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The impact of Bulgaria and Poland's domestic political dynamics on EU security perceptions: A postfunctionalist perspective

**Wpływ wewnętrznej dynamiki politycznej Bułgarii i Polski na percepcje bezpieczeństwa UE.
Perspektywa postfunkcjonalistyczna**

ABSTRACT:

The objective of the article is to examine the impact of domestic political dynamics in Bulgaria and Poland on the perceptions of strengthening EU security. The study is based on a postfunctionalist approach, which assumes a growing ideological and cultural mobilisation of mass public opinion against solutions proposed at the EU level. Two hypotheses are presented, the verification of which requires a combination of factor, decision, and comparative analysis. The research results show that the peripheral geographical location of both states has had a positive impact on the emergence of a domestic political consensus on how to ensure state security, although Poland is more stable in this respect. It also tries to show that cultural and historical differences between Bulgaria and Poland do not result in fundamental discrepancies in the perception of all-European security. The main difference between these States is the presence of a relatively strong pro-Russian faction in Bulgaria and its almost complete absence in Poland. However, preliminary research indicates that the existence of a moderate pro-Russian option

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is not a factor that significantly influences the European policy of any EU and NATO member states.

KEYWORDS:

Bulgaria, Poland, European Union, security, postfunctionalism

STRESZCZENIE:

Celem artykułu jest zbadanie wpływu krajowej dynamiki politycznej w Bułgarii i Polsce na percepcje wzmocnienia bezpieczeństwa UE. Badanie opiera się na podejściu postfunkcjonalistycznym, w którym zakłada się rosnącą mobilizację ideologiczną i kulturową masowej opinii publicznej przeciwko rozwiązaniom proponowanym na szczycie UE. Zaprezentowano dwie hipotezy, których weryfikacja wymagała połączenia analizy czynnikowej, decyzyjnej i porównawczej. Wyniki badań pokazują, że peryferyjne położenie geograficzne obydwu państw przełożyło się pozytywnie na powstanie krajowego konsensusu politycznego co do sposobu zapewnienia bezpieczeństwa państwa, choć większą stabilnością w tym zakresie cechuje się Polska. Starano się także wykazać, że różnice kulturowe i historyczne między Bułgarią a Polską nie skutkują zasadniczymi rozbieżnościami w postrzeganiu bezpieczeństwa ogółouropejskiego. Główną różnicą między badanymi państwami jest obecność relatywnie silnej opcji prorosyjskiej w Bułgarii i jej niemal całkowity brak w Polsce. Wstępne badania wskazują jednak, że istnienie umiarkowanej opcji prorosyjskiej nie jest czynnikiem, który znacząco wpływa na politykę europejską państwa członkowskiego UE i NATO.

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE:

Bułgaria, Polska, Unia Europejska, bezpieczeństwo, postfunkcjonalizm

Introduction

The process of European integration underwent a remarkable transformation. The politicisation of the EU is now a social fact: what was once the essence of a *permissive consensus* is now gone. Instead, the integration process, as well as the EU policies, have become a divisive issue that draws political lines within the member states. Hence, the political process in the EU has become more dynamic and less predictable. Earlier conceptualisations are now replaced by a plethora of political actions that overflow with ease between the local, national, regional, and European layers of politics. This forces political parties to abandon their ideological fortresses and apply an accommodative perspective in a multi-level process.

Still, it is the member states' final say that determines the scope and shape of EU political actions. Particularly, in the case of security considerations, the

need for unanimity shapes the limits of the possible steps. Consensus, however, is not easily obtained, as Hungary's stance on Ukraine reveals. Hence, this paper aims to explore the impact of the domestic political dynamics on the perceptions of the enhancement of the EU's security, understood in military and *quasi*-military terms, leaving out other forms of this phenomenon related to energy, climate, or access to scarce resources. As our research is focused solely on two of the 27 member states, we do not have the intention of drawing general conclusions. Instead, we want to explore these two cases in order to check the existence of similarities and/or distinct patterns of policymaking. We will attempt to map them, embedded in the postfunctionalist assumption, which can be further tested to collect and deliver data and conclusions based on the political processes in other EU member states.

1. Theoretical and methodological background

The theoretical approach used in this article is postfunctionalism, proposed by Liesbet Hooghe and Gary Marks¹. They assume that after a certain threshold of integration has been crossed, it has become firmly embedded in the democratic politics of the member states². Therefore, postfunctionalism is based on four main thoughts: (a) member states maintain a strong position in the architecture of European integration; (b) politicisation of European integration, stemming from the rejection of the societies' general assent on EU politics; (c) *constraining dissensus* conditioned by a self-propelling increase in public interest in European politics; (d) mobilisation of mass public opinion against supranational solutions³.

