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The day Berlin started to speak Polish

Poland rejoiced at Germany's new foreign policy towards Russia. Does this herald a German-Polish security tandem in Europe?

After the fall of the Iron Curtain in 1989, political disputes resurfaced in Poland. Evaluating the history of the People's Republic of Poland, women's rights, the relationship between the state and the church, the shape of the economic reforms aroused enormous social emotions. The division between left and right sharpened on each of these points.

However, there was a consensus on one question. It was the choice of future political and military alliances in which Poland was to find itself after breaking out of the Soviet sphere of influence. The direction was clear: the West. When to join it? As soon as possible!

The first governments of the Third Republic of Poland rightly perceived the weakness of Boris Yeltsin's Russia and that this was a unique chance to 'leap into the kingdom of freedom.' The vast majority of countries in the region took advantage of this historic opportunity, as evidenced by every single Warsaw Pact country joining NATO. Unfortunately, Ukraine did not take advantage of this opportunity, indirectly resulting Russian aggression in 2014 and 2022.

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Unlike Germany, Poland had no illusions about Russia for the past thirty years. 'Change through rapprochement and trade,' which is the essence of Germany's so-called 'Ostpolitik', not only proved ineffective but was also cynically exploited by the Putin regime. When, during the Russian aggression against Georgia in 2008, Polish President Lech Kaczyński said 'we know very well that today Georgia, tomorrow Ukraine, the day after tomorrow the Baltic states, and later it may be time for my country, for Poland', the West, including Berlin, did not listen to his warnings – to Europe's loss.

Poland's perception of Germany's eastern policy

Therefore, Poland welcomes the current change in Germany not only with joy – underpinned by the conviction that it is right in its assessment of Putin's Russia – but also with innate pragmatism. Poland's membership in NATO and the European Union are essential multipliers of its security, a panacea for the trauma of losing independence and World War II, which left its mark on three generations of Poles.

For years, a pacifist and 'Russia-sensitive' Germany was perceived by most Polish political elites as an insecure and unstable state that certainly cannot be counted on in case of an impending threat from the East. On top of that, the Nord Stream I and II project was contrary to Polish and Central European interests and will forever be associated with the short-sightedness of Angela Merkel's eastern policy.

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In Warsaw, questions arise as to how long the change initiated by German Chancellor Olaf Scholz will last and how long Berlin will continue to speak 'Polish' when it comes to the threat to the free world posed by Russia's aggressive actions. Politicians of the left, centre, and ruling right wonder how long Germany will persevere on its new 'realistic' path.

The withdrawal from Russian gas supplies and the sanctions imposed on Russia will prove costly. The question is whether Germany is willing to pay the price? In any case, a lack of consistency will have decisive consequences both for the image of Germany itself and for the entire project of the European Union.

A new security tandem in Europe?

Besides, it is also unclear how Poland's ruling Law and Justice party (PiS) will react in the long run. On the one hand, Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki is celebrating after Scholz's recent speech in the Bundestag because, as he claims, his visit to Berlin the day before effectively 'shook the conscience of Germany.'

Because of its geopolitical location and size, Poland may also see the German

On the other hand, in January this year, PiS party leader Jarosław Kaczyński said in the pages of the weekly *Sieci*: 'The term "Fourth Reich" is [...] legitimate. The Germans openly proclaim

army's increased capacity as an opportunity to expand the Polish army.

that they are the ones to decide [...] They are demanding official recognition of German domination. And the new German coalition can, in a way, be thankful for the fact that it has made the matter clear, declaring the construction of a European federal state under its leadership, of course.' Therefore, it may turn out that just as Germany has revised its stance towards Russia, the Polish national right will have to stop seeing Germany as a threat. It may turn out that even PiS voters will see a chance to increase their security in a closer cooperation between Warsaw and Berlin.

Despite many political uncertainties, the joint political activity of Warsaw and Berlin in defence of Ukraine's independence and sovereignty may lay the foundations for a new security tandem in Europe. This duo may understand that there are no free rides and that the United States will not always come to the rescue. Because of its geopolitical location and size, Poland may also see the German army's increased capacity as an opportunity to expand the Polish army. For years, there was no will to increase the number of its soldiers and to locate an effective missile and air defence system in Poland and the Baltic states.

It is high time for the West – also thanks to Germany – to understand that Poland's actions are not guided by historical phobias, but by the Kremlin's very real threat – which may again look us in the eye.



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