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Eastern Poland in a center-periphery perspective

(Published in:) M. Stefański (ed.) *Strategic issues of the development of the Lublin region*. Lublin (2011): Innovatio Press Scientific publishing house University of Economic and Innovation in Lublin. pp. 95-112.

1. Center-periphery perspective

In this paper I would like to suggest a look at the broader region of Eastern Poland from the center-periphery perspective. I distinguish here the centro-peripheral approach, which is primarily a reference to the so-called World System Theory (Wallerstein, 1974), dependency theory, comparative political science school of Stein Rokkan and the critical political geography (Taylor, 1993), from the currently dominant schools of regional analysis that ignore or neglect the role of the hierarchy of power and geopolitical factors. One popular approach of the so-defined mainstream can be called "borderlands paradigm". The concept of the borderland seems to be an idealistic model, which automatically assumes that the regions located at one or another boundary, in particular a state one, become automatic beneficiaries of their location. It seems that terms such as "borderlands" are often used as euphemisms to replace terms such as "peripheries", which may be considered by many to be too depreciating.

A particular characteristic of the centro-peripheral view, within the meaning I will herein refer to, more extensively presented in my previous works (Zarycki, 2009), is the approach taking into account the crucial role of power relationships, especially the dimension of its external dependencies of regional development, both in the objective political and economic processes and in the making of the knowledge about the peripheral regions. In other words, I will be trying to point out here at the outer dependencies involving the peripheries whose fate, in the perspective I have assumed, can never be considered in isolation from the broader context of the hierarchy of power in the world.

The present paper will focus in particular on geopolitical factors as the historical and contemporary determinants of the socio-economic development of Eastern Poland. However, the assumption here is not that they are the only determinants of the status evolution of the considered region. Rather, it has been written with the intention to supplement the mainstream publications analyzing the constraints and prospects for development of this region, which for the most part seems to ignore or completely marginalize the geopolitical factors. The widely understood exogenous factors are usually considered in terms of opportunities and development impulses but in this short

paper I would like to recall that external factors can also have the character of limitations and negative impulses. I would not like to suggest that these are always clearly decisive determinants of the fate of regions. Usually, they are only one aspect of the external environment. Even if they are not always the most important factor, they seem to be the context whose knowledge and taking into account is necessary to understand the dynamics of regional development processes, in particular the sources of the frequently unexpected or unexplained failures of successive programs of social and economic recovery of peripheral regions.

2. Interface and external peripheries

There are many models of center-periphery relations and ways of classifying the periphery. A very useful one is the model proposed by Emanuel Wallerstein, who specifically distinguished between the most dependent, complete peripheries and the so-called semi-peripheries which, in many dimensions, are intermediaries in the chain of command and beneficiaries of the centers (Wallerstein, 2007). In the context of analyzing the current situation of Eastern Poland it is worthwhile to remind of the basic typology by Stein Rokkan (Rokkan, 1980), who distinguished four types of the periphery: interface peripheries, enclaves, failed centers and external peripheries. From our point of view, the two intermediary categories in this typology seem relatively unimportant. In the geopolitical sense there are virtually no enclaves in the Polish political space.

An example of enclave is the Kaliningrad Region forming as you know part of the Russian Federation and at the same time its westernmost periphery. You can speculate on whether in the Polish space there can be identified any failed or unrealized centers. For Rokkan such an example was, among others, Bavaria. Perhaps in Poland in this context one could mention the two historical capital regions: Greater Poland (Wielkopolska) and the Krakow Region (Małopolska). Their periods of glory, however, belong to the very distant past, and are therefore insignificant for the aim of this article relating to the present day. However, remembering the failed centers in periods of less distant past, their existence could be identified in the Russia, historically understood. For the interpretation of the Polish space, particularly important appear to be the periods of special importance of the centers of St. Petersburg at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and Moscow during the Soviet period. Both centers of power as we know today have lost much of their former potency, although the legacy of their influence seems to be a key factor necessary to take into account when interpreting the logic of development of the Polish space which will be also discussed below. It is worth noting that the dominant convention in the Polish geopolitical thinking is to treat the rise in power of the Polish eastern neighbor, and here we usually have in mind Russia or its other incarnations, as a clear threat. This way of thinking may be associated with the construction of modern Polish national identity as well as the adopted Western prejudices against Eastern Europe and the wider East as such (Zarycki, 2004, 2008b).