In EU member states, a portion of society believes that the progress of integration poses a threat to national identity. These phenomena are visible in Bulgaria and Poland, which are characterised by many similarities, such as a common heritage of communism and their peripheral geographical

¹ L. Hooghe, G. Marks, *A Postfunctionalist Theory of European Integration: From Permissive Consensus to Constraining Dissensus*, "British Journal of Political Science" 2009, vol. 39, no. 1, pp. 3, 22–23, DOI: 10.1017/S0007123408000409.

² D. Leuffen, B. Rittberger, F. Schimmelfennig, *Postfunctionalism*, [in:] eidem (eds.), *Integration and Differentiation in the EU: Theory and Policies*, Cham 2022, pp. 143–144.

³ A. Gruszczak, *Internal Rebordering in the EU: Postfunctionalism Revisited*, "Politics and Governance" 2022, vol. 10, no. 2, p. 247, DOI: 10.17645/pag.v10i2.5165.

location, experience of EU membership in terms of time, and a competitive political system. Linking these connotations with the theory, two hypotheses can be presented: In the first (H1), the independent variable is the potentially flanking geographical location of Bulgaria and Poland, which should result in the existence of a domestic political consensus on how to ensure the state's security. The second hypothesis (H2) is based on the assumption of cultural and historical differences, which allows us to assume that there is a fundamental distinction in the perception of all-European security between Bulgaria and Poland. Verification of both hypotheses is possible by combining factor, decision, and comparative analyses. The domestic cleavages, creating the preconditions of shaping the state's interests, will be factor analysed. Decision analysis will be applied to the elaboration of the decision-making situation characterised by the war in Ukraine, and to decisions taken in both states regarding EU security reforms. Both states will be compared to find out how their domestic dynamics influence their international behaviour in European matters. The time scope of the study is limited essentially to the years 2021–2025, distinguished on the basis of the direct pre-war time in Ukraine, the relative consolidation of state authorities resulting from elections in Bulgaria and Poland, as well as the medium-term experience of EU membership, also marked by the holding of the Council presidencies.

2. Domestic cleavages: Stable instability and unstable stability?

In the analysed time, Bulgaria entered a period of deep political crisis manifested by the seven consecutive parliamentary elections between April 2021 and October 2024. The repeated elections were caused by the inability of the political parties to formulate a stable political majority. In order to understand the preferences of the political parties, it is indispensable to understand the nature of the 2020/2021 protests that led to the loss of formal power by Boyko Borisov. Growing social discontent was already fermented in 2020, when popular protests turned against the political elites, exemplified by Borisov's governments that had remained in power since 2009, with only short breaks. The protesters stood against the persistent corruption,

state of lawlessness, injustice, “mafiotisation” and “state capture”⁴ defined by Maarten Lemstra as “systemic political corruption, through which politicians abuse their control over the decision-making process in the state in order to secure private gains”⁵. Ana Krasteva has identified the temporal evolution of the process as a transition from corruption through endemic corruption to state capture⁶. Hence, the popular demands were concentrated *sensu stricto* on the resignation of Borisov, but *sensu largo* against “the whole political class”, urging for the elimination of informal brokers of power like Delyan Peevski and Ahmed Dogan. In that sense, for protesters, the whole political spectrum needed to be replaced.

The social demand for change paved the way for the emergence of a tangible political alternative, which initially consisted of a small, enduring liberal opposition coalition, Democratic Bulgaria (consisting of two parties: Yes, Bulgaria (Да, България) and Democrats for Strong Bulgaria (Демократи за силна България, DSB), and the Green Movement (Зелено Движение, ZD until April 2024). The protests led to the formation of new parties: There is Such a Nation (Има такъв народ, TSN) and an eclectic formation of various political outcasts siding with the protesters within the Stand Up! Mafia Get Out! movement (Изправи се! Мутри вън)⁷. Importantly, the President of Bulgaria, Rumen Radev, backed by BSP, flirted with the protesters. By the third early parliamentary elections, the reformist camp had consolidated in the sense that the TSN, which won the previous elections, through its destructive position, made impossible the establishment of a viable government, and proved to be a steered proxy of the *status quo* parties, and then a new political project, We Continue Change (Продължаваме промяната, PP), emerged. PP, together with Democratic Bulgaria, shaped the political representation of the new order’s public sentiments.

⁴ S. Domaradzki, *Pokojowa rewolucja w zawłaszczonej demokracji. Kryzys polityczny w Bułgarii w latach 2021–2023*, “Studia Politologiczne” 2024, vol. 73, pp. 151–170, DOI: 10.33896/SPolit.2024.73.9.

⁵ M. Lemstra, *The Destructive Effects of State Capture in the Western Balkans: EU Enlargement Undermined*, Policy Brief, «Clingendael», Netherlands Institute of International Relations, September 2020.

