**A Slavic dispute - the clash between Polish and Russian conceptions of European security policy at the beginning of the 21st century**

/ **Poland’s viewpoint on Russian conceptions of the European order at the beginning of the 21st century – the roots of the Polish-Russian dispute**.

1. Introduction

The aim of the article is to determine the fundamental conflicts of interest between Poland and Russia growing out of Moscow’s vision of the European order, which is perceived by Warsaw to be a threat to its own interests. In the present article, the author refers to documents, statements and analyses devoted to Russian foreign policy issued or published during the first two tenures of Vladimir Putin’s presidency (2000-2008), Dimitry Medvedev’s intervening presidency and Putin’s recent presidential term (2012-2018).

The thesis, which the author presents at the beginning of the article, posits that a large proportion of the problems that have occurred within the sphere of Russian-Polish bilateral relations have arisen from a clash between these states’ differing visions of the European order. The roots of these visions can be traced back both to the perpetual rivalry in Central and Eastern Europe between Poland and Russia and the age-old dispute over who should lead the Slavic nations. This thesis is elaborated from the Russian point of view by, for example, Aleksandr Shirokorad (2007). It should be added that due to the differing potentials of these two countries and a clear asymmetry in the perception of their mutual role in international relations, it is not bilateral issues that have traditionally formed the crux of Polish-Russian relations, but rather both countries’ engagement in the international arena and their attitude to the USA, NATO, European Union, or CIS. A. Bryc emphasizes that geopolitical burdens in Russia and Poland that have permanently affected the national characters of both countries markedly antagonize their bilateral relations (Bryc, 2012: 42-43).

The aforementioned thesis explicating the rivalry between Poland and Russia in Eastern Europe is inextricably linked to conceptions relating to the balancing and bandwagoning of power. Poland joined the Western alliances to bandwagon with stronger countries, yet Poland has also attempted to employ the contrasting balancing strategy of allying with weaker states from the region against Russian influence (Walt, 1987: 112). Poland attempts to use this mechanism to strengthen its position with regard to Russia in the international arena. Consequently, Poland’s NATO and European Union membership and strategic partnership with the United States are of key importance for Polish security policy. According to the bandwagoning theory, Poland is attempting to use such alliances as the one with NATO, because it has no other means of countering potential threats from Russia (Schimmelfennig, 2003: 29). Poland carefully exploits its EU and NATO membership and the capacity and potential of these two institutions, using them to implement such Polish goals as bringing the countries of Eastern Europe closer to the West (for example, through the Eastern Partnership Program) (Włodkowska-Bagan, 2012: 52). When it come to the geopolitical dimension of Poland’s strategy, relations with the USA are especially important. We can compare this strategy to the process of choosing an influential patron. In an alliance of this nature the Polish position is extremely weak and creates problems for how Polish policy is perceived within the European Union (Grosse, 2016: 120, 123-124). Warsaw also demonstrates a willingness to use some elements of a balancing strategy, particularly the seeking of partners for cooperation against Russian influence (Schweller, 1994: 74) among countries from Central and Eastern Europe. This policy is somewhat of an anomaly in geopolitical terms, but can be explained by the nature of the relations between the Polish state and its society (Schimmelfennig, 2003: 77) and Poland’s special attitude towards the Russian state.

1. Poland’s perspective: history, institutions, and geopolitics

The fraught relations between Poland and Russia have a long historical tradition. There is not enough space here to describe all these historical complexities, but it needs to be stressed that despite their common Slavic roots, Poland and Russia have developed in totally different civilizational conditions. Poland was quick to choose the European/Western type of state organization and, along with it, Catholic Christianity. However, Russia accepted Christianity from Byzantium and, at the same time, the eastern model of a power system. As a consequence, from the very beginning, these two countries started to develop according to different models of civilization. From the end of the 14th century, when Poland entered into union with Lithuania, competition between Poland and Russia for influence in Eastern Europe clearly already existed. The 16th and 17th centuries were marked by recurrent wars between the Tsardom of Russiaand thePolish*-*Lithuanian Commonwealth, mainly fought over which state should control Ukrainian territory. In the 18th century Poland fell under Russian control, before finally collapsing at the end of the same century. However, the most serious historical controversies affecting Polish-Russian relations are provoked by events that occurred in the 20th century. This is clear to see from the huge differences between Polish and Russian interpretations of the causes of World War II. While the Polish side underlines Russia’s cooperation with Hitler, the signing of the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact and, ultimately, its coordinated assault on Poland with Fascist Germany, the Russian side draws attention to their desire to protect the Russophone population in the eastern parts of Poland and the self-defensive character of the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact. These grave historical disputes continue to influence relations between the two states. This is primarily the case because politicians from Poland and Russia readily turn to these historical analogies to describe contemporary political processes in the rival state. For example, during the 2009 anniversary of the outbreak of World War II (WWII), Polish President Lech Kaczyński suggested that Russia under Putin was starting to behave like Fascist Germany (*Westerplatte*…, 2009). Vladimir Putin retorted by claiming that some countries (like Poland) had attempted to forget some uncomfortable facts from their own history (*Putin*…, 2009). Putin also reminded the audience that empires (like Russia) cannot be humiliated (*Ostre przemówienie*…, 2009).

