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Ukraine in Poland's Security Policy Amid External Threats

Ukraina w polityce bezpieczeństwa Polski w warunkach zagrożeń zewnętrznych

Abstract

It is substantiated that the fundamental factor shaping Poland's security is its strong integration into transatlantic and European structures, as well as the development of bilateral and regional cooperation with key partners, including Ukraine. In this context, considerable attention is paid to strengthening Ukraine's independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity and supporting its aspirations for European and Euro-Atlantic integration.

Russia's large-scale invasion of Ukraine did not lead to the adoption of any operational and tactical documents in Poland, such as "road map" reflecting approaches to the implementation of strategic partnership under new conditions. Instead, depending on the course of political events at the legislative level, several documents were adopted, which further determined the directions of strategic cooperation between the two states.

Poland remains the main logistical hub for international support of Ukraine in the fight against Russia. Its role in supporting Ukraine is crucial. The partnership between Poland and Ukraine has a symmetrical nature and depends to a large extent on Ukraine's initiatives aimed at ensuring its own security and, therefore, security in the region. These initiatives concern the need to provide Ukraine with military aid.

Keywords: state security, the Republic of Poland, Ukraine, Russian-Ukrainian war, NATO

Abstrakt

Podstawowym czynnikiem kształtującym bezpieczeństwo Polski jest jej silna integracja ze strukturami transatlantyckimi i europejskimi, a także rozwój współpracy dwustronnej i regionalnej z kluczowymi partnerami, w tym z Ukrainą. W tym kontekście wiele uwagi poświęca się

działaniom na rzecz wzmocnienia niepodległości, suwerenności i integralności terytorialnej Ukrainy oraz wspierania jej aspiracji do integracji europejskiej i euroatlantyckiej.

Pełnoskalowa inwazja Rosji na Ukrainę nie doprowadziła do przyjęcia w Polsce żadnych dokumentów operacyjnych i taktycznych, swoistej „mapy drogowej”, która odzwierciedlałaby podejście do realizacji partnerstwa strategicznego w nowych warunkach. Zamiast tego, w zależności od przebiegu wydarzeń politycznych na poziomie legislacyjnym, przyjęto szereg dokumentów, które dodatkowo określiły kierunki strategicznej współpracy między oboma państwami.

Polska pozostaje głównym ośrodkiem logistycznym międzynarodowego wsparcia Ukrainy w walce z Rosją. Jej rola we wspieraniu Ukrainy jest kluczowa. Partnerstwo między Polską a Ukrainą ma charakter symetryczny i w dużej mierze zależy od inicjatyw Ukrainy mających na celu zapewnienie własnego bezpieczeństwa, a tym samym bezpieczeństwa w regionie. Chodzi o inicjatywy Ukrainy dotyczące potrzeby udzielenia jej pomocy wojskowej.

Słowa kluczowe: bezpieczeństwo państwa, Rzeczpospolita Polska, Ukraina, wojna rosyjsko-ukraińska, NATO

Introduction

The need for security is an important part of the collective interests of any community. Every modern state strives to create a concept for overcoming situations that threaten national existence.¹ Ukraine occupies a special place in Poland's security policy due to its geopolitical position, close economic, political, and cultural cooperation. There is a long-term strategic partnership between the two states. The geostrategic importance of Poland and Ukraine convincingly supports the formation in the Central European region of a tandem of regional leaders capable of confronting challenges and threats to the international order, which is at the stage of contradictory and ambiguous changes. A measurable common goal and strategic interest are clearly distinguished in the relations between Poland and Ukraine.² This is the starting point for making joint, coherent policy decisions at the grassroots level. At the same time, the partnership between Ukraine and Poland is being implemented in difficult conditions of many asymmetries. Ukraine operates in a security "gray zone" between Russia and the Euro-Atlantic integration and security structures, to which Poland belongs. Unlike Poland, Ukraine itself does not have clear security guarantees. Therefore, it remains more vulnerable to manifestations of power projection on the part of Russia. This purpose should be served by exerting pressure on Russia through hybrid means, demonstration of military power, and disinformation measures – with so-called historical politics playing an important role. Secondly, a significant consequence of functioning in the "gray zone" of security is the asymmetry of institutional ties between Poland and Ukraine, reflected in their membership in various regional and subregional organizations.³

¹ A. Kamiński (1993). *Bezpieczeństwo Polski na tle rozwoju procesów politycznych w Europie: uwagi metodologiczne*. Polski Instytut Spraw Międzynarodowych. Warszawa, s. 4.