⁶ A. Krasteva, *State Capture versus Contestatory Citizenship in Bulgaria*, Policy Brief, Österreichische Gesellschaft für Europapolitik, Vienna, 7 December 2021, p. 7.

⁷ M. Spirova, *Bulgaria: Political Developments and Data in 2021. The Year of the Three Parliaments*, “European Journal of Political Research” 2022, vol. 61, p. 47, DOI: 10.1111/2047-8852.12373.

Although these parties were unified by the popular frustration with the political situation, they also articulated stances on international matters. Whereas PP and DB openly expressed their attachment to European values and NATO, TSN swiftly embraced the shallow populist rhetoric, making the so-called “Macedonian question” a focal point of their political credo. Stand Up! Mafia Get Out! was even more unclear, as it consisted of both protesters’ activists and former left-wing (mostly BSP) politicians, perceiving the protests as an opportunity to bounce back to mainstream politics. The heated and dynamic political environment in Bulgaria provided for alternative political strategies. The *status quo* political parties (GERB, MRF, and BSP) had to withstand the wave of popular discontent. GERB was pushed onto the defensive in 2021, when, during the July and November elections, it was unable to win. Yet, holding public institutions and possessing disciplined political structures throughout the state, Borisov managed not only to survive but also to return after the tide of social discontent⁸, continuing its pro-Western orientation and values.

BSP applied a different strategy: being a formal opposition to GERB, it claimed to side with the protesters. The real challenge for BSP, a consistent promoter of Russia’s interests in Bulgaria, with the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine, was to take a clear geopolitical positioning. BSP tried to reconcile anti-GERB and anti-war positions; however, this strategy did not work: BSP lost half of its supporters between 2021 and 2024, which made it the biggest loser of popular support among the *status quo* parties. BSP’s decline is connected with the growth of the anti-Western, nationalist, and openly pro-Russian, anti-EU and anti-NATO party Revival (Възраждане) that emerged as an alternative for the discredited nationalist partners (VMRO, NFSB) of Borisov’s governments. Importantly, Revival’s consistently growing support, which made it a third political power in the latest elections in October 2024, forced most of the political parties represented in parliament to declare a *cordon sanitaire* around it. The decision was justified by the “systemic use of political aggression and hate speech”⁹. Moreover, the Movement for Rights and Freedoms took the strategy of a passive observer

⁸ S. Domaradzki, *Pokojowa rewolucja...*, pp. 151–170.

⁹ Държавата изгради „санитарен кордон“ около партия „Възраждане“ (ОБЗОР) [Darzhavata izgradi “sanitaren kordon” okolo partiya “Vazrazhdane” (OBZOR)], Eurocom. bg, 27 February 2025, <https://eurocom.bg/2025/02/27/darzhavata-izgradi-sanitaren-kordon-okolo-partiya-vazrazhdane-obzor/> [27.02.2025].

and more distanced opposition. MRF remained on the safe side, as it had the most disciplined electorate, considered the representative of the Turkish minority, and *de facto* being immune to political change with a guaranteed, consistent political support. While openly embracing NATO and EU values, the reformist parties PP and DB were not able to secure the needed popular support to rule independently.

One characteristic feature of the political crisis was the abrupt change of public support for one or another party, as in the case of TSN, as well as the appearance of new political parties like Morality, Unity, Honour, which stands for MECH ("sword" in Bulgarian) or Greatness (Величие). The partition of MRF into MRF-New Beginning (DPS-NN) and MRF-Democracy, Rights, and Freedoms (DPS-DPS) also contributed to the expansion of small players. Hence, the current Bulgarian parliament is the most fragmented in post-communist history. However, those small parties should not be neglected as they have the potential to bring political majorities up or down.

When reflecting on Bulgaria's political landscape during the political crisis, the role of the President should not be omitted. According to the constitution, when the parliament is unable to gather the necessary majority three times and form a government, the President dissolves the parliament¹⁰ and appoints a caretaker government. One of the specific features of the political crisis was that for most of the period between April 2021 and January 2025, it was either a caretaker government or the President's government that ruled the state. These governments not only conducted politically motivated actions but also signed internationally binding agreements, while the President consistently avoided calling the situation in Ukraine a war and was against providing military support¹¹.

Summing up, the domestic political situation in Bulgaria is dominated by instability expressed in the regular organisation of new parliamentary elections and the almost constant alternation of political power. Instability can, therefore, be considered as the only stable element of the inter-party struggle, which allows us to consider Bulgaria as a state dominated by the existence of an extremely competitive political system.

¹⁰ According to the constitutional amendments of December 2023, the President can no longer dissolve the parliament, which functions until the next parliament is elected.

