategy adopted in 2024, which provides for significant investment in the development of infrastructure for the import of liquefied natural gas and strengthening the interconnections between national energy systems (Draft update proposal..., 2024).

Another important success was the strengthening of the eastern dimension of European neighbourhood policy. The Eastern Partnership Initiative, proposed by Poland and Sweden in 2008, has become a key tool for EU cooperation with six post-Soviet countries. Due to the persistence of CEE countries, especially Poland and the Baltic States, the EU has significantly strengthened its presence and influence in the Eastern Europe and South Caucasus region (Baltag & Romanyshyn, 2023). This led to the signing of association agreements with Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia in 2014, and the granting of candidate status for EU membership to Ukraine and Moldova in 2022.

CEE countries have also played an important role in supporting the European perspective for the Western Balkans. In particular, during Bulgaria's presidency of the EU Council in the first half of 2018, the EU-Western Balkans summit was held in Sofia, which confirmed the European perspective of the region. This policy was continued in the decision of the European Council of March 2020 to start accession negotiations with Albania and North Macedonia (Commission welcomes the..., 2020).

The process of forming a common EU foreign policy is characterised by a complex dynamic in which the countries of Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) face a number of restrictions and obstacles, despite certain achievements. These challenges are caused both by the internal characteristics of the countries of the region and by the structural aspects of decision-making in the EU, creating a multidimensional problem that requires an integrated approach to its solution. The key limitation is the differences in foreign policy priorities between the CEE countries themselves. B. Dicharry & L. Stiblarova (2023) emphasise that despite the common historical past, CEE countries often have different views on key foreign policy issues, which makes it difficult to form a single regional position. This heterogeneity is particularly evident in relations with Russia, where the tough stance of Poland and the Baltic States contrasts with the more moderate approaches of Hungary or Slovakia. Such differences not only complicate coordination within the region, but also reduce the weight of the CEE vote at the pan-European level (Lelieveldt & Princen, 2023).

The limited resources and diplomatic influence of CEE countries in comparison with the "old" EU members

pose an additional obstacle. The EU Soft Power Index for 2024 shows that none of the CEE countries is in the top 10 in this indicator (Jagodzinski, 2024). This situation significantly limits the ability of CEE countries to shape the EU agenda and influence key decisions, creating an imbalance in the ability to implement foreign policy initiatives. Internal political processes in some CEE countries, in particular in Poland and Hungary, have led to tensions with EU institutions. The initiation of the Article 7 Consolidated version of the Treaty on European Union (1992) procedure against these countries significantly weakened their position in negotiations with other EU members on key foreign policy issues. This situation not only undermines the credibility of CEE countries, but also limits their ability to effectively defend their interests on the European stage.

The decision-making mechanism in the area of the EU's common foreign and security policy also acts as a limiting factor. The requirement of unanimity provided for in Article 31 of the Consolidated version of the Treaty on European Union (1992) often makes it difficult to promote CEE initiatives, especially if they do not find support from the "old" EU members. This structural feature of the decision-making process creates additional barriers to the implementation of the foreign policy priorities of the CEE countries, requiring them to perform more complex diplomatic manoeuvres and compromises. Despite these challenges, there are a number of potential areas for strengthening the role of CEE countries in shaping EU foreign policy. These areas include strengthening regional cooperation, developing expertise on key issues, and actively using EU tools. The implementation of these strategies can significantly increase the influence of CEE countries on the European stage.

Strengthening regional cooperation is a key factor for increasing the influence of CEE countries. Closer coordination of positions between the Visegrad Group countries, the Baltic States and other CEE members can significantly strengthen their voice in the EU. Such cooperation will not only allow CEE countries to come up with more coordinated positions, but also increase their negotiating power in pan-European discussions. Developing expertise on key issues is another important area. The CEE countries have unique experience and knowledge, especially in relations with Russia and the Eastern Partnership countries. B. Dicharry & L. Stiblarova (2023) emphasise that strengthening analytical capabilities and active participation of experts from CEE countries in shaping EU policy can significantly increase their influence. This will not only strengthen the position of CEE countries in discussions on key foreign policy issues, but also increase their value as partners for other EU members.

