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## Foreign Policy of Poland in the Post-Cold War Era Between the West and the East

The collapse of the bipolar order at the end of the 1980s proved to be an event which surprised many representatives of the Western political elite. In the mid-1980s almost no one had expected that in just a few years the communist bloc in Central and Eastern Europe would dissolve. Because of that, these decision-makers were largely unprepared for the new geopolitical situation, which not only brought tangible benefits for the United States and its allies, but also created new and rather unexpected challenges to international security, including the rise of ethnic and religious conflicts, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) or the increased risk of destabilization in Central, Southern and Eastern Europe.<sup>1</sup>

From the perspective of Poland, the decomposition of the Warsaw Pact and the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA) was perceived as an expected and positive effect of the political transformation inaugurated during the Round Table negotiations in 1989. These events were followed by the long-awaited dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, which also brought far-reaching advantages for Warsaw. Nevertheless, at the verge of the 1980s and 1990s, Poland was also facing numerous new challenges and threats to its sovereignty, security, territorial integrity and international position. For instance, it proved to be the only country in Europe that had changed all its neighbors between 1989 and 1993. It also found itself in the so-called grey zone of security, located between two blocks of countries: the NATO/European Communities nations and the emerging Commonwealth of Independent States.<sup>2</sup> In this context,

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<sup>1</sup> See: R. ZIĘBA: *Instytucjonalizacja bezpieczeństwa europejskiego*. Warszawa 1999.

<sup>2</sup> R. ZIĘBA: *Główne kierunki polityki zagranicznej Polski po zimnej wojnie*. Warszawa 2010, pp. 9–12.

since 1989 the new, democratic decision-makers in Warsaw faced various dilemmas concerning the development of a proper model of the Polish foreign policy, which would respond efficiently to these challenges and secure crucial national interests in the post-Cold War international order.

This paper aims to provide an answer to the question how Poland adapted its foreign policy to the new and changing geopolitical situation since 1989 in order to secure its basic national interests and democratic transition. It also overviews its most important vectors, goals, tendencies and problems in the post-Cold War era. In order to achieve these goals, the manuscript has been divided into three parts. The first part overviews the external activity of Poland in the 1990s and the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The second part analyzes the foreign policy of Poland in the current, increasingly complicated international situation. Finally, the last chapter provides a general conclusion and presents major trends visible in the Polish external activity after 1989.

In this context, it has to be stressed that this manuscript has one important caveat. Due to the required (and limited) size of this paper, it omits issues and problems which are, according to the author, less important for the general picture of Poland's foreign policy in the post-Cold War era.

## Polish Foreign Policy at the Verge of the 20<sup>th</sup> and the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

### Poland Adapting to the Post-Cold War Environment 1989–1993

The emergence of the government of Tadeusz Mazowiecki in September 1989 opened a new chapter of the Polish foreign policy. New decision-makers in Warsaw, including the Foreign Affairs Minister Krzysztof Skubiszewski, quickly developed its new concept, which accurately assessed the complicated international situation in Poland. According to Skubiszewski, there were 11 major priorities and goals which should have been pursued at the time (1990). Among others, these included: assisting and contributing to the creation of the new European security system, developing contacts with the USSR and Germany, which were to be based on the rule of full recognition of Poland's sovereignty, developing regional relationships, developing political, economic, and cultural ties with the Western Europe and the United States, reducing foreign debt, and

cooperating with international organizations (UN) in combating global problems. This very concept was based on the assumption that Poland should "return to Europe" as soon as possible.<sup>3</sup> In the subsequent years, the political elite widely believed that this "return" should be concluded by the accession to the Atlantic Alliance and the European Communities/ the European Union. As a result, the pro-Western orientation proved to be a cornerstone of its external activity for the next 27 years.

However, before Poland was able to concentrate on its relations with the NATO/EU countries, it had to face a number of significant problems coming from the east. One of the first and most important challenges was to secure the independence and territorial integrity, which was still limited by the existence of the old communist international organizations (Warsaw Pact, Council for Mutual Economic Assistance), as well as by the presence of tens of thousands of Soviet troops on Polish soil. Thus, the new government introduced several solutions which were aimed to change this unfavorable situation. To begin with, it initiated difficult negotiations with Kremlin, concerning the withdrawal of the Soviet units, which were concluded in October 1991. As a result, the last Russian troops left Poland in 1993. Secondly, it cooperated closely with other Central European states in order to disband the Warsaw Pact and the CMEA. This problem was also discussed during the Polish-Soviet bilateral talks at the time. As a result, in June and July 1991 both organizations were finally dissolved, which formally freed Poland from Moscow's influence. And thirdly, one of the key problems in relations with the Soviet Union concerned its rising internal instability. In order to address challenges resulting from the potential collapse of the USSR, Warsaw had introduced the so-called two-way policy. On the one hand, it officially maintained, as far as it was possible, correct political relations with the authorities of the Soviet Union. On the other hand, however, it was supporting pro-independence movements in many Soviet republics.<sup>4</sup>

When the moment of dissolution finally came in December 1991, it was welcomed with satisfaction in Warsaw, as it expected to take great advantages of this event. In the new political situation in the East, Poland faced, however, another serious dilemma, as it had to settle relations with the new neighbors, as well as with the rest of the post-Soviet states. The biggest concerns naturally occurred in contacts with Russia. For instance, Kremlin vigorously manifested its veto to the Polish membership in

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3 E. CZIOMER: *Nowe uwarunkowania, ramy instytucjonalne oraz założenia polityki zagranicznej i bezpieczeństwa Polski po 1989 r.* In: *Polityka zagraniczna i bezpieczeństwa Polski po 1989 roku.* Ed. E. CZIOMER. Kraków 2015, pp. 31–32.

