
Main problems of Russian-Polish relations

Igor Khraban * ^{1 A}; Volodymyr Grubov ^{2 B}; Mariia Rafalska ^{3 B};
Viacheslav Kolotov ^{3 C}

Corresponding author: ¹ Dr of Political Science, Professor, Chief researcher of the Scientific Research Centre, e-mail: khraban728@gmail.com, ORCID: 0000-0003-3319-8538

² Dr of Political Science, Leading Researcher at the Institute of International Relations, e-mail: grubovvm@gmail.com, ORCID: 0000-0002-3048-3280

³ Senior Teacher, e-mail: morafalsk@gmail.com, ORCID: 0009-0005-8584-4791

⁴ Assistant Professor, e-mail: khraban728@gmail.com, ORCID: 0000-0003-1072-6035

^A Military Institute Taras Shevchenko National University, Kyiv, Ukraine

^B Institute of International Relations, Taras Shevchenko University, Kyiv, Ukraine

^C Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv, Kyiv, Ukraine

Received: September 2, 2023 | **Revised:** September 21, 2023 | **Accepted:** September 30, 2023

DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.8400359

Abstract

The article has examined Poland's relations since the collapse of the Soviet Union. Moscow has always opposed Poland's policy of supporting independence and developing democracies in countries such as Ukraine or Georgia, and for this reason, relations between Poland and Russia have been tense and conflicting since the early 1990s. The new order in the international environment provided favorable conditions for domestic political changes but created new challenges and threats. The emergence of a united Germany (a European superpower) and Russia (a country with many domestic problems, pursuing a neo-imperial policy) in this environment has created a serious strategic challenge for Poland's foreign policy. These circumstances also raised an old dilemma regarding the geopolitical position of Poland between Germany and Russia. However, the biggest problems between the two countries have arrived since the beginning of the full-scale Russian-Ukrainian war and the active aid of Poland to Ukraine.

Key words: Ukraine, Republic of Poland, World War II, Eastern Europe, Russia, new foreign policy, Russian-Polish relations, European Union, Soviet Union.

Introduction

The object of research of this article is the foreign policy of Poland in the Eastern European direction. The subject is the formation of the foreign policy of the Republic of Poland after the collapse of the Soviet Union: Polish-Russian relations in general and during the full-scale Russian-Ukrainian war in particular. In the process of studying Polish-Russian relations in the late twentieth – early twentieth century, a number of methods of scientific knowledge has been used. For example, the historical method has been used in the study of the peculiarities of the formation of these relations after the collapse of the Soviet Union; the system-structural method of scientific research – in the analysis of the foreign policy directions of the Republic of Poland in relation to Russia and Ukraine; formal-logical method – used in the study of the peculiarities of the activities of Russia, Ukraine, and Poland in relation to the EU and NATO; comparative method – in the process of studying the formation and establishment of bilateral relations between the Russian Federation with the Republic of Poland.

Theoretical background

The analysis of the latest research and publications makes it possible to state that the general issues of the past and the present Ukrainian-Polish relations are reflected in several works of domestic and foreign politicians, political scientists, and military experts, but the current stage of their development is only being investigated. Among such specialists, we can name K. Pochsa, A. Golubeva, A. Noskova, Yu. Emelyanova, B. Balcerowicz, N. Buglaj, M. Celewicz, M. Januszkiewicz, A. Krampichowski, R. Kupetski, S. Sulowski, M. Tymovsky, J. Kenevich, E. Holzer E. and many others. Although the pre-independence stage of bilateral relations for Russia is covered comprehensively, the modern time of the development of relations requires further research.

Result and Discussion

Russian-Polish relations have never been simple. They have always been dominated by rivalry and mistrust.

1. Here, we can mention the Time of Troubles (1598-1613), when Poland actively participated in the struggle for the Moscow throne; Partitions of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in 1772, 1793, 1795, as a result of which a large part of Polish lands came under the occupation of the Russian Empire; the Soviet-Polish War of 1919-1920 – a military conflict between Poland, on the one hand, and the Russian Socialist Federal Republic; the Katyn massacre is the generalized name of the war crime, the mass execution of Polish citizens, carried out by the bodies of the NKVD of the USSR; The Smolensk tragedy – the plane crash of the Polish presidential plane near Smolensk on April 10, 2010, etc.

