Multilevel politics is as intriguing and attractive as complex for it involves a plentiful of actors that interact through multiple layers of sub-regional, national, and regional European structures both formalized and informal ones. The perplexing web of policymaking that characterizes the EU system of governance bears however pitfalls of responsibility escape, especially at the national level, since there is always a temptation to 'nationalize success' and 'Europeanize failures', as once put by former EU Commission President José Manuel Barroso. In the Polish context, this trivial situation has been particularly exemplary and traceable in the long-lasting public discourse best captured with a recognizable blaming formula 'winna Unia Europejska' or a rhetorical sighing after the single word 'Unia...'.

Kaminska's timely book addresses this problem in Polish public discourse and actual European politics within the domain of European Union external relations. Although the title may not straight off reveal this, 'Poland and EU Enlargement: Foreign Policy in Transformation' by Joanna Kaminska is in fact a study of Europeanization of Polish foreign policy, and thus a valuable contribution to understanding domestic change and transformation with regard to foreign policy formulation in EU member states in the wake of a two-way 'Europeanization' process (comprising 'downloading' and 'uploading' activities).

Tracing the challenges Poland faced after the fall of the Iron Curtain and the collapse of the Soviet Union, but also chances it discovered within these twenty years, most importantly through the accession to the European Union, Kaminska provides a succinct and informative account on Polish foreign policy change and continuity over the last two decades. The book's main purpose is ambitious – to reveal 'whether or not the changes that occurred on the national level in the area of foreign policy would be possible without the EU variable' (p.1). Furthermore, the author's analytical curiosity revolves around the question whether, and if so - to what extent, Poland can constructively influence EU external relations according to its national interests and preferences. Kaminska claims that 'domestic conditions constrained the influence capacity of national government, but the ambition of being an important European player had driven a successful transformation from policy taker to policy maker' (p.2). The book's main argument reads therefore that 'the level of Europeanization of national foreign policy has an impact on the extent to which a member state can influence EU external relations' (p.14).

In tackling the problem posed, Kaminska follows a nowadays widely resonant analytical approach – 'Europeanization' (informally also sometimes labeled as 'EU-zation'), a burgeoning but highly popular concept
that allows to link different levels of analysis and exploring the intrinsic relationship between agents and structures. As such, it allowed the author not only to unveil the patterns, means and ends of influence of the European Union on Poland as a member state, but also to trace the way and extent to which Poland has also been able to influence the developments within the Union, especially as regards the latter's foreign policy domain.

The book is structured in four chapters, framed by introductory part and conclusions, with an extensive list of literature (pp.255-284).

A scene setter, the first chapter entitled ‘Polish Foreign Policy and the EU’ (pp.15-72) outlines the framework within which the further analysis proceeds. It explains the historical and political context of Polish and EU foreign policy making, and explores both directions of influence: the way how the EU can influence domestic politics and the means member states may deploy to project their national preferences onto the European level. She presents and explains the ‘downloading’ process to occur through the mechanisms of elite socialization, bureaucratic restructuring, normative suasion, diffusion, learning, and policy emulation. This chapter further holds that with changes in the domestic political scene, but also with the gained knowledge of how to find its way in Brussels corridors, Poland swiftly and deftly developed its ‘uploading’ ability. Within this chapter, Kaminska exemplifies this uploading capacity with Warsaw's performance during the Polish Presidency in the Council in 2011.

The second chapter, devoted to a case study of balancing politics between Europeanization and Polish national commitments (pp.73-104), in fact represents an analysis of two subcases. The first one investigates the negotiation process of the EU-Ukraine visa facilitation agreement (signed in 2007) and the second one traces the negotiation process of the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement (signed in 2014, in two steps). In both cases, the role of Poland is thoroughly scrutinized and assessed against the criteria of effectiveness (that is to say national goals attainment through a common European action). These two subcases have been fairly well selected and are methodologically well justified. They allow having insight into the performance of Polish diplomacy within the European multilevel system in various circumstances: when Poland is provided with windows of opportunities (agenda shaping when there is no preference on the EU's part) but also when it faces the constraints (advocacy when there is less flexibility, i.e. when faced with the well-defined EU agenda).

