



**BARTOSZ SOBOTKA**

University College of Enterprise and  
Administration in Lublin, Poland

*ORCID iD: 0000-0002-0393-3645*

## THE CREATION OF POLAND'S DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE SYSTEM – CONTINUED



## ABSTRACT

**Purpose:** To present elements of the emerging Poland's development assistance system as an important part of Poland's foreign policy. **Method:** Analysis of documents and available literature. **Results:** The article defines and justifies the catalogue of Poland's priority countries and Polish specialization in development assistance (political transformation in the context of decentralization and the non-formal education sector) for Ukraine in particular. **Conclusion:** The rationale is based on existing comparative advantages and is linked to the overarching goals of Poland's foreign policy – creating security and increasing prosperity, in particular by improving the quality of human capital in Ukraine affecting the labour market in Poland in terms of migration. The text draws attention to the possibility of linking the bilateral program of Polish aid with multilateral assistance from the European Union. The proposed solutions respond to the conclusions and recommendations of the OECD report on the evaluation of our development assistance system.

**KEYWORDS:** *Poland's soft power, Poland's development assistance, Poland's foreign policy, Poland's development assistance system, Polish aid specialisation*

## INTRODUCTION

Twelve years ago, a monograph of my authorship entitled *The Creation of the Poland's development assistance system* (Sobotka, 2012) was published, where I attempted to define an optimal model for the system of this relatively new field of Poland's foreign activity. The work contained conclusions and recommendations gathered from the public debate at the time, supplemented by the author's insights. Over the years, unfortunately, not much has changed (with some caveats), and the recommendations remain valid, although of course they can and should be supplemented.

These caveats are, of course, the positives that need to be mentioned: The adoption of the government's multi-year development cooperation programs 2012-2015, 2016-2020 and 2021 – 2030, Poland's accession in 2013 to the OECD's Development Assistance Committee (DAC), which is a forum that brings together the most important donors of development assistance, or, finally, the *solidification* of the Foundation for International Solidarity, which is a quasi-executive agency of Poland's development assistance, the best evidence

of which is its obtaining in 2023 of EU Pillar Assessments certification, allowing it to attract increased funding from the EU.

The caveats can, and indeed should, also include changes in Poland's international environment. Russian aggression against Ukraine, destabilizing security in Central and Eastern Europe, and a direct consequence of this – the migration of millions of Ukrainians to Poland, seeking refuge and security, which they found thanks to the tremendous solidarity of Polish society and third sector organizations (Bazyl, 2023, p. 10).

The purpose of the article is to present the rationale for defining Polish specialization in development assistance to Ukraine in particular, and linking them to the policy of the European Union as a channel of multilateral support. The rationale is based on existing comparative advantages and is linked to the overarching goals of Poland's foreign policy.

This study uses the method of analysis of both Polish and European Union documents, as well as available current literature on the subject, reports and studies of public institutions (in the area of foreign policy and development assistance).

The immediate impetus for this work is the publication by the OECD of a report on the evaluation of our development assistance system. The document contains 10 recommendations, some of which will be discussed in this text.

It should be noted that this report evaluates the progress made since the first OECD DAC peer review in Poland in 2017. Unfortunately, the bilateral program still relies on short, one-year projects, which limits Poland's ability to strategically plan it in line with partner country priorities. A shortcoming is the late announcement of competitions for entities implementing aid activities, slow decision-making by managing institutions has led to delays in disbursement by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in recent years. The range of very small projects managed under different instruments also creates a risk of duplication and inconsistency. This fragmentation and annual programming make it difficult for Poland to coordinate with other partner countries and meet its international development aid effectiveness commitments. The lack of strategic prioritization and sustained linkage to foreign policy objectives not only jeopardizes the desired balanced approach, but can also be counterproductive.