The active use of EU instruments is another potential area for increasing influence. In particular, the enhanced cooperation mechanism provided for in articles 326-334 of the Consolidated version of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (1992) can be used by CEE countries to promote joint foreign policy initiatives. This tool allows a group of EU member states to promote joint projects even in the absence of a common consensus, which can be an effective way to implement the foreign policy priorities of CEE countries.

Thus, while CEE countries face significant challenges in shaping the EU's common foreign policy, there are real opportunities to strengthen their role. The implementation of these opportunities will require both a strategic approach to regional cooperation and the development of expert capacity and skilful use of existing EU mechanisms. Success in these areas can significantly increase the impact of CEE countries on EU foreign policy, contributing to a more balanced and inclusive decision-making process at the European level.

Discussion

The analysis of the influence of Central and Eastern European countries on the foreign policy of the European Union revealed a number of key trends and problems. In particular, it was established that CEE countries have made some progress in promoting their regional interests, especially in the areas of energy security and European neighbourhood policy. Their influence is limited by differences in foreign policy priorities, limited resources, and tensions with EU institutions. Comparing the results obtained with studies by other researchers helps to better understand the dynamics of these processes and their consequences for European integration.

In the context of analysing the effectiveness of EU foreign policy and the role of individual member states in its establishment, C. Hill (2019) offers a critical look at the EU's ability to act as a single actor on the international stage. The researcher argues that despite the EU's ambitions to become a global player, internal disagreements and institutional constraints often lead to inefficiency and inconsistency in foreign policy. The authors of this study agree with this opinion, given the difficulties identified in forming a unified position of the CEE countries and their interaction with the "old" EU members. However, in contrast to the pessimistic view of C. Hill (2019), the results obtained indicate some success of CEE countries in promoting their interests, in particular, in the field of energy security and European neighbourhood policy. This indicates that despite structural constraints, CEE countries are finding ways to influence EU foreign policy, albeit with varying degrees of success in different areas.

Considering the geopolitical aspect of the EU's relations with the Eastern Partnership countries, D. Cadier (2021) highlights the growing role of geopolitical considerations in shaping EU policy towards the region. The researcher argues that the CEE countries, especially Poland and the Baltic States, played a key role in the "geopolitics" of the Eastern Partnership, promoting more active EU involvement in the region. This thesis can be agreed upon, given the active role of CEE countries in strengthening the eastern dimension of European neighbourhood policy. In particular, the success of the Eastern Partnership Initiative and the signing of association agreements with Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia can be considered as a direct result of the influence of CEE countries on EU foreign policy. However, the identified differences in the approaches of different CEE countries to relations with Russia emphasise the complexity of forming a unified position even within this region, which may limit the effectiveness of their influence at the pan-European level.

Analysing the influence of external actors on CEE countries, E. Kavalski (2019) focuses on China's role in the region, exploring the unintended consequences of the interaction of different identity narratives. Although this study does not directly address the impact of CEE countries on EU foreign policy, it provides an important context for understanding the complexity of foreign policy orientations in the region. It can be assumed that the identified differences in the foreign policy priorities of the CEE countries can be partly explained by the influence of external actors such as China. This highlights the need to consider not only intra-European dynamics, but also the global context when analysing the foreign policy positions of CEE countries and their impact on EU policy.

In the context of Europeanisation of CEE countries, F. Schimmelfennig & U. Sedelmeier (2020) offer a revised version of the external stimulus model, analysing the processes of adaptation of these countries to EU norms and practices. The researchers argue that the effectiveness of Europeanisation depends on the clarity of EU conditions, the size and speed of remuneration, and on the internal costs of adaptation. This model provides a better understanding of the identified problems with the rule of law in some CEE countries, in particular, in Poland and Hungary. The authors agree with the thesis of F. Schimmelfennig & U. Sedelmeier (2020) about the relationship between internal adaptation processes and the foreign policy influence of EU member states. The success of CEE countries in promoting their interests in the areas of energy security and European neighbourhood policy shows that even in the presence of internal problems, these countries can effectively use EU mechanisms to achieve their goals.

