

The “Strategic Thanatos” of Poland

Trapped Midway Between the Past and the Present

Dmitry S. Bunevich

Abstract

This article examines the behavior of Poland on the international stage, specifically its interaction with the European Union, the United States, and Russia in a historical context using a psychoanalytic approach to memory studies. The author presumes that Polish foreign policy may be dominated by “strategic thanatos”—a historical practice of tactically meaningful but strategically destructive behavior which, while declaring the state’s sovereignty a supreme value, in the long run reduces the level of national security and increases international political tensions around Poland. The author suggests that Poland’s policy of building “privileged” relations with the United States and its activity in the post-Soviet space is a continuation of Poland’s interwar policy, whose historical implications have not been critically reconsidered by Polish political and intellectual elites. This policy has resulted in an objective deterioration of the strategic position of modern Poland. The author predicts that, amid a growing conflict with the European Commission, the ruling anti-liberal national clericals from the Law and Justice party will try to rely on U.S. support and become a center of gravity for European rightwing populists. The proposals of French President Emmanuel Macron to deepen European integration and build a new European security architecture together with Russia suggest that the European establishment is seeking to reduce the EU’s military

Dmitry S. Bunevich

Director of the Institute for Russian-Polish Cooperation.

SPIN-RSCI: 3168-3969

Tel: +7 (999) 989 88 14

e-mail: d.bunevich@rospol.org;

Postal address: Office 20, 10/2 Tryokhpudny pereulok, 123001 Moscow, Russia

DOI: 10.31278/1810-6374-2018-16-4-72-94

and political dependence on the U.S. Brussels will therefore strongly oppose the Polish Fronde. The article also points out that Poland’s example shows to Russia that its hopes for cooperation with European rightwing populists are futile. The author concludes that Poland would make a big mistake if, relying on hypothetical American support, it tries to hinder the process of European consolidation and the normalization of Russian-European relations.

Keywords: Poland, Russia, European Union, U.S., historical memory, populism, nationalism

Modern Poland or *III Rzeczpospolita* (the Third Polish Republic), as it is called in official Polish documents, is not the first experience of building a nation-state by the Poles. The very name of the state indicates a certain historical tradition which Polish elites believe they have inherited. The Polish political and scientific discourse singles out the following periods of national statehood in modern and contemporary history: I Rzeczpospolita (1569-1795), the Duchy of Warsaw (1807-1815), II Rzeczpospolita (1918-1939), and III Rzeczpospolita (since 1989). At the same time, the name “Rzeczpospolita” (a calque of Latin *res publica*: *rzecz* “thing, matter” and *pospolita* “common”) is purposely not applied to the Polish People’s Republic (1945-1989), which only emphasizes the Poles’ attitude to the socialist period of their statehood as an artificial distortion of the natural course of national history.

This motley palette of names and dates shows not only changes of political regimes, like in France with its five republics and two empires. In Polish history, unfortunately, transitions from one state project to another largely occurred through catastrophes which ended in the death and disappearance of statehood itself. Over the past 250 years, Poland has at least six times been a victim of partitions or the establishment of its borders and political system by foreign powers without regard to its own interests: three partitions in the 18th century, the Congress of Vienna of 1815, the German-Soviet Treaty of 1939, and the decisions of the Yalta and Potsdam conferences in 1945. To a certain extent, catastrophes have become commonplace in Polish

history, and scenarios of partitions and destruction of the state occur with alarming frequency.

The memory of these recurring collapses of statehood has become a deep “historical trauma” of the Polish national consciousness and shaped a specific view of the role of Poland in Europe and the world among many politicians and intellectuals. It has become a norm with elites of III Rzeczpospolita to pay exaggerated attention to any potential foreign-policy risks to the country that may pose even a hypothetical threat to its historical existence. Polish culture expert Ewa Domańska notes with bitterness that “the category of *victim*” is a key concept for understanding the Polish approach to Polish history (Domańska, 2000). British historian Norman Davies agrees with her, saying that “Polish historians have been consumed by the story of the Partitions. The collapse of old Poland, with its causes and conclusions, has been the reigning obsession of Polish historiography right to the present day” (Davies, 2001).

This specific historical tradition which gave rise to the self-perception of Poland as a “victim country” can be traced back to, at least, the 19th century when outstanding Polish historian Joachim Lelewel and romantic poet Adam Mickiewicz likened the political fate of their homeland to none other than Jesus Christ. They created a narrative which claimed that Poland was destroyed by its neighbors for retaining the true faith and refusing to worship “idols of political interests.” Therefore, Poland, according to the Lelewel-Mickiewicz concept, is the “Christ of nations” destined to be crucified for the sins of Europe (Vassiliev, 2012). This concept, which may seem exotic to the Russian reader, was strikingly reproduced in the 20th century when II Rzeczpospolita, denied any real help from its allies France and Britain, fell under the onslaught of Nazi Germany in September 1939, and then in February 1945 in Yalta was left by the Western powers at the mercy of Joseph Stalin. In the times of the Polish People’s Republic, Polish dissidents and opposition cultural figures began to view the Yalta agreements through the prism of Poland’s recurring national disasters and victimhood. For example, well-known Polish journalist and dissident Leszek Moczulski, later a deputy of the post-socialist

Sejm, said that the Yalta agreements “legalized the last partition of Rzeczpospolita” (Ideiñaya deklaraciya KNP, 1981), and famous Polish singer-songwriter Jacek Kaczmarski even depicted this event in his popular and deeply tragic song “Yalta.”

