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## **The “Northern Turn” in Poland's geopolitical culture**

### **„Zwrot północny” w kulturze geopolitycznej Polski**

#### **ABSTRACT:**

The article analyses the impact of changes in the security architecture in the Baltic Sea Region (BSR) on Poland's geopolitical culture. Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022 led, on the one hand, to Finland and Sweden joining NATO and, on the other, to a crisis in relations between Poland and its partners in Central Europe. This resulted in a new opening in Poland's policy towards its northern partners, who began to be seen as key allies in its multidimensional security policy. This latest diplomatic opening was in line with earlier investment and economic activities related to the BSR and ongoing socio-cultural processes, which have brought the countries of this region closer to Polish society. Therefore, according to the authors, we should speak in this case of a “Northern Turn” in Poland's geopolitical culture, which means that this culture has been enriched with a new direction that is of great importance for multidimensional security and strategic development. The article analyses three spheres of this phenomenon: formal, which pertains to the analysis of international system dynamics; practical, which relates to actual political and strategic decisions; and popular, which reveals transformations in the spheres of culture and identity.

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**KEYWORDS:**

*Baltic Sea Region, Poland, foreign policy, security, geopolitics, strategic culture*

**STRESZCZENIE:**

Artykuł analizuje wpływ zmian w architekturze bezpieczeństwa w regionie Morza Bałtyckiego (RMB) na kulturę geopolityczną Polski. Inwazja Rosji na Ukrainę w 2022 r. doprowadziła, z jednej strony, do przystąpienia Finlandii i Szwecji do NATO, a z drugiej – do kryzysu w stosunkach między Polską a jej partnerami w Europie Środkowej. Zaowocowało to nowym otwarciem w polityce Polski wobec jej północnych partnerów, którzy zaczęli być postrzegani jako kluczowi sojusznicy w jej wielowymiarowej polityce bezpieczeństwa. To najnowsze otwarcie dyplomatyczne było zgodne z wcześniejszymi działaniami inwestycyjnymi i gospodarczymi związanymi z RMB oraz toczącymi się procesami społeczno-kulturowymi, które zbliżyły państwa tego regionu do polskiego społeczeństwa. W związku z tym, według autorów, należy w tym przypadku mówić o „zwrocie północnym” w kulturze geopolitycznej Polski. Oznacza to, że kultura ta została wzbogacona o nowy kierunek, który ma wielkie znaczenie dla wielowymiarowego bezpieczeństwa i rozwoju strategicznego. Artykuł analizuje trzy sfery tego zjawiska: formalną, która dotyczy analizy dynamiki systemu międzynarodowego; praktyczną, która odnosi się do faktycznych decyzji politycznych i strategicznych; oraz popularną, która ujawnia przemiany w sferach kultury i tożsamości.

**SŁOWA KLUCZOWE:**

*Region Morza Bałtyckiego, Polska, polityka zagraniczna, bezpieczeństwo, geopolityka, kultura strategiczna*

## Introduction

Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022 constituted a *critical juncture* for the security architecture in the Baltic Sea Region (BSR), initiating a transformation of the balance of power and alliances<sup>1</sup>. Regional security complexes, as conceptualised in the theory proposed by Barry Buzan and Ole Wæver, typically undergo gradual evolution; however, in cases of sudden shocks – such as the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks – rapid structural changes become possible<sup>2</sup>. Russia's aggression against Ukraine and

<sup>1</sup> D. Szacawa, K. Musiał (eds.), *The Baltic Sea Region after Russia's invasion of Ukraine*, Lublin 2022.

<sup>2</sup> B. Buzan, O. Wæver, *Regions and powers: The structure of international security*, Cambridge 2003, pp. 40–82.

the consequent transformation of security in the region exposed the fragility of traditional cooperation frameworks based on geographical proximity and cultural premises, whilst emphasising the importance of alliances built around shared threat perceptions<sup>3</sup>.

This critical juncture marked a significant shift in the regional (Central European) dimension of Poland's foreign policy and security strategy. First of all, the crisis of the Visegrád Group (V4) – which had served as the leading platform for Poland's regional cooperation in Central Europe for three decades – became particularly evident<sup>4</sup>. This necessitated a review of the existing foreign policy assumptions in the region, which were based on the idea of strengthening the cohesion of Central Europe. Secondly, a commonality of threat perception linking Poland with the BSR states became apparent. As a result, this led to a new opening in relations with partners from this region. Importantly, the revitalisation of political and diplomatic relations became part of the economic, investment, and socio-cultural processes that had already begun earlier. That is why we believe that the Northern Turn, resulting from these changes, should be viewed not only in terms of foreign policy but also in terms of the entire geopolitical culture.

The article employs a multi-level analytical framework rooted in critical geopolitics theory, drawing in particular on the conceptual apparatus developed by Gearóid Ó Tuathail and Klaus Dodds. The research methodology integrates three analytical levels – formal geopolitics (examining international system dynamics and security architecture transformation), practical geopolitics (analysing state-level political decisions and infrastructure development), and popular geopolitics (exploring cultural and identity transformations). Methodologically, the work combines qualitative discourse analysis of policy documents with quantitative analysis of data concerning defence expenditures, energy infrastructure parameters, port throughput statistics, and economic indicators. The study encompasses multiple categories of secondary data, including official NATO and

<sup>3</sup> D. Brommesson, A.-M. Ekengren, A. Michalski, *From variation to convergence in turbulent times – foreign and security policy choices among the Nordics 2014–2023*, "European Security" 2024, vol. 33, no. 1, pp. 21–43.

<sup>4</sup> A. Schmidt, *Visegrad Group – real entity or mirage*, [in:] R. Zięba (ed.), *Politics and security of Central and Eastern Europe: Contemporary challenges*, Springer International Publishing, 2023, pp. 237–260.

European Commission reports, national strategic documents, academic literature, and cultural texts (such as literary works and trends in the publishing market). This multi-method approach enables a comprehensive examination of Poland's geopolitical reorientation across four dimensions: systemic, state, regional, and socio-cultural.

