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SELECTED ASPECTS OF POLAND'S INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS AFTER 1989

1989 was a year of a great breakthrough in the post-war history of Central European countries. The “Autumn of the Peoples” triggered democratic transformation of the countries in the region as well as marked the beginning of the end of the Soviet hegemony in this part of Europe. The so far socialist countries began their march towards freedom and full sovereignty. The bi-polar system, existing so far, sustained at its extreme ends by two global powers – the USA and the USSR – started to crumble. The USSR slowly lost control over the subordinated territory of its satellite states.

1989 was a breakthrough in the history of Poland as well. Within only four years the geo-political position of our country was radically changed owing to the impact of both external and internal factors. The former included primarily the break-up of the bi-polar system caused by political changes in the USSR and the ensuing deterioration in the position of the former global power. The internal factors included, in turn, systemic changes initiated in Poland by the “round table” negotiations and the impact of the changes on the countries of the socialist block.

The route to a qualitatively new environment in Central and Eastern Europe was not easy, however. Parliamentary elections carried out on 4 of June 1989 (free to the Senate and limited by a contract to the Sejm), meant an opportunity for Poland to change the course of her foreign policy. Tadeusz Mazowiecki's cabinet, established on 24 of August, for the first time in the post-war history of the Polish state had the opportunity to pursue the Polish *raison d'état*. Professor Krzysztof Skubiszewski, a specialist in international law, was appointed Minister of Foreign affairs then. In his *expose* he described the situation of the country in the following way: “We are facing a great opportunity for

Poland. In particular, there arises an opportunity to turn our geo-political position – however difficult it may be – into the source of power and advantage and not the source of dependence and stagnation. At the same time, the nature of the changes makes them spell out many new challenges and uncertainties, even threats”¹.

Indeed, the position of Poland, so far responsible for many of its calamities, became an advantage in terms of maintaining close relations with Western European countries to which Poland had been for centuries linked². The disintegration of the Soviet block and gradual loss of the power position by the USSR, created an opening to leave the system of dependency. On the other hand, however, the fact that Polish government rejected Russian guarantees (resulting from the obligation inscribed in the functioning of the Warsaw Pact) and started, in spring 1990, talks concerning the withdrawal of the Russian troops from the territory of Poland, created a situation in which our country voluntarily became part of the “grey zone of security”. Meanwhile, in view of the threat constituted by a hypothetical increase in imperialistic and hegemonic tendencies within the USSR, it was necessary to “transfer” Poland as soon as possible to a system that could guarantee her security and stability. The necessity was obviously related to the geo-political position of Poland. Already in 1992, two well known political scientists, E. Halizak and R. Kuźniar, wrote that “The structure of the close external environment of Poland is characterised by the presence of state powers incomparably greater than Poland. Moreover, our country is located between the most tightly organized, and thus hermetically closed, system of states (the West) and the, ridden with controversial tendencies [...] union of states which constitutes civilizational backwardness, a former empire in relation to which we had been until recently a satellite state. Poland is located then in the field of cross-cutting and colliding influ-

¹ *Sejmowe exposé ministra spraw zagranicznych RP Krzysztofa Skubiszewskiego*, [in:] T. Łoś-Nowak, *Współczesne stosunki międzynarodowe – wybór tekstów źródłowych z komentarzem*, Wrocław 1994, p. 167.

² Both in the mass media and politics, centuries long relations between Poland and France were stressed as well as past alliances with Great Britain. Activities by the Polish emigres of the period were consequential in the respect, especially in the United States and the countries of Western Europe. The opinion-making activities of the milieu concentrated around Instytut Literacki of Jerzy Giedroyc (Maisons Laffitte) are to be named as well.

ences of external powers that – intentionally or not – make a big impact on politics and *status quo* of our country”³.

Polish foreign policy after 1989 aimed at first at expanding linkages with European organizations, especially with the European Communities and the Council of Europe as well as at creating a new identity for Central Europe. Following the ultimate dissolution of the Warsaw Pact in 1991, membership in NATO became Poland's long-term goal.

From the beginning, Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs pursued a two-track policy. On one hand, it acted in favour of integrating the Polish Republic with Western European structures, in particular with the European Economic Community and North Atlantic Treaty Organization. On the other hand, attempts were made to build friendly relations with the countries in the region and regional organizations. The main objective did not entail only incorporation of Poland into the structures of the European Union which were taking shape then, NATO, Western European Union or even the Council of Europe but moving the zone of security and stability some 700 km East of the German border. Poland wanted to take an opportunity to integrate with the West permanently, making thus its choice between integrating Western Europe and disintegrating and destabilized Eastern Europe.

