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‘ZEITENWENDE’: THE RETRENCHMENT – OR NOT – OF ‘TERRITORIALISM’?

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Abstract. ‘Zeitenwende’ as announced by German Chancellor Olaf Scholz in relation to Ukraine suggests the retrenchment of ‘territorialism’. I discuss this with a focus on Poland. Western Ukraine has after all been Eastern Poland until becoming part of the Ukrainian SSR in 1939. Enlarged with Crimea, the same SSR declared independence from the Soviet Union in 1991 at a time when Poland was aiming to join the EU and NATO. Now, Poland is a conduit of assistance, military or otherwise to Ukraine. In due course she may need to reconsider her aspiration, as good as fulfilled now, for being a consolidated nation-state. The alternative in 1919 was something like the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth of old. That model may become relevant once more. If so, then this would be like my alternative – neo-medievalism – to a territorialism under which nation-states are the exclusive building blocks of the international order. Neo-medievalism stands for political action, including defence, no longer being the exclusive province of the territorial nation-state. If so, then thinking about the state as if it were the owner on behalf of the nation of its territory needs to adapt.

Keywords: neo-medievalism, Poland, Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, territorialism, Ukraine.

Introduction

Ukraine reasserting control over its territory has not only rocked the world, it challenges misgivings, as expressed by myself in Faludi (2018) about the alleged poverty of ‘territorialism’. After all, what does territorialism mean other than insisting – as Ukraine bravely and insistently does – on the sanctity of her territory? Now, where does this leave the suggestion in the subtitle of my book for taking ‘A Neo-Medieval View of Europe and European Planning’? An immediate reaction is that neo-medievalism is not about weak, but about diffuse action. Some forceful measures taken by various, shifting coalitions supporting Ukraine prove my point.

This paper has a history: With my book criticising the fixation on states controlling their territories out, I started commenting on its reviews and other relevant matters on ResearchGate.¹ Eventually, this led to another book, ‘Chasing Territorialism’ (Faludi & Rocco, 2022) but not before Delft University Press had the manuscript reviewed. One reviewer drew attention

¹ For reasons unknown, projects and their updates have been removed from the website of ResearchGate. Updates do my own project are all available at: <http://www.spatialplanningtudelft.org/publication/the-poverty-of-territorialism/>.

to the evolving situation in Ukraine. His or her unspoken thought may have been: Why criticise territorialism while she is defending her territory? See here the issue discussed here.

My focus is on how Poland, an ethnically saturated territorial state, is implicated. She has always been concerned about Russia (Davies, 2022) and vice versa: Poland having always been a thorn in Russia's flesh ever since the Polish uprisings in one-time (Russian) Congress Poland. The Czar's reaction was Russification. In 1863-64, young Józef Piłsudski – to be discussed – and his family have been at the receiving end (Zimmerman, 2022).

Another side to Poland is being circumspect about the European Union, more in particular the European Commission and its policies. Only recently, her Prime Minister has defended Poland's misgivings against an, allegedly distant and dominant Brussels elite (CPM, 2023). Which is territorialism in a dual sense: emphasising Poland's having a distinct people and territory to look after and imputing to the EU as if striving to become a federal state proper: territorialism-writ-large.

The latter happened to be also my – simplistic – view when starting my research on European spatial planning but the subtitle of the book on 'The Making of the European Spatial Development Perspective' (Faludi & Waterhout, 2002) signalled ambivalence in the matter. It was 'No Masterplan'.² With this my co-author and myself were meaning to underscore that, if at all, European planning was to be about a framework giving leeway to member states for figuring out what to make of it. Work since has nothing but enforced my view that, at best, European planning could take the form of a sustained dialogue on giving shape to Europe (Faludi 2007). Alas, even in this minimalist form, this was not to be, and I began trying to figure out what European integration itself meant.