## 1. Geopolitical culture

The concept of geopolitical culture derives from the research strand termed critical geopolitics and concerns the way states and societies define their role in the international system, relations with neighbours, the opportunities and threats arising therefrom, and – most importantly – their geographical environment.

Critical geopolitics draws upon classical and realist geopolitics, which primarily analyses the geographical determinants of international relations. In this case, however, the analysis has been enriched by cultural and identity perspectives. As Karl Dodds writes, “If we wish to understand global politics, we must comprehend that it is imbued with social, cultural, and ideological meaning”<sup>5</sup>.

The sources of geopolitical cultures should be sought in the history of a given community, including experiences of relations with other communities and geographical space, as well as ideologies and myths that govern social emotions. Irish scholar Gearóid Ó Tuathail identified that these cultures develop in three domains<sup>6</sup>. The first, termed formal geopolitics, refers to how analysts, scholars, and commentators consciously invoke the scientific tradition of geopolitics. Its manifestation becomes evident in scholarly reflection, think tank work, and international commentary. The second domain, designated practical geopolitics, concerns the utilisation of geographical templates in political discourses to present global processes. This constitutes the language through which political leaders explain their objectives and motivations whilst referencing political geography. The third domain is popular geopolitics, which is visible in popular culture and media (both traditional and social). This concept refers to how global politics and

<sup>5</sup> K. Dodds, *Geopolityka. Krótkie wprowadzenie*, Łódź 2022, p. 51.

<sup>6</sup> G.O. Tuathail et al. (ed.), *The geopolitics reader*, Routledge 2006.

the history of international relations are narrated through literature, films, series, popular music, and, contemporarily, memes and videos posted on social media. As K. Dodds states, this domain "allows citizens to ascribe meaning to events in their own city, country, region, or throughout the world, and to interpret them"<sup>7</sup>.

These three domains are interrelated and interpenetrating. Analysts, scholars, and politicians possess a specific cultural background, formed through education, engagement with high and popular culture, and the socialisation process (including drawing from family memories and experiences). Conversely, culture creators draw from observations of political life and scholarly discourses. There is also an ongoing exchange of thoughts and opinions among these three domains. It should be emphasised that the geopolitical culture of a given community is a dynamic phenomenon, characterised by competing positions and ways of thinking about one's place in the world. Russia exemplifies this; for centuries, ideas have contended, presenting it variously as a state belonging to the Western world, the Asian world, or as a distinct phenomenon of Eurasian character. Similar debates are found in the intellectual history of many other states and nations – from both Central Europe, which sought their place in the world between East and West whilst referencing smaller regional communities such as the Balkans or Central Europe, and former empires such as Turkey or Great Britain, which have defined their relationship with their neighbourhood, cultural heritage, and role in international relations in various ways. These ideas define threat perceptions and key spheres of interest. This concerns both attitudes towards other nations and cultural phenomena, such as religion (e.g., Turkey's stance towards the Islamic world) and ideas (e.g., Russia's stance towards Western liberalism), as well as geography. In the latter case, this also involves perceiving particular spaces – such as mountain ranges, rivers, and seas – as obstacles, barriers, or opportunities and areas of exploitation. Geopolitical cultures differ amongst themselves, as do their internal dynamics. Some are characterised by centuries-long continuity, whilst others undergo changes and turns conditioned by internal factors and changes in the international environment.

It is difficult not to notice that the term geopolitical culture is closely related to the concept of strategic culture, which according to Christoph

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<sup>7</sup> K. Dodds, *op. cit.*, p. 52.

Meyer encompasses “the socially transmitted, identity-derived norms, ideas, and patterns of behaviour that are shared among the most influential actors and social groups within a given political community, which help to shape a ranked set of options for a community’s pursuit of security and defence goals”<sup>8</sup>. Strategic culture, like geopolitical culture, proceeds from similar assumptions about the cultural and identity sources of foreign policy and security strategy. Whilst strategic culture has hitherto been associated primarily with security issues, very often focused on military matters and resilience, geopolitical culture is a significantly broader concept, referring to the entirety of international relations, including questions of values, interests, economy, energy, and socio-cultural relations.

## **2. Formal geopolitics: Transformation of regional security architecture in the BSR after 2022**

At the level of formal geopolitics, the Northern Turn represents a response to the dynamic transformation of security architecture in the BSR. Its most spectacular manifestation was the accession of Finland and Sweden to NATO, described as a “quiet revolution” or “geopolitical gamechanger”<sup>9</sup>. Both these Nordic states had, for decades, defined themselves as militarily non-aligned, and their security policy was based on the principle of non-engagement in peacetime, with the intention of maintaining neutrality in the event of war. However, following the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the process of security policy change in both states proceeded at an extraordinarily rapid pace. In Finland, as late as the first half of January 2022, only 27% of citizens supported NATO membership. However, by 17 May 2022, parliament had approved the membership application by an overwhelming majority of 188 votes in favour, with eight against and three abstentions. In Sweden’s case, the process proceeded in parallel, though due to resistance from Turkey and Hungary, it was finalised later.

<sup>8</sup> C.O. Meyer, *The quest for a European strategic culture: Changing norms on security and defence in the European Union*, Basingstoke 2006, p. 20.

<sup>9</sup> M. Ålander, *A quiet revolution in the North: Change and continuity in Finnish and Swedish security policies*, [in:] D. Szacawa, K. Musiał (eds.), *The Baltic Sea Region...*, pp. 49–60.

Formally, Finland became a member of the Alliance on 4 April 2023, and Sweden on 7 March 2024<sup>10</sup>.

The accession of Finland and Sweden to NATO fundamentally altered the geostrategic situation in the BSR. The enlargement of the Alliance to include two Nordic states, apart from the symbolic change in the regional security architecture, also has practical significance at three levels. At the political level, the security policies of both states have, in many respects, become aligned with those of Poland and the Baltic states, particularly regarding the shared perception of threats from Russia and the strengthening of NATO's eastern flank. At the strategic level, it will ensure better control over sea routes in the Baltic Sea and strengthen the ability to assist the Baltic states in the event of potential aggression on their territory (by land, sea, and air). At the operational level, the ability of both states to defend their own territory and their contribution to the development of NATO's collective forces will strengthen the regional capacity of the Alliance<sup>11</sup>.

