



Poland's Foreign Policy Under the Rule of the Law and Justice Party

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Abstract

Poland was the first country in Central Europe to start dismantling the political system of 'real socialism' in 1989 and has become a pioneer of democratic and market reforms. After 10 years it was admitted to NATO and after 15 years to the European Union. Then, gradually, populism, nationalism and Euro-skepticism began to grow in Poland, which was evident in the years 2005-2007, during the first edition of rules of the conservative-nationalist Law and Justice (PiS) party. After the next eight years of the pragmatic approach of the Polish governments towards European integration, the PiS assumed full power in the country in 2015. The new president and the PiS government began systematic changes in domestic and foreign policy. Populism, illiberalism and authoritarianism began dominating in Polish internal politics, and nationalism and Euro-skepticism in foreign policy. The most important new phenomena in the foreign policy of the PiS government are: (a) the bi-lateralization and militarization of security policy based on the strategic partnership with the US; (b) Euro-skepticism: anti-Brussels posturing and disputes with Germany and France; (c) Poland's nationalistic and great-power approach to Russia; and (d) Three Seas Initiative as a dream of Poland's greatness. The consequences of this Poland's politics are detrimental to itself and to the international environment. It has reduced the importance of Poland as a state in Europe and the world. The world's perception of Poland is increasingly unfavorable among democratic countries, and more favorable among other illiberal countries. But it is not favorable with all illiberal countries, because the nationalism that accompanies Polish illiberalism makes it impossible to improve relations with other not fully democratic or downright undemocratic countries, especially Poland's eastern neighbors. Poland's foreign policy is facing serious challenges, some of which Poland created on its own and is unable to address effectively. This means that there is a growing problem of incompatibility between Poland's policies and the changing international order.

Keywords

Poland, Illiberalism, Foreign policy, the European Union, the USA, Russia, 3SI

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Introduction

The aim of the paper is to present the main actions of Poland in the international arena under the rule of the conservative-nationalist and populist Law and Justice party, which ruled the country twice between 2005-2007 and 2015-2021.

Poland is a medium-sized country that has belonged to NATO since 1999 and to the European Union since 2004. At the end of the 1980s, it played a leading role in the dismantling of the political system of real socialism and, as a consequence, contributed to the disintegration of the Eastern Bloc. At that time, it was a pioneer of democratic reforms in the eastern part of Europe and after 10 years it was admitted to NATO and then to the European Union. Then it entered the path of comprehensive socio-economic development and began getting closer to the highly developed countries of Western Europe. Invariably, since the beginning of the post-Cold War period, Poland has faced various problems in relations with its eastern neighbors, and considers Russia a threat to its independence.

In general, in Poland, until the accession to the European Union, there was a consensus between the main political forces in matters of foreign policy and ensuring the country's security. The consensus prevailed in the matter of ensuring national security, and the main external pillars of Poland's security were NATO membership, a strategic partnership with the USA, and membership in the European Union. When Poland officially became a member of the EU, right-wing political forces began to express more and more clearly fears that Poland would lose its sovereignty within the EU. In autumn 2005, a government headed by the conservative-nationalist Law and Justice party was formed, and Lech Kaczyński, a politician of this party, became the president of the country. The new Polish authorities began clearly formulating reservations about the policy within the EU, tightening relations with the US and fomenting conflict with the strained relations with Russia. Poland clearly pursued the strategy of *bandwagoning* towards the USA, Euroscepticism within the EU and highlighting disputes in relations with Germany, and by fueling historical and current disputes with Russia, it gained the name of a Russophobic country (Grudziński, 2008).

However, Polish society, positively oriented towards European integration, changed its political preferences and in the parliamentary elections in autumn 2007, authorized the pro-European and pragmatic parties the Civic Platform and the Polish People's Party to take over the government. Successive governments of Donald Tusk and Ewa Kopacz led to the improvement and dynamic development of relations, mainly within the Weimar Triangle, with the leaders of the EU, Germany and France. Together with these countries, Poland attempted to revive the stagnant Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP), and in the second half of 2011, Poland, which held the presidency of the Council of the EU, played a positive role in overcoming the financial crisis in the Eurozone, although it did not join this area. Poland continued its strategic cooperation with the USA, and in 2008-2011 it led to a partial normalization of relations with Russia (Zięba, 2011, pp. 43-49). From autumn 2013, it was actively involved in supporting the so-called Revolution of Dignity in Ukraine, and thus relations with Russia began to worsen. After the plane crash in Smolensk, in which President Lech Kaczyński and 95 members of the state delegation died (April 10, 2010), relations with Russia were systematically deteriorating.

However, in the second half of 2015, power in Poland was taken over by the conservative-nationalist populist Law and Justice party. First, in July, Andrzej Duda, a politician of this party, was elected president, and in the autumn PiS took over the government. This started a major shift not only in Polish domestic policy, but also in foreign and security policy. First of all, the anti-liberal turn in Polish politics had its internal sources, such as: (a) the dissatisfaction of broad social strata with the harsh economic and social reforms implemented since the end of 1989, (b) the political awakening of the Polish provinces, which are populist, conservatist and nationalistic, and (c) the increasing influence of the Catholic church to social and political life in Poland. This made it easier for PiS to pursue a populist and authoritarian domestic policy.