Effects of the Polish policy and the changes in Europe were visible not long afterwards. Only a few days after Mazowiecki's cabinet was created, on 19 September 1989, an agreement concerning commercial relations and economic co-operation with the European Economic Community was signed. This was only a prelude to further, much more complicated and long processes. Only two years later – on 16 December 1991 did Poland sign an association treaty with the European Communities (so called European Treaty) which regulated mutual relations during the period of transition from association to full membership⁴. In the same, 1991, year Poland became a member of the Council of Europe.

The events were important for Poles evidencing the change of direction in Polish foreign policy and the beginning of integration with

³ E. Halizak, R. Kuźniar, *Podejście strategiczne a bezpieczeństwo państwa. Aspekty polityczne i ekonomiczne*, Warszawa 1992, p. 3.

⁴ It needs to be admitted though that it was only enforced on 1 February 1994, which was related to the prolonged ratifying procedure in the countries of the EEC as well as to internal reforms of the organization (Maastricht).

the West. The process was blocked however for the countries in Western Europe and the USA were not ready to admit new members or guarantee their security in Central and Eastern Europe. It needs to be remembered that on 1 July 1991, the Warsaw Pact still (at least officially) existed while Russia was against any attempts to intercept power over the space of Central and Eastern Europe.

The weakening of the process of integration with the West resulted in establishing sub-regional structures: Visegrad Group (initially Visegrad Triangle), Central European Initiative, Weimar Triangle and Central European Free Trade Agreement (CEFTA). Some more attention should at this point be dedicated to the structures for two at least reasons. Firstly for the reason that Poland was a founder of most of the structures and has remained their important element (the vortex state) until today. Secondly, for the reason that the establishment and functioning of the structures proves that CEECs were able to structure the geo-political space of the region after the collapse of the Soviet block.

Poland started to co-operate more closely with Czechoslovakia and Hungary first⁵. Already on 9 April 1990 the first meeting of top state authorities from Czechoslovakia, Poland and Hungary took place in Bratislava but no binding conclusions were reached. At the time, differences related to perception of the respective national interests and ways leading to integration with Western European structures (individual or common?) came to the fore.

Ultimately, on 15 February 1991 in Visegrad, representatives of the three states signed a "Declaration of co-operation...", which provided a basis for functioning of the Visegrad Triangle⁶. Following the break-up of Czechoslovakia in 1993, the four member states adopted the name of Visegrad Group which is still current. Although the level of political contacts was high and Poland, the Czech Republic, Hungary and Slo-

⁵ The initiative for those countries to co-operate more closely was probably voiced first by Zbigniew Brzeziński, who at the beginning of 1990 was in favour of the renewed conception to create a federation of Poland and Czechoslovakia. The idea was related to Władysław Sikorski's and Edvard Beneš's ideas from the period of WW II. The initiative was supported by academic and governmental centres of Western European states and the USA. Politicians and strategists believed (quite rightly) Czechoslovakia, Poland and Hungary to be the most „westernized” countries of all of the states of the Soviet bloc. What mattered was also the advanced level of socio-economic reforms in the countries.

⁶ Cf. „Rzeczpospolita” of 16–17 II 1991.

vakia co-operated ever more closely on security issues, no serious breakthrough in developing material and social spheres of co-operation occurred.

Co-operation of Poland with Pentagonal countries initiated in 1991 was an important and promising form of sub-regional collaboration in Europe. The structure's origin dates back as far as 1989 when representatives of Austria, Hungary, Italy and Yugoslavia meeting in Budapest founded Quadrangle with the aim of co-operation to overcome the bi-polar division of the region dating from the Cold War. In 1990, when Czechoslovakia acceded, the structure was renamed into Pentagonale, while in 1991 – after Poland's accession – again, into Hexagonale. The break-up of Yugoslavia and the division of Czechoslovakia produced other changes in the composition and name of the grouping. Mid-way 1992, membership was granted to Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia and Slovenia and a more general name was adopted: Central European Initiative (CEI). The Czech Republic and Slovakia were granted membership in 1993. Macedonia joined the same year. In 1996 Albania, Byelorussia, Bulgaria, Moldova, Romania and Ukraine gained statuses of full membership, while Yugoslavia (today's Serbia and Montenegro) joined in 2000⁷. Altogether, there are seventeen Central, Eastern and Southern European states within CEI. CEI does not constitute an organization *sensu stricto*. Close forms of co-operation are blocked by differing situation within particular countries.