Meanwhile, no one pays particular attention to the fact that the period of dynamic development of Russia at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries had significant positive implications for the Polish territory and the Polish business elite,

whose power was growing in a spectacular way at the time. Today it is usually ignored that the collapse of the Russian Empire was a great disaster from the standpoint of the interests of a large part of those elites and stopped many of the developmental processes. It is an undeniable fact that with the Bolshevik revolution in Eastern Europe the extinction followed of a competitive for the West growth center and the successive attempts of its resurrection by the Soviet Union leaders did not yield results in the long term. And currently, the contemporary Russia has gradually been transformed into a resource base for Western Europe. As one can argue, neither for Poland nor for its eastern regions has this course of things to be regarded as unequivocally positive. It might be difficult, however, within the traditional assumptions of the Polish geopolitical thinking in which there prevails the fear of increasing the strength of neighbors, and the inability to reason in terms of constructive and strategic thinking about waging a number of competing centers is (e.g. Eberhardt, 2008).

Meanwhile, let us focus on the cases of interface and external peripheries. Let us remember that the key difference between them is the force exerted by external centers affecting a particular periphery. An important advantage of an interface periphery, in this context, turns out to be the ability to win conflicts between competing centers in its own favor. As Rokkan and Urwin wrote, "external peripheries have much less leeway in bargaining for trading advantages and subsidies than interface peripheries" (Rokkan & Urwin, 1983). The result of this regularity is that many peripheral regions, which can fall into the category of "interface", turns out to belong to the group of the wealthiest in Europe. According to Rokkan this, for example, is the case with Benelux, Switzerland and other parts of the German-French-Italian border. It is worth noting that due to the strong external cultural influences of opposite vectors, some of these regions have not been included in any of the logics of nation states, nor have they set up their national culture as Belgium and Switzerland, remaining the countries and regions of multicultural, multilingual and interdenominational character. As Rokkan points out, a significant part of the European borderland discussed here has remained an interface area between Catholicism and Protestantism. In some countries, e.g. in the Netherlands, their influences have overlapped, which, according to this author, has resulted in the stimulating interaction, but sometimes also in destructive conflicts. Above all, however, these regions of interface peripheries in the economic sphere have usually managed to make good use of their location. Taking advantage of the competition for influence of dominant European states on their area, they often have themselves achieved the highest wealth and economic growth values per capita. Such opportunities have never occurred to the external peripheries of Western Europe like Ireland, Portugal or Greece. Their ability to negotiate with the dominant centers has always been very limited due to the lack of alternative political context, which condemned them to being bound to a single center. Perhaps among the examples listed here at one time an exception was Greece, which for some time remained in the orbit of interest of the Soviet Union. Due to this factor it obtained a relatively early, based on good conditions invitation to the emerging European Economic Community, the predecessor of today's European Union, and to other Western organizations.

Let us note that Southern Italy, known as the Mezzogiorno, would also qualify as external periphery. Antoni Kuklinski suggested its comparison to Eastern Poland

(Kukliński, 2010)¹. Its immanent state of underdevelopment can be interpreted precisely in terms of a similar one-dimensional dependence on the richer North which is at the same time a part of the European core. Mezzogiorno is not only isolated from its neighbors by the waters of the Mediterranean, an equally important fact is that they are also divided by the political and civilizational boundary, significantly limiting the free movement of people and goods.

At the same time the countries south of Italy, except the little Malta and Greece, which lies further to the east, are states belonging to different culture and at a relatively low level of economic development, which greatly limits their ability of impact on the European continent. So deprived of an alternative and so external peripheral location puts Southern Italy largely at the mercy of Northern Italy belonging to the so called European core as well as the other wealthy parts of the continent, where the main focus of capital resources and markets lies (Gąsior-Niemiec, 2003).

