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Poland's road to NATO – objective and subjective obstacles

Droga Polski do NATO – przeszkody obiektywne i subiektywne

Summary: The paper describes the Polish road to NATO which, contrary to the West's expectations and promises, was long and bumpy. The author presents and analyses various obstacles that hindered Polish accession to NATO. The author divides such challenges into objective and subjective barriers, but using other criteria, the author points to specific geopolitical, international, political, social, and military conditions. Furthermore, the author presents the stances of different countries on the enlargement of the North Atlantic Alliance after the Cold War, particularly the attitudes of the USA, Germany, France, the USSR, and Russia as these states were either more or less supportive of Polish efforts to join NATO or not supportive at all. In 1989-1999 the Alliance's position was slowly evolving from being initially unwilling to support Poland's accession to NATO to being sympathetic towards it.

In the paper, the author poses a few research questions on the above-mentioned obstacles on the Polish road to NATO and a few theses and hypotheses. The author states that primarily the USSR, later the Russian Federation, was against Poland's accession to NATO. Initially, the West also opposed it. After 1989, its priority was to reunite Germany and stabilize military relations with Moscow through the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE) and the elimination of Soviet military bases in post-communist countries of Central and Eastern Europe.

Keywords: Poland, NATO, the North Atlantic Alliance, accession, Russia, the West

Streszczenie: Artykuł ukazuje drogę Polski do NATO, która wbrew wcześniejszym oczekiwaniom i obietnicom Zachodu była długa i trudna do pokonania. Przedstawiam i analizuję tutaj różne bariery, które utrudniały akcesję Polski do NATO. Ogólnie bariery te dzielę na obiektywne i subiektywne, ale stosując inne kryteria, wskazuję również na konkretne uwarunkowania, m.in. geopolityczne, międzynarodowe, polityczne, społeczne i wojskowe. Ponadto ukazuję stanowiska poszczególnych państw wobec rozszerzania Sojuszu Północnoatlantyckiego po zakończeniu zimnej wojny, zwłaszcza Stanów Zjednoczo-

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nych, Niemiec, Francji, Związku Radzieckiego i Rosji, które mniej lub bardziej aktywnie wspierały starania Polski o członkostwo w NATO lub były im przeciwnie. W latach 1989-1999 powoli ewoluowało też stanowisko samego Sojuszu, od początkowo nieprzychylnego do wspierającego akcesję Polski do NATO. W niniejszym artykule stawiam kilka pytań badawczych dotyczących wspomnianych barier na drodze Polski do NATO oraz kilka tez i hipotez. Między innymi stwierdzam, że przeciwny akcesji Polski do Sojuszu Północnoatlantyckiego był przede wszystkim Związek Radziecki, a następnie Federacja Rosyjska, ale początkowo również Zachód, dla którego priorytetem po 1989 roku było zjednoczenie Niemiec oraz stabilizacja relacji wojskowych z Moskwą poprzez zawarcie porozumienia o redukcji konwencjonalnych sił zbrojnych (CFE) i likwidacji radzieckich baz wojskowych w postkomunistycznych krajach Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej.

Słowa kluczowe: Polska, NATO, Pakt Północnoatlantycki, akcesja, Rosja, Zachód

Introduction

The North Atlantic Alliance was established 73 years ago on 4 April 1949 on the initiative of the United States when the Cold War and threats of the outbreak of World War III were intensifying, which was driven by the imperialist policy of the Soviet Union. The Alliance was formed by Western countries and simultaneously became its first line of defence during the Cold War. It was protecting democratic values and principles shared by the countries of the so-called Atlantic community, namely the Alliance, which linked the USA and Western Europe. In the time of the Cold War, it was a pivotal tool to hold back and intimidate the Soviet Union; at the same time, it fulfilled an essential function in the global security and peace system.

The victory of the West in the Cold War confrontation with the East was the beginning of a new stage in international relations. The collapse of the Yalta-Potsdam order opened the door for the international community to broad development prospects and an opportunity to build a new democratic and peaceful global order. However, the transition from the Cold War to the new global order entailed brand new challenges and threats for international security. The Alliance was able to adjust to a unique situation and meet its members' needs for the security and had a stabilizing impact on the surrounding. It was supported by the successful transformation of NATO, which was expressed in its openness to new members (including countries that were former members of the Warsaw Pact) establishing cooperation with Russia and other countries of the former Soviet bloc, and

courage to conduct strenuous, sometimes controversial and flawed stabilization operations beyond the area of the Treaty¹.

After 73 years of its existence, it can be stated that the Alliance has fulfilled its task. Together with the UN, it prevented the outbreak of World War III and is still capable of preventing potential armed conflicts and contributes to their resolution. It should be emphasized that after the collapse of communism at the turn of the 21st century, despite expectations, the world has not become safer. There have been various threats, ranging from asymmetric ones, including international terrorism, to non-military ones, e.g. energy security. Besides that, there have been global geopolitical changes with unpredictable implications relating to NATO members' safety and international security².

Poland joined the Alliance 50 years after it was founded on 12 March 1999; however, our road to NATO was not easy or straightforward. It was overlong and full of different obstacles. After World War II, Poland ended up behind the "iron curtain" in the so-called Eastern bloc with the Soviet Union at its head. It was not until the collapse of the bloc in 1989-1991 that Poland could apply for membership in the alliance of sovereign and democratic states. Poland began its efforts to join NATO in autumn 1989 with the appointment of the non-communist cabinet of Prime Minister Tadeusz Mazowiecki. Ten years later, Poland signed the Washington Treaty, under which Poland became a member of NATO.

The questions that arise include, Why did the process of Poland's accession to NATO take so long? What were the objective and subjective reasons that stunted the process? Who was and who was not supportive of our membership of NATO? The author attempts to answer these questions in the article. The author puts forward some accurate hypotheses and theses forward. The author argues that first and foremost, it was the Soviet Union that was against Poland joining the North Atlantic Treaty but also the West as after 1989, the priority was to reunite Germany and stabilize military relations with Moscow

1 70 lat Sojuszu Północnoatlantyckiego. *Geneza, stan obecny i perspektywy*, Warsaw 2021; R. Asmus, *NATO – otwarcie drzwi*, J.M. Fiszer (ed.), Warsaw 2000; Authors team, *Nowa koncepcja strategii Sojuszu Północnoatlantyckiego 2010. Nasza propozycja*, Cracow–Warsaw 2010, p. 5.