## THE NEED TO RAISE THE PROFILE OF POLISH AID ACTIVITIES – TO MAINSTREAM IT

The first recommendation of the OECD Report, and in my opinion the most important, is to raise the profile of Polish aid efforts by making decision-makers aware of their importance: *In order to increase public and political support for Polish Aid, Poland should invest in development education and lead debates in parliament and in society on how development cooperation contributes to Poland's policy goals (OECD, 2023).*

In order to support any public policy, it is necessary to understand it well, to know its conditions and, importantly, to verify whether parliamentarians, the government, are giving it the right importance. Despite the fact that development aid enjoys a high level of support among the Polish public (65% in a December 2022 opinion poll) (Poles...2022), it is often neglected in the public debate, and completely ignored in the electoral debate.

This is probably due to the fact that we do not identify it with the foreign policy implemented by the Poland. On the other hand, it is, or can be, a very effective instrument of state policy in international relations, as exemplified by the development policies of other countries (Gotkowska, 2010).

It is widely accepted that the strategic objectives of foreign policy are to ensure security and increase the prosperity of the state (Morgenthau, 1954, pp.25-26; Organski, 1958, pp.53,56-63), development policy should also contribute to their realization.

It is worth quoting some numbers at this point, to present the scale of Poland's activities in the area of international development cooperation. When joining the European Union in 2004, Poland made a commitment to increase the value of development assistance to 0.17% of GNI by 2010 and to 0.33% of GNI by 2015. This commitment was not met, which is also raised in the OECD evaluation report (with the exception of 2022) (MFA, 2023). The rate has oscillated around 0.13%-0.15% of GNP. However, we must realize that the annual amount is worth about 4 billion pln. It would seem that these are funds that, if used appropriately, could support the realization of Poland's foreign policy goals. Of course, it should be noted that this amount consists of a bilateral program (directly coordinated by Poland) and a multilateral program,

mainly through the institutions of the European Union, as well as the agencies of the United Nations (over which, unfortunately, Poland currently has little influence). Nevertheless, there is a huge space (which the OECD report also encourages) to link and strengthen the bilateral channel with multilateral assistance. Adequate influence on the European Union's development policy depends on the activity of Polish diplomats, their cause and expertise.

It is worth recalling here that Poland was the initiator of the Eastern Partnership initiative, a European Union foreign policy program within the framework of the European Neighbourhood Policy aimed at six countries: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine (all of these countries were in parallel beneficiaries of the Poland's bilateral aid program).

The initiative was presented at the European Council summit in June 2008 (i.e. shortly after Poland's accession to the European Union), and was officially launched in May 2009 in Prague at a summit of heads of state and government of the EU and partner countries. The Eastern Partnership consists of six pillars: strengthening state institutions and good governance; economic development – taking advantage of market opportunities; expanding connectivity, energy and environmental issues; and improving mobility and people-to-people contacts.

All these areas constituted the entirety of the European Union's relations (political, economic and social) with the countries of Eastern Europe, on the one hand being a certain preparatory instrument for potential accession to the European Union (through the Association Agreement), and on the other hand being a potential *leverage* of the Poland's bilateral program within the framework of the EU's multilateral activities. The Eastern Partnership could have become the anchor of Poland's efforts. Unfortunately, the failure of Ukrainian President Yanukovich to sign the Association Agreement in 2013 has sidelined the initiative.

Further recommendations of the OECD 2023 report are to strengthen and better coordinate from the strategic (planning) as well as operational levels of Poland's development policy. In the Polish system, both the bilateral and multilateral channels are *coordinated* by many institutions: individual ministries (e.g., the Ministry of Science handles activities related to scholarships for foreign students), the Chancellery of the Prime Minister, the BGK (Polish Development Bank), the Foundation for International Solidarity.