Inspired by Zielonka (2014) I started looking to the Middle Ages, more precisely the Holy Roman Empire (Wilson, 2017). Lasting for, give and take, a millennium, it featured overlapping spheres of authority. In fact, the EU, too, features overlapping arrangements, like the Eurozone, Schengen and the Customs Union, none of which coinciding with the common territory of the 27 EU members. I surmise this will be a feature also of any future arrangement between Ukraine, NATO and the EU. That Poland will be a linchpin justifies my focussing on her.

What in this respect comes to mind is that after the Great War (later to be dubbed the First World War because it was of course not the last conflagration) the historic Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth (Davies, 2022) has been a source of inspiration for the Polish statesman and military commander Józef Piłsudski. His idea was for a reincarnation of this Commonwealth to form a counterweight to – maybe even the nemesis of – Russia. The geo-political imagination behind it resonates with a Poland looking towards the future, but apparently without problematising the historic choice in 1919 against Piłsudski's Commonwealth and for a national democracy. What will – what should – Poland's stance be, once the hot phase of Ukraine's struggle is over?.

And Now To Ukraine

With armoured columns moving on Kyiv, it took German Chancellor Olaf Scholz not long to announce a reversal of German policies: 'Zeitenwende'.³ The term signals the end of 'Wandel durch Handel' said to have rested on an idle hope of Russia changing her ways. So, no more building of trust, no more mutual understanding of positions! Instead, there is retrenchment, the taking of firm positions and appreciation of one's own strategic vulnerabilities. What is called for is self-reliance, stockpiling, border closures and projecting strength. And the realisation hits that walls

² The publisher rejected my urgent suggestion to add an exclamation mark!

³ More information on 'Zeitenwende' speech: https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zeitenwende_speech .

give leverage. In short: 'Zeitenwende' means the return of statecraft, strategy, defence. In my book on territorialism (Faludi, 2018, p.38) I quote Balibar (2009) saying about borders that their '(...) absolutization and sacralization (...) expresses the fact that the state is (...) the people's property'.

In papers written at the occasion of the current conflict in Ukraine, the same Balibar sees Ukraine now as a piece on a much larger chessboard. However, like all states, she, too, is an artefact. But here comes the big news: Putin bringing Ukraine closer to an ideal-typical nation-state, and there is nothing to it, he says, but to support her. In Balibar (2022a) he characterises the ensuing conflict as a hybrid, world-wide war short of a World War: one more set in the European civil war raging on and off since 1914 in a borderland with a hybrid population. So, the history of Ukraine is one of changing identities caused by demographic upheavals resulting from colonisations, deportations and mass migrations. Indeed, as Snyder (2018, p. 108) says: 'The rich black earth of Ukraine was at the center of the two major European neoimperial projects of the twentieth century, the Soviet and then the Nazi.' This sediments in Ukraine, not in the form of a unique identity but in bilingualism and biculturalism. In another paper, Balibar (2022b) adds that her patriotism is not of an ethnic but of a civic nature. And there is nothing to it but to support a people that has been invaded, tortured, massacred and whose homes and cultural objects are being destroyed. Which is why de facto the EU is already at war with Russia! But recall that, following the Brzeziński Doctrine, so-called after the Polish-American advisor to US Presidents Zbigniew Brzeziński, Ukraine is the fulcrum of any struggle with Russia.⁴ Indeed, brushing aside the great expert on Russia, George F. Kennan warning not to penetrate her neighbourhood (Crostigliola, 2023), the United States takes the lead in the evolving contest.

On one count I beg to differ with Balibar: as a borderland, Ukraine is not unique. We are all of mixed ancestry, inhabiting lands that have changed ownership and shape. Nation-building in Ukraine with no single nation in evidence is a reminder of this.

Balibar (2022a) ends by saying that the affair will be long and gruesome, with pacifism no option. Presumably as exasperated as I, he adds: 'When, and how are we to return to this problem, be it by consolidating, or be it by crossing which borders and by nurturing which alliances with whom? I don't know.'