¹¹ S. Domaradzki, *Rosyjskie wpływy w Bułgarii po pełnoskalowej agresji Federacji Rosyjskiej na Ukrainę. Polityka, gospodarka, społeczeństwo*, "Prace Instytutu Europy Środkowej" 2024, no. 11, pp. 47–50.

In turn, the basic feature of Polish domestic politics is the division between the conservative Law and Justice (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość – PiS) and the liberal Civic Platform (Platforma Obywatelska – PO) that has been operating since 2019 under the banner of the Civic Coalition (Koalicja Obywatelska – KO), including several smaller satellite groups. Other parties, although present in parliament, play a secondary role and act as coalition partners exclusively for the liberal camp. The existing dualism concerns the goals of EU membership, where the struggle is between the ideological concept (PiS) and a more practical vision of Europe's integration (KO).

An important element of the competing visions is the approach to the EU's future: while the main component of KO's vision is to maintain the EU's cohesion, in the PiS programme, the basic role is played by the postulate of polycentrism. Poland's main background in relations within the EU should be the Central and Southern European region – the so-called Three Seas Initiative that, apart from Austria and Greece, consists of post-communist states. In this line, the region should take responsibility for the EU's eastern policy and support further EU enlargement. It is Poland that should be the core of this integration model¹².

In the period under review, domestic political conflict in Poland was reaching its peak. Before December 2023, PiS had almost full political power, as it dominated the lower house of parliament and benefited from the activity of the President, who also came from this party. A characteristic feature was the dispute over the rule of law, resulting in democratic backsliding¹³. The response of the EU institutions was mainly to initiate numerous proceedings before the Court of Justice and to start in 2017 the procedure provided for in Article 7 TEU, which could have potentially resulted in the suspension of

¹² K. Szczerski, *Utopia europejska*, Cracow 2017, p. 187.

¹³ Cf.: M. Bernhard, *Democratic Backsliding in Poland and Hungary*, "Slavic Review" 2021, vol. 80, no. 3, pp. 585–607, DOI: 10.1017/slr.2021.145; W. Przybylski, *Explaining Eastern Europe: Can Poland's Backsliding Be Stopped?*, "Journal of Democracy" 2018, vol. 29, no. 3, pp. 52–64, DOI: 10.1353/jod.2018.0044; L. Mokrá, P. Juchniewicz, A. Modrzejewski, *Rule of Law in Poland – Integration or Fragmentation of Common Values?*, "European Journal of Transformation Studies" 2019, vol. 7, no. 2, pp. 177–188; D. Bochsler, A. Juon, *Authoritarian Footprints in Central and Eastern Europe*, "East European Politics" 2020, vol. 36, no. 2, pp. 167–187, DOI: 10.1080/21599165.2019.1698420.

rights of a member state¹⁴. However, these actions were ineffective because the judgments were not implemented by Poland.

The parliamentary elections held in October 2023 led to the removal of PiS from government power and the formation of a pro-European coalition, with Prime Minister Donald Tusk seeking to quickly resolve the tensions with the EU. A period of cohabitation began, as the presidential office was still held by PiS representative Andrzej Duda. The President's reluctance and his vetoing of individual bills aimed at restoring the rule of law resulted in the lack of reforms expected by the liberal part of society and the creation of a kind of decision-making stalemate. The victory of Karol Nawrocki, supported by PiS, in the presidential elections in June 2025 will probably prolong this situation.

At the same time, both sides of the political dispute are jointly sceptical of EU federalisation, treating the EU largely as a source of financial transfers and an organisation facilitating the free movement of people. Another manifestation of commonality is the declared opposition to differentiated integration. Moreover, in all the years after the 1989 breakthrough, no significant pro-Russian attitudes have appeared in Poland; all the ruling parties have represented a pro-Western and anti-Russian option. The differences between them concerned the way of governing the state and the scale of Poland's cultural distinctiveness. Parties other than PiS and KO also represent similar positions. In the period under review, the Polish People's Party (Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe – PSL), a conservative grouping with peasant roots, Poland 2050 (Polska 2050), a centrist party, and the progressive New Left (Nowa Lewica) supported deepening Poland's cooperation with the other EU member states, however, without presenting a detailed programme in this respect. All three parties formed a joint government with KO in December 2023. A specific position was taken by the left-wing Together Party (Partia Razem), which, although also pro-European, remained outside the government.

