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Changes in the international order and the security of Poland and Europe

Zmiany w ładzie międzynarodowym a bezpieczeństwo Polski i Europy

Abstract
The article addresses the impact of changes in the international order on the security of Poland and Europe. The starting point is the thesis stating that the transformation of international order, manifested by the competition of powers, the crisis of multilateral institutions and the war in Ukraine significantly redefines the conditions of the security of Poland and Europe. This article aims to show the main challenges for the security of Poland and the European Union, contributing to a better understanding of these issues and the possibility of resolving them. The research problem boils down to the answer to the question: How does the international order transformation affect the strategic conditions of Poland's security and what implications does it cause? The author points to the growing need for a redefinition of security policy in the context of weakening transatlantic ties. The analysis was conducted through the prism of realism, strategic autonomy, and liberal institutionalism. The methods used included document analysis, comparative analysis, and case study. Conclusions emphasise the need to increase the resilience of Poland and other EU states, by strengthening cooperation within European security structures, as a condition for effective response to new threats.

Keywords: Transformation of the international order, Poland's security policy, European Union's strategic autonomy

Streszczenie
Artykuł podejmuje problematykę wpływu zmian w ładzie międzynarodowym na bezpieczeństwo Polski i Europy. Punktem wyjścia jest teza, zgodnie z którą transformacja ładu międzynarodowego, przejawiająca się rywalizacją mocarstw, kryzysem instytucji multilateralnych oraz wojną w Ukrainie, w istotny sposób redefiniuje uwarunkowania bezpieczeństwa Polski i Europy. Celem artykułu jest ukazanie głównych wyzwań dla bezpieczeństwa Polski i Unii Europejskiej, przyczyniając się do lepszego zrozumienia tych zagadnień oraz możliwości ich rozwiązywania. Problem badawczy sprowadza się do odpowiedzi na pytanie: w jaki sposób transformacja ładu międzynarodowego wpływa na strategiczne uwarunkowania bezpieczeństwa Polski i jakie implikacje to powoduje? Autor wskazuje na rosnącą potrzebę redefinicji polityki bezpieczeństwa w kontekście osłabienia więzi transatlantyckich. Analiza została przeprowadzona przez pryzmat realizmu, autonomii strategicznej oraz liberalnego instytucjonalizmu. Zastosowane metody badawcze obejmowały analizę dokumentów, analizę porównawczą oraz studium przypadku. Wnioski podkreślają konieczność zwiększania odporności Polski oraz pozostałych państw UE poprzez wzmacnianie współpracy w ramach europejskich struktur bezpieczeństwa jako warunku skutecznego reagowania na nowe zagrożenia.

Słowa kluczowe: transformacja ładu międzynarodowego, polityka bezpieczeństwa Polski, autonomia strategiczna Unii Europejskiej

Introduction

The contemporary international order is in a state of profound transformation,[1] the dynamics of which significantly affects the security of European states, including Poland. Since the end of the Cold War, the order based on the predominance of multilateral institutions, relative stability and predictability, has been eroding under the influence of a number of parallel processes, such as: the intensifying rivalry between the superpowers, especially between the United States and China, Russia's aggressive policy, and the progressive crisis of international institutions and multilateral cooperation formats. A turning point was the Russian invasion of Ukraine[2] in February 2022, which demonstrated not only the military dimension of threats, but also the importance of energy, economic and information resilience.

The analysis of the impact of the transformation of the international order on the security of Poland and Europe is based on three theoretical components. The first focuses on realism and its variants, providing explanations of how states respond to threats from other powers. For example, the analysis of the pressure Russia exerts on NATO in the context of the war in Ukraine is sometimes interpreted through the lens of neoclassical realism, which combines structural and internal factors.[3] The second is the concept of EU strategic autonomy, as the Union's ability to act independently, or at least more independently of external guarantees, in the areas of defense, security, energy, critical infrastructure, and supply chains, a concept confirmed in official EU documents (e.g., the EU Global Strategy). The third refers to liberal institutionalism, considering the role played by multilateral organizations and alliances, such as the UN, WTO, and NATO, in ensuring collective security, stability, and resilience. In the context of the transformation of the international order, institutions face the need to adapt to new challenges and threats.[4]

The theoretical framework directly supports the aim of this article: to identify the most important threats and indicate courses of action that can increase Poland's and Europe's resilience to the challenges stemming from an unstable international environment. The perspective of neoclassical realism allows us to grasp the impact of the changing balance of power and the aggressive policies of

[1] M. C. Williams, *The crisis of the conservative international order*, "*International Affairs*" 2025, vol. 101, pp. 947–965.

[2] T. Casier, *The EU and Russia: The War that Changed Everything*, "*Journal of Common Market Studies*" 2023, vol. 61, pp. 31–44; M. J. Williams, *Ukraine: Russia's war and the future of the global order; War in Ukraine: conflict, strategy, and the return of a fractured world*, "*International Affairs*" 2025, vol. 101, pp. 361–362.

[3] Ł. Jureńczyk, *Russia's pressure on NATO and its response during the full-scale war in Ukraine*, "Torun International Studies" 2024, vol. 1, no. 19, pp. 19–32.