The historical past also continues to influence contemporary Polish and Russian conceptions of the European order, especially when it comes to the role of the Central and Eastern Europe region. Polish notions of regional integration have historical roots, alluding to the Polish*-*Lithuanian Commonwealth, which incorporated the Baltic States, Belarus and Ukraine as well as Moldova. Some regions of these countries also formed part of the new Polish State builtin 1918. After WWII, Polish thinkers created the idea of a Polish policy toward the East which was in competition with contemporary Russian ideas favoring regional cooperation. The idea behind the Polish Eastern Policy was generally based on a construct created by Jerzy Giedroyc after WWII in which the issue of Polish-Russian relations played a key role (Pomianowski, 2004: 27). Russia itself was also at the core of this idea. According to Giedroyc, Russia, unlike western countries, had not experienced a stage of development marked by decolonization and had not desisted from treating territorial acquisitions as a source of development. Giedroyc believed that the only way Poland could defend itself against incursions of Russian power was by ensuring the independence of the countries located between Poland and Russia. Giedroyc’s project placed particular emphasis on the need to build permanent, friendly and equal relations between Poland and Lithuania, Belarus, and first and foremost Ukraine, turning them all into Polish allies. This was supposed to form a natural part of, and be a condition for, making solid, resilient improvements in Polish-Russian relations, the project’s ultimate aim (Pomianowski, 2004: 33-34). The entire Eastern Policy, as conceived by Giedroyc, was therefore devoted to Russia. It also alluded to Giedroyc’s *idea fixe* – the creation of a self-reliant federation of Central-Eastern Europe states (Korek, 2007: 72).

Any hint of Polish support for the idea of bringing post-Soviet countries into closer orbit with the EU is perceived by Russia as an act of hostility. However, when politicians assumed power in Poland for whom maintaining close bonds with western countries and European integration became a priority, Russian-Polish relations greatly improved. This is because the main priority of such politicians is usually to develop relations with Western European countries, such as Germany, an extremely important policy for Russia as well. In an article published in the *Gazeta Wyborcza* newspaper in 2009, Minister Radosław Sikorski from the liberal and euro-friendly Civic Platform party even renounced (at least in declarative form) the “Jagiellonian ideas”. This effectively meant that he was declaring a reduction in Polish involvement in issues relating to the future of Eastern Europe (Sikorski, 2009). After the Polish parliamentary elections of 2015, which were won by the conservative euro-sceptic party Law and Justice (PiS), there was a return to Giedroyc’s ideas on Poland’s eastern policy. The government made strong declarations of support for Eastern European countries (such as Ukraine) for aspiring towards greater integration with Western institutions. These statements were supported by further statements underlining Poland’s support for the strengthening of NATO’s military presence in the alliance’s eastern member states. Polish representatives such as Witold Waszczykowski, Minister of Foreign Affairs, also propounded the idea of building an “Intermarium” – a coalition of states in East-Central Europe(*Minister Witold Waszczykowski…*, 2017). The conservative Polish government also sought closer cooperation with the new American President Donald Trump on Polish initiatives seeking to deter Russia by bolstering Poland’s political position in Central and Eastern Europe. The Polish government also expected cooperation with the USA on Polish initiatives, including energy projects, directed at the development of economic cooperation within the region (*Spotkanie ministra...*, 2017).

Poland has always declared itself to be committed to a policy of supporting the pro-European aspirations of CIS countries. It has also declared its strong and continuous commitment to the security (NATO) and integration (EU) structures of the West. This thesis can be confirmed by analyzing various speeches given by Polish prime ministers and ministers of foreign affairs in the 21st century. However, some essential differences in the attitudes of particular political factions toward cooperation with the West and East have been observed as well. R. Stemplowski wrote that the political arena in Poland was generally divided into two camps. The first of these consisted of Civic Platform (Platforma Obywatelska/ PO), the Democratic Left Alliance (Sojusz Lewicy Demokratycznej/ SLD), and Polish People’s Party (Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe/ PSL), all of which were pro-European, pro-Atlantic, and favored a pragmatic eastern policy. The other camp consisted of Law and Justice (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość/ PiS) supported by smaller right-wing groupings, and advocated a nationalistic policy based on bandwagoning towards the USA, euroscepticism, and an eastern policy grounded in an anti-Russian stance (Zięba, 2011: 21). In spite of these differences, the entities which guaranteed Poland’s security were generally the USA (or NATO, in which the USA played an important role) and the European Union. This had wide-ranging implications that affected Polish-Russian relations, mainly because NATO has invariably been presented in Russian policy enunciations and documents dating from the 1990s onwards as a hostile organization endangering Russian interests.

The Russians measured the potential usefulness of particular interest groups in Poland for their own policy by evaluating their respective attitudes towards Russia. One proposal for a method for characterizing Polish political parties involved their tripartite division into those that were loyal, those that were disloyal, and those that held a neutral stance toward Russia and its interests. According to this criterion, only the barely functioning Self-Defense of the Republic of Poland (Samoobrona Rzeczpospolitej Polskiej) party was recognized as loyal. Civic Platform was defined as neutral, Law and Justice as disloyal, and the Democratic Left Alliance as neutral (Tarasov, 2008: 142). This characterization would appear to serve as a good starting point for reflecting on problems occurring in Polish-Russian relations.