The analysis of the impact of CEE countries on EU energy policy revealed significant success of these states in promoting energy security issues at the pan-European level. In particular, the key role of CEE countries, especially Poland and the Baltic States, in the establishment of the EU Energy Union and the development of an energy security strategy is established. These initiatives are aimed at diversifying energy sources and reducing dependence on Russian gas. The study revealed certain limitations in the influence of CEE countries due to differences in approaches between the countries of the region themselves and their limited resources compared to the "old" EU members.

Considering the political economy of EU climate and energy policy in CEE countries, S. Četković & A. Buzogány (2019) point to the changing coalition patterns and prospects for the transition to clean energy. The researchers note the growing role of CEE countries in shaping the EU's energy policy. This opinion can be agreed with, given the successes of these countries in promoting energy security issues at the EU level. In particular, the influence of CEE countries on the development of the EU Energy Union and energy security strategies confirms the researchers' thesis about changing the role of these countries from passive recipients of EU policy to active participants in its development. It is worth noting that the identified limitations of this impact, due to disagreements between the CEE countries themselves and their limited resources, complement the analysis of S. Četković & A. Buzogány (2019) with important context of intraregional dynamics.

Analysing decision-making processes in the EU, a study edited by H. Wallace *et al.* (2020) offers a comprehensive analysis of policy-making mechanisms in various EU areas of activity. The researchers emphasise the complexity and multilevel nature of these processes, which is consistent with the identified limitations that CEE countries face when promoting their interests at the EU level. The source's point about structural constraints affecting the effectiveness of EU decision-making can be agreed upon, given the difficulties identified in requiring unanimity in the EU's common foreign and security policy. However, the success of CEE countries in promoting energy security and neighbourhood policy initiatives demonstrates that even in the face of these restrictions, member states can effectively use existing mechanisms to influence EU policy.

Considering the relationship between the EU and other international actors, C. Hill *et al.* (2023) offer a comprehensive look at the EU's role in global politics. The researchers highlight the EU's growing role as an international actor, but also note internal challenges that limit its effectiveness. This can be agreed upon, given the identified successes and limitations of the influence of CEE countries on EU foreign policy. In particular, the ability of CEE countries to influence the development of EU policy on the Eastern Partnership and energy security confirms thesis by C. Hill *et al.* (2023) on the importance of the EU's internal dynamics for its foreign policy activities. The identified differences between CEE countries and tensions with EU institutions illustrate internal challenges that may limit the EU's ability to act as a single and effective international actor.

In the context of the analysis of the EU's global strategy, S. Biscop (2022) examines the evolution of the EU's foreign policy approach, arguing in favour of "real policies with European characteristics". This concept implies a more pragmatic and interest-oriented approach to foreign policy, which, however, remains true to European values. The authors of the present study agree with this opinion, given the active role of CEE countries in shaping EU policy on the Eastern Partnership and energy security, which can be considered as an example of such a pragmatic approach. However, the identified problems with the rule of law in some CEE countries and their impact on the foreign policy positions of these countries highlight the complexity of balancing interests and values in EU foreign policy, which is a central aspect of the analysis by S. Biscop (2022). This demonstrates that the impact of CEE countries on EU foreign policy reflects a broader debate about the nature and direction of European integration.

Analysing the phenomenon of populism in Central and Eastern Europe, S. Engler *et al.* (2021) point to the diversity of anti-establishment and populist movements in the region. This analysis can be agreed with, given the identified influence of populist sentiments on the foreign policy positions of some CEE countries, in particular Hungary. The revealed trend of using Eurosceptic rhetoric by populist governments to mobilise electoral support confirms the conclusions of researchers about the influence of populism on political processes in the region. It is worth noting that the identified specific consequences of populist trends for the ability of CEE countries to effectively influence EU foreign policy complement this analysis. In

particular, tensions between some CEE countries and EU institutions can be seen as a direct result of increased populist tendencies, which limits the ability of these countries to effectively promote their interests at the European level.

