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## Poland's External Security in the Political Thought of Selected Extra-parliamentary National Circles: The Period of Full-scale Ukrainian-Russian Conflict

**Bezpieczeństwo zewnętrzne Polski w myśli politycznej wybranych pozaparlamentarnych środowisk narodowych. Okres pełnoskalowego konfliktu ukraińsko-rosyjskiego**

### • Abstract •

The author of the article presents his definition of the external threat, then he analyses the political thought of two nationalist political circles (the circles of the “Myśl Polska” weekly magazine and the periodical “Polityka Narodowa”) during the full-scale Ukrainian-Russian conflict and in the years immediately preceding it. It should be emphasised that both circles consider themselves to be continuators of the same nationalist movement, namely, the National Democracy and its leader Roman Dmowski. The main objective of the article is to identify the most important external threats to the Polish state. Threats in the form of other state actors are taken into account. The author concludes that the attitude towards Russia, and by extension the conflict in Ukraine, has become a fundamental axis of contention between the two communities. This affects the perception of Poland's external security arrangements.

**Keywords:** external security; nationalism; political thought; National Democracy; Ukrainian-Russian conflict

### • Abstrakt •

Autor artykułu przedstawia swoją definicję zagrożenia zewnętrznego, następnie dokonuje analizy myśli politycznej dwóch nacjonalistycznych środowisk politycznych (środowiska tygodnika „Myśl Polska” oraz periodyku „Polityka Narodowa”) w okresie pełnoskalowego konfliktu ukraińsko-rosyjskiego oraz w latach bezpośredniego poprzedzających. Należy podkreślić, iż oba środowiska uznają się za kontynuatorów tego samego ruchu nacjonalistycznego, czyli Narodowej Demokracji, i jego przywódcy Romana Dmowskiego. Głównym celem artykułu jest zidentyfikowanie najważniejszych zagrożeń zewnętrznych państwa polskiego. Pod uwagę bierze się zagrożenia w postaci innych podmiotów państwowych. W konkluzji autor stwierdza, iż stosunek do Rosji, a co za tym idzie – do konfliktu w Ukrainie, stał się zasadniczą osią sporu pomiędzy obydwoma środowiskami. Rzutuje to na postrzeganie rozwiązań dotyczących bezpieczeństwa zewnętrznego Polski.

**Słowa kluczowe:** bezpieczeństwo zewnętrzne; nacjonalizm; myśl polityczna; Narodowa Demokracja; konflikt ukraińsko-rosyjski

The problem of the security of the state and nation has always been one of the leitmotifs of the political thought of the groupings and circles counted among the broad ideological heirs of the movement known in Poland as National Democracy, as well as its radical factions. It was referred to under various slogans by political parties and groups that originated from National Democracy or referred to its political thought (Smolik, 2017, pp. 126–127, 145, 153–154, 161–162; Maj, 2016, pp. 129–130; Tomaszewski, 2016, p. 320).

At this point, it is worth recalling that National Democracy (also known as “endecja” from the abbreviation ND) was a broad and historic nationalist movement active in Poland since 1893. In the interwar period, it had an anti-German and anti-Semitic character. Its main founder and also its most prominent ideologue was Roman Dmowski. After the collapse of communism in Poland in 1989 and the regime changes, the endecja was reactivated. Some organisational structures, such as the National Party, were run from exile in London. At that time, a number of generally feuding political organisations referring to the “tradition” of thought and activity of National Democracy were established.<sup>1</sup> This state of affairs persists to this day, but there has already been a generational change among Polish nationalists. At the moment, the only parliamentary grouping referring to the “tradition” of National Democracy is the National Movement. It is part of a coalition of several right-wing groups, the Confederation Liberty and Independence.

## **External security formula, research area, sources**

The title formula of the external security of the Polish state is a fundamental delimitation of the area of interest of the author of this article. In this case, the subject of security becomes the Polish state, but in practice it is difficult to consider the issue of state security without taking into account issues relating to the security of the citizens themselves. As Bogdan Zdrodowski notes, external and internal security “should not be treated in isolation, but as complementary values” (2019, p. 55).

The main causative factors of threats are located outside Poland, which does not mean, however, the elimination of all links with favourable conditions inside the country. In this context, I understand external security much more broadly than the formula of international security (Czaputowicz, 2012, pp. 8–9). The latter refers to the appropriate organisation of the international environment, norms, values

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<sup>1</sup> I understand “tradition” as the result of a reflective selection of certain elements from the past, and not its entire heritage, hence the quotation marks.

ensuring that all participants in international relations, especially states, exist without feeling threatened, as well as being able to guarantee their identity, sovereignty, or political independence (Pietraś, 2022, p. 56). Security understood in this way also fits into the classic approach of the state's foreign policy which assumes the maximisation of gains ("vital interests") and the minimisation of losses ("unfavourable situations") (Kuźniar, 2006, p. 122).

