

The European Union as a Regional Power and Its Potential to Become an Effective Global Player

Paula Marcinkowska

University of Warsaw

The European Union plays different roles in the region (Europe and its neighbourhood) and on the global scene. Due to various threats and challenges emerging from neighbouring countries (politically fast-changing environment, illegal migration, etc.), which are affecting the EU countries directly, one of the EU foreign policy's goals is to ensure stability and prosperity in its neighbourhood. However, on the global scene, the EU is building up its position mostly in economic terms, by developing trade relations with other international actors. The research questions are: does the EU have the potential to become an effective global player, both in economic and political terms? Is the EU, as a regional organization, capable of becoming an influential global actor?

Keywords: EU, international actor, potential, position, roles, regional organization, global player

Since 2004, when the biggest EU enlargement took place, the Union has gained new potential as an international actor in terms of its territory, population and – most of all – its economy. By creating the single internal market, the European Union ensures its members the benefits of being an economic giant. Its model of integration is a combination of liberalism (economy and free market rules) and welfare which is derived from social democracy.¹ Undoubtedly, the EU has become an effective process of integration. Its success is grounded in common values and principles, such as democracy, human rights, rule of law, and single market. As an international actor, it has also the ambition to become an influential player on the global scene. Indeed, the European Union is an economic giant, but at the same time it is known as a political and military dwarf. It is characterised by a network of policy-decision centres that are united by common goals but have no leadership, which is often perceived as an obstacle

Paula Marcinkowska – PhD, Institute of International Relations, University of Warsaw.

The remuneration for the author was financed by the Association of Copyright Collective Administration for Authors of Scientific and Technical Works (KOPIPOL), having its seat in Kielce, from fees collected under Article 20 and 20¹ of the Polish Act on Copyright and Neighbouring Rights.

¹ M. Leonard, *Why Europe will run the 21st century*, London & New York: Fourth Estate, 2005, pp. 1–7.

in building a united vision of the EU on the international scene. The provisions of the Treaty of Lisbon² that constitute the legal ground for the position of President of the European Council, the double-hatted position of High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (Vice-President of the European Commission) and the European External Action Service (EU's diplomatic service) were to strengthen the EU's position in international relations and provide institutional leadership within the Union. Nevertheless, at the same time, the European Commission, which was given the responsibility for the external dimension of many policies (e.g., environment, energy, trade), has remained a crucial player in numerous areas.³ The EU's international position is therefore still build by various decision-centres, both on the intergovernmental and the supranational level. The question is whether it has an impact on the EU as an international actor and its position in the world.

EU roles and its power

The European Union is known as a 'civilian power', as its international identity is based on maintenance of peace and security as well as development of international cooperation with other actors in accordance to declared values (human rights, democracy, rule of law). It is a 'normative power' regarding promotion of its norms outside its borders, though mainly in the enlargement (accession criteria) and neighbourhood (conditionality clause) policies. It is also a 'soft power' as it attracts and persuades others through its principles and policies.⁴ However, the EU's external activity has not been homogeneous (due to diversity of the international partners), and it is based on various motives (e.g., economy, security).⁵ The notion of 'power'⁶ is therefore used in different contexts and is related to the roles assigned to the EU by the Union itself and by other actors. In the international arena, the European Union plays a multitude of roles of different nature and scale, which results from the complexity of the EU but also from various visions of the EU foreign policy. The disparities are visible among EU institutions (the European Commission and the Council), between the institutions and the Member States and also between individual Member States. The reason for this is twofold: it unveils tensions among the Member States because of diverse perceptions

² *Treaty of Lisbon amending the Treaty on European Union and the Treaty establishing the European Community*, signed at Lisbon, 13 December 2007, Official Journal 2007/C 306/01.

³ B. van Vooren and R. A. Wessel, *EU External Relations Law. Text, cases and materials*, Cambridge University Press 2014, p. 27.

⁴ 'Soft power arises from the attractiveness of a country's culture, political ideals, and policies' – definition by Joseph S. Nye Jr. More in: Joseph S. Nye, *Soft power: The means to success in world politics*, New York: Public Affairs, 2004.

⁵ R. Kuźniar, *Europa i porządek międzynarodowy*, "Stosunki Międzynarodowe – International Relations" Vol. 50, No. 2, 2014, p. 52.