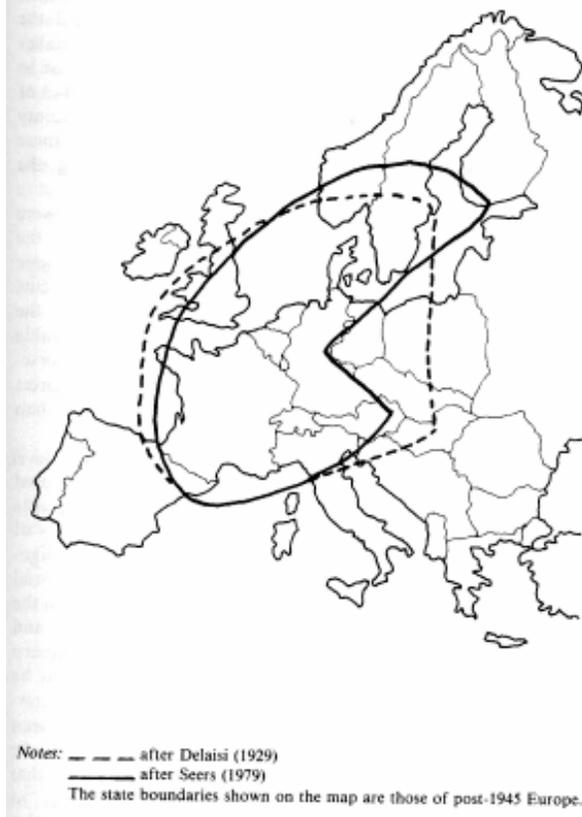
Partly similar was the status of East Germany, also included by Antoni Kuklinski in the program "Triple Mezzogiorno". Its geopolitical position, however, seems to have changed in the last century. As shown in the attached figure from the cited work by Rokkan and Urwin, the contemporary Eastern Germany, as well as Western Poland today, in the interwar period could be included in the core area.

In the period of Cold War these regions were already, within the understanding of the above-mentioned authors, in the peripheral zone of the Eastern Bloc. Currently, the position of Eastern Germany seems to be improving, firstly through its incorporation into the Federal Republic of Germany, secondly through the full opening of the Oder-Neisse border, and lastly due the gradual economic growth in Poland. Also, do not forget the generous financial transfers from Western Germany, in particular from the "solidarity tax" paid by every citizen of FRG, and the great infrastructure investments in the region.

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¹ As part of this initiative there have already been held two major international conferences: "The Triple European Mezzogiorno. Challenges for Cohesion in Europe " held in Warsaw on 24-25 September 2009 and " Mezzogiorni d'Europa - il caso Italia. Nodi gordiani e soluzioni alessandrine" held in Sorrento, Italy on 1-2 July 2011

FIGURE 2.4
The boundary of the European core in the 1920s and 1970s



3. Peripherality of Eastern Poland

From a similar perspective, we look at the current situation of the widely understood Eastern Poland. First, we ask ourselves the question to which type of periphery this region could be included today? Since its peripherality as such seems to be undoubted. After the Polish accession to the European Union in 2004 and the closure of the eastern border of the country in connection with the accession to the Schengen Agreement, Eastern Poland became, as it can be argued, to a great extent an external periphery, not only in the state's dimension, but also in the entire European Union. Although the Polish border with Lithuania has been opened, and Ukraine still maintains the right to enter this country without a visa for citizens of the Union, but at its core line the boundary of Eastern Poland has become a hard line to cross.

As I have mentioned, at the same time Eastern Germany (the area of the former East Germany – the German Democratic Republic) has profited from these geopolitical changes. The full opening of the Polish border has provided the region with a significant influx both of customers for various goods and services (led by the offer of the Berlin airports) and with a steady supply of cheap labor. The so-called Polish Western Territories have historically always been the eastern periphery of Berlin and therefore the isolation from this region has never been beneficial to the metropolis. Poland today

is obviously not a competitive center on the economic and political map of Europe, so it is not able to generate forces with an impact on the former GDR, which would balance the impact of the West European development centers.

However, as it has already been mentioned, it provides relevant markets and offers important workforce resources, whose role has been increasing after the opening of the German labor market to Poles. It is also a supplier of some low-tech products, particularly agricultural and food commodities as well as a good location for the assembly lines of vehicles or household goods. For these and other reasons, on the western border there are numerous joint ventures, whether economic, political or cultural, which appear to be beneficial for the partners from both the countries.

On the other hand, one cannot help but notice that the Oder and Neisse still remain an important economic and geopolitical border. It separates the zone of the richest countries on the continent from its poorer, although nowadays already internal peripheries. As even German authors have pointed out, the relationships between actors on both sides of the border, despite the adopted rhetoric of "disappearance of borders" and full equality, have remained marked by clear dependencies and inequalities resulting from economic and geopolitical disparities (Best, 2007).