The external origins of illiberalism and nationalism in Poland's politics are essential as well. The crisis of the European Union, which had become apparent following the great enlargement of 2004, played an important role in the rise of illiberalism and of the phenomena accompanying it, such as populism, conservatism, nationalism and authoritarianism. It also catalysed the assumption to the government in Hungary by Victor Orbán's Fidesz party (in 2010) and the growth in influence of right-wing and nationalist parties in western European countries, such as the Brexit Party and the increasingly nationalist Conservative Party in the UK, the Nation Rally (until June 2018 known as the National Front) in France, the Alternative for Germany (AfD) in Germany, the Freedom Party (PVV) in the Netherlands, the Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ) in Austria, the Northern League (LN) and the Five Star Movement (MV5S) in Italy, and others.

Already in summer 2010, the prominent American political scientist Charles Kupchan wrote in alarming tone about the European Union's collapse, partly due to economic reasons and, above all, because of the extremely evident renationalisation of political life. In his opinion, this renationalisation was spilling over 'from London to Berlin to Warsaw' and was expressed in a return to sovereignty at the cost of selflessness in the name of a common idea, and this placed the European project under threat (Kupchan, 2010). Additionally, a factor helping to reinforce anti-liberal and nationalist sentiments in Poland was the occurrence of such trends not only in the EU, but also in its immediate neighbourhood and in distant regions of the world (Galston, 2018; Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018). Such phenomena are present almost everywhere in the post-Soviet area, including Belarus, Russia, Ukraine, the South Caucasus and Central Asia, and in authoritarian Turkey, theocratic Iran, nationalist India, and communist China.

As the year 2017 began, illiberalism started dominating the policy of the United States when populist and conservative Donald Trump became president (2017-2020). This strengthened a similar trend in Poland, especially as PiS conducts a very active *bandwagoning* policy with regard to the USA. Polish politicians seeking to implement illiberal policies have countless examples to follow from different autocratic systems around the world (Roth, 2019). Lastly, one should conclude that a factor helping to reinforce anti-liberal and nationalist sentiments is the ongoing reconfiguration of the international order leading to the weakening and – as the prominent neorealist scholar John Mearsheimer pointed out – to the decline of the democratic and liberal West (Mearsheimer, 2019, 30). Poland joined the growing wave of illiberalism and nationalism in the politics of many European and non-European countries.

The Bi-lateralization and Militarization of Security Policy Based on a Strategic Partnership with the U.S.

For the most of Polish political parties the pursuit of a *bandwagoning* strategy towards the USA is a universal foreign policy denominator (Zajac, 2016, pp. 79, 191; Zięba, 2020, pp. 90-132). This has been the policy of many Polish governments, both from the Right and the Left. When PiS came to power, some of its politicians went as far as to suggest a bilateral political-military alliance with the US, to be formed at NATO's expense. In March 2007, then deputy foreign minister Witold Waszczykowski said that Poland should conclude a bilateral alliance with the USA outside the NATO framework.

This occurred when the Polish-American alliance had a clear asymmetrical nature, not only on account of the huge differences in the two countries' potential, but also of PiS' decision made in October a year before to accept Washington's offer to build an anti-missile shield in Poland. Officially, Jarosław Kaczyński's government began negotiations with the USA in May 2007. This was accompanied by propaganda unreservedly justifying the need to host the anti-missile shield on Polish territory. In such circumstances, it was difficult to obtain anything of substance from the Americans during the course of the negotiations. The next Polish government, a PO-PSL coalition, also signed, on August 20, 2008, a not wholly equal agreement concerning the placement of anti-missile launchers in Pomerania under conditions set by the Americans. Characteristically, PiS, now in opposition, pressed the government to sign the agreement without any delay or haggling.

After getting back to power in the autumn of 2015, PiS recommenced the policy based on subordinating Polish interests to those of the United States. This was expressed in many gestures of faithful submission and in the unquestioning support given to the USA in important international matters. During President Andrzej Duda's official visit to Washington on September 18, 2018, the Polish president proposed to the Americans to build a base for the permanent stationing of US troops in Poland – a base he himself referred to as 'Fort Trump'. In what proved to be a break with all norms of rational behavior, before any negotiations on this matter had begun, President Duda proposed that Poland would finance the entire infrastructure of this base. During the ensuing press conference, the Polish President declared that Poland would allocate 2 billion USD for this purpose and gave assurances that, even if the Polish calculations 'do not coincide with those of the Pentagon representatives, I can assure you that we will manage – the [Americans] can rest assured that the infrastructure will be prepared according to their expectations' (Cowell, 2018). This proposal was submitted to the US president without any prior consultations with NATO allies. Poland should have done so, if only out of concern for its credibility, especially as it was requesting the deployment of an additional 1,000 American soldiers, and the more so as Trump said that those soldiers would be relocated from US bases in Germany. Yet another symbolic moment occurred during the ceremony at which the new declaration of strategic partnership between Poland and the USA was signed, with President Trump sitting behind his desk, while President Duda stood to the side awkwardly, bent over the desk as he signed the document, because he had not been provided with a chair for an 'unknown reason'. The non-government media in Poland criticized this awkward moment extensively. During this visit, both sides also reiterated their intention to strengthen their cooperation in the sphere of energy.

