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The Issue of Poland's Dependence on Natural Gas Supplies from the Russian Federation in the Political Thought of Piotr Naimski: Selected Problems

Problematyka uzależnienia Polski od dostaw gazu ziemnego z Federacji Rosyjskiej w myśli politycznej Piotra Naimskiego: wybrane zagadnienia

• Abstract •

The topic of the research was the political thought of Piotr Naimski in the field of reducing Poland's dependence on natural gas supplies from the Russian Federation. The aim of the article was therefore to analyse Naimski's views on the diversification of the sources and directions of natural gas supplies to Poland and to define the political concepts formulated by this politician. The article indicates Naimski's views on increasing Poland's energy security by realizing energy projects such as LNG terminal, Baltic Pipe gas pipeline, as well as activities aimed at counteracting the Russian Federation energy policy in Central Europe. Naimski was one of the staunchest opponents of the construction of Russian-German gas pipelines (Nord Stream and Nord Stream 2).

Keywords: Piotr Naimski; Russian Federation; energy security; political thought

• Abstrakt •

Przedmiotem badań była myśl polityczna Piotra Naimskiego w zakresie zmniejszenia uzależnienia Polski od dostaw gazu ziemnego z Federacji Rosyjskiej. Celem artykułu była zatem analiza poglądów Naimskiego w zakresie zróżnicowania źródeł i kierunków dostaw gazu ziemnego do Polski, jak również określenie koncepcji politycznych sformułowanych przez tego polityka. W artykule wskazano poglądy Naimskiego dotyczące zwiększenia bezpieczeństwa energetycznego Polski (np. projekty energetyczne – terminal LNG, budowa gazociągu Baltic Pipe), a także działania w kierunku przeciwdziałania polityce Federacji Rosyjskiej w Europie Środkowej (negatywne stanowiska wobec budowy gazociągów Nord Stream i Nord Stream 2).

Słowa kluczowe: Piotr Naimski; Federacja Rosyjska; bezpieczeństwo energetyczne; myśl polityczna

Preliminary remarks

One of the most important elements in the political thought of Polish political parties after 1989 was the issue of ensuring Poland's energy security. The projects implemented by individual government offices were conditioned by the structure of the energy balance and the geographical location of the country. At the same time, the vicinity of the Russian Federation, one of the largest producers of energy resources in the world, created favourable conditions for energy cooperation. As a result, in terms of crude oil and natural gas supplies, Poland was for many years a dependent country and was therefore importing these commodities mainly from Russia.

The unfavourable supplies structure of natural gas has been repeatedly negatively assessed by politicians of various political parties. This type of situation was particularly criticized by Piotr Naimski,¹ one of the most important right-wing politicians in Poland.² The objections he formulated stemmed from Naimski's views on the foreign policy of the Russian Federation, which – like many right-wing politicians – he assessed in an expansionist manner. One of the means used by Moscow to achieve its political goals, that is, to make Central European countries dependent, was energy resources (wPolityce, 2015; KL, 2014).

The aim of the article was to analyse the views of Piotr Naimski as regards the diversification of the sources and directions of natural gas supplies to Poland and to define the political concepts formulated by this politician. The main assumption was that Naimski's position on Polish-Russian energy cooperation was conditioned by treating Russia as an “enemy” of Poland, whose policy threatened the security of the country.

Alternative natural gas sources for Poland

Poland's energy security in relation to the natural gas sector was inextricably linked with ensuring stable supplies of this commodity. Piotr Naimski negatively assessed

¹ Dr. Piotr Naimski, one of the most important politicians of the Law and Justice party, responsible for the energy policy of this political group. In 2005–2007, the Secretary of State in the Ministry of Economy, in 2007–2010 advisor to Lech Kaczyński, the President of Poland in 2005–2010, Member of the Sejm in 2011–2019. In 2015–2022, the Secretary of State in the Chancellery of the Prime Minister of the Republic of Poland and the Government Plenipotentiary for Strategic Energy Infrastructure (for more information, see: *Energia i Niepodległość. Piotr Naimski*, n.d.).