In her analysis of the national historical experience in the mid-twentieth century, contemporary Polish researcher Monika Sus wrote that the beginning of World War II and the Red Army’s entry into Poland on September 17, 1939 seriously influenced the modern political culture of the Poles and increased the already acute sense of threat which was constantly present in the Polish political consciousness (Sus, 2014). The well-known Polish researcher and former foreign minister Adam Rotfeld apparently shares this idea as he says that repeated partitions of Poland in the past created, and still keep alive, the belief among the Poles that neighboring countries continue to pose a threat to Polish sovereignty (Rotfeld, 2010). These sentiments grew markedly in the second half of the 2000s, when the national-conservative Law and Justice party actually made the so-called “historical policy” an ideological basis for its foreign and domestic policies, which even gave grounds to historian Andrzej Friszke to send a panicky warning to his compatriots: “Today blatant indoctrination is taking place in Poland—a real war for memory is going on!” (Friszke, 2008).

It can even be assumed that the memory of partitions—above all, the “exemplary” first partitions of the 18th century, which gave rise to the tragic tradition—became the starting point for all subsequent Polish reflections on foreign policy. In this regard, it is important that the first “experience of the death” of Rzeczpospolita took place in the specific conditions of the degradation of the Westphalian system in Eastern Europe, which after the Seven Years’ War was the scene of a fierce clash of interests among two German states, the Austrian monarchy, Prussia, and rapidly growing Russia (Stegny, 2002). Archaic Poland, filled with religious tension but not internally doomed, became hostage to this confrontation which cost it its existence. The repartition of Eastern Europe and the destruction of I Rzeczpospolita provided conditions for working out a new *modus vivendi* for great continental empires, which ensured their more or less peaceful coexistence until

the beginning of the twentieth century. It is natural, therefore, that subsequent Polish leaders, when setting their foreign policies, feared most of all a recurrence of a strategic situation in which the destiny of their country would be the price for a compromise between great powers in the “European East,” where national borders and nation-states themselves were established differently than in the west of the continent.

It seems, however, that problems of Polish self-perception are not limited only to historical reflections on “Poland as a victim” but also lead to what the author calls “strategic thanatos” of Poland, based on general culturological constructs of Jean Baudrillard (2006). This is tactically meaningful but strategically destructive behavior in the international arena which, while declaring sovereignty of the state a super value, in the long run reduces the level of national security and increases international political tensions around Poland. The neurotic fear of a recurring catastrophe, which has not been duly rethought, unfortunately causes the Poles to take actions that ultimately precipitate this catastrophe.

This fundamental problem of Poland would be its private matter but for the role this outstanding (in every way) state objectively has played in Europe. Poland’s demographic, economic, cultural and military-strategic potential makes it a natural contender for the role of a leader capable of structuring spaces from the Baltic to the Balkans. If this potential regional leader, whom George Friedman considered a potential continental leader (Friedman, 2010), continues to be under the increasing influence of “strategic thanatos,” all players which view Eastern Europe as a strategically important region should feel concerned about it.

UNDER THE SPELL OF GREAT SIMPLIFICATION

Polish political views tend towards great simplification: The majority of Polish politicians and strategists sincerely believe that Russia and Germany seek to unite in a strategic alliance at the price of Poland which would inevitably be a victim of this alliance. This exotic view stems from the Poles’ interpretation of the past: they believe that

the main cause of their past national catastrophes was anti-Polish German-Russian collusion, rather than the internal weakness of various historical incarnations of Poland, or Polish mistakes in the international arena, or the general course of the historical process, and so on.

Therefore, Warsaw views all attempts by Moscow and Berlin to establish mutual cooperation through the prism of threats and risks that this rapprochement may pose to Polish sovereignty. In the early 2000s, the Germans and Russians were shocked when their stepped-up efforts to establish cooperation in the energy sector and the beginning of negotiations on the construction of the Nord Stream gas pipeline caused real panic in Warsaw. The then Polish prime minister, Kazimierz Marcinkiewicz, spoke in real earnest of attempts to “move the German-Russian border to the west of Poland,” while Defense Minister Radosław Sikorski (who became well known in Russia in February 2014 after he acted as one of the guarantors of the Agreement on the Settlement of the Political Crisis in Ukraine, which never came into effect) compared the gas pipeline construction to the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact (Gryz, 2009). In the mid-2000s, the language of public politicians and diplomats was not as simplified as it is now; this is why statements like that looked like a complete inability of Polish leaders to control their fears and complexes.

In the Polish picture of the world, the leaders of Russia and Germany (regardless of their names or the century) begin their negotiations with “the Polish issue.” This simplification has always caused Polish diplomats to constantly look for ways to counter hypothetical “Russian-German collusion.” Immediately after 1989, the key year in modern Polish history when the socialist Polish People’s Republic began to be dismantled and the modern Polish statehood built, Warsaw started to look for allies west of Germany.

Initially, Poland viewed France as a potential partner—again, not without the influence of historical factors. In the 16th and 17th centuries, the ruling dynasties of both states were connected by intermarriages. In the 18th century, Rzeczpospolita was a key element of the French “Eastern Barrier” diplomatic system. The 19th century

saw a deep rapprochement between France and Poland, when Polish politicians associated the restoration of independent Poland with the policies of Napoleon I and Napoleon III. In the same century, Paris became the largest center of Polish émigrés; and in the interwar period of the 20th century, the shared fears of France and Poland of a remilitarizing Germany also contributed to the two countries' rapprochement. Believing that Warsaw and Paris had "special" historical relations, Poland tried to build a partnership with Paris that would neutralize Germany's potential claims. It was symbolic that the Polish-French Friendship and Solidarity Treaty of 1991 was signed two months before the conclusion of a similar Polish-German treaty. In the same year, the Weimar Triangle was created—an informal French-Polish-German club aimed at developing common approaches by the three countries to major problems of European politics (Wyligala, 2010). At the same time, the French, realizing that Warsaw was interested in Paris primarily as a counterweight to German influence, showed surprising indifference to the aspirations and fears of their Polish partners. After President Lech Wałęsa told U.S. President Bill Clinton about his country's desire to join NATO, French Defense Minister Philippe Leotard bluntly said: "To knock at NATO's door is to knock at America's door and ask for the American guarantee. That is understandable, but it is not our conception. We want the request for security to be directed to the countries of Europe" (Yost, 1998).

