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POLAND'S MEMBERSHIP IN NATO: POLITICAL AND MILITARY ASPECTS

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After the changes of 1989 Poland aimed at joining NATO in order to protect its security, leave the «grey zone» between the CIS and EU/NATO and strengthen the ties with US. The accession to NATO in 1999 contributed to its security and anchorage in the West, as well as to the development of Polish military capabilities. The relations with the US however remain currently ambiguous.

Key words: Poland, NATO, security, «grey zone», United States, military capabilities, Ukraine.

In the nineties the accession to NATO (was together with the EU enlargement) the main aim of the Polish foreign policy. In 1999 Poland successfully joined the Alliance. Since that time, the role of NATO as the instrument of the Polish foreign policy has weakened at the benefit of the European Union. However Poland did not abandon the idea that the Alliance should continue to enlarge and one day include Ukraine. Poland's aims on the road to NATO.

Until 1989 Poland was part of the Soviet bloc. Its political and economic system was closely based on the Soviet model (hegemony of the communist party, centrally planned economy etc.). Its sovereignty both on internal and external level was considerably limited. The dominance of USSR was institutionalized through the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (Comecon, established in 1949) and the Warsaw Pact (created in 1955). Polish population in majority critically assessed the existing political system and the subjugation by the Soviet Union, while the West, especially the United States benefited from a largely positive image.

The geopolitical situation of Poland has changed radically with the changes in 1989–1991. First in 1989 the so called Round Table agreements led to the democratization of the political system and the end of the communist regime. Second in 1990 because of the German unification, Poland became a direct neighbour of the Western structures. Third, in 1991 both the Comecon and the Warsaw Pact were disbanded, while few months later the USSR definitely collapsed.

Poland was therefore free, nevertheless had to face several challenges and threats. On the internal level it had to build a new, democratic political system, reconstruct the economy, ruined by several decades of the communist «experiment» and more generally – modernize the largely undeveloped country (including the army). On the external level three main issues need to be solved. Despite the end of the communist bloc, Poland feared the revival of Moscow expansionist policy. Such fear was motivated by both the presence of the Russian (formerly Soviet) troops in Poland, which left the country only in 1993 and the declarations of the Russian politicians

concerning the special interests of the Russian Federation in Central Europe. Next, Poland wanted to leave the «grey zone» between the prosperous and stable West, symbolized by the EC/EU and NATO, and the highly unstable Eastern and South-Eastern Europe. If the collapse of the Soviet Union was a relatively peaceful process, it led to some minor conflicts in the post-Soviet republic. On the other hand, the disintegration of Yugoslavia resulted in a full scale war in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. Finally, the Poles wanted to strengthen ties with the United States of America. US were a symbol of the prosperous West, thanks to their strong soft-power and the presence of a large Polish diaspora in America. They were also the winner of the East-West confrontation and, as it seemed, the only superpower able to guarantee the security of the new Poland, in the contrary to weaker and perceived as unreliable Western European countries, such as the United Kingdom or France.

In this context several security policy options were envisaged. At first, Poland opted for the reinforcement of pan-European cooperation within the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe. Such solution seemed relatively easy, because Poland was already member of the CSCE, and potentially acceptable for the still-existing USSR. Some Polish politicians considered the adoption of neutrality, but this option was considered as unrealistic. The Russian president Boris Yeltsin proposed common Western-Russian guarantees for the Central European states, but this scenario was rejected by the latter. In this context Poland opted for the Euro-Atlantic orientation. First official declaration on the will of joining NATO were presented in 1992; all the doubts faded after the 1993 parliamentary elections the new post-communist government decided to continue the Euro-Atlantic course.

The perspective of the NATO enlargement towards the East was at first unwelcomed by the member states – this was due in particular to the strong objection from Russia. The former look for alternatives. In 1994 the Alliance launched the *Partnership for Peace*, which Poland joined in the same year. The attitude towards the Central European countries' aspiration changed around 1995, especially in the US. In 1997 Poland, together with the Czech Republic and Hungary was invited to join NATO. In 1999 it became a member of the Alliance.

NATO membership and Poland's security.

As the member of the North Atlantic Alliance, Poland is covered by the article 5 of the mentioned treaty, which says «The Parties agree that an armed attack against one or more of them in Europe or North America shall be considered an attack against them all and consequently they agree that, if such an armed attack occurs, each of them, in exercise of the right of individual or collective self-defence recognised by Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations, will assist the Party or Parties so attacked by taking forthwith, individually and in concert with the other Parties, such action as it deems necessary, including the use of armed force, to restore and maintain the security of the North Atlantic area», as well as by other arrangements adopted within NATO. Therefore the membership in the Alliance gives Poland a guarantee of aid in case of aggression. However, it should be stressed that the guarantees provided by the Washington Treaty are relatively weak – they do not include any obligation of military help, as it is to Parties to decide which action is necessary.