Meanwhile, returning to Eastern Poland, one can argue that its significant cutting off from Belarus, Russia and Ukraine, which has resulted from our country's entry into the European Union, has been an important factor in moving the region from the pole "interface periphery" or semi-periphery to the pole "external periphery". Importantly, this problem has been marginalized in the discourses of the mainstream and often overlooked in the academic literature². It seems that this is largely due to the lack of congruence of critical perspective on this issue as well as to the prevailing one-sided ways of interpreting the effects of the Polish entry into the European Union as a clearly positive in all dimensions process. Moreover, these problems with an open discussion on the implications of geopolitical change and, in particular, the European Union's policy for Eastern Poland can also be observed at the regional level. Regional elites, in

² The authors analyzing the situation of Eastern Poland in the studies funded by the European Union (e.g. Komornicki & Mischczuk, 2010) have usually drawn a fairly optimistic picture of its situation after the Polish accession to the Schengen area, paying particular attention to the role of public funds redistributed by the Union. At the same time, they have often depreciated the significance of the funds generated due to the region's economic cooperation with its eastern neighbors. Their markets have especially been presented as unworthy of attention because of their lower demands and lack of stability. However, the region's integration into the global economy has been praised as well as the focus on western markets (e.g. Komornicki, 2010). A characteristic feature of the papers concerning this problem drawn up on the Government's commission is the transfer of more responsibility for reducing the region's cooperation with eastern partners to the authorities of the countries neighboring with Poland (e.g. Kawałko, 2008). Such a view seems to marginalize the negative impact on the region of the decisions made at the EU level and to discharge the liability on the easy to condemn in the context of the Polish authorities countries such as Belarus, Russia or Ukraine. Of course, the difficulties in cooperation with the latter have often been substantial, but taking such a fatalistic towards the East and unilaterally Euro-optimistic optics may lead, among others, to a biased rendering of the eastern markets to companies from Western Europe.

particular, seem to lack the courage to take up the issues that are not positively embedded into the visions coming from the centers of developments and ideological justifications of the adopted geopolitical strategies. This weakness of regional elites seems to result in the phenomenon that can be called the cognitive limitation, which prevents the regions from a full understanding of the external conditioning of the sources of their successes and failures in the social-economic field. The same weakness seems also to lead to restrictions in the search for possible sources of growth, which usually are perceived mainly in terms of the UE priorities.

As Roman Galar observes (Galar, 2008), Polish regions in their thinking seem to attach extremely big attention to the European Union directives and the improvement of the acquisition of the EU mediated regional funds, which in practice are usually some minor percentage of most of the budgets of public institutions. It is also, very importantly, only periodic and short-term source of income.

At the same time, as Galar remarks, Polish regions, whose large part is external peripheries, often look up for inspiration to the leading and centrally located western regions and at the same time ignore the much more appropriate example of the resourceful, but peripherally located, regions of the western countries. This cognitive bias brings the risk of falling into the previously described "trap of imitation" (Zarycki, 2008a).

4. Marginalization of Eastern Poland after the EU enlargement

So let us briefly draw attention here to adverse changes in the modern geopolitical position of Eastern Poland. Of course, their sources should be traced in the first place to the geopolitical changes that occurred as a result of the Second World War. The way the contemporary Polish eastern border in 1944 was delineated has been clearly detrimental to the currently defined region of Eastern Poland, though on the other hand it could be argued that it has been a stimulating factor for the development of selected urban centers, particularly those that have become the new, substitute capital cities of the north-east and south-east of Poland i.e. Białystok and Rzeszów. Going even further back in time, it could be argued that during the interwar period the Polish eastern border of the Treaty of Riga (1921) also made the contemporary Eastern Poland the outer periphery. The boundary with the Soviet Union was in fact even more closed than today, and behind that border there was a state remaining in extremely tense relations with Poland. Today, however, the changes in the eastern province after 1944 have clearly had a negative impact on eastern regions, and these areas started regaining their importance alongside with the gradual reopening of the eastern border. Let us recall here in particular, that a period of intense interaction with Eastern Poland, especially with its cities, began even before the formal collapse of the Soviet Union. The liberalization of regime at the border of the Empire caused a rapid increase of passenger traffic there. The boundary could be crossed quite easily with the so-called "vouchers", which were cheap and easy to buy (often at the very border). Polish citizens could also travel on the basis of the easily obtainable in passport offices "AB" stamp, stating the business nature of the trip. Before the closing of the border the towns of the region were