[4] Z. Polcikiewicz, *Cooperation between NATO and the European Union for shaping international security*, "The Copernicus Journal of Political Studies" 2019, no. 1, pp. 65-83; A. Halili, *Non-Traditional Security Threats and NATO's Response in the Contemporary Security Environment*, "*SEEU Review"* 2023, vol. 18, pp. 148-165.

revisionist states, such as Russia, on nation-states' threat perceptions and their strategic responses, including the role of internal factors in shaping security policy. The concept of the European Union's strategic autonomy, in turn, provides a starting point for analyzing the directions in which the EU can build its operational independence in the areas of security, energy, and critical infrastructure. The third component, liberal institutionalism, justifies the importance of international organizations such as NATO, the UN, and the WTO in maintaining order, stability, and collective resilience, and also points to the need for their adaptation to new forms of threats (cybernetic, hybrid, systemic). This theoretical framework enables a comprehensive analysis of the impact of global transformations on the strategic determinants of Poland's and Europe's security and facilitates the development of recommendations relevant to the contemporary international environment.

The adopted theoretical framework corresponds to the research questions posed in the article:

- how does the transformation of the international order, particularly in the context of the war in Ukraine and great-power rivalry, influence Poland's security policy, and
- what is the significance of the development of the European Union's concept of strategic autonomy, as well as the adaptation of multilateral organizations (particularly NATO), for building the resilience of Poland and Europe in the face of new systemic threats?

The analysis focuses on assessing the adequacy of the current security policy of Poland and the EU, with particular emphasis on issues such as the redefinition of NATO's role and the future of transatlantic ties, the EU's ambitions for strategic autonomy, and threats to the energy security of member states.

The article is based on a qualitative approach, combining document analysis, comparative analysis, and case study. The choice of methods is dictated by the nature of the research problem and the goal of identifying the most important security challenges for Poland and the European Union in the context of the transformation of the international order. The document analysis included, among others, official strategies, communiqués from international institutions, reports, and selected legal acts, allowing for the identification of the directions of changes in security policy and the ways in which states and organizations respond to contemporary threats. The analysis is complemented by a case study of Poland, a country of particular strategic importance on the eastern flank of NATO and the EU. This study allows for an in-depth analysis of the adaptation of national security policy in the context of dynamic changes in the international environment. The

article also uses a limited comparative analysis, covering selected EU member states, to reveal differences in approaches to defense modernization. The selection of source material was based on thematic relevance, timeliness, institutional importance, and scientific credibility. A limitation of this approach is the lack of a quantitative and empirical component (e.g., expert interviews or statistical data analyses), which limits the generalizability of conclusions. Furthermore, the dynamic nature of the international environment may result in some outdated assessments and recommendations contained in the text. However, the presented arguments and the emphasis on facts create conditions for using them in posing further research questions and theses.

1. The crisis of international order and its consequences

The international order, understood as a set of rules, institutions and norms governing relations between states, has for the last decades been based on the foundation of the post-war liberal order, dominated by the United States and its allies. The key components of this order were the stability provided by the supremacy of a single superpower, the functioning of multilateral institutions such as the UN, NATO and the WTO, the promotion of democracy and human rights, as well as free trade and the globalisation of the economy.[5] After the end of the Cold War, the dominance of the West and the United States created the conditions for a relatively stable development of international relations, however, over time, symptoms of the erosion of this order began to appear. The last decade has seen an acceleration of disintegration processes, manifested by the rise of geopolitical rivalry between the US and China, which is not limited to the military sphere but also includes technology, trade and regional influence, leading to the formation of a new, multipolar international system. As J. Nye notes, the period of US dominance did not end in a dramatic collapse, but in a slow erosion of strategic advantage in many fields simultaneously.[6] A particular turning point, however, was Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, which not only violated the basic principles of the UN Charter,[7] constituting a brutal violation of European state sovereignty, but also a profoundly transformative event for the security architecture in Europe. For the first time since the Second World War, there is a full-scale armed conflict between two states on the European continent, which has exposed the weaknesses

[5] G. J. Ikenberry, *Liberal Leviathan: The Origins, Crisis, and Transformation of the American World Order*, Princeton 2011, pp. 57–60.

[6] J. S. Nye, *Do Morals Matter? Presidents and Foreign Policy from FDR to Trump*, Oxford 2019, pp. 220–223.

[7] Sz. Zaręba, *Prawne aspekty ataku na Ukrainę*, https://www.pism.pl/publikacje/prawne-aspekty-ataku-na-ukraine [date of access: 06.05.2025].

of existing mechanisms of deterrence and collective response. The war accelerated decision-making processes within NATO (including enlargement to include Sweden and Finland), forced EU member states to revise their defence policies and revitalised the discussion on Europe's strategic autonomy.[8] At the same time, it revealed the deep dependence of some economies on Russian raw materials and the limited ability to respond quickly to complex hybrid threats.