² *Raport. Stan i perspektywy partnerstwa strategicznego Polski i Ukrainy. Punkt widzenia Polski i Ukrainy* (2021). Lublin-Kijów, s. 12. <https://phavi.umcs.pl/at/attachments/2022/0110/115948-stan-i-perspektywy-partnerstwa-pl-web.pdf> [accessed: 20.06.2023].

³ *Ibidem*.

Analysis of the research works and publications

Due to the ongoing active phase of the Russian-Ukrainian war, the current role and position of Ukraine in Poland's national security strategy have not yet been the subject of thorough analysis by either domestic or foreign scientists.

The works of J. Sobczak⁴ and A. Legucka⁵ are important for understanding trends in the security policy of Poland. The Polish-Ukrainian potential was analyzed by O. Zatylnaiko, V. Pavlenko, V. Bocharnikova, and S. Svyeshnikova.⁶

In the article, we also drew on analytical materials produced by the international group of scholars studying Poland and Ukraine, "Stan i perspektywy partnerstwa strategicznego Polski i Ukrainy".⁷ They took into account the shift in the balance of power, emphasized the need to resist the emergence of new dividing lines in the region, analyzed threats from Russia and its movement toward the formation of a profitable geostrategic space, and emphasized the search for the development of a joint security policy between Poland and Ukraine. Poland's national security strategies and official speeches of political leaders serve as the primary sources of this research.

Objective and methods of research

The purpose of the study is to determine the place and role of Ukraine in the security policy of Poland in the context of the Russian-Ukrainian war. The author used the following research methods: comparative (to examine changes in the approach to forming Poland's national security strategy), content analysis (to study speeches of political leaders and authoritative decisions regarding state security policy), generalization (when formulating research conclusions), and a systemic approach (considering security policy through the interrelation of political, economic, military, and other factors).

Presentation of the main material

Challenges and threats to the security of Central and Eastern Europe, and in particular Russia's aggressive policy, determine the development and dynamics of relations between Poland and Ukraine in the area of security at both national and regional levels. In general, Poland's security policy toward Ukraine is reflected in its key conceptual documents – the State Security Strategy and the Defense Strategy. The boundaries of military and political activity are defined quite broadly in these documents, encompassing the region around Poland, Europe, and the Euro-Atlantic area. Poland views itself as a secure state and considers internal risks as its primary concern. As of 2023,

⁴ J. Sobczak (2022). *Nowa strategia bezpieczeństwa narodowego Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej*. „Cybersecurity and Law”, No 4, T. 2.

⁵ A. Legucka (2019). *Polityka zagraniczna Polski wobec Rosji po aneksji Krymu*. „Wschód Europy”, Vol. 5, s. 1.

⁶ O. Zatylnayko, V. Pavlenko, V. Bocharnikov, S. Sveshnikov (2013). *Security policy and military-political relations of Poland*. “Science and defense”, 3.

⁷ *Raport. Stan i perspektywy partnerstwa strategicznego Polski i Ukrainy... Op. cit.*

the likelihood of large-scale aggression against Poland was assessed as low. More attention was devoted to the emergence of regional and local conflicts. Poland regarded the presence of the USA in Europe, Poland's membership in NATO and the EU, and the democratization of Ukraine as the main tools for guaranteeing its national security.

Poland is also interested in Ukraine joining NATO. It views the Central European region as integral part of the security system and advocates the development of a network of connections in Central Europe, both within the framework of the EU and NATO and beyond their borders. The "open door" principle, in turn, aligns with the national interests of Ukraine, as the country aspires to join this military alliance.

On the other hand, the actions of the Russian Federation before 2014 were considered by Poland as attempts to disrupt the European community. The state assumed that the use of armed forces within the country, in particular special forces, was solely to provide assistance to state authorities, state administration, and the public.

