



# CONFRONTATION AND COOPERATION

## 1000 YEARS OF POLISH–GERMAN–RUSSIAN RELATIONS

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Jan Parys

Kolegium Jagiellońskie Toruńska Szkoła Wyższa

## The Soviet army in Poland

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On 4<sup>th</sup> June 1989 the first free parliamentary elections were held in Poland. They were the first elections of this kind in the communist block, which was formed as a result of WW II and the Yalta agreement. This way the process of the destruction of the communist system in Europe, and in consequence the collapse of the Soviet Union, which had been initiated by the establishment of the trade unions „Solidarność”, sped up rapidly.

In December 1991 the first Polish parliament (Sejm), emerged in fully democratic elections<sup>1</sup>, appointed the government of Jan Olszewski<sup>2</sup>. In this way the process of effective action aiming at the transformation of the status of Poland from the Soviet satellite into a sovereign state was initiated. It was also the beginning of the process of establishing the new geopolitical position of Poland in Europe.

<sup>1</sup> One should remember that the previous Sejm emerged in free, yet only partly democratic elections. The elections, as the compromise with the communist regime were of curial character. Regardless the real will of the society they guaranteed that the political parties of the regime would hold 65% of parliamentary seats. It was only the elections of 1991 that renounced this privilege.

<sup>2</sup> The author of this article, Jan Parys, was the first civilian minister of defense of the Republic of Poland between 1991 and 1992 in the government of Jan Olszewski.

During the WWII Poland experienced an immense loss, both in people as well as in property and territory. Alas, it was also followed by the loss of sovereignty, associated with the imposed presence of the state in the Soviet zone, which had been agreed on by the American and British allies.

How come the country that was the longest fighting during the WWII and whose resistance initiated this war lost its independence? In 1991 when the government of Jan Olszewski was being formed it wasn't just a historical question. Without the comprehension of the reasons why during the WWII the independence was lost, the system which had led to this state cannot be changed.

Throughout the WWII Stalin imposed on his western allies the Hitler's point of view on the history of Europe in the 20<sup>th</sup> cent. According to this concept the Second World War began as a result of signing the treaty of Versailles after the Great War. The treaty, both in Hitler's as well as in Stalin's opinion, was the source and the reason of the outbreak of the new war. The conference in Versailles was based on explicitly anti-imperial ideas of an eminent creator of the new international order, W. Wilson, the president of the USA. In his famous seventeen points he presented among the

others the rule of self-determination of nations, and the right of nations to establish independent states, as the condition of the fair international order.

For both Stalin and Hitler this approach was unacceptable. Each of them aimed at extending their states in Europe, and transforming them into the empires on the expense of smaller and weaker states. This idea was presented as the way of introducing order in messed up Europe, providing stability by creating the areas of influence, and dividing Europe between empires according to their interests.

For the British government this idea was obvious, since London had been building its empire for centuries, dividing the world into its own and foreign territories. Beside Churchill there was throughout the war an advisor, a diplomat, publicist and Marxist historian, E.H. Carr. He was strongly supporting the idea of dividing Europe into the western and Soviet parts. His pro-Soviet role was well described by one of Polish emigrant leaders, the Commander in Chief of the Polish Army Kazimierz Sosnkowski, in his works published after the war.

In case of the USA there is no doubt that ill and naive, when it came to the understanding of the communism, F.D. Roosevelt was inspired and controlled in his contacts with Moscow by advisors who, as it has been proved, were working for Moscow.

As the result of the attack of the 3rd Reich on USSR Stalin turned temporarily towards the western countries. In the first phase of the war the Soviet Union had been almost defeated. The western countries could have imposed on Moscow practically any demands. Yet, there was a reversal also on the western side. After two years since the German attack on the Soviet Union the ideas included in Atlantic Charter from 14th August 1941 were negated, the concept of international law based on the ideas of Wilson's as well as the vision of Europe founded on the treaty of Versailles were rejected.

There is no better example illustrating the work of agents than this very reversal in the western policy. Between 14<sup>th</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> August 1943 a conference under the name of „Quadrant”<sup>3</sup> was held in Quebec. It was during this conference that Churchill and Roosevelt decided that the Europe of free nations had no point, and the areas of influence on the continent were necessary to fulfill the ambitions of great powers. Moreover, they decided that after the war the Soviet

Union was to be in charge of the safety in the countries of middle Europe.

Then the idea that Europe consisting of a lot of small and weak states is a vacuum that provokes the aggression of stronger European countries had prevailed. The stability and peace in Europe could only be guaranteed by the states from beyond Europe, i.e. USA and USSR.