The Context

To reiterate, Poland has always been implicated in Ukraine. This while she embraces the nationalist mould of promoting exclusive languages, cultures and identities, one that sees territories each as God's unique gift to a unique people. Thiesse (1999) tells us about this, the idea of national identity on the rise in the 19th century (with reverberations, one should add, right up to the present). Extant empires adopted this thinking, identifying with one ethnicity and culture at the expense of others. Russia's policy in particular has been to embrace Orthodoxy, Autocracy and Nationality (Plokhly, 2023, p. 10). In becoming nationalistic, she followed German thinking, in particular of Johann Gottfried Herder. German nationalism itself sought to unite German principalities leading to the formation in 1871 of the Second German Empire. Its Polish ethnic minority came under pressure to assimilate.

⁴ 'Without Ukraine, Russia ceases to be an empire, but with Ukraine suborned and then subordinated, Russia automatically becomes an empire,' remarked Brzeziński (1994) later.

The exception to the rule of empires jumping on the nationalist bandwagon was Austria-Hungary.⁵ Not that there were no nationalists! The Hungarians were with a vengeance. Arguably, this helped to eventually bring down the double empire. Meanwhile, the Austrian part did its best to accommodate the aspirations of its constituent nationalities. Challenging the dominance of German speakers in Bohemia, the Czechs were gaining concessions, the requirement for public officials to be bilingual amongst them. Their resistance against this and other measures led to German speakers in turn to develop their own brand of nationalism, but this is not the occasion to discuss its effects in the 20th century.

The Polish high nobility in Austria as against the Hungarians was a pillar of the monarchy and Poles were left to be lording over Ukrainians – Ruthenians – in Galicia, now Western Ukraine. Polish was the language of administration, but eventually the Austrian government gave some leeway to Ruthenians, too, to pursue their own brand of nationalism. In Russia, they fared worse. In a book written at the occasion of the fighting in Ukraine, the professor of Ukrainian history at Harvard University, Sergio Plokhy (2023, p. 11) claims their nationalism was ‘(...) much more threatening to the Russian Empire than the Polish revolt’. It was nipped in the bud while at the same time the Russian authorities supported such Russophiles as existed in the Austrian lands. To no avail, because there Russiophiles ‘(...) were largely sidelined politically by proponents of the Ukrainian project (...). The Galician Ukrainians made it possible for Ukrainian authors from the Russian Empire to publish their Ukrainian-language works and welcomed key Ukrainian intellectuals...’ (Plokhy, 2023, 12-13).

We need to also look at geography. Balibar (2022a) has been quoted for drawing attention to Ukraine being in what the classic of world history, Halford John Mackinder, has identified as the ‘Geographic Pivot of History’. Bartov and Weitz (2013) talk about the ‘Shatterzone of Empires’. Salacs (2020) quotes a 2019 Rand Corporation Report ‘Overextending and Unbalancing Russia’. Echoing Brzeziński, it identifies Ukraine as Russia’s most important zone of external vulnerability. Coming from the United States, such phrases are ‘(...) not of the nature of softening his [Putin’s – AF] stance’, Salacs (2020) comments. There is appreciation for Russia’s concerns also in, for instance Dohanyi (2022). Increasingly, though, such voices are seen as coming from the faint-hearted or, worse still, a fringe suspected of being in Russia’s pay.

Language has always been seen as an identifier. In the Postscript to ‘Chasing Territorialism’ I recount my own visits to Ukraine. We were shown the ‘Kyiv Founders’ Monument’ marking the site where Norsemen called Rus got off their boats taking them down the Dnieper (Plokhy, 2021; Davies, 2022). The claim – with according to Plokhy substance to it – was that, if anything, Russians were offshoots of these ‘Kyiv Rus’ rather than the other way round: Ukrainians being belittled as ‘Little Russians’, the message coming from Russia.

On that same visit, language did not, however, seem a problem. At least, our Dutch guide speaking Russian raised no eyebrows. I am not saying that Russians and Ukrainians are the same,⁶ but at least where we were, Russian seemed common.⁷ It could hardly be otherwise. Under the Soviets, millions of Russians came to – or were settled in – Ukraine, with its unification (about which more below) with Crimean increasing their numbers even more. Millions of Ukrainians settled in Russia, too,

⁵ Tolerance of diversity went so far as to make sure that all recruits to the army were commanded in their own language (Scheer, 2020).