However, France was not the main hope of the Poles in their attempts to find allies against imaginary "German-Russian collusion." When the "unipolar moment" (Krauthammer, 1991) came, it was only an alliance with the United States that Warsaw viewed as a soothing guarantee of security and a safeguard against "Russian revanchism" and "German expansionism." Indeed, American support helped Poland join NATO in 1999. It seemed then that Warsaw, having received guarantees from the military-political alliance led by the most powerful state in the world, could now gradually begin the long but necessary work to get rid of its historical fears of its large neighbors. However, Polish elites decided instead to strengthen their "strategic security" by playing on American-European differences.

In 2003, Poland fully supported the United States’ operations against Iraq and ignored the position of its European neighbors Germany, France, and Russia. The Poles and other Eastern Europeans did not confine themselves to declarations only: about 5,000 troops from Eastern European countries were deployed in Iraq in 2003-2005. The desire to fit into the U.S. interpretation of its actions in the Middle East sometimes reached the point of ridicule. For example, political writer Jerzy Redlich, speaking of the motives behind Poland’s participation in the Iraq operation, cited his country’s desire to export its experience of “democratic transformation” of political regimes (Redlich, 2003). In addition, Poland hosted CIA secret prisons for suspected terrorists, where they were tortured, according to human rights activists (Amnesty International, 2006).

Warsaw probably viewed the irritation its cooperation with the United States caused in Berlin and Moscow as a sign that Poland was on the right course. It acted according to the principle of *contradictio in contrarium*: “If the Russians and the Germans criticize our diplomacy, then we are doing everything right.” In 2006-2008, much to the indignation of eastern and western neighbors, Warsaw and Washington began negotiations on the deployment of components of a global missile defense system in Poland, proposed by the White House back in 2001. Poland consistently took a pro-American position in all conflicts, and in the second half of the 2000s it became one of the few large European countries that were ready to unconditionally support U.S. military operations and host missile defense components. The benefits Poland reaped from this close cooperation were more than modest and were limited to elites’ stronger sense of self-importance in world politics, but did not lead to real achievements. Poland actively participated in U.S. efforts to weaken unity between Europe and Russia and hindered the consolidation of the continent on an anti-American agenda. At the same time, pro-American Polish elites caused more and more irritation among EU partners. European political writers, reflecting the general discontent of Western European capitals with Poland, derided it as “America’s ‘Trojan donkey’ in the European Union.”

The right wing of the Polish political class was taken aback by the policy of the next U.S. administration led by Barack Obama who declared his plans to strengthen the U.S. partnership with the EU and “reset” relations with Russia. Poland, as a member of the European Union and a neighbor of Russia, saw in these changes in the U.S. policy not a chance for itself, but a threat. Its reaction was again close to panic. On July 16, 2009, the Polish newspaper *Gazeta Wyborcza* published an open letter signed by twenty-two former leaders of Eastern European countries, including Polish presidents Lech Wałęsa and Aleksander Kwaśniewski. The ex-leaders of the region warmly thanked the United States for its support during the Cold War years, did not fail to mention that they were “Atlanticist voices within NATO and the EU,” and reminded Washington that “our nations have been engaged alongside the United States in the Balkans, Iraq, and today in Afghanistan.” But the main message of the letter was a request to the Obama administration not to abandon its strategic partnership with Eastern Europe and not leave the region at the mercy of Russia, which, in their opinion, “uses overt and covert means of economic warfare, ranging from energy blockades and politically motivated investments to bribery and media manipulation in order to advance its interests and to challenge the transatlantic orientation of Central and Eastern Europe.” The letter contained specific proposals for a new American strategy in the region; in particular, it asked the U.S. not to abandon plans for the deployment of missile defense components and to strengthen interaction among NATO institutions. However, these appeals did not influence Obama’s decisions, and the United States demonstrated its absolute indifference to the fears of its Polish allies. The Poles found themselves hostage to their idealistic views and had to adapt to changes in U.S. priorities. The United States could use Poland against Russia or against potential competitors among the consolidating powers of Western Europe, but what was there for Poland? Its relations with Western Europe were deteriorating, and those with Russia were completely undermined; meanwhile, it was Russia and “old Europe” (above all Germany), not the United States, that were the most important economic partners for Poland. At the same time, the United States, while exploiting the

subject of transatlantic solidarity, demonstrated obvious disregard for the interests of its Polish allies. For example, Poland, which has a multi-million diaspora in the United States, has repeatedly asked Washington to include it in the U.S. visa waiver program, but all its requests were turned down.

