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POLAND TOWARDS THE WAR AND INDEPENDENCE IN KOSOVO

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Abstract. Poland as a member country of the Group has strong economic and military potential in foreign policy and tries to respect the jointly agreed directions of action. Kosovo has become a challenge for Poland of particular importance, because the war started a few days after country has joined NATO.

The research includes analysis of the participation of Poland in the ending of the war in Kosovo, and military involvement through the participation of Polish soldiers in the UN, NATO and EU missions, the participation of Polish politicians in resolving the Kosovo conflict, as well as analysis of the response to the proclaiming of Kosovo's independence.

The aim of this article is to develop an evidence-based comprehensive study of the Polish approach to the conflict in Kosovo by showing and analyzing the key features of the conflict as well as the main issues of Polish participation in it. The key pillar of the approaches is a sovereign state acting in accordance with its national interests and important roles played by individual state agencies as well as by non-state, non-governmental and social actors, but also international organizations.

Key words: Kosovo, European Union, NATO, Kosovo war, foreign policy, Poland, peace missions, Kosovo independence, Yugoslavia.

Introduction. The last 20 years have brought profound changes to Polish foreign and security policy. Like other Central European countries, Poland became part of the Euro-Atlantic zone after joining NATO in 1990 and then the EU in 2004. Poland quickly became the most important player in Central Europe and is perceived in the region as a leader with which it is associated. Due to its size, strong economy, internal stability, and strong army, Poland is treated seriously by the EU Council and member states.

On March 12, 1999 in Independence (Missouri – USA) the Minister of Foreign Affairs, prof. Bronislaw Geremek handed over to the US Secretary of State, Madeleine Albright, the act of Poland's accession to the North Atlantic Treaty. At that moment, Poland formally became a member of the North Atlantic Alliance, the strongest military organization in the world. Poland joined NATO at a time when the alliance was changing and was on the brink of launching its first offensive operation.

Just two weeks after NATO enlargement, the alliance launched a military operation in Kosovo against the Federative Republic of Yugoslavia. At the very beginning of membership, Poland had to demonstrate that it could adapt to the redefined NATO. Poland passed this test unlike the other two members, the Czech Republic and Hungary; Warsaw unhesitatingly supported NATO's actions and, although it did not take part in the offensive part of the operation, it subsequently sent several rotations of peacekeepers. Another decisive feature of Poland's approach to Kosovo was that it sided with the “non-multilateralists” within the Alliance (K. Longhurst, 2013: 363). It was clear that Warsaw attached little importance to the dispute over NATO's failure to obtain a mandate from the UN Security Council. The domestic search for unlawful warfare that took place in much of Western Europe was small in Poland.

Political and military involvement of Poland in the conflict in Kosovo. Polish troops took part in the United Nations Protection Forces Mission (UNPROFOR) in the years 1992–1995 in former Yugoslavia. Similar activities were related to the activities of the Polish Military Contingent in Bosnia

and Herzegovina as part of the IFOR mission (later renamed SFOR), and after NATO transferred command to the European Union – in the EUFOR ALTHEA mission. Currently, according to the decision of the president, up to 50 soldiers and specialists of military personnel serve in this mission. After a significant improvement in security in the region, Operation ALTHEA is slowly coming to an end. Similarly, active operational involvement of Polish soldiers took place in the KFOR mission in Kosovo.

Since 1999, Poland has been one of the countries most militarily involved in peacekeeping, stabilization and humanitarian missions in Kosovo. The Polish state allocated significant amounts of money from the military budget for this purpose. The long-term training of soldiers in the special Training Center for Specialists of the United Nations Peacekeeping Forces named after Lieutenant General W. Sikorski in Kielce. It was also expensive to equip the units assigned for missions with specialized, modern equipment for logistical support, communication, equipment for field hospitals, day rooms and equipment for cultural and educational work, modern means of wheeled transport, suitable for operations in the mountains in extreme weather conditions. The first units of the Polish Army were sent to the Balkans in 1992 as part of the UN-UNPROFOR mandate.