Considering modern European politics, J.M. Magone (2019) offers a comprehensive analysis of political systems and processes in various European countries, including CEE countries. The researcher draws attention to the growing role of these countries in shaping pan-European politics. This opinion can be agreed with, given the revealed influence of CEE countries on EU foreign policy. In particular, the success of CEE countries in promoting their interests in the areas of energy security and European neighbourhood policy confirms the thesis of J.M. Magone (2019) on the growing weight of these countries in EU decision-making processes. Notably, the identified differences in foreign policy priorities between the CEE countries themselves and the limited resources of these countries in comparison with the "old" EU members demonstrate difficulties in implementing their ambitions.

Conclusions

An analysis of the positions and strategies of CEE representatives in EU institutions during the key crises of recent years revealed the heterogeneity of their approaches and a certain discrepancy with the positions of the "old" EU members. During the COVID-19 pandemic, CEE countries have demonstrated various approaches – from centralising power in Hungary to actively promoting digital solutions by the Baltic States. The migration crisis of 2015-2016 revealed the greatest differences with the Visegrad countries, which categorically abandoned the quota system for the distribution of refugees. The war in Ukraine, on the contrary, led to greater unity of positions of the CEE countries, with the exception of Hungary, which has taken a more reserved stance on sanctions against Russia.

The study identified a number of key issues related to CEE membership in the EU that affect their ability to shape the Union's foreign policy. These include issues of the rule of law, particularly acute for Poland and Hungary, economic convergence, which is still a challenge, and growing populist sentiment, which often leads to tensions with Brussels. These factors limit the ability of CEE countries to effectively promote their interests at the EU level.

An assessment of the effectiveness of the CEE countries' influence on EU foreign policy showed that despite the restrictions, these countries have made significant progress in promoting their regional interests, especially in the areas of energy security and European neighbourhood policy. The Eastern Partnership Initiative and the EU's increased attention to energy security issues are direct results of the CEE countries' influence. Their influence is limited by differences in foreign policy priorities, limited resources, and tensions with EU institutions. To strengthen their role in shaping EU foreign policy, CEE countries need to focus on strengthening regional cooperation, developing expertise on key issues, and actively using EU tools, in particular, the enhanced cooperation mechanism. Closer coordination of positions between countries in the region can significantly strengthen their voice in the EU.

The main limitation of this study is its focus on official positions and public statements of representatives of CEE countries, which does not always fully reflect the complexity of domestic political processes and informal mechanisms of influence. Promising areas of further research can be a more detailed analysis of domestic political factors that influence the development of foreign policy positions of CEE countries, and research on the impact

of economic interests and business lobbies on the foreign policy of these countries within the EU.

Acknowledgements

None.

Conflict of Interest

None.