2 R. Cziomer, *NATO w systemie bezpieczeństwa europejskiego*, Cracow 1999; J. Kaczmarek, *NATO w systemie bezpieczeństwa świata*, Wrocław 1998; R. Kupiecki, *NATO u progu XXI w.*, Warsaw 2000.

through the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE). As early as January 1990, Hans-Dietrich Genscher, the federal minister of foreign affairs in West Germany, stated that NATO should not expand to the East. France, NATO, the USA, and the Soviet Union had a similar attitude³.

Moreover, the author believes that the tense international situation in Europe and the process of system transformation in Poland greatly impacted Poland's accession to NATO. It began with the Polish Round Table Agreement⁴ between the communist authority and the leaders of the democratic opposition⁵. From 1989, the Polish system transformation combined radicalism, which is typical of revolution, with evolutionary changes that were controlled by both the opposition and the government. Both sides took into account the internal and international situations. Such a combination was a mixture of revolutionary and evolutionary changes, transformation, and reforms of controlled and uncontrolled processes. The symbolic, bloodless transition from the Polish People's Republic (PRL) to the Republic of Poland (the Third Polish Republic) in December 1989 and the Constitution's amendment began a new period in the history of the Polish nation and state. There are numerous books dedicated to this issue with the pages of various, often eclectic hypotheses and assessments of system transformation in Poland after 1989⁶.

- 3 R. Kupiecki, *Stopniowa rewolucja. Krzysztof Skubiszewski i początki polskiej drogi do NATO*, [in:] *Dziedzictwo Krzysztofa Skubiszewskiego w polityce zagranicznej RP*, A. Bieńczyk-Missala, R. Kuźniar (eds.), Warsaw 2020, pp. 111-150; R. Kupiecki, „Mit założycielski” polityki zagranicznej Rosji, „Sprawy Międzynarodowe” 2019, vol. 72, no. 4, p. 97.
- 4 The Polish Round Table Talks took place on 6 February – 5 April 1989. There were three main work groups (economy and social issues workgroup, political reform workgroup, and union pluralism workgroup). The negotiations took place in the Presidential Palace located at Krakowskie Przedmieście in Warsaw and were preceded by unofficial talks between the government and the opposition in the residence of the Ministry of Interior in Magdalenka. The talks are shrouded in legends and provoke conflicting views. See: J. Skórzyński, *Rewolucja Okrągłego Stołu*, Cracow 2009; A. Łuczak, *Porozumienie przy „Okrągłym Stole”*, [in:] *Rzeczpospolita Polska 1989-2009. Problemy wybrane*, K. Leszczyńska (ed.), Toruń 2010, pp. 7-41.
- 5 Ibidem.
- 6 D. i T. Nałęcz, *1989-1990. Czas przełomu*, Warsaw 2019; T. Słomka, *Od Okrągłego Stołu do Konstytucji małej 1992*, [in:] *Polski rok 1989. Sukcesy, zaniechania, porażki*, M. Jabłonowski, S. Stęпка, S. Sułowski (eds.), vol. 1, Warsaw 2009, pp. 89-104; *Transition to democracy in Poland*, R.F. Staar (ed.), New York 1993; *Transformacja, elity, społeczeństwo*, M. Jarosz (ed.), Warsaw 2005; A. Dudek, *Historia Polityczna Polski 1989-2005*, Cracow 2007; A. Łuczak, *Dekada polskich przemian. Studium władzy i opozycji*, Warsaw 2010; W. Morawski, *Zmiana instytucjonalna. Społeczeństwo, gospodarka*,

On the other hand, the reunification of Germany, the Warsaw Pact, the presence of the Red Army in countries in Central and Eastern Europe, and the dissolution of Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia which led to the escalation of international tension and imminent armed conflicts in the Balkans that NATO was involved in, had a great impact on the international situation, which was disadvantageous for Poland and its foreign policy⁷.

There have been numerous books and papers written on Poland's accession to NATO⁸. This paper is, to a certain extent, a critical analysis, a summary, and an attempt to take an objective look at the role of some states, particularly the Soviet Union/Russia, the USA, Germany, and France, in Poland's process of accession to NATO. The paper does not glorify the countries that contributed to Polish membership in NATO. Neither does it demonize the role of the Soviet Union and Russia in the process. As a conclusion of the analysis based on the theory of classical realism and social constructionism, with regard to the concept of security community defined by Karl Deutsch in the 1950s, adopted by social constructionism in the 1990s, the author states⁹ that the Polish road to NATO was too long, as it took ten

polityka, Warsaw 1998; Z. Sadowski, *Cele społeczne w określaniu strategii rozwoju w procesie transformacji systemowej*, Warsaw 1994; K. Trembicka, *Okrągły stół w Polsce. Studium o porozumieniu politycznym*, Lublin 2003; *Krajobraz po transformacji, Środowisko międzynarodowe Polski lat dziewięćdziesiątych*, R. Kuźniar (ed.), Warsaw 1992; G. Kołodko, *Polskie drogi i bezdroża transformacji*, Cracow 2007.