An important factor in the transformation of the international order is the erosion of the effectiveness and legitimacy of international institutions.[9] Organisations such as the UN and the WTO are facing a crisis of confidence and a lack of capacity to act effectively in crisis situations.[10] Many states, especially authoritarian ones, treat the rules of international law in an instrumental manner, which undermines the foundations of global cooperation.[11] In addition, even within Western structures there is an increase in tensions, as exemplified by the weakening of cohesion in the European Union during the migration crisis,[12] or in energy policy.[13] As D. Baldwin points out, multilateralism is increasingly being replaced by ad hoc coalitions of interests and bilateral agreements that dismantle the existing system of interdependence and collective response.[14] The processes identified by D. Baldwin are eroding the effectiveness and legitimacy of international institutions and undermining confidence in the effectiveness of existing conflict prevention and international law enforcement mechanisms.

The crisis of the international order does not only have a military dimension. Equally important are developments in the areas of energy, economic, technological and information security. Globalisation, which for years has been an integrating force, is now increasingly seen as a source of vulnerability to external crises - from pandemics to disruptions in supply chains to commodity blackmail

[8] The EU's strategic autonomy should be understood as the EU's ability to make decisions and act independently in line with its own interests and values, while maintaining international partnerships where they are consistent with the Union's objectives, see: N. Tocci, *European Strategic Autonomy: What It Is, Why We Need It, How to Achieve It*, https://www.iai.it/sites/default/files/9788893681780.pdf [date of access: 24.09.2025].

[9] J. J. *Mearsheimer, Bound to Fail: The Rise and Fall of the Liberal International Order*, "International Security" 2019, 43(4), pp. 7–50.

[10] B. Hoekman, P. C. Mavroidis, M. Saluste, *Informing WTO reform: dispute settlement performance, 1995-2020*, "Journal of World Trade" 2021, vol. 55, pp. 1–50.

[11] T. Ginsburg, *How Authoritarians Use International Law*, https://www.journalofdemocracy.org/articles/how-authoritarians-use-international-law/?utm_source [date of access: 25.09.2025]; T. G. Weiss, *What's Wrong with the United Nations and How to Fix It*, Cambridge 2012, pp. 45–48.

[12] P. Murray, M. Longo, *Europe's wicked legitimacy crisis: the case of refugees*, "*Journal of European Integration"* 2018, no. 40(4), pp. 1-15.

[13] M. Giuli, S. Oberthür, *Third time lucky? Reconciling EU climate and external energy policy during energy security crises*, "Journal of European Integration" 2023, vol. 45, pp. 395-412.

[14] D. A. Baldwin, *Power and International Relations: A Conceptual Approach*, Princeton 2016, pp. 141–145.

and digital disinformation.[15] As a result, states are beginning to redefine their strategic interests, seeking greater autonomy and resilience. These changes are having a particularly strong impact on EU member states, which on the one hand seek to strengthen the Common Security and Defence Policy, but on the other are struggling with a lack of a coherent vision and conflicting national interests.[16] In this context, Poland as a border state of the EU and NATO, directly exposed to the effects of Russian imperial policy, finds itself at a crucial moment in history for its security.[17] Therefore, an analysis of the consequences of the international order crisis not only constitutes an attempt to understand the changing geopolitical reality, but is also a necessary condition for the formulation of effective national and regional security strategies in the coming years.

2. New dimensions of security

The transformation of the contemporary international order is multidimensional and its dynamics are shaped by a number of interrelated factors.[18] The changing balance of power, global interdependencies and growing systemic challenges make energy, economic, technological or infrastructural issues as important as territorial defence. As a consequence, the security policy of states, including Poland and the European Union, is being redefined, encompassing not only kinetic threats, but also hybrid, asymmetric and systemic ones.[19]

The traditional understanding of security, based on border protection and armed force, is now being transformed. Armed conflicts, such as the war in Ukraine, continue to demonstrate the importance of military capabilities, but their nature increasingly points to the coexistence of military action with disinformation campaigns, cyber-attacks and attacks on critical infrastructure, including energy and digital infrastructure. This means that states need to build capabilities to respond to unpredictable, multifaceted threats, which requires closer coordination between security institutions, civilian services and private actors.[20]

[15] Ibidem, pp. 134–138.

[16] V. Anghel, E. Jones, *Is Europe really forged through crisis? Pandemic EU and the Russia – Ukraine war*, "Journal of European Public Policy" 2023, vol. 30, pp. 766-786.

[17] A. Mazurkiewicz, W. Michnik, *Towards the "Frontline States" Concept? Understanding the Responses to Russia's War Against Ukraine*, https://peacerep.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/Towards-the-Frontline-States-concept.pdf [date of access: 27.09.2025].

[18] *Competing visions of international order Responses to US power in a fracturing world*, https://chathamhouse.soutron.net/Portal/Public/en-GB/DownloadImageFile.ashx?objectId=11251&ownerType=0&ownerId=206859 [date of access: 29.09.2025].

[19] European Council, *Hybrid threats*, https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/hybrid-threats/?utm_source [date of access: 29.09.2025]; NATO, *Countering Hybrid Threats, https://www.nato.int/cps/on/natohq/topics_156338.htm?utm_source* [date of access: 29.09.2025].