Poland's security policy in relation to Ukraine is partially reflected in the European Union's *Eastern Partnership* program, which was initiated by Poland and Sweden and approved by the EU in 2008. Most analysts agree that the main incentive for Poland within the framework of the *Eastern Partnership* is to attract EU resources – primarily financial – to support the goals of its eastern policy. The Eastern partners of the European Union include the states of Eastern Europe and the South Caucasus that fall under the European Neighborhood Policy: Azerbaijan, Belarus, Armenia, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine. The main principles of the *Eastern Partnership* include the rule of law, good governance, respect for human and minority rights, a market economy, sustainable development, broad participation, and responsibility. Its instruments include the Euro-Parliamentary Assembly, association agreements, the creation of free trade zones, the simplification of the visa regime, strengthening of energy security, and agreements on mobility and security (such as combating illegal migration, creating structures of integrated border management, and fighting corruption and organized crime).⁸

In general, the *Eastern Partnership* program was primarily aimed at bringing Ukraine to closer cooperation with the EU through the conclusion of association agreements, the creation of free trade zones, and the simplification of visa regimes. In the long term, this was intended to make the EU's eastern borders more secure and align the six target countries more closely with European standards. The program effectively positioned cooperation with the EU in contrast to cooperation with Russia, encouraging a geopolitical choice between the West and the East.

In the context of global interdependencies and shared threats from Russia, the importance of developments in Eastern Ukraine as a potential factor in the global international system grew significantly for bilateral relations between Poland and Ukraine.

The new geopolitical reality caused by Russia's hybrid war against Ukraine in 2014 led to significant adjustments in Poland's security policy. Since then, national security has taken a dominant role in the agenda of bilateral relations. Anticipating the long-term aggressive actions of the Kremlin, the parties recognized the importance of reliable,

⁸ O. Zatynayko, V. Pavlenko, V. Bocharnikov, S. Svishnikov (2013). *Security policy and military-political... Op. cit.*, p. 6.

stable, and predictable cooperation. In 2008, soft security issues seemed paramount, and the EU's regulatory power was considered the best tool to address them. "Today, hard power and the army play a greater role in the work of the regional security system, and the regulatory power of the EU is no longer sufficient to keep the situation under control".⁹ In response to the new political reality, on November 5, 2014, the President of Poland, Bronisław Komorowski, approved a new National Security Strategy of the Republic of Poland (*Strategia Bezpieczeństwa Narodowego RP*). Its implementation continued the EU's policy of active participation in the security affairs of Eastern Europe. The course on the implementation of NATO decisions remained stable. For example, at the NATO summit held in Warsaw in 2016, a comprehensive aid package for Ukraine was agreed upon. According to A. Legutska, Polish security policy is focused on strengthening NATO as the foundation of the defense of the Polish state.¹⁰ At the same summit, the countries of the Alliance also decided to deploy multinational NATO battalions in Poland, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania.

It should be noted that the 2014 State Security Strategy of Poland did not anticipate the deployment of North Atlantic Alliance troops, in particular the presence of more than 4,000 U.S. servicemen as part of NATO's Enhanced Forward Presence. Since 2016, the eastern flank of the Alliance, which did not exist in 2014, has effectively been formed. It has become an key element of security for both Poland and the Baltic states. At that time, cooperation among EU states intensified in the format of the Bucharest Nine, while infrastructural, political, and economic collaboration under the Three Seas Initiative also strengthened. All these new elements marked to the construction of an architecture of collective European security, in which Poland played an important role.

On May 12, 2020, the President of Poland Andrzej Duda approved a new State Security Strategy. The document provides a clearer definition of the security environment, identifying the neo-imperialist policy of the authorities of the Russian Federation, which is implemented with the use of military force, as the most serious threat. It emphasizes that the illegal annexation of Crimea and military actions in eastern Ukraine violated fundamental principles of international law and undermined the foundations of European security.¹¹ The document notes that the Russian Federation is expanding its offensive military capabilities, conducting large-scale military exercises based on scenarios involving conflict with NATO countries, and engaging in hybrid actions below the threshold of war that carry the risk of conflict. These include cyberattacks, disinformation, and other non-military measures aimed at restoring its power status and spheres of influence.