The transformation of security architecture in the BSR after 2022 is an intensive process driven by several systemic factors. Analysis of collected research indicates three key mechanisms of this process. First, the direct impact of the Russian invasion of Ukraine is noticeable, which acts as the primary catalyst for military infrastructure modernisation throughout the region as well as force deployment<sup>12</sup>. The decision to strengthen NATO's eastern flank was made at the Newport Summit (Wales) in September 2014, following Russia's annexation of Crimea, when the NATO Response Force (NRF) was reformed, including the creation of a multinational high-readiness brigade – the 5,000-strong Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF). Further key decisions strengthening the eastern flank were made at the NATO Summit in Warsaw in 2016, when the creation of the Enhanced Forward Presence (eFP) was agreed. Forces comprising eFP were

<sup>10</sup> D. Arter, *From Finlandisation and post-Finlandisation to the end of Finlandisation? Finland's road to a NATO application*, "European Security" 2023, vol. 32, no. 2, pp. 171–189; K. Muśiał, D. Szacawa, *Regional identity at the critical juncture: How the Baltic Sea region manages the punctuation of the post-Cold War equilibrium?*, [in:] B. Sarkar (ed.), *The Baltics in a changing Europe*, Singapore 2024, pp. 190–192.

<sup>11</sup> L. Wojciechowski, *Polska Polityka Północna: Strategiczne znaczenie regionu Morza Bałtyckiego wobec nadchodzących wyzwań w obszarze bezpieczeństwa*, "Bezpieczeństwo Narodowe" 2025, vol. 46, no. 1, pp. 11–34.

<sup>12</sup> K.D. Motacki, *Znaczenie wzmocnionej Wysuniętej Obecności NATO dla bezpieczeństwa Polski i państw bałtyckich*, "Bezpieczeństwo Narodowe" 2024, vol. 44, no. 1, pp. 91–114.

fully deployed in July 2017 and consist of four multinational battle groups of battalion size. Framework nations led battle groups in Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, and Poland, respectively: Canada, Germany, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Soldiers from other allied states supplement forces from these states<sup>13</sup>.

Second, the heightened threat perception and actions consistent with the logic of the security dilemma have led to rapid growth in deterrent postures and military adaptation<sup>14</sup>. NATO data show that BSR states, following Russia's invasion of Ukraine, have systematically and significantly increased their defence expenditure, measured as a percentage of GDP. According to NATO estimates, in 2025, Poland and the three Baltic states were ranked among the top four in this ranking. Poland will spend 4.48%, Lithuania 4.00%, Latvia 3.73%, and Estonia 3.38%. Moreover, the expenditure of Nordic states also places them in the top ten: Norway in 5th place (3.35%), Denmark in 7th place (3.22%), Finland in 9th place (2.77%), and Sweden in 10th place (2.51%)<sup>15</sup>.

Third, hybrid threats, particularly those directed against undersea critical infrastructure (including energy and telecommunications cables, as well as gas pipelines), have become a recurring subject of concern, prompting both technological and doctrinal adaptations in national defence strategies. The BSR is characterised by particular vulnerability to hybrid attacks due to the dense network of energy, telecommunications, and transport connections linking states in the region<sup>16</sup>. A visible effect of the decisiveness and willingness of regional states to cooperate in the security sphere was the establishment of the joint, multi-domain NATO operation called Baltic Sentry<sup>17</sup>.

<sup>13</sup> J. Gotkowska, *Russia as a challenge in the Baltic Sea Region: A view from Warsaw*, [in:] A.-S. Dahl (ed.), *Strategic challenges in the Baltic Sea Region: Russia, deterrence, and reassurance*, Washington 2018, pp. 85–91.

<sup>14</sup> K. Friis, R. Tamnes, *The defence of northern Europe: New opportunities, significant challenges*, "International Affairs" 2024, vol. 100, no. 2, pp. 813–824; T. Klin, *Counterbalancing, accommodation, and hedging: NATO Eastern flank countries' political strategies towards Russia*, "Rocznik Instytutu Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej" 2024, vol. 22, no. 2, pp. 37–53.

<sup>15</sup> *Defence Expenditure of NATO Countries (2014–2025)*, NATO, [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news\\_237171.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_237171.htm) [30.10.2025].

<sup>16</sup> R. Miętkiewicz, *Zagrożenia hybrydowe na Morzu Bałtyckim. Wyniki analizy możliwości przeciwdziałania*, "Terroryzm – Studia, Analizy, Prewencja" 2025, special issue, pp. 35–71.

<sup>17</sup> *NATO launches 'Baltic Sentry' to increase critical infrastructure security*, 14 January 2025, NATO, [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news\\_232122.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_232122.htm) [7.11.2025].



A consequence of the transformation mentioned above is the shift from subregional cooperation based on geographical proximity to alliances built around shared threat perceptions. The declining significance of the V4 is evident as it has served as the leading platform for Poland's cooperation with Central European states – Czechia, Slovakia, and Hungary – for three decades. The reason for this crisis is the fundamentally different perceptions of the Russian threat amongst members of the grouping, particularly on the Hungarian side, which prevents a common position on key regional security issues<sup>18</sup>. In place of V4 cooperation, we observe the development of new forms of collaboration, particularly within the so-called Nordic-Baltic format (NB8), linking five Nordic states (Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden) with three Baltic states (Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania), with Poland's growing role as a security hub in the region. This cooperation centres on a shared understanding of the Russian threat and the need to bolster NATO's eastern flank<sup>19</sup>.

It is also worth noting that this transformation occurs not only at the level of hard military security (utilising NATO, the EU, and the instruments of these institutions) but also in the sphere of soft security. Subregional cooperation structures, such as the Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS) and the Helsinki Commission (HELCOM), continue activities in countering non-military threats (environmental pollution, organised crime, or energy security)<sup>20</sup>. Simultaneously, they are increasingly focusing on issues related to civil defence and population protection, stimulating the exchange of experiences amongst states and societies in the region in this regard. Prime Minister Donald Tusk participated in the Nordic-Baltic summit in Harpsund on November 27–28, 2024, at the invitation of Swedish Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson, marking Poland's growing integration into Northern European security architecture. Following this summit, Tusk and Kristersson signed a new strategic partnership agreement encompassing eight areas of bilateral

<sup>18</sup> M. Zaborowski, *Central European strategies in the new Cold War: Between balancing and bandwagoning*, "Stosunki Międzynarodowe – International Relations" 2024, vol. 60, no. 1, pp. 1–18.