2. This attitude did not change during the Cold War when Poland was integrated into the so-called “Soviet bloc”. On the contrary, this historical experience has fueled new suspicions, adding ideological differences to the traditional Moscow-Warsaw geopolitical competition. From this point of view, the relations between Russia and Poland, of course, have characteristic features, and, of course, differ from relations with other countries in the region. Therefore, the very concept of a “new Europe”, developed after 1989, may be misleading, unable to cover a wider range of different geopolitical interests and attitudes towards Russia in the region.

3. The post-war borders of Central and Eastern Europe in 1945 were gradually demarcated by the leaders of the anti-German alliance during conferences in Tehran (1943), Yalta, and Potsdam (1945). Despite the fact that Poland was formally one of the victors of World War II, its eastern border was also changed according to the so-called Curzon line or along the Bug River. The eastern territories with the city of Vilno (Lithuanian Vilnius) and Ukrainian Lviv were excluded from the Polish borders.

4. Therefore, after 1945 post-war Poland faced the challenges of rebuilding the country in the conditions of border changes, massive material and human losses, and radical political and geopolitical changes. Moreover, international policy has strongly influenced Poland’s internal awareness, as was clearly evidenced by its participation in the Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia (1968). Besides, during the 1950s and 1960s, Poland’s foreign policy was characterized by its ideological, political, and military dependence on the Soviet Union. At the same time, the question of its western borders, which were largely governed by the recognition of the Oder-Neisse line by the Federal Republic of Germany (in 1970), also had an important impact.

5. In the period of its choice of Euro-Atlantic and European integration course, Warsaw saw Russia as a possible aggression as a threat at the time. In the last decade, Russophobia has been inherent in Polish political life. Both society and the political elite recognized Russia’s aggressive reputation with somewhat imperial ambitions. This is evidenced by the results of public opinion

polls in 1993 by the Polish daily *Gazeta Wyborcza*. When it was asked whether Russia posed a military threat to Poland, 70% said yes, 12% said it was difficult to answer and only 18% said no.

Poland's relations with Russian Federation have not been very good from the beginning. The 1990s can be considered a post-imperial phase of relations between the two countries. Russia's foreign policy was characterized by attempts to influence the processes of accession to NATO and the EU of new states in the region. Russia's refusal to accept Poland's accession to NATO has been present since the beginning of the Russian Federation's existence. This was confirmed by the visits of President Boris Yeltsin (1993) and two heads of Russian diplomacy: A. Kozyrev (1994) and E. Primakov (1996).

Russia's negative position on NATO enlargement to the East was natural, serious, and strategic. The main reason for Russia's negative attitude to NATO enlargement was that much of Central, much of Eastern Europe, and under certain conditions the Baltic states, fell out of Russia's traditional sphere of influence, which inevitably led to Russia's loss of Western influence, Western political theater, and Western operational space.

After the beginning of the war in Chechnya, the explosion of national patriotism, and the idea of restoring the USSR, and especially after the Communist Party's victory in parliamentary elections, many Central-Eastern Europe (CEE) countries began to demand NATO's eastward movement, seeing this as the only guarantee of national independence.

But after hesitation, NATO leaders decided that it was better to expand NATO to the East now that Russia was weakened than to oppose CEE and possibly would face instability in the region later.

On August 25, 1993, in Warsaw, Presidents B. Yeltsin and L. Walesa signed a Joint Polish-Russian Declaration stating that Poland's entry into NATO did not contradict the interests of the Russian Federation. B. Yeltsin spoke in the same vein at press conferences a day later in Prague and Bratislava. On September 30, the leaders of the United States, Britain, France, and Germany received a letter from B. Yeltsin disagreeing with the admission of CEE countries to NATO and proposing to provide joint security guarantees to them from Russia and NATO. This was a turning point in the situation – President Yeltsin's message to Western leaders set out the reasons why Russia objected to CEE membership to enter NATO. Russia's position on this issue was first set out in detail in a report published in late November 1993 by the Foreign Intelligence Service "Prospects for NATO enlargement and Russia's interests" (Tomashevych O., 2003: 1, 64-67).

Poland approved its choice at the Paris Summit in 1997, where Russia agreed to expand NATO to the East. Thereby the distance between NATO and Russia has reduced. According to the Russia-NATO agreement, the allies undertook not to deploy troops along the Russian border, including on Polish territory, on a permanent basis. Realizing the irreversibility of NATO's enlargement process, Russia in 1997 switched to the implementation of anti-NATO policy, the main components of which could be considered "efforts to unite Eastern countries, such as China, Iran, India, on a common anti-American platform; using some differences between leading NATO countries, including France and Germany with the United States, to meet their demands; creation of a protective facade, which would include Belarus, Moldova, Ukraine and the Kaliningrad region of the Russian Federation (Smolyanyuk V., 2010: 2, 163-165).