Russia's large-scale invasion of Ukraine, which began on February 24, 2022, led to a reassessment of the situation and a reevaluation of Russia's aggressive policy in terms of the threat it poses to European security. At the same time, Ukraine emerged

⁹ *Polish-Ukrainian relations: the potential is greater than the problems*. International Center for Prospective Studies. <https://www.prostir.ua/?news=polsko-ukrajinski-vidnosyny-potentsial-bilshyj-za-problemy> [accessed: 20.06.2023].

¹⁰ A. Legucka (2019). *Polityka zagraniczna Polski...* Op. cit., p. 206.

¹¹ J. Sobczak (2022). *Nowa strategia bezpieczeństwa narodowego...* Op. cit., s. 20.

as a key player upon which regional security increasingly depended. Changes in the global international system required constant analysis and evaluation of their impact on the geopolitical landscape of both Poland and Ukraine, the determination of shared interests, and the formation of joint strategies. In this regard, political dialogue between Ukraine and Poland, which was conducted primarily at the level of state leaders, executive power institutions, and at the parliamentary level, proved to be positive.

The visit of the President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelenskyi to Poland on April 5, 2023, was important in this context. It marked his first official visit since the beginning of the war. The choice of Poland as the destination shows what an important role it currently plays in international politics. During the visit, the Ukrainian President met with the President of Poland, Andrzej Duda. Security issues became the main topic of the agenda. According to President Duda, "Poland is the third partner of Ukraine in terms of the amount of military support provided to Ukraine since the beginning of the Russian aggression," adding that the USA and the UK occupy the first and second positions, respectively. "Russia wants to expand its sphere of influence again. Today, Ukraine is the first to firmly and resolutely resist this. Therefore, we support Ukraine and thank everyone who supports Ukraine. And I assured the President that we will continue to support Ukraine," he said. "At that time, more than 300 tanks, 'Krab' howitzers, and much other equipment, including Piorun missiles, were provided to help the defenders of Ukraine, who are heroically resisting the Russian aggressor," A. Duda emphasized¹².

The President of Ukraine also held talks with Prime Minister T. Morawiecki. The topics of discussion included the transit of grain from Ukraine, the reconstruction of war-damaged infrastructure with the involvement of Polish companies, and further integration of Ukraine into the European Union. The Prime Minister of Poland and President V. Zelenskyi also discussed the possibilities of further support of Ukraine in its fight for freedom and the security of Europe.

The meeting between V. Zelenskyi and the Marshal of the Polish Sejm, E. Witek, was also significant. They discussed the importance of parliamentary diplomacy in supporting Ukraine, which is defending itself against Russian aggression, the situation involving abducted children and women, and plans for Polish-Ukrainian cooperation at the parliamentary level. It should be noted that the Polish Parliament has done much to ensure that the issue of Ukraine is present on the international agenda. Moreover, the Polish Sejm has adopted a number of resolutions expressing solidarity with Ukraine, as well as laws providing comprehensive assistance to Ukrainian refugees in Poland.

Russia's attack on Ukraine triggered a wide reaction from the international community, aimed not only at isolating but also at punishing the state in the diplomatic, economic, and legal spheres. On December 14, 2022, the Sejm recognized the Russian Federation as a state that supports terrorism and uses terrorist measures. As the Chamber stated in the document, Russia "systematically violates human rights, international law and the UN Charter and a number of other obligations," "attacks territories of other

¹² *Prezydent Ukrainy z oficjalną wizytą w Polsce* (2023). <https://www.prezydent.pl/aktualnosci/wydarzenia/prezydent-ukrainy-oficjalna-wizyta-w-polsce,66580> [accessed: 20.06.2023].

states, armed attacks, war crimes and genocides,” and “engages [in] hostile economic activities, in particular in energy sector.”¹³ The resolution recognizing Russia as a state sponsor of terrorism was adopted by a majority of 231 votes, while 226 deputies, including those from the opposition, abstaining from the vote.