A clear contradiction between Polish and Russian interests with regard to NATO and the European security architecture became conspicuous during the debates in 2010 over a new strategic concept for the Treaty. General Stanisław Koziej (head of the Polish National Security Bureau under Bronisław Komorowski’s presidency) stated that the new Strategic Concept had saved the Treaty by preserving its basic defensive function and redirecting NATO away from the path to becoming a supra-regional system of collective security (Russia’s favored option – author’s note). Particularly beneficial from the Polish point of view were the entries reinforcing Art. 5 of the Washington Treaty, the maintenance of the “open door” policy, and a clear statement making cooperation with Russia impossible when elementary rules and values respected by the Treaty members were violated or neglected. The decision was also made to develop contingency plans for Poland and to call for a NATO Response Force exercise in Poland and the Baltic States in 2012. This was very well-received in Poland, but posed a challenge for Russia. Much the same applied to the announcement of the need to create a balance between tasks connected with collective security (which was clearly defined as a NATO priority) and operations outside the Treaty’s territory. Koziej positively assessed the fact that desirable cooperation with Russia was conditioned by a need for certain principles of transparency, mutuality and trust to be adhered to. Another important aspect for Poland was the linking of a European antimissile defense system (MD) with NATO’s ALTBMD, effectively anchoring the USA to the European security system. The cooperation between NATO and Russia in this field was based upon the idea of concurrence between two independent systems rather than the building of a common complex to be controlled by Moscow (Koziej, 2010: 11-12), a target that Russia had been striving to achieve.

MD is one of the key points of divergence in Polish and Russian visions of the European security architecture. Poland had always supported Washington’s plans to build this system in Europe, particularly the elements of it to be located on Polish territory. Cooperation with the USA in this field was treated in Poland as reinforcement of Poland’s position in Central and Eastern Europe. The decision, taken by Barack Obama's administration on 17 September 2009 (the seventieth anniversary of the Soviet invasion of Poland), to not go ahead with the installation of MD elements in Poland, was enthusiastically assessed in Russia (Deryabin, 2009). However, in Poland this decision was welcomed with serious disappointment (Gillert, 2009). The new president of the USA Donald Trump returned to the plan to build elements of the missile defense system in Poland, provoking new objections from Russia (Kramer 2016).

After the NATO summits in Newport (2014) and Warsaw (2016), other serious contradictions emerged in Polish-Russian relations, such as the states’ differing stances toward new decisions on novel forms of NATO activity in Central Europe (mainly Poland and the Baltic States) which appeared to commit the Alliance to the building of new military formations. The Polish authorities took one of the most critical stands towards Russia of all the world’s nations. Regardless of party allegiance, Polish politicians started calling for a stronger reaction from western countries, and especially NATO, against Russia’s activities in Ukraine. Poland definitively supported the decisions of the NATO summit in Newport in September 2014, particularly the adoption of the Readiness Action Plan (*Deklaracja...*). Another NATO summit in Warsaw in July 2016 took decisions about the new military bases in eastern member states that were so important for Poland (the Warsaw Summit Communiqué). These steps corresponded to Poland's expectations, since the decision was taken to permanently deploy NATO troops and materiel to border state territory to strengthen their power as a deterrent and shorten reaction times in a crisis situation (Lorenz, 2016: 11).

1. Russia’s outlook on Europe

Russia clearly differentiates European countries in terms of their potential usefulness for its foreign policy and security. It should also be emphasized that there is marked disagreement between Russia and the EU member states over the interpretation of certain core values. According to S. Karaganov, Russia’s elites would like to join the Old Europe of 100 years ago, when the “concert” of European powers played a pivotal role. Meanwhile, contemporary Western Europe has renounced the supremacy of the nation-state and rejected forcible solutions in politics in favor of peaceful collective solutions. Furthermore, it advocates social justice at the cost of individualism and classical liberalism (Bieleń, 2008a: 248). The Kremlin regards the relations between Russia and EU as a mere supplement to the “traditional” political contacts between Moscow and the most powerful European states (the most important relations being those with Germany, France, Italy, and Great Britain) (Bryc, 2010: 248). When Russia emphasizes the importance of its relations with these countries, it is effectively treating them as a counterbalance against American influence in Europe and NATO. Russia has declared that other international organizations (i.e. the Atlantic Alliance) have demonstrated the lack of available alternatives to the UN, and its Security Council (Strategiya nacional’noy…, 2010), in which France, Great Britain, and Germany participate. Countries such as Poland that support American policy are treated as obstacles to the building of relations with Old Europe (Khotkova, 2005: 5-6).

As Professor A.D. Rotfeld (former Polish Minister of Foreign Affairs) once noted, Russia has traditionally perceived a significant proportion of Central and Eastern Europe as a sphere of special interest and influence. In recent years, it has also tried to marginalize and exert pressure on new NATO members by employing such tactics as cutting off oil supplies, cybernetic attacks, or trade embargoes. Consequently, the region has become a genuine zone of conflict between Russia and the West. Russia has aroused the concerns of many Central and Western European countries though they are more anxious about non-military threats such as cybernetic attacks than the prospect of war breaking out. Poland and the Baltic States are of central importance here. These countries fear military conflict with Russia – naturally, on a limited scale rather than open warfare. They see their main opportunity for defending themselves as seeking support from NATO, an organization that is negatively perceived in Russia (‘NATO 2020…, 2010: 111-112). The key issue in Polish-Russian relations, especially in the area of security, is the domination within Russia of a conspicuous tendency to perceive the world in geopolitical categories. Notions typical of civic or wide-open society are barely used at all (Bäcker, 2010: 55). This largely explains Russia’s unwillingness to take into account the opinions of smaller entities in international relations, and Poland undoubtedly falls into this category. This has led to a lack of understanding in Russia of the notion of European integration. Despite the evident conflicts of interest in their bilateral relations, Russia does not officially recognize Poland as a rival. Moscow believes that such a move, even within a very limited context, could reduce Russia’s status while increasing Poland’s importance. According to Russia, Poland is not a country that counts in the international arena (Włodkowska-Bagan, 2012: 49). Russia wished the EU and NATO to cooperate with the Federation and other integrative groupings it had created rather than with individual members of CIS as separate entities. According to the Kremlin, Europe should have two counterbalancing “power centers”: Brussels and Moscow (the EU + CIS) (Bryc, 2010: 242, 244). In 2011, the Russian Federation created a Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) to counterbalance the EU’s integrative influence in the CIS region (Gretskiy et al., 2014: 380-381).