This asymmetry in Polish-U.S. relations is not surprising: unlike Poland, the American expert community has never had a common position on prospects for a special “Polish-American alliance.” Whereas Cold War veterans, such as Edward Luttwak (2008) and Saul Cohen (2003), believed that too close relations with Warsaw did not meet Washington’s interests and would simply make the United States hostage to Poland’s “game against Russia,” their younger colleagues seem to take the Polish vector in the U.S. Eurasia policy more seriously. For example, the aforementioned George Friedman in one of his articles wrote that, although Polish elites linked the issue of their security primarily with a close military-political alliance with Washington, in the event of a hypothetical conflict between Moscow and Warsaw, the United States would find itself in a difficult position. An inevitable collapse of Poland in a head-to-head clash with Russia would be unacceptable to Washington, as it would lose a critical strategic bridgehead on the North European Plain. However, in terms of logistics and military tactics, the U.S. would require much time, during which it would not be able to assist Poland in its conflict with Russia. In this regard, Friedman believes that Poland needs to decide on a grand strategy for the first half of the 21st century, which must be “founded on the understanding that the United States is relying on the balance of power,” political, technological and economic assistance and “not the direct intervention of its own forces” to ensure the security of its allies in the region (Friedman, 2012). Other U.S. strategists, such as Robert Kaplan (Kaplan, 2013) and John Lenczowski (Lenczowski, 2013), emphasize the “energy factor” in the Polish-American partnership. In particular, Kaplan proposes considering the possibility for the U.S. to provide financial and technological assistance to Poland in developing its own shale gas reserves and building a liquefied natural gas terminal on the Baltic Sea, which probably should facilitate the

U.S. strategy of energy penetration into Europe. In any case, the views of American researchers on Poland and on the value of the Polish-American partnership are much more realistic than the Polish hopes for a “privileged partnership” with the United States.

Warsaw, which is under the spell of great simplification due to irrational fear of a German-Russian anti-Polish conspiracy, made a choice in favor of an unconditional alliance with the United States back in the early 1990s and has remained true to this choice. This foreign policy course, which might have had a rational kernel before the country joined NATO and the European Union, became absolutely destructive after Poland’s integration into these Euro-Atlantic organizations. The policy of unconditional Atlantic solidarity deprived Poland of room for foreign policy maneuver and convinced Berlin and Moscow that “the Poles are not negotiable.” Warsaw repeated, in a striking and disastrous way, the mistakes that Polish elites had repeatedly made from the late 18th century to the first half of the 20th century when, instead of building relations with Russia and Germany and reaching a regional accord, Poland chose to support external forces—France and the UK then and the United States now.

STORM SOWERS

If we assume that the risk of a big war in Europe has returned with the beginning of the Ukraine crisis of 2013-2014 and its consequences, then we should admit that Warsaw bears a considerable share of responsibility for this danger. It was Poland that, in cooperation with Sweden, initiated the Eastern Partnership program aimed at involving former Soviet republics in Brussels’ area of influence (Eastern Partnership, 2008). Researchers rarely ask why Poland needed this, confining themselves to general remarks about an anti-Russian slant of Warsaw’s policy in the post-Soviet space. At the same time, this foreign policy is based on a solid historical and ideological foundation which, in the author’s opinion, is an important facet of the Poland’s “strategic thanatos.”

The problem is that Poland and Russia are the only Slavic states to have preserved their own states, created original high European

culture and formulated their own messianic projects for the region. Even the partitions of the 18th century did not deprive Poland of its political and cultural elites (aristocracy, high clergy and intelligentsia) who had a global vision of the situation in Europe, the factor that distinguished Poland from other countries in the region. The present foreign policy ambitions of the Polish leadership should therefore be viewed in a broader historical and cultural context connected with the memory of Polish elites of their country’s centuries-long political and cultural domination in Eastern Europe, the messianic policy of the Jagiellonian and Vasa dynasties, and the history of interwar Poland which proposed its own integration project for Eastern Europe—Międzymorze (Intermarium) (Okulewicz, 2001).

Despite the past catastrophes, the Poles have not given up their “mission in the East” and still are under the influence of the Prometheism ideology formulated during the reign of Marshal Józef Piłsudski. This doctrine, which assigned to Poland the leading role in Eastern Europe, had a distinct anti-Russian slant—it was assumed that Russia could be weakened by supporting ethno-regional nationalism in it. Poland was supposed to act as a patron of peoples fighting against “ethnic oppression” by Soviet Russia. In the second half of the twentieth century, Prometheism was reinvented by Jerzy Giedroyc, an outstanding Polish émigré thinker who proposed a “New Eastern Policy” based on the idea that Poland should reject “imperial ambitions” (quite in the spirit of Piłsudski) and build equal relations with its neighbors, which would help it balance its interaction with Russia or even protect itself against it in the event of a threat. Giedroyc argued that Moscow’s control over Ukraine, Lithuania, and Belarus opened the way for it to establish its domination over Poland, whereas their independence from Russia and their state sovereignty would contribute to Poland’s independence, as well. He believed that Poland should become a “conductor” of the East to Europe and help the Ukrainians, Belarusians, and Lithuanians build their nation states. Influenced by the “New Eastern Policy,” many leaders in Poland today advocate a rethought Prometheism in relation to young eastern states. They have partially reanimated foreign policy concepts of the

1920s-1930s which provided for spreading Polish influence to the East with the main goal of countering Russian influence (Libera, 2010).

In addition, the Eastern Partnership project, if implemented, would have allowed Poland to get rid of its uncomfortable status of a “strategic frontier” in Europe, to the east of which lay the area under the prevailing influence of Russia which had not given up hope to reintegrate these territories in one way or another. The success of the Eastern Partnership would have made former Soviet republics, primarily the largest of them, Ukraine, a new “strategic frontier” of the EU, while Poland would have finally joined the European core and become responsible for the general guidance of this “frontier” and the implementation of the European agenda there. Polish analysts rightly pointed out in this connection that “what interests us most of all and what makes Poland a partner of America and major countries of the West is translated into our policy in the East” (*Polska polityka*, 2005). The Polish leadership reasonably hoped that the implementation of this scenario would be supported by the United States: the formation, under the aegis of Poland, of a new association in the East that would be oriented entirely towards European integration would also have helped increase American influence in Europe. From this point of view, Poland’s Eastern Policy can be viewed not only as competition with Russia or Warsaw’s desire to get rid of its frontier status, but also in a broader context of the United States’ rivalry with the German-French core of the European Union.

