

JURAJ MARUŠIAK

Poland as Regional Power and Polish-Slovak Relations

Since 1989, Poland has shown a long-term continuity in its priorities set for foreign policy and also in their consistent application in practice.¹ They correspond with foreign policy priorities declared by all Slovak Republic (SR) Cabinets since the establishment of SR: NATO and EU integration as well as building good relations with neighbouring countries. The difference between Slovak and Polish foreign policy lies in that the Polish officially declared programmes and proclamations in compliance with their practical implementation, while in Slovakia the activities of political élites in 1994–1998 raised doubts, both among local analysts and foreign partners of Slovakia, whether the effort of the Slovak political representation to realise the set priorities was genuine.²

Poland elaborated its foreign and security policy in two fundamental documents of a long-term character: Defence Strategy of the Polish Republic (PR),³ approved at the government session on May 23, 2000 and Security Strategy of the Polish Republic, approved at the government session on January 4, 2000.⁴ The basis of the Polish foreign policy after 1989 is the orientation of the country to Euro-Atlantic integration structures. Poland considers its major political partners to be USA, Germany, France and Great Britain.⁵ This orientation had its pre-conditions even before, and not

¹ Grażyna Bernatowicz, "Priorytety polskiej polityki zagranicznej", <http://msz.gov.pl/polzagr/priorytety.html> (január 1999).

² See Ivo Samson, "Deklamatívnosť, deklaratívnosť a reálnopolitická rovina v súčasnej slovenskej integračnej politike", *Mezinárodní vzťahy* 3/1996, p. 30-36; Rudolf Chmel - Ivo Samson - Alexander Duleba, "Vzťahy Slovenska so susedmi a s Nemeckom", Martin Bútorá - Michal Ivantyšin (eds.) *Slovensko 1997. Súhrnná správa o stave spoločnosti a trendoch na rok 1998 1998 (Slovakia 1997, A global report on the state of society and trends for 1998)* (Bratislava: IVO 1998) p. 265-286; Pavol Lukáč - Rudolf Chmel - Ivo Samson - Alexander Duleba, "Vzťahy Slovenska so susednými štátmi, Nemeckom a Ruskom", Grigorij Mesežnikov - Michal Ivantyšin (eds.) *Slovensko 1998 - 1999. Súhrnná správa o stave spoločnosti 1998* (Bratislava: IVO 1999) p. 333-374; Juraj Marušiak, "Hlavné trendy v zahraničnej politike SR (Main trends in Slovak foreign policy)", Grigorij Mesežnikov - Michal Ivantyšin (eds.) *Slovensko 1998 - 1999. Súhrnná správa o stave spoločnosti (Slovakia 1998 - 1999. A global report on the state of Society)* (Bratislava: IVO 1999) p. 273-310; Miroslav Wlachovský - Juraj Marušiak, "Hlavné trendy v zahraničnej politike", Martin Bútorá - Michal Ivantyšin (eds.) *Slovensko 1997. Súhrnná správa o stave spoločnosti a trendoch na rok 1998* (Bratislava: IVO 1998) p. 233-244; Miroslav Wlachovský - Alexander Duleba - Pavol Lukáč, "Zahraničná politika Slovenskej republiky", Martin Bútorá (eds.) *Slovensko 1996. Súhrnná správa o stave spoločnosti a trendoch na rok 1997* (Bratislava: IVO 1997) p. 71-100.

³ "Strategia obronności Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej", <http://www.mon.gov.pl>.

⁴ "Strategia bezpieczeństwa Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej", <http://www.msz.gov.pl/polzagr/strategiabezprp.html>.

⁵ Grażyna Bernatowicz "Priorytety polskiej polityki zagranicznej", <http://msz.gov.pl/polzagr/priorytety.html> (január 1999).

Juraj Marušiak graduated from the Faculty of Arts of Comenius University in Bratislava, he studied history as well as Slovak language and literature. From 1996 he has been working in the Department of Political Science at the Slovak Academy of Sciences. His areas of interest are Slovak history of 20th century and international relations. He publishes studies in professional journals and collections as well as in daily press.

only in the opposition dissident environment. Already in the seventies Poland, together with Hungary, tried to modernise their economies by reinforcing economical bonds with western countries, especially through foreign loans.

Polish way to NATO

In the nineties, NATO membership became the priority of the Polish security policy. Poland managed to establish friendly relations with Germany. At the time of the unification of Germany in 1990 Poland was given a guarantee of its eastern borders. The Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) at the territory of “the Weimar Triangle”, in the structures of the European Community and later in the European Union supported the integration ambition of Poland. Even if the Polish eastern border did not show any immediate risks or threats, after the break-up of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) this area became a source of numerous potential risks.⁶ Their background included regional conflicts stemming from the rise of nationalism or from political, economical and social instability, out-of-control mass migrations and revival of the Russian imperialism with westward *proliferation*.

Justified questions on the future shape of Russian politics were raised when at the beginning of nineties, negotiations on the withdrawal of the Soviet – or Russian – troops from Poland⁷ were being deliberately slowed down and the concentration of Russian troops in the Kaliningrad area, called “the most militarised territory in Europe” was very high.⁸ In the second half of the nineties the process of Russia and Belarus, rapprochement became a security risk for Poland. On April 2nd, 1997 the process resulted in a constitution of an integration union at the eastern border of Poland – Union of Russia and Belarus - with remarkable military potential. Organised aggression is not the only necessary reason for a threat to Poland security: it may be also a consequence of an incident, e.g. of an *unintentional violation* of water or air space, which induces probably the highest concern of Poland since its probability increases with an increasing concentration of military potential, as it is in the case of the Kaliningrad area.⁹ The Polish security doctrine pays, inter alia, special attention to energy security, which requires “the stratification and protection of the most important imported energy supplies and channels, such as oil and natural gas.” Last, but not least, Poland considers developing new dividing lines in Europe, caused by “deepening of economical and civilisation differences in the world, especially on the European continent, between the areas characterised by dynamic development and areas lapsing into stagnation” a security threat. That is why Poland declares the preservation of an open character of European institutions, the maintenance of the dynamics of integration processes and development of active, bilaterally beneficial cooperation with the countries and regions outside of European integration groupings.

The first phase of contacts between Poland and NATO in the years 1989 - 1993 was characterised by checking the contacts and probing negotiations. Poland openly declared its intention to join NATO at the conference of North Atlantic Treaty Organisation on “New Europe” security issues which took place in Brussels on February 12, 1992. This period culminated on

⁶ Paul Latawski, “The Polish Road to NATO. Roads and Prospects”, *The Polish Quarterly of International Affairs* 1/1993, p. 74.

⁷ Paul Latawski, “The Polish Road to NATO. Roads and Prospects”, *The Polish Quarterly of International Affairs* 1/1993, p. 74.

⁸ Roman Kuźniar, “Geostrategiczne uwarunkowania bezpieczeństwa Polski”, *Sprawy Międzynarodowe* 1/1993, p. 15.

⁹ Marek Szymański, “Potencjał militarny w obwodzie Kaliningradzkim a bezpieczeństwo Polski”, *Przegląd Zachodni* 1/1999, p. 151.

November 2, 1992, when the Polish Institute for National Security (Biuro Bezpieczeństwa Narodowego) approved two documents, constituting the foundation of new security doctrine,¹⁰ the main objectives of which became economic integration with the West and NATO membership. The issue of NATO membership at the time remained in the shadow of EC (EU) integration, because the Alliance was not yet prepared to accept new members. Polish political representatives declared that by NATO membership Poland does not pursue only military and political goals, but also seeks to “catch up” with many delays in its development, civilisation issues, democratic political system stabilisation and free market economy.¹¹

The years 1993 - 1997 represent a period of Poland and NATO convergence. Poland's membership in the Alliance gradually became the first priority among the objectives of Polish foreign policy. At the World Economic Forum in Davos on January 31, 1993 the general secretary of NATO Manfred Wörner also thanks to the active approach of Poland announced to the Polish Prime Minister Hanna Suchocka that Poland will become the first Central European country invited to join NATO.