⁶ When it was discovered that he had done so once, the Dutch Special Envoy for Business and the Reconstruction of Ukraine felt compelled to leave his post (Stöckl, 2023).

⁷ Presently, Ukraine promotes the use of Ukrainian. Raising eyebrows in Hungary, language rights of the Hungarian minority in the far west are affected.

where they continue to be found.⁸ Not a linguist myself, I surmise that the two languages are not that different. On top of which it is true that there is nothing eternal about languages spoken.

Another visit was to L'viv (Ukrainian) – Lwow (Russian) – Lwów (Polish) – Lemberg when in the Austrian Crownland of Galicia and Lodomeria. A novel by the Austrian writer Joseph Roth, 'Radetzkyarsch' (2017 [1932]) ends in Brody east of L'viv and close to the former border with Czarist Russia. It was from Brody, a miserable garrisons town that the regiment of Roth's anti-hero, Lieutenant Baron von Trota, beat a retreat before the advancing Russians in 1914. Having led an aimless life, but finally committing a hopeless act of bravery, the protagonist comes to his end at the hands of the advancing Cossacks.⁹ Indeed, the Austrian-Hungarian army gave a poor account of itself until, eventually, for reasons of his own, the October Revolution led Lenin to conclude the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk in early-1918. This had huge effect on what currently goes under Ukraine, with the Germans setting up a puppet regime in Kyiv and the Austrians back again. All this was to little avail: the November 1918 Armistice put a sudden end to all of this. Amidst chaos, including pogroms, new states sprung up left and right. They included the West Ukrainian People's Republic which the Poles duly subdued. There is a monument in the centre of L'viv to this short-lived experiment and L'viv cemetery holds the graves of soldiers from both sides.¹⁰ A monument to the memory of American flyers reminds also of foreign interventions (Beevor, 2022). We date the Great War to 1914-1918, but Polish historians Borodziej and Górný (2018a, 2018b)¹¹ talk about 1912-1923: from the Balkan Wars to the end of the Russian Civil War and the Greek-Turkish War.

The Poles had their share in this extended version of the Great War, advancing as far as Kyiv from where the Bolsheviks evicted them, together with their ally, the (East) Ukrainian Army under Symon Petliura. Not before having recognised the Polish claim to Western Ukraine, Petliura commanded his army taking its last stand against the Russians advancing in Poland. He would end up in exile in France. Not the only one accused of having been involved in pogroms, he was murdered there under murky circumstances by a Jewish anarchist.

Eventually, the Polish army under Józef Piłsudski stopped the Bolsheviks marching west with World Revolution in their sights (Davies, 1972). The Reds withdrew to the newly declared Soviet Union including the (East) Ukrainian Socialist Soviet Republic. Western Ukraine became what it had in effect been when still part of Austria: Polish. Having fought for restauration of the Russian Empire, the Whites together with Western expeditionary forces evacuated what and whom they could, leaving the rest to the mercy of the Reds. In exile, the Whites, including their commander Anton Denikin continued to dream of a Russia reunited. Alongside Nobel Prize Laureate Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, according to Plokhy (2023) also dreaming, Denikin is one of President Putin's sources of inspiration.

For Poland, the Great War brought the end of partition. The Second Treaty of Versailles recognised her independence, stipulating at the same time that she should respect the rights of its German, Lithuanian, Jewish and Ukrainian minorities. Piłsudski's rival, the National Democrat Roman Dmowski was for a more nationalistic Poland. The story of interbellum Poland is complex, involving Piłsudski until his passing away in a murky power game. At least this spared him the ignominy of seeing Poland defeated by Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union, but not before Poland herself had abrogated the safeguards for her own minorities stipulated at Versailles. About Piłsudski's legacy more below.