The “creative development” of the Giedroyc concept, which rejected the ideology of Prometheism, in fact turned into the modernization of political approaches of the past, which no longer included elements of direct territorial expansion but were nevertheless only a new version of the old doctrine, a kind of Prometheism 2.0. It is this post-imperial messianism and the anti-Russian strategic approach that cause Polish elites to support various integration projects involving post-Soviet countries (Eastern Dimension of the EU and the EU Eastern Partnership). In 2005 and 2014, Poland acted in Ukraine strictly in the logic of Prometheism 2.0. It is symbolic that in his comments on the present Ukraine crisis, even such a connoisseur of Russian culture as

Jerzy Pomianowski, wrote: “If we allow Ukraine to remain alone, thus leaving it at the mercy or disfavor of the huge neighbor, then due to natural circumstances this will be a resumption of the old geopolitical situation for Poland. And for Russia? It will be an impetus for it to conduct an imperial policy” (Pomianowski, Józefczuk, 2014).

The obsessive fear of losing sovereignty and the messianic aspirations towards the post-Soviet space provoke so vigorous actions by Poland in the field of security that they bring about opposite results: higher foreign policy risks for Warsaw, increased instability in the region, armed conflicts near its borders and an influx of refugees from Ukraine. Due to cultural and historical factors, Polish diplomacy remains hostage to the “strategic thanatos” which prompts Warsaw to pursue a policy that in the long run will reduce its security and increase international tensions around Poland. Meanwhile, Polish intellectuals usually overlook the fact that it was competition for the influence over peoples in a wide arc stretching from the Baltic to the northern part of the Black Sea region that in the past had more than once caused Russia to participate in anti-Polish actions. Although Russia, with rare exceptions, had no direct interest in Polish territories, it nevertheless could not put up with the Poles dominating the Russian-Polish border area.

ENFANT TERRIBLE OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

The figure of Donald Tusk, the prime minister of Poland in 2007-2014, at times inspired hope that Warsaw was gradually overcoming its historical fears and complexes. Being a conservative liberal, a Catholic believer and a consistent Euro-optimist, who fluently spoke German with Angela Merkel and Vladimir Putin, Tusk symbolized a soft renovation of the Polish political elite and its readiness to produce new leaders not obsessed with old Polish fears (Lykoshina, 2013). It was under Tusk’s premiership that studies of Russian-Polish relations began to place emphasis on “pragmatization,” “normalization” and “dialogue.” His government created promising political formats, such as regular triangular meetings of the foreign ministers of Russia, Germany, and Poland (called “Trialog” or “Troika”), and an extended humanitarian cooperation infrastructure began to be built.

In particular, Centers for Polish-Russian Dialogue and Understanding were opened in Warsaw and Moscow. Although at the beginning of Tusk's premiership his foreign minister Radosław Sikorski proposed the Eastern Partnership project, Polish diplomats began to favor the Western vector. Both Moscow and Brussels at that time increasingly viewed Warsaw as a difficult yet responsible and reasonable member of the European Union. The election of Tusk as President of the European Council in the summer of 2014 was a symbol that Poland was admitted to "old Europe" not only legally but also culturally.

Tusk and his Civic Platform party looked particularly encouraging for Europeans against the background of their political antagonist, the national-conservative Law and Justice party led by the Kaczyński twins, Lech and Jarosław. Lech Kaczyński was president of Poland in 2005-2010. Beginning with the parliamentary/presidential election cycle of 2007-2010, the rivalry between the pro-European Civic Platform and the Kaczyńskis' Euroskeptic party was the central axis of Polish politics, with the liberals invariably ending up as the winner. Things changed in the 2015 elections when Andrzej Duda, a young protégé of Lech Kaczyński, was elected president. A few months later, the Euroskeptics again won a convincing victory in parliamentary elections and formed a single-party government.

However, "Euroskepticism" does not adequately define the ideology of the ruling party in Poland. Supporters of Jarosław Kaczyński share what could be rightly called consistent and systemic anti-liberalism: they hold nationalist and clerical views, are skeptical about minorities' rights, consider European liberals, social democrats and communists enemies of Christian Europe, are fiercely opposed to the influx of Muslim refugees, and, of course, many of them are outspoken xenophobes, sexists and supporters of various conspiracy theories. Law and Justice, which came to power in 2015, was a precursor of the rightwing populist shift which began in the Western world with Brexit and Donald Trump's victory in 2016. Naturally, it had happened before that governments in one or another EU country were formed by political parties whose views were unacceptable from the point of view of the "Brussels consensus," and Polish national conservatives,

too, already controlled the presidency and the Sejm in 2005-2007, which caused many problems for their EU partners due to their consistent Germanophobia and Russophobia. However, those were only episodes, and such governments usually did not last long.