Of course, there is a body that is empowered to broadly coordinate the program – the Development Cooperation Program Council under the Minister of Foreign Affairs (created by the Development Cooperation Act of September 16, 2011). However, given the *departmentalism* of Poland's policy, as well as the conduct of even divergent activities within the framework of foreign policy itself by individual institutions (e.g., the Office of the President and the Chancellery of the Prime Minister), coordination requires decisive improvement and, above all, coupling it with the overarching goals of the Poland. Moreover, completing the picture, it should also be mentioned that in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs itself, this subject is dealt with by at least 4 organizational units, often with conflicting interests. Despite the great potential, in principle, since the beginning of accession to the European Union, we have not managed to significantly influence EU development policy (multilateral channel) (Szynol, 2022).

## **POLAND'S PRIORITY COUNTRIES**

The selection (and, in particular, the limitation of their number) of priority (partner) countries to which aid is provided and the selection of Poland's specialties is a major challenge.

The non-application of the so-called programmatic approach in development policy has traditionally been one of the reasons for weakening the effectiveness of activities. This type of approach means first and foremost: focusing the bilateral development assistance budget on a narrow set of priority countries and specializations, ensuring that allocations correspond to these priorities, and developing clear government-wide targets for each priority partner country based on consultations with partner country stakeholders and in coordination with other providers.

The lack of a limitation on the number of priority countries and coordination among donors can lead to a situation where multiple donors are involved in a single country in a single sector, leading to a frequent situation where the authorities of such a recipient country play up their political interests instead of concerting with donors to truly improve the quality of life of the population.

Meanwhile, in parallel, other countries in need of international support do not receive it (the aid darlings/aid orphans' phenomenon).

The Multiannual Development Cooperation Program 2021 – 2030 Solidarity for Development defines 10 priority countries: 4 Eastern Partnership countries (Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine) and 6 in Africa and the Middle East (Ethiopia, Kenya, Senegal, Tanzania, Lebanon and Palestine). In the previous period, i.e. 2016–2020 (Multiannual Development Cooperation Program 2016 – 2020), Poland supported the communities of 12 countries: 4 Eastern Partnership countries (Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine) and 8 in Africa, Asia and the Middle East (Ethiopia, Kenya, Senegal, Tanzania, Uganda, Myanmar, Lebanon and Palestine). Some progress can be seen here, as in 2012–2015 there were 20 priority countries: Belarus, Ukraine, Georgia, Moldova, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Afghanistan, the Palestinian Authority, 8 countries in the East African region (Burundi, Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, Somalia, South Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda), 2 North African countries (Libya, Tunisia), Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan (MFA, 2011).

It seems that it would be appropriate to focus only to 4 countries of the Eastern Partnership (**Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine**), while continuing to provide assistance to the others, but without priority country status.

If development aid is an element (tool) for achieving a country's foreign policy goals, then what overarching goals can the Poland's government pursue in countries in Africa and the Middle East? Of course, these are important directions, especially Africa, while foreign policy should be effective and, with limited resources, some prioritization should be done (Paterek, 2013). The prosperity and security of the Poland (and therefore the overarching goals) largely depend on the situation in Ukraine, Belarus, Georgia and Moldova. In addition, potential economic interests (as discussed below) have far greater potential for development in these countries.

## POLISH SPECIALIZATION WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF DEVELOPMENT POLICY

A more complicated aspect is the selection of Polish aid specializations.

In order to understand the momentousness of the problem, one can compare here, for example, the ranges of Polish specialization resulting from official action plans for particular years (which are the criteria for selecting projects within the framework of bilateral activities). Table 1 shows Poland's priorities in selected years.