- 7 A.D. Rotfeld, *Nowy początek: dylematy polskiej polityki zagranicznej w latach 1989-1993*, [in:] A. Bieńczyk-Missala, R. Kuźniar (eds.), op. cit., pp. 27-39; *Bezpieczeństwo międzynarodowe czasu przemian: zagrożenia-koncepcje-instytucje*, R. Kuźniar (ed.), Warsaw 2003; idem, *Polska polityka bezpieczeństwa 1989-2000*, Warsaw 2001.
- 8 J.M. Fiszer, *Transformacja ustrojowa w Polsce po 1989 roku oraz jej sukcesy i porażki*, [in:] *Polska i Europa w perspektywie politologicznej*, J. Wojnicki, J. Miecznikowska, Ł. Zamęcki (eds.), vol. II, Warsaw 2020, pp. 73-98; J.M. Fiszer, M. Czasak, *Trójkąt Weimarski. Geneza i działalność na rzecz integracji Europy w latach 1991-2016*, Warsaw 2019; A. Ziółkowski, *NATO w XX wieku. Transatlantyczne zależności*, Warsaw 2002, pp. 193-197; T. Otłowski, *Polska w procesie integracji z NATO i Unią Zachodnioeuropejską 1991-1998*, Toruń 1998, p. 24; M. Zając, *Założenia strategiczne funkcjonowania NATO*, "Horyzonty Bezpieczeństwa" 2015, no. 1, pp. 66-67; K. Skubiszewski, *Polska i Sojusz Północnoatlantyczny w latach 1989-1991*, "Sprawy Międzynarodowe" 1999, no. 1, p. 7; P. Wiecezorek, P. Kludka, *Droga Polski do NATO – próba bilansu*, Warsaw 1997, pp. 49-50; J.M. Fiszer, *Unia Europejska a Polska. Dziś i jutro*, Toruń 2002; J. Golec, *Polska droga do Unii. Tło polityczne*, "Dziś" 1998, no. 11, pp. 79-93; *Polska w NATO: bibliografia selektywna 1999-2004*, M. Burzyńska (ed.), Warsaw 2004.
- 9 The researchers applied those theories first of all to analyze the international order after the end of the Cold War, the condition of transatlantic relations, and NATO transformation after 1989. See: J. Nye, *Konflikty międzynarodowe. Wprowadzenie do teorii historii*, Warsaw 2009, pp. 27-32; J. Czaputowicz, *Teoretyczne wyjaśnienia Europejskiej Polityki Bezpieczeństwa i Obrony*, "Stosunki

years. Nevertheless, overall, accession was worth the wait. In order to verify the theses and hypotheses and compare attitudes and policies of particular countries towards Poland's efforts to join NATO, the author applied a comparative method and an institutional and legal method.

In conclusion, the author states that Poland's accession to NATO in 1999 and the European Union in 2004 was crucial to Poland's security and national interest. It created a state free of the threats that Poland had had to deal with in the previous decades, even centuries¹⁰. It ennobled Poland in Europe and strengthened its position in the international arena.

1. The position of the West on NATO enlargement to the East

When Poland joined the North Atlantic structure, it strengthened our country's security and its role in international relations. Yet, before it could happen, Poland had to overcome a number of barriers, which, in the opinion of the author, should be categorized as either objective or subjective. The history of international relations, particular between European countries, and the world often shows that practice does not go hand in hand with theory. According to the theory of classical realism, states have their interests, and, while in practice, they keep acting in a particularistic, even selfish manner in relations with other states, they officially refer to the theory of liberalism and slogans about peace, sovereign equality, and cooperation. This is the way leaders of the countries and politicians act. As a rule, they say one thing and refer to noble ideas (peace, law, ideology, doctrines, religion, friendship, sovereignty, democracy) but do another. It was the same in the case of the leaders of Europe in the past, including Helmut Kohl, chancellor of Germany, who pronounced himself an advocate of Poland advocate in NATO and the European Union, and in 1989 promised that Poland

Międzynarodowe – International Relations” 2013, vol. 48, no. 2, pp. 9-25; J. Czaputowicz, *Teorie stosunków międzynarodowych. Krytyka i systematyzacja*, Warsaw 2008; R. Jackson, G. Sorensen, *Wprowadzenie do stosunków międzynarodowych. Teorie i kierunki badawcze*, Cracow 2006, pp. 278-283.

10 P. Tálas, *The Role of NATO and the EU in Poland's Security and Defence Policy*, [in:] *The NATO and EU Relations of Central and Eastern European Nations*, G. Varga (ed.), Budapest 2020, pp. 57-70.

would quickly become a member of both organizations. In 1999, after ten years of laborious efforts, Poland joined NATO, and after 15 years, it joined the European Union¹¹.

The revolutions of 1989, which led to the elimination of the Eastern bloc, astonished the West and contributed to profound changes in the European and global geopolitical and geostrategic system. The events in Central and Eastern Europe led to the collapse of the Yalta-Potsdam order and opened up new prospects for development for the countries of the region. It was hoped that the international order after the Cold War, its shape, organizational structure, and principles would exemplify the rule of international law, respect towards international agreements, sovereignty, and independence; and negotiations, compromises, openness to cooperation – namely what we could describe as “necessary”, “sufficient”, “simple”, and “well-known from the past” solutions – would be emphasized in international relations¹². This did not happen, though. At the beginning of the 1990s, there was a strategic and political vacuum at the global level that threatened international security and could only be filled by the swiftly reformed NATO extending to post-communist countries of Central and Eastern Europe¹³.

The issue of NATO and European Community extension to the East arose when the Soviet empire broke down. There was an open question about when it would happen and what it might take to achieve the goal. Moscow was making the situation more complicated, and this to a great extent “determined how the leaders of NATO member states acted, including some German politicians. For some time, Russia’s objection was also an argument that determined the reluctance of the American administration towards the idea of NATO’s opening to the East. Washington even rejected this idea”¹⁴. France and

11 J.M. Fiszera, *Unia Europejska a Polska. Dziś i jutro*, Toruń 2002; *Polska droga do Unii Europejskiej w świetle spuścizny Jana Kułakowskiego. Dokumenty i materiały*, M. Jabłonowski, W. Janowski, G. Sołtyśiak (eds.), Warsaw 2018.

12 T. Łoś-Nowak, *Europejskie dylematy na XXI wiek: między chaosem a ładem międzynarodowym*, “Przegląd Politologiczny” 2020, no. 2, pp. 8-9.

13 Ibidem. See: Z. Brzeziński, *Balancing the East. Upgrading the West. U.S. Grand Strategy in an Age of Upheaval*, “Foreign Affairs” 2012, vol. 91, no. 1; F. Zakaria, *Can America be Fixed? The New Crisis of Democracy*, “Foreign Affairs” 2013, vol. 92, no. 1.

