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## **ANALYSIS AND TENDENCIES OF THE POLISH-BELARUSSIAN RELATIONS AT THE BEGINNING OF THE XXI CENTURY**

### **Summary**

In this article, we give analysis on the relations of Poland and Belarus after Poland's entrance into NATO. The analysis is conducted in the light of the general external policy of the EU and NATO in respect to the CIS; the relations of Poland and Belarus in this context are of great interest because the border of Poland and Belarus became the line of contact of NATO and the CIS in 1999. On the basis of the relations of Poland and Belarus we have tried to discover mutual interests of these countries in each other and based on it to model a scenario of further development of the relations of Poland and Belarus in the regional and global context.

**Key words:** Poland, Belarus, NATO, EU, Eastern partnership.

**Problem formulation.** Study of the Polish-Belarusian relations on the latest stage of history, important for Ukraine to determine the interests and goals of Poland in the Eastern direction, after the integration into NATO and the EU.

In addition, the experience of building the Polish foreign policy in the post-Soviet integration process into NATO and the EU could be useful Ukraine on the basis of its foreign policy vector.

Also, it should be noted that after Poland's accession to NATO in 1999, the Polish border was the line of contact between NATO and the CIS, and this position is interesting study of Polish foreign policy as a conductor policy of NATO and the EU

to Eastern Europe, in particular - in the country to the beginning of the century, it was part of the CIS.

Polish-Belarusian relations are also relevant for Ukraine, since both countries are close neighbors of our country and the study of their bilateral relations - points of contact and cooperation, and points of tension and potential conflict between Poland and Belarus, it is important from the point of view of the concept of security of Ukraine and the development of the strategy of bilateral relations with both Poland and Belarus.

**Analysis of recent research and publications.** The topic of Polish-Belarusian relations in the XXI century in the Ukrainian bibliographies studied even less than the theme of relations between Poland and Belarus in 1990. This is partly explained by freezing relations and their transition and predictably intense phase, whereas in the early 1990s, it was possible to assume different scenarios of development of bilateral relations between Poland and Belarus.

Among the works of Ukrainian scientists should be made of Article Lviv researcher Oleg Borynyaka in which the scientist describes in detail and analyzes the period of the Polish-Ukrainian relations in the 90s and their development in the early 2000 [12]. In addition, when writing the article were involved in the archives of various news agencies [7,8]

We should also highlight the analytical materials of the Polish journalist - a specialist in Eastern Europe Jacob Loginov, who analyzed in detail the energy aspect of Polish-Belarusian relations in the mid-2000 [9].

**The purpose of the article.** The study is a thorough study of the history of Polish-Belarusian relations in the beginning of the XXI century on the basis of which the author, after analyzing this topic, trying to formulate a mutual interest of each other, based on which, you can simulate the scenario of further development of bilateral relations between Poland and Belarus - the nearest neighbors Ukraine.

**Statement of the basic material.** Since the beginning of the XXI century, after Poland's accession to NATO and the signing of the Belarus-Russia treaty establishing the Union State, the Polish-Belarusian relations went into "frozen" phase. Belarus

failed to develop a strategy of constructive relations with Poland in an environment where Poland is a NATO member. Poland is focused on internal reforms and the upcoming accession to the EU.

Nevertheless, in 2002 it was created the first and only purely Polish-Belarusian Euroregion - "Bialowieza Forest". The aim of the Euroregion is the development of regional relations, as well as work to preserve the environment, in particular the unique forests in the region. [4]

Over time, high-level political attempts to restore dialogue. So, in 2003 in St. Petersburg was the second official meeting of Alexander Lukashenko and Alexander Kwasniewski (the first was held in 1996 in the Bialowieza Forest). This meeting was the impetus for intensification of bilateral dialogue. In 2003-2005. held meetings and negotiations of prime ministers, secretaries of security councils, deputy prime ministers, foreign ministers, economy ministers, the heads of supervisory agencies, other public leaders of Belarus and Poland. [3]

Meanwhile, in 2004 in connection with Poland's accession to the EU between Poland and Belarus was established visa regime.