At the beginning of the 21st century, the same Russian proposals for defining a new European order became very evident, and this has had profound consequences for Poland’s position ever since while clearly also affecting Polish-Russian relations. These postulates can be seen as an attempt to redefine the most rudimentary security policy goals and objectives presented by Russia since the 1990s. The following assumptions with regard to European security and NATO’s place in it emerged from Putin’s projects: the fundamental role when it comes to determining the shape assumed by the European order should be played by a multi-leveled concert of superpowers (where economic and energy-related factors would be of prime importance). The United Nations (UN), and particularly the Security Council, where Russia has the right of veto, should form the foundation for legal and international regulations. Security levels should be safeguarded by regional organizations – in Europe, this should be the Organization for Security and Cooperation (OSCE) (a quasi-UN for Europe). The third pillar of the European security concept is cooperation with NATO. At the beginning of the 21st century, Russia had a negative attitude towards the organization but pragmatically wanted to cooperate. It also made attempts to reorient NATO’s direction of policy towards the organization of collective security (Czajkowski, 2003: 156-157).

The proposals for a new European order that Russia had been declaring since the 1990s were eventually gathered into the so-called Medvedev Plan, otherwise known as the *European Security Arrangement Project* (Proekt Dogovora…, 2009)*.* It can be deduced both from this document and Russian politicians’ policy enunciations that Russia was striving to create a concert of powers and define its influence in Europe. First and foremost, the Federation wished to secure its monopoly over security in the CIS region, where the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) was to be in charge of security issues, a proposal included in the arrangement proposed by Medvedev (Proekt Dogovora…, 2009). Since Russia was the unquestioned leader in this organization and within the CIS area, it proposed to be given practical supremacy within this region. These were not, however, new Russian propositions. From the 1990s, the Russian Federation started treating the revitalization of its influence in post-Soviet space as a means of strengthening its position in relations with the West, thus securing a significant place for itself in a multipolar world (Bieleń, 2008b: 21). Moreover, the CSTO allowed Russia to secure its presence in such strategic places as Central Asia and the Caucasus while maintaining strongholds (like Belarus) in Europe. Russia, being aware of the limits to its own potential, counted on cooperation to create a more extensive system of security. This was meant to theoretically significantly increase its effectiveness, all the more so since the Russian Federation would be acting within a Russia – Europe – USA geopolitical triangle (Gomar, 2010: 24-26). Russia addressed this proposal for a European order to Germany and France first, supplementing it with offers of bilateral trade and investment exchanges that it thought could interest them. This created the impression that Russia, by doing this, was effectively alluding to the “concert of powers” notion (Krzymowski, 2009: 24). At the same time Russia wanted, as had been the case since the collapse of the Soviet Union, the signing of the cooperation agreement with NATO to be conditional on the organization limiting its military presence in the states that had recently become treaty members. In fact, Moscow demanded the Alliance prohibit the location of “considerable military forces” in newly admitted countries (Prus-Wojciechowska, 2010). This shows that Russia could have been striving to build what were effectively buffer zones in Europe, thus treating NATO members unequally.

Generally, what divided Russia and the EU most as far as security issues were concerned were their differing attitudes towards the future of Ukraine, energy policy, the Kosovo Question, and “frozen” conflicts within the CIS, in Abkhazia, and South Ossetia (Bryc, 2010: 247-248). Additionally, Poland frequently proposed initiatives within the forum of the EU which threatened Russian interests in those issues. Moscow’s main concern was to limit any actions by Poland and other new members of NATO and EU that sought to engage western structures in policies relating to post-Soviet territory, in particular attempts to bring Ukraine closer to Europe or offer support to Georgia. These actions were defined in Moscow as acts of espionage favoring Washington (Raś, 2010: 24).