14 A. Mania, *Department of State i Foreign Service w polityce zagranicznej USA lat gorącej i zimnej wojny 1939-1989*, Cracow 2019, pp. 519-587; J. Kiwerska, *Partnerstwo w przywództwie? Stany Zjed-*

the UK shared a similar position. France was cautious in its support of NATO enlargement to the East, explaining that, on the one hand, it was concerned that only the USA would benefit from such enlargement and consolidate its leadership on the European continent, and, on the other hand, fearing that relations with Russia might get worse. After the collapse of the bipolar system, France stressed its individuality regarding the Alliance's role towards the states of Central and Eastern Europe, including the Soviet Union. Besides this, France believed that NATO enlargement should be preceded by the Alliance's reform and EU enlargement. The USA, Germany, France, and the UK thought that enlargement of NATO and the European Community should be postponed until Russia introduced principles of democracy and would be ready to be a partner of the West¹⁵.

The Alliance's Strategic Concept adopted at the summit in Rome in November 1991 significantly changed the organization's perception of recent rivals, which after the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact ended up in the "grey zone" of security. In the Concept, it was stressed that it is necessary to establish close relations with those states that until 1991 were a part of the Warsaw Pact. The Concept also determined the further military presence of the USA in Europe. At the end of December 1991, NATO offered nine Central European countries (six were former members of the Warsaw Pact and three were Baltic countries) to found a North Atlantic Cooperation Council (NACC)¹⁶. NATO tried to gradually extend the scope of operations and include post-communist states in its political and military system in order to increase the security of the Euro-Atlantic area¹⁷.

The establishment of an alternative cooperation programme, the Partnership for Peace (PfP), at the NATO summit in Brussels in

noczone i Niemcy (1989-2016). Perspektywa polska, Poznań 2017, pp. 134-135; G. Robertson, *NATO i Rosja: przemiany*, "Polski Przegląd Dyplomatyczny" 2002, no. 1.

- 15 S. Parzymies, *Polityka zagraniczna Francji po zimnej wojnie*, Warsaw 2017, pp. 506-507; K. Kończal, *An Inspiring and Intimidating Relationship: Franco-German Cooperation from the Polish Perspective*, [in:] *Franco-German Relations Seen from Abroad. Post-war Reconciliation in International Perspectives*, N. Colin, C. Demesmay (eds.), Switzerland 2021, pp. 69-89.
- 16 S. Parzymies, op. cit., p. 507; B. Frédéric, *Où en est l'Alliance atlantique? L'improbable partenariat*, "Les notes de l'IFRI" 1998, no. 6, pp. 36-39.
- 17 R. Kupiecki, *Od Londynu do Waszyngtonu. NATO w latach dziewięćdziesiątych*, Warsaw 2007, pp. 151-158; J. Fałęcki, *Zapewnienie bezpieczeństwa w świetle koncepcji strategicznych NATO*, "Ante Portas – Studia nad Bezpieczeństwem" 2014, no. 1, p. 14.

January 1994 was critical in terms of the plans for NATO enlargement. The main aim was to strengthen cooperation between the Alliance and the countries of Eastern and Southern Europe, although, with no security guarantees; and to build foundations for intensification of relations with these countries and their future membership of NATO. about the programme concerned joint defence planning, training, consultations, joint military exercises and manoeuvres, and participation in peace operations and humanitarian missions with NATO member states. Active cooperation within the PfP was supposed to be a precondition for future NATO membership. However, the decisions made at the January summit did not spell a rapid extension of the Alliance to the East. France and other member states, as well as Russia, were still against it. The final document stressed, "We hope for enlargement as a part of an evolutionary process, taking into account political and security development in entire Europe"¹⁸.

President Bill Clinton's visits and talks in Prague and Warsaw in July 1994, when the Americans were slowly changing their attitude towards NATO enlargement to the East, was a helpful turn in international policy for Poland and other states of the Visegrad Group. After the meeting of NATO foreign ministers in June 1994 in Istanbul and increasing support of Americans towards enlargement, Germany started to more openly support postulates of the Visegrad Group states. On 30 September 1994, in Seville, German Defence Minister Volker Rühle attempted a debate on NATO enlargement to the East. It was his opinion that, after the success of PfP, the negotiations with the Visegrad Group should enter another level; Russia and Ukraine should be offered close cooperation as their membership in the Alliance was impossible. Unfortunately, Rühle's offer was rejected by William Perry, the US secretary of defence, who believed that it was too early to list specific countries and that it was better to focus on deepening cooperation within the PfP. At the following meeting of NATO foreign ministers in Brussels on 1 December 1994, the Alliance confirmed its desire to extend NATO to the East but within an "evolu-

18 S. Parzymies, op. cit., p. 508. See: M. Wągrowska, *Partnerstwo dla pokoju*, Warsaw 1994, p. 9; J. Kiwerska, op. cit., p. 143; *Bezpieczeństwo międzynarodowe po zimnej wojnie*, R. Zięba (ed.), Warsaw 2008.

tionary process” with regard to Russia’s interests and recommended the preparation of a special “Study on NATO Enlargement” which was announced in 1995. The document contained the main assumptions and principles of NATO enlargement to the East, which was expected to be peaceful and non-confrontational. NATO declared its “will to consciously avoid taking Russia by surprise with decisions to expand and develop cooperation”¹⁹.

Although the effects of the Brussels debates did not go beyond the well-known formula of an “evolutionary process”, Russia responded negatively. Moscow withdrew from the PFP’s individual programme and from the agreement on political dialogue with NATO adopted by the Duma on 22 June 1994. This led to a setback in NATO-Russia relations. On 22 March 1995, Russian Foreign Affairs Minister Andrei Kozyrev stated that Moscow might recommence dialogue with Brussels if certain conditions were met. He demanded the preparation of a security programme for Europe, with NATO being one of its elements but not the foundation of its new security architecture. He spoke out in favour of broad military cooperation while warning that since Russia was denied the right to veto NATO’s resolutions, the Alliance should not have one against Moscow²⁰.