visited by tens of thousands of visitors from the East, even from as far away as Central Asia or Transcaucasian countries. A majority of them engaged in petty trade, although some took to wholesale trade. This human stream generated serious income for the entire region. It also stimulated the growth of certain industries, led by the furniture industry, whose condition has now much deteriorated. There are also stories of attempts to expand Polish companies on the grounds of the former USSR, which collapsed after the sealing of the eastern border. For the branches of Polish companies founded in Grodno or Lviv, a particularly useful "human resource" were people who knew both Polish and Russian, and often a third language. The closure of the border resulted in a dramatic decline in border traffic, which resulted in, among others, the loss of income sources by a significant, though never quite specific group of entrepreneurs and ordinary employees in companies producing mainly for export (Tomaszewska, 2011). As the estimates of revenues from the continuing until the closure of the border economic exchange revealed, they were an important source of capital for the whole region (Stypulkowski, 2011). As a result of closing the borders there have also been great reductions in transport links of the region to the east, most significantly on railway lines, where they have shrunk to symbolic dimensions. In particular, Białystok has lost its historic status of an important station on the Warsaw-Petersburg line. Today, one international train departs from it daily – and this is just an ordinary suburban line to Grodno. Also in Rzeszów only one international train stops at present - a sleeping from Krakow to Lviv with a stop in Rzeszow at 1 a.m.

It is worth noting that in the central media there has been little mention of the protests against the closure of the eastern border that took place in the cities of the region. Scenes of the demonstrations, the most famous of which was the manifestation of merchants and people dependent on trade with the east in Białystok, were neither shown on television news nor discussed in the central press. Media nationwide at the same time were full of the enthusiasm over the numerous benefits, partly purely symbolic, that Poland gained by entry into the European Union and then joining the Schengen Agreement³. At the time when on the Bug a new iron curtain was created,

³ The testimony of this dissonance were the results of opinion polls (CBOS, 2002) indicating a clear dissonance between the moods of Eastern Poland's citizens and those from the rest of the country. The former were mostly opposed to the closure of the eastern border, probably being much more aware of how important a factor in the development of the region was the economic exchange with the eastern partners and informal border trade. The other Polish people in the majority declared their support for the introduction of visa regime on the eastern border, presumably having no precise knowledge of its economic role. Extremely important were also the results of studies conducted among local community leaders in Eastern Poland before the closure of the border (Kurczewska & Bojar, 2002). Most of them expressed serious concern about the potential negative impact of this decision. They pointed out, among others, at the potential threat of a substantial burden on the local budgets of social costs associated with the crisis caused by the closure of the border. Today we know that this problem has partly been "solved" by the increased migration of Eastern Poland's citizens to the West, facilitated by the simultaneous opening of the borders and labor markets in the EU. These local leaders also deplored the lack of financial security of the regional companies exporting to eastern markets and the financial weakness of eastern partners. These and other topics of their remarks were, however, hardly noticeable in most overviews of the problems of the region prepared at the central level, which focused on the profits of the Polish accession to the Union.

marginalizing Eastern Poland, and Belarus, additionally, introduced for the Poles the obligatory transit visa to travel to Russia, the Polish media were full of plethoric statements about the incredible freedom of travel gained for the Poles through the Schengen Arrangement. Even in the regions themselves, the critical voices on those very unfavorable for the areas changes have hardly been visible in the dominant discourses, and predominantly appeared at the level of informal private discourse. Official discourses of regional authorities as well as the central discourses have been dominated by lists of successes due to the support of the European Union. Under such conditions it is extremely difficult to talk about problems arising for the regions from the EU membership and thus, in general, discussion about the strategic future of Eastern Poland becomes difficult. At the same time, in most cities of Eastern Poland the discourse of local authorities has been focused on the visions of bombastic infrastructure projects. Their common feature are idealistic plans for the creation of parks of science, technology, innovation and all kinds of technological progress imitating the Silicon Valley in California and other most affluent core regions of the modern world. These visions often stand in contrast to the real economic problems, and the question of the collapse of the economic exchange with the Eastern partners, which were the source of significant - though not directly controlled by the Brussels - capital incomes in the region. Eastern partners are also rarely considered during strategic planning, which is usually focused only on contacts with the West. Strategic thinking of the regions turns out to be very much focused on improving the skills in applying for the EU aid and its possibly soonest clearance, often without a thorough analysis of their usefulness or their place in the broader perspective of strategic development plans.

