

ROMAN KUŹNIAR

RETREAT FROM THE POLISH *RAISON D'ÊTRE* OR NATIONAL INTEREST*

*Every physical being whose influence has
a negative impact on the environment,
commits suicide*

Alfred N. Whitehead

The foreign policy of the Law and Justice (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość—PiS) government is presented in many ways, using various key words or metaphors. Its considerations attempt to stress the depth of the changes in some of its key directions or conversely, seek elements of continuity. Most researchers and commentators agree, however, that the foreign policy of the Polish government in power since the autumn of 2015 is strictly subordinate to the goals of its domestic policy.

In the approach proposed below I present it as a policy of retreat from the Polish *raison d'être* or national interest as defined by the pro-independence political bloc after the fall of communism in 1989. The foreign policy of the newly independent and sovereign Poland was defined by the team of Tadeusz Mazowiecki and Krzysztof Skubiszewski, and the national interest behind it was defined by the minister of foreign affairs in his famous speech before parliament of 22 January 1993. Having outlined the context from the conceptual and historical point of view, Professor Skubiszewski stated:

From this perspective, the Polish national interest dictates that in the coming years the acquired sovereignty (should be) be confirmed, national security built, the economic and civilisation-enhancing development of the nation and society supported, and our role on the international scene, and especially in Europe strengthened.¹

Polish foreign policy expressed the national interest not only of an independent Poland, but—also and inseparably—that of a democratic and European Poland. These concepts were closely tied with one another. The current retreat from the national interest starts with questioning the vision of Poland as a democratic state located at the heart of Europe, a state which identifies itself with the European unity project initiated by European Communities and currently continued by the European Union (EU). It has to be emphasised here that the national interest and consequent foreign policy evolving since

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¹ K. Skubiszewski, *Polityka zagraniczna i odzyskanie niepodległości. Przemówienia, oświadczenia, wywiady 1989–1993*, Warsaw, 1977, 301.

1989, resulted in a quarter of a century of unprecedented economic and civilising development (best of all former members of the Soviet Bloc at that time) and secured it a good position on the international arena, and an increasingly strong one in the EU.

I. TASK OF FOREIGN POLICY—COVER FOR AUTHORITARIAN TENDENCIES

Since the beginning, the obvious goal of the ruling bloc's domestic policy has been the creation of an authoritarian state, or—in gentler terms—the creation of a state of non-liberal democracy or ornamental democracy. The purely political goal of the political order which the government of Law and Justice is trying to achieve is to secure indefinite power. The goal is to minimise any chance for the political opposition of equal participation in political life or possible victory in the future. It is a political attempt to combine the experiences of countries like Belarus or Mexico—long ruled by the Revolutionary-Institutional party, or Chavez's Venezuela. There could be more of these comparisons. The ruling bloc would have already made more progress towards this political formula if it had not been for the 'limiting' fact of Poland's membership of the European Union and the Council of Europe.

The intentions of the ruling Law and Justice party were fully exposed when it attacked the Constitutional Tribunal under the pretence of correcting the mistakes of the previous ruling coalition of the Civic Platform and the Polish People's Party (PO–PSL), which prematurely elected two members of the Tribunal. Acting within its mandate as defined by the Polish Constitution of 1997, the Constitutional Tribunal issued rulings (in November and December 2015) as a reaction to the unconstitutional actions of the ruling bloc. To remove the obstacle to the total freedom of the government, without limitations resulting from the standards of the democratic rule of law written into the Constitution,² the governing majority decided to 'neutralise' the Tribunal and to deprive it of the function which a constitutional court normally performs in this kind of political system (based on the principle of the tripartite division of power and the balance of powers). The attack on the Tribunal led not only to a system-wide crisis,³ but also caused a reaction from the competent (because of Poland's membership of the EU and the Council of Europe) international bodies—the European Commission and the Venice Commission. The attempt to eliminate the systemic role of the Constitutional Tribunal was also unequivocally negatively assessed by the Polish legal profession and legal experts, regardless of their worldviews.⁴

² M. Safjan, Politics and the Constitutional Tribunal: the Constitution—the last instrument of defence against politics, *Ruch Prawniczy, Ekonomiczny i Socjologiczny* 78(1), 2016, 35–42 <DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.14746/rpeis.2016.78.1.3>>.