⁶ The concept of 'power' is used in the meaning of an ability to influence the behaviour of other actors.

of the Common Foreign and Security Policy (as an intergovernmental policy), and it reflects various national interests.⁷ On the other hand, international society seems to expect that the EU will engage in responding to threats and challenges of various nature – from territorial disputes to economic crises. Does the EU have the capacity to respond to all of them? As an international actor, the European Union is ‘*an entity which interacts with third countries and international organizations (and even its own Member States), (...) has a stand-alone identity composed of values, interests and policies which it seeks to define and promote internationally as its own*’.⁸ Diversity combined with common principles might be an advantage of the EU in building its position in the world. The success may lie in the unique nature of the Union – it is neither a regular international organization nor a federation of nation states. However, this is not only the question of the EU’s uniqueness and its impact on the effectiveness of its external actions. The EU’s international position is built not merely by the outcomes of its foreign activities but also by the internal decision-making processes that encourage (or discourage) 28 European countries to agree on a common policy to pursue their own interests. For building the EU’s effectiveness as an international actor, the foreign policy-making process seems to be as important as its outcome.

Following M. Cremona’s suggestions, we could indicate a number of major roles that the EU plays in the international arena:

- The EU as a model of regional economic integration that goes beyond trade and includes also development as well as security objectives;
- The EU as a market player (exporter and importer). On the one hand, it is protective to its domestic markets, but on the other hand, it offers ‘market access in return for reciprocal advantages’;
- The EU as a rule generator (through promotion of its regulatory norms but also through active participation in multilateral platforms of rule-setting, such as the WTO);
- The EU as a stabiliser – promoting peace, democracy, rule of law, regional cooperation, as well as multilateral solutions to global challenges;
- The EU as a ‘magnet’ for countries that want to join the European Union and simultaneously as a ‘neighbour’ beyond the enlargement policy (‘everything but institutions’).⁹

Charlotte Bretherton and John Vogler suggest the indication of other external roles of the European Union as a global actor. The inclusive understanding of the

⁷ D. Milczarek, ‘Teoretyczne interpretacje międzynarodowej roli Unii Europejskiej w ramach nowego ładu światowego’, in *Porządek międzynarodowy u progu XXI wieku. Wizje-koncepcje-paradygmaty*, R. Kuźniar (ed.), Warsaw: WUW 2005, p. 409.

⁸ B. van Vooren and R. A. Wessel, op. cit., p. 2.

⁹ M. Cremona, ‘The Union as a Global Actor: Roles, Models and Identity’, *Common Market Law Review*, Vol. 41, 2004, pp. 553–573.

EU that associates the EU's roles with the Union's proclaimed values presents the European Union:

- As a model of regional integration (how to achieve security and prosperity in the modern world);
- As a promoter of its values (protection of human rights, rule of law, democracy, etc.);
- As a new influential global player (a counterweight to the United States), which is a combination of the two above-mentioned roles.

At the same time, other roles could be associated with the EU's exclusive identity, which leads to the perception of the Union as a 'fortress' by non-member countries. In this understanding, the EU shall be perceived as a protector of its members from external threats (threats to prosperity/welfare and threats to security).¹⁰ Its practices can be clearly seen in the common commercial policy, common agricultural policy as well as in immigration rules. All these roles expose hybrid identity of the European Union, which combines actions focused on promoting its values and attempting to respond to threats and challenges outside the Union, at the same time, providing exclusive rights and a secure environment to its members.

As a 'civilian power', the EU advocates the use of non-military tools in international relations (in the opinion of Robert Kagan, the EU's external policy based on 'soft-power tools' derives from the Union's military weakness).¹¹ The cornerstone of the EU's external relations is development policy. The Union provides more than 50 per cent of development aid in the world, which makes it the leading donor.¹² The European Union has also assumed the leading role in climate change policy and supports the UN multilateral disarmament and non-proliferation regulations as well as instruments in maintaining international peace and security.¹³ The EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy includes a conflict prevention mechanism, peace building, humanitarian aid, as well as crisis management. Nonetheless, the EU has not been playing a significant role in providing security outside its borders. As Steven Blockmans notes, due to the fact that promotion of values is one of the EU's main goals in its international activity, the European Union has not only a legal obligation but also a moral duty to engage in peaceful settlements of external disputes.¹⁴ Article 3(5) TEU states: *'In its relations with the wider world, the Union shall uphold and promote its values and interests and*

¹⁰ Ch. Bretherton, J. Vogler, *The European Union as a Global Actor*, London & New York: Routledge, 2006, pp. 56–61.