⁸ Having earned his reputation for suppressing Ukrainian nationalists, Nikita Khrushchev, for whose role see below, made it to be the all-powerful First Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union.

⁹ Brody has named the local grammar school after Joseph Roth, one of its former pupils.

¹⁰ Watson (2014, p. 546) reports on the brief war with attendant pogroms.

¹¹ For English see Borodziej & Górný (2021).

Prior to this, Ukrainian nationalists had resisted Polish rule. Not long ago, modern Ukraine celebrated one of their leaders, Stepan Bandera, with the issue of a postage stamp. For reasons to be discussed, this irked Polish MEPs, but to Russians, ‘Banderites’ is code for Ukrainians resisting Russification (Riabchuk, 2010). The accusation is that they have also been Nazis. In fact, matters are more complex: In pursuance of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, for the first time Eastern Poland became Western Ukraine and as such part of the Ukrainian SSR. Basing himself on sources collected by the wartime Polish government in exile, Gross (1988, p. 226) describes life in these parts as having been so bad that Poles – and also Jews (!) – fled to the German zone of occupation, soon the *Generalgouvernement* where the Holocaust would take place.

Not long after that, Ukraine and much else was overrun by the *Deutsche Wehrmacht*. Which was when Bandera counted on having his Ukrainian state, if only as a Nazi vassal, but the Germans wanted not another one of those; they wanted Europe’s ‘bread basket’ as part of the *Generalplan Ost*.¹² So, they packed Bandera away in a concentration camp. What remained of ‘Banderites’ went underground, fighting the Germans while also continuing their campaigns against such Poles as had remained. To this day, Poland commemorates what is called the Volynian Massacre at their hands.¹³ And, yes, there was also the (Ukrainian) 14th SS Volunteer Infantry Division Gallicia, part of the many troops from occupied territories doing much of the fighting for the *Wehrmacht*.

It is against this backdrop that I consider a future when history may come back in the form of a renewed effort to emulate the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. If so, it might be somewhat like the ‘neo-medievalism’ which I envisage for the future organisation of space.

A ‘Neo-Medieval’ Future for East Central Europe?

Drawing on the Middle Ages for inspiration seems far-fetched, but Zielonka (2014) already referred to makes the case in relation to the EU. Without invoking neo-medievalism again, Zielonka (2023) amplifies nation-states being not the only, let alone the ideal sites for either democracy or governance, proposing instead to empower NGOs and professional associations and empowering institutions of urban, national, regional and global governance. This while Poland of course embraces the nation-state model. Being what one might call a frontline state, she strengthens also her forces, always in tandem with the United States¹⁴ and insists that Western Europe, too, pulls its weight.

To see why she – but not she alone – is seeking to check Russia, read the history books. There one learns that, of the empires dividing up the former Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, Czarist Russia has been the most oppressive. With Poland reborn, the country had two options. Seeing Russia as the primary threat, as indicated already the wartime leader Józef Piłsudski wished to see the once very powerful Commonwealth resurrected. Roman Dmowski, as against this favoured a coherent nation-state. His dream of an ethnically homogenous Poland has been more than fulfilled when, after the Second World War, the Holocaust and forced exchanges of lands and people between them made Poland as good as mono-ethnic.

So, what about the future? Putin absorbing Ukraine would of course mean a new (very) Cold War. Also problematic would be a compromise, at the point of writing – July 2023 – merely whispered about. The war aim continues to be to restore Ukraine in her borders of 1991 including Crimea.

¹² On this there is extensive documentation, also and in particular in German.

¹³ This continues to cause friction between Poland and Ukraine. See Krzysztozek (2023).

¹⁴ Poland always knew where to look first. Snubbing Germany and France remaining on the sidelines during the Second Iraq War, she joined the ‘Coalition of the Willing’ with the United States.