³ B. Chrabota, Zdewastowany TK to tylko początek walki o państwo, *Rzeczpospolita*, 23 December 2015.

⁴ J. Stępień, To wygląda na zamach stanu, (interview by A. Kublik), *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 20 November 2015; A. Zoll, Za chwilę będziemy żyli w państwie totalitarnym, (interview by

Interest in the perceived threat to the democratic rule of law in Poland, expressed by these bodies, was met with hostile, anti-European narrative from the ruling bloc. To a large extent it was directed at the political opposition and other circles opposed to constitutional violations; one of the least strong accusations directed against the opposition was to label it a 'Targowica'—a synonym for national treason. Resorting to this kind of insult exposed the rulers' determination to strive for 'full power' (without any constitutional constraints), and simultaneously had the goal of demeaning the opposition in the eyes of public opinion, especially its own supporters. This could raise fears that it was a preparation for the justification of future persecution of the opposition and the limitation of freedoms and civil liberties.⁵ At the same time the language used by the ruling bloc exposed its completely non-European mentality and political culture.⁶

The retreat from democracy and PiS's attempt to create an autocratic state was confirmed by its immediate take-over of the public media and its turning them into party media. News and shows on current affairs started to resemble the language of propaganda of the time of the Polish People's Republic (PRL) that related in particular to emphasising the merits and uniqueness of those in power and discrediting and demeaning the political opposition and opinion-forming groups which opposed PiS's ruling style. Simultaneously laws were passed which increased the powers of institutions and agencies in charge of public safety, the apparatus of 'repression' (including the methods of surveillance and penalties available to be used now against members of the political opposition). Public administration became subject to 'janissarisisation' which means a departure from the civil service recruitment criteria towards nominations of unqualified and inexperienced but politically acceptable candidates. There have been mass layoffs of civil servants appointed or nominated to the higher levels of public administration in previous years. The recent replacement of the personnel in some sectors was greater than that between 1989 and 1990 and instead resembled the period immediately after the Second World War when the communists took power.

The clear similarities in the direction of political changes being implemented in Poland by the Law and Justice bloc with those carried out in the states that were earlier part of the former Soviet Union were sometimes explained as resulting from the political beliefs and worldview of PiS leader Jarosław Kaczyński. The master idea of his political concept being full sovereignty, without any limitations, from the highest centre of political power, came from the teachings of his academic mentor and promotor of his Master's thesis and Doctoral dissertation—Professor Stanisław Ehrlich. In the 1950s Professor Ehrlich specialised in implementing in Poland the Soviet doctrine of law and

A. Kublik), *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 21–22 November 2015; M. Safjan, Prezydent wkroczył we władzę Trybunału, (interview by E. Siedlecka), *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 23 November 2015. All three were presidents of the Constitutional Tribunal in the past.

⁵ R. Kuźniar, Czy grozi nam noc kryształowa, *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 12 April 2016.

⁶ A. Wolff-Powęska, Jak gardzą ludzie Kaczyńskiego, *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 16–17 January 2016.

state.⁷ Additionally that ‘highest centre of political power’ recommended by Ehrlich is currently an extra-constitutional body, similarly to the first secretary of the Polish United Workers Party (PZPR) in the Polish People’s Republic. Jarosław Kaczyński does not currently perform any government functions, he is just an ordinary member of parliament, although nobody from PiS denies that he is the one who makes the most important decisions subsequently implemented by the ruling bloc (the government, the parliamentary majority, the President).