The priority of the foreign and security policy of all governments in Poland in the 1990s was integration with the North Atlantic Alliance and the EU. Any other variant, be it neutrality, regional cooperation, or possibly a lower form of cooperation with NATO, has never been brought up in the country. From the very beginning of the crisis in Yugoslavia, the Republic of Poland was actively involved in helping to resolve the conflict (M. Waldenberg, 2000). From the beginning of the conflict (1991) until now, Polish soldiers have been actively participating in ensuring peace and security in the Balkans under the auspices of the CSCE first, and since 1994 the OSCE, UN, NATO and EU, as observers, peacekeepers, advisers, trainers and instructors.

In Poland, the attitude towards NATO air strikes on Serbia was publicly manifested relatively mildly. There were neither violent mass protests – as in most of Europe – nor turbulent support – as in Prague. The only public action of approval for NATO activities was undertaken by a small group of Albanians living in Poland (A. Bogusz, 1999).

Tadeusz Mazowiecki's reports can definitely be considered a very significant and internationally significant contribution to the resolution of the conflict in the former Yugoslavi (R. S. Hliwa, 1993), who in 1992, on the recommendation of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights, served as the Special Rapporteur on the situation in the field of human rights in the territory of the former Yugoslavia, especially in Bosnia and Herzegovina. In his reports, he extensively described the situation of the Yugoslavia region at that time, citing the causes, course, effects and proposals for solving the existing problems. The main problems were the camps, prisons, the lack of or inefficient functioning of the judiciary, the cut-off of necessary humanitarian aid; overall gross violation of human rights. Mazowiecki decided that the idea and not the consequence of this war was the mutual destruction of nations. Within the first ten days after T. Mazowiecki took up his position, the first report was prepared in which T. Mazowiecki, through the UN Human Rights Commission, alerted the public about mass violations of human rights by all parties to the conflict, as well as numerous fatalities, mass rapes of Muslim women by Serbian soldiers. He emphasized the tragic situation of the Muslim population fearing the threat of collective extermination. He pointed out that local authorities tolerate violence; that there is no rule of law; that the situation of prisoners in the camps is dramatic; that mutual religious and national hatred is reinforced by the indoctrination of the population. He pointed out that UN field units are unable to effectively defend the threatened population and cannot take any steps to stop human rights violations (J. Divjak, 2014).

In addition, in a document dated February 10, 1993, T. Mazowiecki demanded that the UN Defense Forces (UNPROFOR), present in several places in the former Yugoslavia, immediately appear in the security zones and “get a mandate to use force in defense of the civilian population”. The resolution made no mention of “*the defense of the enclave by UNPROFOR soldiers*” at all (J. Divjak, 2014),

Mazowiecki noted in a report written in August 1995, in which he showed the diplomats how much they were reluctant to take action to limit the effects of the war (R. S. Hliwa, 1993).

Meanwhile, in March 1999, Prime Minister Jerzy Buzek pressed hard for accelerating the procedure of Poland's accession to NATO, and he succeeded – Poland joined NATO a few weeks before the NATO Summit in Washington in mid-March. Two weeks after hoisting the Polish flag in Brussels, the war over Kosovo broke out. J. Buzek then announced that Poland took part in a very symbolic way in an attempt to control the situation in Kosovo, but “*we did not know that a war would break out*” (Jerzy Buzek, 2019).

The extreme wings of the Polish political scene spoke out loudly in protest against air raids on Serbia. The statements of “Trybuna”, expressing the views of the extreme faction of the SLD, and “Nasz Dziennik”, whose point of view is close to the deputies of our Circle, even contain phrases: “NATO – the world's gendarme” (Anna Bogusz, 1999).