Thus, the regions today often seem to have limited cognitive abilities to identify sources of growth and income outside of spheres regulated by the European Union or indicated by it as a priority. One can in this context wonder, whether the emphasis on the fact that the Eastern Poland's peripherality is largely determined by geopolitical factors, is not a repetition of banality. It seems, however, worthwhile to remind this circumstance because the dominant discourse on the region begins to increasingly draw its fate as determined solely by the will, resourcefulness, or even the very attitude (in particular the "pro-innovation" one) of its inhabitants. Such unilateral fully blaming of these regions for their present situation seems to be a creation of a very one-sided picture.

5. Opportunities and challenges arising from the status of the interface periphery

A frequently cited example of a country that can today be a model of social and economic policy is Finland (e.g. Grosse, 2010). It is worthwhile in this context to note, however, that this country owes its success not only to the skillful exploitation of internal resources but also to the intelligent use of specific geopolitical location, which can also be defined as interface periphery. Indeed, let us consider that the very emergence of Finland as an independent state was largely the result of competition on its territory of Swedish and Russian influences (Paasi, 1996). For several centuries, these lands passed from hand to hand, and at this time the country that in a given period was out of control over the current Finnish territory supported the independence of the Finns against its opponent, in particular with regard to language and culture. Independent

Finland was also able to skillfully and consciously use its geopolitical position to achieve significant economic gains. In the postwar period in particular, it exported both its own products (mainly forestry machines) and goods from other western countries to the Soviet Union on privileged terms.

Today, it is on the one hand able to enjoy the privileges offered by membership in the European Union and the proximity of Scandinavia, on the other hand by the neighborhood of the second-largest metropolis of Russia - St. Petersburg. Using this 'contact' location, Finland can be "close to the West" for Russia, a place of recreation and shopping trips for wealthy Russians and at the same time the supplier of many products on the Russian markets. Towards the west, Finland strives to serve as an expert on Russian affairs, reaching significant achievements in this field. Publications of Finnish academic institutions such as Aleksanteri Institute at the University of Helsinki regarding the former Soviet Union are present in the circulation of the global scientific community to a much greater degree than the texts of Polish scholars from analytical centers in Poland e.g. the Polish Center for Eastern Studies.

So we can say that Finland knows how to perfectly take advantage of its geopolitical position, which has not always been, let us remember - like in the Polish case - only beneficial, bringing about the well-known invasions. You can also recall in this context that the Finnish example clearly suggests that the success in the modern economy relies as importantly on innovation as on the ability to win and then control the markets on which one is able to get the specific advantage over the players who are dominant elsewhere. This is well illustrated by the example of a Pole who was for a significant period sitting on the board of the famous Finnish corporation Nokia - Stefan Widomski. As he emphasized in his interviews (e.g. Widomski, 2006), one of the key advantages of his company at that time was their special, to a large extent conditioned by the historical experience of cooperation with the Soviet Union and its geographical proximity, access to the huge Russian market on which, notably, Widomski himself was Nokia's leading expert. It is this competitive advantage that was no less important in the development of the company, as Widomski stresses, than the innovative character of the corporation, which for reasons of global marketing costs is able to implement in the production and wide distribution only a small part of the innovative solutions offered by its inventors. In this context, one may speculate that the knowledge of the eastern markets due to geographical and cultural proximity of Eastern Poland to the former Soviet Union as well as the last dozen years of close business cooperation until the closing of the border has been the region's untapped capital. Taking full advantage of it, however, seems possible only by creating native brands of international status, which seems a difficult task for companies on a regional scale. Anyway, in this respect Finland seems to be a great source of inspiration.

If we take into account the importance of the discussed here skillful use of geopolitical context, then speaking about the future of Eastern Poland we realize that one can not consider it without also looking at the political, economic and cultural situation in Belarus, Ukraine and Russia. Any improvement in this sphere could potentially be an important stimulus for the development of Polish regions. This factor seems to be neglected in the Polish official discourse, which seem to be quite unilaterally focused on

the European Union as the main source of development impulses, both in the financial, regulatory and ideological dimension.