The concept of the ruling bloc’s politics could be defined as a triad: authoritarianism–nationalism–populism. The ideological justification of the idea of a strong (authoritarian) state is the nation understood by PiS as an ethnic and religious community. The nation is the highest value in its programme and the State is the main means to guarantee the implementation of its interests.⁸ The nation is portrayed as a sovereign above the law to whose will all should conform. In reality—the role of the sovereign has been seized by the ruling party, especially its leader. However, one cannot seriously use the argument of the sovereign will in pursuit of the dismantling of a democratic state, with the support of only 18.7 per cent of eligible voters in the general election (with 38.4 per cent voter turnout). There was no mention of creating an authoritarian state in PiS’s electoral programme. Thus it is justified to assume that this national narrative (in practice—nationalistic—as it is associated with many xenophobic and anti-Semitic statements) is only an ideological staffage with the goal of legitimising the building of a ‘strong state’. Unquestionably here is the inspiration of the National Democratic movement but it is secondary to the endeavour of achieving authoritarian power. In post-war European democracies, a classic example of a political formation which put ‘nation’ on its banner was the Gaullist movement—but that one did not contain any authoritarian tendencies.

In PiS’s political rhetoric the national element is strongly interwoven with the class element. PiS marched to power with the slogan of a fight against liberalism and inequalities. The quarter of a century of independent Poland was presented as a period when capitalists, bankers, liberal reformers, free professions and free media did very well financially (and all of them were connected with, sometimes even serving, foreign interests). In this narrative, the victim of the changes was the ordinary man, the average Pole. The improvement in the situation in Poland, which was presented as a country on the verge of collapse, economic downturn and dysfunction, is now to be also contingent upon the restriction of the freedom to get rich(er) and support of the poor. Those who ruled before were portrayed by President Andrzej Duda as treating Poland as a ‘cash-cow’ motherland (*‘ojczyzna dojna’*). PiS’s leadership was reaching here for the egalitarian sentiment generated in the time of the PRL, which was directed against ‘unjust’ elites. The populism of the ruling party was winning the lower instincts of the frustrated part of society, which did not see itself as a beneficiary of the Polish transformation, and was also exploit-

⁷ K. Mazur, Prezes i jego mistrz, *Rzeczpospolita*, 30–31 January 2016.

⁸ More in: *Jaka zmiana? Założenia i perspektywy polityki zagranicznej rządu PiS*, Report of the Batory Foundation of May 2016 by A. Balcer, P. Buras, G. Gromadzki, E. Smolar.

ing social and financial inequalities which exist in every society but become magnified during the transformation and accelerated growth such as occurred in Poland after 1989. The government propaganda and use of investigative and judicial bodies to seek out 'scandals' incriminating its critics or symbolic capitalists-exploiters, was meant to satisfy the need for 'social justice' which PiS created. The enemy in the background takes the form of various types of liberalism. Another display of populism is the 500 Plus Programme (support for parents with two or more children), which does not address the real problem (namely demographic decline) as well as lowering the retirement age, although the rest of Europe—for the same demographic reasons—is doing exactly the opposite. Populism is supposed to guarantee the ruling party a social base but it also demonstrates the government's dislike of a Europe portrayed as an area of cultural oversophistication, downright decadence, and what is more of a Europe which exploits Poland (Poles) in co-operation with the current elites in Poland (but not necessarily truly 'Polish').

II. AGAINST INTEGRATING EUROPE

The system-wide transformations and the ideological climate created by the ruling bloc define the background of its international policy, in some cases even justify it. The peculiarities of its policies and institutional changes which are its creation and goal (in the summer of 2016 the ruling bloc had barely started on that path), require complete freedom from any hindering pressures from outside. This has been well described by the authors of the Batory Foundation report quoted earlier: implementation of necessary internal changes is to be possible as a result of the elimination of a chance of interference from the outside'. And further 'According to PiS internal changes in Poland are met with resistance from external players—according to Kaczyński—the European establishment (especially Germany) and a large part of the American establishment, which powers are either already opposing the strengthening of the Polish subjectivity in international relations, or will be doing so in the future'.⁹ The starting point for this type of behaviour is the assumption of Poland's vassal role in the last twenty-five years. This point of view completely ignores the natural interdependencies and integration processes going on today as well as collaboration in the security sphere. All the above influences the practice of sovereignty, especially for highly developed States. And yet none of those States is seen as a vassal and does not define itself as a vassal state or a state of limited subjectivity. This sovereignty narrative and its implications for external relations are a function of PiS's endeavours to create an authoritarian state without competent international organisations 'meddling' in Polish affairs or allied nations, up to now Poland's main partners on the international scene, expressing their concerns.