<sup>19</sup> P. Szymański, *Region nordycko-bałtycki w polityce bezpieczeństwa Polski: punkty wspólne i protokół rozbieżności*, "Bezpieczeństwo Narodowe" 2025, vol. 46, no. 1, pp. 35–48.

<sup>20</sup> K. Musiał, D. Szacawa, *Regional...*, pp. 188–190; M. Szulc, *Regional cooperation in the Baltic Sea Region in an unstable world: Opportunities, challenges, and threats*, "Polish Political Science Yearbook" 2025, vol. 54, no. 3, pp. 27–37.

cooperation, including security and defence, support for Ukraine, energy, climate and environment in the Baltic Sea Region, and trade relations. This partnership reflects Poland's increasingly significant role as a key actor in the Baltic Sea Region, both in terms of security policy and economic co-operation<sup>21</sup>.

### **3. Practical geopolitics: Energy infrastructure, maritime economy, and the sub-regional dimension**

The process of turning towards the North in Poland's geopolitical culture finds its most tangible reflection at the state level in the transformation of energy infrastructure, the development of the maritime economy, and in the sub-regional dimension. These interrelated processes form the foundation of Poland's reorientation of its economic strategy towards the BSR and cooperation with Nordic partners, thereby creating a new quality in Polish thinking about energy security and geopolitical position. Key elements of this transformation are related to the energy sphere: the Baltic Pipe project (a gas pipeline connecting Norway with Poland through Denmark) and the LNG terminal in Świnoujście.

The construction of the Baltic Pipe gas pipeline was carried out between 2018 and 2022, and its significance extends beyond the technical dimension. This gas pipeline has become a symbol of Polish-Norwegian cooperation and a means of deeper integration with the Nordic-Baltic space<sup>22</sup>. The project was implemented in collaboration with transmission system operators from Denmark (Energinet) and Poland (Gaz-System), with support from Norway (Gassco). Launched on 1 October 2022, it represents a strategic breakthrough in Poland's energy policy. This infrastructure, with a transmission capacity of 10 billion cubic meters of gas annually from Norway to Poland (and 3 billion cubic meters in the reverse direction), has enabled Poland

<sup>21</sup> D. Szacawa, *Poland's Northern Policy and Nordic-Baltic Cooperation*, "IEŚ Commentaries" 2024, no. 230, <https://ies.lublin.pl/en/comments/polands-northern-policy-and-nordic-baltic-cooperation/> [4.11.2025].

<sup>22</sup> J.M. Godzimirski et al., *Polish-Norwegian Perceptions and Interactions*, Warsaw 2024, pp. 18–19.

to obtain direct access to gas deposits on the Norwegian Shelf<sup>23</sup>. As the European Commission emphasises, the Baltic Pipe constitutes a key project for regional supply security and is the result of the European Union's long-term policy aimed at diversifying gas sources<sup>24</sup>. In 2024, it accounted for 45.4% of Poland's natural gas imports; in the first three quarters of 2025, approximately 5.74 billion cubic meters of gas were transmitted through the Baltic Pipe, making it the primary source of this raw material supply to Poland<sup>25</sup>. In 2023, Poland imported approximately 6.3 billion cubic meters of gas via the Baltic Pipe (approximately 44% of total imports), which, combined with LNG supplies through the Świnoujście terminal (6.5 billion cubic meters, 46% of imports), enabled the complete elimination of supplies from Russia<sup>26</sup>. This transformation occurred at a strategically important moment – just before the expiration of contracts with Gazprom at the end of 2022, in the context of Russian aggression against Ukraine.

Meanwhile, the LNG terminal in Świnoujście, operating since December 2015, received 329 LNG shipments by the end of 2024 (including 61 in 2024, which allowed the import of 5.61 billion cubic meters of gas)<sup>27</sup>. By the end of the third quarter of 2025, 60 shipments with a total volume of approximately 4.07 million tonnes of LNG (approximately 5.52 billion cubic meters) arrived at the terminal, which means that the so-called "Baltic corridor" accounted for over 80% of total supplies<sup>28</sup>. The increase in the number and volume of deliveries was made possible by the completion of the facility's expansion (installation of additional vaporisers, construction of a second berth, and construction of a third LNG storage tank), which increases the annual regasification capacity of the LNG terminal in Świnoujście to 8.3 billion

<sup>23</sup> M. Paszkowski, *Polish-Norwegian cooperation in the field of energy security in the political thought of Prawo i Sprawiedliwość (PiS) and Platforma Obywatelska (PO)*, "Bezpieczeństwo. Teoria i praktyka" 2022, no. 1, pp. 101–114.

<sup>24</sup> European Commission, *Launch of the Baltic Pipe*, 27 September 2022, [https://commission.europa.eu/news/launch-baltic-pipe-2022-09-27\\_en](https://commission.europa.eu/news/launch-baltic-pipe-2022-09-27_en) [20.10.2025].

<sup>25</sup> *Polskie LNG w trzecim kwartale 2025*, CIRE, 17 October 2022, <https://www.cire.pl/artykuly/serwis-informacyjny-cire-24/polskie-lng-w-trzecim-kwartale-2025-> [20.10.2025].

<sup>26</sup> O. Voytyuk, *The Baltic Pipe and its impact on energy security in Central and Eastern Europe*, "Polityka Energetyczna – Energy Policy Journal" 2022, vol. 25, no. 1, pp. 89–108.

<sup>27</sup> A. Sikora, *Podsumowanie rynku LNG w 2024 roku, czyli jak radził sobie gaz skroplony w Polsce i nie tylko*, 7 January 2025, <https://biznesalert.pl/polskie-lng-gaz-energetyka-polska-europa/> [15.10.2025].