**Table 1.** *Poland's development assistance priorities in selected years*

2011	2023
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- governance (good governance), in particular: preventing and combating corruption, initiatives to harmonize laws with EU law (in the areas of justice, customs and border services; land legislation and cadastre), pension reform, urban management of municipal services, and other initiatives implemented within the framework of the Eastern Partnership;</li> <li>- migration and border management, in particular: initiatives to improve border movement and combat illegal migration</li> <li>- rural development and agriculture, in particular: support for agricultural advisory services, activation of local communities to improve the quality of life in the countryside;</li> <li>- small and medium-sized business, in particular: increasing energy efficiency and waste disposal, activation of SME associations.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- building professional, transparent national and local institutions that act for the public good and safety and in accordance with the law; including in terms of key reforms resulting from preparation for EU membership;</li> <li>- building civil society, including ensuring flexible, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels of government;</li> <li>- developing national and local crisis management systems, building the capacity of public administrations to prevent and respond to natural and man-made disasters, and increasing operational capacity in this regard;</li> <li>- facilitating access to quality education and vocational training;</li> <li>- supporting entrepreneurship and the reconstruction and development of businesses among those affected by armed conflict;</li> <li>- support for regional and local development strategies aimed at sustainable economic growth;</li> <li>- support for the development of entrepreneurship, including through technology and knowledge transfer for economic innovation;</li> <li>- support for the processes of developing and implementing policies, programs and instruments for the reconstruction, modernization and sustainable development of cities and territories;</li> <li>- supporting economically, socially and environmentally beneficial connections between urban, peri-urban and rural areas by strengthening national and regional development planning;</li> <li>- improving the quality of and access to health care and social services for those affected by armed conflict;</li> <li>- supporting public administrations at all levels to ensure effective environmental management and climate change adaptation, including the adaptation of internal regulations to European Union standards, taking into account, in particular, the rebuilding of the capacity of these institutions after the losses suffered during the military aggression of the Russian Federation;</li> <li>- supporting the public sector, including the local level of government, in the use of renewable energy sources and increasing energy efficiency.</li> </ul>

**Source:** Wieloletni program współpracy rozwojowej na lata 2021–2030. Solidarność dla rozwoju, Program polskiej współpracy rozwojowej realizowanej za pośrednictwem MSZ RP w roku 2011, Ministerstwo Spraw Zagranicznych, Warszawa 2010.



As you can see, instead of decreasing the scope of specialization (perhaps it is better to use the word areas of support) it has even dramatically increased. Of course, this does not mean that there are no needs of the recipient country in these areas. However, the essence of specialization is to concentrate activities in a particular area in order to increase impact and therefore effectiveness.

Guidance on the essence of defining specialization can be found in the EU Code of Conduct on Division of Labor in Development Policy. According to the document, specializations should be based on comparative advantages, which is defined in the annex of the document as follows: *a donor's comparative advantage refers to the added value, the relative advantage within a given activity, and is characterized by the lowest costs, compared to other donors. Added value, on the other hand, is determined based on the following criteria: presence on the ground, experience in a given country or sector, possession of technical capacity, global and local level of assistance provided, trust of other donors and the partner country government, capacity to engage in other sectors of support, capacity to respond quickly to changes, predictability of the scope of assistance, effectiveness of methodology and procedures, and in some cases by the fact that an assistance activity has been undertaken (Communication, 2007).*

Is it possible to try to define some area of our specialization that fits into the above, in such a way that we can link it to cooperation in the multilateral field (strengthening the bilateral program of action and, above all, the budget from the multilateral channel)? We can venture to say that our export good, our specialty, **is the decentralization of the system and support for local government reforms.** It is widely accepted that this reform in the era of systemic transformation in Poland was a great success. Decentralization of the system has resulted in greater efficiency of public policy, which has become closer to the citizens. It is widely believed that local governments have unleashed creativity in Poles, rebuilt the regional identification of residents, and, above all, allowed the development of civic activity and the embodiment of the idea of civil society, which has translated into economic growth and the general well-being of residents. Moreover, it cannot be overemphasized that during these 20 years of bilateral development assistance program, hundreds of projects have been implemented in this area. Fact, they largely consisted of organizing seminars and conferences for the purpose of *sharing experience*, but in the course of them hundreds of interpersonal

as well as inter-institutional (partner cities, NGOs) relationships were built. The second area, a potential Polish specialization, could be education. First of all, it is necessary to start here with the fact that Poles, Ukrainians and Belarusians belong to the same culture, we adhere to similar values or otherwise use similar *mental maps*. I would even risk the thesis that we constitute a certain community (or can constitute), based on a Slavic *creed*, a Central European *rite*.