Since Putin’s return as president in 2012, Russia's defensive strategy has been visibly strengthened to secure its position and spheres of interest in the CIS region. This assessment was apparently confirmed by Trenin, who wrote that Russian policy under Putin greatly resembles bidding farewell to an empire, a process that is generally accompanied by post-imperial wars (Trenin, 2011: 13-15). This kind of post-imperial thinking probably accompanied Russia’s decision to intervene in Ukraine in 2014. It manifested itself in the form of increasingly aggressive anti-Western rhetoric and strengthening of authoritarian tendencies across Russia, and was primarily provoked by economic problems, which started to influence the Russian model of power. Since 2012 (when oil prices were still high), the Russian economy has started to slow down (Menkiszak, 2015: 19). Russia is a typical example of a state suffering from petro-state syndrome, where the power of the political elite is consolidated by income from rent during booms, but such political states become brittle if the economy has problems. When political legitimacy begins to collapse (as was the case with Putin in 2012), these states resort to repression to stay in power (Auty, 2003: 39). The process of state militarization that followed Putin’s return was therefore hardly surprising (Sherr, 2017: 8). Lo (2015: 26) argues that the stability of Russia's political system and its relationship to foreign policy are closely related to the condition of the Russian economy. Economic factors were also a source of power, vulnerability, and engagement, and in the years of Putin’s tenure their influence on foreign policy has increased significantly. Minister Sergey Lavrov wrote in 2013 that Russia could not even hypothetically consider the option of Russia’s “attachment” in a subordinate role to some other key player on the international arena (Lavrov, 2013: 1-2). But the EU was still then perceived, at least declaratively, as a source of support for Russian economic development (*Kontseptsiya vneshney*... 2013). After 2014, Russia changed its strategy towards the European Union. In documents dedicated to foreign policy, the Russian Federation stopped declaring its willingness to integrate with the EU and started emphasizing the role of the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) as a universal integrative institution in the CIS region. Russia stated that the EAEU had been designed to play an important role in harmonizing integration processes in Europe and Eurasia (*Kontseptsiya vneshney*... 2016). This position was successfully elaborated at Russian talks with EU representatives, during which Russia explicitly declared that the EAEU should be recognized as an equal partner to the EU during talks on governance in the Eurasian space (Lavrov, 2017). Despite the West rejecting the Russian conception for the division of Europe into zones of influence (according to the aforementioned Medvedev Plan), Russia actually implemented these ideas through its decision to take aggressive military action in 2014. Moreover, clearly defining the post-2014 balance of power between Russia and the West on the basis of its military aspects was treated in Russia as a more stable solution than previously favored conceptions based on mutual trust. Trump’s suggestion that he would be willing to transfer the burden of ensuring the European Union member states’ collective security to the states themselves (by the same token limiting American presence in Europe) was welcomed with exultation in Russia (Golub, Alekseyev, 2017: 62-63). This kind of process could have fulfilled the expectations Russia had been presenting since the collapse of the Soviet Union (for example, in the Medvedev Plan). However, the Americans’ subsequent decision to cooperate with Central European countries such as Poland and the Baltic States ultimately provoked negative responses from the Russians (Belobrov, 2017: 47-48) such as the strengthening of their rocket forces in the Kaliningrad region (Peskov..., 2017).

Russia also treated EU activity in the CIS region (as defined in the new EU conception of foreign and security policy titled *A* Global Strategy *for the* European Union's Foreign *and* Security Policy*: “*Shared Vision*,* Common Action*: A* Stronger Europe*”* (2016)) as an obvious challenge thrown down to Moscow and its interests (Danilov, 2017: 16). One of the tools of European policy in this region was a joint Polish and Swedish project known as the Eastern Partnership, EaP (*A* Global Strategy... 2016). In Russian eyes the EaP was little more than a tiny component of a larger game plan directed against Moscow. Some experts from Russia forcefully expressed the allegation that the United States was playing the role of puppet master, smoothing along the EaP’s implementation (Gretskiy et al, 2014: 381-382). Continued close cooperation between Poland and the USA seemed to confirm these assumptions.

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1. Russia’s view of NATO and MDS

In the most important documents concerning Russian foreign policy issued by Medvedev and Putin, it is still the West and NATO that are perceived as the main sources of threat to Russia’s position. Both the *Concept of Foreign Policy* (2008, 2013 and 2016) and *National Security Strategy Until 2020* underlined that Russia had regained its former status internationally and was striving to fulfil its national interests. The character of Russia-NATO relations has a double-sided structure whose parts often stand in opposition to each other. At the official level, before the Ukrainian conflict in 2014, relations were determined by declarations of cooperation and even partnership. At the level of daily politics and among experts, Russia, as was the case during the Cold War, treated NATO (and vice versa) as a potential opponent (Oznobishchev, 2011: 50). The Russian Federation perceived NATO as an instrument of containment tasked with curtailing Russian attempts to rebuild their own influence in Europe (Ivanov, 2017: 34). In 2001, Putin stated that as long as NATO remained a military organization, Russia would evaluate it negatively (Shakleina, 2002: 302).

Nevertheless, Russia attempted to establish a dialogue with NATO on the condition that the Federation’s influence in the CIS area would be guaranteed (Baranowski, 2003: 427). During the presidencies of Putin and Medvedev, some changes of direction in relations between Russia and NATO could be observed. These did not, however, herald any significant change in Russian perceptions of the Treaty. Putin, despite adopting a pragmatic attitude towards this organization and taking up dialogue with it, incessantly regarded NATO as a threat to Russian interests. As Czajkowski (2003: 147-148) makes clear, NATO was regarded as the most important and constant threat to Russian security. In terms of security in the strictest sense, NATO’s role was not of crucial importance to Russia and that was one of the greatest paradoxes of Russian politics. The Russians (politicians, military men and others) realized that NATO could not attack Russia, since it was a defensive structure, and besides, public opinion in its member states would never agree to such a move. The Russian position arose from a specific paradigm for perceiving international relations. Russian experts conceded that close military cooperation between the countries of the Baltic region and the USA on attempting to change the geopolitical status of Eastern European countries such as Ukraine, Belarus and Georgia posed a serious threat to security in the region (Voronov, 2014: 107). This led in turn to fears of a possible military threat to the Baltic countries (Chivvis, 2015: 40). Some problems between NATO and Russia arose from the fact that Russia was not included in the management of European security as well as Russian aversion toward NATO itself, which had ultimately won the cold war arms race. Additionally, there were problems caused by a mutual lack of understanding at the cultural level and some economic conflicts of interest (many of which were energy-related) (Sakwa, 2008: 252, 254-256). By joining Russia’s rival and fomenting the above-mentioned conflicts of interest (e.g. campaigning to have an antimissile shield built on its territory) Poland automatically became one of the elements of policy Russia perceived as hostile. NATO, in official Russian propaganda, was considered as an institution primed to fight Russia. Poland was seen as a lesser threat, albeit one that favored the weakening of Russia’s prestige and international position (Awdiejew, 2007: 385).