<sup>28</sup> *Polskie LNG...*

cubic meters from 1 January 2025<sup>29</sup>. The planned Floating Storage and Regasification Unit (FSRU) in Gdańsk, with a total regasification capacity of approximately 6.1 billion cubic meters of gas per year, will further enhance supply flexibility and provide access to global gas markets<sup>30</sup>, with the first delivery expected at the turn of 2027/2028<sup>31</sup>. This LNG infrastructure not only strengthens Poland's energy security but also positions the state as a potential gas hub for Central and Eastern Europe, increasing its geopolitical influence in the region<sup>32</sup>. Energy supply diversification extends beyond the gas sector. The oil terminal in Gdańsk and the planned oil terminal on the western coast enable oil imports by sea, minimising dependence on a single supplier<sup>33</sup>. These investments in energy infrastructure not only strengthen Poland's economic security but also enhance its resilience to hybrid threats and energy blackmail.

Parallel to the energy transformation, Poland is dynamically developing the maritime economy, particularly port infrastructure, which constitutes the second pillar of reorientation towards the BSR. Polish Baltic ports – Gdańsk, Gdynia, and the Szczecin-Świnoujście complex – play an increasingly important role in European logistics chains and constitute a significant element of economic integration with the Nordic space. Port revenues to the state budget from VAT, customs duties, and excise duties reached 9.27 billion PLN in 2023, underscoring their fundamental importance to the national economy<sup>34</sup>.

The year 2024 brought record results for the three main Polish ports, whose total net profit amounted to 551.7 million PLN, representing a 26%

<sup>29</sup> GAZ-SYSTEM completed the expansion of the LNG Terminal in Świnoujście, Gaz-System, 22 January 2025, <https://www.gaz-system.pl/en/for-media/press-releases/2025/january/22-01-2025-gaz-system-completed-the-expansion-of-the-lng-terminal-in-swinoujscie.html> [15.10.2025].

<sup>30</sup> A. Serry, *Development of liquefied natural gas facilities in the Baltic Sea ports: A geographical perspective*, "Regional Formation and Development Studies" 2017, vol. 23, no. 3, pp. 134-145.

<sup>31</sup> *Construction of the FSRU LNG terminal in the Port of Gdańsk begins to pick up pace*, Port Gdańsk, 17 March 2025, <https://www.portgdansk.pl/en/events/construction-of-the-fsru-lng-terminal-in-the-port-of-gdansk-begins-to-pick-up-pace/> [16.10.2025].

<sup>32</sup> A. Podraza, *Bezpieczeństwo energetyczne Polski w kontekście neoimperialnej polityki Rosji oraz współpracy europejskiej i transatlantyckiej: Polska jako hub gazowy*, "Sprawy Międzynarodowe" 2020, vol. 73, no. 1, pp. 135-161.

<sup>33</sup> M. Piekarski, *Bezpieczeństwo dostaw surowców energetycznych do Polski drogą morską*, "Wschodnioznawstwo" 2020, vol. 14, pp. 177-195.

<sup>34</sup> D. Szacawa, *Poland's...*

increase. In total, they handled over 3.27 million TEU containers (a rise of 9.33%)<sup>35</sup>. The Port of Gdańsk achieved a profit of 263.9 million PLN (a 24% increase), setting a record in container handling at 2.25 million TEU (a rise of 9.68%), strengthening its primary position in the BSR<sup>36</sup>. The Port of Gdynia achieved a profit of 140.2 million PLN (a 32% increase) and handled 975,000 TEU containers, approaching the one million TEU level. The port is also developing the Outer Port project (launch 2028/2029). By filling in part of the water area covering approximately 151 hectares, a container terminal with an annual handling capacity of 2.5 million TEU will be established, along with deep-water quays with a total length of approximately 2.5 km, enabling the handling of the largest vessels entering the Baltic<sup>37</sup>. The Szczecin-Świnoujście complex recorded a profit of 147.7 million PLN (a 23% increase). Construction of the Deepwater Container Terminal in Świnoujście, with a capacity of 1.5 million TEUs annually, is underway. The terminal, scheduled for commissioning in 2028, will be situated east of the LNG terminal and will be capable of handling the largest container ships that can navigate the Baltic Sea<sup>38</sup>.

The *blue economy*<sup>39</sup> in Poland, although constituting a relatively small share of the national economy (approximately 1% of employment and 0.7% of gross value added), shows an upward trend. Since 2011, employment in this sector has increased by over 50%, reaching 158,000 people in 2021. Developing with particular dynamism are the shipbuilding sectors, fisheries, and non-living marine resources, in which Poland ranks fourth, fifth, and

<sup>35</sup> *Polskie porty morskie biją rekordy. Ambitne plany inwestycyjne na przyszłość*, Ministerstwo Infrastruktury, 9 January 2025, <https://www.gov.pl/web/infrastruktura/polskie-porty-morskie-bija-rekordy-ambitne-plany-inwestycyjne-na-przyszlosc> [17.10.2025].

<sup>36</sup> Actia Forum, *Polskie porty morskie w 2024 roku. Podsumowanie i perspektywy na przyszłość*, Port Monitor, 2025, <https://netka.gda.pl/polskie-porty-morskie-w-2024-roku-podsumowanie-i-perspektywy-na-przyszlosc-raport-port-monitor-autorstwa-actia-forum/> [17.10.2025].

<sup>37</sup> *Podsumowanie wyników przeładunków w Porcie Gdynia za 2024 rok*, Port Gdynia, 23 January 2025, <https://www.port.gdynia.pl/podsumowanie-wynikow-przeladunkow-w-portcie-gdynia-za-2024-rok/> [17.10.2025].

<sup>38</sup> *Polskie porty morskie biją rekordy...*

<sup>39</sup> The blue economy is a concept of sustainable use of marine, ocean, and coastal resources, which aims to support economic development while caring for the environment. See M. Gołębiowska, *The Blue Economy in Poland and the Baltic States*, "IEŚ Commentaries" 2024, no. 104, <https://ies.lublin.pl/en/comments/the-blue-economy-in-poland-and-the-baltic-states/> [4.11.2025].

sixth, respectively, in the EU in terms of employment<sup>40</sup>. Port development aligns with a broader strategy of integration within the Nordic-Baltic economic space. Polish ports function as alternative and secure transport routes in the context of geopolitical tensions, which were particularly highlighted by Russian aggression against Ukraine<sup>41</sup>. In the future, priority will be given to investments in critical infrastructure, innovation, resilience, and security.