Education is of strategic importance in the context of social capital development. Of course, the formal system managed by the public administration is important. However, in an era of digital transformation and technological change forcing a shift away from a linear model of career development (education-work-experience) to a continuous replenishment of competencies and skills, it is crucial to implement and disseminate systems that allow for the validation of competitions and qualifications through short forms of education within the non-formal system (Migałka et, 2023). It is assumed that the 750,000 Ukrainians paying Social Security contributions in Poland as of 2022 will, on the one hand, save the Polish social security system (ZUS, 2023) and, on the other hand, enable the Polish labour market to function by ensuring the supply of labour. However, the coming changes in the labour market and the spectre of a competence mismatch will not be satisfied with the classic flow of migrants, Quality of human capital will become strategically important.

**Our know-how in the field of education can be the Integrated Qualifications System (IQS)** being implemented in Poland, which aims to raise the level of human capital in Poland by describing, organizing and bringing together various qualifications in a single register. The system is an important policy tool for lifelong learning. Ultimately, it is intended to cover all aspects of activities undertaken in Poland related to the confirmation of learning outcomes. It is intended to be a tool for implementing the state policy for lifelong learning in partnership between the government, local government, employers, employees and civil society (and therefore also links to the first Poland's specialization). To better understand the MCC, one can outline the benefits it offers to different stakeholder groups:

- For those interested in obtaining qualifications, it provides new opportunities to plan their development and the next stages of their careers in Poland and abroad.

- For employers, such a set of information provides assistance not only in hiring people with the right competencies, but also in better planning of activities to support the professional development of their employees, in particular in connection with regional competence needs (Hrynkevych et al., 2023).
- For offices, institutions and non-governmental organizations carrying out various public tasks, the integrated qualifications registry facilitates access to a continuously updated set of information on qualifications operating in the market.

This system enables the effective integration of the entire education system through the National Qualifications Framework with the European Qualifications Framework, thanks to common principles, terminology and, most importantly, the principle of ensuring the quality of qualifications, thanks to which it is an excellent tool for complementing competencies acquired in the formal education cycle in an era of technological changes affecting the labour market (automation, robotization and the replacement of individual professions by generative artificial intelligence algorithms).

It is not insignificant that about 50,000 people from Ukraine are currently (2024) studying at Polish universities, and about 290,000 children are studying in Polish schools and kindergartens.

As a reminder, in addition to security, the goal of foreign policy is to create wealth, this wealth is created by people (still assisted and not replaced by technology). It is in our interest to educate and thus strengthen relations with the elites/staff of the future Ukrainian economy.

Building a coherent system of competence enhancement can definitely be mutually beneficial.

## POLAND'S SOFT POWER AND REAL INTERESTS

Thousands of visits by both Ukrainians to Poland and Poles to Ukraine is a huge asset (before the war) in many projects, as well as the huge expressions of solidarity of the Polish society by welcoming millions of Ukrainians into Polish homes (during the war) is an achievement that cannot be lost. This is our soft power – the ability to influence hearts and minds, sometimes called smart power (Zalas-Kamińska, 2022). It's just that in the age of *realpolitik*, you have to know how to use it. In other words, past experience must be turned into contracts, into real economics. **It's now or never.**

Right now is the so-called momentum, we are keeping our fingers crossed for the end of the war in Ukraine and the massive aid that will be passing through Poland to rebuild it. It's time to fill those hundreds/thousands of partner city relationships, jointly implemented projects – soft projects – with content. Polish NGOs have the know-how on how to move in Ukraine, but also in Belarus. Let them do it under the Polish flag, and not as contract employees of the *Mariott Brigades* from Germany, the USA or France.