4 See: R. KUŹNIAR: *Droga do wolności. Polityka zagraniczna III Rzeczypospolitej.* Warszawa, pp. 84–85; R. ZIĘBA: *Główne kierunki polityki...*, pp. 24–27.

NATO. At the time, Poland also prioritized relations with Ukraine, which was demonstrated by the fact that it was the first state in the world to recognize Kiev's independence. In principle, Poles wished to create a strong buffer zone in the East, which would separate Central Europe from the Federation of Russia, still perceived as a major threat. A stable and pro-Western Ukraine was expected to play a key role in this concept. As a result, Warsaw attempted to enter into a strategic cooperation with Kiev, which proved to be a difficult task to achieve in the long term, mostly due to the strong Russian-Ukrainian ties.<sup>5</sup>

Meanwhile, the vast majority of the Polish political elite supported the idea of integration with the Western structures, while it hadn't been officially declared for a few years due to the visible reluctance among some of the NATO/European Communities states. Nevertheless, membership in these organizations was perceived, as mentioned above, as the final goal, which would ensure national security and proper conditions for accelerated development in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Before that goal could be pursued, new decision-makers had to face three major dilemmas emerging in the West. To begin with, there was the unification of Germany. While Poland, in contrast to France and Great Britain, accepted and supported chancellor Helmut Kohl's ambitions since day one, his initial reluctance in recognizing the Polish-German border on the rivers Odra and Nysa Łużycka raised some doubts. This problem was, however, quickly and successfully solved during the "Two plus Four" negotiations, when the Polish viewpoint was supported by the Western powers. Effectively, it forced Germany to sign a border treaty on November 14, 1990. Along with the good neighborhood treaty concluded on June 17, 1991, it laid strong foundation for the cordial mutual relations, which flourished in the upcoming years both politically and economically.<sup>6</sup>

The second dilemma concerned the aforementioned doubts of many Western countries in the validity of Polish ambitions to integrate with the NATO/EU. Many decision-makers, for instance in France, hesitated to support such an idea. They feared not only the lack of internal stability in the Central European grey zone, but also the high financial costs of accession and the possible marginalization of Russia, which could have a negative impact on the European security system. Such a stance was manifested by the NATO Secretary General Manfred Wörner during his

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5 M. STOLARCZYK: *Rosja w polityce zagranicznej Polski w latach 1992–2015*. Katowice 2016, pp. 151–163; J. BUGAJSKI: *Ethnic Politics in Eastern Europe*. London 1994; M. LAKOMY: *The Game of Ukraine: Conflict in Donbass as an Outcome of the Multilayered Rivalry*. "Politeja" 2016, 45, pp. 292–293.

6 E. CZIOMER: *Główne problemy polityki zachodniej i bezpieczeństwa*. In: *Polityka zagraniczna i bezpieczeństwa Polski...*, pp. 62–65.

visit to Poland in 1990, when he stated that the option of its accession to the Atlantic Alliance was not considered.<sup>7</sup> However, in time this perception started to evolve, mostly due to two reasons. On the one hand, Russia proved to be a less stable and credible partner than many leaders in the West initially believed. Moreover, there were other options on the table which would prevent its marginalization in the case of NATO's expansion. On the other hand, Warsaw proved to be an increasingly solid partner due to its successful internal reforms and rational foreign policy. Thus, the Polish authorities officially declared their intentions to join the Atlantic Alliance in 1992, when the aforementioned concerns in the West started to decline. Subsequently, the Western powers welcomed Warsaw's ambitions to be a part of the transatlantic community.<sup>8</sup> At the same time, Poland also attempted to deepen contacts with the European Communities, which resulted in its association with the EC, signed in December 1991. Later on, during the Copenhagen summit in 1993, the European Council confirmed that the associated Central European states may become members of the European Union after meeting the specified criteria (so-called Copenhagen criteria).<sup>9</sup>

Finally, Poland wished to develop relations with the only remaining superpower – the United States. Close cooperation with Washington was perceived in Warsaw as the only solution that could ensure Poland's security in the unstable international environment. Moreover, it would accelerate its accession to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. The American political elite was, however, initially reluctant to allow this rapprochement. Nevertheless, Poland quickly gained some trust in Washington, as it able to evacuate CIA, DIA and NSA agents from Iraq before the Desert Storm operation in 1990 (code-name: *Operacja Samum*). As a result, U.S. decision-makers cancelled part of Poland's foreign debt. They also provided crucial assistance in creating its first special operations forces unit – GROM. In other words, in the following years, Polish assistance in the Middle East proved to be a huge step forward in the bilateral relations with the United States.<sup>10</sup>

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7 R. KUPIECKI: *Akcesja Polski do NATO – okiem historyka i uczestnika*. "Bezpieczeństwo Narodowe" 2014, 1, p. 49; A. KOŁODZIEJ: *Droga Polski do NATO*. SLD.org. 30.12.2016. [http://www.sld.org.pl/ckfinder/userfiles/files/Droga\\_Polski\\_do\\_NATO.pdf](http://www.sld.org.pl/ckfinder/userfiles/files/Droga_Polski_do_NATO.pdf), p. 5 [access: 30.03.2019].