[20] M. Kaldor, *New and Old Wars: Organized Violence in a Global Era*, Redwood City 2013, pp. 128–130.

In the energy dimension, the security of EU countries was seriously questioned after Russia's aggression against Ukraine, which showed how much and how many European economies were dependent on Russian raw materials.[21] The interruption of gas and oil supplies by the Russian Federation not only had a direct economic impact but also triggered a debate about Europe's strategic energy autonomy.[22] Poland, thanks to earlier strategic investments in energy diversification such as the LNG terminal in Swinoujscie or the Baltic Pipe gas pipeline, turned out to be in a better situation than many Western European countries, but the crisis still highlighted the importance of security of supply as a pillar of national security, especially in the case of the economy of the Federal Republic of Germany.[23]

The economic dimension of security, on the other hand, relates not only to resilience to external shocks, but also to the ability to remain competitive under conditions of geopolitical and economic instability. Increasing regulatory pressure in the European Union, including the so-called "Green Deal", poses a challenge to Central and Eastern European countries whose economies are largely based on industry and conventional energy.[24] These policies, although directed towards climate transformation, may paradoxically weaken the ability of member states to respond to external threats by raising production costs and reducing energy availability.[25]

Increasing importance is also being placed on technological security, including digital infrastructure, 5G networks, strategic data and artificial intelligence, among others. In the context of competing global powers, access to modern technologies is becoming as important as access to energy resources. Poland and other EU countries are confronted with the need to strengthen national and EU innovation capabilities and to counter the technological dominance of China and the US, which control key links in global value chains.[26]

Managing security in this broad sense requires not only adequate financial resources, but above all a coherent strategy and a realistic assessment of risks. Under the conditions of complex crises (war, raw materials, climate and technology) an effective security policy must integrate sectoral actions and be rooted in stable

[21] Eurostat, *EU trade with Russia — latest developments*, https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=EU_trade_with_Russia_-_latest_developments [date of access: 30.09.2025].

[22] Regulation (EU) 2023/435 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 27 February 2023 amending Regulation (EU) 2021/241 as regards REPowerEU chapters in recovery and resilience plans, and amending Regulations (EU) No 1303/2013, (EU) 2021/1060 and (EU) 2021/1755, and Directive 2003/87/EC, OJ L 63, 28.2.2023, pp. 1–27.

[23] *W poszukiwaniu straconego czasu. Niemcy w Erze Zitenwende*, ed. A. Kwiatkowska, Warszawa 2023, p. 5.

[24] Eurostat, *Shedding light on energy in Europe – 2025 edition*, https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/interactive-publications/energy-2025?utm_source [date of access: 30.09.2025].

[25] J. Zielonka, *The Lost Future: And How to Reclaim It*, New Haven 2023, pp. 147–150.

[26] *Strategic sovereignty: How Europe can regain the capacity to act*, eds. M. Leonard, J. Shapiro, pp. 12–14, https://ecfr.eu/archive/page/-/ecfr_strategic_sovereignty.pdf [date of access: 10.05.2025].

political and economic foundations. Understanding this need is reflected in strategic documents adopted by the main decision-making centers, i.e. the European Union, NATO and the authorities of the Republic of Poland, which clearly emphasize the need to strengthen systemic resilience and protect critical infrastructure.[27, 28, 29]

3. Poland facing new geopolitical realities

Poland is an important element of the transformations taking place in the international security system, which results from both its geographical location and alliance commitments. The changing balance of power, the intensification of rivalry between global powers and Russian aggression against Ukraine are significantly redefining Poland's strategic environment.[30] In these conditions, the key challenge is to adapt to new realities while strengthening the country's resilience, both in the military and civilian dimension.[31] After 2022, Poland has significantly increased its defense spending, allocating around 4% of GDP to modernizing its armed forces, making it a leader among NATO countries in terms of military spending in relation to GDP.[32] The purchases of modern weapons (including HIMARS systems, K2 tanks and F-35 aircraft) are aimed not only at increasing the country's defense capabilities, but also at strengthening the deterrence policy against potential aggressors. Such a dynamic armaments policy is also a form of building Poland's negotiating position within NATO and the European Union, where Warsaw calls for increased military involvement on the Alliance's eastern flank.[33]

Similar trends are also observed in the security policies of other European countries, which, in the face of the growing threat from Russia, have significantly intensified modernization efforts. Finland and Germany, for example, represent two distinct yet complementary approaches to defense sector transformation.

[27] Council of the European Union, *A Strategic Compass for Security and Defence*, Brussels: EEAS, March 2022, https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/strategic-compass/?utm_source [date of access: 30.09.2025].

[28] NATO, *Strategic Concept 2022,* Adopted by Heads of State and Government at the Madrid Summit, 29 June 2022, https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/2022/6/pdf/290622-strategic-concept.pdf?utm_source [date of access: 30.09.2025].

[29] *National Critical Infrastructure Protection Program*, https://www.gov.pl/web/rcb-en/national-critical-infrastructure-protection-program?utm_source [date of access: 30.09.2025].