In the resolution, the deputies emphasized that the prosecution of individuals who have committed crimes in Ukraine and against Ukraine is necessary to demonstrate that “international law does not allow impunity, and individual criminal responsibility can also be borne by heads of state.” Therefore, the Sejm supported actions aimed at punishing the guilty, as well as related initiatives, such as the creation of a Special Tribunal for crimes of aggression against Ukraine and the establishment of the International Center for the Prosecution of Crimes of Aggression against Ukraine, which will focus on the relevant collection of the evidence base.¹⁴

Cooperation between Ukraine and Poland in the field of security is focused on modernity and the future. However, the nature of relations between the two states also depended on the perception of their complex and contradictory past. At the same time, there was a growing understanding among Ukrainian and Polish politicians, historians, and statesmen that the politicization of so-called “sensitive” topics in times of war could be exploited by Russia as a tool of manipulation to weaken cooperation between the two states, especially in the military sphere. Therefore, on the main discussion platforms, the topic of war gained more importance and prominence than complex issues of their shared history.

It should be noted that the leaders of Poland, the Czech Republic, and Slovakia share a unified approach to Ukraine's security guarantees. In particular, in an article by the Prime Ministers of Poland, the Czech Republic, and Slovakia – M. Morawiecki, P. Fiala, and E. Geger – published in *Foreign Affairs*, they stated that “for many years, the Kremlin has systematically undermined international stability and security by violating international law, using or threatening to use force, and undermining democratic institutions through political and hybrid warfare. Its act of aggression against Ukraine is merely the most extreme expression of these ongoing actions. Now is not the time to ease our resolve. As the fight on the battlefield intensifies this spring, we look towards the summer and fall. We must continue to stand by Ukraine without qualification or reservation. That includes making sure that it receives all the weapons and financial assistance it needs to defeat Russia and fully restore its sovereignty and territorial integrity. This is a legitimate request by Ukraine's democratically elected government.”¹⁵

¹³ *Sejm uznał Rosję za państwo wspierające terroryzm*, Sejm Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej. Sejm Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej. <https://www.sejm.gov.pl/Sejm9.nsf/komunikat.xsp?documentId=4774505381CECC10C1258918007022FA> [accessed: 20.06.2023].

¹⁴ *Uchwała Sejmu ws. ścigania rosyjskich sprawców zbrodni wojennych przeciwko Ukrainie* (2023, 14th April). Sejm Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej. <https://www.sejm.gov.pl/Sejm9.nsf/komunikat.xsp?documentId=76800B17483740B3C12589910064DD34> [accessed: 20.06.2023].

¹⁵ P. Fiala, E. Heger, M. Morawiecki M. (2023). *The Free World Must Stay the Course on Ukraine*. Foreign Affairs. https://www.foreignaffairs.com/ukraine/free-world-must-stay-course-ukraine?gad=1&gclid=CjwKCAjwge2iBhBBEiwAfXDBR_J6CKOTDfAfdq_ujuJPjnRsm8pNOEKIapsgy_NfP_gb_EzhliuGxoCzAsQAvD_BwE [accessed: 20.06.2023].

Poland's security issues are closely linked to Ukraine's potential accession to NATO. In 2008, Poland and its allies decided that the future of Ukraine (as well as Georgia) should be tied to NATO membership. Until that time, according to the Prime Ministers of the three states, they must be ready to provide security guarantees to Ukraine to prevent it from becoming a "gray zone" once and for all. The Prime Ministers believe that it is not too early to plan post-war security guarantees for Ukraine, as there will be no investment and sustainable recovery in the country if it is not able to protect itself from future aggression. The upcoming NATO summit in Vilnius should address difficult questions about Ukraine's future accession to the Alliance and the future strategy towards Russia. During the visit of NATO Secretary General, E. Stoltenberg, to Kyiv in April 2023, President Zelenskyi stated that Kyiv expects the NATO summit in Vilnius to approve a package of security guarantees for Ukraine on its way to membership in the Alliance.¹⁶

Conclusions

A fundamental factor shaping Poland's security is its strong integration into transatlantic and European structures, as well as the development of bilateral and regional cooperation with key partners, including Ukraine. In this context, considerable attention is paid to strengthening the independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity of Ukraine and supporting its aspirations for European and Euro-Atlantic integration.

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¹⁶ Ukraine expects the NATO summit to approve a package of security guarantees on the way to membership (2023). European Pravda. <https://www.eurointegration.com.ua/news/2023/04/20/7160220/> [accessed: 20.06.2023].

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