Polish political representatives, after the programme Partnership for Peace (PfP) were presented at the NATO summit in Brussels on February 10. – 11, 1994 showed their disenchantment. The NATO decision was considered to be a step, through which the Alliance “left their options open” and the decision on enlargement “was deferred to non-specified future.”¹² The Minister of Foreign Affairs Andrzej Olechowski inter alia demanded that the programme should contain a time horizon for membership, and the cooperation programmes are to be also considering clear time perspective. Polish political representatives rejected to interpret the PfP as an alternative to NATO enlargement and consistently preserved this stance for all the NATO pre-membership period. Some of Olechowski initiatives appeared also in the Invitation to Partnership from January 1994, first of all the perspective of NATO membership for the countries which will declare their will to become members and will actively approach PfP programme realisation. These changes were approved by the NATO summit after the visit of the Chief of Headquarters of the USA Armed Forces, General John Shalikashvili and the then ambassador of the USA in the UN Madelaine Albright in Warsaw at the beginning of January 1994.

As for bilateral relations, cooperation with the USA was of a special importance for Poland, since the Polish party defined the USA to be its “strategic partner”¹³ and then relations with Germany. Polish-German reconciliation made possible more intensive mutual political and economical relations and started the process of NATO Eastern enlargement. According to Z. Brzezinski, the relevance of Polish-German reconciliation can be “compared only to the consequences of French-German reconciliation for Europe.”¹⁴

An important element of Poland's cooperation with the member countries of NATO was multilateral cooperation. It was a part of so called “osmotic tactics” of Poland – i. e. a tactic of gradual penetration into NATO, of deepened cooperation with the Alliance and participation in

¹⁰ “Założenia polskiej polityki bezpieczeństwa a Polityka bezpieczeństwa i strategia obronna Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej”, *Strategia bezpieczeństwa Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej* <http://www.msz.gov.pl/polzagr.strategiabezprp.html>.

¹¹ Grażyna Bernatowicz, “Priorytety polskiej polityki zagranicznej”, <http://msz.gov.pl/polzagr/priorytety.html> (január 1999).

¹² Ivo Samson, “Rozdzielne akcenty rozširovania NATO”, Ivo Samson - Tomáš Strážay (eds.) *Európska bezpečnosť a proces rozširovania NATO. Skúsenosti a pozícia Poľska v Euroatlantickej Aliancii* (Bratislava: SFPA 2000) p. 37.

¹³ “NATO w polityce bezpieczeństwa Polski. Rozdział I.”, *Przegląd Środkowoeuropejski* 22/1998 (April 1998) <http://www.medianet.pl/ceurorev>.

¹⁴ Zbigniew Brzezinski *Velká šachovnice* (Praha: Mladá fronta 1999) p. 76.

its programmes. At a foreign policy level the tactic was manifested by Poland's conduct "as if it is already a NATO member."¹⁵ The most significant manifestation of this behaviour was participation of Polish troops in international forces IFOR/SFOR, operating in Bosnia and Herzegovina and having achieved a high degree of interoperability with the NATO armed forces. A Polish military unit is present in Kosovo as a part of KFOR international forces. The proof of Poland's commitment to its NATO membership relevance, interpreted by Poland as strengthening relations between Euro-Atlantic structures and other countries of Eastern Europe is the fact that, Lithuanian unit (30 soldiers) and Ukrainian unit (108 soldiers) submitted to the Polish command, operate within the Polish part of KFOR. The board and accommodation of Lithuanian soldiers are financed by Poland. Besides, common Polish-Ukrainian (POLUKRBAT) and Polish-Lithuania (LITPOLBAT) troops were established and are ready for participation in peacekeeping operations.¹⁶

The cooperation with NATO took place also within "the Weimar Triangle", i.e. consultation mechanism between France, Germany and Poland. Even if the objective of this mechanism was above all the support of the Polish-German rapprochement and use the experience from historical reconciliation between Germany and France, thus reinforcing the establishment of FRG in Euro-Atlantic structures as well as promoting the integration of Poland into NATO, the Weimar cooperation after the first trilateral meetings of the Ministers of Defence of Poland, Germany and France, held on March 3 in Paris and July 18-19, 1994 in Warsaw developed the security aspect as well. Defence Ministers of FRG and France, Volker Rühle and François Leotard respectively, proved their support of Polish efforts to join NATO, they also endorsed the Polish standpoint that, NATO should open to all countries of Central and Eastern Europe. The Paris meeting of Defence Ministers from the Weimar Triangle countries resulted in granting the status of an associated partner of the Western European Union (WEU) to nine countries of Central Europe: Poland, Hungary, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Romania and Bulgaria.¹⁷

A more practical outcome resulted from trilateral cooperation between Poland, Germany and Denmark. It was initiated by Denmark in 1994 and confirmed by an agreement of August 18, 1995. Assistance to Poland in the process of preparations to join NATO became an immediate objective of the agreement. The cooperation between headquarters and armed forces of the signatory countries was subordinated to this task. In August 1997 the cooperation resulted in a decision to form - by 1999 - a common trilateral unit within NATO, the Chief Command of which is located in *Sczeczyn*.¹⁸

The active foreign policy of Poland, its active approach to the issue of NATO enlargement, the unambiguous standpoint of both the governmental and opposition groupings to the membership of Poland in the Alliance accompanied by practical steps in the areas of domestic and foreign policies resulted in the fact that Poland, unlike Slovakia, was among the three countries invited to negotiate their joining NATO at the NATO summit in Madrid on July 1997. After the

¹⁵ Bogusław Świątlicki - Stanisław Koziej, "Polish Way to the NATO (Lecture)", Cyklus seminářov "Skúsenosti s poľskou systémovou transformáciou" Bratislava, 5. 1. 1999.

¹⁶ <http://www.mon.gov.pl>.

¹⁷ Robert Mroziewicz, "Skúsenosti a pozícia Poľska v Euroatlantickej aliancii", Ivo Samson - Tomáš Strážay (eds.) *Európska bezpečnosť a proces rozširovania NATO* (Bratislava: SFPA 2000) p. 40.

¹⁸ Robert Mroziewicz, "Skúsenosti a pozícia Poľska v Euroatlantickej aliancii", Ivo Samson - Tomáš Strážay (eds.) *Európska bezpečnosť a proces rozširovania NATO* (Bratislava: SFPA 2000) p. 40; Pavol Lukáč, "Weimarský trojuholník a Visegradska štvorka", *OS 7/2000* (July 2000) p. 48.



Senate of the USA ratified the Alliance enlargement and after the smooth ratification of North Atlantic (Treaty Organisation) agreement in Polish "Sejm" on February 17, 1999 Poland, together with the Czech Republic and Hungary became, on March 12, 1999 official NATO members.