One might therefore speak of cognitive limitations in the Polish strategic thinking about the future of the regions resulting from the unilateral symbolic dependence on the European Union. In this context, one may note that some elements of success in the economic development, which periodically managed to reach Poland in the 70s of the twentieth century, the so-called Gierek decade, can be attributed to the nature of the then relatively interface or 'contact' peripherality of the country. Although it remained a clearly subordinate to Moscow part of the Eastern Bloc, it found itself under a very strong influence of the western countries led by the U.S, which was at that time trying to undermine the political cohesion of the Warsaw Pact countries. The two superpowers tried to win the favor of the Polish, also by investing in Poland's economy and technological solutions. It was then that the dynamic and high-tech economy branches developed such as aviation and telecommunications, which was made possible both through the Soviet acquiescence and the granting of licenses and loans by western countries. Both the countries also invested in the Polish science and scientists. The U.S. government made donations reaching into the millions of dollars in scholarships for Polish scientists traveling to the U.S. (Bockman & Eyal, 2002; Sulek, 2010). These were means much greater than the ones spent for similar purposes at present. Many Polish scholars were also trained in the leading science centers in the Soviet Union, which during the communist period had in many areas, especially those associated even indirectly with the armaments industry, institutions at the highest world level. This period also brought benefits to a lot of centers located in the widely-understood Eastern Poland. This period of soliciting Polish favor, in particular of its most developed sectors of the economy, began to end when the power of the Soviet Union in Central Europe started to be limited. With the collapse of communism it has become insignificant, and from then on it can be seen that the whole Poland has become very much of an outer periphery. This outer peripherality of Poland has become especially obvious after its accession to the European Union, in particular after the accession to the Schengen Agreement. The above-mentioned geopolitical change between the 70s and 90s can also be considered as one of the factors explaining the process of de-industrialization of the region after the collapse of the so-called Eastern Bloc.

The country's western regions have become the clearest beneficiary of these changes on a regional scale, though of course they have also lost many of their former strengths. However, in the new geopolitical configuration, due to their location, the opening of borders and the existing transport infrastructure they proved particularly attractive to German and other international corporations. Providing significantly lower than in Western Europe labor costs as well as low transport costs they proved to be privileged sites for large industrial investments with the significant role of low and medium-qualified workforce. In this context, Eastern Poland was largely lost in the new geopolitical situation. As it seems, however, it happened mostly not because of attributed to its inhabitants specific "eastern mentality" (Zarycki, 2010), but primarily due to making it into an outer periphery located at the sealed UE borders. Also, the region has traditionally remained an area without good transport links to Western Europe.

Meanwhile, let us remind here that the historical development of multiple centers of Eastern Poland was, like their current problems, largely geopolitically conditioned. A particularly good example of this is Bialystok, owing its flourishing in the past to its position as interface periphery. The primary source of the dynamic development of this city was the building of the famous Warsaw-Petersburg railway, opened already back in 1862. Until today it has remained the basis for the relatively fast connection to Warsaw, although, as it was mentioned before, it is not used in international traffic (in particular there is no traffic between Lithuania and Belarus due to the accession of the former to the EU). Such a rail connection with the capital can only be a dream for Rzeszow, which in this respect seems to have been, until the present day, cut off by the partition borders between Russia and Austria. Regarding Bialystok, it should also be noted that in the years 1834-1851 a significant role in its development was played by the active at the time customs frontier between the Polish Kingdom and Russia proper. The town of Bialystok located just behind this tariff barrier in the east gained a significant impetus for the rapid development of industrial plants that could supply their products to the gigantic Russian market. Now, the city has lost all of these historic assets. Of course, it should be emphasized that the source of this depreciation of Bialystok status has not only been recent geopolitical changes. As it has already been mentioned, change of borders after World War II was probably the biggest blow to the development potential of the regions now known as Eastern Poland. It was then that they were cut off from their natural capitals and growth centers. I mean here particularly Vilnius, Lviv, Grodno and Brest. The first two of these cities were also important academic and intellectual centers with great potential, which strongly radiated at the regions discussed by us today. Keeping pace with their former status, sometimes even at the world level, will probably still take the modern Eastern Poland's centers a vast amount of time and effort.