In order to appease Russia and neutralize France’s attitude, in 1995-1996, NATO took on unilateral responsibilities regarding activity on the eastern flank, which Russia was afraid of. NATO declared that it did not intend to position any weapons there, including a nuclear weapons, or build military infrastructure which would threaten Russia’s security. Such commitments were included in the “Founding Act on Mutual Relations, Cooperation, and Security between NATO and the Russian Federation”, which was signed in Paris on 27 May 1997. In order to lighten the atmosphere and encourage better cooperation between the Alliance and Russia, the NATO-Russia Permanent Joint Council was established in 1997, which was replaced by the NATO-Russia Council in 2002. As Robert Kupiecki writes, it meant that

19 R. Kupiecki, „Mit założycielski” ..., p. 100. See also: R. Kuźniar, *Polityka bezpieczeństwa w polskiej polityce zagranicznej*, [in:] *Polska polityka bezpieczeństwa: 1989-2000*, R. Kuźniar (ed.), Warsaw 2001, pp. 98-99.

20 R. Kuźniar, *Polityka bezpieczeństwa...*, pp. 100-101; G. Robertson, *NATO i Rosja: przemiany*, “Polski Przegląd Dyplomatyczny” 2002, no. 1, pp. 122-134.

“NATO expansion was not celebrated as a triumph over Russia but as a logical effort made to meet European security needs. The intention to establish an open partnership with Russia balanced the effects of it”²¹.

In the opinion of the author, US President Bill Clinton's letter to French President Jacques Chirac written on 14 August 1996, in which he pointed to the importance of the acceleration of NATO enlargement to the East (which France continued to be opposed to) for European security, was also significant for the process of the Alliance's expansion. As the author has mentioned, France “treated the Alliance's enlargement to the East as a consolidation of American leadership on the European continent and as a challenge to Russia”²². France cared more for good relations with Russia, particularly economic ties, than for post-communist countries from Central and Eastern Europe joining NATO. What is more, France believed that the world does not need this Alliance, a child of the Cold War, and it should rather end its activity or should be reformed and prepared for the needs of the post-communist world before implementing the extension²³.

At the following NATO summit in Madrid on 8-9 July 1996, despite the objections of France, Spain, Greece, and Italy and their demand to include Slovenia and Romania as well, a joint front of the USA, the UK, and Germany together decided on NATO enlargement. Poland, the Czech Republic, and Hungary were invited to the debate. German Chancellor Helmut Kohl, who was present at the summit, pushed through a motion to sign all necessary accession documents by the end of 1997. The closing stage of the negotiations between NATO and the Visegrad Group was the signing of an “accession protocol” in the presence of the foreign affairs ministers of the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland in Brussels on 16 December 1997. The ceremony of Poland, the Czech Republic, and Hungary's accession to NATO took place on 12 March 1999, on the Alliance's 50th anniversary²⁴.

21 R. Kupiecki, „Mit założycielski”..., p. 100; idem, *NATO w polskiej perspektywie 1989-2019*, Warsaw 2019, pp. 95-97, 194-207; *Dokumentation*, “NATO Review” 1997, no. 4, pp. 7-11.

22 S. Parzymies, op. cit., p. 508.

23 Ibidem, p. 509; R. Kuźniar, *NATO w nowym środowisku strategicznym*, “Sprawy Międzynarodowe” 2006, no. 3, pp. 24-29.

24 T. Otlowski, op. cit., p. 86; J.M. Fiszer, *Rozszerzenie NATO o Polskę, Czechy i Węgry oraz ich znaczenie dla partnerstwa transatlantyckiego*, “Przegląd Politologiczny” 2002, no. 4.

Twelve days later, representatives of these countries for the first time participated as observers in the weekly ambassadors' meeting of the North Atlantic Council. It should be noted that in January 1998, over a year before Poland officially joined NATO, after the first NATO member states ratified Poland's country's accession to the organization, the vast majority of Poles considered the accession as an important event, including 44% believing that it was a turning point in history²⁵.

2. Poland's efforts to join NATO

There are a number of reasons why Poland started the road to NATO membership after the fall of communism. The essential one was that Poles were striving to bring stability and security to their country, which they had not had for over three centuries²⁶. What is more, after 1989, the geopolitical situation was unfavourable for Poland as new threats for its security arose. Only the North Atlantic Alliance could guarantee safety. In July 1990, Prime Minister Tadeusz Mazowiecki received a letter from US president George Bush, in which he suggested making contact with NATO. In August 1990, the North Atlantic Alliance and Warsaw established diplomatic relations.

When the anti-communist opposition took power in Poland in the autumn of 1989, it was necessary to redefine the place and role of the country in the changing European security structure. Prime Minister Tadeusz Mazowiecki and Foreign Affairs Minister Krzysztof Skubiszewski were aware that the communist system would inevitably collapse, but they feared that major shifts might only bring harm to the countries of Central Europe, which were still a part of the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA) and the Warsaw Pact (WTO)²⁷. In the view of the USSR and the presence of the Soviet army in Poland, and unwilling to prematurely reveal long-term intentions, Skubiszewski did not directly mention NATO in his first speech in

²⁵ Ibidem, p. 1.

²⁶ J. Kaczmarek, *NATO, Europa, Polska 2000*, Wrocław 2000, pp. 194-195.

²⁷ J.M. Fiszer, *Uwarunkowania i cele polityki zagranicznej Polski – aspekty teoretyczne i utylitarne*, [in:] *Polityka zagraniczna Polski w latach 1989-2020*, A. Chojan (ed.), Warsaw 2021, pp. 1950; K. Skubiszewski, *Polska i Sojusz Północnoatlantycki w latach 1989-1991*, "Sprawy Międzynarodowe" 1999, no. 1, p. 7.

the Sejm on 24 April 1990. At a meeting with NATO Secretary General Manfred Wörner at the Polish embassy in Brussels in 1991, President Lech Wałęsa also mentioned that Poland's foreign policy was not aimed at the USSR, and Poland had not yet thought about membership in NATO. He only expressed hope for the creation of a new system of European security with Poland's participation²⁸.

In 1989-1991, Poland cut ties with the Soviet Union; the Warsaw Pact and the CMEA were dissolved. Poland settled relations with Germany, Russia, and other neighbours by concluding appropriate treaties. It seemed that the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) was going to be an organization that would be a foundation for the international order. After the collapse of the USSR in December 1991, in 1992-1999, the main objective of Polish foreign policy was to ensure the state's security through membership of NATO and the EU. Polish government's position was that the country's road to Europe should start with NATO as joining the Alliance would provide better conditions for European Union membership. By that time, the Russian army had completed the withdrawal of its troops from Poland. It was believed that by becoming a member of the North Atlantic Alliance, Poland would be able to leave the so-called grey zone and receive guarantees for its safety²⁹.