But not all EU members let alone others seem fully committed. In addition to which, Putin could play a wild card: return some of Western Ukraine to their original owners. One-time Russian President Dmitry Medvedev seems to have suggested no less (Zbytniewska, 2023). Plokhly (2023, p. 121-122) relates the same having been aired after Russia's annexation of Crimea, at that time by Vladimir Zhirinovskiy, leader of the ultranationalist Liberal Democratic Party. The latter had spoken of referenda in parts of Ukraine taken previously from Poland, Hungary and Romania. The Polish foreign minister Radosław Sikorski reported the same idea being aired when Ukraine was applying for a NATO Membership Action Plan in 2008.¹⁵

If so, then this would create great mischief in the EU. But consider now Ukraine coming to whatever conclusion on the matter of her territorial integrity. As far as her immediate neighbour Poland is concerned, when shaking off the Soviets became a realistic prospect, the then Polish diaspora had argued already for renouncing claims for restoring her pre-war borders. With only small Lithuanian and Ukrainian minorities remaining, once again, the country had become as ethnically homogenous as she could ever have hoped for. Such Poles as had survived World War II in Ukraine had long been settled in areas vacated by millions of Germans. No, Poland would not even think of reclaiming Western Ukraine. But surely, Ukraine herself would remain dependent on the EU, on NATO and on the United States whom East Central Europeans trust more than anybody else. Helping Ukraine will continue to engage a Poland with apprehensions of Russia in her genes. Of the powers that had divided the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth between them at the end of the 18th century, the Russian Empire has after all been the most oppressive, exiling Poles – including Piłsudski – to Siberia and suppressing the Polish language and culture.

To repeat, the same Piłsudski became a Polish military strongman and politician with restoring the Commonwealth in his sights. Snyder (2003) points out that by our standards the latter had been no democracy. What counted had been its – multi-ethnic – nobility. Never mind whether Catholic, Orthodox, or Protestant and speaking whatever languages, these nobles regarded themselves all as 'of the Polish nation'. National identity became associated with language only in the 19th century when the idea consumed Europe like a wildfire. Piłsudski's competitor in Poland, Roman Dmowski (already mentioned) was an advocate of integral nationalism. Snyder (2003) tells us that his National Democrats

(...) knew what they were doing. Had Poland's borders stretched any further to the east [as would have been the case if anything like Piłsudski's Commonwealth had come to pass – AF] the party would never have won an election. As the 1922 parliamentary elections demonstrated, Poland in its Riga frontiers [the reference being to frontiers with the new Soviet Union agreed at the Treaty bearing the name of this, from now on until 1945 Polish city – AF] was evenly split (...)

between Dmowski's National Democrats on the one hand and socialists and national minorities on the other.

After the murder at the hands of a nationalist of the President, coming like Piłsudski from Lithuania, the latter withdrew, albeit temporarily, from politics, only to pursue his controversial path as Polish President and strongman until passing away in the mid-1930s.

If only not by recreating the Commonwealth, circumstances may nudge a future Poland towards some form of association with her neighbours. Consider her having already taken what is called the 'Three Seas Initiative' inspired by Intermarium, one of Piłsudski's ideas. It relates

¹⁵ Taking such rumours seriously enough to warrant a reaction in 2023, the Slovak foreign minister refused to apologise for commenting that, '(...) had Vladimir Putin succeeded in Ukraine, Hungary would have already made territorial claims against Slovakia' (Hudec, 2023).

to an area from the Baltic to the Black Sea and the Adriatic, with Ukraine already attending its recent meetings.¹⁶

Now, importantly, a new Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth was not thought of as in a manner of speaking a Greater Poland. It was a defensive alliance against Russia. However, thinking that Bolshevik rule would collapse, the Entente Cordiale was unenthusiastic. In this she was to be disappointed and so, eventually, the successors of the Entente had to contend with, and even support the last man standing on mainland Europe during World War Two: Joseph Stalin.

Soon after World War II, he of course broke faith with his Western Allies. So, the same powers as before, but now with the United States strongly engaged, faced the Soviet Union and its satellites, at the time including Poland. When the Soviet Union collapsed, inspired, as once again indicated by her diaspora, Poland renounced any territorial claims. Polish minorities outside her borders as still existed – for instance in Lithuania – should accommodate to their being just that: minorities. Such minorities as continued to exist in Poland were to remain.