The Polish president's visit to Washington expressed the clientelist nature of Poland's relations with the USA. This was reflected in the US administration's cancellation, on grounds that were rather unconvincing, of Trump's visit to Poland planned for August 21–September 2, 2019, where he was supposed to take part in the commemoration of the 80th anniversary of the outbreak of WWII. The following meeting between the Polish and American presidents took place on September 23, 2019, on the occasion of a meeting of the UN General Assembly. A *Joint Declaration on Advancing Defence Cooperation* between the USA and Poland was then signed. This document provided for an increase of the US contingent in Poland by about 1,000 soldiers (up to about 5,500) and indicated the locations of the bases where they would be stationed. Then, on August 15, 2020, another agreement was signed to strengthen the presence of US troops in Poland.

The PiS authorities have continued with the militarization of security that has been initiated by their predecessors, by considerably raising spending on weapons as well as purchasing new equipment exclusively from the USA. In March 2018, a contract was signed for the purchase of two Patriot missile batteries, that is, 16 launchers and 208 very expensive PAC-3 MSE missiles to intercept enemy missiles (\$6-7 million each), as well as additional equipment such as radars and IBCS command system components. Poland has thus acquired equipment, which does not yet exist in its finished form. In other words, it has become dependent on research work on these weapons done in the USA. This contract is worth 4.75 billion USD and Poland is to obtain only about 3 billion USD in offset. This transaction is greatly overpaid because the cost of implementing the first stage of the 'Vistula' anti-missile program (by the purchase of American missiles) is equal to four annual Polish modernization budgets. Polish experts estimate that the entire 'Vistula' program will cost about 14.75 billion USD.

The purchase of the above-mentioned equipment became even less rational after Poland's withdrawal from the endeavor to develop the EU's military capabilities (such as in-flight refueling) without proposing any feasible alternative solutions. Instead, the Polish government prefers to turn to the USA for its defense-related purchases. On January 31, 2020, Poland and the USA signed an agreement for Poland to purchase 32 F-35A aircrafts for the crazy sum of 4.6 billion USD. There was no tender procedure and the agreement does not provide for any offset. Deliveries of the planes are expected to begin in 2026. It is the second-largest arms contract in Poland's history.

This case indicates, similarly to former purchases of military equipment in the USA, that Poland is working gravely in order to reinforce its own defense capabilities and, thus, is facilitating the strengthening of the NATO's eastern flank. It is praised by former US President Donald Trump as the European leader in higher defense spending. That Trump is satisfied that Poland's increased expenditures on arms will be spent to purchase costly weapons systems in the USA should come as no surprise.¹ Polish leaders declare further increases in defense spending. President Duda has pledged to increase such expenditures to 2.5% of GDP in 2024. These are gigantic sums, about 31 billion USD yearly. Unfortunately, it does not increase Poland's security to a degree that would justify

1 In the Polish parliament there is a consensus about increasing spending on defence. On September 15, 2017 the Sejm voted, with one vote against and five abstentions, a law increasing such sending to 2.5% GDP in 2030 and subsequent years.

the certainty that Poland would be able to defend its territory in case of an expected war with Russia. Moreover, the militarization of Poland's security policy does not contribute to reinforcing international security but, quite on the contrary, leads to its weakening by stirring up the arms race. It also has a negative impact on the financing of many heavily neglected areas of social life in Poland, such as education, science, health care or social security.

The already mentioned bases of Poland's policy such as resting its security on a tight alliance with the USA, militarizing NATO's eastern flank and 'buying its security' in the USA, while at the same time neglecting the second main pillar of Poland's external security – the European Union – bring about concerns not only within the country but also among Poland's EU allies and partners. Very critical opinions about Poland have been formulated in Western Europe. For example, *Politico* published that:

The ruling nationalists in Warsaw are gambling on personal chemistry and political affinity with U.S. President Donald Trump to ensure their security from a revisionist Russia even as they isolate themselves from the rest of the European Union. Putting so many eggs in the American basket is a risky strategy, not just because of Trump's unpredictability and uncertain duration in power, but also because Warsaw is about to lose its best friend in the EU — the U.K. — and has no obvious alternative ally in Brussels. [...] But Kaczyński, obsessed by how Britain and France abandoned Poland to the Nazi German invasion and partition with Russia in 1939, sees permanent U.S. "boots on the ground" as the only dependable insurance against Russian aggression. (Taylor, 2018).

Nevertheless, PiS authorities pay no attention to the criticism of its European allies. Instead, they supported US President Trump's irresponsible actions, such as the US withdrawal from the nuclear agreement with Iran (on May 8, 2018) and the suspension of the INF agreement (on February 1, 2019). The Polish authorities agreed to co-organize, with the US, and to host an international foreign ministers' conference, in Warsaw on February 13-14, 2019. It was devoted to Middle East security and was primarily intended to pressure Iran. Characteristically, the Polish authorities failed to consult this highly controversial initiative with the political opposition. Instead of a joint announcement by Poland and the US, the conference was announced by US Secretary of State Mark Pompeo. Iran was not invited to this conference. Representatives of Russia, China, Turkey, and the head of EU diplomacy Federica Mogherini, also failed to attend. The US and Israel used Poland, and the US Secretary of State and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu insulted the Polish nation. Poland's image suffered greatly as a result.² The conference failed to bring any positive results and only confirmed that the PiS government serves mainly American interests and pursues an openly clientelist policy with regard to the USA.