Since the beginning of its membership in NATO, Poland has made efforts to get NATO (multinational) military units and NATO defense infrastructure located on its territory, esteeming that such arrangements would strengthen its ties with the Alliance and therefore contribute to its security; within a real NATO presence in Poland, its guarantees may prove to be inefficient. These efforts brought only limited success, once more because of the negative position of Russia. In 2004 NATO established its Joint Force Training Centre in Bydgoszcz (Kuyavian-Pomeranian Voivodeship); this city hosts also the 3rd NATO's Signal Battalion. Polish leaders complained more than once about that fact, claiming that the new members should be treated in the same way than the other and that the NATO infrastructure should be distributed equally among the member states. It would be particularly important that Poland hosts temporarily or permanently Allies' forces.

In the first decade of the new century, Poland is a safe country – states the Strategy of National Security adopted in 2007. Such situation is due firstly to the geopolitical changes in Europe after 1989 (end of the Cold War, peaceful collapse of the communist system, successful enlargement of the West), but the membership in NATO contributes to the security of Poland.

It should be noted in particular that Poland had no major exogenous terrorist experience, especially after September 11th, 2011. Also outside Poland intentionally directed against Polish citizens or interests (with the exception of hostilities in Iraq and Afghanistan) constituted isolated incidents. Once again however, this fact is rather not due to Poland's membership in NATO. Polish engagement and in the US and NATO led missions in the Arab-Muslim world, and more generally in the «war against terrorism» (secret American prisons for the presumed al-Qaeda members in Poland) rather increase Poland's attractiveness as a target for terrorist attacks. Limited operational capabilities of terrorist groups in Poland, attractiveness of alternative targets and other factors explain why no terrorist attack never occurred in this country.

One can wonder what about other non-traditional threats potentially directed against Poland and the effectiveness of NATO guarantees in this context. The NATO Strategic Concept adopted in 2010 states that it will «develop the capacity to contribute to energy security, including protection of critical energy infrastructure and transit areas and lines, cooperation with partners, and consultations among Allies on the basis of strategic assessments and contingency planning». Also «a number of significant technology-related trends – including the development of laser weapons, electronic warfare and technologies that impede access to space – appear poised to have major global effects that will impact on NATO military planning and operations». However will NATO be able to protect Poland against the consequences of a new Ukrainian-Russian gas crisis, like those in 2006 and 2009? Or against an electronic attack, like this directed against Estonia in 2007? That remains an open question.

Since the '90 Poland has payed much attention to the development of the non-article 5 («out of area») missions of the Alliance. It is worth to be noted that in 1999, the year of Polish accession to NATO, the Alliance launched the war against Yugoslavia. Poland remains attached to the traditional function of NATO,

nevertheless it does not aim at impeding its evolution. It considers that such action might weaken the Polish position within the Alliance. Moreover the «out of area» missions keep NATO «in a good shape», which would be of importance in case of an article 5 scenario.

The evolution of NATO leads to the last, more general and fundamental question – does the Alliance in the second decade of 21st century remain a viable guarantee of security of Poland? Its political and military position on the continent seems to fade. Such situation is due to the development of the European Union, cutting of the military spendings, disinterest of Barack Obama administration in Europe, growing disapproval of NATO populations for the ongoing military operations. In this context Poland should not rely only on the Alliance.

NATO membership and the return to the West.

In 1999 Poland joined NATO; five years later it became a member of the European Union. This way it has realized the main aims of its foreign policy defined as the beginning of the '90. The double membership in NATO and EU have been perceived as a return of Poland to the West, proof of its success after the changes of 1989 and guarantee of its future development.

At the turn of the century Poles used to oppose the Alliance and EU. The first was to provide it security, the second – money. During the war in Iraq in 2003 Poland joined the pro-American «new Europe» camp, including most of the Central European states, as well as the United Kingdom, Italy, Spain etc., which led to the deterioration with the main countries of the «old Europe» – Germany and France. The Atlantic orientation of the Polish foreign policy was also visible in its criticism towards the European Security and Defense Policy (currently Common Security and Defense Policy). Poland declared its support for all action taken by European security institutions, nevertheless it estimated the concept of the ESDP was unclear; it could also undermine NATO's effectiveness and lead to a loosening of ties between the US and Europe in the security sphere.