[30] A. Szeptycki, *The Russian Federation and Polish Security: A Risk Analysis*, "Central European Journal of Security Studies" 2023, vol. 1, pp. 33-47.

[31] P. Ostrowski, R. Zych, *State's Resilience to Critical Infrastructure Threats: The Example of the Russian War on Ukraine*, "Teka Komisji Prawniczej PAN Oddział w Lublinie" 2024, no. 2, pp. 349-363.

[32] T. Dmitruk, *Wydatki na obronność Polski w latach 2022-2025 według MON*, https://dziennikzbrojny.pl/aktualnosci/news,1,12101,aktualnosci-z-polski,wydatki-na-obronnosc-polski-w-latach-2022-2025-wedlug-mon [date of access: 12.05.2025].

[33] I. Surwillo, V. Slakaityte, *Power moves east: Poland's rise as a strategic European player*, https://www.diis.dk/en/research/power-moves-east-polands-rise-as-a-strategic-european-player [date of access: 12.05.2025].

Finland, which joined NATO in 2023, has consistently developed deterrence and defense capabilities, guided by the concept of collective resilience. Over the past three years, the country has increased defense spending to a level exceeding 2% of GDP, investing in modern weapons systems, including F-35A fighter jets and SAR reconnaissance satellites, as well as strengthening border infrastructure along the Russian border.[34] The reform of the land forces assumes their full modernization by 2035, with particular emphasis on mobility, interoperability, and rapid response capabilities. Developing the reserve component and the conscription system have also been given high priority.[35] Since 2022, Germany has been implementing a fundamental shift in its security policy, known as the Zeitenwende. In 2024, defense spending reached the 2% GDP threshold for the first time, with a planned increase to 3.5% by the end of the decade.[36] Furthermore, a special €100 billion modernization fund[37] was established, which finances the purchase of modern combat systems and enables a sustainable increase in defense spending through an adjustment to the legislative framework.[38] Both the Finnish Total Defense model and the German Armed Forces' Technological Modernization Strategy point to the need for a multidimensional approach to security policy. The common denominator is not only increased spending but also building long-term institutional resilience, increasing interoperability, and deepening allied cooperation.

Poland, being one of the leaders in defence investments, also plays an active role in shaping the EU's eastern policy. Since the beginning of the war in Ukraine, the Polish authorities have been among the most consistent supporters of military and political support for Kiev. Poland, as a border state, perceives the conflict in Ukraine not only as regional destabilization, but also as a test of the durability of the order based on international law and a real threat to the security of the entire Central and Eastern Europe.[39]For this reason, Poland is seeking to act as a mediator in the security system of Central and Eastern Europe. This role requires not

[34] G. O'Dwyer, *Finland's 2024 defense budget targets arms restocking, border security*, https://www.defensenews.com/global/europe/2023/10/13/finlands-2024-defense-budget-targets-arms-restocking-border-security/? [date of access: 12.10.2025]; *Finland – Defense sector overview*, https://www.trade.gov/country-commercial-guides/finland-defense [date of access: 12.10.2025].

[35] *What NATO can learn from Finland's defense strategy*, https://www.military.com/feature/2025/10/06/what-nato-can-learn-finlands-defense-strategy.html [date of access: 12.10.2025].

[36] *Sharing the burden: How Poland and Germany are shifting the dial on European defence expenditure*, https://www.nato.int/docu/review/articles/2025/04/14/sharing-the-burden-how-poland-and-germany-are-shifting-the-dial-on-european-defence-expenditure/index.html [date of access: 15.10.2025].

[37] *Bundestag beschließt das Sondervermögen für die Bundeswehr*, https://www.bundestag.de/dokumente/textarchiv/2022/kw22-de-sondervermoegen-897614? [date of access: 15.10.2025].

[38] *Sondervermögen Bundeswehr: Zustimmung und Vorbehalte*,https://www.bundestag.de/dokumente/textarchiv/2022/kw19-pa-haushalt-sondervermoegen-891366? [date of access: 15.10.2025].

[39] P. Wieczorek, *Potencjał obronny państw NATO – wojna w Ukrainie – wyzwania dla bezpieczeństwa*, "Kontrola Państwowa" 2024, no. 5, p. 87.

so much acting as an equal arbiter in conflicts between major players, but rather offering channels of communication, dialogue initiatives, and diplomatic instruments that can ease tensions and limit escalation.[40]

Poland, as a participant in multilateral structures (EU and NATO), actively supports initiatives related to peace negotiations in the context of the war in Ukraine, as exemplified by the establishment of the Council for Cooperation with Ukraine, tasked with coordinating aid and reconstruction efforts and facilitating dialogue between the parties.[41] Poland participates in debates with other countries and international institutions, formulating proposals for future security guarantees, infrastructure, and logistical support for Ukraine.[42] Furthermore, Polish diplomatic delegations participate in bilateral consultations and advisory missions in Kyiv, supporting Ukraine's EU accession negotiations.[43]