8 R. KUPIECKI: *Akcesja Polski do NATO...*, pp. 54–61; A. KOŁODZIEJ: *Droga Polski do NATO...*

9 R. WILLA: *Droga do członkostwa w Unii Europejskiej – przykład Polski*. "Dialogi Polityczne" 2007, 8, pp. 83–88.

10 M. LASOŃ: *Polsko-amerykańska współpraca wojskowa na przykładzie wojsk specjalnych*. In: *Stosunki Polski z mocarstwami w drugiej dekadzie XXI wieku*. Eds. K. CZORNIK, M. LAKOMY, M. STOLARCZYK. Katowice 2016, p. 93; M. LAKOMY, K. CZORNIK: *Polityczny i wojskowy wymiar*

To recapitulate, at the verge of the 1980s and 1990s, the foreign policy of Poland was dominated by two vectors of activities: Western and Eastern. While the first held greater importance due to its ambitions of “returning to Europe,” the second vector was crucial to secure short-term interests, such as territorial integrity, security and sovereignty. At that point other, extra-European areas, excluding several exceptions, i.e. the engagement in the Middle East before and during the Desert Storm operation, held relatively little importance in the external activities of Warsaw.

### The Road to the West

Polish foreign policy since 1993 was concentrated mostly on reaching the most important goal: becoming a member of the NATO and the EU. In order to do so, Warsaw worked to improve its contacts with the Western European states, such as Germany and France. In the first case, the bilateral relations developed dynamically. Germans willingly adopted a role of “the Polish advocate” in the NATO/EU. There were several reasons behind this decision, but one of the most important ones concerned Berlin’s desire to move the borders of both organizations eastwards. Moreover, Germany became the most important economic partner of Poland. Relations with the 5<sup>th</sup> French Republic lagged behind the dynamics of the Polish-German relationship, despite numerous bilateral treaties signed since 1989. This was manifested, among others, by the French reluctance to fully support the ambitions of Warsaw in 1997, when Paris attempted to influence the American intent to invite three Central European states to the Atlantic Alliance.<sup>11</sup>

Poland continued its efforts to expand contacts with the United States, both politically and militarily. This finally brought some tangible effects in the second part of the 1990s. Thanks to U.S. support during the summit in Madrid in 1997, the Atlantic Alliance invited Poland, Czech Republic and Hungary to negotiations on the NATO membership. As a result, after short talks, Poland became a part of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization on March 12, 1999.<sup>12</sup> This event has been widely and accurately perceived by the public opinion as one of the greatest achievements of the

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*stosunków polsko-amerykańskich w pierwszej i drugiej dekadzie XXI wieku.* In: *Dylematy polityki zagranicznej Polski na początku XXI wieku.* Eds. K. CZORNIK, M. LAKOMY, M. STOLARCZYK. Katowice 2014, pp. 417–419.

<sup>11</sup> R. ZIĘBA: *Główne kierunki polityki...*, pp. 59–63; M. LAKOMY: *Stosunki polsko-francuskie w drugiej dekadzie XXI wieku.* In: *Stosunki Polski z mocarstwami...*, pp. 177–178.

<sup>12</sup> R. KUPIECKI: *Akcesja Polski do NATO...*

Polish foreign policy in the post-Cold War era. It meant, essentially, that Poland finally became a formal ally of the United States and the Western European powers, which significantly strengthened its security and confidence, especially in the context of the unpredictable relations with Russia. This also put an end to the grey zone of security in Central Europe. In sum, the first significant step towards Europe was made.

In the meantime, Poland also attempted to accelerate the process of integration with the European Union. This goal, however, proved to be much more difficult to achieve than the membership in NATO. In 1994 Poland officially filed for joining the organization. Subsequently, it had to introduce far-reaching internal reforms, which adapted its legal system to the EU's requirements. As a result of these efforts, the official talks on membership were inaugurated in 1998. These proved to be much longer and more demanding than the NATO negotiations. They were completed in 2002.<sup>13</sup>

The attention of Poland's decision-makers at the time was also heavily focused on relations with the Eastern European states. The major goal in this vector included the prevention of all negative processes which could block Warsaw's integration with the West. The bilateral relations with Russia were dominated by the Kremlin's *niet* concerning the membership of Poland in the NATO/EU. They were also regularly disrupted by other problems, such as Russian demands concerning the creation of an extraterritorial highway in Poland. Moreover Moscow's investigation into the massacre of the Polish nationals in Katyń, committed by the Soviets in 1940, as well as the Kremlin's actions in Chechnya, raised some controversies and criticism in Poland. In this context, the atmosphere of the Polish-Russian relations in the 1990s was usually cool. Meanwhile, Poland, without luck, continued its efforts to develop contacts with Ukraine. This was due to the fact that Kiev was much more interested in cooperating with Russia at the time.<sup>14</sup>

Polish diplomacy also got increasingly active in the extra-European regions, such as the Eastern Asia and the Middle East. For instance, Polish president Aleksander Kwaśniewski visited People's Republic of China in 1997, but this brought little tangible benefits in the long-term. Nevertheless, it has to be stressed that these regions were secondary areas of interest at best, in comparison to the European theatre.<sup>15</sup>

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13 See: A. PATEREK: *Polska w Unii Europejskiej*. In: *Polityka zagraniczna i bezpieczeństwa Polski...*; E. CZIOMER: *Główne problemy polityki zachodniej i bezpieczeństwa...*

14 M. LAKOMY: *Główne problemy w stosunkach polsko-rosyjskich na początku XXI wieku*. In: *Stosunki Polski z sąsiadami w pierwszej dekadzie XXI wieku*. Ed. M. STOLARCZYK. Katowice 2011, pp. 72–73.

15 T. OKRASKA: *Polska wobec wzrastającej potęgi Chin. Próba oceny szans i zagrożeń*. In: *Dylematy polityki zagranicznej Polski...*, pp. 567–572; *Historia stosunków polsko-chińskich*.