This period in Polish foreign policy is over. With the entering to European Union and growing disappointment with the US (see below), Polish foreign policy underwent an intense process of «Europeanisation», which led to the idea that EU is the principal instrument and field of activity of Poland in international relations. At the same time the role of NATO is shrinking. The Polish population largely share this point of view. According to the *Transatlantic Trends 2013* Poles are more critical about NATO than European in general. 58 % of the latter and only 47 % of the former agree that NATO is «still essential» for their country's security.

Membership in NATO and relations with the US.

Strengthening of relations with the US was an important aim of the Polish foreign policy, including when it was entering NATO. In order to realize this aim Poland has engaged in several military missions led by the US and NATO. Just after its accession to the Alliance, it got involved into the intervention against Yugoslavia. Although the operation was launched without the mandate of the United Nations, Poland fully supported the American position that this «war for human rights» was legitimate due to the incompatibility of the international and UN law with the new challenges of the

instable international order. In particular Poland made a substantial contribution to the stabilization force in Kosovo (KFOR), supplying an army battalion (756 soldiers).

After September 11th Poland got also involved into the operation in Afghanistan. Until 2006 its contribution to ISAF was relatively small (about 100 soldiers), but then it grew considerably up 1200-strong contingent. Such decision stemmed from the conviction that the mission was of fundamental importance for NATO, its identity, its strength, its effectiveness, as well as from the belief that a strong NATO had a direct impact on Poland's security. The Polish contingent was a part of the American division, therefore its strategy and tactics were defined by the Americans. Poland opted for such solution to strengthen ties with US and to gain experience from working alongside the Americans.

In the first years of the 21st century Poland decided also to support the intervention in Iraq and to actively engage in the war against terrorism; in particular it probably hosted secret American prisons, where the presumable Al-Quaeda members were detained. In both cases the attitude of Poland was driven mainly by the will to strengthen Polish-American bonds; both activities also were realized outside the NATO framework.

The pro-American Polish policy, especially its engagement in the war in Iraq and the secret prisons contributed to the degradation of Poland's image on international arena and to the worsening of Poland's relations with its main EU partners, i.e. Germany and France. In 2003 the French president Jacques Chirac commenting on the support of the «new Europe» for George W. Bush policy in Iraq, said that these countries would have acted better «if they had shut up».

In contrary to Polish expectations, the close cooperation with the US and the engagement in American-led war did not brought any concrete economic benefits, almost no lucrative contracts that Poles had expected – despite direct lobbying led by the Polish leaders. The only exception was former Polish vice-prime minister Marek Belka (currently head of the Polish central bank) who in 2003–2004 directed the interim civil (mainly American) administration of Iraq, and then coordinates its economic policy.

An active engagement in the above mentioned conflicts brought some concrete, although limited military benefits, which shall be analyzed separately.

What is more, the pro-American option did not contribute to the strengthening of the Polish-American ties. It is rather the contrary. The policy of the Bush administration on Iraq, in particular its misleading statements on the presence of the weapons of mass destruction in that country led to the deterioration of US image in Poland. From 2002 to 2007 the support for US leadership in the world dropped in Poland by 24 %, from 64 % to 40 %.

Despite close Polish-American relations established at the beginning of the '90, Poland has remained one of few EU countries, whose citizens still need visas to travel to US. Together with such countries as Romania, Bulgaria or Turkey it is not covered by the Visa Waiver Program, which allows citizens of participating countries to travel to the United States without a visa for stays of 90 days or less, when they meet all requirements. This issues has been discussed several times on the highest level during

the Polish-American meetings. US politicians favorable to Poland had tried more than once to change that situation, until now – unsuccessfully. Undoubtedly, from the Polish point of view, the visa issue remains one of the most painful problems in the bilateral relations.

What is more, Poland will not host the elements of the American missile shield. The program was developed under the Bush administration. Officially it was supposed to protect US and some of their allies from attack from the «rogue states» such as Iran or North Korea. Nevertheless it was perceived also as potentially directed against Russia; that is why it was negatively received in that country. Also in Western Europe some feared the construction of the shield may weaken transatlantic ties and lead to intensified rivalry in the field of armaments. In Poland the vision of the presence of American installations were attractive for most of political forces. Under Obama administration the United States gave up the project of locating the elements of the shield in Central Europe (2009).

This decision together with the American «reset policy» towards Russia led to the fear that US was no more interested in this region of the world. In the same 2009 a group of Central European intellectuals, including former president of Poland Lech Wałęsa wrote an open letter to Barack Obama, declaring that «United States and Europe need to reinvest in the transatlantic relationship (...) the United States and Central and Eastern Europe must reconnect around a new and forward-looking agenda». They underlined in particular the need of NATO, although they claimed that the Alliance is not enough.

The membership in NATO and Polish military capabilities.