The present situation is basically different, though. Firstly, rightwing populists are strengthening their positions throughout Europe. Secondly, Polish national clericals seem to have a real chance to retain power after the 2019 parliamentary elections due to a high level of public support for the government’s social and economic policies and, probably, some of its measures (to reform the judicial system and state-run media) intended to broaden the powers of the executive branch and its influence on society. Brussels views the Polish reforms as an authoritarian attack on the independence of courts and the freedom of information. After Warsaw ignored all EU calls to give up the reforms, the European Commission filed a lawsuit in the European Court of Justice, accusing Warsaw of violating basic norms of European law (European Commission, 2018). In a worst-case scenario for Poland, it may be stripped of its voting rights in the EU Council of Ministers. What will Polish national populists do in this situation?

A rational logic would require that the incumbent government make concessions to Brussels which demands a return to the status quo, that is, the abandonment of the controversial reforms. However, rational thinking is not a strong point of the Polish political class in general and its ruling national-clerical wing in particular. There is reason to believe that this time, too, Poland’s “strategic thanatos” will prevail and Warsaw will escalate its conflict with Brussels, hoping for American support and an alliance with rightwing populists in other EU countries. In particular, Poland may pin hopes on Stephen Bannon, one of the leaders of American alt-rights who recently founded The Movement, a community of extreme rightwing parties in Europe. Duda’s recent visit to Washington and his proposal to host a large U.S. military base in Poland, already christened “Fort Trump,” should also be viewed in the context of Warsaw’s search for rapprochement with the United States amid the deepening conflict with the European Commission.

The European Union could partly put up with the Fronde of Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, for many years accused by Brussels of authoritarian tendencies. Hungary does not pose a threat to the EU's unity due to its economic, demographic and military-strategic scale. Besides, one non-dangerous “rebel without a cause” created a semblance of pluralism and, at the same time, was an object-lesson showing Eastern Europeans how they should not behave. Poland is a country of a different scale and its elites, who have strategic thinking of their own, can reasonably claim the role of leader consolidating “alternative Europe,” which rejects EU principles, around themselves. Warsaw's hopes that the U.S. will support this “alternative Europe” pose special danger to Brussels. As the Atlantic rift widens and French President Emmanuel Macron keeps calling ever so louder to build a new security architecture on the continent together with Russia, the creation of a bastion of American military-strategic and political presence in Eastern Europe would be absolutely unacceptable to the EU.

Therefore, it is not surprising that the European Commission reacted quite strongly to the Polish government's moves. However, European sanctions may not be limited only to stripping Warsaw of its voting right or multi-billion-euro fines. The Polish economy is very closely linked with and depends on the European, primarily German, economy and there are many people in the Polish ruling class, including opposition leaders, who would gladly use European resources in their domestic political struggle. There are also other, more subtle ways to exert pressure on inconvenient governments, which is easy to do given that the information picture in Europe is shaped not by “alternative media” but by “liberal media” that despise the Law and Justice ideology. In short, a Warsaw-Brussels conflict, should it break out in full force, which cannot be ruled out considering the aforementioned historical and cultural prerequisites, can hardly end well for Polish national populists: the mills of Brussels grind slowly but surely.

It is also important that Polish society and the Polish political class are still divided into romantic nationalists and pro-European conformists, as evidenced by recent municipal elections. Former Prime Minister Tusk, who may run for president in 2019, has warned his compatriots:

if Law and Justice remains in power, the country may exit the EU. This threat can still frighten voters because the overwhelming majority of Poles, despite their support for the national-clerical government, still uphold Poland’s EU membership. Therefore Polish liberals view EU membership as a guarantee of their country’s well-being and security, with cooperation with the United States conducted within frameworks that would not annoy Brussels. But what will Poland do if the liberals’ devotion to the EU fails to bring the desired result? In fact, the EU may fail to overcome the crisis, or its solution may imply excluding Poland from the Union, or a “two-speed Europe” may be created, or some other scenario may take place in which the European Union may be basically reformatted.

Apart from attempts to build a still closer bilateral alliance with the United States, there are other strategic options that Warsaw may use. For example, it may revitalize the Trójmorze (Three Seas) Initiative which provides for creating a bloc of Visegrad Group members (Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, and Slovakia), the Baltic states, Austria, Croatia, Bulgaria, Romania and, in the longer term, Ukraine and Moldova. This scenario is closely related to the long-standing Via Carpathia initiative, which involves building a transnational highway network connecting the Baltic coast (Klaipeda) with the Mediterranean Sea (Thessaloniki). The Three Seas initiative’s September 2018 summit in Bucharest even announced the establishment of a special infrastructure fund, while the initiative itself has been supported by the U.S. and personally by President Donald Trump, who visited the organization’s Warsaw summit in the summer of 2017.

At the same time, attempts to build a “Central European bloc” of its own, which Warsaw may make if the EU crisis intensifies, would hardly bring positive results, as there are too many factors that will work against such an initiative. Firstly, there are many differences among countries of the region, which are now smoothed out by a powerful supranational project (EU). Secondly, it is not clear what economic base may underlie such an alliance: the purpose of hypothetical North-South transport corridors is unclear, while the objectives of the existing East-West corridors and their development