In this way in Quebec the allies accepted as their own the thesis of the critics of the treaty in Versailles. The decisions were confirmed at the meeting of the Big Three with Stalin in Teheran on 28th November 1943. It was declared there what had previously been agreed on at the British-American conference.

In Teheran Stalin didn't have to demand anything. He had won Teheran before, thanks to his agents, at the conference in Quebec. When it came to Europe and issues concerning communism Roosevelt had hardly any knowledge. He realized what his two advisors, Harry Hopkins and Alger Hiss, suggested he should do. Today we know that both of them were working in Stalin's interest<sup>4</sup>.

These two politicians claimed that the Europe of independent states meant something dangerous, so called *vacuum*. These two Stalin's men, steering America's policy had influenced the fate of Poland more than our government in London. They were of greater importance than the struggle of the Poles during the Second World War.

The Soviet Union was then in such a military situation that in Teheran Stalin couldn't demand much, and would have accepted any solution offered by the West. Stalin's diplomats, however, masterly stoked fears concerning the possibility of armistice between Hitler and the Soviets. Now we are aware that it was merely a skillful game, and not a real possibility.

The representatives of the West decided that Stalin was to be paid for defending against Hitler, and promised him in Europe more than the German-Russian agreement from August 1939 (the pact of Ribbentrop and Molotov) had provided for. In fact during the negotiations with the West it was Stalin who was a weaker party since his defensive capability against Wermacht depended on the military supplies from western countries. Therefore, Stalin couldn't demand anything. He was the pledging side and would have accepted any political solution.

<sup>3</sup> T. Modelski, *Byłem szefem wywiadu Naczelnego Wodza*, Warszawa 2009, p. 115.

<sup>4</sup> More information at: A. Codevill, *Informing Statecraft*, New York 1992, chapter 11.

For the Soviet diplomacy it came as a great surprise that the work of Soviet agents amongst British and American elites was so efficient. Stalin got more than he had expected, than he had ever dared to dream. Basing on the will of the West he could keep the Middle Europe for himself, as England its colonies, and the USA its influence in the western Europe. During the conference in Yalta the division of the influence zones had only been confirmed. Stalin was then in the consumption stage of what had been promised to him in Teheran. By fait accompli he grabbed new territories and made the whole nations dependent by force with the approval of the western states.

The change of western policy towards Poland cannot be called otherwise than the betrayal of the ally. This change at the end of 1943 was easier since it happened after the Commander of Home Army general Stefan Rowecki „Grot” had been arrested by Gestapo, as well as after the death of the Prime Minister general W. Sikorski.

The significance of Poland in Russian policy was best expressed by Stalin in June 1945 at Kremlin during the decoration ceremony of the Red Army officers before their departure to the conference in Potsdam: *„It's Poland not Germany that is our biggest catch in history”*. Alas, in the West there are few knowing the rules of Russian geopolitics and diplomacy.

The most significant consequence of the mistakes that Western policy had made towards Europe during WWII was the actual silent agreement on the presence of the Soviet army in Poland. This issue reflects the question of our sovereignty. Without solving it after 1989 Poland would have remained what it had been during communism times, the satellite state of Moscow.

Formally there was no international document that would sanction the presence of Soviet army in Poland after the war. It wasn't mentioned in the Potsdam Pact (there is only a remark in the minutes about it), or even in the text of the Warsaw Pact. Throughout many years there wasn't even a written agreement of the communist authorities of Poland concerning the military presence. For many years Poland had been the only country of the socialist block in which Soviet army stationed. It has to be mentioned, that the presence of Soviet troops in East Germany resulted from the agreement made in Potsdam.

After 1956 some attempts were made to regulate formally the presence of Soviet units (also called Północna Grupa Wojsk – PGW) (the Northern Group of Forces) in Poland by the authorities of communist

Poland. This situation wasn't changed by the fact that these agreements, e.g. the one from 17th December 1956 on the legal status of the Soviet troops in Poland, or the one from 23<sup>rd</sup> October 1957 about the number and location of Soviet units in Poland, were signed between the authorities of the empire and the local government<sup>5</sup>. Therefore they cannot be accepted in any way as making the presence of PGW in Poland legal. They were always signed by Polish authorities who were imposed by Moscow, and under the threat of using violence, since in the presence of many thousands of armed troops of the empire on the Polish territory. The content of the above mentioned agreements can be acknowledged as formally correct. The problem is, however, that even these agreements were not abided by the Soviets. The first calls concerning the withdrawal of PGW appeared in 1956 expressed e.g. by inhabitants of Świnoujście. Such a motion was proposed to W. Gomułka by a group of servicemen (e.g. general Z. Hibner). Later on in the 1980s the issue was brought up by independence organizations (KPN, KSN, PPN). Obviously, they didn't bring any results, and were merely the manifestation of the nation's will.