The cooperation with NATO within the *Partnership for Peace* program and later the accession to the Alliance led to the adoption by Poland of the NATO/Western politico-military standards in the field of security and defense. Through various trainings, exercises, maneuvers, and later military operations Polish army has become familiarized with NATO, its values, organization, style of work. The included in particular the introduction of the democratic control over the military forces, which only some years earlier, in the '80, had played a major role in the political life of the communist Poland.

Polish Army units participated in these three most important operations of the Alliance – in Bosnia and Herzegovina (SFOR) conducted in 1996–2004, in Kosovo (since 1999), and in Afghanistan. Nevertheless, in terms of number of soldiers, its contribution to effort of the Alliance never exceeded 4 %. It is also worth noting that Poland did not take part in the majority of smaller NATO missions, like anti-piracy operations in the Indian Ocean, as well as NATO assistance for African Union operations.

Nevertheless the membership in NATO allowed Polish soldiers to participate in real (not peacekeeping) operations – this concerns especially the mission in Afghanistan. Up to 28 thousand soldiers (Polish army counts some 100 000 soldiers) could improve their military capabilities in a very demanding environment. The participation in the NATO missions, once more in particular in Afghanistan,

demanding also the modernization of the military equipment, so it could be used in quasi open war conditions in Central Asia.

Nevertheless the engagement in Afghanistan led to 43 casualties (Americans lost more than 2100 people in that country). Such a heavy toll can be partially explained by the fact Poland has not imposed any restrictions on the use of its forces, while most of the Allies did. Therefore Poles have regularly participated in the most dangerous missions and more than once paid with their life.

The participation in the war in Afghanistan led to important costs. Poland has spent some 1,7 billion dollars on that mission. This money has not been completely lost, as most of it was spent on military equipment. Poland remains one of the few EU and NATO members, which despite the global economic crisis have not cut down the spending on defense. Such a situation can be explained both by the will to strengthen Polish position in the Western structures and its apprehension for its security.

Finally, it should be noted that the war in Afghanistan is negatively assessed by the Polish population. In 2012 62 % of Poles wanted to withdraw the troops from Afghanistan, while 55 % of the respondents tended to describe intervening in Afghanistan as a mistake and 54 % said they were pessimistic about the prospects of stability.

Poland and Ukraine–NATO relations.

Despite a growing lack of enthusiasm towards NATO, until 2010 Poland did continuously support the NATO enlargement policy, and in particular the efforts of the Ukrainian «orange team» to join the Alliance. Such a policy stemmed from four reasons.

First, it believes that the accession towards NATO would contribute to the democratization, modernization and stabilization of Ukraine. This way it would enhance security in the direct neighbourhood of Poland.

Second, the enlargement of NATO is still perceived as an element of the enlargement of the West. All the new EU member states have also entered NATO, so it can be assumed that these two processes are somehow interrelated.

Third, Poland still fears Russia and its expansionist policy. It expects Ukraine's accession to NATO would weaken Russia in the region, while strengthening the security of Poland.

Fourth the membership of Ukraine in NATO would contribute to the development of Polish-Ukrainian cooperation, especially in the defense area, as Poland is already a member of the Alliance.

It should be noted that these theses reflect the Polish interests and aims and maybe contradictory with those of Ukraine, especially as they have been defined by the ruling team in the law on the principles of Ukraine's domestic and foreign policy (2010) which states that Ukraine is a non-bloc state.

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ЧЛЕНСТВО ПОЛЬЩИ В НАТО: ПОЛІТИЧНІ ТА ВІЙСЬКОВІ АСПЕКТИ

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Після змін 1989 Польща вирішила вступити до НАТО, щоб захистити свою безпеку, залишити «сіру зону» між СНД та ЄС / НАТО і поширити співпрацю з США. Вступ до НАТО в 1999 році зміцнив її безпеку та позицію в західній спільноті, а також дозволив розвинути польський військовий потенціал. Відносини з США, проте залишаються в даний час неоднозначними.

Ключові слова: Польща, НАТО, безпеки, «сіра зона», Сполучені Штати Америки, військовий потенціал, Україна.

ПОЛИТИЧЕСКИЕ И ВОЕННЫЕ АСПЕКТЫ ЧЛЕНСТВА ПОЛЬШИ В НАТО

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После изменений 1989 Польша решила вступить в НАТО, чтобы защитить свою безопасность, оставить «серую зону» между СНГ и ЕС / НАТО и укрепить узы с США. Вступление в НАТО в 1999 году способствовало ее безопасности и позиции на Западе, а также позволил развить польской военной потенциал. Отношения с США, однако остаются в настоящее время неоднозначные.

Ключевые слова: Польша, НАТО, безопасности, «серая зона», Соединенные Штаты Америки, военный потенциал, Украина.