One of the fundamental discrepancies between Polish and Russian policy was the differing manner in which they perceived European security. From the 1990s, Moscow emphasized the need to ensure that Central-Eastern Europe remained a bloc-free zone, whereas Poland’s main aim was to leave the “no man’s land, the grey area” of European security. In the new European division into two spheres, Poland wanted to enter the western part. Russia considered building security systems based on divisions to be wrong (Shanshieva, 1999: 115). Moscow’s negative attitude towards Poland, and Russia’s attempts to diminish Poland’s importance on the international arena largely resulted from the way both countries perceived the European order and the role of NATO and the USA in Europe. Over the first two decades of the 21st century, Russia regarded the USA as its main political adversary. Such an impression emerges from the *Concept of National Security* *of Russia* (valid from 2000 to 2009 and the new edition of this document valid from 2009 to 2020) which states that American attempts to build structures of international order based on world domination by the countries of the West under its leadership posed a challenge to the Russian Federation. According to Russia, this system was based on a one-sided forcible military solution to the problems of foreign affairs policy that made no attempt to acknowledge the basic norms of international law. The concept emphasized that among the most important threats to Russian security was the strengthening of NATO and its expansion towards the East (Kontseptsiya natsional’noj…, 2009, 2013, 2016). In the view of most Russian experts and scholars, NATO’s expansion, rather than increasing peace and security, only served to consolidate American presence in Europe (Shakleina, 2002: 286). The implication of such statements is that Russians viewed themselves as an encircled nation.

Russian experts and politicians opined that Poland and other new NATO countries were treated by America as a counterbalance to the conciliatory policies of other Western European countries towards Russia (Khotkova, 2005: 5-6). The view has also appeared in many Russian publications that the United States were striving to keep Europe dependent on them, especially militarily. The concurrent expansions of NATO and the EU were viewed as a conscious American policy targeted at the control of Eastern Europe. They were also meant to counteract the increasing political importance of Germany (which was reluctant to encourage American presence in the region) (Narochnickaya, 2003: 49-50). In Russia’s view, the acceptance of post-communist countries into NATO was a conscious attempt to diminish the influence of Russia and Germany in the region to the advantage of the USA. This was essential, because this area was, in Russia’s geopolitical reckoning, unusually important strategically and determined Russia’s influence on the international arena. Within this context, the strategic partnership with the USA so frequently highlighted by Poland had to evoke obvious connotations in Russia and influence its policy towards Warsaw, especially when Poland was involved in extending NATO and the EU eastward. Furthermore, the Polish-American warnings directed at Europe against the rise of neo-imperialism in Russia were, in Russia’s opinion, supposed to necessitate an American military presence in the Old Continent. Russian experts borrowed a colloquial expression from the West to differentiate the NATO membership, defining the USA as coming from Mars (willing to use force) and the Europeans as coming from Venus (not prone to using force). It was easier for Russia to maintain political relations with Europe, which was more open to dialogue (Medvedev, 2003: 28). In Russia’s view, the new NATO and EU countries with their ally, the USA, negatively influenced the dialogue between Russia and Europe (Wawrzycka, Poborski, 2003: 12).

 Since 2000, another problem in Polish-Russian relations was provoked by Poland’s engagement in the building of the aforementioned antimissile system. As Kortunov (2009: 14-15) has argued, the antimissile shield may become a threat to Russia (within 15 to 25 years), especially if this period were to coincide with modernization of the USA’s nuclear potential. This system could make it possible for other countries to aim their atomic weapons from the USA at Russian targets. Increasing incidences of “Weimar syndrome” in the Muslim world will contribute to the escalation of transnational activity directed by terrorist organizations at the countries of “Great Europe”, which include Russia. According to Nikonov, an influential persona in the Kremlin, Moscow did not have any reason to support the expansion of NATO because this could only lead to Russia’s isolation and the undermining of its role in issues of European security (Nikonov, 2003: 36). Moreover, Moscow did not have any reason to support the USA’s plans for the Antimissile Defense System. In fact, Russia believed that such a system could cause the collapse of the control system over strategic weapons, not only in bilateral relations between Russia and the USA but also within a wider context incorporating China (Nikonov, 2003: 36). Russia was also afraid that, by neutralizing its nuclear missile potential, the system would undermine the strategic position of the Federation and its ability to control the situation in the Central and Eastern Europe region. The American antimissile shield in Europe was treated by Russia as an attack on its superpower aspirations and provoked a new armaments race (Beliaev, 2007: 88).

1. Donald Trump’s visit in Poland in July 2017 confirmed Russia's fears about Poland’s close cooperation with the USA. Trump in his speech in Warsaw criticized Russia and urged it to "join the community of responsible nations". Trump assured Poland of military, economic and energy cooperation will and American support for the regional collaboration and democratic movements in Central and Eastern Europe. The Trump’s words that US “has demonstrated not merely with words but with its actions that we stand firmly behind Article 5, the mutual defense commitment” and the suppression of anti-democratic forces in the world ([Całe przemówienie](https://www.tvn24.pl/wiadomosci-z-kraju%2C3/cale-przemowienie-prezydenta-donalda-trumpa-w-warszawie%2C754847.html)..., 2017) were particularly well perceived in Poland. Trump’s declarations were identified in Russia as a US return to close cooperation with new member states of NATO and the UE, which had also competitive character towards Russia’s interest in Europe. Russian experts stressed also the business character of Trumps declarations, especially in terms of military cooperation (for example sale of US military equipment to Poland) and energy issues (delivery of American liquid gas to Europe). In these issues US cooperation with Central Europe will harm Russia’s position in the region (Seferinkina, 2017). In Russian opinion, such American politics might affect the security architecture in Europe (Drize, 2017). Particularly important were the plans to build elements of anti-missile shield system in Poland (Tramp poobeshchal..., 2017).Russia’s CIS policy