² The analysis of the concept of various political actors (groups, politicians) in relation to ensuring the energy security of the state is an issue that is the subject of research on the political thought of political parties (Paszkowski, 2015).

Poland's dependence on Russia in this respect, and therefore he was in favour of creating a diversified structure of natural gas imports. At the same time, he was pragmatic in assessing Russia's foreign policy and believed that it had an expansionist character. In this context, P. Naimski invariably emphasized that "Russian gas exports are to serve the goals of the Kremlin's foreign policy" (Fijołek, 2014). In 2022, he indicated that "energy is a weapon used by Russia against us [Poland – M.P.]" (Kozłowski, 2022). As part of the proposed solutions, he emphasized the need for: 1) building a regasification terminal in Poland on the Baltic Sea to receive liquefied natural gas (LNG); 2) strengthening energy cooperation with Norway by the creation of a direct Polish-Norwegian gas connection; 3) starting exploitation of domestic natural gas resources also from unconventional deposits.

In order to create more balanced structure of natural gas supplies to Poland, it was necessary to build infrastructure for the supply of natural gas from directions other than Russia. This task was planned to be implemented, among others, as part of the construction of a regasification terminal on the Polish coast of the Baltic Sea. While performing various public functions, Piotr Naimski has repeatedly emphasized the role of the LNG terminal in ensuring Poland's energy security. In formulating his position, he considered the project to be strategic for at least five key reasons.

Firstly, it allowed for the diversification of the sources and directions of natural gas supplies to Poland. Undoubtedly, it was one of the most important arguments in terms of the construction of the terminal, because, in Naimski's opinion, this type of infrastructure made it possible to ensure the physical diversification of natural gas supplies to Poland.

Secondly, it limited Russia's ability to exert influence over Poland. In particular, on the one hand, Naimski was afraid of Russia's use of "energy blackmail" in a physical way – supply interruptions that would have a negative impact on the economy, and on other hand, in a political way – i.e., influencing political decisions. Due to the existing infrastructure (the Yamal-Europe gas pipeline), the possibility of using the "energy dictate" by OAO Gazprom (the main natural gas exporter to Poland) in the opinion of P. Naimski was very high. Such actions have been used by Russia several times, and the most indisputable example of this was the policy of the Russian Federation in 2021 and after the invasion of Ukraine in 2022.

Thirdly, it provided an opportunity to bring natural gas to Poland at a lower price. Due to the monopoly on natural gas supplies to Poland, OAO Gazprom was able to export gas to Polish energy companies under much more favourable conditions than in the case of the necessity to compete with several producers. This type of infrastructure limited this form of dependency. As a result, the construction

of the LNG terminal in Świnoujście increased the ability of several producers to compete in the Baltic Sea region for a potential customer (Żaryn, 2015b).

Fourthly, it placed Polish energy companies in a much better negotiating position in relation not only to Russian suppliers, but also to other producers of energy resources (Telewizja Republika, 2016; Karwowski, 2014).

Fifthly, it allowed Polish companies to opt out from long-term contracts for natural gas supplies from Russia. In this context, P. Naimski emphasized that “if the price of Russian gas is sufficiently competitive, we do not rule out the purchase, but definitely not as part of a long-term contract” (BiznesAlert.pl, 2016). Undoubtedly, this type of approach allowed the “depoliticization” of Polish-Russian gas cooperation, since the construction and subsequent exploitation and supply of this commodity to Poland have historically been the subject of interstate talks. As a result, the abandonment of the long-term contract made it possible to end the negotiation and amend the content of the Polish-Russian agreement, which constantly accompanied trade talks between the companies (Porozumienie, 2011).

In addition to the construction of the LNG terminal, politicians from the Law and Justice party advocated the implementation of other energy projects. As a result, many right-wing politicians – including Piotr Naimski – emphasized the legitimacy of building a gas pipeline that would connect natural gas consumers in Poland with the area of extraction of energy resources in Europe, and thus, above all, the Norwegian continental shelf. The essence of Polish-Norwegian energy cooperation was the construction of the Baltic Pipe gas pipeline connecting Norwegian natural gas resources with Poland through the Danish gas system to the town of Niechorze (BiznesAlert.pl, 2021). The implementation of the investment was to connect the Polish gas pipeline network with the European system. Additionally, the construction of a storage system in Niechorze was planned, according to which a gas hub (gas trading point) was to be built in northern Poland. Initially, the first discussions and then Polish-Norwegian negotiations on the supply of natural gas to Poland took place during the reign of Jerzy Buzek, the Prime Minister of the Republic of Poland in 1997–2001. In the next period, after the Democratic Left Alliance came to power, the government of Leszek Miller, the Prime Minister of the Republic of Poland in 2001–2004, abandoned the construction of the gas pipeline. Piotr Naimski negatively assessed the actions of L. Miller government, which, in his opinion, abandoned the implementation of natural gas import agreements with partners from Denmark and Norway that were originally negotiated by the J. Buzek government (Polskie Radio, 2007). In the following years, he was in favour of reactivating the concept of building this gas pipeline.

The direct gas connection between the Norwegian continental shelf and the Polish coast of the Baltic Sea was to fulfil at least three important tasks.

Firstly – to create a balanced natural gas supply structure. As a result of the investment, it was possible, on the one hand, to import natural gas also from the Russian Federation (under appropriate market conditions and prices), and on the other hand, to create additional sources and routes for the import of energy resources to Poland (WNP.pl, 2006; Naimski, 2015b; Nizinkiewicz, 2016).

Secondly – to enable greater competition between suppliers and customers in the Central European region, and consequently to increase the level of energy security in this part of Europe. Therefore, P. Naimski emphasized that “measures to diversify the directions of gas supplies to the Baltic region, Poland and, more broadly, Central Europe – is a basic condition that must be met if we are to be able to talk about a competitive gas market” (Naimski, 2016a).

Thirdly – to ensure safe supplies of natural gas to Poland. Piotr Naimski stressed that imports from the Russian Federation have historically been withheld due to Moscow's policies, and therefore it was more important for Poland to have stable supplies of this commodity, in order to limit the negative impact of potential supply disruptions on the economy (Maciążek, 2016). This type of scenario became real in April 2022, when the Russian Federation unilaterally suspended gas supplies to Poland. The concepts formulated and actions taken, through the development of energy infrastructure, were to lead to increased competitiveness in Central Europe. According to Naimski, only ensuring supply possibility from various producers created the basis for energy security of the countries in the region (Rzeczpospolita, 2016).

In the arguments of Piotr Naimski on ensuring Poland's energy security, the concept of reducing dependence on natural gas supplies through the use of domestic resources of this commodity often appeared. The development and subsequent application in the United States of America of modern technologies for extracting natural gas and crude oil from unconventional reservoirs (horizontal drilling, hydraulic fracturing) has led to a rapid increase in the production of these commodities. The energy revolution in the U.S. has completely changed the country's energy situation and its role in the global trade in natural gas. In the opinion of P. Naimski, the use of modern technologies and extraction techniques could also change the energy situation in Poland, including reducing dependence on natural gas supplies from Russia. In his statements, P. Naimski emphasized that the extraction of natural gas from unconventional deposits could contribute to the improvement of the energy situation by: 1) limiting the import of natural gas from the Russian Federation to Poland; 2) reducing the share of this commodity from Russia in Central Europe, and thus increasing price competition between suppliers (limiting the dominant position of OAO Gazprom in this part of Europe) (Szczepański, 2012); 3) ensuring

access to domestic commodities, which made it possible to conduct an independent economic and political policy. The position presented by P. Naimski was identical to the arguments raised by this politician in the context of the implementation of other energy projects. Their common denominator was the desire to secure a better energy position vis-à-vis suppliers from the Russian Federation.

Summing up, it should be stated that a characteristic feature of Piotr Naimski's political thought was the need to comprehensively ensure Poland's energy security through the parallel implementation of several investment projects. The actions taken were to ultimately lead to the creation of a gas hub in Poland, enabling trade in natural gas and gas supplies to Poland and other Central European countries (Centrum Informacji o Rynku Energii, 2018; WNP.pl, 2016; Falkowski, 2016). Liberalization of the natural gas market (increased competition) limited the possibility of Russian companies influencing the domestic gas market. At the same time, Naimski emphasized the legitimacy of using domestic energy resources, which reduced the dependence on gas supplies from Russia. Therefore, he constantly emphasized that any, even a small, change in the supplies structure by increasing imports other than Russian natural gas would be of fundamental importance for Poland's energy security.