Earlier, it was Our Circle and the ultra-left SLD MPs Piotr Ikonowicz, Piotr Gadzinowski and Bogdan Lewandowski who did not vote in the Sejm for Poland's admission to the North Atlantic Treaty. Official opposition to Poland's membership in NATO was announced by small quasi-right parties: Stronnictwo Narodowe and Polish National Community, standing on the basis of Pan-Slavism and an alliance with Russia. Later, both groups protest against “*aggression against our brotherly New Yugoslavia under the guise of defending human rights*”, and their protest coincided with the dramatic veto of SLD MP Izabella Sierakowska, reminding that “*Poland has always had cordial ties with Yugoslavia.*” (A. Bogusz, 1999). To strengthen its position, the opposition also relied on religious questions. Yes, the appeal against the participation of Polish soldiers in the military action in Yugoslavia, addressed to President Aleksander Kwasniewski by a group of Orthodox Christians, was based on religious grounds, who believed that Poland's participation in NATO operations could be judged by history, similarly to the participation in the intervention in Czechoslovakia in 1968 as part of the Warsaw Pact. The pro-Serbian “refusal front” gained surprising supporters. Lech Walensa found as many as four reasons to be “*for and even against*” (A. Bogusz, 1999), including the fact that he received the Nobel Peace Prize.

Debates on the legality of NATO's “Allied Forces” operation, as a result of which Serbia was bombed, were also held in the Sejm of the Republic of Poland. During the session of the Sejm on April 8, 1999, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Bronisław Geremek, attempted to justify NATO's activities in the former Yugoslavia. Yes, he said, “*It is not true that Albanians and Serbs began to die from air attacks. The action of mass ethnic cleansing started earlier, the withdrawal of the OSCE verification mission in which Poles participated started much earlier than the NATO attacks and was related to the beginning of ethnic cleansing*”. In response to the criticism of another member of the Sejm, Ikonowicz, that “in other cases of persecution, no intervention was undertaken”, he explained that “sometimes evil was opposed, and sometimes not.” (*Government information on the basic directions of Poland's foreign policy*). B. Geremek added that he did not think that “failure to oppose evil can be justified by the fact that not in all cases one reacts to it” (*Government information on the basic directions of Poland's foreign policy*). When MP Ikonowicz remarked that the NATO airstrikes had erected a wall of hatred between Serbs and Albanians, he replied that the wall of hatred between Albanians and Serbs was rather caused by ethnic cleansing, mass murder and expulsion of people (*Government information on the basic directions of Poland's foreign policy*). Minister B. Geremek's thesis is confirmed by historians and researchers of the history of Yugoslavia (D. Gibas-Krzak, 2009).

However, what he said next, he asked to be treated as his certain position. He asked whether the intervention by NATO, which was still ongoing at that time, was a breach of international law. He saw this as an important question in debates on international law. At this point, for the last 10 years, the thesis was introduced that international law cannot be limited to the United Nations Charter and respect for state sovereignty, because international law existed before the United Nations Charter

and state sovereignty is not the only reference to international law. Geremek also referred to Tadeusz Mazowiecki, who said that there was a certain dispute between two great principles: between the principle of state sovereignty and the principle of human rights (D. Gibas-Krzak, 2009). He stressed that one should therefore be aware that the United Nations Charter contains the foundations of international law and constructs a security system based on the concerted action of the five powers. At the time when they were formulated, human rights and humanitarian issues had not yet been included in the great acts of international law. These fields developed only after the adoption of the United Nations Charter. In 1949, the Geneva Conventions for the Protection of Victims of War were adopted, in 1977 the protocols to these conventions allowing their use in internal conflicts – and the Kosovo conflict is such – and finally, from 1948 to 1970, several major conventions were adopted on the protection human rights. One should be aware that this has also changed the situation of the *acquis*. This changes our understanding of the violation of international law in the event of an intervention violating state sovereignty (*Government information on the basic directions of Poland's foreign policy*).

In his speech, he also emphasized that it should be recalled that the operation of the North Atlantic Alliance now also refers to the 3rd Resolution of the Security Council; Resolution 1160, Resolution 1199 and Resolution 2003. All these resolutions unequivocally assess the acts of human rights violations taking place in Kosovo. And these resolutions also demand that the Yugoslav government fulfill certain issues. None of them have been performed. The sending of a verification mission under an agreement between the OSCE, NATO and the Yugoslav government was intended as a means of fulfilling what the Security Council had called for, and therefore the conclusion that the Security Council was not informed of the situation is not true. To this he added two more facts. One, that a resolution proposed to the Security Council that would have condemned NATO's actions as aggression was rejected. There were three votes in favor of the resolution, in all others it was not supported. So we can say that we are in a situation where the practice of international law defines completely new rules, which, one can hope, will also become norms of international law (C.J.Chivers. Russian Candidate Denounces Kosovo).