NATO membership meant a change in Poland's geopolitical position. Until then it was located within the "grey security zone" NATO and the member countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS); now it is still in the "area of touch" of NATO and its two most important partners, Russia and the Ukraine, but it is protected by security guarantees resulting from its Alliance membership. The relations of the Alliance with these two states are of key importance for European security. From the military point of view Poland's territory is specifically important from a strategic viewpoint, being located at the European East-West line.¹⁹

Within Europe Poland with its population over 38 million represents a medium size state. It has an ambition to become a regional power and aspires to the leadership position among Central European countries. As opposed to that, American political scientist Zbigniew Brzezinski stated: "Poland is too weak to become a geo-strategic player and it has the only chance - to integrate into Western Europe." "This situation limits" the range of possibilities in its geo-strategic decision-making.²⁰ However, its sensitive position at the Russian and Belarusian borders makes it possible to include it among "geo-political centers". That is why the opinion of the former Polish Minister of Foreign Affairs Bronisław Geremek - indirectly contradicting to that of Brzezinski - is relevant as well. He said: "Poland is not a big country, but it is not small either... As a member of big structures - European and Euro-Atlantic ones - Poland can play a role of the country implementing its sense of responsibility for the region of Central Europe."²¹

Poland is able to influence the political scene not only of its smaller neighbours, Slovakia and Lithuania, but also that of Ukraine, Belarus (where it intensively supports the opposition against the President Alexander Lukashenko's regime) and Russia. Polish political representatives realises this and try to articulate not only a political, but also a civilisation message the bearer of which they aspire to be: „Poland is a model for the region, today more than ever; it is an example of successful transformation, due to which we could abandon the realm of the political relations based in dependence on the Soviet Union and join the world in which freedom means an opportunity to achieve economical success and national independence."²² Poland is an attractive partner for Latvia and Romania as well, even if they are not its neighbours. Since the end of the eighties, relations with Hungary are of a special importance for Poland. At the beginning these were relations of two countries, achieving the biggest progress in political and economical transformation. After 1994 their close communication was the result of the continuing Visegrad cooperation, since the

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¹⁹ "Strategia obronności Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej", <http://www.mon.gov.pl>.

²⁰ Zbigniew Brzezinski *Velká šachovnice* (Praha: Mladá fronta 1999) p. 50.

²¹ Bronisław Geremek, "Euroatlantická solidarita", *Mezinárodní politika* 5/1999 (May 1999) p. 6.

²² Bronisław Geremek, "Euroatlantická solidarita", *Mezinárodní politika* 5/1999 (May 1999) p. 6.

Czech and the Slovak Republics, each for different reasons, withdrew from it until 1998. The relevance of Poland for Slovakia and the other neighbouring countries increased after Poland had become a NATO member. Poland is located in both the German and French special interest zone. Currently it is considered to be a strategic ally of both the USA and of Germany in Central Europe. The consequence is Poland's participation in the Weimar Triangle. On the European continent "potentially significant geopolitical line comprising of three states and 180 million people with a highly cultivated sense for national identity" developed.²³ This interpretation of the Weimar Triangle is being adopted by Polish political representatives and current Polish Prime Minister Jerzy Buzek in his exposé in the Sejm on November 11, 1997 characterised it as "the spine of Europe."²⁴ Recently the influence of NATO and the EU may extend via Poland to the north, to the Baltic region as well as to the East, to the Ukraine and Belarus. Poland as a neighbour can influence the foreign policy orientation of its eastern neighbours and Slovakia in both positive and negative way. For Slovakia Polish bordering means being a neighbour of a regional power. Poland is the only member of the above-mentioned potential geo-political line with a common border with Slovakia. Also, it is within Poland's interest to secure stability at its southern border, since it was a witness of several unpleasant surprises coming from there in the past. For the fulfilment of declared Slovak ambitions to become a NATO a EU member Poland is of great importance to Slovakia nowadays, even if SR, from geographic and economical point of view, is more inclined to the south, to the Panonian lowlands.²⁵

Even if Z. Brzezinski does not see Poland as a "player" at a global level, he accepts its significant position in Europe. He expressed it in his older text from the first half of nineties, i.e. at the time when the maxim of Bill Clinton, the President of USA was already known: "...the question is not whether NATO shall be extended, but when and how," - at the time when, however, a clear framework of future enlargement was not decided yet.²⁶ Brzezinski then submitted a proposal for such a procedural reform of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), that would enable NATO and Russia to "jointly and promptly respond to peace endangerment, perhaps via a special advisory mechanism involving the key players: the USA, Russia, Great Britain, France, Germany, Italy, Poland and the Ukraine."²⁷ The position of Poland as a regional leader is undoubtedly bolstered by fact that it is as the only Central European country a member of two informal - but influential regional initiatives - the Weimar Triangle and the Visegrad Four.

In the process of approximation to the Alliance and preparations for NATO membership, Poland presented itself as an active partner, introducing its own initiatives and proposals for the organisation of Central and Eastern Europe. Poland contributes to the development of the strategic conception of NATO and advocates the open character of its enlargement, so that no state seeking to join the Alliance, was not excluded. Poland specifically supports the integration of Slovakia and Lithuania into NATO. In 1994 - 1998, when Slovakia diverted from consistent realisation of its foreign policy plans, Poland's support of Lithuania integration ambitions became more intensive than those of Slovakia.²⁸ At the same time Romania, unlike Slovakia, became

²³ Zbigniew Brzezinski, *Velká šachovnice* (Praha: Mladá fronta 1999) p. 76.

²⁴ Jerzy Buzek, "Tekst exposé prezesa Rady Ministrów Jerzego Buzka wygłoszonego w Sejmie RP 10 listopada 1997 r.", <http://www.kprm.gov.pl/menubez.html>.

²⁵ Oskar Krejčí, "Geopolitické východiská slovenskej štátnosti", *Politické vedy* 4/1999, p. 147-167.

²⁶ Zbigniew Brzezinski, "Plán pre Európu", *Medzinárodné otázky* 2/1995, p. 104.

²⁷ Zbigniew Brzezinski, "Plán pre Európu", *Medzinárodné otázky* 2/1995, p. 112.

²⁸ Pavol Lukáč, "'Poľská lobby' v USA - vplyv na poľsko-americké vzťahy", *Listy SFPA* 12/1998 (December 1998) p. 7.

closer to Poland, since it also aspired to NATO membership in the first wave of NATO enlargement.

The Polish party understands NATO enlargement as a process accelerating the European integration and EU enlargement. According to Polish experts "the enlargement of both security guarantees guaranteed by NATO and EU integration negotiations to the Balkans and other countries of Central and Eastern Europe should not be understood as putting a stop to NATO enlargement, but rather as a direct geo-political consequence resulting from the membership of Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic in NATO."²⁹ Poland's immediate objective for the new wave of Alliance enlargement is the Slovak Republics membership. Poland has been markedly committed to the establishment of special relations of NATO with Russia and Ukraine. According to A. Kwaśniewski it is not possible to build a system of European security against Russia – or with Russia turning its back to it. These relations were codified by the Act defining mutual relations, cooperation and security between NATO and the Russian Federation, signed on May 27, 1997 in Paris and the Charter on a Distinctive partnership between NATO and the Ukraine, signed right after the NATO Madrid summit. The new Security Strategy of the Polish Republic which has come into effect in 2000 declares that, "the constructive development of relations of the Alliance with the Eastern European countries including relations within the NATO Standing Council– Russia and the NATO Commission – the Ukraine as well as development of relations within the programme Partnership for Peace is of vital interest to Poland."³⁰ As for the Polish long-term relations, membership in a security system being formed in the EU/WEU framework is equally important as NATO membership. Poland also advocates strong Euro-Atlantic bonds in the security area, i.e. maintaining the USA presence in the European security policy.³¹

The significance of Polish NATO membership for Slovakia

Membership of Poland in NATO and its active engagement in the Alliance is of a great importance for Slovakia: first of all because Poland represents, together with other countries of the Visegrad Four - a considerable supporter of Slovakia's membership in the Alliance. Even though before 1998 Lithuania became the most perspective favourite, after the Slovak Parliamentary elections in 1998 the primary attention of Poland turned back to Slovakia. Similarly to the Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, Polish representatives consider Slovakia's NATO membership to represent a completion of the first wave of the Alliance enlargement.³² The considerable benefit for Slovakia is the experience of Polish negotiators from the Alliance pre-membership phase as well as the study of the arguments of the Polish party used during the period it pushed through its integration ambitions. Slovakia may draw on its northern neighbours experience in many other areas, as the reform of armed forces, operations in multinational forces,

²⁹ Krzysztof Zielke, "Geopolitika stredoeurópskej spolupráce", Jaroslav Kuča - Elemír Nečej - Vladimír Tarasovič (eds.) *Stredoeurópska bezpečnostná spolupráca a jej bezpečnostná dimenzia* (Bratislava: Stredisko obranných štúdií Ministerstva obrany SR 1999) p. 30.

³⁰ "Strategia bezpieczeństwa Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej", <http://www.msz.gov.pl/polzagr/strategiabezprp.html>.

³¹ "Strategia bezpieczeństwa Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej", <http://www.msz.gov.pl/polzagr/strategiabezprp.html>.

³² The words of Polish ambassador in Slovakia Jan Komornický confirm it: "It has to be stressed that the support of Polish party to the membership of the SR in the Alliance is clear. As a member of the Alliance we will do our best for Slovakia's membership; naturally, only if the Slovak society will want it. It is necessary to accomplish the first wave of NATO enlargement. Slovakia is the closest country for Poland and the Alliance, which shall join NATO. From the Polish viewpoint Slovakia is at the first place."

training of defence professionals and public relations, all of which will be useful, because in Slovakia - especially after NATO's air intervention against Yugoslavia during the Kosovo crisis - the number of supporters of the Alliance membership decreased to under 50%. Currently Slovakia, at least in the defence sector, tries to adapt the Polish experience of its relations with the Alliance. Representatives of both Ministries of Defence negotiate mostly in the fields of security (defence, military) policy, strategy and legislation, information protection, development of human resources at the Ministry of Defence, the reform of the army and whole defence and security system.³³

After Poland joined NATO, the Polish armaments industry became a competition for the Slovak armament industry already affected by the conversion. If Slovakia becomes an Alliance member, its position on the Euro-Atlantic markets will be even more difficult. In spite of all this Poland's experience in restructuring and integration of its armaments industry can be of big value for Slovakia. Contacts between Polish and Slovak Ministries of Defence also include cooperation in armaments industry issues. Slovakia can draw inspiration from Polish experience in the cooperation of governmental political groupings with the opposition in the support of fundamental objectives of Polish foreign policy. An example of effective work with expatriate organisations is the activity of Polish emigrant circles abroad with the aim to achieve NATO membership for Poland.³⁴

Poland, together with the Czech Republic, are the members of the northern wing of NATO. Hungary, in spite of original assumptions, is included in the southern wing. Slovak experts voiced an opinion that, it is more realistic for Slovakia to expect potential future membership in the NATO southern wing.³⁵ Poland as a member of NATO northern wing will, naturally, concentrate more on the activities in the Baltic Sea region, the Baltic countries, Russia, Ukraine and Belarus. Slovakia, if it is hypothetically included in the NATO southern wing, will, unlike its northern neighbour, pay more attention to events happening in the Danube basin and the Balkans. Despite Poland's different geopolitical inclination, it will represent an important Slovak partner at the field of Euro-Atlantic cooperation due to its close relations with the USA and Germany.

The Pan-European dimension of Polish foreign policy

The Pan-European pillar of the Polish security policy relies on Poland functioning within the OSCE. Poland presents itself as an active member of this organisation, even though it does not support the Russian concept of collective security: "Poland, however, supports the strengthening of effective action of this largest security organisation on the European continent, specifically in the fields of preventive diplomacy, precluding conflicts, crisis management and after-conflict recovery, the development of "soft guaranties" and security means, as well as in the area of building democratic institutions and development of civil society."³⁶ Poland rejects all the efforts turning this organisation to the major institution of security system in Europe: "The merits of the

³³ Peter Barták, "Využívame skúsenosti a poznatky z poľskej cesty do NATO", Ivo Samson - Tomáš Strážay (eds.) *Európska bezpečnosť a proces rozširovania NATO* (Bratislava: SFPA 2000) p. 11-15.

³⁴ Pavol Lukáč, "Poľská lobby" v USA - vplyv na poľsko-americké vzťahy vzťahy', *Listy SFPA*, 12/1998 (December 1998) p. 7.

³⁵ Vladimír Kmec - Miloslav Nad, "Nová bezpečnostná situácia Slovenska po rozšírení NATO" *Mezinárodní politika* 4/1999 p. 19.

³⁶ Vladimír Kmec - Miloslav Nad, "Nová bezpečnostná situácia Slovenska po rozšírení NATO" *Mezinárodní politika* 4/1999 p. 19.



OSCE in the stabilisation of the situation in Europe are undeniable. However, its utilisation in situations of military threat is restricted. Since the OSCE has no military potential available and it covers too many controversial interests, its capacity for prompt decision making is limited.³⁷ In 1998 Poland was the OSCE presiding country. Polish Minister of Foreign Affairs B. Geremek, on the occasion of taking over presidency of the OSCE on January 17, 1998 declared principal objectives of Poland's presidency adapting the organisation in order to be able respond to more adequately to the new challenges of nowadays, increase its effectiveness in solving conflicts, revitalise the OSCE "human dimension", comply with the responsibilities of the function of a coordinator of the preparations of the European Security Charter, establishing more effective cooperation with other Euro-Atlantic organisations and reinforce the democratic standards of co-existence of countries in Europe.³⁸ OSCE actively contributed to the efforts to solve the Kosovo conflict and due to Poland, a Kosovo Verification Mission was established, the task of which was to persuade both the parties to restrain from violence. Poland was engaged also in the organisation of OSCE surveillance mission during general elections in Bosnia and Herzegovina as well as in taking over the OBSE task of police monitoring from the UN in Eastern Slavonia. Poland, during its presidency of the OSCE, was also active in 1998, supporting democracy in Slovakia by developing intensive diplomatic pressure on the Slovak party with the objective to make it agree with the presence of OSCE observers during the elections to the NR SR (National Council of the Slovak Republic – the Slovak Parliament).³⁹

Polish support to the integration of Slovakia into Euro-Atlantic structures

Poland's position as a regional power is also manifested by its support to the integration ambitions of Slovakia. After independent Slovakia was established, Poland, together with others, interpreted its existence as a potential source of instability in the region, mainly due to its unclear political representation⁴⁰ and the foreign policy orientation.⁴¹ In Poland, the split of Czecho-Slovakia at the beginning of 1993 was accepted with uneasiness. The local press informed about the piece of news in a sensational manner mixed with uncertainty.⁴² What Polish politicians were silent about and what the Polish press suggested only cautiously was openly voiced by Polish foreign policy analysts and experts from other countries: "The split of Czecho-Slovakia has changed the geo-politics of Central Europe; Prague is oriented to close relations with Germany, but in Bratislava, Eastern European tendency might very well prevail ..."⁴³ Although the political representatives of Slovakia led by the Prime Minister V. Mečiar declared an interest to integrate

³⁷ Grażyna Bernatowicz, "Priorytety polskiej polityki zagranicznej", <http://msz.gov.pl/polzagr/priorytety.html> (január 1999).

³⁸ Jerzy M. Nowak, "Polskie przewodnictwo OBWE", *Rocznik Polskiej Polityki Zagranicznej 1999* (Warszawa: MSZ 1999) p. 22.

³⁹ Jerzy M. Nowak, "Polskie przewodnictwo OBWE", *Rocznik Polskiej Polityki Zagranicznej 1999* (Warszawa: MSZ 1999) p. 24-26.

⁴⁰ Ivo Samson *Die Sicherheits- und Außenpolitik der Slowakei in den ersten Jahren der Selbständigkeit* (Baden-Baden: Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft 2000) p. 90.

⁴¹ Ivo Samson, "Deklamatívnoš, deklaratívnoš a reálnopolitická rovina v súčasnej slovenskej integračnej politike", *Mezinárodní vztahy* 3/1996, p. 30-37.