The only clearly Eurosceptic grouping in the period under review was Confederation (Konfederacja), an umbrella party formed by libertarians

¹⁴ D. Moriarty, E. O'Keeffe, *Maintaining the Rule of Law in Poland: What Next for the Article 7 Proceedings?*, Policy Brief, Institute of International and European Affairs, Dublin, 21 February 2018; A. Szmyt, *Circumstances of the Application of Article 7 par. 1 of the Treaty on EU with Regard to the Rule of Law in Poland*, "Gdańskie Studia Prawnicze" 2020, vol. 48, pp. 119–129.

from New Hope (Nowa Nadzieja), nationalists from the National Movement (Ruch Narodowy), and extreme nationalists from the Confederation of the Polish Crown (Konfederacja Korony Polskiej), the latter announced independence before the 2025 presidential elections. The role of all these groups increased as their presidential candidates won a total of over one-fifth of the votes. However, they do not represent an openly pro-Russian position, offering instead an anti-Ukrainian programme.

Thus, the domestic situation in Poland is characterised by stability resulting from the existence of two strong and highly competitive political camps that alternate or co-govern within the framework of cohabitation. However, the division of society into two almost equal parts, conservative and liberal, involves many elements of instability in the system, based on mutual aversion and the search for opportunities to weaken or break up the political adversary.

3. Ukrainian war: Conditional or unconditional support?

The full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 added a new division line in Bulgarian politics. Entangled in the political crisis, parties had to take a clear stance on the most serious security situation in Europe since 1989. Particularly, the political rhetoric describing the events in Ukraine immediately positioned the parties; whereas the pro-Western element called the Russian actions “aggression” or “war”, the pro-Russian protagonists replicated the Russian narrative of “special operation” or simply refused to use the term “war”. Importantly, while GERB, PP, and DB condemned the Russian invasion, the BSP, TSN, the emerging Revival, and the short-lived Bulgarian Rise (Български възход) followed Moscow’s narrative.

The Russian invasion further complicated Bulgarian politics as it brought new tensions among the coalition partners during every government, among representatives of the pro-Russian and pro-Western positions. It has become commonplace to clash over the nature and scope of Bulgarian support for Ukraine, disputing whether the support should be strictly humanitarian or military, if at all, or whether troops should be sent. This topic was also connected with the desperate need for modernisation of the Bulgarian army.

Regardless of the unstable political situation until 2024, Bulgaria provided tangible military support for Ukraine. According to the current foreign

minister, Georg Georgiev (GERB), Bulgaria is ninth in the absolute value of delivered support. The assistance was approved by seven decisions of the Bulgarian parliament, authorising the delivery of various types of weapons, ammunition, and equipment¹⁵. When, in November 2023, the parliament authorised the delivery of discharged armoured vehicles, President Radev vetoed, arguing that they could still have been used. The parliament rejected his veto with the votes of GERB, PP-DB, and DPS¹⁶.

Despite serious domestic differences, Bulgaria adopted and maintained a pro-Ukrainian position, although it was conditional, depending on the unstable political situation characterised by the existence of active forces sceptical of helping Ukraine. In turn, in the initial phase of aggression, the reaction of all Polish authorities and most of the opposition was pro-Ukrainian. This concerned both political, military, and humanitarian activities. Three years of war did not result in a reversal of this trend, with Confederation and the Confederation of the Polish Crown as the only parties to fully express Ukraine-sceptical views. The remaining political groups were cautious in this regard and, in extreme cases only, called for a substantive review of the forms of financial support for Ukrainian refugees.

In detail, the first of Poland's strategic decisions was to strengthen Poland's support for Ukraine's EU integration¹⁷. Poland's activities contributed to Ukraine's rapid granting of candidate country status and the commencement of accession negotiations. Throughout the conflict, Poland also became the main advocate for Ukraine's future NATO membership¹⁸. The second strategic decision was Poland's weakening of its demands for resolving historical issues, although the topic of the "Volhynian massacre" was constantly

¹⁵ *Колко помощ и оръжие е дала България за Украйна: Сметката на външния министър* [*Kolko pomosh't i oryjie e dala Bylgarija za Ukraina: Smetkata na vynshnija ministyr*], Actualno.com, 10 March 2025, https://www.actualno.com/society/kolko-pomosht-i-oryjie-e-dala-bylgarija-za-ukrajna-smetkata-na-vynshnija-ministyr-news_2409493.html [10.03.2025].

¹⁶ *НС отхвърли вето на президента за БТР-ите за Украйна* [*NS othvarli vetoto na prezidenta za BTR-ite za Ukraina*], BNT1, 8 December 2023, <https://bntnews.bg/news/ns-othvarli-vetoto-na-prezidenta-za-btr-ite-za-ukraina-1259003news.html> [8.12.2023].

¹⁷ K. Garczewski, *W cieniu historii. Polska, Niemcy i rosyjska wojna przeciwko Ukrainie*, "Przegląd Zachodni" 2023, no. 1–2, p. 60, DOI: 10.60972/PZ.2023.1.2.51.