Counteracting Russia's energy expansion in Central European countries

The position of the Russian Federation and the importance of Russian companies as suppliers of energy resources to Central European countries, including Poland, were assessed negatively by Piotr Naimski. In particular, Naimski made a critical assessment of the energy expansion of Russian companies in Europe and an attempt to build new infrastructure connections between Russia and the European Union countries (e.g., the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline) (Centrum Informacji o Rynku Energii, 2021). As a result, some of the forms of response to the actions of Russian companies in Europe were attempts to achieve closer energy cooperation between European countries under the concept of the European Energy Security Treaty (EEST), which was to ultimately strengthen cooperation between the signatories in order to limit Russia's energy impact in Europe.

The analysis of the traces and evidence of political thought shows that Piotr Naimski negatively assessed Poland's dependence on energy supplies from Russia, and changing the unfavourable structure of natural gas imports was a priority of the political strategy which, in his opinion, should be implemented by Polish

government. At the same time, he emphasized that the construction of infrastructure to increase the supply of natural gas to Central European countries from Russia was not in the political interest of Poland. In this context, he questioned the legitimacy of implementing infrastructure projects such as Nord Stream and Nord Stream 2 across the Baltic Sea. The role of this investment was confirmed by qualifying it as one of the most important energy threats to Poland (Naimski, 2015a). A characteristic feature of P. Naimski's political thought was undermining the sense of creating gas pipelines due to the numerous risks that were associated with the implementation of these investments. In the opinion of the Law and Justice politician, the Nord Stream and Nord Stream 2 gas pipelines posed a threat to Poland for at least three reasons. Firstly, they disrupted the energy market in Central European countries, as they increased the amount of Russian gas available in this region. P. Naimski emphasized that in the event of the Nord Stream gas pipeline being built, "competition with the excess of Russian gas, the price of which depends on the political needs of the Kremlin, will not be easy" (Nowak, 2006). In this situation, the possibility of ensuring appropriate price competition between natural gas producers in this part of Europe was limited (Radio Maryja, 2016). Secondly, they undermined the idea of energy solidarity and strengthened Russian-German energy cooperation, which was unfavourable for Poland in the context of potentially counteracting Russia's expansive foreign policy in Central Europe region (Sieradzki, 2015). Thirdly, they limited the ability to play a significant role in the transit of Russian energy resources through the territory of Poland. The consequence of this view was the conviction that Poland's unilateral dependence on natural gas supplies from the Russian Federation would therefore deepen (Archiwum Zakładowe Ministerstwa Gospodarki, 2007). At the same time, P. Naimski specifically emphasized the negative role of the European Commission in the process of construction of the Nord Stream pipeline, which, on the one hand, undertook actions and efforts for greater diversification of sources and directions of natural gas supply to Central European countries, and on the other hand, accepted the creation of this type of investment. The project ultimately made it possible to increase the level of dependence of many European countries on natural gas supplies from the Russian Federation (RIRM, 2016).

In addition to expanding the energy infrastructure enabling the physical diversification of the sources and directions of natural gas supplies to Poland, an important component of Piotr Naimski's political thought was to emphasize the importance of international cooperation to limit Russia's position in Europe. One of the tools creating the possibility of energy cooperation was the postulate to create a multilateral structure – the European Energy Security Treaty (Jesień, 2006; Paszkowski, 2013, 2017), which was to include some member states of

the European Union and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). The Russian-Ukrainian gas crisis at the turn of 2005/2006 had a significant impact on the approach of Law and Justice politicians, including Piotr Naimski, to energy issues. The suspension of natural gas supplies to European countries confirmed the thesis, repeatedly represented by Naimski, that the Russian Federation uses “energy resources” to achieve political goals (Nowak, 2006). The actions taken by Russia after the 2022 invasion of Ukraine confirmed the risks raised by Naimski regarding energy dependence on that country.