The situation on the Polish-Belarusian border poses a significant challenge to Poland's effectiveness as a mediator and promoter of regional security.[44] Belarus, supported by Russia, is conducting hybrid operations, including the exploitation of migrants, disinformation campaigns, and border crime as a means of destabilizing relations with Poland.[45] The consequence of these actions is a weakening of Poland's image as a credible mediator in Central and Eastern European security matters. Disinformation campaigns portray Poland as a country violating human rights, which is exploited by Kremlin and Minsk propaganda to undermine its moral and political legitimacy as an intermediary.[46]

In the new geopolitical realities, energy policy is also becoming particularly important. For years, Polish politicians have warned against Europe's excessive dependence on Russian raw materials, which was confirmed after 2022 in decisions to phase out supplies from Russia.[47] At the same time, the need to accelerate

[40] T*he Nations of NATO: Shaping the Alliance's Relevance and Cohesion*, ed. T. Tardy, Oxford 2022, pp. 259–278.

[41] Zarządzenie nr 41 Prezesa Rady Ministrów z dnia 5 kwietnia 2024 r. w sprawie Rady do spraw Współpracy z Ukrainą.

[42] S. Zhelikhovskyi, I. Tykhonenko, *Foreign Policy Initiatives of the Republic of Poland in Support of Ukraine in Russian-Ukrainian War*, "Acta de Historia & Politica: Saeculum XXI", Special Issue 2023, pp. 61-71.

[43] *Inauguracyjna wizyta polskich ekspertów ds. negocjacji akcesyjnych w Kijowie oraz konsultacje wiceministrów spraw zagranicznych Polski i Ukrainy,* https://www.gov.pl/web/dyplomacja/inauguracyjna-wizyta-polskich-ekspertow-ds-negocjacji-akcesyjnych-w-kijowie-oraz-konsultacje-wiceministrow-spraw-zagranicznych-polski-i-ukrainy [date of access: 16.10.2025].

[44] A. Nitszke, *Poland's Response to the Migration Crisis on the Polish-Belarusian Border in the Light of European Union Law*, "Athenaeum. Polskie Studia Politologiczne" 2023, vol.79, pp. 179-193.

[45] A. Wawrzusiszyn*, Russian-Belarusian hybrid activities on the borders of the European Union and NATO, "Journal of Modern Science" 2025,* vol. 61, no. 1, pp. 10–32.

[46] PISM, *Russian and Belarusian Disinformation and Propaganda in the Context of the Polish-Belarusian Border Crisis*, https://pism.pl/publications/russian-and-belarusian-disinformation-and-propaganda-in-the-context-of-the-polish-belarusian-border-crisis? [date of access: 16.10.2025].

[47] T. Furman, B. Sawicki, *Polska rezygnuje z rosyjskich dostaw ropy, gazu i węgla,* https://www.parkiet.com/surowce-i-paliwa/art35979451-polska-rezygnuje-z-rosyjskich-dostaw-ropy-gazu-i-wegla [date

the energy transformation poses challenges for Poland related to ensuring the security of supplies and the stability of energy prices. In this context, investments in nuclear energy, renewable energy sources and the expansion of transmission infrastructure are key elements of the country's energy security.[48]

Adaptation in the economic and infrastructure sphere is no less important. Initiatives such as the Three Seas aim to reduce the development asymmetry between the eastern and western parts of the EU and to make the region independent from external political and economic pressures. Poland plays the role of a leading country here, striving for better infrastructure connections and increased energy capacity in the region. In this way, not only economic potential is built, but also strategic resilience against attempts to destabilize the region by external entities.[49]

The intensification of efforts to strengthen Poland's security through regional and bilateral cooperation mechanisms is reflected in the reactivation of the Weimar Triangle,[50] whose future, according to M. Kleiber, "...appears to be extremely important politically and economically, also having enormous significance for the stable development of the entire European Union."[51] In the field of security, the Weimar Triangle "is needed to share the perception of strategic challenges and find answers to them."[52] In recent years, in the face of military threats from Russia, it has assumed a new role: a platform for coordinating defense and strategic actions for the security of Central and Eastern Europe, and above all, Poland.[53] The Treaty of Nancy, signed on May 9, 2025, by the President of France and the Prime Minister of Poland, has an even more pronounced pro-defense character, introducing a commitment to mutual military assistance in the event of armed aggression. The treaty also contains provisions on the joint development of

of access: 12.05.2025]; *Plan uniezależnienia UE od dostaw rosyjskiej energii* https://www.gov.pl/web/przemysl/plan-uniezaleznienia-UE-od-dostaw-rosyjskiej-energii [date of access: 12.05.2025].

[48] The above-mentioned goals and other intentions regarding energy security were formulated in: *Polityka energetyczna Polski do 2040 r.,* https://www.dziennikustaw.gov.pl/M2021000026401.pdf [date of access: 12.05.2025].

[49] J. Błaszczak, *Inicjatywa Trójmorza: rola Polski w sercu Europy Środkowej,* https://ine.org.pl/inicjatywa-trojmorza-rola-polski-w-centrum-europy-srodkowej/ [date of access: 12.05.2025].

[50] A. Hreczuk, *Trójkąt Weimarski: nowe otwarcie. Ministrowie ogłaszają cele*, https://www.dw.com/pl/tr%C3%B3jk%C4%85t-weimarski-nowe-otwarcie-ministrowie-og%C5%82aszaj%C4%85-trzy-cele/a-69154786 [date of access: 02.10.2025].

[51] M. Kleiber, *Trójkąt Weimarski. Naturalna konsekwencja ugruntowanej współpracy*, https://wszystko conajwazniejsze.pl/prof-michal-kleiber-trojkat-weimarski-naturalna-konsekwencja-ugruntowanej-wspolpracy/ [date of access: 02.10.2025].

[52] K. M. Zalewski, *Reaktywacja współpracy weimarskiej budzi wielkie nadzieje. Jak mądrze wykorzystać tę szansę?,* https://forumdialogu.eu/2024/05/31/reaktywacja-wspolpracy-weimarskiej-budzi-wielkie-nadzieje-jak-madrze-wykorzystac-te-szanse/ [date of access: 02.10.2025].

[53] *Intensifying Weimar Triangle* cooperation, *https://www.gov.pl/web/national-defence/intensifying-weimar--triangle-cooperation?utm_source* [date of access: 02.10.2025].

defense capabilities, the arms industry, as well as infrastructure and energy resilience.[54] The concluded treaty and the resumption of cooperation within the Weimar Triangle clearly indicate the strengthening of bilateral relations with key partners in the European Union.

4. The importance of transatlantic ties and strategic autonomy in Europe's new security architecture

Russia's aggression against Ukraine has exposed the structural limitations of the EU in responding to military threats on its own and has highlighted how crucial NATO's role in ensuring European security remains.[55] Despite the ambitions of some member states, the EU still lacks sufficient military potential, intelligence capabilities, and an effective command system to conduct larger-scale operations without the participation of the North Atlantic Alliance.[56] Strategic autonomy, understood as the ability to act independently in the field of security and defence,[57] faces numerous obstacles – from a lack of political cohesion among member states, to uneven defence spending, to differing threat perceptions. While France promotes the idea of "Europe puissance" and calls for greater independence from the US, many CEE countries, including Poland and the Baltic states, fear that an excessive emphasis on autonomy could weaken the US commitment to the region, which could lead to a security gap.[58]

In practice, the EU has undertaken a number of initiatives aimed at strengthening the Community's defence capabilities. Programmes such as PESCO (Permanent Structured Cooperation), the European Defence Fund or the Strategic Compass are an expression of the desire to build a more coherent and self-sufficient security and defence policy. However, their effectiveness remains limited, among others

[54] *Traktat o wzmocnionej współpracy i przyjaźni między Rzecząpospolitą Polską a Republiką Francuską*, file:///C:/Users/Admin/Downloads/Traktat_o_wzmocnionej_wsp%C3%B3%C5%82pracy_i_przyja-%C5%BAni_mi%C4%99dzy_Rzecz%C4%85pospolit%C4%85_Polsk%C4%85_a_Republik%C4%85_Francusk%C4%85.pdf [date of access: 02.10.2025].

[55] T. Casier, *The EU and Russia: The War that Changed Everything*, "*Journal of Common Market Studies*" 2023, vol. 61, pp. 31–44; D. Genini, *How the war in Ukraine has transformed the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy*, "Yearbook of European Law" 2025, no. 00, pp.1–43.

[56] S. Biscop, *European Strategy in the 21st Century: New Future for Old Power*, London – New York 2018, pp. 72–75.

[57] Strategic autonomy also includes protecting one's own interests and values, especially in economic and technological areas, see: T. Gehrke, *EU Open Strategic Autonomy and the Trappings of Geoeconomics,* https://www.egmontinstitute.be/app/uploads/2022/06/EU-Open-Strategic-Autonomy_Gehrke_2022.pdf?type=pdf [date of access: 04.10.2025]; N. Helwig, *EU Strategic Autonomy after the Russian Invasion of Ukraine: Europe's Capacity to Act in Times of War,* "Journal of Common Market Studies" 2023, vol. 61, pp. 57-67.

[58] B. Lippert, N. von Ondarza, V. Perthes, *European Strategic Autonomy: Actors, Issues, Conflicts*, Berlin 2019, pp. 8–10.

due to insufficient funding, lack of interoperability of systems and insufficient political readiness to act together in crisis situations.[59]

The war in Ukraine also confirmed that NATO's deterrence and rapid response capabilities, which are able to effectively strengthen the eastern flank, increase military presence and provide a nuclear deterrent umbrella, are still crucial to Europe's security.[60] Although the EU has played an important role in terms of humanitarian aid, sanctions and economic support, military aspects have remained NATO's domain. Thus, despite rhetorical declarations, the EU's strategic autonomy remains a concept in the making, being more of a political project than an operational reality.[61] In this context, the key challenge is not so much the choice between autonomy and alliance dependence, but developing a realistic model for the coexistence of both pillars. More and more analyses indicate the need for so-called strategic complementarity, in which the EU strengthens its capabilities in areas that complement NATO's activities, such as cybersecurity, critical infrastructure resilience or logistics and arms industry coordination, without duplicating the Alliance's structures.[62] For Poland, this means the need to pursue a balanced policy, consisting, on the one hand, of consistently supporting NATO's presence in the region and actively participating in its structures, and on the other hand, participating in EU projects that really increase the EU's defense capabilities. Poland can play the role of a bridge between Eastern and Western Europe, promoting a realistic approach to building European defense capabilities while maintaining strong transatlantic ties.[63]

Conclusions and recommendations

The transformation of the international order, resulting from the overlapping processes of great-power rivalry, the erosion of multilateral institutions, and Russian aggression in Ukraine, has significantly impacted the security environment in Europe. In this new geopolitical context, it is crucial to identify the main sources of threats and mechanisms destabilizing the international environment, as well as to identify potential courses of action to strengthen the resilience of Poland and the European Union. The return to the logic of power competition,

[59] K. Miszczak, *"Strategiczny Kompas" Unii Europejskiej. Większe bezpieczeństwo i skuteczniejsza obrona UE – plan działań do 2030 r.,* "Politeja" 2024, no. 1(88/1), pp. 145–151.

[60] M. Mälksoo, *NATO's new front: deterrence moves eastward*, "*International Affairs"* 2024, vol. 100, pp. 531–547.

[61] S. Blavoukos, G. Pagoulatos, *Europe after Putin's War: EU Foreign and Defence Policy in the New European Security Architecture*, "Hellenic Foundation for European and Foreign Policy" 2022, no. 3, pp. 2-15.

[62] *NATO and EU: Strength in Complementarity*, https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/nato-and-eu-strength-complementarity_und_en [date of access: 16.05.2025].

[63] K. Muti, *Charting a new course: How Poland can contribute to European defence,* https://ecfr.eu/article/charting-a-new-course-how-poland-can-contribute-to-european-defence/?utm_source [date of access: 04.10.2025].

the shift from a unipolar order to a more complex multipolar system, and the limited effectiveness of some international institutions are leading EU and NATO member states to consider the need to revise their existing strategic assumptions. In this context, the importance of building autonomous defense capabilities while maintaining alliance commitments is growing.[64]

Military security remains a crucial element of state policy, but increasing attention is also being paid to its non-military dimensions, such as energy, economic, infrastructural, and digital security. The crises of recent years have highlighted the limitations of a model based solely on the primacy of international law and institutional stability, particularly in the context of authoritarian states employing hybrid tools and economic pressure as instruments of influence.[65] Therefore, continued efforts to strengthen deterrence and build internal resilience seem justified. This includes investments in conventional defense and cybersecurity, the development of the domestic defense industry, and the gradual reduction of energy dependence on authoritarian states. However, it should be noted that the effectiveness of these efforts depends on a stable budgetary framework, political consensus, and the availability of technological and human resources.

International cooperation within NATO remains a central pillar of Polish security policy, as evidenced by both strategic government documents and operational practice.[66] This cooperation can be complemented by constructive and selective engagement in EU initiatives that enhance the ability to respond to hybrid threats and are consistent with the policy of the North Atlantic Alliance.

For the European Union, one of the challenges remains the development of so-called strategic complementarity with NATO, which should focus on complementing rather than duplicating defense capabilities. Achieving this goal, however, requires not only increased defense spending in member states but also streamlining decision-making mechanisms, which currently limit the EU's agency in crisis situations.[67] Political and strategic divergences between member states, as well as varying levels of ambition regarding strategic autonomy, are a certain limitation. In Poland's case, one of the key challenges remains the development of sustainable and effective regional cooperation formats that could enhance the

[64] European Defence Agency, *Defence data 2023-2024*, https://eda.europa.eu/docs/default-source/brochures/eda---defence-data-23-24---web---final.pdf? [date of access: 17.10.2025].

[65] European Commission, *Hybrid Threats – Defence Industry and Space*, https://defence-industry-space.ec.europa.eu/eu-defence-industry/hybrid-threats_en? [date of access: 17.10.2025].

[66] *Strategia Bezpieczeństwa Narodowego Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej*, https://www.bbn.gov.pl/ftp/dokumenty/Strategia_Bezpieczenstwa_Narodowego_RP_2020.pdf [date of access: 17.10.2025].

[67] J. Helferich, *Trapped in the grey zone: NATO-CSDP relations in a new era of European security governance*, https://link.springer.com/article/10.1057/s41311-024-00647-9? [date of access: 17.10.2025].

region's political and operational cohesion. However, the effectiveness of these initiatives depends on the convergence of participants' interests, the avoidance of internal tensions, and investment in security and communications infrastructure.

The transformation of the international order presents Poland and Europe with challenges that require not only institutional adaptation but also the development of a new strategic framework. While many actions are undertaken in response to current threats, it is worth considering implementing long-term, coordinated policies that strengthen systemic resilience and the ability to respond independently to crises. However, it is important to remember that the effectiveness of these actions will depend on many factors, including the level of political consensus, the effectiveness of national and international institutions, and the evolution of the global security environment.

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