## Poland and the War on Terror at the Beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

Another phase of Poland's foreign policy began in 2001, due the 9/11 terrorist attacks. Its decision-makers and society, being already a part of the transatlantic community, obviously expressed their solidarity with the American nation and decided to take part in the "War on Terror," which was declared subsequently by George W. Bush. This decision proved to have long-term effects, as Warsaw increased its activity in the Middle East and Central Asia.

On the one hand, since 2002, the Polish army participated in the stability operation in Afghanistan. Its level of military engagement in Central Asia peaked between 2008 and 2011, when the Polish troops took responsibility for the security of one of the provinces in Afghanistan – Ghazni.<sup>16</sup> This operation was concluded in 2014. It has to be stressed, however, that Poland still participates in the Resolute Support mission, which provides training and assistance to the Afghan National Army.

On the other hand, since 2002 Poland has also played a certain role in the international debate concerning the complicated situation in Iraq, which sparked some serious controversies among the NATO/EU member-states. Warsaw supported George W. Bush's intentions to attack Saddam Hussein's regime, which was manifested, for instance, by the signature of the famous "Letter of the Eight" in January 2003. Furthermore, alongside the United States, United Kingdom and Australia, it actually participated in the invasion of Iraq in March 2003.<sup>17</sup> Subsequently, Poland became responsible for the stabilization of central Iraq (South Central Zone), which forced Warsaw to increase its military involvement in the Middle East – Polish troops numbered about 2500 soldiers at its peak. The stability operation was concluded in 2008. It has to be noted that the Polish military involvement in Iraq raised some great controversies both domestically and internationally. For instance, the public opinion in Poland criticized the lack of expected political and economic benefits and high casualties among its troops.

Evident pro-Americanism expressed by Warsaw in 2002 and 2003 had also deteriorated contacts with some Western European partners, such as France, which disapproved of the invasion of Iraq. Choosing the involvement in the controversial Middle Eastern operation over the European solidarity caused a long-term crisis in the Polish-French relations, which

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GoChina. <http://www.gochina.gov.pl/index/?id=35f4a8d465e6e1edc05f3d8ab658c551> [access: 2.04.2019].

<sup>16</sup> M. LAKOMY: *Misja International Security Assistance Force w polskiej polityce bezpieczeństwa na początku XXI wieku*. "Studia Politicae Universitatis Silesiensiis" 2013, 11.

<sup>17</sup> R. ZIĘBA: *Główne kierunki polityki...*, pp. 154–155.

lasted until 2007. President Jacques Chirac strongly criticized Central European states for their uncritical attitude towards the U.S. international actions. Moreover, Poland disagreed with various European initiatives, such as, e.g. the shape of the Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe.<sup>18</sup> Despite these concerns, it succeeded in becoming a member of the European Union on the May 1, 2004. This moment constituted the second great achievement of Poland's foreign policy in the post-Cold War era, which completed the process of "returning to Europe."

After 2007, the relations between Poland and the Western European powers improved. The new government decided to concentrate on relations with Germany and France. Thus, the bilateral contacts with both states developed dynamically. This was manifested, e.g. by the Polish-French declaration on the strategic partnership, concluded in 2008. Paris and Warsaw strengthened cooperation in many dimensions, such as the European affairs, military industries, energetic security and science.<sup>19</sup> In addition, the Polish-German relations got more cordial and intensive, as both states were acting together in many affairs, mostly under the European Union framework. The economic dimension of the bilateral contacts was also improved.<sup>20</sup>

As a result, since 2007 Poland has resigned from the previous die-hard pro-Americanism for the moderate cooperation with all transatlantic partners. This rebalance was manifested by the Polish reluctance to participate in the NATO's intervention in Libya in 2011. This approach coincided with a similar attitude of Germany at the time. This does not mean, however, that the relations with the United States deteriorated. Both states, despite some controversies at the beginning of Barack Obama's presidency,<sup>21</sup> developed their political and military contacts. Poland still perceived the United States as its most important ally and closely cooperated with Washington, e.g. in Afghanistan.<sup>22</sup>

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18 S. PARZYMIES: *La France et L'Europe centrale*. In: *Annuaire Française de Relations Internationales 2009*. Ed. S. SUR. Bruxelles 2009; M. LAKOMY: *Stosunki polsko-francuskie...*, pp. 178–179.

19 M. LAKOMY: *Stosunki polsko-francuskie...*, pp. 178–179.

20 E. CZIOMER: *Miejsce Polski w poszukiwaniu nowej roli i odpowiedzialności międzynarodowej Niemiec w drugiej dekadzie XXI wieku*. In: *Stosunki Polski z mocarstwami...*, p. 145.

21 Poland has signed the agreement on creating the elements of the American anti-missile shield on its soil in August 2008. In this context, Barack Obama decision to modify the anti-missile shield program in 2009 sparked some serious criticism in Poland. Many political elite representatives felt that they „got betrayed” by the United States. See: P. TURCZYŃSKI: *Amerykańskie koncepcje tarczy antyrakietowej w Europie*. „Zeszyty Naukowe WSOWL” 2011, 161.