⁴² Juraj Marušiak, "In Slovacia sunt leones", *Literárny týždenník*, 19. 3. 1993 p. 12.

⁴³ Roman Kuźniar, "Geostrategiczne uwarunkowania bezpieczeństwa Polski", *Sprawy Międzynarodowe* 1/1993, p 9-28.

Slovakia into the Euro-Atlantic structures, "the weak economical standing of the country and proclaimed methods of its overcoming proved just the opposite." This concerned e.g. announced maintenance of the state control over majority of the Slovak industry. As soon as in 1993 foreign analysts did not miss the neutralistic, even Pan-Slavic tendencies in Slovakia. The split of Czechoslovakia induced concern as for the future of the Visegrad Four (V4).⁴⁴ In spite of that relations between Slovakia and Poland developed without conflicts. Poland wished to see stability on its southern border; for Slovakia good relations with Poland were beneficial, since Poland was the only significant state that unambiguously supported its integration ambitions to NATO and EU. As opposed to other V4 countries the mutual relations have not been burdened with any negative historical resentments.

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The first official Slovak-Polish bilateral summit was the visit of the SR President Michal Kováč in Poland on January 25 – 27, 1994. M. Kováč in Warsaw stressed the interest of Slovakia in the development of good relations with Poland – he even declared Poland to be the strategic partner of SR: "The Slovak Republic considers the friendship with Poland to be one of the most important pillars of Slovakia's international position." M. Kováč and Lech Wałęsa underlined the importance of mutual cooperation at the level of

Visegrad Four. M. Kováč also suggested a special dialog, a specific partnership between Slovakia and Poland at the level of the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Defence. The Slovak party realised the edge of Poland in the process of integration to Euro-Atlantic structures as well as integration handicap of Slovakia. Poland did not reject Kováč's initiative and commented it in a positive manner. It declared definite support to the Slovak ambitions, although L. Wałęsa just expressed that, any proposals strengthening multilateral cooperation between Central European countries are welcomed. The fact that no explicit consent was announced was the consequence of uncertain foreign policy orientation of Slovakia and its comparatively weaker position in relation to the Euro-Atlantic structures and resulting unwillingness of Poland to endanger its own integration process. Kováč's visit in Warsaw was, moreover, during its course, challenged by the then Prime Minister Vladimír Mečiar, when he explained the absence of a member of the delegation, the Minister of Economy of SR Ján Ducký, by lack of co-ordination of the President's visit of Poland with the obligations of the SR Government.

After the fall of V. Mečiar's Government in March 1994, the new Government of the SR led by Jozef Moravčík realised the significance of maintaining intensive bilateral relations with Poland. The first visit of the new Minister of Foreign Affairs Eduard Kukan was the one of Poland on April 10, 1994. His colleague Andrzej Olechowski declared the willingness to help Slovakia through advice and promised to exert its influence on the integration efforts of Slovakia, specifically on

⁴⁴ Thomas S. Szayna, "Rozpad Czecho-Słowacji (kilka uwag o jego konsekwencjach)", *Sprawy Międzynarodowe* 1/1993 p. 68-69, 72.

the process of ratification of the Agreement of Association of the SR to the EU, or in obtaining loan from International Monetary Fund. On August 18, an official visit of Prime Minister Moravčík to Warsaw took place.

In spite of the change of government in Slovakia after the 1994 elections both parties were interested in development of mutual relations; these were, however, developed much more in the field of economy than in the area of international politics. In 1996, even with increasing dissonance between declared priorities of the Slovak foreign policy and its political practice the Polish interest in close cooperation with Slovakia continued. It was motivated most of all by an effort to prevent the strengthening of the Russian influence in Slovakia, and via Slovakia in the whole Central European region. However, Poland did not support Slovak proposals for deepening the integration within the Central European Free Trade Area (CEFTA) by the means of establishing its permanent secretariat in Bratislava or the liberalisation of capital flows and movement of working force. Through the bolstering of integration within CEFTA the SR political representatives in power strove to decrease the comparative edge of its Visegrad neighbours in the integration processes, weaken the chances of the strongest candidates to join EU before Slovakia and thus diminish the developing threat of international isolation of Slovakia. It went even that far as interpreting CEFTA as an alternative to EU integration; representatives of CEFTA member states, however, resolutely rejected it - on the contrary, confirmed that, CEFTA is understood as a preparation for EU integration.

The President of SR M. Kováč played a special role in the development of mutual bilateral relations. On March 1, 1996 he met his Polish counterpart Aleksander Kwaśniewski in Tatranská Javorina. Both the representatives stated that, the process of both EU and NATO enlargement is not directed against Russia, Ukraine and Belarus – just the opposite: it has to make possible the cooperation of these countries with the Euro-Atlantic structures. The visit of Kwaśniewski got complicated by inadequate reaction of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the SR to his Budapest visit declaration that, the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland may become EU members at the same time, while Slovakia, due to its internal political situation, possibly later. The spokesperson of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the SR Juraj Matejovský on February 20, 1996 labelled the declaration as an inappropriate one, “because joining EU is not a race.” A. Kwaśniewski talked about his Budapest declaration again during the visit to Slovakia and de facto confirmed his opinion when interpreted it as “perception of the absence of vigorous Slovak pro-integration presentation.”⁴⁵ This expression of A. Kwaśniewski represented a first serious warning signal for Slovakia from the Polish side, meaning that Poland ceased to see Slovakia, due to its internal political development, as a perspective candidate for integration into EU and NATO compared to the other countries of the Visegrad group. At the time military cooperation was intensively developed. The visit of the State Secretary of the Minister of National Defence of Polish Republic (PR) Andrzej Karkoszka in Bratislava in August 1996 represented a big foreign policy event. While A. Kwaśniewski articulated his warning towards Slovakia in a diplomatic manner, A. Karkoszka unambiguously expressed a possibility of Slovakia’s exclusion from the first wave of NATO integration, but he still admitted a possibility that, decisive members of the Alliance might change their standpoint. He still declared the support of Poland to Slovakia’s integration into NATO. Decision of the US Congress on Slovakia not being among the first four countries for which the assistance aimed for

⁴⁵ Miroslav Wlachovský - Alexander Duleba - Pavol Lukáč, “Zahraničná politika Slovenskej republiky”, Martin Bútora (eds.) *Slovensko 1996. Súhrnná správa o stave spoločnosti a trendoch na rok 1997* (Bratislava: IVO 1997) p. 79-80.

the preparations to join NATO, amounting to USD 60 mil. was approved, was interpreted by A. Karkoszka as a significant political signal, which should be “closely analysed by everybody.” “It is a reason for starting a discussion also in your country, the outcome of which will show to all the world a definite pro-West policy of Slovakia, directed to NATO integration.” In this respect he declared willingness to assist Slovakia “through cooperation, contacts, and in a sense, through the help in interpretation ... of its positions and standpoints to the third countries,” but he added that, the internal political situation in Slovakia would be the ultimate decisive factor.