Whether JICA (Japan Agency for International Co-operation) will have its field missions? No, rather, it will look for partners with experience in field work. Paraphrasing a popular phrase, one can write that truck drivers from Western Europe do not venture onto the roads of Eastern Europe and the result (i.e., goods), someone has to prove. We cannot allow Poland to be just a logistics hub for other countries, a construction depot.

It is in our interest to help Ukraine (Bieńczyk-Missala, 2023), we have already given tanks, we don't have any more. Now we can give actual concrete support in the form of building/rebuilding the country's prosperity. The richer Ukraine, better off, the richer Poland (not to mention safer).

To this end, it will be necessary to support Polish foreign investments, primarily private (because they are more effective), assured by the state or the European Union's Global Gateway initiative. It is worth noting here that not one-way investments, where the profit earned goes only to the country of origin of the capital (as is unfortunately the case in Poland) these investments should create added value also in the country of investment of capital. In other words, not to be based only on cost arbitrage as labour-intensive,

but also knowledge-intensive (investments in IT, gaming, precision industries such as the military and space sectors).

The clear articulation and pursuit of vested interests is part of an undercurrent of a paradigm shift in the provision of development assistance by the European Union, which is moving away from an approach focused on poverty eradication and focusing on vested interests. This shift is supported by the majority of the Union's members, which thus gains the opportunity to strategically influence the world (Kugiel, 2023), particularly in an era of structural changes and the emergence of the new global order (e.g., China-US relations, and the 2023 and 2024 conflicts).

It is also largely dictated by the lack of real results from the United Nations initiative: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which includes 17 Sustainable Development Goals. Since this initiative was adopted by all 193 UN member states by General Assembly Resolution on September 25, 2015 in New York, it has become the pivot of global aid efforts. In a fairly short period of time, donors realized that ambitious goals – responding to real needs – could not be met with aid provided in the form of grants or budget support and private sector involvement was necessary.

The scope of Poland's relationship with Ukraine is characterized by multilayeredness:

- Poland's soft power influence on Ukraine, the existence of a certain debt for supporting 3 million migrants in the first phase of the war,
- Poland's role as a political advocate in the salons of the EU in the perspective of Ukraine's membership in the European Community,
- the potential role of the Polish-Ukrainian duopoly in relations with the U.S. and the U.K. (representatives of the Atlantic world) as a stabilizer of this part of the continent, to some extent defined as *a committed buffer*, as opposed to *a neutral buffer* (Mearsheimer, 2014), e.g., through the realization the Three Seas Initiative (Nitszke 2022; Bartosiak 2018, pp. 513-627; Zenderowski 2021),
- provide an ideal foundation for building (realization of the strategic goals of the Republic of Poland) security and prosperity of Poland.

The Polish-Ukrainian and, in the longer term, also Belarusian alliance in terms of demographics cannot be overestimated in the context of **the potential possibility of balancing** the main player in the European Union – Germany, and therefore the possibility of creating EU policy. However, the realization of this prospect also implies the need to plug migration policy, which has not yet been fully formulated (Adamczyk, 2023; Duszczyk et al. 2023), into relief efforts.

## SUMMARY

Given the public support for Poland's actions in the area of development aid, it is no longer necessary to cite arguments that we ourselves once received it, because we have a sense of solidarity with other people, or that Poland is now about 20-22 richest country in the world (out of about 200 countries). It is more necessary to reinforce this support with arguments that are theoretically obvious, but disappear in the public debate. Namely: it is about the direct possibility of realizing, by means of development policy, the primary objectives of the state's foreign policy, i.e. creating security and prosperity.

Polish aid is slowly coming out of its infancy and adolescence (officially, it just appeared in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs about 19 years ago). It's high time to give it a proper status, especially since Poland will soon hold the presidency of the Council of the European Union in 2025 in the first half of 2025. This will be an excellent opportunity to establish itself as a reliable, mainstream actor (and also director) of the future theatre of aid activities in Ukraine, to which the international donor community will be able to delegate part of its activities.

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