¹⁸ A. Zagórska, *Wpływ wojny na Ukrainie na bezpieczeństwo państwa polskiego*, "Studia Wschodnioeuropejskie" 2024, no. 21, p. 85.

present in the public debate¹⁹. The third strategic decision was to open Poland's borders to several million refugees from Ukraine, which was of particular importance for the labour market²⁰. The fourth decision was to direct their own military aid to Ukraine. On a *per capita* basis, Poles have provided the most funds of all donors. In addition, Poland became the central hub for the transfer of American and European military equipment²¹. Poland, also due to its geopolitical location, offered Ukraine unconditional support.

4. EU security: Certainty or uncertainty?

The debate on EU security is now at the top of all European discussions. In this respect, Bulgaria's presence in security initiatives reached a high level. In July 2022, the Bulgarian parliament was among the first to ratify Finland and Sweden's NATO membership, with Revival as the only political party voting against²². Bulgaria has also taken part in the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) within the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), being active also in other European formats.

The second important security-related context concerns Bulgaria's membership in the Schengen and Eurozone. Bulgaria joined the Schengen Agreement in two steps: from March 2024 for its air and sea borders and from January 2025 for the land borders. The vast majority of the political spectrum supported this act, with the notable exception of Revival, which considered

¹⁹ K. Musiał, *Polska – Ukraina, Polacy – Ukraińcy: specyfika relacji a eskalacja wojny na terytorium Ukrainy*, "Dyskurs i Dialog" 2023, vol. 11, no. 1, p. 76, DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.8431313.

²⁰ M. Duszczak, P. Kaczmarczyk, *The War in Ukraine and Migration to Poland: Outlook and Challenges*, "Intereconomics" 2022, vol. 57, no. 3, p. 61, DOI: 10.1007/s10272-022-1053-6.

²¹ Ł. Jureńczyk, *Changing the Importance of Poland in the Security Policy of the United States in the Context of the War in Ukraine*, "Przegląd Politologiczny – Political Science Review" 2023, no. 1, p. 61, DOI: 10.14746/pp.2022.28.1.4.

²² *Българският парламент ратифицира приемането на Швеция и Финландия в НАТО. Само „Възраждане“ против и поискаха референдум за излизане на България* [Balgarskiyat parlament ratifitsira priemaneto na Shvetsiya i Finlandiya v NATO. Samo „Vazrazhdane“ protiv i poiskaha referendum za izlizane na Balgariya], petel.bg, 13 July 2022, https://petel.bg/Balgarskiyat-parlament-ratifitsira-priemaneto-na-SHvetsiya-i-Finlandiya-v-NATO--Samo-Vazrazhdane-protiv-i-poiskaha-referendum-za-izlizane-na-Balgariya-___451834 [13.07.2022].

this a threat to Bulgaria's borders in respect of the migrant crisis²³. Also, membership in the Eurozone remains a political priority, and the strategic decisions on this matter were taken at the EU level in June 2025. Again, the strongest resistance to the Euro comes from Revival, which has not only tried to initiate a referendum on this issue twice²⁴ but has also organised provocations and an attack on the House of Europe (the European Commission Representation to Bulgaria). The criticism of the Euro is also shared by BSP and TSN²⁵.

The third problem is the attitude towards further EU enlargement. Bulgaria's veto on the commencement of the accession negotiations with North Macedonia was imposed by the last Borisov government and backed by President Rumen Radev in 2019²⁶. The veto lasted until July 2022, when the so-called "French proposal"²⁷ was accepted by both Bulgarian and North Macedonian authorities. This came, however, at an extremely high political cost, since the junior coalition partner in Petkov's government, TSN, left the coalition and pushed Bulgaria towards its next early parliamentary elections.

The fourth and constant problem is a *status quo*-reformist and an EU-Russia cleavage. The political spectrum suggests that the parties representing pro-EU (or pro-Western) values attract the majority of voters, regardless of whether they are part of the *status quo* or the reformist bloc. The anti-Western

²³ В. Бачева, Д. Къркеланова, *В парламента едни празнуват, други недоволстват от влизането ни в Шенген*, 24 часа [V. Bacheva, D. Krkelanova, *V parlamenta edni praznuvat, drugi nedovolstvati ot vlizaneto ni v Schengen*, 24 chasa], 12 December 2024, <https://www.24chasa.bg/bulgaria/article/19509438> [12.12.2024].

²⁴ З. Вълчанова, Е. Илиева, *Парламентът отхвърли и втория опит на „Възраждане“ за референдум за еврото* [Z. Valchanova, E. Iliyeva, *Parlamentat othvarli i vtoriya opit na „Vazrazhdane“ za referendum za evroto*], Investor.bg, 4 September 2024, <https://www.investor.bg/a/516-politika/400324-parlamentat-othvarli-i-vtoriya-opit-na-vazrazhdane-za-referendum-za-evroto> [4.09.2024].