¹¹ For more see: R. Kagan, *Paradise and Power. American and Europe in the New World Order*, London: Atlantic Books, 2004.

¹² European Development Policy website https://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/policies/european-development-policy_en (accessed on 16 May 2015).

¹³ European External Action Service's website: http://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/un_geneva/eu_un_geneva/disarmament/index_en.htm (accessed on 16 May 2015)

¹⁴ S. Blockmans, *The EU as a global peacemaker*, Inaugural lecture 487, published in the series of the University of Amsterdam 2014, p. 6.

contribute to the protection of its citizens. It shall contribute to peace, security, the sustainable development of the Earth, solidarity and mutual respect among peoples, free and fair trade, eradication of poverty and the protection of human rights (...)’ and ‘The Union’s action on the international scene shall be guided by the principles which have inspired its own creation, development and enlargement, and which it seeks to advance in the wider world: democracy, the rule of law, the universality and indivisibility of human rights and fundamental freedoms, respect for human dignity, the principles of equality and solidarity, and respect for the principles of the United Nations Charter and international law (...)’ (Article 21(1) TEU).¹⁵

In addition, *‘The Union shall define and pursue common policies and actions, and shall work for a high degree of cooperation in all fields of international relations, in order to:*

- (a) safeguard its values, fundamental interests, security, independence and integrity;*
- (b) consolidate and support democracy, the rule of law, human rights and the principles of international law;*
- (c) preserve peace, prevent conflicts and strengthen international security, in accordance with the purposes and principles of the United Nations Charter, with the principles of the Helsinki Final Act and with the aims of the Charter of Paris, including those relating to external borders;*
- (d) foster the sustainable economic, social and environmental development of developing countries, with the primary aim of eradicating poverty;*
- (e) encourage the integration of all countries into the world economy, including through the progressive abolition of restrictions on international trade;*
- (f) help develop international measures to preserve and improve the quality of the environment and the sustainable management of global natural resources, in order to ensure sustainable development;*
- (g) assist populations, countries and regions confronting natural or man-made disasters;*

and

- (h) promote an international system based on stronger multilateral cooperation and good global governance’ (Article 21(2) TEU).¹⁶*

The emphasis is put on the EU’s actions in the region as *‘The Union shall develop a special relationship with neighbouring countries, aiming to establish an area of prosperity and good neighbourliness, founded on the values of the Union and characterized by close and peaceful relations based on cooperation’ (Article 8(1) TEU).*¹⁷ These legal obligations stem from inside the EU but at the same time they are expectations addressed to the European Union by other international actors.

Notwithstanding, due to the limited use of military means by the Union and in pursuit of its interests, the EU needs to develop its diplomatic practices. For now,

¹⁵ *Consolidated version of the Treaty on European Union*, OJ C 326, 26.10.2012.

¹⁶ *Ibidem*.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*.

the EU could be called an ‘emerging diplomatic actor’¹⁸ when it comes to its tools and their effectiveness. The Treaty of Lisbon did not resolve the question of the EU’s diplomatic system by providing institutional and representative ground for its development (European External Action Service under supervision of the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, the President of the European Council). The Treaty did not address the question of the relations between the new set of diplomatic practices in comparison to the already existing practices of national institutions.¹⁹ Aside from the challenges emerging in the neighbourhood (neither the High Representative nor the President of the European Council were invited to the Minsk talks on the Ukraine crisis in February 2015),²⁰ there are some areas where the new system of tools established to help the EU build its strong position in international affairs has been effective. This is the case with the Iran talks on the nuclear weapons, where Catherine Ashton as High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy has been a chairwomen to the Six-Power Group (the US, the UK, China, France, Russia, and Germany) since 2010.²¹ In other areas of the EU’s external policy, the patterns that were used before the Lisbon Treaty still exist. A good example of this are commercial policy and climate change talks, which are mostly conducted by Commissioners, with very little involvement of the European External Action Service. This reflects the hybridisation of the EU diplomacy and has its roots both in treaty provisions and in practice. This internal contradiction could cause external inconsistency.²² Therefore, it should be taken into account in building a coherent EU diplomacy in order to become more effective.

Taking into account the various roles assigned to the European Union and the effectiveness of the EU’s actions, undoubtedly the leading aspect of its presence in the international arena is the economic significance of the EU. It is derived from the roots of the European integration process. The economic community has become the ground for further regional integration. The fact that the Union is called an ‘economic giant’ results from statistical figures. In 2013, the EU was the largest economy with 17.2 per cent of world GDP (its share of world imports and exports in 2013 was 16.4 per cent).²³ Nevertheless, due to the crisis in the eurozone, the EU has entered a hard phase of integration. There are various opinions on the direction of further integration. The debates focus not only on the eurozone (the possibility of Grexit) but also on the fear of disintegration (e.g., the issue of UK membership). This affects the position of the

¹⁸ M. H. Smith, ‘The EU as a Diplomatic Actor in the Post-Lisbon Era: Robust or Rootless Hybrid?’, in *The European Union as a diplomatic actor*, J. A. Koops, G. Macaj (eds), Palgrave Macmillan 2015, p. 18.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, pp. 23–24.

²⁰ German Chancellor Angela Merkel and French President François Hollande participated in the talks with Ukraine and Russia. For more see: <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/feb/12/ukraine-crisis-reports-emerge-of-agreement-in-minsk-talks> (accessed on 13 May 2015)

²¹ Federica Mogherini, who took the office of High Representative in 2014, appointed Catherine Ashton Special Adviser for the Iran talks.

²² M. H. Smith, ‘The EU as a Diplomatic Actor...’, *op.cit.*, pp. 26–27.

²³ Official EU website: http://europa.eu/pol/comm/index_en.htm (accessed on 10 May 2015)

European Union on the world stage.²⁴ As Robert Kagan points out, after the domination of the US on the global scene, ‘*international competition among great powers has returned, with Russia, China, Europe, Japan, India, Iran, the United States, and other vying for regional predominance. Struggles for status and influence in the world have returned as central features of the international scene*’.²⁵ In order to respond to the competition of various centres of power in the modern multipolar world, the EU should deal with the internal crisis and concentrate on deeper integration to build its strong position as an independent player.

Apart from economic factors, the EU shall be seen as a value-based community, which creates its collective identity in the international arena. As Roman Kuźniar indicated, the international identity of the EU is strongly dependent on its internal structure. It covers the issue of internal diversity, leadership and the institutional model (noting that the intergovernmental model of decision-making together with strong leadership would be desirable for a distinctive international identity).²⁶ The EU’s identity is also built on common interests in international relations, which are shaped by the Union’s policies (mostly in the economic sector but also in foreign and security policy).²⁷ However, proclaimed values are ‘not a decisive factor in shaping behaviour’.²⁸ External actions taken by the European Union are determined most of all by self-interest. The creation of the European Neighbourhood Policy in 2004, based on promotion of the EU’s values outside its borders, was to provide a secure and stable neighbourhood for its Member States.²⁹ Thus, external promotion of values became a tool in ensuring their interests. The understanding of the EU’s collective identity shall be also linked to the Union’s commitment to multilateralism, as shown by, for example, its activity within the United Nations system – which allows pursuing policy objectives related to the EU (or the Member States’) interests.³⁰ The EU’s identity stems not from the values the Union wants to promote but from the instruments (diplomacy and preventive steps) it is using to achieve its goals. Therefore, the question of the Union’s identity and of how it is perceived by the external international actors has an impact on the position of the EU on the international stage.

²⁴ B. Góralczyk, ‘European Union – The Best of Times, the Worst of Times?’, in *Introduction to European Studies: A New Approach to Uniting Europe*, D. Milczarek, A. Adamczyk, K. Zajączkowski (eds), Centre for Europe, University of Warsaw 2013, pp. 510–511.

²⁵ R. Kagan, *The Return of History and the End of Dreams*, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2008, pp. 3–4.

²⁶ R. Kuźniar, ‘Międzynarodowa tożsamość Europy (UE)’, in *Unia Europejska – nowy typ wspólnoty międzynarodowej*, E. Haliżak, S. Parzymies (eds), Warszawa: ASPRA-JR, 2002, pp. 28–29.

²⁷ A. Antczak, *Role międzynarodowe Unii Europejskiej. Apekty teoretyczne*, Vizja Press&IT, Warszawa 2012, p. 142.

²⁸ Ch. Bretherton, J. Vogler, *The European Union as a Global Actor*, London & New York: Routledge, 2006, p. 40.

²⁹ Ibidem.

³⁰ S. Blavoukos, D. Bourantonis, ‘Introduction – The EU presence in international organizations’, in *The EU presence in international organizations*, S. Blavoukos, D. Bourantonis (eds), London & New York: Routledge, 2011, p. 1.

Regional or Global power?

The end of the Cold War has brought a crucial change in the perception of international security. The notion of ‘power’ has been associated not only with military capabilities but also with soft tools in responding to global threats and challenges. Power has become ‘less transferable, less coercive, and less tangible’.³¹ As international security cannot be achieved by a single actor, the process of regionalization had an impact on the roles (as well as the ambitions) of regional organizations in ensuring regional security. Therefore, they could fill the gap in the post-Cold War international security system.³²

The forms of the EU’s external actions refer to enlargement policy, European Neighbourhood Policy, development policy, bilateral relations with other powers, multilateral cooperation, and interregionalism.³³ The EU’s power is exercised in two dimensions: in the economic sector (as an influential economic player) and in promoting its values in third countries (mostly as a significant part of enlargement policy and also in some parts of the neighbourhood policy). However, the success of the enlargement and neighbourhood policy has its limits due to geographical reasons (only European countries may apply for membership – Article 49 TEU). It cannot be thus applied to other regions. Nevertheless, the recent economic crisis revealed the scope of global interdependence. The implications are seen strongly in the areas of migration and security. The threats the EU needs to face are coming not only from its closest neighbourhood but also from other regions (e.g., terrorism). The wide range of challenges requires an adequate system of tools and coherent actions.³⁴ They also need to be supported by increased financial resources, as only 5.8 per cent of the EU budget for 2014 is allocated to external actions (the EU as global player), excluding the European Development Fund.³⁵

The EU is a regional power in terms of its economy and transformative capabilities – both internally, towards its Member States, as well as externally, towards the neighbouring countries that wish to join the Union (in the near or distant future). Promotion of the EU’s values and principles in Central and Eastern Europe should be considered one of the largest achievements of the European Union over the last twenty years. The effects are seen in the EU’s biggest enlargement in 2004 (and later on). The enlargement policy has always been a crucial dimension of the EU’s external

³¹ J.S. Nye Jr., *Power in the global information age. From realism to globalization*, London & New York: Routledge, 2005, p. 77.

³² T. Tardy, ‘Building peace in post-conflict environments. Why and how the UN and the EU interact’, in *The EU, the UN and collective security. Making multilateralism effective*, J. Krause, N. Ronzitti (eds), London & New York: Routledge, 2012, p. 198.

³³ B. Hettne & F. Söderbaum, ‘Civilian Power or Soft Imperialism? The EU as a Global Actor and the Role of Interregionalism’, *European Foreign Affairs Review*, No. 10, 2005, pp. 535–552.

³⁴ A. Antczak, *Role międzynarodowe...* op.cit., pp. 144–145.

³⁵ Official website of the European Union: <http://europa.eu/about-eu/basis-information/money/expenditure/> (accessed on 11 May 2015).

actions. It has been designed as the main instrument to peacefully achieve stability and democracy on the continent.³⁶ Every European country that wishes to join the Union must comply with the accession (Copenhagen) criteria established in 1993 by the European Council. To become a member, a state needs to fulfil:

- political criteria: rule of law, democracy, respect for human rights and minorities;
- economic criteria: a functioning market economy as well as the ability to deal with competition;
- legal criteria: institutional capacity to implement the *acquis communautaire*.³⁷

The EU also strives to be a transformative power in neighbouring countries, beyond the enlargement policy. Its will is based on the EU's interest in promoting the declared values to ensure secure neighbourhood. According to the European Security Strategy (ESS, 2003), one of the EU's strategic goals is to protect its Member States from threats and challenges emerging in the nearest neighbourhood.³⁸ The launch of the European Neighbourhood Policy in 2004 was to ensure a 'ring of friends' and avoid 'new dividing lines in Europe'.³⁹ It has been created as a new concept of cooperation with the 16 neighbouring countries,⁴⁰ one that will allow using different types of EU mechanisms: foreign policy tools (on intergovernmental level) and also instruments of close economic relations, conducted by the European Commission. It was designed as a set of tools ('everything but institutions'), which could encourage and help neighbouring countries in their transformation processes. However, the expectations of the neighbouring countries addressed to the EU (mainly internal market access and visa abolition) are not met in the EU short-term agendas. At the same time, the Union does not indicate clear 'awards' (membership cannot be a goal in the neighbourhood policy) to the neighbouring countries for compliance with EU rules. Although the ENP has its shortcomings, which is seen particularly in the case of Belarus (no progress in bilateral relations), most of the neighbouring states (particularly the Eastern countries) want to follow the EU's requirements in order to maintain privileged relations (even without the promise of becoming a member). The reason for this is the still big economic and social attractiveness of the EU to its neighbours.

The last few years have brought many crucial changes in the neighbourhood and have become a test for the EU's foreign and external policy instruments in building its international position. The huge test for the EU's external capabilities is Eastern

³⁶ R. Trombetta, 'The making of EU foreign policy – does Lisbon matter? A view from within', in *The foreign policy of the European Union. Assessing Europe's role in the world*, F. Bindi and I. Angelescu (eds), Washington D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2012, p. 52.

³⁷ Official website of the European Commission: http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/policy/glossary/terms/accession-criteria_en.htm (accessed on 11 May 2015)

³⁸ A secure Europe in a better world, European Security Strategy, Brussels 12 December 2003.

³⁹ Communication from the Commission, European Neighbourhood Policy, Strategy Paper {SEC(2004) 564, 565, 566, 567, 568, 569, 570}, COM(2004) 373 final, Brussels 12.05.2004.

⁴⁰ From the East: Ukraine, Moldova, Belarus, Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan; and the South: Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, and the Palestinian Authority.

Europe and particularly the Ukrainian crisis, which has been intensified after Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014. Moreover, as a region full of historical and ethnic conflicts, the Balkans have been a big challenge for the EU in building its position as a transformative power. The region's location (important communication routes), diversity of religions as well as ethnic conflicts cause the coexistence of integration and disintegration.⁴¹ The challenges come not only from the threat to security in the region (unresolved bilateral disputes could escalate to the whole region) but also from the poor economic situation as well as strong nationalist movements. Therefore, the biggest challenge for the EU as a regional power is:

- Adaptation of existing policies to the changing political environment. This refers not only to Eastern Europe but also to the Southern neighbours and the aftermath of the Arab Spring;⁴²
- Offering new measures for solving the 'frozen' relations with countries such as Belarus and contributing to peace negotiations in the Middle East: the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, the civil war in Syria.
- The ability to meet the challenges and expectations posed by other international actors (e.g., the EU–Russia competition in the Post-Soviet space – the Euroasian Union vs. the EU's Eastern Partnership).

On the global scene, the roles the EU plays are of a different nature. The European Union is one of the biggest economies in the world, which makes it a partner and a competitor in the global arena.⁴³ The Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) with the United States, which is being negotiated by the European Commission, will further increase the Union's influence on the world trade rules.⁴⁴ Albeit, the EU is a global actor not only in terms of trade but also in promotion of human rights, as well as good governance.⁴⁵ It is also a leading donor of humanitarian aid (by provisions of goods, services, technical assistance, and financial instruments).⁴⁶ According to the European Foreign Policy Scorecard 2015, prepared by the European Council on Foreign Relations think-tank, outside of Europe the EU is working on strengthening relations with China and other Asian countries (relations with China still dominated in 2014, but the EU also continued negotiations of the free trade agreement with Japan); as regards North Africa and Middle East, the EU is focusing on the region through the prism

⁴¹ N. Lubik-Reczek, *Państwa postjugosłowiańskie wobec członkostwa w Unii Europejskiej i NATO (Analiza porównawcza)*, Toruń: Wydawnictwo Adam Marszałek, 2011, pp. 15–18.

⁴² The protests in North African countries against social disparities (poverty, unemployment, corruption) that began in 2010 after the public suicide of a 26-year old Tunisian citizen.

⁴³ Official website of the European Union: http://europa.eu/about-eu/facts-figures/economy/index_en.htm (accessed on 13 February 2015).

⁴⁴ Official website of the European Commission: <http://ec.europa.eu/trade/policy/in-focus/ttip/> (accessed on 13 February 2015).

⁴⁵ B. Hettne & F. Söderbaum, op. cit.

⁴⁶ More data on the official website of the EU humanitarian aid and civil protection department: <http://ec.europa.eu/echo/>

of security (transitions after the ‘Arab Spring’; the civil war in Syria); on the Eastern border, the EU continues promoting democratization processes through the Eastern Partnership (the special case of Ukraine).⁴⁷ The EU is also building its position within other international organizations, mostly the UN (intervening in the UN institutions on behalf of its members), and NATO (using NATO’s capabilities for operations led by the EU, e.g. ‘Althea’ in Bosnia and Herzegovina).⁴⁸ In the era of globalisation, the emergence of new powers and the demand for global governance – when one of the reasons of the current global governance crisis is the ‘lack of effectiveness in solving global problems’ – the EU has got a chance to have impact on global affairs.⁴⁹ The EU might overcome the deficit of legitimacy as it is in the interest of all the Member States – when acting individually, they have very little chance of being effective on the global scale.

Threats and challenges for the EU as an international actor

What affects the EU most after the Treaty of Lisbon in building its strong position in international relations are its own shortcomings, such as the lack of a political leader and the economic crisis. The question of leadership in the Union is posed in every debate on the future of the EU (should it be the President of the European Council, the High Representative or a single country – with emphasis on Germany). The attempts to underline the differences in the EU are becoming more popular in almost all Member States. The economic crisis has brought also a tendency to re-nationalism, which could undermine the integration project.⁵⁰

When analysing how the EU exercises its soft power in the region and on the global scale, we can observe threats and challenges that are of particular importance. They all evoke the EU’s role as a provider of stability, security and prosperity:

- The unresolved conflicts in the neighbourhood cast a shadow over the EU’s potential to become an effective global player – the separatist entities of Abkhazia and South Ossetia (as a result of the war in Georgia in 2008), Nagorno-Karabakh (conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan), the conflict in Transnistria (an unstable autonomous region of Moldova), and the escalation of the conflict in Eastern Ukraine after Russia’s annexation of Crimea in March 2014. So far, they exemplify shortcomings of the EU’s effectiveness as a soft power.

⁴⁷ European Foreign Policy Scorecard 2015, European Council on Foreign Relations, <http://www.ecfr.eu/scorecard/2015> (accessed on 15 February 2015).

⁴⁸ D. O’Sullivan, ‘The EU’s external action: moving to the frontline’, Guest Editorial, *European Foreign Affairs Review* Vol. 19. No. 3 (2014), pp. 329–334.

⁴⁹ M. Saxer, ‘Multilateralism in Crisis? Global governance in the twenty-first century’, in *The European Union and Emerging Powers in the 21st Century. How Europe can shape a new global order*, T. Renard, S. Biscop (eds), Ashgate 2012, p. 62.

⁵⁰ B. Góralczyk, ‘Kryzys 2008 r. a nowa rola Unii Europejskiej na scenie globalnej’, in *Unia Europejska jako aktor na scenie globalnej – razem czy osobno?*, B. Góralczyk (ed.), Centrum Europejskie Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego 2014, pp. 170–171.

- The proclamation of Kosovo’s independence showed the lack of unity within the EU (only 23 among out of 28 Member States have recognised Kosovo’s independence)⁵¹, when at the same time Kosovo has been given a ‘potential candidate’ status to the EU membership.⁵²
- The EU’s transformative power that contributed to transitions processes of the East and Central European countries, has found to be an inefficient tool in overcoming ethnic conflicts in the Balkans (due to their diverse nature).⁵³
- Illegal migration and immigration of people with different cultural/religious backgrounds (problems with assimilation) cause a challenge to the EU (there is an urgent need for a coherent policy towards the flow of illegal migrants from the other side of the Mediterranean).
- Other global threats: terrorism, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, organized crime, all of which require multilateral cooperation (potential EU contribution).

The EU’s activity in the international arena shows that the Union focuses its engagement on prevention, which brings good results in the international climate change politics (the EU as a global environmental policy actor)⁵⁴ but is still ineffective in responding to the sudden threats and challenges (e.g., the ‘Arab Spring’, the annexation of Crimea), and is incapable of taking prompt actions.

Conclusions

The EU as a soft power remains the most successful case of integration – showing how to peacefully transform the continent from after-war devastations into a prosperous region, where countries declare common values and principles. The European Union is still an exceptional example of regional integration. So far, the most effective mechanism within the EU’s external action is its enlargement policy. A similar approach is exercised towards the Union’s neighbours (but without a declared membership perspective) under the European Neighbourhood Policy, relations with neighbouring countries and the EU impact on their transformation processes represent a real test for the EU’s claims to be an effective international player.⁵⁵

⁵¹ Spain, Romania, Slovakia, Greece and Cyprus have not recognised the declaration of Kosovo’s independence in 2008.

⁵² Website of the European Commission’s enlargement policy: http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/countries/detailed-country-information/kosovo/index_en.htm (accessed on 15 May 2015).

⁵³ C. Dahlman, ‘Europe and its borderland’, in *Interventions in the new political geographies of the European ‘neighbourhood’*, L. Bialasiewicz, C. Dahlman, G.M. Apuzzo, F. Ciuta, A. Jones, Ch. Rumford, R. Wodak, J. Anderson, A. Ingram, *Political Geography* Vol. 28 (2009), p. 80.

⁵⁴ More: Rüdiger K.W. Wurzel, J. Connelly (eds), *The European Union as a Leader in Interational Climate Change Politics*, London & New York: Routledge/UACES, 2011.

⁵⁵ H. Maurer & L. Simão, ‘From regional power to global power? The European Neighbourhood Policy after the Lisbon Treaty’, in *Global Power Europe – Vol. 1, Theoretical and Institutional Approaches to the EU’s External Relations*, A. Boening, J-F. Kremer, A. van Loon (eds), Springer 2013, p. 95.

Due to internal economic (and partly political) crisis, the EU's external capabilities have decreased. In this sense, the position of the EU has been recently weakened. Zbigniew Brzeziński sees even potential irrelevance of the EU as a model of regional integration. In his opinion, as it comes to the Union's international presence, it is 'too passive regarding international security' and 'too set in its ways, it fears multicultural diversity'.⁵⁶ It is hard to disagree that the EU foreign policy seems to be the weakest form of European integration. Due to its intergovernmental nature, it is characterised by the 'capabilities–expectations gap' (Ch. Hill).⁵⁷ On the one hand, there are expectations to act as a unity; on the other hand, in many cases, its Member States prefer to act individually. These limitations of the EU's potential in the international arena result from different interests and foreign policy cultures.⁵⁸ Some of the interests could be seen as purely national, while in other cases, states could have different priorities, but only by bringing them under the European policy they may reach better effectiveness. On one hand, the intergovernmental form of cooperation in foreign policy matters causes obstacles to the Union's ability to respond immediately to the fast-changing political environment and speak with one voice; on the other hand, the blur of international and domestic policies as a result of globalisation could upgrade the Union's role as a global actor.⁵⁹ The EU's and national interests in many cases complement each other as they are based on common goals, such as stability and security (e.g., European Security Strategy 2003). This network of interests creates a circle of interdependence, which could strengthen the EU as an international organization. Nevertheless, to be influential on the global scale, the EU should behave as a leader and propose its own solutions to regional and global challenges. This means active participation as a mediator in conflicts and also suggesting, within a multilateral platform of cooperation, innovative answers to global threats (like in the case of climate change). So far, the Union is not a global power, but it has the potential to become an effective global player – both in the economic and the political sphere, but whether this potential will be used depends on the determination and political will of its Member States.

⁵⁶ Z. Brzeziński, *Strategic Vision. America and the Crisis of Global Power*, New York: Basic Books, 2012, p. 36.

⁵⁷ Ch. Hill, 'The Capability-Expectations Gap, or Conceptualizing Europe's International Role', *Journal of Common Market Studies*, Vol. 31, No. 3, September 1993, p. 315.

⁵⁸ J. A. Emmanouilidis, 'Europe's role in the twenty-first century', in *The European Union and Emerging Powers in the 21st Century. How Europe can shape a new global order*, T. Renard, S. Biscop (eds), Ashgate 2012, p. 94.

⁵⁹ M. Emerson, R. Balfour, T. Corthaut, J. Wouters, P.M. Kaczynski, T. Renard, *Upgrading the EU's role as global actor. Institutions, law and restructuring of European diplomacy*, Brussels: CEPS, 2011, pp. 14–19.