Thus the stationing of PGW had never been legalized, it had always been an army of strangers, performing occupational functions towards the nation and defending the imposed communist regime. Its stationing was later on sanctioned by so called Brezhnev's Doctrine, which clearly stated the limited sovereignty of the member states of the Warsaw Pact.

Such a result of WWII made the Poles follow the mission of regaining the independence after the war. This could only happen by overthrowing the Soviet dominance in the Middle Europe. Hence, the geopolitical changes in Europe were the key to our freedom. The Poles didn't have in mind just democracy or market economy, but also a new geopolitical balance of powers in Europe, which would open the door to our sovereignty.

The United States, and particularly Ronald Reagan, already after 1982 had rejected the decisions of Teheran and Yalta, questioned the right of Moscow to enslave the Middle Europe, and rejected the concept of areas of influence. Reagan didn't hide, that he was aiming at gaining the military advantage over the USSR. He

<sup>5</sup> These issues are discussed more broadly by: M.L. Rogulski, *Okupacja imię sojuszu. Armia Radziecka w Polsce 1956–1993*, Warszawa 2001; A. Skrzypek, *Mechanizmy uzależnienia w stosunkach polsko-radzieckich 1944–1957*, Pułtusk 2002.

started the arms race, that Moscow wasn't able to follow economically.

For many reasons, which won't be reminded here, in 1988 Gorbachev announced in Warsaw that he wouldn't defend the power of PZPR in Poland using force, i.e. using PGW. After the *Solidarność* people started governing Poland the problem of the presence of PGW had to be considered in the context of the new order in Europe. The policy of the authorities after the so called contract elections in June 1989 should be brought closer here.

It was already in November 1989 that Prime Minister, Mazowiecki, announced that the alliance with the USSR was indispensable for Poland, and in February 1990 he repeated that PGW was to stay in Poland till the relations between Poland and Germany were settled. Mazowiecki accepted the communist idea that Moscow defended us against Germany, and that was why PGW units should stay in our country. He perceived this army as an ally and guarantor of Polish borders. Poland, as Mazowiecki stated, would settle its ally relations with the Soviet Union and would seek for such solutions in its relations with the USSR which would respect its interests as a powerful empire<sup>6</sup>. In March 1990 Komitet Obrony Kraju (the Committee of the State's Defense) pointed out that the withdrawing of the Soviet army was to be correlated with the development of the international situation<sup>7</sup>.

In my opinion such an attitude was in no way realistic. Mazowiecki ignored the fact that the Berlin Wall had collapsed, that Moscow had agreed on that, which meant the end of the division of Europe, that in May 1991 Zjednoczone Dowództwo (the Joined Command) of the Warsaw Pact Army was disbanded, and in Germany they were thinking already about the reunion, and didn't question the border with Poland. As a result of rapid changes in April 1991 Comecon was disbanded, and so was the Warsaw Pact in July of the same year. The negotiations concerning the withdrawal of PGW from Poland began when the issue had become the postulate of general public in Poland, and when as a part of preparations for the 2+4 settlement (on the reunion of Germany) the withdrawal of PGW from Europe was being considered. The negotiations were made easier by the international pressure, i.e. the talks

of Reagan and Bush with Gorbachev concerning the withdrawal of PGW in Europe.

The first round of the Polish-Russian negotiations that took place on 15th November 1990 could be considered the beginning of negotiations on the withdrawal of PGW. During work meetings, the director of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MSZ), Grzegorz Kostrzewa-Zorbas was an actual head of the Polish delegation. General Z. Ostrowski was appointed the assignee of the government in issues concerning PGW in Poland. At that time there were 56 thousand Russian soldiers in Poland in 56 garrisons, 600 tanks, 952 armored vehicles, 390 heavy guns and mortars, 231 planes and helicopters, as well as 400 thousand tons of equipment<sup>8</sup> (including 90 thousand tons of ammunition).

Officially the withdrawal began on 8<sup>th</sup> April 1991 on the day when Brygada Rakiet Operacyjno-Taktycznych (the Brigade of Operational-Tactical Missiles) was withdrawn from Borne-Sulinowo. Finally, after fifteen rounds of negotiations, in May 1992 following numerous stages the Polish-Russian agreement was signed, and it was decided that PGW would have left Poland by the end of 1993. The agreement was a great success of the government of Jan Olszewski, which had been achieved despite the strong counter action of the pro-Russian circles in Poland.