Russia perceives the post-Soviet space as its sphere of influence, wants to maintain a buffer zone extending into the EU and NATO territory, and attempts to enforce the creation of a new security architecture that would allow it to weigh in on the defense and security choices of sovereign states (Lorenz, 2016: 10). The post-Soviet region has played a significant role in Polish-Russian relations. As was mentioned above, during Putin’s and Medvedev’s presidencies, Russia has regarded the region as strategic and tried to monopolize its influence in this area. Each attempt at outside intervention in the CIS area has evoked anxiety among influential Russian lobbies, both military and economic (Stępień-Kuczyńska, 2007: 135). Consequently, Polish aspirations to bring the eastern countries closer to Europe and NATO have met with firm responses from Moscow. The closer integration of Ukraine with the USA would question, for instance, the relevance of the Russian fleet stationed on the Black Sea and would also equate to an attempt to push Russia out of the region. For Russia, the potential accession of Ukraine to NATO is one of the greatest military and political challenges (Kortunov, 2009: 16). Moscow did not interpret NATO’s eastward expansion as a direct military threat, but rather as a challenge for the Federation’s national security (Kortunov, 2009: 24) that could possibly lead to Russia being “pushed out” of Europe. According to the Russians, rivalry between the USA (and its European allies) and Russia over their respective influence in the CIS region has been observable since the 1990s. Ultimately, the two sides attempted to implement mutually irreconcilable rival political projects for the development of the post-Soviet region and interpreted their mutual rivalry as a “zero-sum game”. Since the beginning of the 21st century, the USA has been attempting to “force democracy” into this region, a tactic that resulted in the so-called “color” revolutions (Bespalov, 2011: 118).

Monaghan has written that Russian policy should be interpreted as defensive rather than aggressive. This was the case at the beginning of the second term of Putin’s presidency, when attempts were made to increase internal unity and defend Russia against outside interference in domestic issues instead of arguing with the West. Despite Russia realizing that it could not afford to come into confrontation with the West, the Kremlin still wanted to alter the post-Cold-War alignment of powers as much as possible. In Monaghan’s (2008) view, Putin’s appearance in Munich could be have been interpreted as a defensive speech rather than a challenge to the West, as Poland has tended to perceive it. Russian diplomats highlighted the broader context of Russia’s concerns. The acts of terrorism in Beslan and colorful revolutions in Georgia and Ukraine were perceived in Russia as threats orchestrated by the West, which wanted to prevent the Russian Federation from returning to international relations and intervening in its own internal affairs. For this reason, in September 2004, Vladislav Surkov, a pro-Putin ideologist, stated that the enemy was “at the gates” (Monaghan, 2008: 718-719). Dimitry Pieskov, the incumbent assistant to the Russian President’s press attaché, stated that the speech was not confrontational. It was merely a reply to double standards being employed by the West (especially by the USA) [and consequently Poland – author’s note] (Monaghan, 2008: 721). A further development in such reasoning can be observed after 2014, when the Russian authorities declared unequivocally that the cause of the crisis in Russia's relations with the West should be attributed to EU and NATO’s expansionist policies (Entin, Entina, 2017: 20).

It seems that after the accession of Central-Eastern European countries to NATO in 1999 and 2004, Moscow decided to maintain the status quo, which in practice meant counteracting further losses of influence by all means necessary. Russia resolved to prevent countries of the “near abroad”, especially Ukraine and Georgia, from entering the western integration systems (Szlajfer, 2008: 8-9). Any movement of Ukraine towards the West would seriously call into question the credibility of Russia’s geopolitics in Asia and its ability to control its closest neighbors (Szlajfer, 2008: 8-9). At the NATO-Russia Council meeting during the NATO summit in Bucharest in 2008 (before the Russian-Georgian war), Putin starkly warned that if Ukraine and Georgia were accepted into the alliance, he would take appropriate action (Allenova, Geda, Novikov, 2008). In Tsygankov’s view, Russia’s decision to go to war with Georgia was motivated by a willingness to end the debate on the third wave of NATO expansion in a manner that complied with Russian expectations (Tsygankov, 2013: 186).

The conflictive nature of Polish-Russian relations can be attributed to the fact that the most important areas of international activity, both for Poland and for Russia, are the West and CIS. According to the editions of *Conceptions Russian Federation Foreign Policy* published in 2000, 2008, 2013 and 2016, Russia’s top regional priorities are the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) closely followed by the European Union (Kontseptsiya vneshniey…, 2000, 2008, 2013, 2016). CIS’ place as a special sphere of Russian activity has also been confirmed in Russian Federation documents strictly related to security issues. For instance, it was noted that in the area outside Russia, the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) was the unit which guaranteed collective security. At the same time, attention was also drawn to issues arising from the development of NATO (including the expansion of its security infrastructure towards Russia’s borders) and attempts to turn it into a global organization (Strategiya natsional’noj…, 2009). In the edition of *Conception of Russian Federation Foreign Policy* published in 2013, it is clearly stated that the process whereby the historic West was declining in potential and significance was gathering pace due to the increasing power of the Asia-Pacific Region (Kontseptsiya vneshniey…, 2013). Stanisław Bieleń has even argued that Russia “has lost the modernizing impulse coming from the West because of its serious economic disturbances” (Bieleń, 2014: 143). In the issue of *Conception of Russian Federation Foreign Policy* from 2016 the status of the West was confirmed. This document states that two of the primary reasons for the crisis between Russia and the West were the NATO and EU enlargement processes, which were “manifested in geopolitical expansion” (Kontseptsiya vneshniey…, 2016).