The intensification of international cooperation in the BSR also has its sub-national dimension, both at the voivodeship level (the top layer of regional administration in Poland) – especially Pomorskie and Zachodniopomorskie – and at lower-tier local government units, primarily cities. Analysis of foreign cooperation priorities, which voivodeship assemblies adopt by resolution, indicates that it is precisely the BSR that creates the most significant potential for the development of these regions. It is stated as first amongst both the most critical geographical directions and cooperation objectives.

The Pomorskie Voivodeship, as specified in both the 2008 document and the 2025 document, emphasised the importance of cooperation within international associations focused on the Baltic Sea. The most recent document indicates the particular significance of networks such as Euroregion Baltic (ERB), Baltic Sea States Subregional Co-operation (BSSSC), Parliamentary Forum for the Southern Baltic (PSO), and structures such as the Helsinki Commission (HELCOM), Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference (BSPC), Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions of Europe (CPMR) and its Baltic Sea Commission, CBSS, Vision and Strategies Around the Baltic Sea (VASAB), and the Union of the Baltic Cities (UBC).

A similar consistency can be observed in the case of the priorities adopted by the Zachodniopomorskie Regional Assembly in 2009 and 2016<sup>42</sup>. In the draft document submitted for public consultation in September 2025<sup>43</sup>, even greater emphasis was placed on the importance of developing investment,

<sup>40</sup> European Commission, *Poland*, EU Blue Economy Observatory, 2024, [https://blue-economy-observatory.ec.europa.eu/country-profiles/poland\\_en](https://blue-economy-observatory.ec.europa.eu/country-profiles/poland_en) [4.11.2025].

<sup>41</sup> A. Sadłowski, A. Kijek, A. Zając, *Impact of Russian invasion of Ukraine on the Polish transport sector*, "Ekonomista" 2025, pp. 1–15, DOI: 10.52335/ekon/200606.

<sup>42</sup> *Priorytety Współpracy Zagranicznej Województwa Zachodniopomorskiego*, Urząd Marszałkowski Województwa Zachodniopomorskiego, 13 December 2016, [https://wwt.wzp.pl/sites/default/files/priorytety\\_wspolpracy\\_zagranicznej\\_wojewodztwa\\_zachodniopomorskiego.docx](https://wwt.wzp.pl/sites/default/files/priorytety_wspolpracy_zagranicznej_wojewodztwa_zachodniopomorskiego.docx) [24.09.2025].

<sup>43</sup> *Ogłoszenie o konsultacjach społecznych projektu Priorytetów współpracy zagranicznej Województwa Zachodniopomorskiego*, Biuletyn Informacji Publicznej Województwa

economic, and scientific cooperation, as well as the development of communication networks with partners from Sweden, Denmark, Finland, Germany, and the Baltic states. As in the neighbouring voivodeship, engagement in regional international cooperation formats was also emphasised.

The networks, as highlighted earlier, alongside regional initiatives, also hold significant importance for cities in the voivodeships above. This particularly concerns European Union programmes, such as Interreg Baltic Sea Region and Interreg South Baltic, as well as city associations including UBC and the New Hanseatic League. The first network aims to facilitate the exchange of experiences and deepen cooperation in economic matters and sustainable development. The second refers to the tradition of the late medieval Hanseatic League – its activities focus on issues of heritage, culture, and identity. Importantly, in 2025–2026, Polish cities will be organising meetings of representatives of these organisations. In November 2025, Słupsk is hosting the UBC summit, and in 2026, the New Hanseatic League congress will take place in Stargard.

#### **4. Popular geopolitics: Literature and life experiences**

Significant changes in the sphere of popular geopolitics began to occur even earlier than in the areas described above. As early as 2015, Polish literary scholar Przemysław Czapliński noted that the North was starting to assume a distinct role in the Polish imagination. Czapliński's deep reflection, based on an analysis of selected literary works, will be expanded here with a presentation of other socio-cultural phenomena that confirm his thesis: trends in the publishing market, the popularity of historical themes, the presence of Scandinavia in popular political discourse, and the issue of Polish emigration. In his essay, Czapliński stated that Polish imagination had been, until recently, stretched along the East-West axis. This was primarily a result of the history of the last three hundred years, during which Polish sovereignty was undermined or destroyed by Prussia/Germany and Russia, and the question of belonging to one of the civilisational-political circles became a key

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Zachodniopomorskiego, <https://bip.wzp.pl/artukul/ogloszenie-o-konsultacjach-spoecznych-projektu-priorytetow-wspolpracy-zagranicznej> [24.09.2025].



issue for Polish national identity<sup>44</sup>. As Czapliński states: “The East-West axis thus experienced represented the paradigm of Polish history and appeared as an unchanging frame of reference. [...] It represents not only the route from Moscow to Berlin and Paris, but above all, an image of Poland’s developmental possibilities. These possibilities always remain dependent and, therefore, not autonomous”<sup>45</sup>. Analysis of contemporary literature allowed him to conclude that whilst this arrangement remains current, it has been “weakened, loosened, and deprived of its exclusivity because it has been enriched by the North-South axis”<sup>46</sup>.

Of these two new poles, it is precisely the Northern one that gains particular significance according to the author. The North has become for Poles another West – closer and more accessible, as the relationship with it is free from traumas, complexes, and the compulsion of imitation. Czapliński indicates that Sweden, Denmark, and Norway have, for Poland, become an imagined model of modernity and social security. However, the latter stands in contradiction to Polish distrust of state institutions and attachment to personal freedom. According to Czapliński, this causes “reflection excluding the application of any Northern model in Poland”<sup>47</sup>. For this very reason, the relationship with the North is said to awaken in Poles the desire to search for their own model of modernity.