The slogan of sovereignty is to be a shield for internal voluntarism. In the same manner as used to be used by Russia, China or governments of some African nations all criticised by the UN for human rights violations, persecution

⁹ *Jaka zmiana? Założenia*, passim.

of the opposition or autocratic rule. Not surprisingly that commitment to sovereignty was, for the first time in the official rhetoric of the ruling bloc, demonstrated by President Duda in his speech in the UN at the end of September 2015 (before his party came to power). Already in that speech the strong anachronism of understanding international law in connection with sovereignty was clearly visible. The slogan ‘peace through international law’, repeated there by Duda, was after all the motto of the League of Nations which, as we know, did not survive. The international community today is much farther ahead in its approach to peace and the methods that guarantee peace: law alone will not suffice, and what is also necessary is the ability to exercise pressure on and interfere with states which through their internal practices start to pose a security hazard for their neighbour(s). Such a selective and instrumental use of the banner of sovereignty is dependent on internal needs and also consists in ignoring one of the main components of the international legal definition of sovereignty according to which ‘Each State is obligated to comply with its international commitments in good faith...’¹⁰ This definition is confirmed in the Constitution of the Republic of Poland of 1997. Its Article 9 reads: ‘The Republic of Poland abides by international law binding upon it.’ Thus exclamations of ‘sovereign’ and ‘sovereignty’, heard coming from the PiS parliamentary club (including Prime Minister Szydło) during parliamentary discussions on the European Commission’s and the Venice Commission’s concerns about the dismantling of the Polish constitutional judiciary and other legislation indicating a departure from the democratic state (*Rechtstaat*) sounded rather surreal. (Ultimately) it was the voters (sovereign) who did not agree *a priori*. The elections resulted in a government which is supposed to act within the framework defined by the Constitution, while ‘Europe’s’ concerns stemmed from the fact that recent history shows that democratically elected governments have subsequently attacked democracy (Hitler, Lukashenka, Janukovych).

Equally surreal, and particularly in the context of the dispute with the European Commission¹¹ was the adoption by the ruling bloc of the resolution on sovereignty. The MPs representing the ruling party in the Parliament displayed trepidation in the face of the alleged threat to Polish sovereignty from... the European Union (!). In doing so Poland was the only EU Member State which displayed this kind of fear. There was no attempt made in the Parliament to justify the undermining of the role of the Constitutional Tribunal in a democratic legal state, as this was not possible; instead the banner of sovereignty was waved and sovereignty became a euphemism for the political voluntarism of the ruling party. This surreal impression was magnified by the joy openly expressed by some PiS politicians because of the crisis in the EU,

¹⁰ This is referred to in Point VI of the Declaration on Principles of International Law adopted by the United Nations General Assembly of 24 October 1970 (The principle of the sovereign equality of all its Members), para. f.

¹¹ The Parliamentary resolution regarding Poland’s sovereignty and the rights of its citizens was adopted by the ruling party on 20 May 2016. It rejects the EU’s competence regarding the Polish constitutional crisis and assures that the rights of Polish citizens are not compromised. As is well known, the guarantor of the rights and liberties, not only in democracies, are not governments or ruling parties but independent judiciary bodies, including constitutional courts which can reject resolutions threatening human rights.

who even predict its imminent collapse. If that were the case, such a Union should not constitute any threat to the sovereignty of its Member States. Currently the opposite is true: it is the Member States that threaten the integrity of European unification (earlier Greece, now the United Kingdom, and there are a few others joining the queue, including Poland). This is no threat to Polish sovereignty—this is an artificial, invented problem—but here we have a political revolution which provokes a response from competent bodies and international mechanisms. *Nota bene*, free and sovereign Poland participated enthusiastically in their creation as their mission is to stop the return of non-democratic governments in our part of the world (which is a reaction to the experience of communism).