The next delimitation will concern the research field, namely, contemporary nationalist circles. Guided by such selection criteria as: "tradition", range of influence, and clarity of thought projecting both diversity and originality, I will focus on two of them. In this context, the title term 'extra-parliamentary national circles' suggests a focus on centres of political thought that are free from the specificity of parliamentary struggle and the associated media coverage, and therefore able to express structured political thought and more ad hoc political views more freely. I therefore deliberately use the term 'environments' ('circles') rather than 'national groupings' here. In contrast, environments that are not considered extreme will become a research area. Therefore, there is no danger of extremism dictated by the desire to compete for radicalism here.

As such sources, I will analyse statements by publicists from centres such as: "Myśl Polska" and "Polityka Narodowa". In the first case, we are dealing with a weekly newspaper and a portal with the same name. The magazine originated in London in exile and was founded in 1941, although almost all the columnists are now domestic and represent their next generation (Turek, 2005, p. 19; Grudniak, 2011, p. 111). The second case concerns a magazine that has been coming out in a notebook form since 2008, twice a year, as well as the "Nowy Ład" portal. The editors and columnists of both refer to the "tradition" of national democratic thought (Jajecznik, 2013, p. 351).

## **Objective of the article and research method**

Due to the specific volume of the article, I will limit myself to a single objective, which will be to identify the most important external threats to the Polish state as perceived by the aforementioned nationalist circles. I will focus on state-owned entities, while I will omit the not-so-transparent supranational entities. The method I will use will be the analysis of content of political journalism, i.e., statements published in print or on social networks. In order to demonstrate the dynamics of thought involved in the response to Russian aggression against Ukraine, some of the analysed statements will directly precede the period of conflict.

Although threats are not the same as hostility and enemies, there is a great deal of overlap. As Ewa Maj notes in the case of the heirs of National Democracy, one can even speak of inheriting a “set of enemies” while adapting their “shape and character” to current political realities (2006, p. 391). The crucial difference is that the notion of the enemy plays a largely mobilising, emotion-stimulating function, rather than arising from cold calculation. The latter was increasingly claimed by journalists of the younger generation (Fryszkowski, 2007, p. 3; Królikowski, 2007, p. 28; Łubiński, 2016, p. 20).

As Anna Szwed-Walczak points out in her monograph on the perception of Poland’s enemy by contemporary nationalists, four state-derived categories of threats are discernible in the national press after 1989: territorial threats (Germany, Ukraine), economic threats (Germany), threats to sovereignty (Germany, Russia, USA) and, finally, damage to Poland’s international image (Germany, Ukraine, USA, Russia) (2019, p. 393). Germany therefore becomes the source of the greatest threat to Poland, which, as the author notes, is being adapted to Poland’s contemporary political situation, i.e., in a sense, modernised (Szwed-Walczak, 2019, p. 440).

## Germany

The author’s conclusions presented above relate to the period 1989–2014 and apply to a much broader spectrum of political groupings and environments. In the case of the period analysed below and the two centres of thought we are interested in here, the stigma of the National Socialist “tradition” is also visible, although to a much lesser extent it influences the assessment of individual states as a potential threat to Poland. The columnists of the “Myśl Polska” magazine (hereinafter MP) seem to be slowly moving away from the conviction of the German threat, which they manifested back in the early 2000s (Dawidowicz, 2011, p. 156). They tend to locate the threat to Poland from Germany and Germans in Poland rather in the wartime past of both countries (Jastrzębski, 2023, p. 9). Interestingly, they encourage Germany to become independent of its “occupier”, the United States (Piskorski, 2021, p. 7). At times, they even defend Germany because of its desire to maintain correct relations with the Russian Federation and unwillingness to support Ukraine more broadly in its conflict with Russia. The German policy towards Moscow was supposed to be the right one, as it did not expose Europe to “upheaval”, in contrast to the “barker” role played by Warsaw according to the “neo-Piłsudskian two-enemy theory” now plugged into US global politics (Scriptor, 2022). Significantly, MP’s columnists therefore do not recognise that Poland’s security may be threatened by

the tightening of German-Russian relations, but by the expansion of NATO as part of an aggressive globalist US policy.