References

- [1] Anghel, V., & Jones, E. (2022). Failing forward in Eastern enlargement: Problem solving through problem making. *Journal of European Public Policy*, 29(7), 1092-1111. doi: [10.1080/13501763.2021.1927155](https://doi.org/10.1080/13501763.2021.1927155).
- [2] Baltag, D., & Romanyshyn, I. (2023). The European Union and its Eastern Partnership neighbours – a framework to evaluate performance. *International Politics*. doi: [10.1057/s41311-023-00475-3](https://doi.org/10.1057/s41311-023-00475-3).
- [3] Bindi, F. (2022). *European Union foreign policy: A historical overview*. Retrieved from <https://art.torvergata.it/bitstream/2108/360664/1/EUFP%20Intro%20and%20History.pdf>.
- [4] Biscop, S. (2022). *EU Global Strategy: Realpolitik with European characteristics*. Retrieved from <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/84598547.pdf>.
- [5] Bite, P., Szombathelyi, M.K., & Vasa, L. (2020). *The concept of labour migration from the perspective of Central and Eastern Europe*. *Economics & Sociology*, 13(1), 197-216.
- [6] Cadier, D. (2021). The geopoliticisation of the EU's Eastern Partnership. In A. Tyushka & T. Schumacher (Eds.), *The European Union and its eastern neighbourhood* (pp. 77-99). New York: Routledge. doi: [10.4324/9781003083634](https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003083634).
- [7] Ceron, M., Palermo, C.M., & Grechi, D. (2021). Covid-19 response models and divergences within the EU: A health dis-union. *Statistics, Politics and Policy*, 12(2), 219-268. doi: [10.1515/spp-2021-0003](https://doi.org/10.1515/spp-2021-0003).
- [8] Četković, S., & Buzogány, A. (2019). The political economy of EU climate and energy policies in Central and Eastern Europe revisited: Shifting coalitions and prospects for clean energy transitions. *Politics and Governance*, 7(1), 124-138. doi: [10.17645/pag.v7i1.1786](https://doi.org/10.17645/pag.v7i1.1786).
- [9] Commission welcomes the green light to opening of accession talks with Albania and North Macedonia. (2024). Retrieved from https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_20_519.
- [10] Consolidated version of the Treaty on European Union. (1992, February). Retrieved from <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/eut/teu/title/I>.
- [11] Consolidated version of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union. (1992, February). Retrieved from <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/eut/teec/contents>.
- [12] Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees. (1954, April). Retrieved from <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/refugees.pdf>.
- [13] Czech Republic sends tanks, infantry fighting vehicles to Ukraine. (2022). Retrieved from <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/czech-republic-sends-tanks-ukraine-czech-tv-reports-2022-04-05/>.
- [14] Decision of the Council of European Union No. 2017/0360 Reasoned Proposal in Accordance with Article 7(1) of the Treaty on European Union Regarding the Rule of Law in Poland “On the Determination of a Clear Risk of a Serious Breach by the Republic of Poland of the Rule of Law”. (2017, December). Retrieved from file:///C:/Users/USER/Downloads/1_en_act_part1_v3_3_871DA71A-D6FC-B85B-F649EDC0ADF4B470_49108.pdf.
- [15] Destradi, S., Cadier, D., & Plagemann, J. (2021). Populism and foreign policy: A research agenda (Introduction). *Comparative European Politics*, 19(6), 663-682. doi: [10.1057/2Fs41295-021-00255-4](https://doi.org/10.1057/2Fs41295-021-00255-4).
- [16] Dicharry, B., & Stiblarova, L. (2023). Positive externalities of the EU cohesion policy: Toward more synchronised CEE countries? *International Economics and Economic Policy*, 20(3), 485-508. doi: [10.1007/s10368-023-00566-9](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10368-023-00566-9).
- [17] Draft update proposal: “Integrated national energy and climate plan of the Republic of Slovenia”. (2024). Retrieved from https://commission.europa.eu/system/files/2023-07/EN_SLOVENIA%20DRAFT%20UPDATED%20NECP.pdf.
- [18] Durakçay, F. A. (2023). Hungary's position on the Russia-Ukraine war and its implications for cooperation in the Visegrad group. *Eurasian Research Journal*, 5(4), 7-26. doi: [10.53277/2519-2442-2023.4-01](https://doi.org/10.53277/2519-2442-2023.4-01).
- [19] Engler, S., Pytlas, B., & Deegan-Krause, K. (2021). Assessing the diversity of anti-establishment and populist politics in Central and Eastern Europe. In M. Caiani & P. Graziano (Eds.), *Varieties of populism in Europe in times of crises* (pp. 170-196). New York: Routledge. doi: [10.4324/9781003157380](https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003157380).
- [20] EU warns Hungary over virus power grab. (2020). Retrieved from <https://www.dw.com/en/eu-warns-hungary-over-coronavirus-power-grab/a-52969515>.
- [21] European Economic Forecast. (2024). Retrieved from https://economy-finance.ec.europa.eu/document/download/c63e0da2-c6d6-4d13-8dcb-646b0d1927a4_en?filename=ip286_en.pdf.
- [22] European Parliament Resolution No. 2024/2703(RSP) “On Attempts to Reintroduce a Foreign Agent Law in Georgia and its Restrictions on Civil Society”. (2024, May). Retrieved from https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/B-9-2024-0246_EN.html.
- [23] Fuchs-Schündeln, N., & Schündeln, M. (2020). The long-term effects of communism in Eastern Europe. *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 34(2), 172-191. doi: [10.1257/jep.34.2.172](https://doi.org/10.1257/jep.34.2.172).