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ *Рамкова позиция относно разширяване на ЕС и процеса на стабилизиране и асоцииране: Република Северна Македония и Албания*, Министерски съвет Република България [Ramkova pozitsia odnosno razshirjavane na ES i procesa na stabilizirane i asotsiirane: Republika Severna Makedoniya i Albaniya, Ministerski Savet Republika Balgariya], 9 October 2019, <https://www.gov.bg/bg/prestsentar/novini/ramkova-pozitsia> [9.10.2019].

²⁷ S. Domaradzki, „Francuska propozycja” rozwiązania sporu bulgarsko-macedońskiego. Krok potrzebny, ale czy dobry?, „Komentarze IES” 2022, no. 169, <https://ies.lublin.pl/komentarze/francuska-propozycja-rozwiazania-sporu-bulgarsko-macedonskiego-krok-potrzebny-ale-czy-dobry/> [21.07.2022].

positions are represented mainly among the nationalist leaning political parties (Revival, TSN) but also BSP, which, depending on the issue, is ready to compete for the anti-EU votes with Revival and TSN.

Interestingly, the political divisions are not obvious even if we only take the main political players into consideration. Although both GERB (*status quo*), as well as PP and DB (reformist), openly underlined their pro-Western orientation, at the same time, they became the main political rivals. It was the political clash between these two blocs that generated the enduring political crisis. Simultaneously, BSP (*status quo*) and TSN (*reformist*) were much less Western-enthusiastic, and *de facto* supported Russia's narrative and interests not only in Bulgaria but also within the EU and NATO. As was already mentioned, the MRF remained passive both nationally and internationally. After all, the Bulgarian case shows that there is a noticeable link between the generally pro-Western popular attitude and the behaviour of the majority of political parties represented in the parliament. Furthermore, despite some uncertainty, the political crisis did not harm Bulgaria's international standing as an EU and NATO ally, which confirms the argument that the crisis was dominated by domestic political considerations and did not question the general geopolitical orientation.

In turn, Poland faces three main challenges to European security. The first is the need for Europe to take on greater responsibility for military support for Ukraine from the US, and to take on responsibility for itself. Given the poor state of the European defence sector, quick solutions are still needed in the short term, such as introducing a special defence budget or transferring some funds from the *Next Generation EU* to security-related expenditure²⁸. This is connected with the CFSP reform by the introduction of qualified majority voting, about which Poland was sceptical during the PiS government²⁹. After the coalition led by Tusk took power, there was no clear change in this respect, although unofficial statements began to indicate a potential agreement to reform the CFSP voting system. Poland has also strongly supported the idea of appointing an EU commissioner for defence

²⁸ A. Koziół, *Wojna na Ukrainie impulsem do budowy europejskiego przemysłu obronnego*, "Biuletyn PISM" 2024, no. 53.

²⁹ A. Juncos, K. Pomorska, *Populists in the Shadow of Unanimity: Contestation of EU Foreign and Security Policy*, "Politics and Governance" 2024, vol. 12, pp. 11–12, DOI: 10.17645/pag.8099.

and space³⁰, remaining a PESCO member and a supporter of the latest NATO enlargements. However, after the 2025 presidential election, a relatively clear division emerged: while the government prefers to strengthen the EU's security capabilities, the president supports the strictly pro-American option.

In this regard, it is important to note that Russia's invasion of Ukraine was a powerful external shock to NATO cohesion. As Heidi Hardt notes, while shocks can temporarily disrupt cohesion, they also have the power to reorder political understanding among allies in fundamental ways³¹. Poland's strong pro-Atlantic orientation is, therefore, subject to certain challenges, which have been noticed by Tusk's government. The leadership role of the US depends to a large extent on the credibility of its security guarantees within NATO. The effects so far have been positive for Poland, as the US has increased its rotational military presence³². The construction of the US anti-missile base was also completed in early 2025.

The second challenge is Ukraine's EU membership. As pointed out by Elżbieta Kaca, the EU must develop far-reaching recommendations for Ukraine regarding the state of the rule of law, including the role of non-governmental organisations. It is also important to increase aid for the administration and deepen economic integration. Perhaps all the more important is reaching a consensus within the EU on its institutional reform, enabling possible eastern enlargement. The main element here is the aforementioned introduction of majority voting in some new areas of EU policies³³.

The third particular challenge for Poland is the instrumentalisation of migrants as a form of destabilisation of security on the eastern external border of the EU by Russia. Anna Szachon-Pszenny and Agnieszka Zaręba draw attention to several contexts of this problem³⁴. First, the main goal of the actions is to destabilise the security of the Union. This results from the

³⁰ A. Koziół, *Zmiana w myśleniu strategicznym UE – powołanie komisarza ds. obrony i przestrzeni kosmicznej*, "Biuletyn PISM" 2024, no. 168.