A different view seems to be taken by the community of “*Polityka Narodowa*” periodical (hereinafter: PN), who emphasise the negative consequences of long-term cooperation between the two countries and German raw material dependence on Russia. The real threat from Germany is the political, economic and ideological dependence of Poland. Over the past 30 years, a dense network of influence has emerged, which includes not only the political and economic spheres but also universities and NGOs. The latter constitute environments “aiming at the decomposition of the Polish political and national community” (Kita, 2021a, 2022a).

According to Kacper Kita, the war in Ukraine disavows Germany's previous policy, it proves that the German political elite, eager to do business with Moscow at all costs, is irresponsible and that it is becoming downright dangerous for Poland to remain a German satellite any longer (Kita, 2022b). In contrast to the MP community, close relations with Russia are a cause for criticism rather than emulation.

## Russia

For MP, the issue of the Russian threat would contradict the pro-Russian ideological canons of the editorial board. They are best illustrated by an excerpt from a polemic between editor-in-chief Jan Engelgard and Jakub Maciejewski, a columnist for the “*Sieci*” weekly magazine. “Well, dear sir, Dmowski did not construct his concept in the short term, just tactically. As he wrote in 1925, his idea of an alignment with Russia (i.e., a sovereign Poland with Russia) is timeless, runs beyond current politics during the World War and is ‘the most important task of Polish politics’ for generations to come” (Engelgard, 2021, p. 7). This interpretation of Dmowski's thought seems to determine a belief in the possibility of ensuring Poland's security through the arrangement of correct relations with the Russian Federation or any incarnation of the Russian state (Engelgard, 2021, p. 7). However, the MP community has so far failed to present a comprehensive concept for Poland to arrange correct relations with Russia.

The pursuit of Poland's security is thus understood and at the same time pursued through a series of warnings against rearming Ukraine and underestimating the power of Russia. MP's publicists are highly critical of Mateusz Morawiecki's government policy. In their view it is dragging Poland, as a NATO frontline state, into a real armed conflict with Russia (Śmiech, 2022, p. 13). At the same time, they warn against Poland being assigned the role of NATO's anti-Russian “bumper”, i.e.,

a country supplying Ukraine with arms, which could lead to it being recognised by Russia as a country directly involved in an armed conflict. In doing so, it is recalled that in the ranking of the world's military powers by Global Firepower, Russia still ranks second (Radzikowski, 2023a). Paradoxically, there are not only fears of a strong Russia, but also of a failed Russia. According to Zdzisław Markowski, a weak, broken Russia would pose the same threat to Poland as an imperial Russia. Indeed, Russia, threatened with the destruction of its statehood, may turn to nuclear weapons as a last resort. At the same time, the author warns against attempts to ethnically dismantle it (Markowski, 2023). Interchangeably, therefore, an argumentation straight out of the 1990s is used here, when columnists from many political options emphasised the threat posed by an unpredictable, disintegrating Russia.

Representatives of the PN community have a different attitude towards Russia. Past unpleasant experiences of Russian nationalists mean that they do not see the current regime as a viable alternative to the morally decaying West (Bronisławski, 2013, p. 102). There is an emphasis on the growing Russian threat. Its causes, however, are to be found not only in a return to the imperial policy of the former tsarist state, but also in the dilettante policy of the Polish authorities, which do not take into account the situation inside the former USSR. In this context, the mutual statement on Russia evident in Michał Sadłowski's polemic with Szymon Wiśniewski is noticeable (Sadłowski, 2021, cf. Wiśniewski, 2021). Generally, however, no one doubts that the main state actor threatening Poland is the Russian Federation, and this is mainly the result of its imperial policy, not Polish Russophobia or the ignorance of the Polish political elite (Engelgard, 2022, p. 1). In contrast to MP, the publicists of the PN community do not set Poland as a model for the policies of Viktor Orbán while accusing the Polish political elite of "irrational Russophobia". They refer to it with understanding, pointing out Hungary's different security conditions, including its far-reaching raw material dependence on Russia (Kowalczyk, 2022).

## Ukraine

Among the centres of political thought analysed here, Ukraine is also exposed as a threat to Poland. The MP community excels in this, with the main justification, apart from the political realism of Dmowski and other nationalists, being the fight for a truthful historical memory concerning the crimes of the OUN-UPA and SS units composed of Ukrainians committed against the Polish population during World War II (Lewicki, 2021; Samborski, 2021, p. 14). The glorification of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA) and the figure of Stepan Bandera within Ukraine's

official historical policy outrages MP's columnists, as does the construction of an all-Ukrainian identity on the basis of the cult of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army and the unwillingness to make concessions on this issue (Engelgard, 2023, p. 1; Radzikowski, 2023b).