The last combat units of PGW left Poland on 28th October 1992. It was the 24th Brigade of Torpedo Cutters. The remaining military groups of PGW had eventually left Poland on 17th September 1993. All in all, Soviet units left Poland in 2981 railway transports consisting of 22 934 carriages<sup>9</sup>.

Units securing the transit of the Northern Military Group (consisting of 7 thousand soldiers: 2 communication brigades, 2 securing units, 9 posts of the inspection of military communication, economic unit of dismantling) withdrawing from the German territory left Poland in 1994. The Polish side had overtaken from PGW 7 854 estates, regained for the economy 70 thousand hectares of land (including 35

<sup>6</sup> Words by T. Mazowiecki quoting after: "Rzeczpospolita" 13.09.1989.

<sup>7</sup> „Perspektywy”, 1990, no. 21, p. 7.

<sup>8</sup> The data presented following the calculations in the work: J. Zygmuntowicz, *Niechciani goście. Stosunki polsko-rosyjskie podczas wycofywania Północnej Grupy Wojsk*, Toruń 2007.

<sup>9</sup> I'm presenting the data quoting the vice-minister of transport at that time Witold Chodkiewicz.



thousand hectares of forests), 3 hectares of port wharfs, and 23 railway sidings<sup>10</sup>.

The documents available today let us confirm the previous presumptions, that the USSR had stored nuclear weapons in Poland. The Soviet army already at the end of the 1950s anticipated the use of nuclear weapon during the attack on the western Europe. PGW stationing in Poland had such weapons at its disposal.

The authorities of the USSR and the Command of the Northern Group of Forces didn't inform the Polish party about their equipment or the assignments for their units. According to the agreement from 25<sup>th</sup> February 1967 between the head of the Ministry of National Defense of Polish People's Republic and the minister of defense of the USSR the Polish party had financed at least three depots (bunkers), in which nuclear weapons meant for the Polish Army (LWP) was being stored. The weapons consisting of almost 170 warheads was the Polish property, although during the peace time it was secured by special Russian units. In case of alarm states it was to be supplied to Polish missile units, armed in launch vehicles of the S-300 type, as well as to the squadron of bombers. The data referring to this issue is available in the documents of so called Operacja Wisła (the Vistula Operation). During the withdrawal of PGW from Poland the Soviets took nuclear warheads from the bunkers, despite the fact that they had been purchased by LWP and were the property of Poland.

Before and even now there has been in Poland a part of political elite content about Polish dependence on Moscow. No wonder then, that the negotiations concerning the withdrawal of PGW from Poland were being delayed. The Polish vice-minister was making attempts to block the disbanding of the Warsaw Pact. The president of Poland, following the idea of the Moscow's agent, was trying to reestablish this pact suggesting during his speech in Bundestag the creation of so called NATO-bis in the east of Europe. Another Soviet agent had removed from the text of Wałęsa's speech the piece referring to the need of withdrawing PGW from Poland.

During the times of Jan Krzysztof Bielecki's government the commission led by the deputy Prime Minister Leszek Balcerowicz estimated the level of damage associated with the stationing of PGW in Poland. The main loss was connected with the use

of forest and agricultural areas without any charge, ecological damage, as well as the damage of property. The overall loss experienced by the Republic of Poland between 1945 and 1993 was estimated by the Commission at the level of 62.6 billion of Polish zloty<sup>11</sup>. In order to sign the agreement on the final withdrawal of PGW from Poland the government of Jan Olszewski agreed for so called zero option, which meant annulling the dues, accepting the damage as the cost of the rapid ending of the occupation.

Today it is clear that communists were giving away the power in Poland for the price of leaving the country still dependent on Moscow, and not changing the geopolitical status quo. Therefore the negotiations included only a part of the opposition groups, i.e. the ones for whom the dependence of Poland from Moscow was not a problem. For some good relations with Russia are a priority, for others it is the sovereignty of the Polish state. It was obvious for Olszewski's government that the withdrawal of the entire PGW from Poland means choosing by our country pro-western option and preserving the sovereignty.

Luckily, it proved impossible to limit the aspirations of the nation only to internal reforms. The process of the reduction of the Soviet empire couldn't have been stopped. During the times of Olszewski's government Poland had clearly chosen pro-western option. Both open and restricted negotiations between MON (the Ministry of National Defense) and NATO resulted in the visit of Secretary General of NATO, Manfred Wörner, in Warsaw and his official announcement that the doors of NATO are open for Poland.