Most worryingly, Poland, while pursuing a close alliance with the USA and an increased US military presence on Polish territory, is preparing for Russia's expected military aggression. It is hoping that such an attack will automatically 'drag' the US into a war to defend Poland. Krzysztof Szczerski, minister in President Duda's Chancellery, spoke

² During a conversation with the Polish Foreign Minister Jacek Czaputowicz, M. Pompeo demanded that Poland return the heirless Jewish property to American citizens, and B. Netanyahu accused the Polish nation of complicity with Germany in exterminating Jews during the Holocaust. There was no adequate reaction of the Polish authorities to these statements.

about this clearly in April 2016, when he stated that: ‘We want a potential aggression on Poland to mean an automatic confrontation with the entire alliance and its military force located within the territory of our country for the purpose of mutual defence.’ (Stawka, 2016).

This political madness does nothing to guarantee Poland’s security, because, in the so-called hour of truth, in the situation of a Polish-Russian conflict, as assumed in the scenarios of the decision-makers for Polish security policy, the allied guarantees for Poland on the part of representatives of the United States could turn out to be illusory – among other things, because the United States, being guided by its own vital interests, will not risk a nuclear conflict with Russia, a nuclear superpower, over Poland, even if it meant the United States’ loss of credibility as an ally.

Euro-skepticism: Anti-Brussels Posturing, Disputes with Germany And France

As Jarosław Kaczyński and other PiS activists came to power in 2005 and in 2015, one of their main slogans was about Poland ‘getting off its knees’. This entailed questioning Poland’s policy within the framework of the European Union, including its policy with regard to EU leading members Germany and France, and with regard to Russia. PiS accused the PO-PSL governments of Donald Tusk and Ewa Kopacz of having ‘capitulated’ to those countries, and this included Russia, relations with which during the tenure of the two previous governments also left much to be desired. PiS’ criticism of previous governments included the publicly formulated accusation that Poland had become a ‘German-Russian condominium.’³ An eruption of euro-skepticism in Poland took place during the presidential electoral campaign and during the parliamentary elections of 2005. The propaganda of right-wing and populist parties was dominated by slogans calling for the defense of Polish sovereignty in the EU, and for standing up to the ‘dictate’ of Brussels, Berlin and Paris.

During the first PiS governments, Poland refused the ratification of the Constitutional Treaty that had been signed by the previous government on October 24, 2004, and did not take part in any essential political debate within the European Union. PiS politicians still believe today that EU membership restricts Poland’s sovereignty. Some of them, such as Jarosław Kaczyński, see Brussels as the ‘new Moscow’ and believe that Poland should resist dependence on the EU, of which, paradoxically, Poland is a member. In government circles, the prevailing expectation ‘from Brussels’ is that Poland would be treated as an equal to ‘old’ EU member states.

The PiS government messed up Poland’s relations with France and Germany, the two leading EU member states. Poland was dissatisfied with Germany’s and France’s leading roles in the Union, and with the strengthening of the CSDP, which Poland does not favor. In recent years Poland has been further dissatisfied with the care for compliance with the rule of law by EU member states. In its relations with Germany, the Polish government embarked between 2005-2007 on historical disputes and polemics about the Expellees Association’s restitution claims with regard to property left in Poland following the post-

3 This formulation was used by PiS chairman Jarosław Kaczyński during an interview with the right-wing *Gazeta Polska* on September 8, 2010. This slogan has been repeated by the leading PiS politicians after PiS came to power in the fall of 2015.

WWII expulsions of Germans, and protested against the German government's support for the project to build the Centre against Expulsions in Berlin. The PiS government from time to time publicly raises demands for reparations from Germany for losses inflicted on Poland during the Second World War. Given these and other differences (like criticizing Germany for its part in the construction of the Nord Stream gas pipeline on Baltic Sea floor) Poland contributed to block dialogue and collaboration within the framework of the Weimar Triangle (France-Germany-Poland). This collaboration was reinstated during the years 2007-2015 by the governments of the PO-PSL coalition. The PiS government which succeeded them, however, resumed the policy that had antagonized Germany and France, and this led once again to the dormancy of the Weimar Triangle.

Relations with France began to violently deteriorate in October 2016. Poland refused to purchase French Caracal battle helicopters and broke a contract worth 3.92 billion USD, undertaken by the previous government, and it was followed by irresponsible statements made by members of the government. In particular, defense minister Antoni Macierewicz lied in the Sejm, saying that the contract with France had been intended as Warsaw's reward to Paris to make up for the benefits France had to forgo when it desisted from selling three Mistral-type warships to Russia. He further claimed that France had sold these ships to Egypt, which then let Russia have them for a symbolic dollar (Egipt, 2016). These developments revealed the clearly pro-American, nationalist and anti-Russian course of Polish foreign policy.