The countries which questioned the validity of Russia’s ideas on the European order, especially in the CIS region, came up against problems in their relations with Russia. Relations with Poland exemplify this process well, especially when Law and Justice (PiS) held power (in 2005 and 2015). Even in periods of warmer Polish-Russian relations, representatives of Poland (such as the aforementioned Radosław Sikorski) did not stop declaring their support for pro-democratic trends in the policies of such countries as Ukraine, Georgia or Belarus, although this support clearly became weaker when Civic Platform and the Polish People’s Party held power. This coalition government tended to stress the internal problems faced by these countries on their path to European integration (Exposé 2011…). Nevertheless, the decision to adopt the Eastern Partnership Program was taken on the initiative of this same government. EaP was a joint initiative involving the EU, its member states and six Eastern European partners: **Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia**, the Republic of **Moldova** and **Ukraine (*Eastern Partnership* 2016).**

After the Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014, relations between the West and Russia significantly deteriorated. Poland’s support for Ukraine meant that Polish-Russian relations became even worse than those that had existed in 1989. In the opinion of the author of this article, this happened because after the Ukrainian crisis and the West’s decision to extend its sanctions against Russia, Moscow had little to gain from fostering good relations with the West and so decided that it might as well stop feigning attempts to maintain good relations with Poland on the basis of it being a member of the EU and NATO.

According to Bieleń (2008a: 230), examination of the structure of Russian perception of the international environment showed that two groups of recipients were especially important – a post-Soviet group from the “close abroad” and a western group (Bieleń, 2008a: 230). Russian diplomacy was particularly sensitive to relations with these groups. This sensitivity can be explained in large measure by the results of a survey carried out among international experts on the potential and effectiveness of Russian foreign policy . The results show that Russia has the greatest potential of influence in the post-Soviet space and towards certain countries (Ukraine and Georgia, so important for Poland’s Eastern Policy, were rated very highly). At the same time, Russian policy in these priority spheres was notable for its very low effectiveness. In fact, it is Russian diplomacy’s relatively poor performance in very important areas of foreign policy that could have made it so susceptible to the interference of foreign entities in these matters. Many areas to which experts ascribed high potential of influence were ranked outside the top ten in terms of effectiveness. These included relations with Ukraine and Georgia, and migration policy towards CIS countries. As far as Russian policy on the West was concerned, Russia’s ability to influence NATO received a poor rating, yet the USA and EU yet Russia’s potential to influence them both was ranked as moderate. The effectiveness of Russian policy in all these spheres was rated as low or moderate (in the case of the EU and USA) (Melvil et al, 2009: 86-87). Russia’s problems with its own economic development meant that it was unable to propose an attractive integration model for the CIS countries. This essentially explains the low effectiveness of Russian diplomacy in the CIS region. Russia’s only tool for stopping CIS countries cooperating with the West has been the military threat it poses, and the use of force to solve difficult political issues has been employed as an effective strategy in Putin’s politics (Lynch, 2016: 106).

The close cooperation between the USA and Poland in 2004/2005, while the crisis in Ukraine was being resolved, aroused suspicion in Russia as to whether the actions of the Ukrainian oppositionists were being inspired by the Americans. For instance, the mutual Polish-American congratulations after Viktor Yushchenko’s victory were commented on in Moscow (Prezidenty…, 2009). The more radical Russian media interpreted the events in Ukraine as being provoked by ruthless western interference financed by Washington and carried out by alleged non-governmental organizations that claimed to be supporting democracy, but were in fact instruments in a political war (Byukenen, 2004). In an interview published in 2004, Minister Lavrov tabled an offer from Russia to the CIS while simultaneously warning the West against any attempts to force democracy on this region. According to Lavrov, the countries integrating with Russia could count on concessionary conditions for economic cooperation with Russia, including cheaper energy supplies (Minister Ławrow*…,* 2005: 9). The same Russian rhetoric could be seen in 2014 after the victory of Ukrainian Euro-Maidan, when Vladimir Putin in his so-called Crimea Speech talked about the new Ukrainian government that it is “disciplining” “by the foreign sponsors” (Putin, 2014).

1. Conclusion and implications for NATO and EU

As was mentioned earlier in this paper, Russia suffers from post-imperial syndrome. This helps to explain Russia’s sharp reactions, and even its demonstrations of military strength. Russia has still not accepted the loss of its global position, so is trying to secure its position in the CIS region. The Russian economic model is so unattractive that Moscow cannot encourage CIS countries to integrate with Russia using economic measures. Consequently, the only way to safeguard Russia’s position in post-soviet space is the maintenance of a steady military pressure. Russia is also attempting to deter other international actors from exerting their influence in in the CIS region. It is obvious that Poland’s support of the pro-EU-integration aspirations of CIS countries, particularly those that stand to benefit from the Eastern Partnership program, has provoked a crisis in Polish-Russian relations. This begs the question of whether the Poland, EU and NATO should respond to Russia’s objections by abandoning their policy of engagement in post-soviet space. The Russian Federation is seeking a place for itself in the global order and testing the reactions of other countries to its exertion of its own interests on the global stage. Consequently, NATO and the EU should be prepared for different scenarios when it comes to their relations with Russia. Despite Russia’s objections, the West should not forget about the CIS countries’ pro-West aspirations. This policy of recognition should be conducted with much greater diplomatic sophistication than before. Poland, as a member of this Western institution, should support a balanced policy towards all European countries, especially Russia.

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