At the beginning of 1997, Slovakia, in line with the observation of Polish representatives, having continued in the inconsistency between its verbal declarations and the practice, was definitely dismissed from the list of the countries with a perspective to participate in the first wave of NATO and EU enlargement. Polish President A. Kwaśniewski in January 1997 mentioned only Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic as potential candidates for the Alliance enlargement, with the idea that the first group countries shall become advocates of the inclusion of the other countries of Central and Eastern Europe. Even if he declared the SR’s NATO membership as a geopolitical interest of Central Europe, while the membership of Romania was reflected only as “strategically important”, nothing could change the situation of Slovakia occurring in the same group as the Baltic republics and Ukraine. The former ambassador of PR in Slovakia Jerzy Korolec in 1997 openly stated: “The complicated internal situation in Slovakia does not facilitate the realisation of one of the most important objectives of Poland’s foreign policy – the development of regional cooperation and first of all, integration of the countries of Central and Eastern Europe in it... Slovakia in practice does not share Poland’s opinion on the relevance of inter-regional cooperation in shaping “European reality.”” In his opinion Slovakia’s situation resulted from complicated relations with Hungary and the Czech Republic and close relations with Russia. He stated that, “Polish and Slovak interests in the field of security are not defined in an identical manner.”⁴⁶ Polish Minister of Foreign Affairs D. Rosati at the session of the Polish Sejm in January 1997 said that, the place of Slovakia in Europe is not sufficiently settled yet.⁴⁷

In April 1997, a new ambassador of Poland to Slovakia was appointed. On acceding to the office he declared not only continuous support of Poland to Slovak way to EU and NATO, but also an interest to develop and intensify mutual contacts in the areas of culture, science and sport.⁴⁸

Shortly after the Government of the SR on April 22, 1997, before the referendum on NATO membership, ordered the Minister of Interior Gustáv Krajčí not to distribute ballots, comprising a question concerning potential direct presidential elections, to municipalities, Slovakia was on May 7, 1997 unexpectedly visited by the Chairman of the Polish Sejm Józef Zych, who was a representative of pro-integration platform in PSL. In Piešťany a meeting with the chairperson of NR SR Ivan Gašparovič took place. The meeting was a result of a Polish initiative and no common communiqué was issued afterwards. According to J. Zych the impulse for the meeting in Piešťany was the recent talks between Russia and the USA,

⁴⁶ Jerzy Korolec, “Stosunki ze Słowacją. In: *Rocznik polskiej polityki zagranicznej 1997*”, (Warszawa: MSZ 1997) p. 166.

⁴⁷ Rudolf Chmel - Ivo Samson - Alexander Duleba, “Vztahy Slovenska so susedmi a s Nemeckom”, Martin Bútora - Michal Ivantýšyn (eds.) *Slovakia 1997. Súhrnná správa o stave spoločnosti a trendoch na rok 1998* (Bratislava: IVO 1998) p. 270.

⁴⁸ The historian - medievalist from the Catholic University in Lublin was substituted by Jan Komornicki, a Tatra mountaineer, the former chief of the Tatra Mountain Rescue Service and a Member of Parliament for PSL. In the Sejm he was a chairman of its Polish Slovak group within the Interparliamentary Union. Unlike his not very noticeable predecessor he was prepared much better for his function, he speaks Slovak, in the past during his work in the Tatra Mountain Rescue Service he maintained contacts with the Slovak partners, he even spent several months at the Forestry and Timber University in Zvolen, Slovakia.

resulting in “the emerged different interpretations related to integration of new Central European countries into NATO and the EU.” At the same time he stressed that, Poland is not indifferent to the fact, in which phase its neighbours will be admitted to NATO and expressed a support to pro-West aspirations of the SR Government. Although the contents of negotiations of the two Parliament Chairpersons have not been revealed yet, it is possible - perhaps in relation to the approaching referendum and governmental coalition arrangements to mark it, as well as in view of the Madrid summit of NATO preparations – to postulate a hypothesis that, this was the last attempt of Poland to prevent the fall of Slovakia to self-isolation and the exclusion of the country from the first wave of NATO and the EU enlargement. The visit of J. Zych and the substitution of the ambassador J. Korolec by newly installed J. Komornický bear in itself another interesting aspect. It seems that by nomination of J. Korolec the Polish party presented its understanding of Slovakia as dominantly catholic country, while the appointment of the PSL representative to the position of ambassador in Bratislava and the authorisation of J. Zych to fulfil an (until now not explained) diplomatic mission Poland presented a change of its opinion to the basic paradigm of political activities in Slovakia, in the sense that, Polish political representatives stopped considering Slovakia to be a catholic country. Just the opposite, the most suitable partners to be in contact with the Slovak political representatives appeared to be politicians from PSL circles, the only Polish political party which maintained contacts with HZDS and which through its cautious approach to European integration processes and by its advocating traditional values of rural Poland was able to express empathy for internal political discussions in Slovakia in the largest possible extent.

During the unexpected visit of J. Zych, the Polish Minister of Foreign Affairs, D. Rosati, highlighted in Sejm the cooperation with the Czech Republic and Hungary but he also mentioned a third country from former Soviet bloc being an object of Polish foreign policy's special interest: Lithuania. Slovakia was put at the same level as Romania, Latvia and Estonia. Before the visit of Slovak Minister of Foreign Affairs Pavol Hamžík to Poland on May 14, 1997 the chairperson of the governing party, the PR Social Democracy Party, Józef Oleksy openly declared that, Slovakia's exclusion from the first wave of the Alliance enlargement is caused by internal political situation in the country. Hamžík could not preclude a change in Poland's view to Slovakia's integration chances.

Shortly after the NATO Madrid summit on July 8, 1997, where Slovakia was not invited to negotiations on Alliance enlargement a long-prepared visit of Polish President A. Kwaśniewski to Bratislava took place on August 20, 1997. At the meetings with the SR highest representatives A. Kwaśniewski repeated the continuous Polish support for the Slovak integration ambitions. However, he explicitly voiced his opinion on necessary alteration in both Slovak internal and consequently foreign policy. In discussions he did not avoid mentioning the obstacles, preventing Slovakia from joining the EU and NATO and awarded President M. Kováč the highest Polish State honour, The Order of the White Eagle. He stressed that “Poland will be happy to support the pro-European aspirations of Slovaks, but first the Slovaks have to make it possible.”⁴⁹

Polish foreign policy, especially after the parliamentary elections in the autumn 1997 became oriented to the cooperation with the part of Slovak political spectrum, which was undoubtedly

⁴⁹ Pavol Lukáč, “Polsko a Slovensko (susedia obrátení k sebe chrbtom)”, OS 2/1998 (February 1998) p. 23.

bound to integration into Euro-Atlantic structures. The new Prime Minister Jerzy Buzek, a representative of right-wing Solidarity Election Action (AWS) highlighted the significance of regional cooperation. He said that, “common objectives and both geographic and mental similarities link us with to the Czech Republic and Hungary. I am convinced that Slovakia will fully share our efforts and the way of their realisation.”⁵⁰ After 1997 Poland opted for “double track policy”⁵¹

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towards Slovakia. On one hand, it stressed its interest to get Slovakia involved in the integration processes in Central Europe, but on the other hand, it associated this possibility with a necessary change in internal political situation in the country. In practice, this approach was manifested by maintaining contacts with official representatives of the SR and parallel support to the opposition. Although top-level contacts between Slovakia and Poland almost ceased, contacts between Slovak political opposition and Poland’s official representatives intensified. A delegation representing the Slovak Democratic Coalition (SDK) visited Poland on June 10, 1998. At the beginning of September the former SR President M. Kováč paid his visit to the country. At the end of his visit he expressed an expectation that

Poland will take the role of a “patron”, who would advocate Slovak interests at the international scene.⁵² In fact, Poland has already played the role anyhow.

In the years 1994 - 1998 Poland acted as a mediator between Slovakia and the EU and NATO structures. It continued the dialog with Slovakia even after 1996, when Slovakia ceased to be a candidate for the first wave of these structures enlargement. After the Parliamentary elections in Slovakia in 1998, Poland was one of the initiators of the Visegrad cooperation revitalisation. Bilateral relations substantially changed as well. The new Prime Minister M. Dzurinda and the new Minister of Foreign Affairs E. Kukan organised their first official visit to Warsaw on November 12, 1998. The Slovak representatives thus confirmed that they consider Poland to be its strategic partner in foreign policy, which in fact was a return to the results of the Warsaw visit of President M. Kováč in January 1994. The Slovak party agreed with the Polish opinion that the building of Euroregions on their common borders is necessary and that diversification of energy sources of both countries is needed.⁵³ Even though the latter is an important priority for Poland – at the

⁵⁰ Jerzy Buzek, “Tekst exposé prezesa Rady Ministrów Jerzego Buzka wygłoszonego w Sejmie RP 10 listopada 1997 r.”, <http://www.kprm.gov.pl/menubez.html>.