The rotations in the Polish government, culminating in the formation in February 1996 of a center-left government led by Włodzimierz Cimoszewicz, which was serious about building trade and economic cooperation with Moscow, had a positive effect after the beginning of the war in Chechnya, the explosion of national patriotism and the idea of restoring the USSR, and especially after the Communist Party's victory in parliamentary elections, many CEE countries began to demand NATO's eastward movement, seeing this as the only guarantee of national independence.

Let's remind that the largest gas contract in the history of the two countries, worth \$ 25 billion, signed in September 1996, provided 250 billion cubic meters of supply of gas to Poland over 25 years. (Buglay N., 2017:3, 152-153).

A painful and still unresolved issue remains the Katyn events. In April-May 1940 the Soviet special services shot there about 22,000 captured Poles, most of whom were officers. The Soviet investigation after World War II blamed the Germans. An investigation by the General Military Prosecutor's Office of the RP in 2004 found that the People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs (NKVD) of the USSR was guilty of making unreasonable death sentences for 14,542 Polish citizens and established the death of 1,803 people. In 2010, the State Duma (Russian parliament) of the Russian Federation adopted a statement "On the Katyn tragedy and its victims", in which it acknowledged that the shootings were carried out on the direct instructions of J. Stalin. In 2012, the European Court of Human Rights classified the Katyn shooting as a war crime.

The next controversial issue is the tragedy near Smolensk and the death of Polish President Lech Kaczynski, who just flew onto the anniversary of the Katyn tragedy. For 8 years, the Polish side has been trying to investigate this tragedy, as a result of which Russian air traffic controllers are accused of deliberately bringing the crew of the Tu-154M presidential plane to a plane crash.

For the first time, the Russian Federation (RF) was mentioned separately in the 2007 Strategy, in particular in the context of Poland's energy dependence. It was noted that the Russian Federation, taking advantage of the acute situation in the energy market, is actively strengthening its position, including in the interregional resource market (Piliaiev I., 2016: 4, 132).

Poland's National Energy Strategy to 2030, adopted in 2008, has set an ambitious goal of expanding the use of renewable energy sources, diversifying natural gas supply routes, and developing nuclear energy. According to this document, one of the priorities in international energy cooperation is the "integration of energy, including electricity with the Baltic States (Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia)". The construction of an LNG terminal and the signing of a long-term contract with Qatar for liquefied gas supplies, the integration of Poland's gas transmission system with the relevant systems of Germany, the Czech Republic, and Slovakia, and the development of shale deposits were components of reducing energy dependence on Russia.

After the beginning of the financial and economic crisis in 2007, European countries, joined by Poland, began demanding that Russia reduce gas prices, but Russia insisted on compliance with the terms of the contracts. Poland driven by the need for diversification has announced its intention to extract shale gas and build a terminal to receive liquefied natural gas from Qatar. For shale gas production, she invited the US company to conduct field exploration, which showed the economic inefficiency of production. At that time Poland was receiving about two-thirds of its gas from Russia and was seeking to find alternative sources for national security reasons. Purchasing gas from the United States will help diversify energy supplies and strengthen energy security.

The defining stage in Polish-Russian relations was Poland's condemnation of Russia's aggressive policy toward Ukraine. It should be emphasized that Poland became the first NATO country to amend its legal documents, defining Russia's policy towards Ukraine as a threat to its own national security. It should be noted that NATO was aware of Russia's aggressive policy as a threat to peace and stability in the world. This is confirmed by the relevant response of the Alliance to the conduct in August-September 2017, united by design and on a single operational background, operational, combat, and mobilization training on a national scale – Strategic Command and Staff Training (SCST) of the Russian Federation (RF) Armed Forces. One of the stages of the training was the joint strategic exercise (JSE) of the armed forces of Russia and Belarus "West-2021", the active phase of which took place on September 10-16, 2017. About 200,000 military personnel, more than 80 planes and helicopters, and up to 760 units of military equipment, including more than 290 tanks,

more than 240 guns, rocket launchers and mortars, as well as up to 15 ships, were participating in the exercises. (*WEST*, 2021: 5).

The modern Russian “historical narrative” about Polish-Russian relations and the assessment of Polish policy are clearly negative. However, it should be noted that in the first decade of the twenty-first century, attempts were made to understand the complexity of this relationship – a noble effort, believing that they took place under the most difficult circumstances in the history of Polish-Russian relations throughout the twentieth century. As a result of research conducted by Polish and Russian historians, in 2010 a work was published (almost 900 pages) edited by the joint efforts of Rotfeld and Turkunov and entitled “White spots – black spots. Difficult issues of Polish-Russian relations, 1918-2008”. (Polish Institute of International Relations, Warsaw, 2010) (*Rotfeld D.*, 2010: 6).

In 2010, it seemed possible to reach an agreement between Poland and Russia on even the most vulnerable issues, which for decades had symbolized Soviet denials and persisted in the new Russia, one of Stalinism’s most brutal crimes – the massacre of Polish prisoners of war which took place in 1940 in Katyn. But despite Russian leaders taking a real turn in the 1940s – an important breakthrough in itself – the shadow of the Katyn celebrations in 2010 was overshadowed by a plane crash near Smolensk involving then-Polish President L. Kaczynski and 95 members of the Polish political elite were killed.

Therefore, at the beginning of the second decade of the XXI century, in the specific context of the Ukrainian crisis started by the pro-European Maidan revolution in 2013, Russia officially and strongly denied any attempts to be open – in the sphere of historical policy – returning to traditional interpretations of the Polish-Russian relations, which marked the Soviet era. Rydel points to Poland’s attempts to maintain a dialogue on a jointly recognized historical policy, emphasizing that the so-called reset in Polish-Russian relations should also include historical policy. The Polish scientist reminds us that in 2009 a successful Polish-Russian-German conference on the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact took place. In the same year V. Putin was the guest of honor at the Polish celebrations of the 70th anniversary of the beginning of World War II, and in 2011 the Polish parliament decided to establish a Center for Polish-Russian Dialogue and Understanding. Finally, in an attempt to repeat the formula “forgive and ask for forgiveness”, the President of the Polish Episcopal Conference, Archbishop Michalyk, and Moscow Patriarch Kirill in 2012 signed a joint Message to the Polish and Russian nations. Despite these attempts at reconciliation – especially with regard to a common, difficult history – current political developments placing Poland and Russia on opposite sides of geopolitical disputes have effectively led to the abolition of all such joint activities. Moreover, according to Rotfeld: “the goal was not achieved because they said the religious act was prepared in accordance with a clear political order, and “the Message” was signed in circumstances more appropriate to an international agreement than an act of goodwill and reflexive conscience” (*Rotfeld D.*, 2010: 6).

Pelczynska-Nałęcz, the former Polish ambassador to Russia (2014-2016), told in the 2010s that Polish-Russian relations have become very difficult. She has listed the reasons for the sharp cooling of relations between Moscow and Warsaw. According to her words: “First, we have a fundamental difference of interests, first of all, a different perception of the war in Ukraine. We see this war as a security threat, and Russia as a source of that threat. Secondly, Russia’s views on history are unacceptable to Poland. Finally, the Russian side has lost interest in any constructive efforts to build relations with Poland” (*Pelczynska-Nalencz*, 2015: 7).

In the opinion of Piekło, the ambassador of Poland to Ukraine from 2016-2019, today we can confidently say about an important lesson from the Smolensk catastrophe for Poles – Putin’s Russia cannot be trusted. “We have learned what Ukraine is constantly learning. Putin’s Russia is not and cannot be a partner for democracies. And it can never be trusted. Moscow has not yet returned the

remains of the Polish presidential plane to Poland. There is still no answer to the questions asked by Polish prosecutors". According to him, Russia is slowing down the investigation into the causes of the Smolensk crash, using methods similar to those it uses to investigate the circumstances of the downing of a Malaysian Boeing in the skies over Donbas.

Pieklo notes that today Polish-Russian relations are minimized. He considered the cancellation of the visit of the Polish delegation to Russia on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the Smolensk catastrophe – a vivid illustration of the state of bilateral relations (Russia cannot be trusted: 8).

Now, the American side and the EU leadership under its influence have only established the need to continue/strengthen Russia's policy of strategic deterrence (based on the principle of confrontation). The tactics of Russia's concessions and taking into account its geopolitical interests in exchange for resolving the conflict in eastern Ukraine and resolving other international security issues are not considered acceptable by the West in the short term.

A sign of the collapse of a common historical policy based on the principle of Polish-Russian reconciliation and forgiveness was, among other things, Russia's return to the traditional – that is, Soviet or even Stalinist – geopolitical interpretation of Ribbentrop's origins and consequences. The Molotov Pact of August 23, 1939, which resulted in the Soviet Union with the Third Reich (1939-1941), meant for the Poles the invasion of the Red Army on September 17, 1939, and the "fourth partition" of Polish territories, leaving the Polish East under Soviet control.

While Western Europe, as well as Poland, does not deny the Soviet Union's contribution to the victory over the Third Reich, the interpretation of the origins of the world conflict, especially the modern Russian view of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, is controversial and sometimes fierce. In March 2015, Polish historians strongly criticized the wording of a joint German-Russian history textbook on the 21st century, which reaffirmed the former Soviet thesis of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, stating that in 1939 Stalin "had no choice but to enter into a pact with Hitler". Kaminski, president of the Institute of National Remembrance, expressed a critical view of Russia's position on this issue, telling the portal of interia.pl that "attempts to falsify such facts are very worrying". In this context, it seems important to quote Snyder, who argued that "Russia's historical policy" is directly related to its foreign policy aimed at destabilizing the international order.

"Our country now has the worst relations with Poland since the end of World War II" – Russian Ambassador to Poland Andreev said in an interview with the RosBusinessConsulting TV channel.

"Our opponents are constantly trying to retroactively replay history, adjust its interpretation to the demands of the current political environment: they believe that since relations with Russia are now bad, it means that the role of our country in history should be portrayed exclusively in a negative way. And this is done in order to weaken the international positions of modern Russia. The decisive role of the Soviet Union in the victory over fascism in World War II is the most important milestone in our history, which is most directly related to the present. The entire post-war system of international relations, and international law, based on the UN Charter, was formed on the basis of the results of the Second World War. The Soviet Union rightfully took the place of one of the main victorious powers in this system, and Russia inherited this place as a state – the successor of the USSR.

Now they are trying to promote the concept according to which it turns out that in World War II there were democratic states on one side of the confrontation, including Poland (although reorganized Poland in the pre-war period could hardly be considered a democratic state), and on the other – totalitarian regimes. In this situation, the USSR is put "on the same level" as Nazi Germany, its decisive contribution to the victory over fascism is devalued, and the main thing is that Nazi Germany was opposed by Western democracies – they are supposedly the real winners.

Only in reality, it was not so. Perhaps some Western European countries, which were subjected to German aggression, “only” lost their freedom. But both for our country and for Poland the question of life and death, national survival was being resolved. And as a result, the European countries occupied by Germany were obliged for their independence to a decisive degree to the “undemocratic” USSR, which, however, unlike other victims of German aggression – both democratic and not so – was ready to fight to the death for its freedom and independence, and at the same time – it just so happened – brought liberation to other European countries, where now they do not like to remember this” – the ambassador declared (Pieklo: 8).

Poland insists that when the current Russian authorities talk about the role of the USSR as the “liberator” of Europe, they are ignoring the fact that until 1941 Moscow participated in the partition of the continent along with Berlin. These two countries, the USSR and Germany, are responsible for the outbreak of World War II. According to this version, the statement that the USSR “liberated” Europe is a communist-imposed narrative, and Poland could not present its version of events until 1989 – the fall of the communist regime in the country.

It is recalled that in the early 2000s, when Russia’s relations with Poland softened, in 2002 the countries agreed to create a Russian-Polish group on complex issues. The historians and political scientists who entered it were supposed to discuss and understand the main problems of Russian-Polish relations arising from history. The group has published two books: *The Crisis of 1939 and White Spots – Black Spots*. Now, due to difficult relations between the countries, its work has been suspended after the aggressive policy of the Russian Federation against Ukraine.

As Andreev said, “There are absolutely no plans to resume the work of the group. It is pointless. It so happened that all the discussion of historical issues between us before was reduced to constant, persistent, repeated attempts by the Polish side to induce us to admit its correctness and our all sorts of sins towards Poland. We don’t need it. And in the current situation – after the massive demolition of monuments to Soviet soldiers-liberators in Poland, when the very fact of the liberation of Poland by the Red Army is denied – we simply do not have any common platform for discussing historical topics within the framework of political dialogue” (*Relations with Poland*, 2021: 9).

The decision taken at the 2014 summit EU in Brussels to appoint Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk as President of the European Council was important and seemed to signal a strong EU position against Moscow. It should also be remembered that the same meeting of EU heads of states and governments confirmed the line of “geopolitical balance”, calling on the two shores of the European continent (the Baltic Sea and the Mediterranean) to complement each other rather than compete.