22 See: M. LAKOMY, K. CZORNIK: *Polityczny i wojskowy wymiar stosunków...*

In the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Poland remained an active actor in the Eastern Europe. The relations with Russia initially improved, which was influenced mostly by the launch of the "War on Terror." Nevertheless, they deteriorated again soon after, which was mostly caused by the events in Ukraine. The pro-Western Orange Revolution, which erupted in 2004, was strongly supported by the Polish political leaders. Its eventual success, manifested in Victor Yushchenko's presidency, was perceived by them as a major achievement and a chance to weaken the traditional Ukrainian-Russian ties. These far-reaching expectations, demonstrated by the plans to build a strategic partnership with Kiev, proved to be disappointing. Among others it was caused by the internal problems of Ukraine, governed by the former Orange Revolution oppositionists, as well as by the lack of progress in bringing Ukraine closer to the Western structures. For instance, Warsaw failed to promote Kiev's accession to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization in 2008. As a result, when Victor Yushchenko was replaced by the pro-Russian Victor Yanukovich in 2010, Warsaw and Kiev's relationship became less intensive.<sup>23</sup>

Since 2004, the Polish-Russian relations suffered another period of crisis. The success of the pro-Western opposition in Kiev angered Kremlin, which in retaliation made a series of gestures aimed to punish Poland. These included the introduction of the Unity Day, which commemorates the expulsion of the Polish soldiers from Moscow in 1612 and the embargo on Polish meat in 2005. The deterioration of the bilateral relations was also caused by Warsaw's criticism of the changes in the Russian political system introduced after the Beslan terrorist attack in 2004. The relations between Warsaw and Moscow plunged even more in August 2008, during the Caucasus war. The conflict in Southern Ossetia and Georgia caused a resolute reaction of the Polish authorities, which strongly criticized Kremlin's military actions. President Lech Kaczyński, alongside with other Central European leaders, even visited Tbilisi during the war, in order to express his support for the Georgian cause.<sup>24</sup> Finally, the Polish presidential plane crash in Smolensk in April 2010 proved to have negative and long-lasting consequences for the bilateral relations. This tragedy has sparked great controversies and heated debates. These concerned, among others, the fact that Moscow still has not returned the plane's wreckage to Poland.

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23 R. ZIĘBA: *Główne kierunki polityki...*, pp. 178–183, 206–207.

24 M. RAŚ: *Rosja jako wyzwanie dla polskiej polityki zagranicznej*. In: *Stosunki Polski z mocarstwami...*, pp. 201–203; B. MOŁO: *Nowy wymiar polityki wschodniej*. In: *Polityka zagraniczna i bezpieczeństwo Polski...*, pp. 142–146.

## Polish Foreign Policy in the Second Decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Major Tendencies and Problems

At the beginning of the second decade of the 21st century, the position of Poland in the system of international relations was rather solid. Due to the membership in NATO and the European Union, as well as a relatively stable situation in Europe, there were very few serious threats to its national security. It maintained cordial relations with the majority of its European partners, including France, Germany, and Great Britain. Cooperation with the United States was also developing in most areas. At the same time, it gradually limited its military engagement in the extra-European areas, which was perceived by many commentators and experts as a positive move, allowing to conduct necessary military reforms. Its diplomacy, however, remained interested in the events that occurred in the Middle East, North Africa (the Arab Spring) and Central Asia. It usually supported diplomatically the Western initiatives in these areas, but restrained from considerable participation in military activities, which was proved by the aforementioned case of the Libyan conflict.<sup>25</sup> The only serious challenges continued to emerge in the East, due to the long-lasting and unresolved crisis in the relations with Russia.

It should be stressed that while the foreign policy was always an important subject of a debate between major political parties in Poland, there was a general consent related to its pro-Western course. Most of political actors were also quite keen to accept the pro-American stance of the subsequent governments in Warsaw. Nevertheless, since at least 2005, due to the increasing rivalry between Law and Justice (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość, PiS) and the Civic Platform (Platforma Obywatelska, PO), Poland's international relations have become an object of heated disagreements. This manifested, among others, during the aforementioned military conflict in Georgia, as well as in the aftermath of the Smolensk presidential plane crash. It became even more evident during the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, when the traditional pro-European attitude of PO was contrasted with the evident pro-Americanism of PiS.<sup>26</sup> These contrasting visions have had a significant influence on the course and specificity of Poland's external activities.

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25 K. CZORNIK: *Polska percepcja Arabskiej Wiosny oraz jej implikacji w skali regionalnej i globalnej*. In: *Dylematy polityki zagranicznej Polski...*, pp. 558–562.

26 I.P. KAROLEWSKI, T. MEHLHAUSEN: *Między polityką kreowania a asertywnością. Polskie debaty o Europie na przykładzie europejskiego traktatu konstytucyjnego i wojny na Ukrainie*. "Przegląd Politologiczny" 2017, 2.

In this context, the major breakthrough in the Polish foreign policy occurred in 2013/2014, due to the eruption of the Euromaidan revolution in Ukraine, followed by the war in Donbass. Warsaw decided to support the pro-European protesters in Kiev, as their demands included association with the European Union and resignation of the pro-Russian president Victor Yanukovych. Both priorities were therefore beneficial for Poland. Initially, Polish Foreign Affairs Minister Radosław Sikorski, along with his French and German counterparts, mediated between the government and the opposition. After Victor Yanukovych had fled and was replaced by the new, pro-Western authorities, the outcome of the Euromaidan revolution was perceived in Warsaw as a major political success, similar to the Orange Revolution a decade earlier. In February 2014, however, the Federation of Russia stepped in, using military forces to annex the Crimean Peninsula. Subsequently, pro-Russian rebels launched an uprising in Donbass. It was the turning point that changed the whole perception of the events in the Eastern Europe due to several reasons. To begin with, the eruption of a military conflict in the proximity of the borders of Poland created new, unexpected threats to its national security. For a time, many political elite representatives, journalists and experts were even seriously concerned about the possibility of the Russian invasion. This atmosphere of insecurity was fueled by a number of military incidents that occurred between NATO member-states and the Federation of Russia since 2014. Thus, the government in Warsaw had to respond to these new threats both politically and militarily. It has initiated accelerated military modernization and increased its efforts within the NATO, aiming to secure its frontiers. Thus, since 2014, the Polish-Russian relations have been in a permanent crisis.<sup>27</sup>

The Polish-Ukrainian relations after the Euromaidan revolution have naturally improved. Warsaw has supported new authorities politically, economically, and also militarily. For instance, it has provided humanitarian aid for the troops fighting in Donbass, and has granted loans to Ukraine. Both states have also developed a strategic partnership, which was confirmed by the declaration signed in Kiev in August 2016.<sup>28</sup> Nevertheless, these relations have encountered some serious dilemmas, concerning mostly three problems. Firstly, Kiev has introduced a historical policy, which is highly controversial from the Polish perspective. It has started to glorify Ukrainian nationalists (OUN, UPA) responsible for the war crimes and ethnic cleansings of Poles in Volhynia during the Second

<sup>27</sup> M. LAKOMY: *The Game of Ukraine...*

<sup>28</sup> *Przyszłość Ukrainy w NATO. Deklaracja prezydentów Dudy i Poroszenki*. Polskie-Radio.pl. 2016. <http://www.polskieradio.pl/5/3/Artykul/1659080,Przyszlosc-Ukrainy-w-NATO-Deklaracja-prezydentow-Dudy-i-Poroszenki> [access: 5.04.2019].

World War.<sup>29</sup> Such a tendency has put a question mark on the official cordiality of Kiev towards Poland. It has been also widely criticized by many Polish academics, experts, politicians and journalists.

Secondly, Kiev since 2014 has been battling with various internal and external problems. These were manifested, among others, by the activities of the infamous Right Sector, which even sparked some domestic clashes in mid-2015.<sup>30</sup> Such a situation has been far from the initial expectations of Poland, which hoped for accelerated political reforms and economic development in Ukraine. Due to that, the traditional goal of creating a buffer zone in the East has proved to be unreachable. There are also essentially no chances that in the foreseeable future Ukraine will become a member of the EU/NATO, which is a major disappointment for the authorities in Warsaw.

Thirdly, Poland was quickly sidelined in the international negotiations over the war in Donbass. It participated in the aforementioned talks between the government and the opposition, which were held in February 2014 in Kiev.<sup>31</sup> Later on, however, Warsaw was not included in the Normandy contact group activities, which is composed of Germany, France, Russia and Ukraine.<sup>32</sup> This means that the position of Poland in the Central Europe since February 2014 has significantly decreased. Moreover, it has been a sign that the declared strategic partnership with Kiev has been lacking, as it did not attempt to include Warsaw in these negotiations.

To recapitulate, the revolution and war in Ukraine has proved to be the greatest threat to Poland's national security and international position, as well as one of the most important challenges for its foreign policy after 1989. The outcomes of the Euromaidan have quickly proven to be less positive than many politicians initially believed. Thus, many aspects of the Polish external activity since November 2013 have been influenced by the events in the East.

In this context, Poland has remained an active participant of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization activities. In July 2016, it organized

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29 J. TOMASIEWICZ: *Skrajna prawica nacjonalistyczna na Ukrainie: ideologie, struktury, działalność*. In: *Implikacje konfliktu ukraińskiego dla polityki zagranicznej i bezpieczeństwa Polski*. Eds. K. CZORNIK, M. LAKOMY, M. STOLARCZYK. Katowice 2015.

30 P. ANDRUSIECZKO: *Bitwa o Mukaczewo, czyli bratobójcze walki na Ukrainie. W roli głównej Prawy Sektor*. *Gazeta Wyborcza*. 2015. <http://wyborcza.pl/1,75399,18344378,bitwa-o-mukaczewo-czyli-bratobojcze-walki-na-ukrainie-w-rol-i.html?disableRedirects=true> [access: 15.03.2019].

31 E. STASIK: *Przełom na Ukrainie. Porozumienie podpisane*. *DW.com*. 2014. <http://www.dw.com/pl/prze%C5%82om-na-ukrainie-porozumienie-podpisane/a-17449162> [access: 1.04.2019].

32 *Normandy Format Foreign Ministers Start Talks on Donbas in Minsk*. *KyivPost*. 2016. <https://www.kyivpost.com/ukraine-politics/normandy-format-foreign-ministers-start-talks-donbas-minsk.html> [access: 30.03.2019].

the NATO summit in Warsaw, where member-states decided to introduce new security mechanisms aiming to secure the Alliance's eastern flank. This was consistent with the Polish interests after the eruption of the Donbass war. Among other, the new solutions included strengthened NATO's military presence in Poland. The summit communiqué has also strongly criticized international activities of the Federation of Russia and reaffirmed the Alliance's support for Ukraine's sovereignty and stability.<sup>33</sup> This meant that the conference in Warsaw was a major success of the Polish foreign policy.

Meanwhile, Poland has been less active within the European Union framework. Its interests within the EU, since the parliamentary elections in 2015, have been focused mostly on the migrant crisis, due to two reasons. Firstly, it has been considered by the new decision-makers as a major threat to European security. Secondly, some European leaders, such as the German chancellor Angela Merkel, intended to introduce a new system of relocation and resettlement of asylum seekers among the EU member-states, based on obligatory quotas. The new government in Warsaw strongly opposed these plans, which was manifested in a number of statements and actions in the international environment, e.g. concluded in cooperation with the Visegrad Group.<sup>34</sup>

In this context, it has to be stressed that since the elections in 2015, there have been some evident modifications in Poland's foreign policy in the Western vector. Firstly, while the relations with Germany have been still recognized as a priority,<sup>35</sup> the general atmosphere in bilateral relationships has deteriorated. Thus, the previously noticeable partnership in various European affairs has become less evident. Secondly, the Polish-French relations suffered a crisis in 2016, mostly, but not only, due to the October 2016 decision of the government in Warsaw to cancel the purchase of the French transport helicopters *Caracal*.<sup>36</sup> It has caused seri-

33 *Warsaw Summit Communiqué*. NATO.int. 2016. [http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official\\_texts\\_133169.htm?selectedLocale=en](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_133169.htm?selectedLocale=en) [access: 17.03.2019].

34 *Szydło: nie będzie zgody V4 na zmianę zasad relokacji uchodźców*. WP.pl. 2016. <http://wiadomosci.wp.pl/kat,1342,title,Szydlo-nie-bedzie-zgody-V4-na-zmiane-zasad-relokacji-uchodzcow,wid,18258803,wiadomosc.html?ticaid=118cea&ticrsn=3> [access: 28.03.2019].

35 Foreign Affairs Minister Witold Waszczykowski has described Germany as the "most important neighbor and economic partner" of Poland (*Minister Witold Waszczykowski o priorytetach polskiej dyplomacji*. Ministerstwo Spraw Zagranicznych RP. 2016. [https://www.msz.gov.pl/aktualnosci/wiadomosci/minister\\_witold\\_waszczykowski\\_o\\_priorytetach\\_polskiej\\_dyplomacji](https://www.msz.gov.pl/aktualnosci/wiadomosci/minister_witold_waszczykowski_o_priorytetach_polskiej_dyplomacji) [access: 4.01.2017]).

36 According to official statements, this decision was caused by the insufficient French offset offer (*Polska nie kupi Caracali*. Ministerstwo Rozwoju kończy negocjacje z Airbus. Defencje24.pl. 2016. <http://www.defencje24.pl/461956,polska-nie-kupi-caracali-ministerstwo-rozwoju-konczy-negocjacje-z-airbus> [access: 20.02.2017]).

ous resentments among the 5<sup>th</sup> French Republic political elite and public opinion. Thirdly, Warsaw has added new impetus to the relations with Great Britain, which has been preparing to leave the EU. This new trend has been manifested in the first ever Polish-British intergovernmental consultations in London, which were held in November 2016. During the event, London promised Poland close political, economic and cultural ties after its EU exit.<sup>37</sup>

Since 2015, Poland has also manifested its commitment to the alliance with the United States, especially in context of the aforementioned conflict in Ukraine. There are several arguments to support this statement. To begin with, the new authorities have stressed multiple times the importance of the relations with the United States, especially in terms of security. Secondly, Warsaw has decided to buy advanced American weaponry, such as the AGM-158B JASSM-ER cruise missiles, which should significantly improve the Polish military capabilities.<sup>38</sup> Thirdly, it has cooperated with the United States in developing the elements of the American anti-missile defence system in Poland. The construction of the U.S. anti-missile platform in Redzikowo started in May 2016.<sup>39</sup> Both states have also conducted numerous military exercises, such as the Anaconda in June 2016. And finally, due to the decisions taken during the NATO summit in Warsaw, American troops started relocation to Poland, in order to strengthen the Alliance's eastern flank.<sup>40</sup>

Moreover, it has to be stressed that Poland has recently increased its political and military activities in the extra-European areas again. For instance, its troops participated in the European Union's military operations in Africa: European Union Training Mission in Mali (2013–2014) and

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37 *First Ever Polish-British Intergovernmental Consultations*. Premier.gov.pl. 2016. <https://www.premier.gov.pl/en/news/news/first-ever-polish-british-intergovernmental-consultations.html> [access: 5.04.2019]; *Britain Promises Close Ties with Poland after EU Exit*. FoxNews. 2016. <http://www.foxnews.com/world/2016/11/28/britain-promises-close-ties-with-poland-after-eu-exit.html> [access: 2.04.2019].

38 J. Palowski: *70 pocisków JASSM-ER dla polskich F-16*. Zgoda Departamentu Stanu. Defence24.pl. 2016. <http://www.defence24.pl/500502,70-pociskow-jassm-er-dla-polskich-f-16-zgoda-departamentu-stanu> [access: 3.04.2019]; *Polska kupi od USA rakiety JASSM-ER. Wartość kontraktu to prawie miliard złotych*. wPolityce.pl. 2016. <http://wpolityce.pl/polityka/320833-polska-kupi-od-usa-rakiety-jassm-er-wartosc-kontraktu-to-prawie-miliard-zlotych> [access: 3.04.2019].

39 R. BROWNE: *U.S. Launches Long-Awaited European Missile Defense Shield*. CNN. 2016. <http://edition.cnn.com/2016/05/11/politics/nato-missile-defense-romania-poland> [access: 5.04.2019].

40 *Gen. Hodges: batalion USA w Polsce – w kwietniu, brygada – prawdopodobnie w lutym*. Onet.pl. 2016. <http://wiadomosci.onet.pl/swiat/kiedy-wojska-usa-pojawia-sie-w-polsce/pxc285> [access: 4.04.2019].



European Union Force in Central African Republic (2014–2015). In 2016 Warsaw decided to take part in the international fight against the so-called Islamic State in the Middle East.<sup>41</sup> Moreover, the new authorities have also attempted to develop political and economic relations between Poland and the PRC, which in 2011 had gained the level of strategic partnership but as yet lacked the proper content. This was manifested in the fruitful visit to the PRC conducted by president Andrzej Duda in November 2015.<sup>42</sup> As a result, president Xi Jinping visited Poland in June 2016.