- [24] Georgia urgent opinion on the law on transparency of foreign influence. (2024). Retrieved from [https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/default.aspx?pdffile=CDL-PI\(2024\)013-e](https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/default.aspx?pdffile=CDL-PI(2024)013-e).
- [25] Hamilton, R.E., Popkhadze, M., Navarro, L., Kutelia, B., & Sikharulidze, V. (2024). *Georgia's foreign agents law and resulting protests*. Retrieved from <https://policycommons.net/artifacts/12441502/georgias-foreign-agents-law-and-resulting-protests/13338130/>.
- [26] Hantrais, L., & Letablier, M.T. (2020). *Comparing and contrasting the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in the European Union*. London: Routledge. doi: 10.4324/9781003140719.
- [27] Hill, C. (2019). European foreign policy: Power bloc, civilian model-or flop? In R. Rummel & V. Erdmann-Keefer (Eds.), *The evolution of an international actor* (pp. 31-55). New York: Routledge. doi: 10.4324/9780429310690.
- [28] Hill, C., Smith, M., & Vanhoonacker, S. (Eds.). (2023). *International relations and the European Union*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- [29] Household consumption: Price levels in 2023. (2024). Retrieved from <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostat-news/w/ddn-20240620-2>.
- [30] Hungary criminalizes border violations. (2015). Retrieved from <https://www.dw.com/en/hungary-passes-tough-new-laws-against-border-violators-amid-refugee-surge/a-18694948>.
- [31] Hungary's Orban ready to "occupy" Brussels to bring EU change. (2024). Retrieved from <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/hungarys-orban-ready-occupy-brussels-bring-eu-change-2024-03-15/>.
- [32] Jagodzinski, K. (2024). *Global Soft Power Index 2024 – a world in flux*. Retrieved from <https://brandfinance.com/insights/global-soft-power-index-2024-a-world-in-flux>.
- [33] Jastrzębski, M. (2024). Pandemic elections in European Union countries in the assessment of OSCE observing missions reports. *Elections in Times of a Pandemic – Dilemmas and Challenges: Experiences of the European Countries*, 59, 119-133. doi: 10.1163/9789004690622_010.
- [34] Judgment of the Court of Justice (Grand Chamber) in Case No. C-66/18 “European Commission v Hungary”. (2020, October). Retrieved from <https://curia.europa.eu/juris/liste.jsf?num=C-66/18>.
- [35] Judgment of the Court of Justice of the European Union (Grand Chamber) in Cases Nos. C-643/15 and C-647/15 “Slovak Republic and Hungary v Council of the European Union”. (2017, September). Retrieved from <https://www.asylumlawdatabase.eu/en/content/cjeu-joined-cases-c-64315-and-c-64715-slovak-republic-and-hungary-v-council-european-union-6>.
- [36] Kavalski, E. (2019). China in Central and Eastern Europe: The unintended effects of identity narratives. *Asia Europe Journal*, 17(4), 403-419. doi: 10.1007/s10308-019-00563-1.
- [37] Keukeleire, S., & Delreux, T. (2022). *The foreign policy of the European Union*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing.
- [38] Koridze, N. (2023). *Polish Foreign Minister Zbigniew Rau visits Georgia*. Retrieved from <https://civil.ge/archives/539136>.
- [39] Law of the Republic of Poland “On the System of Common Courts, the Act on the Supreme Court and Certain Other Acts”. (2020, December). Retrieved from <https://isap.sejm.gov.pl/isap.nsf/DocDetails.xsp?id=WDU20200000190>.
- [40] Lelieveldt, H., & Princen, S. (2023). *The politics of the European Union*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- [41] Magone, J.M. (2019). *Contemporary European politics: A comparative introduction*. London: Routledge.
- [42] McEvoy, E., & Ferri, D. (2020). The role of the joint procurement agreement during the COVID-19 Pandemic: Assessing Its usefulness and discussing its potential to support a european health union. *European Journal of Risk Regulation*, 11(4), 851-863. doi: 10.1017/err.2020.91.
- [43] Metcalfe-Hough, V. (2022). *Migration Crisis?: Facts, challenges and possible solutions*. Retrieved from <https://odi.org/en/publications/a-migration-crisis-facts-challenges-and-possible-solutions/>.
- [44] Nausėda, G. (2024). *Discussed the latest developments in Georgia with President*. Retrieved from <https://x.com/GitanasNauseda/status/1783116359129301376>.
- [45] Pact on migration and asylum. (2024). Retrieved from https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/policies/migration-and-asylum/pact-migration-and-asylum_en.
- [46] Poland and Lithuania see Nord Stream 2 as threat to energy security. (2019). Retrieved from <https://www.reuters.com/article/markets/currencies/poland-and-lithuania-see-nord-stream-2-as-threat-to-energy-security-idUSKBN1W20TN/>.
- [47] Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council No. 2016/399 “On a Union Code on the Rules Governing the Movement of Persons Across Borders (Schengen Borders Code) (Codification)”. (2016, March). Retrieved from <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A32016R0399>.
- [48] Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council No. 2020/2092 “On a General Regime of Conditionality for the Protection of the Union Budget”. (2020, December). Retrieved from <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/reg/2020/2092/oj>.
- [49] Report of the European Commission No. SWD(2021) 722 final “On the Rule of Law Situation in Poland”. (2021, July). Retrieved from <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52021SC0722&from=EN>.
- [50] Schimmelfennig, F., & Sedelmeier, U. (2020). The europeanization of Eastern Europe: The external incentives model revisited. *Journal of European Public Policy*, 27(6), 814-833. doi: 10.1080/13501763.2019.1617333.
- [51] Special report 17/2023: Circular economy – slow transition by member states despite EU action. (2023). Retrieved from <https://www.eca.europa.eu/en/publications?ref=SR-2023-17>.
- [52] Stubbs, P., & Lendvai-Bainton, N. (2020). Authoritarian neoliberalism, radical conservatism and social policy within the European Union: Croatia, Hungary and Poland. *Development and Change*, 51(2), 540-560. doi: 10.1111/dech.12565.