A new cycle in continuing Polish-French polemics was marked by French president Emmanuel Macron's public condemnation of nationalism and criticism of Poland (and the other members of the Visegrád Group) that were accused for lack of solidarity in dealing with the migrant crisis and for blocking EU climate policy, whose aim was to reduce carbon dioxide emissions into the atmosphere, and also when he proposed steps to deepen EU integration and to reinforce the CSDP. Given its disinclination toward further EU integration, Poland often criticized the positions of France and Germany. This was caused by Poland's different vision of the EU's future as compared to that of most other EU members. In 2016-2017, the government of Beata Szydło demanded a new EU treaty that would strengthen its intergovernmental character. Poland supported the United Kingdom and pointed to Donald Tusk, the president of the European Council, as the person responsible for Brexit. The PiS government has an *à la carte* vision of the EU, which it sees as a free trade zone, and is opposed to integration in other areas. It takes no notice of the fact that the EU Treaty binds member states to deepen integration also in non-economic areas and to respect democratic norms and values. Polish politicians of the government camp protest severely against all criticism, which concerns infringements on the rule of law and EU norms and values, and which is articulated by other European leaders and from the European Commission.

Problematic issues in Poland's relations with EU institutions and leading EU member states are compounded by the fact that Poland's authorities maintain close contacts with similar populist and nationalist parties from the other European countries. The closest of these are with Fidesz, the party now governing Hungary. Meetings between Jarosław Kaczyński and Fidesz leader Victor Orbán, as well as meetings between the two countries' prime ministers, take place often. Not least important is the mutual friendship

felt by both nations towards each other – a sentiment with long-standing historical roots. In 2007 the parliaments of Hungary and Poland established March 23 as the Day of Polish-Hungarian Friendship. Quite early on, after the parliamentary elections of 2011, which PiS lost, Jarosław Kaczyński stated that ‘a time would come when we will have Budapest in Warsaw’ (Kaczyński, 2011). Indeed, very quickly after coming to power in 2015, PiS began to encroach on the rule of law and took exclusive control of the Polish public media: in 2018 it forced through a law on higher education which limited the autonomy of higher learning institutions in an unprecedented way. Poland and Hungary also have much in common on the international stage. Both countries are opposed to the main EU current, take a firm stand against immigration and are strongly skeptical about deeper European integration. They coordinate common defensive strategies following the European Commission’s initiation of procedures provided by article 7 of the EU Treaty with regard the two countries. In December 2020, Hungary and Poland blackmailed 25 other EU member states if funding from the EU budget would be linked to compliance with the rule of law.

PiS leaders also maintain close relations with populist and nationalist groups in western European countries, in France, Italy and Spain, and also in Great Britain. They are taking concrete steps to create a new alliance of populist forces in the EU. To this end, on April 1, 2021, Prime Minister Wojciech Morawiecki took part in a meeting in Budapest with the Prime Minister of Hungary Victor Orban and Mateo Salvini. On December 3-4, 2021, at the invitation of Kaczyński, the leaders of conservative and extreme-right parties discussed the development of a common vision of Europe and the European Union in Warsaw. (Populist, 2021). PiS’ most important ally in its illiberal and nationalist policy was the former President of the United States Donald Trump. President Trump supported the Polish authorities regardless of their violations of the rule of law and democratic standards. The situation changed when Joe Biden became the US President in January 2021, who made the promotion of human rights one of the priorities of his foreign policy. As the commentator *Politico* wrote, the position of authoritarian regimes in Poland and Hungary is imperiled by their own policies and “authoritarians also need to worry about public approval, and political isolation will not go down well with populaces of these two countries.” (Benjamin, 2021).

Poland’s Nationalistic and Great-Power Approach to Russia

Both the presidential and parliamentary electoral campaigns of 2005 were characterized by the right-wing PiS’ (and also PO’s) criticism of Russia, claiming that Moscow alone bore responsibility for the poor relations between the two countries, and accusing it of being reluctant to address and elucidate the difficult historical matters burdening Polish-Russian relations. Yet again, the Polish authorities raised the issue of the Katyń Massacre (1943) and criticized Russia’s Main Military Prosecutor’s Office for having discontinued its investigation into this matter (in March 2005), demanding that the massacre be recognized as a crime against humanity, while the Polish Institute of National Remembrance launched its own investigation in the matter. Critical voices were raised in Warsaw about the divergent views of Poland and Russia on the subject of the decisions taken during the Yalta Conference in 1945; in the summer of 2005 the children

of some Russian diplomats were assaulted and beaten by unknown hooligans in Warsaw, and in August of the same year each country expelled a number of the other's diplomats. Under the PiS governments of 2005-2007, the deterioration of Polish-Russian relations became critical. However, Sergey Yastrzhembsky, the Russian president's influential advisor, arrived in Warsaw in January 2006, and in October 2006 so did Russia's foreign minister Sergey Lavrov, but but these two visits did not overcome the impasse in Polish-Russian relations. The Polish authorities behaved in an antagonistic manner, not only towards Russia but also towards its EU partners, feeling buoyant at the increasingly closer relations with the USA that followed Washington's 2006 proposal to build America's missile shield in Poland. . The nationalism of the Polish elite combined with Russophobia was also of great importance.

Since PiS has returned to power in 2015, its governments have only rarely entered into sharp disputes with Russia. The principal issue in Russia-related statements made by government officials has been the demand that Russia return the wreckage of the Polish plane that crashed on April 10, 2010 in Smolensk, killing then Polish President Lech Kaczyński along with 95 members of a Polish state delegation on the way to Katyń. Jarosław Kaczyński, and the party he leads, blamed the disaster on Russia and even added that the Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk and Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin had conspired to kill the Polish delegation. While PiS has not been able to produce any evidence in support of this theory, it organized commemorative 'monthlies', i.e. rallies of many thousands of people in the Polish capital to keep the 'Smolensk religion' alive until April 2018. In the meantime, Polish-Russian relations remained frozen. The first meeting between the foreign ministers of Poland and Russia took place only five years later, in May 2019, on the occasion of a session of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, held in Helsinki. The meeting did not bring about any breakthrough in bilateral relations.