Reaction in Poland to the granting of independence to Kosovo. On February 26, 2008, the Government of the Republic of Poland adopted a resolution recognizing Kosovo's independence. The decision on the imminent recognition of Kosovo's independence was announced by Minister Radosław Sikorski on 18 February during a meeting of the EU General Affairs and External Relations Council. He confirmed in the aforementioned international forum that he had applied for recognition of Kosovo's independence, as did most of the Member States of the European Union. Before that, NATO Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer visited Belgrade. The Russian presidential candidate Dmitry Medvedev also paid a visit (C .J. Chivers. Russian Candidate Denounces Kosovo). Both sides represented a different view of Kosovo's independence. While Europe and the United States talked about the independence of Kosovo and the further integration of Serbia and Kosovo into Western structures, Russia was against it and claimed that “*the act of declaring Kosovo's independence is absolutely against international law. It violates the sovereignty and destroys the territorial integrity of the Serbian state*” (C. J. Chivers. Russian Candidate Denounces Kosovo).

Sikorski wanted Poland to be one of the first countries to recognize Kosovo's independence. However, it turned out that the minister “*went ahead of the ranks*” (C. J. Chivers. Russian Candidate Denounces Kosovo). Poland was not one of the first countries to recognize Kosovo's independence because the government withheld its decision until the president's opinion was heard. The president, in turn, did not want to hurry, and the whole situation was justified by the need for time and estimation of the benefits and losses that Poland and the world can achieve from recognizing Kosovo's independence. He was mainly concerned that a dangerous precedent would be set for separatist provinces in Georgia (Abkhazia, South Ossetia) or Moldova (Republic of Transnistria). The Prime Minister of the Republic of Poland said that the government supported the recognition of Kosovo's independence.

Despite the president's dissenting opinion, he will respect the government's decision. However, he admitted that *“this is a difficult situation, especially when the government takes a decision that will not improve the image of Poland among a large part of the Balkan Slavs.”* (In the case of Kosovo, Lech Kaczyński strongly observed: *this is a violation of the fundamental principle of the territorial integrity of UN member states*).

Prime Minister D. Tusk noted that he *„has no doubts on which side Poland should be on, but he is grateful to the president for distancing the government from the situation at the right moment.”* Prime Minister D. Tusk believed that *“it is good that the decision was not announced quickly in an ostentatious way. Now she is more restrained, gentle and more understandable to the world. It's because of the president. It is good that there has been a dialogue on this matter between the Prime Minister and the President, said the Prime Minister. But now is the right time to recognize Kosovo's independence. However, in order to recognize the youngest country in the world, as almost 20 EU countries have already done so, Poland cannot leave its natural, Western allies in this difficult situation. It was about the Americans who had already recognized Kosovo.*

At the same time, the Prime Minister planned to send a special political mission to Belgrade, which was to assure the Serbs of Polish sympathy and provide assistance in the framework of Serbia's cooperation with the EU. The government rightly believed that the Serbs should not be harmed, they should be given more care and attention. There were countries in the EU itself, including as large as Poland, which were willing to help Serbia if it was interested in such a European perspective.

After the declaration of Kosovo's independence, T. Mazowiecki, who in 1992 was the UN Special Envoy to Bosnia and Herzegovina, had doubts about what such a mission would look like and who would lead it. The decision to send the mission was supported by Jacek Saryusz-Wolski (PO), who was going to Serbia on behalf of the European Parliament. The future of both Kosovo and Serbia lies in the EU. Serbia needs to be shown a friendly face to the Union, it needs to be encouraged to reform. Wojciech Olejniczak (SLD), in turn, said about the need to send a high-ranking government representative to Belgrade. He emphasized that before recognizing Kosovo's independence, the rights of the Serbian minority should be claimed.