- [53] The Bratislava Declaration. (2016, September). Retrieved from <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/21250/160916-bratislava-declaration-and-roadmapen16.pdf>.
- [54] Ukraine refugee situation. (2024). Retrieved from <https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/ukraine/location/10781>.
- [55] Varga, M., & Buzogány, A. (2021). The foreign policy of populists in power: Contesting liberalism in Poland and Hungary. *Geopolitics*, 26(5), 1442-1463. doi: 10.1080/14650045.2020.1734564.
- [56] von Bogdandy, A., Bogdanowicz, P., Canor, I., Grabenwarter, C., Taborowski, M., & Schmidt M. (Eds.). (2021). *Defending checks and balances in EU member states. Taking Stock of Europe's Actions*. Berlin: Springer.
- [57] Wallace, H., Pollack, M.A., Roederer-Rynning, C., & Young, A.R. (Eds.). (2020). *Policy-making in the European Union*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- [58] Willoughby, I. (2024). *Lipavský: Georgia "foreign agents" law spells move away from EU membership*. Retrieved from <https://english.radio.cz/lipavsky-georgia-foreign-agents-law-spells-move-away-eu-membership-8816976>.
- [59] Zięba, R. (2020). *Poland's foreign and security policy*. New York: Springer International Publishing.
- [60] Zielonka, J. (Ed.). (2023). *Paradoxes of European foreign policy*. London, Boston: Kluwer Law International.