The basic principles of Polish policy at the beginning of the 1990s in the field of internal and external security were determined by two documents adopted by the National Defence Committee on 2 November 1992. Those were "Assumptions of Polish Security Policy", signed by the president of the Republic of Poland, and the document "The Security Policy and Defence Strategy of the Republic of Poland", which developed and specified the assumptions. The documents emphasized that the Republic of Poland treated its borders as inviolable and had no territorial claims against its neighbours. It respected the sovereignty of other states and renounced the use of force, includ-

28 S. Koziej, *Polska doktryna obronna i jej modyfikacja w obliczu integracji z NATO*, Warsaw-Toruń 1996, pp. 8-9.

29 J.M. Fiszer, *Przesłanki wewnętrzne i międzynarodowe upadku Związku Radzieckiego w 1991 roku oraz jego konsekwencje geopolityczne dla polityki zagranicznej Polski*, "Rocznik Instytutu Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej" 2021, no. 2, pp. 38-51; S. Koziej, *Polityka bezpieczeństwa Polski na przełomie XX i XXI wieku: od odrodzenia w latach dziewięćdziesiątych do zerwania ciągłości po 2015 roku*, [in:] A. Chojan (ed.), op. cit., pp. 51-72.

ing the threat of using force in relations with other states. The key objective of Polish security policy was to obtain membership in NATO, and to ensure conditions for peaceful development on the foundation of previously mentioned premises, following international law, particularly the Charter of the United Nations and other international documents, both bilateral and multilateral³⁰. In another part, it was stressed that considering the then situation in Europe, Poland's security could be ensured through:

- Poland joining the European security structure, specifically NATO and the Western European Union (WEU);
- activity in the forum of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE);
- mutually beneficial, equal, bi- and multilateral regional cooperation, including military;
- good relations with neighbouring countries;
- further arms control in Europe and the world, and effective control over adopted restrictions;
- Poland's active participation in the UN, OSCE, NATO, and WEU peace operations;
- integration with Western European political and economic structures, first and foremost with the EU;
- improvement of the Polish defence system³¹.

Thus, the goals of Polish integration and security policy after 1989 were clearly defined. They were supposed to be implemented within a non-confrontational process without violation of the interests of other states³².

When Poland and other Central European countries manifested for the first time that they wanted to join the North Atlantic Alliance and the EU, their signals were, as the author has mentioned, firmly rejected by NATO and European Communities politicians and experts. The presence of the Soviet army in the region and reluctance to aggravate relations with the decaying yet unpredictable USSR were the main reasons for the West's restraint. At that time, NATO had huge prob-

30 R. Zięba, *Nowa instytucjonalizacja bezpieczeństwa europejskiego*, Warsaw 1998, pp. 58-59.

31 *Ibidem*, p. 59.

32 W. Malendowski, W. Waszczykowski, *Międzynarodowe uwarunkowania bezpieczeństwa Polski*, [in:] *Międzynarodowe stosunki polityczne*, W. Malendowski, Cz. Mojsiewicz (ed.), Poznań 1996, p. 65.

lems with determining its new role and tasks in the changing world; it feared it might lose efficiency due to the extension to the East and participation in contradicting interests of small states, and did not want to take on any further responsibilities. Admittedly, Article 10 of the North Atlantic Treaty of 1949, which established NATO, opened the door to the Alliance to states that expressed readiness and respected the system of democratic values. In practice, there were various political and military reservations. Thanks to reforms conducted in accordance with real needs that the member states had, NATO managed to survive through the beginning of the 1990s, which was a critical period for the organization. NATO also survived the evolutionary death of the Soviet Union, which contributed to a large extent to the change of negative attitudes of the West towards Poland's accession to the North Atlantic Alliance and the European Union, which was founded in February 1992³³.

The Polish road to NATO through the aforementioned Pfp, with the initial objection from Russian and most Western countries, was very long. It began with the system transformation in 1989 and lasted ten years³⁴. There were many doubts whether Poland would finally join the North Atlantic Alliance and whether NATO would be the same as it had been when the Warsaw Pact existed. The concerns that Poland would be subordinated to another power or organization were compounded by the negative experience of the long domination of the Soviet Union, which lasted for several decades. A considerable proportion of Poles perceived Polish accession to the North Atlantic Alliance as subordination to the United States' interest. The closer Polish accession to NATO was, the more frequent was the expression of concern of a new form of dependence on a foreign power. The day before Poland acceded to NATO, slightly more people thought that membership in this organization would be a new form of subordination to a foreign power (42%) than that it would guarantee independence (41%). Such

33 A. Ziółkowski, *NATO w XX wieku. Transatlantyckie zależności*, Warsaw 2002, pp. 193-197; T. Otłowski, op. cit., p. 24; M. Zając, *Założenia strategiczne funkcjonowania NATO*, "Horyzonty Bezpieczeństwa" 2015, no. 1, pp. 66-67.

34 J.M. Fiszler, *Rosja wobec akcesji Polski do NATO i Unii Europejskiej*, "Myśl Ekonomiczna i Polityczna" 2018, no. 1(60), pp. 264-289; J.M. Fiszler, *The Thirtieth Anniversary of the Sejm and Senate Elections in 1989. Systemic Transformation in Poland and its Consequences for Europe and the World*, [in:] "Myśl Ekonomiczna i Polityczna" 2019, no. 3(66), pp. 139-163.

attitudes completely changed in the first year of Polish membership of NATO. In February 2000, the majority of Poles (56%) saw membership in the Alliance as a guarantee of Poland's independence, and less than a third (29%) believed that it was a new form of dependence on a foreign power³⁵.

When Poland was making efforts to become a NATO and EU member state, it undoubtedly was looking for more significant military, political, and economic security than could ensure it for itself. Even if there were to be military alliance between the countries of the Visegrad Group and tightened economic cooperation, which was rather unlikely, such an alliance and cooperation would not guarantee Poland and other countries external security. The guarantee of peaceful coexistence and cooperation in Europe, which was provided by NATO and the EU, is priceless, particularly nowadays when Russia is breaking the international law and order that have been developed over many years³⁶.