In turn, the charge d'affaires of the Serbian embassy in Poland, Nikola Zurovac, hoped that the Polish government would not recognize Kosovo's independence. He said that *“the number of letters, e-mails and phone calls from Poles supporting Serbia exceeded our expectations”*. The Serbian ambassador was sure that the majority was on the side of Serbia and hoped that the Polish government would too. When Poland proposed to send a mission, Zurovac replied that *“talks are always good”* (In the case of Kosovo, Lech Kaczynski strongly observed: *this is a violation of the fundamental principle of the territorial integrity of UN member states*). Serbia did not recall its ambassador from Warsaw because Belgrade did not manage to send one. Nikola Zurovac was considered the highest diplomatic representative of Serbia in Poland.

In the case of Kosovo, the President of the Republic of Poland, L. Kaczynski, strongly observed – he considered recognition of Kosovo's independence as a violation of the fundamental principle of territorial integrity of UN member states. At the same time, Prime Minister D. Tusk said that the President of the Republic of Poland demonstrated general dissatisfaction with what the government was proposing and doing towards Kosovo. The prime minister also stressed that he was obliged to listen to and consult with the president on many steps, but he did not always agree. Official speeches were also made by the President's Minister, Michał Kaminski, and the head of the Prime Minister's Office Sławomir Nowak, justifying the position of the president and the prime minister. Yes, Presidential Minister Michał Kaminski emphasized that the president recommended *“prudence”* regarding Kosovo. The issue of Kosovo's independence has serious implications for other areas of the world.

In turn, the head of the Prime Minister's office, Sławomir Nowak, said that President Lech Kaczyński believed that Poland should not recognize Kosovo, because it has strategic alliances to the south-east of the Polish borders, and there is also a risk of separatism there. He also stressed that *“the president would prefer not to recognize Kosovo at all”* (Tusk: on Tuesday the government will recognize Kosovo's independence). Nowak added that the head of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs R. Sikorski is in constant contact with his counterparts in the countries that the president was concerned about. As he said, *“we are all worried”*, but the government has a different opinion on this matter and *“restraint is probably not so advisable”*. In his speeches, Prime Minister Tusk said that he was not a *“man of conflict”*, but he did not intend to create an artificial propaganda impression that *“everything is fine”*. Facts, decisions and opinions expressed by the Presidential Palace clearly indicate that the President of the Republic of Poland *“assumed the duty of patronizing the opposition. It's a kind of presidency”* (Tusk: on Tuesday the government will recognize Kosovo's independence). D. Tusk emphasized that he does not necessarily share the position of President L. Kaczyński or expect any special proofs of sympathy from him. However, the prime minister said that he would like the president of the Republic of Poland to be able to cooperate with the government in spite of everything, where it is required by the interest of the state. He stressed that his government would not be a government of *“romantic revolution”*. *„With the help of revolts and revolutions ruins and ashes are most often achieved”*. According to the Prime Minister, the last two years before 2008 showed that *“if someone has too many visions in their head, too much revolutionary temperament, if someone is a radical – it does more harm than good”* (Tusk: on Tuesday the government will recognize Kosovo's independence).

During an official visit to Serbia on May 13, 2009, the President of the Republic of Poland assured that he supported the Serbian position on Kosovo and disagreed with last year's decision of the Polish government recognizing the independence of the former Yugoslavia and Serbia.

The Polish government recognized Kosovo's independence, but the President did not conceal that it happened in conditions when the president and the prime minister did not have the same position on this issue. On the other hand, the Polish president said in Belgrade that the democratically elected Polish government had the right to make such a decision (*In the case of Kosovo, Lech Kaczyński strongly observed: this is a violation of the fundamental principle of the territorial integrity of UN member states*).

As it was already mentioned in the work, the government of D. Tusk recognized Kosovo statehood on February 26, 2008, nine days after the unilateral declaration of independence by the authorities in Pristina. The President of the Republic of Poland also expressed hope that the problem of Kosovo's future could be successfully resolved, while warning that the unilateral proclamation of Kosovo's independence in February 2008 constituted a violation of the fundamental principle of territorial integrity of UN member states. According to the Polish leader, the events around Kosovo resulted in the war in the Caucasus in August 2008, which violated the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Georgia (*In the case of Kosovo, Lech Kaczyński strongly observed: this is a violation of the fundamental principle of the territorial integrity of UN member states*).