Czapliński’s thesis is confirmed by the popularity of Nordic literature in Poland. This concerns not only crime fiction and detective novels, which have become a global phenomenon, but also other literary genres. Beyond translations of works by contemporary writers recognised worldwide, such as Jan Fosse or Karl Ove Knausgård, new translations of classics, including Knut Hamsun, are also appearing on the Polish market. Classics of Nordic children’s literature remain popular, primarily due to the works of Astrid Lindgren and Tove Jansson. It should also be noted that there exist popular publishing series devoted exclusively to the works of authors from Nordic

<sup>44</sup> P. Czapliński, *Oś Północ – Południe. Mapa performatywna – „z geograficznym położeniem niekorzystnym zaczniemy wreszcie walczyć Polski”*, “Kultura Współczesna. Teoria, interpretacje, krytyka” 2015, no. 2, pp. 141–161. Czapliński expanded on the idea contained in his essay in his book *Poruszona mapa: wyobrażenia geograficzno-kulturowa polskiej literatury przełomu XX i XXI w.*, Kraków 2016.

<sup>45</sup> P. Czapliński, *Oś Północ – Południe...*, p. 142.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 143.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 161.



countries. Poznańskie Publishing House runs the Series of Works by Scandinavian Writers (which also includes works by authors from Iceland and Finland), within which thirty titles have been published since 2019<sup>48</sup>. A similar initiative is the Baltic series, published by Marpress, which, in addition to Nordic writers, also includes works by authors from Estonia, Lithuania, and Latvia<sup>49</sup>. It now numbers twenty-five titles, which have been published over the last six years. This is obviously not a comprehensive review of the publishing market – works by writers from the region are found in the offerings of many other enterprises.

It is also evident that the North has become an area of increased interest for authors of non-fiction literature, which is particularly popular in Poland. Until recently, Wydawnictwo Czarne and Wydawnictwo Poznańskie, specialising in literary reportage, primarily published books devoted to Central and Eastern Europe and the Balkans; an increasing number of works by Polish authors focusing on the Nordic countries are now being published. Other publishing houses also offer similar publications. A distinctive phenomenon in the publishing market is the work of Katarzyna Tubylewicz, which provides an in-depth examination of Sweden from a socio-cultural perspective. In this context, it is also worth mentioning the numerous and widespread publications on lifestyle-themed topics and guides related to Nordic ways of life, which are associated with the concepts of *hygge*, *lagom*, and *sisu*.

The enthusiasm for the Scandinavian theme in popular culture is also visible in numerous film and television productions about Vikings (such as *Vikings*, *Vikings: Valhalla*, *The Last Kingdom*), crime series (*Bordertown*, *The Bridge*, *Caliphate*) and the animated series *How to Train Your Dragon*. This theme is also very eagerly undertaken by reenactment groups. Their most important meeting is the annual Festival of Slavs and Vikings in Wolin, which has been organised since 1993. In recent years, it has gathered several hundred reenactors and several tens of thousands of visiting guests (according

<sup>48</sup> *Seria Dzieł Pisarzy Skandynawskich*, Wydawnictwo Poznańskie, <https://wydawnictwopoznanskie.pl/sklep/kategoria/literatura-piekna/seria-dziel-pisarzy-skandynawskich/> [25.09.2025].

<sup>49</sup> *Baltyk*, Wydawnictwo Marpress, <https://marpress.pl/kategoria-produktu/baltyk/> [25.09.2025].

to the Mayor of Wolin, Ewa Grzybowska, approximately 30,000 people visit the town during the festival)<sup>50</sup>.

The strong presence of Scandinavia in Polish public life is also manifested through the popularity of numerous brands (such as Ikea, Jysk, or Volvo), heavy metal bands, and athletes, particularly in winter sports and speedway racing. However, references to contemporary Scandinavian reality in Polish popular culture also have another dimension: in the internet circulation of opinions, Sweden is presented as an example of a state that has made serious mistakes in its migration policy. This view is most often given by bloggers, influencers, and commentators associated with new right-wing movements. Reports of crimes committed by criminal groups formed in immigrant communities usually serve as a pretext for developing similar reflections. The slogan “Szwecji już nie ma” [“The country we called Sweden no longer exists”] has become popular in this context. This statement is meant to signify that Sweden as we knew it from cultural works or our own experiences no longer ‘exists’, as immigrants from Muslim countries have dominated everyday life and cultural norms in this state<sup>51</sup>. This slogan has become so popular that gadgets bearing its inscription are now available for purchase. It should be mentioned that they are often used – ironically and sardonically – by people from left-wing circles<sup>52</sup>. Nevertheless, as can be seen, Sweden has become an essential point of reference in Poland for describing contemporary reality.

A crucial element of Poland’s relations with the Nordic states is the large Polish community residing in these countries. According to official data, nearly 130,000 Polish citizens reside in Norway<sup>53</sup> as a result of emigration over the last twenty years. In the case of Sweden, the situation is somewhat different, as emigration to this country has a more extended history and, therefore, Poles often have Swedish citizenship, with many people identifying with and having family in Poland coming from mixed marriages. Data

<sup>50</sup> W Wolinie rozpoczął się XXX Festiwal Słowian i Wikingów, *Dzieje.pl*, 1 August 2025, <https://dzieje.pl/wiadomosci/na-wolinie-rozpoczal-sie-xxx-festiwal-slowian-i-wikingow> [30.09.2025].

<sup>51</sup> B. Chmielewski, *I w tym roku świat nie będzie, czyli o obrazie Szwecji w skrajnie prawicowych mediach*, *Przegląd Bałtycki*, 28 January 2019, <https://przegladbaltycki.pl/9414,i-w-tym-roku-swiat-nie-bedzie-czyli-o-obrazie-szwecji-w-skrajnie-prawicowych-mediach.html> [30.09.2025].

<sup>52</sup> The Lewacka Szmata online shop offers mugs with the inscription “Szwecji już nie ma”, <https://lewackaszmata.pl/produkt/kubek-szwecji-juz-nie-ma/> [30.09.2025].