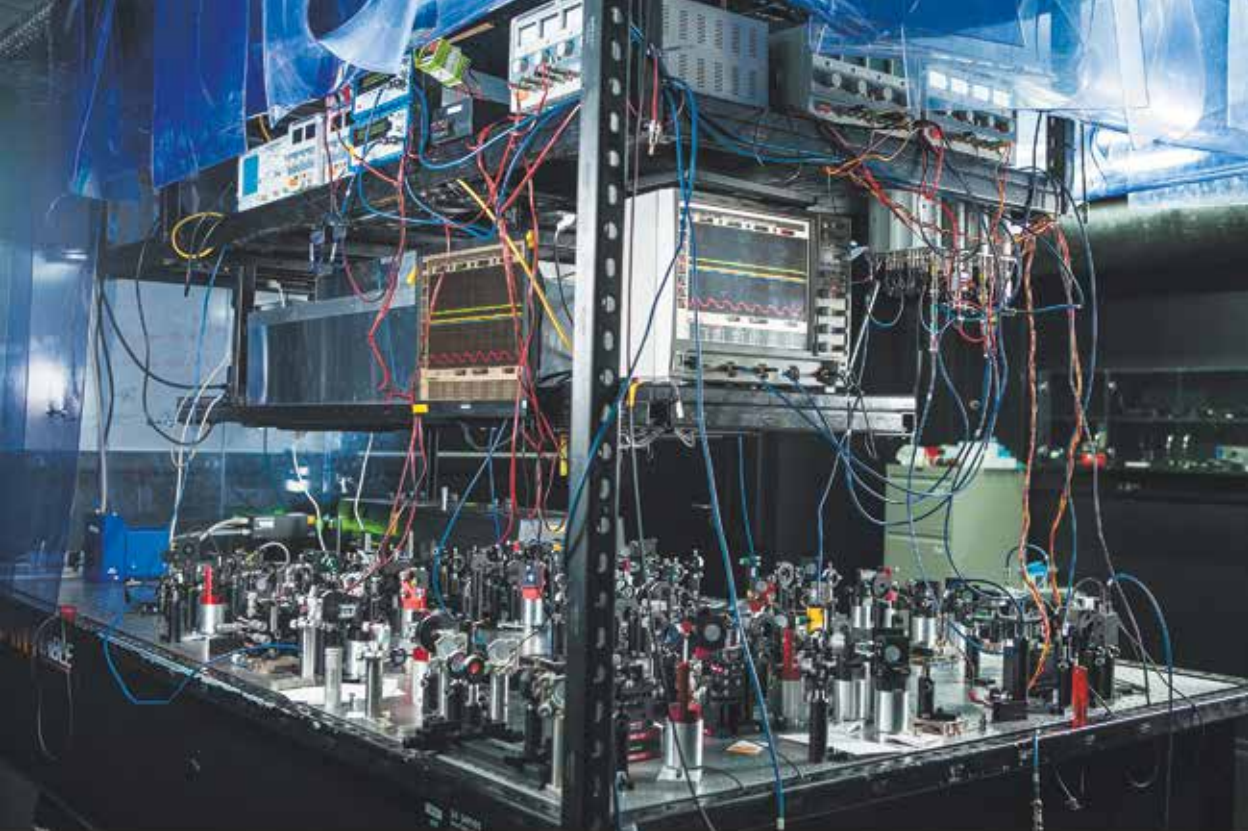
prospects are, on the contrary, quite clear. Thirdly, powerful neighbors such as the “Western core” of the EU, which would become even more consolidated in the event of the European Union’s transformation, and Russia would hardly allow the formation of an independent bloc such as the Three Seas.

If the “Eastern wing” of the European home starts separating from the main building, Poland may try to create a bloc of its own, probably with U.S. support. These attempts, however, will hardly succeed; it is more likely that, under such a scenario, the region will simply return to the situation of the 1920s-1930s when the region was not engaged in cooperation but experienced fierce rivalry among a dozen small and medium-sized states headed by nationalist and authoritarian governments. Thus, Warsaw’s present anti-Brussels gamble may in the long run lead to even greater instability and new risks for the country and the whole region—the “strategic thanatos” continues to hold sway over Poland.

* * *

Polish elites persist in repeating their historical mistakes. There has again emerged an area of instability and armed conflict (Ukraine) on Poland’s borders. Its relations with neighbors that are vital for its national security and economic development (Russia, Germany, and the European Union as a whole) are ruined again. Warsaw again pins its hopes on a faraway and partly imaginary ally (the United States) which is interested in Poland and the rest of Eastern Europe only in the context of their relations with the EU and Russia. This scenario has repeatedly occurred in the past, in various versions, and each time its outcome was highly undesirable for Poland. Unfortunately, there are risks that this time, too, “strategic thanatos” will prevail and Poland will enter a hopeless and senseless conflict that does not bode well for it without any trump cards in hand.

In this case, Russia should show reasonable restraint and oppose Poland’s irrationality with healthy pragmatism and sober calculation. The Kremlin has a potentially strong partner in this growing crisis—Brussels, like Moscow, is not interested in a broader U.S. military and



Quantum technologies are built on the knowledge how to control individual particles. It is as if we got rid of restraining work gloves to handle the subtlest properties of substance. This ensures ultimate accuracy in measurements, provides us with miniaturized instruments, makes data transmission better protected, and increases computational efficiency. Quantum technologies offer an opportunity to overcome the constraints on global progress.



political presence in Eastern Europe. The deployment of American medium- and short-range missiles in Poland would be a nightmare for Russia and EU leaders. This possibility cannot be ruled out, considering the United States' likely withdrawal from the INF Treaty and the desire of the Polish right to consolidate their strategic alliance with Washington. In addition, Poland's example shows how wrong experts are by recommending the Russian authorities to support European national populists and count on partnership with them. The Polish right ardently support "traditional values" and damn "Brussels liberals," which, however, does not encourage them to begin a dialogue with Russia. On the contrary, European nationalists seem to prefer Trump, who wants to see Russia isolated and Europe divided, as their protector. Meanwhile, there have been signs in recent months that Moscow may resume dialogue not with "alternative" but real Europe, with those forces in the EU that seek consolidation of the continent and that want to put an end to the Old World's military-political dependence on the United States. Poland would make probably the biggest mistake in its postwar history if it tries, relying on hypothetical American support, to stand in the way of these growing processes.