President L. Kaczyński confirmed in Belgrade that *“Poland supports Serbia on its way to the European Union”*. He also expressed his support for Serbia's policy towards its former province of Kosovo. Serbian President Boris Tadić thanked L. Kaczyński for not favoring Poland's recognition of Kosovo. Referring to the case of Kosovo, President L. Kaczyński explained that *„it was recognized by the Polish government, which had such a right under the Constitution of the Republic of Poland”*, but he did not hide that it was in conditions when the president and the government were not of the same sentences. He stressed that the democratically elected government had the right to make such a decision. At the same time, he expressed his conviction that the Kosovo issue was a problem to be solved. The President of the Republic of Poland declared that he was an ardent supporter of Serbia's policy on this issue, led by B. Tadić.

Public opinion on Poland's recognition of Kosovo's independence was also divided. Some politicians believed that the independence of Kosovo would cause a dangerous domino effect in Europe. The LPR MEP, Sylwester Chruszcz, was a supporter of this opinion. He referred to his speech in the European Parliament, in which he was surprised that “*the situation in Kosovo is very often communicated to the public in a unilateral way, harmful to the Serbs*”. S. Chruszcz claimed that “*the future of Europe and the world should be decided by sovereign states and nations at the forum of such institutions as the United Nation (An independent Kosovo is necessary, but it makes no sense)*”. That is why he thanked Russia and those countries which, at the UN Security Council, were against moving borders in Europe. These positions were supported by Pawel Piskorski, People Platform MEP, who warned against “*the pan-European enthusiasm associated with the birth of the youngest state in the world*” (*An independent Kosovo is necessary, but it makes no sense*).

The part of society supporting the recognition of Kosovo's independence believed that the establishment of Kosovo was the right of the nation to establish an independent state and the right to self-determination. Just like Poles, they had the right to rebirth their country on November 11, 1918 (*An independent Kosovo is necessary, but it makes no sense*).

Other publicists also point to the contradiction of the fundamental principles of self-determination and the integrity of the territory. Both of these values are the foundation of the current geopolitical order. They also point out that “*Kosovo is a very poor province. There is virtually no industry and unemployment is well over 50 percent. (...) Independence, in the event of a boycott from Belgrade, will be painful and costly*”. Russia's blocking of Kosovo's independence is “*theatrical gestures*” and Moscow is simply “*considering how best to use the Kosovo card for its needs ... although it fears any centrifugal and pro-independence tendencies*” (*An independent Kosovo is necessary, but it makes no sense*).

It should be emphasized here that Russia's position on this issue remains unchanged. In June 2019, Serbian weeklies published cover photos of Vladimir Putin with the slogan: “*Brothers, Serbs, do not give up Kosovo*”.

The facts mentioned above show that not only the Polish state was strongly involved in the problems of Kosovo, but also scientific and social institutions, which, regardless of the state structures, showed their own initiative and actively participated in the normalization of life in the region destroyed by warfare.

Conclusion. Thus, when Poland was not yet a member of NATO, it was already taking serious steps to stabilize the crisis not only in Kosovo, but also in the entire Balkans. An extremely important role in the analysis and decision-making during the crisis was played by the reports of Tadeusz Mazowiecki, who in 1992, on the recommendation of the UN Human Rights Commission, served as the Special Rapporteur on the Situation in the Field of Human Rights in the former Yugoslavia, especially Bosnia and Herzegovina. In his reports, he extensively described the then situation in the Yugoslavia region, citing the causes, course, effects and proposals for solving existing problems. However, the UN did not treat the reports properly as signals for a sudden and necessary intervention in the Balkan situation in order to prevent the escalation of the crisis, the growing wave of genocide, genocide – crimes with particular atrocities.

Kosovo is an example proving that Poland attached importance to participation in peacekeeping and humanitarian missions in the Balkans. Objectively, however, it must be admitted that the political and military actions for Kosovo were in line with the security strategy of the European Union (UE Resolution: 580) and NATO (New Strategic Concept), and made a significant contribution to the stabilization of this region.

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