The removal of the EU flag from the office of the Prime Minister of the Republic of Poland was not accidental. It is hard to tell either whether the smile on Prime Minister Szydło's face, when her government's actions against the Constitutional Tribunal were defended by the enemies of the EU was accidental, too; maybe the Polish Prime Minister did not understand the whole situation. The aversion of the ruling bloc towards EU's flag—as towards the EU as a whole—is purely ideological. After all the symbolism of the flag refers to medieval Christianity. This aversion is also a policy of dislike. It is turned against (Western) Europe, the current phase of its civilisation and the level of its integration this is to say, the European Union. PiS would prefer the EU did not exist and European unification had stopped at its earlier phase of the EEC or the Common Market. The Minister of Foreign Affairs Witold Waszczykowski said that clearly in his parliamentary exposé—he demanded that the EU returned 'to its roots' by which he meant the 'four freedoms'.¹² This was not only negating the EU itself, created after all between 1991 and 1992, but also negating the development of the Community from its conception in 1957 until the end of the 1980s. However, from the current form of EU integration, the ruling bloc quite enthusiastically accepts the structural funds. These are 'due' and to these Poland is 'entitled'. Despite the same Minister's categorical negation of further tightening of its integration, or EU's 'interference' in Polish internal affairs.

One can safely postulate that from the very first day of coming to power the government bloc led by Jarosław Kaczyński has led a foreign policy of the de-Europeanisation of Poland. Thus, although on the one hand the government acknowledges Poland's formal membership of the EU, this also means that firstly, the internal political changes will keep diminishing Poland's role as a member of the European community of values (contrary to the parliamentary assurances of Minister Waszczykowski), and secondly—PiS's Poland does not accept the current model of integration which grants supra-national powers to some EU bodies. The only 'positive' vision of the EU that the government has is defined by its slogan 'Europe of free and sovereign nations (or States).' This slogan came back strongly on the occasion of Brexit, which provided the ruling bloc with a pretext to emphasise the need for a new treaty

¹² Government information about directions of Polish foreign policy in a speech given by the Minister of Foreign Affairs on 29 January 2016.

that would be a departure ‘from Lisbon’ which would also be the beginning of the deconstruction of the European Union.¹³

It has to be stressed that this is a totally ahistorical postulate. This kind of Europe already existed and brought about two world wars in the twentieth century. The Copernican Revolution in European history, in the relationships between its nations, aimed at making make war impossible through a very special project which was the Schuman Declaration and the creation of the European Community. The goal of this undertaking was from the beginning political, not economic. The interdependence of democratic and free nations was and still is a cornerstone of this project. The restriction of freedom started when autocratic systems started to be developed within the States, which the EU was supposed to prevent. This is a simple and logical equation. Everyone in Europe knows it. Obviously, it is worth challenging the occasional EU usurpations regarding cultural and social affairs (at which PiS is also very active), but this has nothing to do with the rule of law, whose unravelling has been since the autumn of 2015 the essence of the problem of Poland’s presence in the EU. The ruling bloc has hinted that if Brussels remains so interested in the departure from the democratic rule of law in Poland, a referendum regarding Poland’s continued membership in the EU may have to be considered (member of the European Parliament Z. Krasnodębski).

Poland’s view on both aspects of its EU membership — the systemic and the institutional—has already triggered off its gradual marginalisation within the Union. If Poland is not interested in being present at ‘the hard core’ of the EU and keeps deviating from the EU’s standard, it will be losing allies (and this has already happened) and will be perceived as a second class member. The ruling bloc not only wants to worsen the level of integration, but it itself puts Poland on the Union’s periphery. PiS’s policy of a ‘worse Poland within a worse Europe’ is the opposite of what is required by the Polish national interest, and the opposite of what Poland strived to achieve after gaining independence and sovereignty—a ‘strong Poland within a strong Europe’. A weak and fragmented Union is going to lose its attribute of solidarity which has always been important to Poland and from which Poland has benefited. It will provide no support regarding security either.

An example of PiS’s Poland’s policy towards the EU is its new attitude towards Germany: from the beginning aloof and full of suspicion. Already earlier, before its victory in the last elections, PiS disavowed excellent relations between Warsaw and Berlin and the good personal relationship between Prime Minister Tusk and Chancellor Merkel. In its narrative Poland was presented as a vassal or a client of Germany or as a part of the ‘German-Russian condominium’. Germany was strongly criticised for historical reasons and for its position in the EU, including its pursuit of achieving closer integration. Since 2015 Chancellor Merkel and Germany have been subject to strong criticism by PiS for their attitude towards the refugee and immigrant crisis. In his exposé, the Minister of Foreign Affairs mentioned Germany almost at the end of the list, after... Moldova. The 25th anniversary of the bilateral treaty of

¹³ Szerzej: O. Osica, Polska nie jest wyspą, *Tygodnik Powszechny*, 3 July 2016.

1991 was celebrated in a cool, although proper, atmosphere. Coming to power, the ruling bloc formulated four conditions for normal partnership with Germany: allowing Poland's participation in the Normandy format, Germany's abandonment of Nordstream 2, modification of the EU's climate and energy package and granting minority status to Poles living in Germany. These were in fact 'prohibitive conditions'. Indeed, after a few months of a bad climate in Polish-German relations, the PiS government decided that insisting on these conditions would result in a lasting impasse. The conditions were dropped, but the anti-German narrative, developed in this context, ruined the trust and above all—Warsaw's ability to secure Germany's support for its interests. Germany is not an easy partner for Poland but it is a necessary and irreplaceable one. The deliberate spoiling of bilateral relations and the departure from Krzysztof Skubiszewski's concept of a 'Polish-German community of interests in a unified Europe' have done a disservice to Polish national interests and the PiS government is obviously unable to draw conclusions from the experiences of geopolitics and history. That is already¹⁴ harmful, and may prove costly as well. After all, bad Polish-German relations are going to favour a closer relationship between Germany and Russia. The ruling bloc managed very fast to destroy one of the biggest assets of Polish diplomacy after 1989.

Gone is also, the latterly excellent relationship with France. One of its elements was, among other things, efficient communication between both presidents: Komorowski and Hollande. The breaking off of final negotiations regarding the purchase of French helicopters for the Polish army was one of the reasons that have contributed to the cooling in relations. However, the more profound reasons for that cool-off are ideological differences, especially attitudes towards Europe. The fate of the relations with these two, until recently key partners, has also been shared by the Weimar Triangle which has been in the last decades, regardless of ups and downs, a very useful instrument of our diplomacy.

III. IF NOT EUROPE...

When the government questions Poland's position in Europe and the geopolitical and institutional foundations of the foreign policy of an independent Poland, the circumstances raise the question—what exactly does it want to base its new foreign policy on? What is supposed to be its new foundation? The President's and the government's answer to this question is: the periphery of Europe and the European Union. It is somewhat logical as they are selecting this place for Poland themselves.

In his parliamentary exposé, the Head of Polish diplomacy named the UK Poland's main partner within the EU. Let us recall that this was in the months just before the referendum which was to decide about the UK's leaving or remaining in the EU. The June referendum 'took away' the PiS government's the main ally in the EU. Today's Warsaw believed that together with London

¹⁴ K. Szczerski, Germany, our first partner, (interviewed by J. Bielecki), *Rzeczpospolita*, 10 June 2016 (Minister of Foreign Affairs justified the departure from the four initial conditions). P. Jendroszczyk, Polsko-niemiecka rocznica bez emocji, *Rzeczpospolita*, 16 June 2016.

it would constitute an internal opposition against the EU. Instead it was left to stand alone. The choice of Britain (as an ally) was even harder to understand because historically and geopolitically it has never displayed solidarity with our part of Europe. It was London after all which coined the policy of appeasement, which advocated satisfying the III Reich's hunger at the expense of its neighbours from Eastern Europe. The remaining ally is then Victor Orbán's Hungary, an earlier an inspiration for PiS ('we'll have Budapest in Warsaw'). Orbán, however, is much more pragmatic and sly. His hostility towards the European Union is not ideological. He is not so openly heading towards an authoritarian state, neither is he so thoughtlessly eliminating competent people from different spheres of the social and economic establishment. Finally, he has an ally in Putin. Realising that Kaczyński's closest ally in the EU is Putin's best friend should not give Poles any reason to feel proud or calm.