The MP community, however, tries to rationalise its dislike of Ukraine by linking it to geopolitical, military and economic circumstances. The strong antagonism in Polish and Russian foreign policy resulting in an inability to foresee a closer prospect for Polish-Russian cooperation leads the MP's publicists to consider the previously rejected "two enemies" concept as distancing Poland from Kiev. However, it was considered that the concept of "bleeding" of two potential adversaries of Poland would not guarantee the latter a long-term security (Rękas, 2022a). It would be advantageous for Poland to weaken both warring parties and not resolve the ongoing conflict. It would also be an opportunity for it to regain the political subjectivity damaged by its involvement in helping Ukraine as an executor of US and EU orders (Szłęczak, 2003).

The PN community, whose representatives were already advocating a permanent alliance between Poland and Ukraine long before the war, takes a radically different stance on this issue (Siemiątkowski, 2016, p. 4, 2017, p. 68). Already after the conflict had heated up, in an issue of PN devoted to Ukraine, its editor-in-chief Jakub Siemiątkowski stated that it was difficult to consider it likely that in the foreseeable time horizon Ukraine could threaten Poland, as a country already much poorer and on top of that ruined by war. The losses inflicted by the Ukrainian army on Russia during the conflict will prevent the latter from invading Poland any time soon (Siemiątkowski, 2022, p. 59).

According to Adam Szabelak, close relations with Ukraine are becoming "the key to multiplying Poland's potential". He notes with satisfaction Poland's unprecedented diplomatic, humanitarian and military support as a manifestation of the awareness of decision-makers in Warsaw that the war in Ukraine "is also our war" and moves the threat from Moscow away from Polish borders (Szabelak, 2022, pp. 79–80).

## **United States**

In the case of both communities analysed in this article, the United States appears to have, until recently, occupied one of the top spots on the list of state threats as a source of global imperialism. This is a paradox because it concerns Poland's main ally in the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation. The MP community recognises

the US as primarily responsible for the conflict in Ukraine (Scriptor, 2022). At the same time, the far-reaching dependence of Europe on the United States and the perfidious game of the US aimed at its total subjugation in military, economic (including energy), and socio-cultural terms are conceded. US policy towards Europe is clearly demonised, even at the expense of misrepresenting the facts (Panasiuk, 2023a).<sup>2</sup> In contrast, the impending end of US dominance and the unipolar world, understood not only as the end of US economic and military dominance, but also of the prevalence of “intrusive, one-dimensional liberalism” and the associated triumph of “anti-values”, is indicated (Panasiuk, 2023b).

A similar view seems to be held by PN’s representatives, who have devoted a separate issue of PN to the matter of the twilight of US dominance. PN’s publicists agree that at the axiological and ideological level, the United States, dominated by liberalism of all kinds, has nothing to offer Poland, both as a state and as a cradle of the old and new right. To imitate the patterns created there would mean “the destruction of the Polish national community” (Zimny, 2021, p. 53; Kita, 2021, p. 73). In the field of international relations, Poland should take into account that unilateralism is no longer tenable and that the US may want to give up its “messianic” attitude towards Central and Eastern Europe in order to win Russia over to its game with China. Therefore, Poland must be ready to revise its attitude towards the Russian Federation in order not to become “a pawn” serving as a bargaining chip for the US in the pursuit of its interests in the region (Szabelak, 2021, p. 95). Thus, we see here an understanding of the policy of “resetting” relations with Russia “as is” once pursued by the Donald Tusk’s government.

In the optics of this environment, the assessment of the impact of the US on Poland’s external security fundamentally changes after the Russian aggression against Ukraine. The editorial office strongly supported Ukraine and Polish efforts to support it militarily and politically. Poland’s security has therefore been strongly merged with the condition of NATO and the response of the United States. There were even concerns raised by Jakub Siemiątkowski that US involvement in the conflict with China could make it easier for Russia to re-impose its hegemony in Central and Eastern Europe (2022, p. 61). Despite their aversion to the ideological role of the United States in Europe, PN’s representatives see no alternative to the security implemented by US-led NATO.

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<sup>2</sup> An example is the allegation of the occupation of Germany by US troops, and the failure to encourage an increase in the size of the army and arms expenditure. In fact, the opposite was and is true. It was President Donald Trump who demanded that Angela Merkel increase spending on the Bundeswehr.