Poland, as a member of the EU and NATO, has clearly supported the new Ukrainian leadership which appeared after the Maidan. The Polish government did not accept the annexation of Crimea, and even the Polish press and television, reporting on the war in Ukraine, denied – especially in the summer of 2014 – Russia’s military presence in southeastern Ukraine and its support for the self-proclaimed Donetsk and Lugansk republics. The war in accordance with the ceasefire agreements in Minsk through the President of Belarus Lukashenko was to conclude. In particular, the so-called “Norman format” was used during the talks started in Minsk. In fact, the celebration of the 70th anniversary of the Allied landings in Normandy in 1944 provided an opportunity to involve France, Germany, Russia, and Ukraine in discussing possible solutions to the crisis.

At that stage, it was necessary to appreciate the goals of Russian policy, which became sharply anti-Western in late 2013, and even more so in 2014. Evidence of this dynamic related to the so-called Eurasian Union, a project that was strongly supported by Putin’s entourage. According to that union, Russia would not be a simple regional state, but a world superpower, as in Soviet times. It should be added that from Putin’s ideological point of view, such a worldview was very

close to the nationalist view and was symbolized by the Kremlin's alliance with the Orthodox Church – a seemingly geopolitical attempt to reconstruct "Great Russia".

The political scientists claimed that the Smolensk catastrophe was only an element of this cooling, which is not the most important today.

Since the beginning of the full-scale aggression against Ukraine, Poland has been one of our most consistent and reliable partners. And it is not surprising that Ukrainian-Polish relations have become one of the main directions of information and psychological special operations for Russia.

Today, Poland does not hesitate to help Ukraine with weapons and humanitarian projects, it was among the first to refuse Russian gas, and, in the economic crisis, it supported millions of Ukrainian refugees (more than 1 million). The leadership of this country traveled to Kyiv despite the rocket attacks and is looking for ways to help the Ukrainian economy in wartime conditions.

To promote the narratives needed by the Kremlin, the so-called "information throws" are used, i.e. dissemination of specially prepared disinformation and manipulative "news" through available resources. When preparing them, the Russians use both official statements of representatives of the Polish and Ukrainian authorities in the appropriate interpretation, as well as outright fakes.

To achieve the maximum psychological effect, propagandists refer to Polish "experts" and politicians of nationalist views and representatives of Polish radical groups. Publications, depending on the target audience, are translated into Ukrainian, Polish, and other languages and are simultaneously distributed by controlled mass media and social networks, where they are commented in the right direction with the help of the "troll factory".

During the months of the war, the main message of the "Polish" case of Russian propaganda is the assertion that the leadership of Poland, under various pretexts, seeks to occupy the western part of Ukraine. The main "throw" over this period were the following:

– information "throw". Poland plans to occupy a part of Ukraine, introducing a peacekeeping contingent to its territory.

In reality. On March 16, 2022, the Minister of Defense of Poland M. Blaszczak did indeed present the project of creating a peacekeeping mission in Ukraine at a meeting of NATO defense ministers in Brussels. However, the contingent was to consist not only of Poles, but also of various NATO member countries representatives, and the project did not foresee the occupation of Ukrainian territories, but was intended to send a clear signal to Putin that NATO did not agree with the war crimes of the Russian Federation. After the refusal of the General Secretary of the Alliance Ye. Stoltenberg to send a peacekeeping contingent to Ukraine, the Polish side did not make any more similar statements;

– information "throw". The law of Ukraine on the special status of Poles in Ukraine legalizes the takeover of Ukraine by Poles and enables Polish citizens to integrate themselves into the Ukrainian government and promote laws and decisions beneficial to Poland.

In reality. The Law "On Establishing Legal and Social Guarantees for Citizens of the Republic of Poland Staying in the Territory of Ukraine" is a response to a similar Polish law on assistance to citizens of Ukraine, which simplified legal residence, employment, education, medical care and social guarantees for Ukrainian refugees. So, we are talking about a mirror step, and not about unilateral concessions by Ukraine in favor of Poland. The document only regulates the rules for the stay of Polish citizens in Ukraine, it does not contain a clause that allows Poles to hold government positions;

– information "throw". In September 2022, pro-Russian social media circulated photos of referendum ballots in which residents of the Lviv region are asked whether they support the region's inclusion in Poland. The authors of the news claimed that such "referendums" could soon be initiated by Hungary and Romania.

In reality. On September 28, S. Zharyn, the government commissioner for the security of the information space of Poland, proved irrefutable evidence of the forgery of “photo evidence”;

– information “throw”. On July 9, 2022, fake information was being spread online that the government of Ukraine has allegedly approved a resolution according to which Poland received the right to issue passports to citizens of Ukraine, and therefore the “levers of governance” in Ukraine continue gradually pass to Poland;

In reality. According to the legislation of Ukraine, citizens can issue ID cards and foreign passports only in state institutions of Ukraine. Passports are issued outside of Ukraine by the Document SE unit, which is subordinated to the State Migration Service of Ukraine, not the Polish government;

– information “throw”. Poland has launched a program of “policing” Ukraine – Polish language lessons are being introduced in Ukrainian schools.

In reality. As Deputy Prime Minister of Ukraine I. Vereshchuk stated, the possibility of Ukrainians getting an education in Poland and Poles in Ukraine was discussed at a meeting in January 2023. However, this is only a proposal aimed at learning the languages of neighboring countries for the integration of Ukrainians into the European space, and there are no reasons to talk about the “policing” of Ukrainians.

– information “throw”. On November 14, 2022, fake information appeared in mass media sources about the return of “its territories” by Poland with the help of Polish peacekeepers, but the latter were replaced by Polish mercenaries who supposedly fight for Ukraine.

In reality. Although there are Polish volunteers in the foreign legion of the Ukrainian army, it is a relatively small number of people who, even if they wanted to, would not be able to “take control” of entire regions. However, the Russian audience does not understand this, because it has been lied to for months that “mostly foreign mercenaries” are fighting on the side of Ukraine, etc.

Outright fakes about Poland’s aggressive intentions are part of a targeted Russian disinformation campaign to discredit the strategic partnership between the countries and reduce the level of support for Ukraine by the Polish authorities and society. Despite the efforts of propagandists, Poland remains one of the most consistent and reliable partner of Ukraine (*Як Росія намагається, 2023, 10*).

It is worth noting that as of March 2022, about a thousand Russian companies were working in Poland and Russia’s foreign direct investment in Poland amounted to about 1.1 billion Polish zlotys, and already on April 26, 2022, the Polish government imposed sanctions against 33 companies. The list of sanctioned companies includes Polish and foreign companies that are connected or owned by Russian persons and that are considered connected to the Russian government. These companies are prohibited from any participation in public tenders in Poland. These companies are of key importance for the economic strategy of the Russian government, providing it with a significant source of income in the context of the invasion of Ukraine.

Of the more than 1,100 Western companies that announced plans to limit their operations in Russia in 2022, a quarter came from Poland.

According to data collected by the KSE Institute, in 2021, 50 Polish companies (with a capital share of 50+%) employed at least 4,688 people in Russia, these companies received \$1.7 billion in annual revenue, paid \$23 million in taxes, and had \$923 million in capital and \$1.2 billion in assets.

2 companies (4% of the total), which generated ~ 43% of revenue, completely left the Russian market and sold their shares, 32 companies (64% of the 50 observed companies) announced plans to leave Russia or suspended their activities in this country, in 2021, they employed 400 people (it should be noted that many companies are trading and do not have staff or offices in the country), they received \$197 million (12%) in annual revenue, had \$18 million in capital and \$73 million in assets. Only some Polish companies (at least 4 or 8% of the total) are

still staying, and 12 companies (24%) are waiting and limiting their investments. These 2 groups generated a fairly significant part of the revenue (\$777 million or 45%) received by Polish companies in Russia and employed 74% of all personnel (Хто справжній друг, 2023: 2023, 11).

Thus, at the present stage, the basis of Polish geopolitical strategy is the following important principles:

- Poland, as a religious missionary, must ensure the protection of the values of Catholicism;
- the main goal of Polish foreign policy is the democratization of the eastern neighbors;
- the country is an eternal “victim” of Russia.

According to this, we can consider the most important foreign policy tasks of Poland:

– weakening Russia’s geopolitical position, preventing its transformation into a great power by means of the final separation of Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova, the countries of the South Caucasus, their entry into NATO and the EU;

- weakening the influence of the Russian Federation in Central Asia;
- diversification of energy supplies to Poland and the EU bypassing Russia from the Caspian region through the countries of Central Asia, Georgia, and Ukraine;
- creation of a separate economic zone in the East, expansion of markets for Polish goods, and enlargement of presence in these countries through direct investments (Antonyuk N, 2014: 12, 57).

Thus, we can conclude that in foreign policy Poland after 1989 faced serious challenges. On the one hand, it was a question of restoring independence and freedom. The possibility of pursuing one’s own sovereign foreign policy was envisaged. On the other hand, there was a fundamental turn in Poland’s foreign policy. It freed itself from the imposed subordination of the Eastern bloc and independently chose interdependence with Euro-Atlantic structures, dictated its own standards, but did not restrict the freedom of domestic and foreign policy. Therefore, it was possible to combine independence with a strategic orientation to the West through integration with the European Union and NATO.

Thereby, it was possible to combine independence with a strategic orientation to the West through integration with the European Union and NATO.

However, there was no absolute consensus in the current discussions on this issue. Poland, due to its potential and geopolitical position, was unable to provide external security for itself and create favorable external conditions for its own development. This meant the need for an effective, stable, and responsible foreign policy. Proper implementation of foreign policy required political stability, domestic political consensus on strategic goals and directions, as well as the provision of appropriate material resources for its realization, as well as greater use of the intellectual potential of Polish universities.

The changes in Central and Eastern Europe that began in Poland in 1989 led to the collapse of the Soviet bloc and became one of the reasons for the collapse of the USSR in 1991. The Soviet Union was transformed into the Russian Federation and a number of newly independent states (including Baltic states, Ukraine, and Belarus), which became Poland’s neighbors. The Russian Federation shared a border (in the northeast) with Poland: the so-called Kaliningrad enclave. Since 2004, Poland’s eastern border has also become an important part of the European Union’s new eastern borders.

The government of Donald Tusk – who was Poland’s prime minister from 2007-2014 tried to adopt a policy of “thaw” or “reset” in relations with Russia.

In addition to the disgust of Polish politicians with the “thaw” in relations with Russia, there are and remain objective geopolitical causes of the conflict between Poland and Russia. These reasons include, in particular, the historical difficulties that bind Poland, Ukraine, and Russia, as well as energy security issues, and finally Poland’s role in preparing it for active EU and NATO membership. This list has recently increased due to Poland’s support for Ukraine during the Maidan

and after the fall of Viktor Yanukovich's regime. In addition, Poland has provided political support to Ukrainians in the context of Russia's occupation of Crimea and the military conflict with so-called "pro-Russian insurgents" in southeastern Ukraine.

It should be emphasized that the Ukrainian Maidan (2013-14) caused a rather radical change in the attitude of the Polish government, including Prime Minister Tusk and his Foreign Minister Sikorski, towards Russia and Putin. Mutual accusations and the use of Cold War language were heard in both Moscow and Warsaw.

Since 2014, Poland has focused its efforts on strengthening its security policy. One of the first NATO members to react to the changing international situation as a result of the Ukrainian-Russian conflict and take this into account in the development of a new Security Strategy in 2014 (Strategia, 2014: 13).

Today, Poland's defense budget is 1.8 % of GDP, one of the highest in Europe. The Polish government planned to increase this figure to 2 % starting in 2016, but this decision was postponed. The main pillars of Polish foreign and military policy are participation in NATO, and the EU, cooperation with the United States, and participation in regional and global organizations such as the OSCE, the Visegrad Group, and the United Nations.

Conclusions

Even a brief overview of Polish-Russian relations, both past and present, shows their complexity and ambiguity. This relationship also seems burdened by an element of unpredictability, and perhaps even some fatalism. Characteristically, short periods of "reconciliation" or "thaw" have always been accompanied by much longer periods of non-cooperation, resentment, hatred, and armed conflict. Undoubtedly, the most important factors that negatively determine modern Polish-Russian relations should be attributed to geopolitics.

For Poland, "one of the key issues related to the further expansion of Euro-Atlantic structures to the East is the general relations between Russia and the United States and the European Union, with a special focus on satellite countries. In this context, it is not surprising that Poland has taken an active position on the events in Ukraine, in particular its negative assessment of Russia's actions in Crimea and Donbas. Events in Ukraine are not perceived in Poland as part of NATO's strategy to "disintegrate Russia". On the contrary, in Poland, the conflict is seen as a sign of Russian expansionism, and the annexation of the Crimean Peninsula is an unprecedented forced change of border lines established in Europe after 1945. Despite the best intentions of those in Poland and Russia who want to improve mutual relations, despite the awareness of the importance of Russia as a great power with a unique identity and significant cultural heritage, modern realities cannot lead to positive conclusions, especially in the context of the dispute over of Ukraine in 2014-2021.

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