³¹ H. Hardt, *NATO after the Invasion of Ukraine: How the Shock Changed Alliance Cohesion*, "International Politics" 2024, open access version, DOI: 10.1057/s41311-024-00629-x.

³² Ł. Jureńczyk, *Credibility of American Security Guarantees towards Poland in the Context of the War in Ukraine*, "Athenaeum" 2023, vol. 79, no. 3, pp. 267–268, DOI: 10.15804/athena.2023.79.13.

³³ E. Kaca, *Perspektywy wschodniego rozszerzenia UE*, "Biuletyn PISM" 2023, no. 187.

³⁴ A. Szachon-Pszenny, A. Zaręba, *Instrumentalizacja migrantów jako forma destabilizacji bezpieczeństwa na wschodniej granicy zewnętrznej UE w kontekście wojny w Ukrainie*, "Politeja" 2024, no. 1, pp. 100–102, DOI: 10.12797/Politeja.21.2024.88.3.06.

strategy of the Russian Federation, which states that the US and the EU pose a threat to the Russian state and its values. Second, destabilisation primarily concerns the frontline EU members, that is, the Baltic states, Finland, and Poland at the top. Third, destabilisation of the EU is an element of hybrid warfare, which also includes disinformation activities of Russian and Belarusian propaganda. Fourth, the instrumentalisation of migrants and the Ukrainian refugee crisis requires a rethinking of the entire EU migration policy, which means the correction of the general philosophy in this respect. Fifth, hybrid warfare within the scope of the instrumentalisation of migrants on the border with Belarus has the potential to intensify. This is expressed in the number of attempts to illegally cross the border.

It should be clearly stated that, in the case of Poland, there is no cleavage based on pro-Western and pro-Russian attitudes. Political parties supporting cooperation with Russia do not exist or do not directly articulate their views. However, this does not mean that Russia does not have any influence on Polish politics and the media sphere, which is done through the activities of the Russian secret service, usually taking the form of anti-Ukrainian and anti-EU rhetoric.

Poland, as the fifth-largest member state, aims to play a significant role in the EU by influencing tactical and strategic decisions made therein. Whereas during the PiS government, Poland was an outsider, this did not apply to matters related to the war in Ukraine: Poland became one of the leaders of pro-Ukrainian policy. This practice has been maintained by the new government formed in December 2023. However, it is not certain whether Poland will play a significant role in the CFSP reform, because domestic divisions, strengthened by Nawrocki's victory in the presidential elections, may not allow for taking far-reaching decisions in this regard. Thus, the situation in Poland can be seen as one of uncertainty regarding the future EU security, although there will certainly be strong Polish attempts to link it with NATO.

Conclusions

The basic assumption of postfunctionalism is that the current shape of integration processes within the EU is influenced by the negotiating governments of the member states, whose positions are conditioned by the views dominant in domestic political systems. The latter are characterised by the

growing interest of the national public in European affairs, which results in a discord connected with ideological and cultural mobilisation of the mass public against solutions proposed at the EU level. Bulgaria and Poland, as EU members, are also characterised by this phenomenon.

The independent variable in the first of the hypotheses examined here (H₁) was the peripheral, or potentially flanking, geographical location of Bulgaria and Poland, while the dependent variable was the existence of a domestic political consensus on the state's security. This study shows that the political situation in Bulgaria is dominated by the "stable instability" of an extremely competitive political system. However, despite serious differences consisting of the activity of forces sceptical of this, Bulgaria has adopted and maintained a pro-Ukrainian position and pro-Western attitude in security matters. In turn, the political situation in Poland is characterised by "unstable stability" resulting from the existence of two strong and highly competitive political camps. Due to its geopolitical location, Poland gave Ukraine unconditional support, being one of the most important players in the Western European security system. Eventually, the "acting" political consensus emerged within both states. However, while this consensus is not as stable in Bulgaria, it does not raise any major doubts in Poland.

The second hypothesis (H₂) was based on the independent variable, stating cultural and historical differences between Bulgaria and Poland, which was supposed to allow us to assume that there was a fundamental split in the perception of all-European security between these two states. The basic distinction is the existence of a relatively strong pro-Russian political orientation in Bulgaria, with no such equivalent in Poland. However, the case of Bulgaria shows that pro-Western social attitudes dominate there, which does not harm Bulgaria's international position as a loyal EU and NATO member. Poland, for its part, is characterised by a strong desire to play the role of one of the EU leaders.

Therefore, it cannot be stated that there are differences in the perspectives on the future of EU security between the two states since they both present an unequivocal pro-Western position to the outside world. It seems that the existence of a moderately large pro-Russian option is not a factor that significantly influences the European and international policy of a state rooted in the Western security system. However, this requires further in-depth research.

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