Acquiring Wörner's declaration was a great success of MON, the government, and Poland. At this very moment Poland got the chance for being a sovereign and safe state. It isn't known that the negotiations between Wörner and Polish Ministry of Defense were coordinated by a Pole, an expert from his cabinet, Wojciech Kornacki. This former officer of Home Army from the Warsaw Uprising lived in London. In this way the generation of Home Army was completing its mission from the occupation times.

As an experienced European politician Wörner was aware that the agreement between the West and Poland should include also military issues, and that there wouldn't be safe Germany without solving problems with Poland, withdrawing PGW from Poland, and that

<sup>10</sup> The data presented after J. Zygmuntowicz, *loc.cit.*

<sup>11</sup> The documents concerning the work of the Commission can be found in the archives of the Ministry of Finance.

joining NATO by Poland would be the best solution for Polish-German relations. It also meant that Soviet troops had to leave Poland. Leaving Poland in shadow zone wasn't in German interest either. No wonder then that the Wörner's visit in Poland happened quickly and was a breakthrough. It was enough for Polish party, especially MON, to be decisive and credible.

Since that moment the supporters of pro-Russian option found themselves in difficult position. They had to struggle against the general public as well as with the pressure of the West. The withdrawal of PGW was just a question of time then. There was, however, the last attempt to keep Russian influences in Poland, i.e. the intent to include in the Polish-Russian treaty the right of Moscow to have enclaves in former PGW bases, called trade companies. In agreement with the Belvedere the vice ministers of foreign affairs were trying to introduce such a solution to the project of the treaty (without the agreement of the government, and keeping it secret from the assignee of the government in issues concerning PGW, general Ostrowski).

The entries in the project prefigured that the income of the companies would finance the further stationing of Russian soldiers in Poland. Thus on the one hand Moscow was negotiating the withdrawal of PGW from Poland, while on the other it was trying, taking advantage of the weakness of minister Skubiszewski and president Wałęsa, to impose in the treaty the stationing of its soldiers without determining the time they would stay in Poland. Thanks to the determined attitude of Jan Olszewski's government they failed. I remember a meeting in the office of the Prime Minister, when the decision was made to send a wireless to Wałęsa confirming in writing the standpoint of the government. It was also about having a written proof of who had what kind of attitude towards the sovereignty of the state. Wałęsa had to give up his former promises he had made to the Russians. The fact that the treaty with Russia signed on 22<sup>nd</sup> May 1992 excluded the further military dependence from Russia is actually the merit of the attitude of a few government members, who were well aware of the threat connected with Wałęsa's pursuit in Moscow concerning the treaty. It should be emphasized here that Russia didn't make such demands towards any other country of the former block. It was the determined standpoint of this government concerning the Polish-Russian treaty that enabled the joining of NATO by Poland. If the treaty with Russia had been accepted in the Belvedere version, it is most probable that Poland wouldn't have been accepted to NATO.

The opposition of the Prime Minister towards the decisions in the treaty accepted by the Belvedere caused an immediate action of forwarding in parliament the motion to remove the government.

To my view the facts mentioned above speak for themselves. The three issues, i.e. the agreement on the withdrawal of PGW, signing the treaty with Russia that guaranteed sovereignty, and acquiring the declaration from NATO that there is a place for Poland in the Pact, are in my opinion three significant and real achievements of the government, which determined the geopolitical position of Poland in Europe for decades. Each of them undermined the decisions made once in Yalta and Teheran, as well as the ones made recently during so called round table in 1989. Therefore, the work of Jan Olszewski's government should by no accounts be limited to the issues of lustration or the struggle for the benefits of privatization. The real struggle in 1992 was about regaining sovereignty and the change of the position of Poland on the map of Europe. And here the government had achieved a success. It had taken the advantage of the moment when the USA was powerful, whereas Russia was weak. The government of Jan Olszewski didn't waste this historical opportunity. For this moment the nation had been waiting for almost 50 years, since Teheran.

The voting on the overthrowing the government of Jan Olszewski on 4<sup>th</sup> June 1992 didn't concern lustration. It was the voting referring to the issue in which part of Europe would Poland be, the western or Russian one. Several people were well aware of that, especially those who during famous conference with the President decided on the need of hasty change of the government, even though many voting MPs still believe it was all about lustration. Still lasting hatred towards the government of Olszewski confirms the fact that there are numerous enemies of sovereign Poland. The authorities appointed at that time, however, couldn't ignore pro-western attitudes present in the society. Pro-western option demarcated by Olszewski's government turned out to be irreversible. No government after 1992 has decided the explicit treason and military dependence of Poland from Moscow.

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