⁵¹ Pavol Lukáč - Rudolf Chmel - Ivo Samson - Alexander Duleba, “Vzťahy Slovenska so susednými štátmi, Nemeckom a Ruskom”, Grigorij Mesežnikov - Michal Ivantyšin (eds.) *Slovakia 1998 - 1999. Súhrnná správa o stave spoločnosti* (Bratislava: IVO 1999) p. 340.

⁵² Pavol Lukáč - Rudolf Chmel - Ivo Samson - Alexander Duleba “Vzťahy Slovenska so susednými štátmi, Nemeckom a Ruskom”, Grigorij Mesežnikov - Michal Ivantyšin (eds.) *Slovensko 1998 - 1999. Súhrnná správa o stave spoločnosti* (Bratislava: IVO 1999) p. 340.

⁵³ Juraj Marušiak, “Hlavné trendy v zahraničnej politike SR”, Grigorij Mesežnikov - Michal Ivantyšin (eds.) *Slovensko 1998 - 1999. Súhrnná správa o stave spoločnosti* (Bratislava: IVO 1999) p. 293; Alexander Duleba, “Slovenská zahraničná politika - bilancia šiestich rokov a perspektívy zmeny”, *Mezinárodní vzťahy* 1/1999 p. 47.

meeting of the Prime Ministers of the Visegrad countries on May 15th, 1999 in Bratislava, Poland officially submitted a proposal to build a gas pipeline connecting Norway with other countries of Central Europe – Slovakia has been reserved in its attitude towards the pipeline and in the energy sector still prefers close cooperation with Russia.

Topics, which have been opened for discussion during the first bilateral Slovak-Polish negotiations after the last elections, i.e. issues of the EU and NATO integration, transborder cooperation, the diversification of energy sources and north-south transport routes were developed in the subsequent contacts. Polish diplomacy also played an important role in discussions on the admission of Slovakia to the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). Besides, since 1998 Poland has striven for mental reconciliation between both the countries and, using the words of B. Geremek, it concentrates on "the activities aimed to strengthen democratic and market options of the country."⁵⁴

After the elections 1998, however, several dissonant moments occurred in the mutual Slovak-Polish contacts. Presentations of the Polish agricultural representatives in 1999 and 2000 led some Slovak politicians, e.g. the Prime Minister Mikuláš Dzurinda to the approach expressed by the representatives of the Czech Republic and Hungary, i.e. cautious reservation to the leadership tendencies of Poland in the region. This approach may be exemplified by his speech at the Congress of European People's Party on February 4, 1999, when he, advocating for Slovakia to be - at the session of European Council in Helsinki – included in the first group of candidate countries, called attention to the fact that, the agricultural sector in Slovakia is not as strong as it is in Poland to cause Spain and/or the EU concern.⁵⁵ Pointing to shortcomings of Poland in the situation when Slovakia is, according to evaluation of European Commission, definitely the weak link in the Visegrad group,⁵⁶ is not very productive. On the contrary, it can harm mutual trust between Slovakia and Poland, which is the most significant advocate of Slovakia's integration into NATO/EU. Another dissonant moment in mutual relations is the already mentioned reserved approach to the Polish proposal to build a gas pipeline from the Baltic coast southward and the Yamal gas pipeline from Russia through Belarus to Poland, bypassing the Ukraine. Both the countries, however, managed to overcome different opinions concerning establishing the Euroregions on the common borders, although there is a lot to be done in the practical realisation of the agreed objectives in the area of transborder cooperation.

Since the independent Slovakia was established both Slovakia and Poland paid a lot of attention to their mutual relations. All the time "Polish-Slovak relations manifested a constant and continuing character, or, to put it differently, did not face such significant problems," as in relations of Slovakia to Hungary and the Czech Republic.⁵⁷ For Poland, Slovakia is important as one of the constituents of maintaining stability in the region and at the southern borders of the country. Also, Poland tries to avoid the Belarusian scenario from the half of the nineties, the scenario that meant the strengthening of the Russian influence right on the Polish border. For Poland and other Visegrad countries, Slovakia is important also from a geo-political point of view, because it is the only member

⁵⁴ Viliam Roth, "K slovensko-poľským vzťahom. Videné z Varšavy", *Mezinárodní politika* 5/1999 p. 11.

⁵⁵ Juraj Marušiak, "Hlavné trendy v zahraničnej politike SR", Grigorij Mesežnikov - Michal Ivantýšyn (eds.) *Slovensko 1998 - 1999. Súhrnná správa o stave spoločnosti* (Bratislava: IVO 1999) p. 307.

⁵⁶ Zdeněk Lukáš, "Taktizování Bruselu přináší nejistotu", *Mezinárodní politika* 3/2000 p. 23.

⁵⁷ Břetislav Dančák, "Geneze spolupráce ve střední Evropě", Břetislav Dančák (eds.) *Integrační procesy ve středoevropském prostoru II.* (Brno: Masarykova univerzita 1999) p. 44.

of the Visegrad group which borders with all the three other countries. The geo-political factor, however, as the year 1997 has shown, does not play such a crucial role in considerations of the EU and NATO member states, as it was probably expected by the Slovak political representatives before the 1998 elections.⁵⁸ Polish interest in making the relations with Slovakia more intensive is motivated also by economic interests, not so much for the volume of reciprocal trade as for the concerns over high costs of introducing the Schengen regime on the common borders.⁵⁹

Even in the period of an escalated confrontation with Western countries and other neighbours, the Slovak political representatives tried to avoid a direct conflict with Poland, through which it might definitely burn all its boats, not only in relation to the West but also in the region. The parliamentary elections in 1998 made possible to overcome the gap between verbal declarations and practical politics with the consequence of the substantial revitalisation of Slovak-Polish relations.

Perspectives and risks of the Visegrad cooperation

Although Poland can be characterised as an initiator of development of the Visegrad cooperation, its activities are not met - and in the past have not been met either - with a definite support in the region. One of the reasons of ending the activities of the Visegrad Four after 1993 was not only the split of Czechoslovakia and following tendencies of V. Mečiar's Cabinet to self-isolation, but also "the fear of braking effect of Poland."⁶⁰ This effect was caused by the weak economical standing of the country combined with its role of the Central European regional power. Although doubting the importance of the Visegrad cooperation was presented most of all by the Czech prime minister Václav Klaus, who built his opinion on an alleged privileged position of the Czech Republic in relation to the EU,⁶¹ at the time the Czech Republic together with Hungary shared the other analysts' concern that, the Polish economic situation will result in slowing down the process of integration of Central and Easter European countries into the EU.⁶² Countries of Visegrad group, with an exception of Slovakia, in the second half of the nineties started bilateral cooperation in the matter of the integration into the Euro-Atlantic structures. After an interim depression the relations between the Czech Republic a Poland from 1993 on, gradually obtained a character of "a strategic partnership" in the region. In the second half of the nineties, at the time when the idea of Visegrad Four was regarded dead, due to the relation between Poland and the Czech Republic a new term "Post-Visegrad Two" was introduced.⁶³ The concern of excessive Polish influence in the region survives especially in the Czech Republic and Hungary, since due to Poland's economic weak standing their admission by the EU could be slowed down. That is usually stated as a reason why e.g. Hungary asked to stress first of all "the human dimension" of the Visegrad cooperation, the collaboration in education and culture. Before the Helsinki summit at the end of 1999 both the Czech Republic and Hungary viewed the

⁵⁸ Ivo Samson *Die Sicherheits- und Außenpolitik der Slowakei in den ersten Jahren der Selbständigkeit* (Baden-Baden: Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft, 2000) p. 38, 45.