To recapitulate, recently the Polish foreign policy has undergone some significant modifications, mostly due to the eruption of the military conflict in Ukraine in 2014 and the change of government in 2015. Poland seeks to find a new *modus operandi* in an uncertain international environment, which would ensure its security and strengthen its international position. This was manifested, among others, in the activities of Poland within the NATO (summit in Warsaw), and the EU (disagreement on migrant relocation system), as well as strong emphasis put on relations with the United States. Moreover, Warsaw has been recently more interested in the extra-European regions as well. These tendencies have continued in 2017 and 2018; however, there was a visible lack of long-lasting, positive effects. Warsaw was still conflicted with major European powers (with the exception of Great Britain) over internal its situation, as well as over diverging concepts of European integration. At the same time, it was concentrated on cooperation with the United States, which was manifested with, e.g. increased arms deals. However, it has to be stressed that in time, a visible lack of balance in bilateral relations (in favor for Washington) started to be more and more visible.

## Conclusions

At the turn of the 1980s, Poland faced numerous challenges concerning the fall of the bipolar international order. Within just a few years, it successfully coped with the majority of them, securing its sovereignty and

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<sup>41</sup> W. RYLUKOWSKI: *Poland to Send Up to 210 Troops to Fight Against ISIS*. WBJ.pl. 2016. <http://wbj.pl/poland-to-send-up-to-210-troops-to-fight-against-isis/> [access: 3.04.2019].

<sup>42</sup> *Xi Jinping Holds Talks with President Andrzej Duda of Poland, Two Heads of States Decide to Promote Development Level of China-Poland Strategic Partnership*. Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China. 2015. [http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/zxxx\\_662805/t1319025.shtml](http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/t1319025.shtml) [access: 5.04.2019].

territorial integrity. It settled relations with its new neighbors, partook in the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact and the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance, removed Russian units from its territory and laid strong foundations for relations with its future key partners: United States and Germany.

Since then, the foreign policy of Poland has been characterized by several outstanding features. To begin with, it has been continuously concentrated on the transatlantic area, i.e. North America and Western Europe. Until 2004, Poland had been focused on "returning to Europe," which was concluded by its accession to the NATO/EU. Since then Poland has proved to be an active member of both organizations. It has also attempted to use them in order to realize its foreign policy goals and strengthen its international position, especially in the Eastern Europe. The western vector of the Polish external activity has been dominated by the relations with two states. First, there is the United States, which has been perceived as a crucial partner and ally, invaluable from the national security's point of view. Therefore, Warsaw has traditionally attempted to develop bilateral relations with Washington, with a particular emphasis put on military cooperation. However, sometimes these relations raised some international concerns, due to Warsaw's excessive pro-Americanism. Second, there is Germany, which has been crucial for the Polish economy and the membership in the European Union/NATO. After the accession, both states, despite some natural differences, frequently cooperated in the various European affairs, which was perfectly visible between 2007 and 2015.

Secondly, the Central and Eastern Europe has also played a crucial role, especially from the national security viewpoint. Foreign policy in the East has been strongly influenced by the complicated relations with Russia. Since day one these contacts have been unstable, permeated by regular crises. Polish decision-makers have perceived Kremlin's policy of rebuilding its international position as a clear threat. Both states expressed different opinions on such issues as, e.g. the NATO expansion and the Chechnya wars in the 1990s, as well as the annexation of the Crimean Peninsula in 2014. Both states have also competed for the influence over Ukraine, which was evident during the Orange Revolution in 2004 or the Euromaidan revolution in 2013/2014. However, even since the eruption of the military conflict in Donbass, the Polish-Ukrainian strategic partnership, crucial for Warsaw, has been facing some challenges which need to be addressed. In this context, the relations with other states in Central and Eastern Europe have been for decades of rather secondary importance, despite their geographical proximity. Poland has frequently exploited the Visegrad Group framework and supported the Baltic states sovereignty and security, but it hasn't been a major focus of its foreign policy.

Finally, extra-European events have rarely brought increased attention of the Polish political elite. There were, however, a few exceptions. To begin with, Poland increased its presence in the Middle East several times. This was manifested by the aforementioned Iraq invasion in 2003, the subsequent stability operation in this country, as well as the recent operations against the Islamic State in Kuwait and Iraq. Moreover, it was an active participant in the combat against the Taliban in Central Asia. Polish troops also participated in several peacekeeping and training operations in Africa (Central African Republic, Congo, Tchad), but this involvement was rather influenced by the logics of its relations with France and other European Union's partners. When it comes to diplomatic relations with extra-European powers, they were usually lacking serious initiatives on the Polish side. The only significant exception in the recent years concerns the development of relations with the People's Republic of China.

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### Foreign Policy of Poland in the Post-Cold War Era Between the West and the East

**SUMMARY:** This paper aims to provide an answer to the question how Poland adapted its foreign policy to the new and changing geopolitical situation since 1989, in order to secure its basic national interests and support democratic transformation. It also overviews its most important vectors, goals, tendencies and problems throughout the last 27 years. It argues that the Polish external activity since the end of the Cold War has been largely focused on the events which occurred in Europe and the transatlantic area. This strictly regional fixation has been caused mostly by the specific geopolitical position of Poland, as well as by its limited resources in comparison to the Western European powers. Therefore, its foreign policy usually expressed limited interest in the extra-European affairs, with the exception of the military interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

**KEY WORDS:** Poland, Polish foreign policy, NATO, Russia