Undoubtedly, the concept proposed by the government of Kazimierz Marcinkiewicz resulted from the conviction about the institutional weakness of the European Union as a structure incapable of solving energy problems in Europe (Łakoma, 2007; Nowak, 2006). P. Naimski claimed that “the European Union does not have an energy policy”, therefore “it is not able to create a key mechanism of solidarity cooperation in the event of random accidents” (Archiwum Rady Ministrów, 2006a; Popławski, 2006). In the opinion of Piotr Naimski, the proposed concept of EEST was to play essentially two important tasks: 1) ensuring energy solidarity between the EEST signatories, understood as the need to support a country threatened with supply interruptions in crude oil, natural gas or electricity (political aid); 2) enabling the actual supply of the missing commodities or electricity to countries affected by a crisis (physical aid) (Kublik, 2006). This goal was to be served, among other things, by expanding the energy infrastructure between signatory countries, including the implementation of non-commercial investment projects (e.g., “sleeping pipelines”) (Archiwum Rady Ministrów, 2006b).

Summing up, it should be stated that one of the important elements of Piotr Naimski’s political thought was the need for international cooperation in the area of, on the one hand, counteracting unfavourable energy projects (Nord Stream, Nord Stream 2 gas pipelines), and, on the other hand, creating an appropriate cooperation framework serving the interests of Poland (EEST). The construction of energy connections bypassing Poland and other Central European countries was particularly negatively assessed by the politician of the Law and Justice party. In Naimski’s opinion, the emergence of Russian energy projects had to be counteracted by expanding the domestic infrastructure and building alliances with countries that assessed Russia’s energy policy in a manner comparable to that of Poland. This was the purpose of the idea of establishing the European Energy Security Treaty.

Final remarks

As part of the formulated energy concepts, Piotr Naimski emphasized that Poland's great dependence on Russia, due to its politics and complicated historical relations, put Poland in a difficult and even dangerous situation. As a result, he pointed out that only the implementation of many energy projects aimed at balancing the structure of natural gas supplies to Poland would create the conditions for ensuring the country's energy security. The actions taken were to lead to a situation in which Poland would pursue a sovereign energy policy, so it would independently decide about the sources of energy supplies (Naimski, 2016b). In Naimski's opinion, this type of situation could take place in the case of an extensive energy infrastructure enabling an energy company to trade with natural gas suppliers on an arm's length basis. As a result, Naimski advocated decision-making freedom in business relations, where price should play a key role, because, as he emphasized, "those countries, those economies that have access to cheap energy, are competitive, have a competitive advantage, have a political advantage" (Żaryn, 2015a).

To recapitulate, there are two basic approaches to ensuring the state's energy security. According to the first approach, the state uses domestic proven and recoverable energy resources. In the second approach, governments seek to create a supply structure that differs in terms of sources and routes of imports. As part of the formulated energy concepts, Piotr Naimski approached energy issues in a holistic manner, not focusing on just one of the distinguished approaches. As a result, he pointed out the legitimacy of both the exploitation of domestic natural gas resources (he also repeatedly raised the need to extract unconventional deposits) and the development of energy infrastructure, which would ultimately lead to Poland's independence from natural gas supplies from the Russian Federation. At the same time, Naimski did not approach energy issues in a doctrinarian manner and did not believe that Poland could not import energy resources from Russia. He only emphasized the need to limit the possibility of monopolizing natural gas supplies, and the extensive infrastructure was a tool enabling cooperation with various energy producers. Ultimately, P. Naimski was essentially concerned with improving the negotiating position of Polish energy companies in relation to the Russian energy companies that have dominated for years. If a favourable price was presented, Polish companies could – at an appropriate level – buy natural gas from Russia. At the same time, Piotr Naimski realized that the price offered by Russian energy companies in this part of Europe was the most advantageous, and therefore without an appropriate government policy towards this sector, energy companies – based only on the price of this commodity – could become dependent on specific

suppliers. In essence, Naimski stressed the need to build a more balanced supply structure based both on the source and direction on the one hand, and the price of supplied natural gas on the other.

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The opinions expressed in this publication are those of the author only and cannot be equated with the position of the Institute of Central Europe.

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