In 1991 Poland also began to co-operate more closely within so called Weimar Triangle. The Weimar Triangle constitutes a forum for consultation linking Poland with states which have not been part of the former socialist block but play an important role in Europe, that is Germany and France. Initiating closer co-operation with France and Germany at the beginning of the 1990s (when transforming Poland was only starting to build its position in Europe) has to be perceived as a success on the part of Polish diplomacy. It is noteworthy that the "French-German engine of Europe", playing a key role in European integration, would as a rule not admit other partners to institutionalized co-operation despite many attempts by some member states of the EU and other states as well. Poland was granted a privilege then⁸.

⁷ The Polish Foreign Ministry web-site: www.msz.gov.pl

⁸ A. Halamski, *Trójkąt Weimarski*, www.gdnet.pl/warecka

Since 1991 annual, informal meetings in which Poland, France and Germany participate have been held. They are dedicated to international relations, economic issues, cultural and inter-personal exchanges. Since 1996, within the Weimar Triangle, consultations of foreign ministers were started as well as decisions concerning a coordinated policy vis-à-vis Ukraine and the Baltic states were taken. In February 1998, in Poznań the first summit gathering heads of the states of the Weimar Triangle (Helmut Kohl, Jacques Chirac, Aleksander Kwaśniewski) was organized. The summit was to prove that even when the formal, organizational framework of the Weimar Triangle is missing, the forum is perceived as a relevant institution to build stabilization and peace in the centre of Europe.

During the first half of 2003, because of the Iraq war and the Polish support for the US military action there, the relations between Poland and France and Germany deteriorated to a degree. Despite the summit in Wrocław (Breslau), in which presidents Kwaśniewski and Chirac as well as Chancellor Schroeder took part, the rank of the Weimar Triangle was diminished. Apart from that, Poland's accession to the European Union opens potentially a much larger area for her politics, her interests become more diversified, targeted at other partners as well⁹.

Central European Free Trade Agreement (CEFTA)¹⁰ is another structure created to fill out the geo-political vacuum. It was also to create a bridge leading to the Union and NATO structures. CEFTA originated on the basis of an agreement signed on 21 December 1992 in Kraków (Cracow), effective of 1 March 1993. Initially, it was signed by three countries: Czechoslovakia, Poland and Hungary. The establishment of CEFTA was motivated by radically decreased commercial exchange between the countries of Central Europe after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the dissolution of the COMECON. The signatories declared that the agreement was aimed at lifting duty fees blocking commerce between the member states. Subsequently, the agreement was joined by Bulgaria, Slovenia, Romania. The Baltic states applied for membership as

⁹ M. Cichoński, *Porwanie Europy*, Kraków–Warszawa 2004, p. 81.

¹⁰ Alongside the name, two other names are used for the organization: Środkoeuropejskie Stowarzyszenie Wolnego Handlu (*Central European Association of Free Trade*) or Środkoeuropejska Umowa o Wolnym Handlu (ang. *Central European Free Trade Agreement*).

well. CEFTA ceased to function the moment the European Union was enlarged in 2004 since no rivalry economic organization may function within the EU. Until 2004 CEFTA represented a market of 90 million consumers. Its zone stretched from the Baltic Sea to the Black Sea and the Adriatic.

Let us return however to the issue that is crucial for Poland: striving to become a member of NATO and the EU. Co-operation of Poland with the other countries of the region was for Poland important but not the most important.

As mentioned above, North Atlantic Treaty Organization was not open and not ready for ambitions of CEECs, including Poland¹¹. Only on 20 December 1991, not to discourage post-Communist states from co-operation with Western European structures, North Atlantic Council for Co-operation (NACC) was established. NACC was to constitute an institutional basis for co-operation between the states and NATO.

In reality, at the Brussels summit in December 1994, the process of enlarging the Treaty was decided. Heads of the NATO states confirmed in the Brussels declaration that in congruence with art. 10 of the Washington Treaty, the Treaty is open to membership of other European countries. All the time, NATO's decision was influenced by the attitude of Russia which was continually opposing the enlargement of the Treaty to CEEC. Russia perceived it as a threat to its sphere of influence and its own security. Influenced by the Russian attitude, NATO offered an intermediate form of co-operation to the countries of our region – a project of “Partnership for Peace” (January 1994). The programme was to facilitate the development of co-operation between European countries and reinforce the state of continental balance through strengthening the institution of civil control over armed forces, common military training, undertaking common peace missions. The project became a compromise of a kind between expectations of CEECs and the actual offer of the Treaty, which was then not ready to expand.