6. Problem of regional inequality functionality

It is also worth remembering, that while analyzing the situation of less developed regions there is often a tendency to perceive the weakness of their economies in terms of the obviousness of their problems and costs they generate. This perspective is quite typical of the contemporary academic discourse or the one coming from public institutions, whose mission is to assist in the development of all the weaker regional communities or social groups. We forget, however, that the situation of the so-called "underdevelopment" of some regions can, from certain perspectives, be seen as a functional one. By analyzing the cases of "problem regions" we are usually acquainted with the negative aspects of socio-economic configurations in which they operate. However, usually we do not pay attention to the returns derived by other agents from such and no other state of affairs and political and economic relations. In particular, this situation can happen when particularly unfavorable social and economic situation in certain regions is the result of a specific "export" to them of the social costs of development and restructuring of other parts of the country or even the continent (Kula, 1983). Currently, international corporations are a major agent for whom the transfer of the social costs of development from the developed regions to peripheral regions, which usually takes place through their shifting to the social budget of the state, may be a beneficial phenomenon. Great metropolises can also be seen as beneficiaries of such

transfers, as they can parasitize both on the immediately surrounding peripheries (the backwash effects) or on the ones located in other parts of the country. The well-known mechanism described in particular by the so-called World System Theory is the mechanism of using peripheries by the core areas to buffer the crisis waves (Wallerstein, 1975).

So, analyzing the situation of the "Polish Mezzogiorno" one should perhaps look not only at the problems that arise from its underdevelopment but also, to better understand them, look for the mechanisms and agents due to which that retardation is, for some, a functional one or even simply advantageous. Perhaps to such beneficiaries of the Polish Eastern Poland and other European peripheries belong, to a higher or lower degree, the strongest regions of the continent as well as the strongest metropolitan centers of the country? This type of dependency concerning the South of Italy has already drawn the attention of numerous authors (e.g. Gasiór-Niemiec, 2010). The beneficiaries of their disability are often considered to include, among others, the strong economic institutions of Northern Italy as well as part of the political elites, especially those favored by the existing institutional balance of power in Southern Italy. Similarly, in the case of Poland you can note that the low competitiveness of the eastern regions makes them useful reservoirs of cheaper and usually well-educated workforce, both for the most developed regions of the world and Polish cities. The universities of Eastern Poland are also a place of extra work for many scientists from the metropolitan centers. Educating young people in the region, largely in specialties in which they have no chance of finding employment on the spot, they contribute, at the same time, to the strengthening of the stream of emigration. This education may also be more broadly considered as increasing the level of professional and consumer aspirations to the level of global economic centers, and therefore usually impossible to meet at the regional level. So, let us remember that the promotion of the regions of Eastern Poland will mean that the European and Polish cities will lose many young and educated migrants with modest financial expectations from these areas. Thus, even at the subconscious level, they may be uninterested in a quick and really effective solution of their problems and the creation of another growth center, competitive for the already existing ones.. Similarly, some regional elites, in particular those having privileged access to the benefits of public funds, may not be interested in changing the existing hierarchy of power and development.

7. The problem of peripheral elites

In this context, an important priority for the regions of Eastern Poland seems to be supporting their strong and independent intellectual elites, who would be able to overcome the cognitive limitations in the strategic thinking about regions, described herein. The need is, in particular, for financially independent elites who know on the one hand global languages, conceptual and institutional systems, and on the other hand the local economic and political problems as well as the cultural code of the local area. Thanks to their competence and independence, they should have both the ability and courage to talk about the difference of regional viewpoints and conflicts of interest, both at the regional level and between the national and European level. Efforts to better

understand the mechanisms of peripheral elites may be one of the possible academic activities serving this goal. In particular, an interesting question seems to be the sociology of knowledge on the outermost regions. A major problem seems to be the participation of peripheral elites in the creation of knowledge of their regions at different levels of its generation. The Estonian-Canadian researcher Merje Kuus (Kuus, 2007) in an interesting way drew attention to the interrelations of peripheral and central elites, which is often considerably affecting this process.

On the other hand it is worth remembering that the same peripheral regional elites, even the most excellent and independent ones, fail to overcome the fundamental limitations of growth. The outermost regions must therefore be able to solicit their business on a national level. They should both know how to lobby, use political mechanisms and effectively present their arguments and point of view in the media as well as in the field of our top priority – the academic one.

From this point of view, the important aspect of strengthening the periphery is not only the, so fashionable today, promotion of regional autonomy, whose other face is, after all, the taking away from the centers of responsibility for the fate of the periphery which "wanted to take their fate into their own hands." It seems undoubted that there are many fundamental issues relevant to the development of the Eastern Poland which cannot possibly be resolved by any entities on a regional scale. An example of this is the issue of the struggle for the opening of the eastern border, where a solution is possible only at the international level. At the supra-regional level are located also issues of strategic planning and financing of infrastructure solutions or support for home business enterprises capable of global operations, whose investments potentially can become agents of development and innovation in the eastern regions.

8. References

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