References

- Amnesty International, 2006. [online]. Available at: <<http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/POL30/003/2006/en.>> [Accessed 31 October 2018].
- Baudrillard, J., 1976. *L'Échange symbolique et la mort* [Symbolic exchange and death]. Paris: Gallimard.
- Cohen, S., 2003. *Geopolitics of the world system*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.
- Davies, N., 2001. *Heart of Europe. The past in Poland's present*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Domańska, E., 2000. [Re]creative myths and constructed history. (The case of Poland). In: Stråth, Bo., ed. *Myth and memory in the construction of community. Historical patterns in Europe and beyond*. Brussels: P.I.E./Peter Lang, pp. 249-262.

Eastern Partnership, 2008. Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council. Brussels. [online] Available at: <http://eeas.europa.eu/eastern/docs/com08_823_en.pdf> [Accessed 30 October 2018].

European Commission, 2018. Rule of Law: European Commission refers Poland to the European Court of Justice to protect the independence of the Polish Supreme Court. *Press release*. [Online] Available at: <http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-18-5830_en.htm?locale=en> [Accessed 30 October 2018].

Friedman, G., 2010. *The next 100 years: a forecast for the 21st century*. London: Allison and Busbey.

Friedman, G., 2012. Poland’s strategy. *Stratfor Worldview*. [online]. Available at: <<https://www.stratfor.com/weekly/polands-strategy>> [Accessed 30 October 2018].

Friszke, A., 2008. Co ma państwo do historii [What is the state’s interest in history]. *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 14 June.

Gryz, J., 2009. *Rosyjska polityka energetyczna: Implikacje dla bezpieczeństwa Polski* [Russian energy policy: implications for the security of Poland]. AON.

Ideinaya deklaratsiia KNP, 1981. *Polsha 1980: “Solidarnosti” god pervyĭ* [Poland 1980: “Solidarity” the first year]. London: Overseas publications interchange Ltd.

Kaplan, R., 2013. Europe’s new map. *The American Interest*, 8(5), May/June.

Krauthammer, C., 1991. The Unipolar moment. *Foreign Affairs*, 70(1), pp. 23-33.

Lenczowski, J., 2013. Poland on the geopolitical map. *Sarmatian Review*, 33(1), pp. 1730-1733.

Libera, P., 2010. Polski prometeizm. Jak ewoluował i jak z nim walczono? [Polish prometeism. How did it evolve and how was it fought?], *Pressje*, Vol. 22/23.

Luttwak, E., 2008. Georgia conflict: Moscow has blown away soft power. *The Telegraph*, 16 August. [online]. Available at: <<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/georgia/2571274/Georgia-conflict-Moscow-has-blown-away-soft-power.html>> [Accessed 30 October 2018]

Lykoshina, L., 2013. *Donald Tusk: politicheskij portret* [Donald Tusk: political portrait]. Moscow: INION RAN.

Okulewicz, P., 2001. *Koncepcja «Międzymorza» w myśli i praktyce politycznej obozu Józefa Piłsudskiego w latach 1918–1926* [The concept of «Międzymorze» in the political thought and practice of Józef Piłsudski's camp 1918–1926]. Poznań: Wydawnictwo Poznańskie.

Polska polityka, 2005. *Polska polityka wschodnia: Materiały konferencji zorganizowanej w dniach 28–29 października 2005 roku we Wrocławiu* [Polish Eastern policy: Materials of the conference held on 28–29 October 2005 in Wrocław]. Wrocław: Kolegium Europy Wschodniej.

Redlich, J., 2003. Polsha v novoy roli. Yevropejskaya politicheskaya dinamika [Poland's new role. European political dynamics]. *Address on Radio Svoboda. Broadcast by Kolomiichenko E.* Available at: <<http://archive.svoboda.org/programs/ce/2003/ce.050503.asp>> [Accessed 30 October 2018].

Pomyanovskij, E. and Yuzefchuk, G., 2014. Ot Lyublina do Ukrainy nedaleko [It's not far from Lublin to Ukraine]. *Novaya Pol'sha*, No. 4.

Rotfeld, A., 2010. Nadal boimy się Rosji [We are still afraid of Russia]. *Polska Times*. [online]. Available at: <<https://polskatimes.pl/adam-rotfeld-nadal-boimy-sie-rosji/ar/334226>> [Accessed 30 October 2018].

Stegny, P., 2002. *Razdely Polshi i diplomatiya Ekateriny II. 1772. 1793. 1795* [Partitions of Poland and the diplomacy of Catherine II. 1772. 1793. 1795]. Moscow: Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniya.

Sus, M., 2014. Kultura polityczna w Polsce i w Niemczech [Political culture in Poland and Germany]. *Interakcje* [online]. Available at: <<http://www.polska-niemcy-interakcje.pl/articles/show/42>> [Accessed 30 October 2018].

Vasiliev, A., 2012. “Padenie Pol'shi” i modeli memorializacji travmy [“The fall of Poland” and trauma memorialization models]. In: Repina, L., ed. *Krizisy perelomnyh epoh v istoricheskoī pamiaty* [Landmark epoch crises in historical memory]. Moscow: IRI RAN, pp. 215–248.

Wyligąła, H., 2010. *Trójkąt Weimarski. Współpraca Polski, Francji i Niemiec w latach 1991–2004* [Weimar Triangle. Cooperation between Poland, France and Germany in the years 1991–2004]. Toruń: Wyd. Adam Marszałek.

Yost, D., 1998. *NATO transformed: the Alliance's new roles in international security*. Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace.