

A Survey of Developments in Poland, Belarus, and Ukraine by the
Regional Specialists of RFE/RL's Newslite Team

UKRAINE, POLAND, AND THE EU'S WIDER EUROPE INITIATIVE. The Wider Europe initiative announced in March 2003 is a comparatively late attempt to grapple with the problem of new neighbors as the European Union enlarges in 2004. Its proposal for "Integration, not Membership" levels all four western members of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) -- Russia, Belarus, Ukraine, and Moldova -- to that of Russia's objective of pursuing integration, but not membership. Of the other three states, one is disinterested in the EU (Belarus) and two seek membership (Ukraine and Moldova).

The Wider Europe initiative places the western CIS with other EU neighbors in North Africa and the Middle East. Placing the western CIS together with North Africa and the Middle East "has become the document's key problem" because it "is a gross political and psychological blunder made by the authors," the Center for Peace, Conversion, and Foreign Policy of Ukraine, a Kyiv-based think tank, concluded.

The Wider Europe initiative does not apply to the western Balkans and Turkey, who are offered an open-door policy of future membership. North Africa and the Middle East are not geographically European and therefore membership is not an issue (Morocco was politely told after applying that it was not "European.")

The main undecided gray area is the western CIS, which is geographically in Europe but psychologically for most Western Europeans it is outside Europe. As Britain's "The Guardian" wrote, the western CIS states may be simply "too poor, too undemocratic, or simply too different." However, the Wider Europe initiative will continue to be perceived as a double standard if it only agrees to an open-door policy for the western Balkans but not the western CIS. There is no logical explanation why an open-door policy is used for one region of geographic Europe (the western Balkans) and denied to another (the western CIS). Offering the same open-door policy to both regions would contribute to the differentiation that the European Council proclaims as central to its Wider Europe initiative. The western Balkans has never proven its higher commitment than the western CIS to common values; if anything, the opposite.

Ironically, the impression is that Ukraine is, in effect, being punished for pursuing positive and peaceful interethnic relations. The Warsaw-based Stefan Batory Foundation criticized this double standard by observing sarcastically that if Ukraine had experienced ethnic conflict, this "would most likely have pushed Ukraine up the EU's agenda." This is surely the wrong signal for

the EU to send.

In recent years Poland has lobbied inside the EU (and NATO) for Ukraine. The Polish Foreign Ministry produced two papers, one in February and another in May, in support of an "Eastern Dimension" for the EU. Both were meant to contribute to discussion of the Wider Europe initiative. A major factor raised in both papers was the need to differentiate EU policy towards its eastern and southern neighbors. This was subsequently accepted in the European Council's conclusions on the Wider Europe initiative released in June. The Polish papers take the question of differentiation one step further by asking the EU to treat countries depending on "the degree of convergence of their values and foreign policy with those of the EU."

Demanding that countries move closer towards the EU's understanding of common values without an open-door policy is self-defeating. Central European states were not asked to improve their adherence to common values before the EU signed association agreements with them. The association agreements were first signed and then those countries worked towards fulfilling the Copenhagen criteria required for EU membership.

Poland therefore rightly believes that the Wider Europe initiative does not go far enough as it should leave the door open for Ukraine and Moldova. These two states should be allowed the possibility of upgrading their relationship in the long term with the EU to that of association agreements.

The May Polish paper calls for actions plans developed for Ukraine and Moldova to become "Partnerships for Association." These would prepare both states "to enter into an association or neighborhood agreement" when the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) expires in 2008. (The PCA was signed in 1994 but did not go into effect until 1998.)

The Polish papers provide concrete recommendations for the Wider Europe initiative. They postulate that EU-Ukrainian relations should be upgraded to the level of the EU-Russia. The implicit message is that the EU is giving preference to Russia for geopolitical reasons. Market economic status should be granted to Ukraine (a status granted to Russia in mid-2002), which would open the door to World Trade Organization membership. Also, targeted assistance should be provided through a "European Civil Society Neighborhood Fund" to pro-European political, economic, media, civil society, and local government forces in Ukraine.

Poland also supports the enhancing of political and security dialogue as part of the elaboration of a common European political and economic space. This, coupled with an open-door policy, would psychologically separate the common understanding of the EU from "Europe." Flexible border controls should balance concern about soft security threats with the continuation of cross-border contacts.

Military cooperation should be expanded, as agreed at the June 2002 session of the European Council in Seville, in EU-led crisis management operations. Ukraine has already assigned a military liaison officer to the EU. Joint infrastructure projects could be elaborated in energy, transportation, and communications. In May the EU, Poland, and Ukraine signed an agreement to extend the Odesa-Brody

pipeline to Gdansk to deliver Azerbaijani oil to Europe. The project was backed by a business plan outlined by former British Defense Minister Malcolm Rifkind, a consultant to PricewaterhouseCoopers, which stressed its advantages.

The enlarged EU will inevitably have to tackle the issue of its eastern gray area. New EU member states, such as Poland and the three Baltic countries, are expected to lobby for an "Eastern Dimension" and the adoption of a NATO-style open-door policy for geographically European states such as Ukraine.

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