The party ruling Poland since the autumn of 2015 campaigned with the intention of creating an Intermarium, a strong coalition of states located between the Baltic Sea, the Black Sea and the Adriatic Sea. This slogan was strongly present in Andrzej Duda's electoral programme. Minister Waszczykowski in his parliamentary exposé also dwelled on this region's alleged opportunities. The idea is unrealistic for many reasons, which has been known for a hundred years. Since mid-2016 the slogan seems to have disappeared from PiS's foreign policy. Its earlier appearance demonstrated not only fantasy but also ignorance in that regard.¹⁵ Poland cannot afford that in the long run. Well, but if not a strong Union, then what, a fantasy of strong Intermarium... If not the Weimar Triangle with Germany and France, then maybe the Visegrad Group with Putin's friends—Orbán and Zeman. Indeed, the Visegrad Group (VG) meetings have intensified. Quite obviously, new Polish leaders feel better in this company than in the company of Merkel and Hollande. However, the only point binding the VG together turned out to be its objection to accepting Middle East refugees, which is in fact, a negative programme. Concepts of alliances like the Intermarium and the Visegrad Group direction prove to be a weak alternative to the EU and its main powers.

The National Democratic to some degree inspiration of the ruling party could bring about results in the form of closer relationships with Russia. Earlier signals from that bloc were mixed. In his keynote speech in the Parliament, the leader of Polish diplomacy spoke of the hopes for 'pragmatic and factual relations with the Russian Federation'. An essentially similar position taken by the previous government entailed PiS's accusations of succumbing to Russia. The best (and shortest) response to that would be—it is a 'commendable' attempt at continuation. And if it were so, then with much worse results, because besides the unfriendly rhetoric of the ruling bloc and real problems and differences, there is also Putin's foreign policy which, at the moment, makes the normalisation of relations with Russia (practically impossible). At least for the previous government and the previous President the price for the bad relations with Moscow was the extraordinary support of Ukraine

¹⁵ L. Wójcik, *Emocje i iluzje rządzą polską polityką zagraniczną*, *Polityka*, 27 January 2016.

it its conflict with Russia. The strong nationalistic element in PiS's ideology, along with similar sentiments felt by many of its activists and constituents, caused the weakening of the Polish activity in Ukraine. What is more, the more adamant approach towards the problem of the genocide in Wolyn will only lead to a further deterioration in the Warsaw–Kiev bilateral relationships, also at the level of their opinion-forming groups. Another weakness of Poland's position in Eastern Europe is the fact that Poland has lost its role as an example of democratic transformations. The weak position in the EU makes it impossible to draw the EU or any of its Member States into Poland's policy towards our eastern neighbours, as it used to be in the past (creating a synergy affect in this direction). Besides, it is fair to say that the political transformations forced by the ruling bloc are convenient for Putin, just like as is Warsaw's strong Eurosceptic and decentralising positioning within the European Union.¹⁶

During the earlier rule of the coalition led by PiS in 2005–2007 the compensation for Poland's worsening position in Europe (the objection to the Lisbon Treaty and deteriorating relations with Germany) was supposed to be close relationships with the USA. The then President Lech Kaczynski was exhibiting clearly pro-American sentiments. This time, however, the same scheme would not work because of PiS's attacks on the Constitutional Tribunal, whose US equivalent is sacrosanct. The American media and politicians strongly criticised the antidemocratic actions of the new government in Warsaw.¹⁷ Therefore, in spite of Poland's multiple attempts to schedule President Duda's visit to the USA and meet President Obama,¹⁸ or to have a chance for a longer conversation with him, these never happened. The two eventually met during the NATO summit in Warsaw but the 40-minute conversation between them ended with exceptional discord. The US President expressed, also publicly, his concern about the worsening state of democracy in Poland.¹⁹ This was an unprecedented event. Never since the end of the cold war has the main NATO power or its secretary general expressed this kind of concern regarding one of the member states. This has of course a negative effect on Poland's place in NATO, especially on recruiting allies for Polish proposals and requests. Admittedly, during the NATO summit in Warsaw a decision was made to reinforce the Eastern flank by placing in Poland one NATO battalion, but this was in fact the implementation of the decisions of the earlier summit in Newport in September 2014. The allies wished to demonstrate in this way their unity and resolve towards Russia. However, Poland's weakening position in NATO will soon start to undermine its objective of ensuring security within NATO.