However, intensification of bilateral relations was not to continue. The stumbling block was the situation with the Union of Poles in Belarus. In the election of the chairman of the Union in March 2005, won social activist Anzhelika Borys. However, the former chairman Tadeusz Kryuchkovsky submitted an application to the Ministry of Justice of Belarus to recognize the election illegitimate, complaining of violations of the election procedure. The Ministry of Justice has satisfied his claim, however, the new leadership of the Union refused to hold a second congress. Poland said the Belarusian government to intervene in the affairs of an independent public organization. In the Soviet Union there was a split. Supporters held Kryuchkovsky Congress which announced the exclusion of Angelika Borys and her colleagues from the Union of Poles in Belarus and elected new Chairman Joseph Bowman. This decision recognized the Belarusian authorities, however, did not recognize Poland, chairman of the Union continues to believe Anzhelika Borys. Since then, in fact, there

are two Belarusian Union of Poles - recognized by the Warsaw and Minsk recognized. [4]

As a result of this conflict, May 2005, Belarus expelled the First Deputy Ambassador of Poland. Poland said the expulsion of a diplomat from Belarus and banned entry to Poland Minister of Justice of Belarus.

Then there was a few more big diplomatic scandals. The Belarusian authorities have not given permission to span over the country of the Polish plane with top-level delegation, which was sent to Smolensk on the fifth anniversary of the opening of the Katyn memorial. The plane flew through Ukraine and Belarus authorities then stated that in fact permission was granted, and that it was a provocation on the part of the Poles. In response, Poland recalled its ambassador from Minsk. About a year in Belarus there was the Polish ambassador. Although the new ambassador - Henryk Litwin was appointed in February 2006, credentials to he could give only one and a half years - in December 2007 [7]

In general, the 2005 and 2006 can be called the most difficult period in the relations between Poland and Belarus. Indirect cause of tension coil can be called "orange revolution" that occurred in Ukraine in late 2004 and brought to power a pro-European President Viktor Yushchenko. It was after the events in Ukraine, the Belarusian authorities have stepped up the fight against foreign non-governmental organizations within the country and abroad, primarily Polish diplomats openly accusing them of spying.

Thus, in the same 2005 Belarusian authorities decided to ban the activities on the territory of Belarus, the European Foundation "Dialog", which has been registered in Poland. At the same time, the official Minsk has accused Poland of espionage with the aim to destabilize the situation inside Belarus. Poland initiated in response to the expulsion of another representative of the Belarusian Embassy in Poland [8].

Recession tensions gradually began to attack immediately after the presidential elections in Belarus in spring 2006. Then Ambassador Pavel Latushko submitted to the Polish Foreign Ministry a package of proposals for the implementation of several small

collaborative projects such as the improvement of infrastructure of border crossing points, cultural cooperation [9].

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This gesture was the beginning of a gradual warming of relations at the diplomatic level, although at the highest political level, relations have remained frozen. A powerful reason for the resumption of active dialogue, was the intensification of the construction of the pipeline "Nord Stream" in 2007 - a direct gas pipeline from Russia to Germany via the Baltic Sea bottom. This project is clearly contrary to the national interest as Poland and Belarus. Therefore, to resume dialogue on the possibility of building a second branch of the Yamal gas pipeline, which serves Polish and Belarusian side as a cheap and cost-effective alternative for all parties, "Nord Stream". [9] Although the second branch of the Yamal gas pipeline was never built, and the "Nord Stream" by contrast, was a few years running, this situation has given a powerful impetus to unfreeze the Polish-Belarusian relations, and most importantly - made clear that in the case of joint foreign trade problems both countries are ready in some way to unite and develop a common position. The situation with "Nord Stream" has shown that Poland can and must defend its national interests often contrary to the countries of "old Europe", and Belarus can and should defend their national interests against the interests of Russia, especially since the year 2007 is already evident was the failure of the project of the Union State and a deep stagnation of the CIS.

After that, there was a significant intensification of Polish-Belarusian relations in the energy sector. So, in 2009, the Ambassador of Belarus to Poland Viktor Gaisenok said that Poland and Belarus is interested in the connection of gas networks for energy security. According to the diplomat, the connection of networks would change the direction of flow of gas, and in the case of an accident or other emergency situation gas from Belarus would be able to come to Poland and vice versa. [10]

In addition, in late 2008, at the First Belarusian Investment Forum in London, a contract was signed between the Ministry of Energy of Belarus and the Polish company «Kulczyk Investments», owned by the Polish entrepreneur and one of the richest Poles Jan Kulczyk. It was an investment project to build a large power plant in Belarus. Two years later, the project was designed as a thermal power plant in the town

of Zelva in Grodno region. [10] However, at a certain stage the negotiations have reached an impasse, as the parties were unable to reach a common decision on the distribution of electricity produced at the power plant in Zelva. According to other information, the failure of the agreement took place because of the conflict of interests of Belarusian and Russian energy ministries, as well as the Russian side was interested in the construction of the power plant on its own terms. [11] In any case, the project is now frozen.

However, energy cooperation is one of the most promising potential of the Polish-Belarusian cooperation. And it is with joint work in the energy sector of the Polish-Belarusian relations can reach a new level, because it is this area for the first time after a busy period 2005-2006, the Belarusian leadership has made it clear that much more effective and promising to see in Poland is not a threat to national security, potential ally and partner. And further development of Polish-Belarusian relations, in our opinion, will be directly dependent on the pressure of the Russian side to the energy security of Belarus. The stronger the pressure - is more active cooperation with Poland, the more projects will be launched. And that's energy sector at this stage sees the key to the first step in a potential union of Poland and Belarus.

Since 2008, Poland has started to give citizens of the former Soviet Union, the so-called "card of the Pole" - a document which gives the right to free multiple entry visa to Poland and gives in its territory the right to equating the owner of the document to a citizen of Poland (legally work without a work permit, to do business on a par with Polish citizens, get an education on the same conditions as nationals of Poland, etc.). The owner of the "Polish Card" is open to any citizen of the former Soviet Union, who has Polish roots, and recognize that they belong to the Polish people.

The initiative is intended, above all, to Ukraine and Belarus. Thus, as of 2012 from 100 thousand issued by "Polish Card" 46 thousand have been issued to citizens of Ukraine, 42 thousand - citizens of Belarus, 5000 - the citizens of Lithuania and only 2.7 thousand - citizens of Russia. [13] In addition, 89% of "Polish Card" issued in 2013 accounted for the citizens of Ukraine and Belarus. [14]

In 2009, Belarus was incorporated into Poland and Sweden initiated a project of the European Union "Eastern Partnership", designed to deepen relations between the European Union and some countries of the former Soviet Union.

"Eastern Partnership" was intended to be a platform for multi-level dialogue and the significant strengthening of relations between the countries. The Belarusian leadership initially seen in the "Eastern Partnership" economic outlook, as well as the possibility of normalizing relations with western partners and balancing the foreign policy of Belarus [15].

However, the dialogue in the framework of "Eastern Partnership" is carried out not only at the level of government, but also at the level of civil society. For example, more than once in the meetings of the different platforms representatives of Belarusian non-governmental organizations, as well as representatives of the opposition.

At the same time, if the European side a lot of attention is paid to the development of democracy and protection of human rights, the official Minsk has been configured for specific projects, in what appears a serious activity. So, it has been proposed and implemented projects auto corridor Klaipeda-Vilnius-Minsk-Kyiv, celebrating the 600th anniversary of the Battle of Grunwald et al [16].

It can be stated that at the initial stage of its existence, the project "Eastern Partnership" for Belarus has fulfilled an important function - he led her out of international isolation, he has given a platform to renew and strengthen the ongoing dialogue especially with its immediate neighbors - Poland, Lithuania, Ukraine.

However, conflicts remain unresolved, and sometimes worsening. So, in 2009, Poland imposed sanctions a group of Belarusian officials, accusing them of persecuting recognized Warsaw Union of Poles in Belarus.

In 2010, on the eve of the next presidential elections in Belarus again broke diplomatic scandal around the Union of Poles in Belarus. This time he was associated with the ownership of the Polish House in the village Ivianiec Minsk region. Arriving at the place of conflict representatives of the Polish Embassy called the Belarusian side

charges of interfering in the internal affairs of Belarus and led to the withdrawal of the Polish ambassador to Warsaw [17].

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The course of the presidential elections in Belarus in 2010, the arrests of opposition figures and the dispersal of mass meeting even more aggravated the relations of Belarus with Western partners, prompting harsh criticism of the Belarusian regime.

At the beginning of 2011 Poland, speaking out against the persecution of Belarusian opposition and reprisals against protesting citizens, forbidden to enter the territory of Poland Alexander Lukashenko and some Belarusian officials. The Belarusian authorities are also accused of organizing protests 19 December 2010 Polish and German intelligence agencies.

However, Belarus continued to actively use the initiative "Eastern Partnership" as a platform for dialogue and initiation of various projects, although it has gone a little shadow on the background of making steps towards European integration - Moldova and Ukraine.

The impetus for the next activation of relations between Belarus and the EU in general and Poland in particular, were the events in Ukraine in 2013-2014. Belarus, as well as Poland did not recognize the annexation of the Crimea, and Russia is trying to act in a situation of war in eastern Ukraine as a peacemaker, offering its territory as a place of negotiation. At the same time over the last year ceased diplomatic scandals with Poland and vice versa, can be observed intensification of the dialogue between Belarus and Europe. Thus, in February 2015 in Minsk visited several EU officials and the "Eastern Partnership" to meet with the Belarusian authorities and the Belarusian President said he expects at the beginning of a kind of dialogue between Minsk and Brussels, and that now the relations between Belarus and the EU is not as obscure as the before. [18]

Thus, analyzing the relations between Poland and Belarus in the period from 1999 to 2015, it can reveal some interesting trends. Coil tension in bilateral relations always takes place before the presidential elections in Belarus - it was 1999, when it was still aggravated by Poland's accession to NATO, which the Belarusian government



considered a threat to its national security. And at the time of elections in Belarus in the autumn of 2001, relations between neighbors were actually frozen. So it was in 2005, when a year before the presidential election broke the biggest diplomatic row between Poland and Belarus, the Union of Poles in Belarus at the time of the elections in 2006, in Belarus, in fact not even the ambassador of Poland worked since he could not have presented his credentials. It was the same in 2010, the year when the pre-election scandal erupted again with the Union of Poles in Belarus. However, in 2015, the continuation of this trend is not observed, which suggests that Belarus is watching the developments in Ukraine, and now sees a threat not only to the West as in the East. Moreover, such a situation can contribute to efforts by authoritarian tendencies in Belarus, in connection with which the Belarusian authorities do not feel the danger before the election.

In addition, seriously affect bilateral relations between Poland and Belarus external factors. If the influence of Brussels and the EU common foreign policy to the actions of Poland consistently and predictably, the actions of the Belarusian vary depending on the relations between Belarus and Russia. Thus, in the early 2000s, when there were hopes for the project of the Union State, the relations with Poland and the West in general remained frozen, but in 2007, when it was obvious failure of the project of the Union State and the stagnation of the CIS, and most importantly - after the launch of Russia unprofitable Belarus "Nord Stream", Belarus immediately began looking for options for alternative energy projects, in particular with Poland. Further, an agreement was signed on the establishment of the Customs Union and, almost simultaneously - "Eastern Partnership". At this stage of Belarus conducted a multi-vector policy, but the priority is still given to the eastern direction that the Belarusian leadership is perceived as more reliable and specific. However, with the outbreak of war in Ukraine, the rhetoric of the Belarusian leadership has become much tougher, both in relation to the customs union as a whole, and in particular the Eastern partners, and we are seeing a warming of relations with the EU.

It is possible to observe a consistent trend in Poland work with the Belarusian population regardless of the relations with the official Minsk. Thus, in Belarus there

are several large Polish institutions such as the Union of Poles in Belarus, the Polish Institute in Minsk and others. It is also significant that in 2005 Poland has not remained aloof from the conflict with the Union of Poles in Belarus, and despite the evident deterioration of relations with the Belarusian authorities to settle and is now supporting the Union of Poles in Belarus with the leadership is not imposed by the Belarusian authorities. In addition, in this regard, the example of the introduction of "Card of the Pole," which, though applies to all post-Soviet countries, but mainly issued to citizens of Ukraine and Belarus - the nearest and largest neighbor Poland. The inclusion of Belarus in the initiative "Eastern Partnership" as significant, as Belarus is the most authoritarian state of all that are included in the initiative. However, the "Eastern Partnership" is used as a platform for dialogue not only with the authorities but also with civil society in Belarus.

Thus, we can observe a consistent interest of Poland to the development of relations with Belarus and if there is no possibility of such a development with the official authorities, then there are opportunities for joint projects with civil society. We can assume that such a policy is Poland's strategic direction and will continue in a similar vein and beyond. For Poland, Belarus - one of the closest ethnically and culturally nations, a country that can bring great benefit Poland because of its geopolitical position. Therefore, in our opinion, Poland sees in the medium or long term, Belarus, as one of its closest allies. In addition, having a historical parallel, we can see that one of the strongest European countries XVI - XVIII centuries - Rzeczpospolita, includes in its membership the entire territory of present Belarus and Lithuania, a considerable part of the territory of present Poland and Ukraine. Therefore, bearing in mind the history of Poland and develops in the future, in our opinion, will develop a close relationship with these historically close nations themselves. An example of such a policy can be read and various social programs aimed at the citizens of Belarus and Ukraine, and the "Eastern Partnership" and the Polish-Ukrainian-Lithuanian battalion created in 2015 - the first example of military cooperation in this format to exchange experiences and help Ukrainian armed forces in approximation to NATO standards. [19]

In general, we can say that the war in Ukraine is considerably affected as a Polish-Belarusian relations and foreign policy of Belarus in general. Note solidarity with the position of Poland, Belarus and the western world in the non-recognition of the annexation of the Crimea Russia. In addition, last year the trend of progressive rapprochement between Belarus and the western world. The Belarusian government wants to develop a series of contacts between the so-called dialogue on modernization, involved in the program "Eastern Partnership". [20] Belarus is expected to sign the Bologna Convention.

In addition, the war in Ukraine is largely influenced by the Belarusian-Russian and Belarusian-Ukrainian relations. A month after the events euromaidan, Alexander Lukashenko in Belarus, the Acting President of Ukraine Oleksandr Turchynov. The main message of the meeting was to certify the parties in mutual friendship. [21] Taking into account that at that time, the Russian leadership is still referred to as legitimate fugitive President Viktor Yanukovich, such a meeting, including wear and demonstrative character. Belarus has shown the world its integrity and independence from Russia in the Ukrainian question.

Already in the midst of war in Ukraine, Lukashenko quite strongly criticized the positioning of the Crimea as Russian territory, once again, making it clear that he does not recognize and does not recognize the annexation of the Crimea by Russia [22].

Meanwhile, the Ukrainian issue, Belarus proved to be a conciliatory side, offering Minsk as a platform for negotiations. For example, in Minsk signed two international agreements, the purpose of which was the de-escalation of the conflict in the Donets Basin - the fall of 2014, the winter of 2015. The talks in Minsk attended by Presidents of Ukraine, Russia, France, and the German Chancellor. For the first time in many years in Minsk were once two key political figures in the EU.

In December 2014, the bilateral meeting of Presidents of Ukraine and Belarus, where President Alexander Lukashenko assured the Ukrainian counterpart that Belarus is ready to provide full support to Ukraine [23].

Against this background, Belarus unilaterally renewed the customs control on the border with Russia [24], thereby effectively discrediting the idea of the Customs Union, and Alexander Lukashenko in January 2015 year shows that Belarus is not a part of the "Russian world" [25].

**Conclusions.** Thus, the events in Ukraine in 2013-2015, may be a key period that changed the foreign policy vector of Belarus. Such a trust relationship with Russia as they were previously, and now should not expect, because now obvious potential threat from the east to Belarus. However, it is premature to talk about a certain foreign policy vector sharp reversal of Belarus. It is understood that the start of an active dialogue and cooperation with European institutions, will mean the need for internal reforms in Belarus, which may be disadvantageous to the current Belarusian regime, on the other hand - the situation in Ukraine shows a clear danger to the Kremlin and Belarusian regime understands. In such a situation, Belarus is trying to build strategic relations with Western partners, to try to protect themselves against a potential threat from the eastern neighbor. And Poland in this direction could be the first ally of Belarus, as a conductor of EU foreign policy, and as a country that is constantly throwing "bridges" in the form of various social and political projects of its eastern neighbors. Therefore, in our opinion, we should expect further warming and intensifying relations between Poland and Belarus. Ukraine in this situation should be developing bilateral relations with the two countries to take an active part in integration projects of the "Eastern Partnership" and to initiate new projects with the participation of Poland and Belarus, which could become a tool for further allied relations between the three countries.

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