<sup>53</sup> J.M. Godzimirski et al., op. cit., pp. 8–11.

from the Polish government service gov.pl indicate that the 'size of the Polish community' in this state is estimated at 110,000. A similar situation exists in Denmark, where the 'Polish community' is estimated at 60,000 people<sup>54</sup>. To this statistic should also be added the 30,000 Poles living in Iceland<sup>55</sup>. It is worth noting that the figures above do not include seasonal workers, including those performing work on contracts lasting several weeks or months. To the aforementioned numbers should also be added a difficult-to-estimate group of people who spent several years in these states and then returned to Poland.

Labour migration, which intensified after Poland joined the European Union, meant that the Scandinavian states and Iceland became closer to us in a direct way – they became places of life and personal experience for many people, as well as an area of influence through family relationships. The character of labour migration to these states favours this, including the fact of maintaining constant contact with the home state. To the over 310,000 Poles living permanently in Scandinavia and Iceland, one should, therefore, add not only temporary workers or students but also families living in Poland, for whom this region has also become close and vital<sup>56</sup>. Polish ports, which handle regular connections with Scandinavian states, benefit from this; in 2023, the port in Świnoujście handled approximately 1.1 million passengers (48% of total passenger traffic in Polish ports), primarily on routes to Sweden. Meanwhile, ports in Gdynia and Gdańsk collectively handled approximately 800,000 passengers<sup>57</sup>. These maritime connections constitute a vital element of the economic, social, and cultural ties between Poland and the Nordic states.

<sup>54</sup> *Polonia i Polacy za Granicą – Historia*, Gov.pl, <https://www.gov.pl/web/polonia/historia> [1.10.2025].

<sup>55</sup> M. Walków, *Islandia szykuje się na wybory... w Polsce. Jesteśmy tam największą mniejszością*, Money.pl, 21 August 2025, <https://www.money.pl/gospodarka/islandia-szykuje-sie-na-wybory-w-polsce-jestesmy-tam-najwieksza-mniejszoscia-7147359649176096a.html> [1.10.2025].

<sup>56</sup> For information on the scale and nature of Polish emigration to Sweden and Norway, see K. Gmaj, *Polacy: największa grupa imigrancka w Norwegii*, "Studia BAS" 2019, no. 4, pp. 101–121; M. Friedrich, *Migracje Polaków do Szwecji po przystąpieniu Polski do Unii Europejskiej w 2004 roku*, "Cywilizacja i Polityka" 2016, no. 14, pp. 163–173.

<sup>57</sup> European Commission, *Poland...*

## Conclusion

Since 2022, the BSR has become a clear example of a regional security complex, defined by the inextricable interconnection of the security of individual states and collective threat mitigation through coordinated actions within NATO and the European Union. The BSR, following the Russian invasion of Ukraine, is undergoing a fundamental redefinition of its identity and security architecture, transitioning from a 'soft security' model to an assertive focus on collective defence and deeper integration with the West. This transformation creates both opportunities and challenges for Poland. On the one hand, Finland and Sweden's accession to NATO, along with the growing importance of Nordic-Baltic cooperation, opens up new possibilities for Poland to play a regional leadership role in security matters. Poland, as the largest state on NATO's eastern flank, has the potential to serve as a bridge connecting Nordic, Baltic, and Central European states. Poland's presidency of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR) in 2024–2025 and its chairmanship of the CBSS (July 2025 – June 2026) also align with the growing significance of the northern direction<sup>58</sup>. On the other hand, effectively utilising this potential requires a strategic reorientation of Poland's foreign and security policy. The BSR, with its extensive institutional infrastructure, historical experiences, and shared threat perceptions, represents a natural direction for such reorientation.

Sweden and Finland's accession to NATO shifts Poland's obligations concerning the defence of allied territory further north. This, in turn, holds particular significance for the Polish Navy, which has been the most neglected component of Poland's armed forces for years. Its capabilities must now be significantly strengthened, which is the purpose of the *Miecznik* (frigates) and *Orka* (submarines) programmes. The strategic importance of the Baltic Sea – particularly in the context of controlling the Danish straits and islands such as Gotland, Bornholm, Saaremaa, and the Åland Islands – is as vital today as it was in Viking times.

<sup>58</sup> *Presidency of the Republic of Poland in the Council of the Baltic Sea States 2025–2026 Priorities*, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Poland, <https://www.gov.pl/web/diplomacy/presidency-of-the-republic-of-poland-in-the-council-of-the-baltic-sea-states-20252026-priorities> [25.08.2025].

The expansion of energy and port infrastructure, together with the development of the maritime economy, constitute a material expression of the Northern Turn in Poland's geopolitical culture. The Baltic Pipe, LNG terminals, and the expansion of ports in Gdańsk, Gdynia, and Świnoujście are not merely infrastructure projects, but strategic instruments of Poland's reorientation towards the BSR and cooperation with its Nordic partners. They also constitute the foundation of transport system resilience, which is crucial for national security. Moreover, these investments bring multidimensional benefits: they strengthen Poland's and the region's energy security, reducing dependence on Russian supplies; they increase resilience to hybrid threats; and they position Poland as a key energy and logistics hub for Central and Eastern Europe.

At the symbolic level, this is accompanied by a shift from cooperation based on geographical proximity to alliances built around shared threat perceptions, as well as a greater presence of Scandinavian themes in socio-cultural life, which translates into an increase in Poland's regional agency and deepening relations with Nordic partners. Trends in the publishing market, the popularity of historical themes, the presence of Scandinavia in popular political discourse, and Polish emigration are the most visible socio-cultural phenomena that confirm Czapliński's reflection based on the analysis of literary works.

The emergence of the Northern Turn in Poland's geopolitical culture is a new and dynamic phenomenon. Its shape is still evolving. It will depend on international conditions as well as the attitudes of the Polish political, business, and intellectual elites. It should be emphasised that the emergence of this turn does not invalidate other foreign policy directions and dimensions of geopolitical culture. Instead, it means that this culture has been enriched with a new direction that is of great importance for multidimensional security and strategic development. However, as researchers note, fully utilising the potential of this reorientation requires coherent political strategies (foreign policy strategy and security strategy), deeper integration in the region, and the cultivation of long-term cultural and institutional ties with Northern Europe. The Northern Turn at the infrastructure level constitutes a solid foundation; however, its sustainability depends on complementary actions at other levels – from the international system to the sub-national and socio-cultural levels.

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