¹⁶ W. Radziwinowicz, Moskiewskie nadzieje na Polskę, *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 22 January 2016.

¹⁷ Poland Drifts in the Wrong Direction. Editorial, *International New York Times*, 7 July 2016.

¹⁸ President Duda visited the US twice (in the autumn of 2015 and in the spring of 2016) and each time had a short exchange with President Obama, however, both times only during international conferences. To compare: the previous President Komorowski was invited by Obama to the White House in December 2010 (within six months after his election), where both presidents engaged in a 2-hour discussion.

¹⁹ M. Zawadzki, Obama – Duda: pochwały i niepokój, *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 9–10 July 2016.

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It is concerning that Poland's new foreign policy is driving it towards geopolitical isolation. Depriving ourselves of allies and friends in Western Europe is happening at the time of Putin's offensive destabilising of security in our immediate vicinity. This situation is made even worse by the fact that Russia is actively, and with some success, seeking allies in various Western European States, especially in the right wing, nationalistic and anti-European environments, but not only there. A big part of the ruling circles in Germany, France or Italy show 'understanding' for Russia's importance and needs; Orbán and Zeman have already been mentioned. Statements made by the leading politicians from the ruling bloc about 'Poland getting up from its knees', 'regaining its subjectivity', or about implementing 'assertive politics' or about 'lighting up the Polish lantern' are indicative of the lack of a geopolitical understanding of reality. The rare connection of geopolitical illiteracy, historical amnesia, Sarmatian showing off and blatant incompetence owing to staff purges (similar to those carried out by the communist authorities in Poland between 1944–1947) are already damaging and will become even more damaging to the Polish national interest.²⁰ When exacerbating the adverse tendencies in our immediate surroundings which worsen regardless of Poland's actions, the ruling bloc behaves like the object in the sentence quoted above by the outstanding philosopher of science Alfred N. Whitehead.

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RETREAT FROM THE POLISH *RAISON D'ÊTRE* OR THE NATIONAL INTEREST

S u m m a r y

The author of this paper proves the damaging effects of subjugating Poland's interests in external relations to a specific programme of domestic policy. The domestic policy of the Prawo i Sprawiedliwość (Law and Justice) government is to build an authoritarian state on the foundation of nationalism and populism. The conduct of this policy has led to an unavoidable conflict between Poland and its European neighbours. The European Union and the Council of Europe have obligations and the means to react in situations when democracy in the Member States is threatened. The effect of this conflict is the progressive marginalisation of Poland in the EU. The loss of the position within the EU cannot be compensated for by creating an Intermarium because this idea has been unrealistic since conception. The relationships between Poland and the US worsened when Obama's administration became sensitised to the setbacks in democracy in Poland, especially since they meant the virtual elimination of the political position of the Constitutional Tribunal. The ruling bloc does not have a positive vision either of relationships with Eastern Europe. All in all, we are witnessing a rapid deterioration in Poland's international position to the detriment of its ability to pursue its goals and its national interests.

²⁰ K. Szczerski, *Zapalimy polską latarnię*, (interviewed by P. Wroński), *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 11 June 2015; R. Kuźniar, *Diplomacy – Sarmatian style*, *Rzeczpospolita* of 15 April 2016. Mao-tse-Tung talked about 'getting up from its knees', when his policy led to economic and cultural catastrophe in China. The meme about Poland which 'got up from its knees and proceeded to fall on its head' was very popular in Polish electronic media at the end of 2015 and the beginning of 2016.