Chapter three “Shaping EU Policy Toward Russia? The Veto Case” (pp.105-139) represents another case study to ground Kaminska's threaded argument on Poland's developed capacity to use EU-level negotiation processes as an arena for pursuing national policy preferences. Focused on the negotiation of the EU's new Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) with Russia (2006-2008), this case study reveals how Poland used its boosted bargaining and veto powers to co-shape the EU's stance particularly on energy and security matters in EU-Russian relationship – a genuinely difficult policy area for negotiation games.

In the concluding chapter four, the case study on the Eastern Dimension of the European Neighbourhood Policy (pp.141-186) is meant to support the author's claim on the usability of political opportunity structures that may be well discovered within the system of multilevel governance in Europe. By presenting ‘a clear policy vacuum’ (p.141) in the domain of the EU's 2003 just emerging neighbourhood policy as such a window of opportunity,
Kaminska shows how an EU agenda-free (or at least agenda-flexible) policy matter can be seminally utilized for both pursuing national policy preferences and at the same time advancing a member state's role and image at the Union level.

All in all, Kaminska sympathetically – but reasonably justified – shows Poland as a great ‘gambler’ who scored rather well in the ‘bargaining games’ (p.143) on the future of European Union’s policy towards the (Eastern) neighbourhood that started in 2003, and resulted in first preliminary outcomes in early 2009, with the launch of the Eastern Partnership policy initiative.

Tellingly, Kaminska’s book is truly revealing for it provides a response to vast critical voices blaming and shaming Brussels for all the costly adaptation measures Warsaw has been adopting to become ‘EU-fit’. In that, the book also deserves a high appreciation as it faced a double analytical challenge – investigating foreign policy matters of new and still evolving international actors, the EU and post-communist Poland.

The depth of the author’s issue inquiry and analysis on certain problems addressed in the book is quite impressive for she goes beyond commonsensical acknowledgement of Poland’s accomplishments in European politics and digs deeper to reveal who did what and how. Searching for agents and actions that triggered structural changes in EU foreign policy, the author traces the causal and action chains with an insider’s knowledgeable loupe. For instance, when attributing to Poland’s accomplishments the launch of the European Endowment for Democracy (EED) initiative, Kaminska scrupulously traces the causes, micro-institutional patterns and macro-political effects of the policy revealing how Poland’s Foreign Minister Sikorski ‘pressed’ Baroness Ashton to put the issue on the agenda which was simultaneously deftly backed by Ambassador Tombinski’s negotiation and informal policymaking skills at the COREPER level (p.33-34), to put it short here.

Whereas Kaminska indeed succeeds in conceptualizing what kind of foreign policy actor Poland is (pp.36-48), her general take on the Polish foreign policy Europeanization would have benefited from the – regrettably missing in the book – elaboration on the EU as an international actor. Moreover, the ever-growing role of the European Parliament in EU external relations (parliamentary control, international treaties, legislation), as well as the input made by Polish MEPs, is only occasionally addressed in the book. Regrettably and rather surprisingly for a book that heavily focuses on Poland’s Ukraine policy, the text slips up at transliterating the names of Ukrainian leaders the Russian way – featuring ‘Timoshenko’ (p.87) and ‘Yanukovich’ (p.98) instead of ‘Tymoshenko’ and ‘Yanukovych’. Apparently typing errors, the appearances in the text of the names ‘Yertseniuk’ (p.36) instead of ‘Yatseniuk’ and ‘Kutchma’ (p.77) instead of ‘Kuchma’ are, too, little wishful occurrences.

These small inconsistencies notwithstanding, Kaminska’s book is a well-researched title and a well-written contribution to our understanding of both Polish foreign policy transformation and the dynamics of EU foreign policy, particularly towards the Eastern neighbourhood. The book is also meaningfully and originally framed (in the Polish foreign policy context) by the author’s analytical perspective of Europeanization. Although highly populated in public policy studies, the Europeanization approach remains a rather rare choice in foreign policy investigations. It should be emphasized, therefore, that Kaminska’s take in this context is a pioneering and comprehensive assessment of Polish foreign policy Europeanization, which well complements a handful of related seminal studies on Europeanization of the ‘big three’s’ (Germany, France, UK) and some other major
(Spain, Portugal) EU member states' foreign policies.

Sposób cytowania:

https://www.pol-int.org/pl/node/1912?j5Q6rewycZ5HtUDXTWpx7UZE=1&r=2820