The year of 1995 was a breakthrough in Poland's relations with NATO. Poland, as the first CEEC, was offered military assistance within the framework of the American programme “Foreign Military Fi-

¹¹ See more in: E. Haliżak, *Postzimnowojenna adaptacyjność i otwartość Zachodu*, [in:] *Stosunki międzynarodowe: geneza, struktura, funkcjonowanie: podręcznik akademicki*, eds E. Haliżak, R. Kuźniar, Warszawa 1994, p. 371–374.

nancing”. Co-operation within the programme “Partnership for Peace” was also developing (common military manouvers in Wędrzyn). Apart from this, with Russia more and more preoccupied with its internal economic and political crisis, the US attitude towards CEECs also began to change slowly.

Finally, in 1997 it became clear that Poland may enter the structures of NATO before it accedes the structures of the EU. American President, Bill Clinton, visiting Poland in July 1997 officially invited our country to become a member of NATO. A few days later (8–9 July) in Madrid a summit of NATO heads of states was held. Three CEECs were invited to enter negoatoations concerning their membership (the Czech Republic, Poland, Hungary).

The historical Madrid Summit ended the first phase of the multi-annual process during which the countries tried to become part of the Treaty structures. The process composed of the establishment of North Atlantic Council for Co-operation, the programme of Partnership for Peace (1994) and the politicians’ declaration of 1996 stating the readiness of the Trearty to enlarge despite Russia’s opposition. The last issue was partly solved when in May 1997 a “Fundamental Act Concerning Bilateral Relations of Co-operation and Security” was signed by Russia and NATO in Paris. The Madrid summit was also attended by delegations of 28 states that participated in the Programme of Partnership for Peace. The Summit Declaration stated also the date for finalizing negotiations in December 1997 and ratification of the agreements so that full membership of the new members could be achieved by April 1999, that is on the 50 anniversary of the Treaty. The next step was taken on 16 December 1997 in Brussels at the meeting of foreign affairs ministers of the NATO states. The decision concerned signing accession protocols, which ended the phase of the negotiations. The process of ratification was greatly supported by a debate held in the American senate. In the night of 31 April/1 May 1998, the Senate voted in favour of admitting new member-states, which practically decided about the admittance of the three CEECs, including Poland to NATO in 1999. On behalf of Poland, President Aleksander Kwaśniewski ratified with his signature the “Washington Treaty”, which is a legal basis of NATO on 26 February 1999. A few days later, on 12 March, Poland (together with the Czech Republic and Hungary) became a member of North Atlantic Treaty Organization, which significantly affected its geo-political position. Poland moved from the grey zone of security,

devoid of an atomic “umbrella” or security guarantees by any of the powers, to a zone managed by the most powerful military alliance in the history of humankind.

With Poland's accession to NATO, one of the most important paradigms in her history – related to its positioning between two, frequently rival, civilizations – was also broken. At the same time, during the first phases of the membership, Polish politics was confronted with two most relevant events. The first one was related to a debate about a new strategy of the Treaty, which was to answer the question concerning the meaning of NATO's existence in XXI century. The second event, which not only made the situation of the Treaty more complex but also produced fears concerning the future of the organization, was the Kosovo war (March–June 1999). Faced with the two events, the government of our country had to define Polish security interests within the Euro-Atlantic arena and choose a way to proceed.

Meanwhile, Poland continued to approach the European Union, striving to be included in its structures as soon as possible. Polish authorities rightly saw in our future membership in the EU hope for accelerated economic development of the country and for expanding the Polish security zone. The actual accession negotiations started only in spring 1998. 30 chapters were then selected for negotiations, which made visible how complex the process of accession was and how big the differences in legal regulations between the two negotiating subjects.

The European Council's summit in Goeteborg in June 2001 was specially important in terms of the enlargement. Representatives of the fifteen member-states of the EU decided that these accession countries which would have completed their negotiations by the end of 2002 would be admitted to the Communities in 2004. Thus, the date of the Union's enlargement was set.

The negotiations with the EU were finished during the already historic summit of the European Council in Copenhagen, held on 12–13 December 2002. On the last day of the summit a decision was finally taken to admit to the EU ten new members on 1 May 2004. Apart from the Polish Republic, nine other countries became members of the EU in 2004: Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovakia, Slovenia, Malta and Cyprus. The accession treaty was signed by Prime Minister Leszek Miller and Minister of Foreign Affairs, Włodzimierz Cimoszewicz on 16 April 2003 in Athens.

Thus in 2003, the “iron curtain”, which artificially divided Europe into two parts, fell down for real. Joining the process of European integration, Poland was offered a historic opportunity to overcome her, so far inopportune, position between great political powers.