## **NATO: A threat or an effective form of guaranteeing Poland's security?**

One of the fundamental issues of ensuring Poland's external security is the question of NATO membership. The MP community spoke out against Poland's accession to NATO almost from the very beginning of the magazine's existence on Polish soil after it moved from London in 1993. The aversion to NATO is one of the canons of political thinking here (Smolik, 2011, pp. 137–143). This rhetoric has even intensified in recent years. The North Atlantic Treaty Organisation is considered a “forward bloc” relic of the Cold War, which, following the collapse of the USSR, should have been dismantled long ago. It poses a “deadly threat” to Europe and to Polish sovereignty (Piskorski, 2023). MP's publicists are keen to refer to examples of nationalist and far-left movements hostile to NATO from Scotland and France, far from Russia. At the same time, they often but not always invoke geopolitical considerations. In doing so, they rightly note that the prevailing mainstream consensus in Poland on NATO precludes alternative thinking (Rękas, 2022b; Piskorski, 2022; Jacob, 2023).

In the case of the PN community, NATO is recognised as an alliance that weakens Germany's position and its ability to dominate Poland. A similar reading is given to measures to strengthen the so-called eastern flank of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation. Shortly after the Russian aggression against Ukraine, Poland's membership of NATO is recognised as a *sine qua non* for its military security. The Russian aggression against Ukraine should be used to strengthen Poland's position in Europe, to “promote a vision of security and strategic independence”, and in this connection the “collective imagination” should be used, as was once done in connection with Poland's accession to the EU and NATO (Kita, 2022c; Wyszkowski, 2022).

In the view of PN's columnists, it is not the US but Russia that is seeking a new Cold War, so that, according to the concept of former Russian Foreign Ministry chief Yevgeny Primakov, it is attempting to spearhead a broad alliance of non-Western states against the US and NATO. Instead, it is in Poland's interest to be reduced to the role of a regional power, considered in the world as a “harmful, unreliable and aggressive troublemaker”. Poland should therefore support even the politically distant circles in NATO and the EU, which understand the need to cooperate with Poland in order to defend their own interests, as in the case of France, whose influence in Southern Africa has been seriously weakened by Russia, mainly the Wagner Group operating there (Kita, 2023).

None of the circles analysed here therefore count themselves as enthusiasts of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, but in the former case it is regarded as a source

of imperialism and a threat to sovereignty from which Poland should stay away. In the case of the PN community, we encounter a general acceptance of NATO as an ad hoc solution guaranteeing Poland's security, within which we should seek our own solutions.

## Conclusions

Both circles analysed above refer to the "tradition" of National Democracy, including in particular the political thought of Roman Dmowski, but nevertheless have a different understanding of its continuation today. This largely influences the different perception of Poland's external security issues. The main focus of the dispute is their relationship to past and present Russia and modern, independent Ukraine. As Grzegorz Radomski once rightly pointed out, relations with Ukraine have been and continue to be considered in the context of Polish-Russian relations (2007, p. 290). For these and many other circles, it would therefore be difficult to analyse Polish-Ukrainian relations without considering the attitude towards Russia. The MP community therefore takes a strongly pro-Russian and anti-Ukrainian stance. The reverse is true for the PN community.

This leads us to the following conclusions, which are also the execution of the objective set out at the outset.

1. In practice, both circles clearly distance themselves from the "tradition" of National Democratic thinking by marginalising, but not eliminating, the significance of the German threat. It becomes a function of the Polish-Russian relationship and, at the same time, the Polish-American relationship. The assessment of the foreign policy of Poland's western neighbour clearly differs between the two circles. Germany, more as a nation than as a state, instead represents an ideological threat to Poland.
2. Despite the common aversion to the ideological face of the US and the unilateralism in international politics attributed to it, PN's publicists in the era of the conflict in Ukraine see no better guarantee for Poland's external security than the US and the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation based on its power. In turn, for the MP community, both of these actors represent a threat to security and peace in the world, and therefore also to the security of Europe and Poland.
3. A radically different attitude towards Russia, both as a centuries-old geopolitical and social entity and the current Russian Federation, is apparent. For PN, it is a major threat, for MP, a country with which it is possible to

develop peaceful and partnership-based political and economic relations. These divergences impinge on the directions of the search for effective and autonomous solutions to Poland's external security towards West, such as neutrality or the Three Seas Initiative. However, these are already problems that should become the subject of a separate publication.

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