Having done so, Poland became an EU member, in which capacity she was joined by other former Soviet satellites. Rather than emulating liberal Western Europe, they – and Poland above all – revel in being free to pursue their own mores and values. And she sees the United States as her preferred ally. So far for the backdrop to a scenario of the future.

Whatever that future might bring, Poland as the largest former satellite would be implicated. Weakening Russia has been the idea behind Piłsudski seeking to revive the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth as a bulwark against her. What will Poland's strategic position after an end to the Ukraine conflict do to her as an ethnically homogenous country? What will happen to the million-and-a-half Ukrainian nationals that have already lived and worked there before the conflict? What to those who have been warmly welcomed recently, not only, but above all in Poland? And, what role will Poland play in Ukraine's reconstruction? What role will she have as the indispensable conduit to the United States and vice versa, be it through NATO or bi-laterally? What will this do to Poland's pronounced position? Not to mince words, will she make good on the promise of renouncing all ambitions on territorial gains and remain the standard bearer (as she had been towards the end of the Soviet Union) of 'European values'?

As regards European values, she may give her own answer to the question of what these values are. Beyond this, contrary to crack ideas aired in 2008 and again in 2014 by Russian circles, Poland will spend no thought on absorbing even part of Ukraine. But she might – does – consider some form of alliance with Ukraine implicating other former satellites, too, the likes of Romania, as well as the Baltic States and Finland.

Having accepted Ukraine as a candidate for EU membership, the EU itself seems to have little clue as to how and when to make good on this. Surely, it is far-fetched to even mention the German Democratic Republic having been absorbed by way of electing to voluntarily join the Federal Republic. But the fact remains: EU members are free to decide on what belongs to the territory considered for membership. France has for instance included most – but not all – of its overseas territories.¹⁷

¹⁶ Ukraine also participates in the EU's 'Macro-regional Strategy for the Danube Regions'.

¹⁷ Since the Netherlands has not, their 16 km joint border on the Island of Saint Martain/Sint Maartin counts as an external border of the EU. Even when she was a member, UK dependencies like the Channel Islands were not included. Once part of the EU, with the agreement of Denmark, Greenland has left.

Conclusion

'Zeitenwende'? Sure, but maybe not quite as expected. Thus: not a return to more pronounced national policies, not even in areas of defence and weapons procurement too expensive – and complex! – for any extant European country to organise. These are no longer matters of state but of, often fluid – and in any case variable – coalitions between states. This as against the knee-jerk reaction to challenges which is to consider matters in supra-national terms: a centrally organised common response, a common command, a common defense, common procurement, common rules of engagement. No, reality is more complicated! Even the military knows various mixes of joint weapons production, training and command, with overlaps and also gaps, depending on national capacities, preferences and idiosyncrasies. All this will apply with even more force in a post-war situation in and around Ukraine.

If this is true for defence matters, even within NATO, then the more so with European integration. With the best of intentions, admitting Ukraine – or any other candidate – is no simple matter. Arrangements will be complex and shifting, the more so since absorbing a country of the size, let alone the state of destruction of Ukraine will create issues beyond the imagination. And there will be huge interests, like there have been after the fall of the Iron Curtain, from international investors. Already, much of the coveted Black Earth of Ukraine is after all in foreign hands! Going by precedence, post-war reconstruction will be anything but a smooth process.

To refocus once more on Poland, all of this will have an impact. She can gain – has already gained – in prestige but must figure out what image she wants to cast: triumphant in her pronounced nationalist stance or a facilitator of some larger, if diffuse commonwealth. In other words, Poland may have the chance to reconsider historic choices made after the Great War between a revival of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth – neo-medievalism if you wish – adjusted to fit the 21st century on the one hand and an entrenched territorialism-cum-nationalism that voters have opted for on the other. The terms need to be adapted, and so with the underlying ideas, but the choice may very well remain the same.

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