In the opinion of the Polish opposition, the PiS government does not seek confrontation with Russia. A significant factor explaining this seems to be the similar authoritarian natures of the Polish Russian governments. Politicians and liberal or leftist media protesting against the violation of the rule of law by the Poland's government and its president allege a 'betrayal of Polish interests' and the country's 'drift' toward an eastern satrapy regime. As an example, they point to the cooperation that exists between the Hungarian Prime Minister Orbán and the Russian president Putin. The Russian political scientist Andrei Kortunov goes so far as to state that 'the Russians see in PiS a party that seeks to sow in Europe that which is in the Kremlin's interest' (Radziwinowicz, 2019).

In matters of domestic policy, such as 'protecting' children from sex education, discrimination, LGBT, gender, domestic violence against women, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) the PiS government's way is similar to Russia's. Despite Kaczyński's Russophobia, the Russian secret services' penetration (and likely financing) of dispersed right-wing and nationalist circles in Poland can be clearly seen (Poland's, 2017).

The disputes about historical issues between Poland and Russia escalated even more at the end of 2019. Then Russian President Vladimir Putin took advantage of Poland's weakened position in the western world to accuse Poland – repeatedly and going against

established historical facts – of being complicit in bringing about WWII. As he did so, he passed over in silence the fact that the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact of August 23, 1939 was of decisive importance in this regard. Putin also raised the question of Polish anti-Semitism and Poles' participation in the extermination of Polish Jews by the German occupiers. Poland's allies (the USA, Germany, France, and the United Kingdom) supported Warsaw in these polemics (Wanat, 2019), but failed to prevail in the historical disputes with Russia. Warsaw pursued its own nationalist historical policy, which collided with Russia's historical narrative. As it turned out, the PiS government's earlier decision to suspend the activities of the Polish-Russian Group for Difficult Matters made it difficult to find common ground for dialogue. The conservative-nationalist Polish government found that Russia was a heavyweight adversary that had built its own great-power narrative on the basis of its own subjective view of history. It is worthwhile to remember that Poland's historical policy runs into similar problems, if on a lesser scale, with regard to Germany, Israel and Ukraine.

Three Seas Initiative as a Dream of Poland's Greatness

Polish foreign policy, as conducted by right-wing governments, encounters problems in establishing relations with Poland's two main neighbours – Russia to the east and Germany to the west – and with adapting to the role of a middle-rank country in the contemporary, increasingly inter-dependent world. This means the thinking of PiS' conservative and nationalist politicians reverts to concepts known from the past. These stress the need to maintain full sovereignty and see Poland in a leading or even a great-power role in central Europe. This was the case during Poland's 'Golden Age' in the 16th century, when the rule and influence of the Polish-Lithuanian 'Commonwealth of Both Nations' extended from the Baltic to the Black Sea, and when members of the Jagiellonian dynasty also reigned in Bohemia and in Hungary. The contemporary concept, the Three Seas Initiative, which is treated by the Polish authorities as a vehicle that elevates Poland to the position of international power in central Europe, has been implemented since 2015, blessed by former US President Donald Trump.

PiS' political thought most often makes reference to the federation concept of Józef Piłsudski, who proposed after the First World War that a Polish-Lithuanian-Belarusian-Ukrainian federation be created, with the possibility of admitting Latvia, Estonia and even Finland to it in due course. After this concept's rapid demise, in 1921-1926 Poland attempted to implement another project of regional cooperation between the Baltic, Black and Adriatic seas. This was the concept of Intermarium, and it was accompanied by the concept of Prometheism, which entailed support for secessionist movements in Russia and the USSR. These two concepts shared the fate of the previous one.

In conducting their policy of 'raising Poland from its knees' the Polish authorities not only created a crisis situation in relations with Russia but also led to serious tensions in relations with Berlin, Paris and with EU institutions. In practice, the Polish government reverted to the theory of finding two enemies in Russia and Germany. Contrary to obvious facts, which indicate Poland's deep structural ties within the EU framework, the Polish authorities began to distance themselves from the EU and went back to stressing Poland's geopolitical situation, as was the case in the distant past and, especially, during the inter-

war period. In this situation, PiS leaders opted to build a geopolitical trampoline of sorts, in the shape of the Three Seas Initiative, and to look for support for it with former US President Donald Trump and his clearly unfriendly stance toward the EU. Or perhaps they only took it upon themselves to do America's bidding? Generally speaking, in justifying the launch of the Three Seas Initiative, the Polish government usually mentions the need to rise to the challenges and threats emerging from the international environment, including the EU crisis, the unfavourable evolution of the decision-making processes within this community (including the emergence of a "two-speed" EU), and the neo-imperial policies of the Russian Federation.

The idea to establish multi-level collaboration between the countries lying between the Baltic, Adriatic and Black Sea was proposed in autumn 2015 by the Chancellery of President Andrzej Duda and the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In addition to Poland, the Intermarium project includes 11 other central European EU member states: Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia. Croatia in particular showed great interest in the project and, along with Poland, began to promote the Three Seas Initiative (3SI) project.