3. Poland in NATO – opportunities and threats

Poland, as a peripheral state torn between the East and the West with a position outside the core of the international community, in the current situation in Europe and the world, should pursue a realistic policy, i.e. not indulge in illusions and keep its feet on the ground. Poland cannot withdraw from the EU or NATO. The Union is the guarantor of the country's economic security, and NATO is the foundation of military security. Poland is still a weak country; internally, the nation is quarrelling and divided. Besides that, Poland is surrounded by countries that are either hostile or that do not wish it well. The former are Russia and Germany, and the latter is Belarus. The Russian Federation is a superpower, and Germany has a chance to gain the position of a dominant state (not only in our region) by 2050. In the author's

35 *20 lat członkostwa Polski w NATO*, survey report, Centrum Badania Opinii Społecznej, 2019, no. 31, p. 8.

36 B. Mazurkiewicz, *Zmiany w postrzeganiu przestrzeni a geopolityka we współczesnej Rosji*, "Przegląd Geopolityczny" 2017, no. 22, pp. 117-127; K.A. Kowalczyk, *Geopolityczne dążenia współczesnej Rosji*, "Przegląd Geopolityczny" 2019, no. 27, pp. 78-92; *Stosunek do NATO i obecności wojsk sojuszników w Polsce*, survey report, Centrum Badania Opinii Społecznej, 2022, no. 40; T.L. Friedman, *Jak radzić sobie z mocarstwem, którym rządzi zbrodniarz wojenny?*, "Gazeta Wyborcza", 16 April 2022, p. 27.

opinion, Germany is already a regional power, i.e. a leader in Europe, capable of pursuing foreign policy on a global scale. Germany has economic, military, scientific, technical, and demographic potential which exceeds Poland's capabilities in every respect. Many experts predict that around 2050, Germany will have the chance to become a global power. Interestingly, Beijing announced that in 2049, on the 100th Anniversary of the People's Republic of China, China will become the number one superpower in the world. This will help deepen China and Germany's cooperation and strengthen their roles in the international arena³⁷.

Russia is the biggest country in the world in terms of area. It stretches from west to east for about 10,000 km, through 11 time zones. It also has the longest land border and the longest shoreline. It borders as many as 14 countries. In addition, it has enormous natural resources, including gold, oil, gas, and uranium. Its military potential, including the number of nuclear warheads and missiles held, parallels that of the United States. Under the rule of Vladimir Putin, Russia has been successively seeking to rebuild its position as a superpower in the world, which is impossible without having specific alliances and without making other countries, including Germany, dependent, or through cooperation with China. The Eurasian Economic Union was also established to serve this purpose and be an alternative to the European Union. As Vladimir Putin announced, in 2018 alone Russia spent some 47.7 billion dollars on its armed forces, and in 2018-2027 will spend as much as 20 trillion roubles (about 500 billion dollars)³⁸.

Poland is a medium-sized state, and in the hierarchy of the international community of our continent is far behind Germany and Russia and will not be able to catch up with them until 2050. Today, with a GDP of EUR 3.1 trillion, Germany is the strongest economy in the European Union, generating over a fifth (21.1%) of EU GDP. With a GDP of EUR 424.6 billion, Poland ranks eighth in the EU (2.9% of

37 J.M. Fiszer, *Czy Chiny przejmą kontrolę nad światem w połowie XXI wieku?*, "Biuletyn Analiz i Opinii" 2021, no. 03(44), pp. 1-16; B. Góralczyk, *Wielki renesans. Chińska transformacja i jej konsekwencje*, Warsaw 2018.

38 W. Radziwinowicz, *Rosja mniej zbrojna*, "Gazeta Wyborcza", 29 December 2017, p. 8; K.A. Kowalczyk, op. cit., pp. 78-92; A. Curanović, *Przeznaczeni do wielkości! Poczucie misji w polityce zagranicznej. Przypadek Rosji*, Warsaw 2020.

EU GDP). On the other hand, GDP per capita (calculated according to purchasing power parity) with a value of EUR 11,200, which constitutes 69% of the EU's average GDP per capita, classifies Poland at a distant 24th position among EU member states. In this respect (standard of living), in 2016, only four EU countries were poorer than Poland – Bulgaria, Croatia, Latvia, and Romania. Additionally, in relation to Germany, the Polish GDP structure looks unfavourable, which is characterized by a very high share of consumption and a low percentage of investments and exports. A crucial factor in this competition will also be active German and Russian foreign policy related to both countries' authority and prestige in the international arena, in contrast to Poland, whose anti-Russian and anti-German course raises concerns among Central and Eastern European countries. Poland's relations with France and China are not good, either. Nowadays, Poland is particularly threatened by the international policy of Vladimir Putin, who wants to bring about "a new Yalta". Russia under the rule of Vladimir Putin does not resemble Russia under the rule of Boris Yeltsin in the 1990s when everything was falling apart and the state was neglected in the international arena. Today, the country is relatively stable. Russia refers to the Slavic tradition, fascination with the Russian soul, and the popularity of Russian culture in the West. Russia recognizes itself as a preserver of the Orthodox heritage and the leader of the world of Eastern Christianity. In practice, if necessary, Russia is ready to use hard power to resolve conflicts and defend its national interests. Moreover, its leader still enjoys over 80% support, and the anti-Putin opposition is weak, divided, and repeatedly pacified. Putin's goal is the Chinese model, i.e. a strong dictatorship and a strong, developing economy, as well as strengthening Russia's position in the international forum. Nowadays, the Western media now and then announce distressing news that Russia is preparing for a new war, that it is ready to start it, and is just waiting for a convenient moment to unleash it³⁹. Considering the new balance of power

39 *Pod tronem cara kipi młoda Rosja, Z Adamem Michnikiem rozmawia Stanisław Skarżyński*, "Gazeta Wyborcza", 30 December 2017 – 1 January 2018, pp. 8-9; R. Łoś, *Soft power Rosji*, "Przegląd Strategiczny" 2017, no. 10, p. 576; A. Czajkowski, *Federacja Rosyjska: przywracanie utraconej wielkości*, [in:] *Polityka zagraniczna. Aktorzy, potencjały, strategie*, T. Łoś-Nowak (ed.), Warsaw 2011, pp. 81-103.

which is currently forming, Polish membership in NATO and the EU is essential for its security. In the opinion of Polish politicians, Poland needs to be realistic and reinforce its role in the Euro-Atlantic system. This is the only way to pursue Poland's national and state interests.