⁵⁹ Jiří Dienstbier, "Visegrad", *Mezinárodní politika* 2/1999 p. 4-7.

⁶⁰ Luboš Palata, "Visegrad? CEFTA? Středoevropské společenství?", *Mezinárodní politika* 2/1999 p. 8.

⁶¹ Jiří Dienstbier, "Visegrad", *Mezinárodní politika* 2/1999 p. 4-7.

⁶² Luboš Palata, "Visegrad? CEFTA? Středoevropské společenství?", *Mezinárodní politika* 2/1999, p. 8.

⁶³ Miroslav Wlachovský - Juraj Marušiak, "Hlavné trendy v zahraničnej politike", Martin Bútora - Michal Ivantyšin (eds.) *Slovensko 1997. Súhrnná správa o stave spoločnosti a trendoch na rok 1998* (Bratislava: IVO 1998) p. 240.

Polish efforts to reinforce the relations within the Visegrad Four, besides others, as an effort to prevent disintegration of "the Luxemburg group".⁶⁴ The argument is the weak economical performance and insufficient development level of Poland, after 1998 more and more criticised also from the EU. Main areas of criticism are the slow progress of the economy restructuring, dominance of heavy industry and mining as well as the absence of reforms in the agricultural policy. Farmers still constitute almost one quarter of the population, and that is why this sector is not able to compete with the agricultural sector in EU countries. Agriculture's share in the gross domestic product of Poland is only 5%.⁶⁵ If the farmers from Central and Eastern European countries, after they became the future EU member states, were entitled to the current subsidies provided to farmers in the EU, Poland as a member would mean considerable financial load for the EU budget. The biggest problem in the CEFTA countries is, doing away with the customs barriers for the agricultural products.⁶⁶ This critique was openly articulated at the session of The Council of Europe in Helsinki in November 1999, but critical signals and hints have been appearing already for two years. In September 1997 they were pointed out in a paper, presented at the Polish Embassy in Prague by B. Geremek before he was installed to the function of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the PR. He expressed a warning that the delay of privatisation and re-privatisation, halting the modernisation of the agricultural sector and perseverance of the monopolistic and étatistic elements in the economy are the reason that "in the hierarchy list of candidates developed by the Brussels, Poland invisibly sinks to lower positions and at the list of countries ranged according to the economical freedom it is located at the bottom, both below the other countries of Visegrad group and the Baltic countries. This situation weakens Poland's chances."⁶⁷

Perspectives of Poland as a regional power from the Slovak viewpoint

It can be expected that Poland will, in spite of numerous economical problems and the critique on the part of the EU, maintain its privileged position in the region. In relation to the EU Poland tries to present itself as an active partner, striving to introduce its own solutions and unlike in, e.g., Slovakia, the Polish political debate includes discussions on the future character of the EU and Poland's position in it after joining the EU. That is why it is possible that Poland will, providing that - on political grounds - it remains to be the hot political candidate for EU membership, play the role of a pioneer in negotiating advantageous conditions especially in the agricultural sector, free movement of people issue and environment matters also for Slovakia and/or the other candidate countries: in this situation it will be politically difficult for the EU to find political arguments for difference in conditions for Poland and other associated countries joining the EU in the same enlargement wave. Poland has already pushed through in the EU negotiations the direct payments for the farmers from the EU budget as well as full access to the structural and cohesion funds in spite of the disagreement on the side of the European Fifteen representatives. Poland, however, asks for the introduction of restrictions on the free movement of capital for a transitional period, specifically due to the issues of the land ownership by the citizens from EU

⁶⁴ Luboš Palata, "Visegrad? CEFTA? Středoevropské společenství?", *Mezinárodní politika* 2/1999 p. 8.

⁶⁵ Jan Jůn, "Při jednání o vstupu do EU má Polsko problémy se zemědělstvím", <http://www.press.cz>.

⁶⁶ Lubomír Kopeček, "Polská republika", Břetislav Dančák (ed.) *Integrační procesy ve středoevropském prostoru II.* (Brno: Masarykova univerzita, 1999) p. 173-174.

⁶⁷ Bronisław Geremek, "Polsko & spol. Tvář v tvář nebezpečí marginalizace v Evropě", *Mezinárodní politika* 10/1997, p. 8.

member states, in the areas of environment, occupational safety standards and the maintenance of special economic zones.

Indeed, the chance of Poland to “soften” the EU membership requirements for the other post-communist countries, including Slovakia, will be realistic only provided that Slovakia’s membership is decided in the same level and at the same time. If Slovakia joins the EU later, Poland’s political support may be still counted on, but Poland’s approach in the agricultural

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negotiations will be probably less welcoming for fear of Slovakia’s being Poland’s competitor, with respect to Slovak agricultural production as well as the concerns on Slovak competition for different forms of assistance allocated for the agricultural sector of the potential new EU member states from Central and Eastern Europe. Last but not least, Poland is attractive for Slovakia also as a member of CEFTA, within which, as a preparation for the future EU membership, a gradual removal of the customs barriers for some commodities is organised. If Poland joins the EU before Slovakia, it can result in a stricter regime on the Slovak borders and cancellation of some agreements entered into at the level of this organisation.⁶⁸

The future development of Slovak-Polish relations remains open. At the moment, the core of the relations is constituted by the common effort of both the countries

to become part of the same European integration groupings. After the assumed primary objective is achieved and the stability of the region is established, the fundamental base of the relations will have to be newly defined. It is probable that the center of mutual relations will be shifted into the economical area. The cooperation with Poland provides for Slovakia “a chance for a shift in its eastward politics”.⁶⁹ While currently the basis of the chance is, first of all, the Polish support to Slovakia’s NATO integration and a possibility to set the country free from the monopolistic dependence on Russian oil and natural gas supplies, in the future the chance may bring the formulation of a common policy towards the Ukraine. While the Ukraine is of a strategic significance for Poland, Slovakia has not recognised the strategic relevance of the Ukraine for its security and independence yet – but the currently unused potential of mutual relations in the area of economy plays a dominant role. It is possible that at the level of the Euro-Atlantic structures Poland and Slovakia will jointly promote the policy loyal to their eastern neighbour. Regardless of the fact whether the economic or “the eastern” moment will play a decisive role in looking for a new formulation of Polish and Slovak relations - or both – the existence of a partnership with a regional power - its immediate neighbour - will still be of vital importance for Slovakia, since it is based not only on pragmatic calculations but also on a certain common mental and emotional closeness.

Poland has not achieved the position of a regional leader in Central Europe only due to its geo-strategic location, the number of population or the economic potential. The authority,

⁶⁸ Jiří Dienstbier, “Visegrad”, *Mezinárodní politika* 2/1999 p. 6.

⁶⁹ Alexander Duleba, “Slovenská zahraničná politika - bilancia šiestich rokov a perspektívy zmeny”, *Mezinárodní vzťahy* 1/1999 p. 47.

currently established by Poland in the region is first of all the consequence of unambiguously articulated objectives of its foreign policy, their consistent implementation and the existence of its own, clearly formulated idea on future security and political architecture of the region. Poland, unlike its other Visegrad neighbours, presents its foreign policy and security ideas, also those concerning the West, as an active and inventive partner, introducing innovative solutions. At the same time, on the contrary to the other V4 countries, Poland presents its Euro-Atlantic integration ambitions, in the most pronounced manner, not only as a result of pragmatic, economic, political or security considerations, but also as a vector of its civilisation orientation. It subscribes to the Promethean task to disseminate the western civilisation message in the region of Central and Eastern Europe. That is why it is also attractive for the countries that are not, at the moment, the favourites of the first wave of the EU and NATO enlargement – i.e. for Lithuania, Latvia, but also Romania and the Ukraine. ■

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