The main difference between this policy and its prototype from 2005-2007 was Poland's focus on collaboration solely with central European countries, excluding Ukraine and Georgia. On August 25, 2016 the representatives of the twelve central European states first met in Dubrovnik and adopted the *Joint Declaration on the Three Seas Initiative*. The text of the declaration clearly limits collaboration as part of the 3SI to infrastructural and economic matters and to the framework of the European Union. It announces modernization projects aimed at bridging the developmental gap between the western and eastern part of the EU, which is supposed to foster a deepening of the EU common market and, at the same time, to prevent the formation of a 'multi-speed' EU. In successive years, more 3SI summits have been held, the second of which, in July 2017, was attended by former US President Donald Trump. The sixth 3SI summit was held on July 8-9, 2021 in Sophia.

Poland's involvement in the Three Seas Initiative, similarly to its revisionist approach to the entire tried foreign policy course of 1989-2015, betrays Poland's ill-adaptation to life among Western democracies. It has to be admitted that the words that Milan Kundera wrote several decades ago, to the effect that the tragedy of Central Europe lies in the fact that it finds itself tied 'culturally to the West and politically to the East' remain valid. (Kundera, 1983). Today, despite 30 years of transformations, Poland is reverting to solutions proper to an authoritarian system and to geopolitical concepts which it knows from the past and which are triumphant in contemporary Russia.

Moreover, it should be noted that EU member states, including those involved in the Three Seas Initiative, are being played off each other by outside actors, notably by the US and Russia. This is already seriously hindering the building of unity among 3SI states, and yet it is on this unity that Poland is attempting to build its position as regional leader and a competitive block within the European Union. In addition, hanging over all this is the spectre of Poxexit – the spectre that Warsaw's policies within the EU will lead either to Poland's marginalization within the EU by all other member states or to that organisation's slow deconstruction, regardless of Jarosław Kaczyński's or Mateusz Morawiecki's stated

interest in remaining in the EU. In the event, the Three Seas Initiative as a vehicle raising Poland to international power status will not survive.

Consequences of the New Polish Policies

It is rather hard to estimate what the long-term consequences of Poland's illiberal and nationalist policies will be as these policies are quite recent and have been occurring uninterruptedly for only a few years. A visible outline of some of their effects is beginning to emerge, however. Firstly, one can notice the gradual weakening of the European Union which has, in any case, been struggling with an ongoing crisis for various reasons. The decision by Poland, a relatively large EU-member state, to embark on policies that entail violations of EU norms and standards has negative consequences. It strengthens the determination of Victor Orbán in Hungary to continue along the path of illiberalism, and encourages toleration of corruption in the Czech Republic, and especially, in Romania. The entirety of Poland's behavior in the EU since the autumn of 2015 indicates that, irrespective of the pronouncements made by PiS leaders about strengthening the EU, Poland has embarked on a path that will lead to its departure from this organization, or at least out of its mainstream. In other words, Polesxit, a term invented by the media, has become the aim of Poland's PiS government.

The illiberal and nationalistic vector chosen by Poland's ruling party casts a shadow on Poland's bilateral relations with other European countries. Poland's actions that weaken the EU have led to disputes with the two countries most engaged in the integration process – France and Germany. Poland is becoming increasingly isolated in the EU. The only member state Poland can count on, and not always, is Hungary. Also, the Polish elite's nationalism precludes any improvement of relations, also heavily burdened by historical disputes, between Poland and its other eastern neighbors. Poland has opted for bilateral relations with these countries as the main vehicle for its policies. It has nothing attractive to propose to these countries, however. Generally speaking, it can be stated that Poland's eastern policy under PiS has reached a stalemate, as the Polish authorities have lost interest in Poland's eastern neighbors. Instead, they are satisfied with being a client of the USA and with supporting the policy of this superpower in the post-Soviet area.

The PiS government is also conducting a historical policy and is using history instrumentally for day-to-day policy. On March 1, 2018 Poland introduced an act of law intended to protect Poland's good name. The new regulations call for up to three years of incarceration for anyone ascribing to the Polish nation or state any responsibility for crimes committed by Nazi Germany. The intention of the new law is to counter the phrase 'Polish death camps', which quite often appears in statements made by officials in other countries and in the foreign media. The law also includes provisions allowing for the filing of criminal charges against anyone denying crimes committed by Ukrainians against Poles in 1943 in Volhynia. The law also provides for the prosecution of foreigners abroad for this. It has had negative international repercussions in Israel, the USA and Ukraine. Poland has followed in Turkey's footsteps and has put its prestige abroad at risk.

While observing the security policy Poland has pursued since 2015, one should note that it has been frantically seeking military reinforcement of its own defense and of NATO's entire eastern flank. In military terms, increasing the defense potential of Poland

and of its allies in this part of Europe is of little importance. Even if one were to assume the possibility of a conflict with Russia, an increased military presence where the two opponents come face-to-face will not determine the outcome, as cyber war and missile and air war may be of key importance. On the other hand, increasing the presence of the USA and other allied soldiers by several thousand in the vicinity of Russia's borders serves the psychological war between NATO and Russia and its significance is only mental. It also reflects in what a poor condition are the relations between the West and Russia.