To sum up, Poland – according to the theory of geopolitics – as a peripheral state today and in the near future, in contrast to the growing power of Germany and Russia, and because of the structure of the international reality in which it operates and thus the aforementioned hierarchical nature of the international community, has limited opportunities for pursuing its interests, including a critical promotion to the position of a dominant state in the region. Without European Union and NATO support, its national interests and international security will be seriously threatened. I would not count on real support from the Visegrad Group countries in the event of a direct threat. The Slovaks, Czechs, and Hungarians tolerate Poles, but I doubt that they love us very much. Definitely, they will not die for us. They are closer to Germany and Russia than to Poland. Germany and Russia can find a common language and develop cooperation behind Poland's back or at our expense. The Russians long ago linked their interests with Germany, especially in the economic sphere. Examples of this are the Nord Stream 1 and 2 gas pipelines and the number of direct investments that Germany makes in Russia despite the EU economic sanctions imposed on Russia for the annexation of Crimea. In this way, Germany de facto supports the aggressor, and Poland openly supports Ukraine and exposes itself to retaliation⁴⁰.

Conclusion

In the view of what was mentioned above, the question arises, What would happen to Poland and its security if we did not belong to NATO and the European Union, which ensure safety for Poland, Europe, and

40 J.M. Fiszer, *Pragmatyczna polityka Niemiec wobec Rosji i jej skutki dla bezpieczeństwa Europy w XXI wieku*, "Studia Politica Germanica" 2016, no. 2(5), pp. 11-34; A. Sakson, *Współczesna niemiecka geopolityka – ciągłość i zmiana*, "Myśl Ekonomiczna i Polityczna" 2016, no. 4(55), pp. 356-365; P. Buras, *Między europeizacją a Gazpromem: Niemcy, Rosja i bezpieczeństwo energetyczne*, "Raporty i analizy" 2008, no. 7; M. Stolarczyk, *Główne kwestie sporne i dylematy w stosunkach polsko-niemieckich w drugiej dekadzie XXI wieku*, [in:] *Integracja, polityka zagraniczna, praworządność, wyzwania dla Polski współczesnej*, E. Mreńca (ed.), Warsaw 2019, pp. 559-583.

the world? The Poles are aware of this, and that is why the level of public support for Poland's membership in the EU and NATO is still very high. In a survey conducted in February 2020 by the Centre for Public Opinion Research (CBOS), as many as 89% of respondents approved of Poland's presence in the EU. Only 7% of respondents were against it⁴¹. In contrast, in a survey conducted by CBOS in February 2019, as many as 72% of respondents approved of Poland's presence in NATO, and only 3% of respondents were against it⁴².

Despite such high public support, the European Union and NATO should undertake several reforms and intensify cooperation within the transatlantic system and in the international arena to improve its effectiveness. Poland should actively support the transatlantic system and strengthen its position in NATO and the European Union, which are the guarantors of its national and international security. Poland should support Ukraine's and Belarus' accessions to NATO and the European Union and develop proper relations with the USA, Germany, and Russia. Russian neo-imperialist policy is nowadays the biggest threat for Europe and the world. That is why states should talk and cooperate with Russia, not isolate it in the international arena because as the history of international relations shows, that is a short-sighted and harmful policy for Polish and European security. This is also NATO's attitude, despite suspended cooperation between NATO and Russia after the illegal annexation of Crimea. NATO does not perceive Russia as an opponent. What is more, NATO respects Russia's interest and opts for cooperation with Moscow. In turn, Russia rejects NATO's proposition and accuses the West of "failing to keep its words and bad intentions towards Moscow placing in the position of a victim regaining its right to dignity and defending its own interests"⁴³. It seems that Moscow does not realize that such a policy and a hybrid confrontation with NATO undermine its credibility as a responsible actor in international relations.

41 *Postrzeżenie Unii Europejskiej i jej instytucji*, survey report, Centrum Badania Opinii Społecznej, 2020, no. 32, p. 1.

42 *20 lat członkostwa Polski w NATO...*, p. 7; *Stosunek do NATO i obecności wojsk sojusznicznych w Polsce...*, pp. 5-7.

43 R. Kupiecki, „Mit założycielski”..., pp. 99-100. See: M. Menkiszak, *The Russian challenge. Its nature and the right response to it*, "Federal Academy of Security Policy Working Paper" 2017, no. 27.

Nowadays, other problems that result from the weakness and instability of many states in the world are a severe challenge for NATO. Although failed states and so-called rogue states are not a direct military threat to the Alliance, they are a source of many military and non-military challenges in different terms. The consequences of the chaos and instability in countries such as Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya, and Tunisia are different and have been visible over the years as escalating international terrorism, civil wars, tensions, and religious and ethnic conflicts, as well as mass migrations to Europe. Constant attention and the right response from the Alliance and the EU are needed if non-military threats, such as financial, economic, ecologic, energy, and raw material crises escalate⁴⁴.

In the current international situation, the main task for the Alliance should still be defence against various threats to its members in compliance with Articles 5 and 6 of the Washington Treaty. Being capable of effective deterrence of potential aggressors and, if needed, protecting the people, territory, and national interests of member states in the area of NATO and neighbouring countries determine its essence and is a foundation that makes it possible to fulfil various military tasks effectively. It requires that NATO member states preserve adequate military resources and non-military standards, ensuring the capability to effectively protect the interests and security of its members. Poland meets such requirements by spending funds on NATO needs and strengthening its army. In this way, according to Article 10 of the Washington Treaty, Poland both contributes to the development of NATO's potential and achievement of its strategic and political goals and increases its capability to effectively operate in favour of reinforcing security and peace in the world.

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