Poland has opted for additional weapons and for an increased US military presence on Polish soil. Such a way of thinking is typical of politicians, who have little knowledge of the nature of any future war or understanding for how tragic the consequences of such a war would be for the population and for the environment. Such thinking is usually associated with soldiers and with irresponsible and unprofessional politicians. Any observation of PiS politicians suggests that they are, indeed, of just such type. Just such a lack of professionalism and responsibility can be seen in their quite frequent statements indicating that an attack on American soldiers stationed in Poland will automatically draw the USA into the war. It is enough, however, to read attentively the most important provision of the North Atlantic Treaty, Art. 5, to understand that it doesn't provide for any such automatism. Instead, it states that an ally is to take 'such action as it deems necessary' in case of attack on one or several allies. This 'deeming' doesn't entail any automatic action but rather the liberty for each ally to choose.

The illiberal stance of Polish conservative and nationalist politicians leads them to expect, above all, US armed assistance. Therefore, they prioritize bilateral relations with the USA over solidarity with the whole North Atlantic Alliance. The similarity of their ideological beliefs to the populist and anti-liberal policies of the former US President, Donald Trump, have given them additional motivation. By 'purchasing' Poland's security from the USA at excessive cost they not only disregard other important and yet to be filled needs of their own society, but also disregard solidarity with other NATO allies.

When, in September 2018, President Duda proposed that Poland 'buy' Fort Trump, or when Poland ordered American F-35 combat planes, Poland failed to inform its other allies of these intentions. Poland should have done so, if only out of concern for its credibility, especially as it was requesting the deployment of an additional 1,000 American soldiers, and the more so as Trump said that those soldiers would be relocated from US bases in Germany. Such moves certainly would not strengthen either the North Atlantic Alliance, or Poland's security.

However, it soon turned out how illusory were the hopes of Polish leaders in Donald Trump, who supported the Polish authorities not so much with concern for Poland's security, but with the desire to support the illiberal and Euro-sceptic policy of Warsaw. In the autumn of 2020, Trump lost the presidential election, and the new US president, Joe Biden, in one of his first decisions, canceled Trump's decision to reduce the contingent of US troops in Germany (Biden, 2021). Although Poland can still count on US support for its security, it will face problems with the US returning to the promotion of democracy in the world and respect for the rule of law in other countries. Meanwhile, the Polish PiS government is ostentatiously violating democratic norms, the rule of law, freedom of the media and discrimination against various minorities. It causes trouble in the European Union, and now it looks similar to the USA.

As a result of the foreign and security policies conducted by the Polish government and President, the country's international position has wilted and its international roles have been distorted. The roles Poland performs, contrary to the aims of its authorities, are absolutely different from the roles it declares (Zięba, 2020, p. 268 *et seq.*). Poland, which had for years been a prime example of a state that had successfully carried out democratic transformations, is now becoming an authoritarian state, where the Constitution and the rule of law are ostentatiously broken.

Under the PiS government, Poland is no longer an engaged and pragmatic participant in European integration, as it was in the years 2007-2015, including the time when Poland held the presidency of the EU Council in the second half of 2011. Poland abandoned the role of an active participant in the Weimar Triangle and it's gone on to multiply misunderstandings and disputes with France and Germany. It has taken on the task of breaking apart European integration and even the role of a destructor of the European Union. Since the Smolensk air catastrophe in April 2010, when a plane carrying a Polish state delegation to Katyń crashed, Poland has gradually moved away from normalising its relations with Russia under the influence of Russophobic PiS propaganda. Under the PiS government, these relations have been frozen, and Poland has openly taken the role of a 'weaker' of Russia's imperial ambitions on the international stage and neglected its bilateral relations with this power. The most visible element of Poland's overall foreign and security policy is the ever-reinforced *bandwagoning* strategy with regard to the United States. In former President Trump, the Polish authorities found an ideological ally, but now it is over. President Biden knows Poland and has a positive attitude towards the USA, but ideologically he is in opposition to the rulers of Poland.

PiS' recurring reference to the 'will of the Sovereign' while it conducts its populist and anti-liberal domestic and foreign policy is only a marketing ploy. In fact, the Polish Sovereign, that is, Polish society, is one of the most pro-European. Support among society for Poland's membership in the EU oscillates between 70-80%. Despite this, the country's government is pursuing a policy that will de facto lead to the marginalization of Poland in the EU, perhaps even to Polesxit. These same authorities also often say that they are defending Poland's sovereignty and interests against the 'greedy' European Union while, at the same time, making short thrift of the same interests and sovereignty by placing the country under the tutelage of the United States and assuming the role of vassal and client state. This may be an expression of a desire to compensate for Poland's growing isolation in the Western world. This has been the case so far, but we do not know what will happen during Biden's US presidency. It is beyond doubt that for the US Poland will remain an important ally within NATO.

To conclude, one may claim that due to illiberalism and its derivatives the importance of Poland as a state in Europe and the world has decreased. The world's perception of Poland as it is governed by PiS is increasingly unfavorable among democratic countries, and more favorable among other illiberal countries. But not all, because the nationalism that accompanies Polish illiberalism makes it impossible to improve relations with other not fully democratic or downright undemocratic countries, especially Poland's eastern neighbors. Poland's foreign and security policy is facing serious challenges. Some of them Poland created itself and is unable to address effectively. This means that there is a growing problem of incompatibility between Poland's policies and the changing international order.

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