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Geopolitical and foreign policy concepts of Poland: The search for a projection for today

Abstract

This article analyzes the concepts of Polish foreign policy that originate from the historically proven Piast and Jagiellonian concepts formulated by the Polish political elite in previous centuries. These were named after the dominant royal dynasties of the Polish state in the Middle Ages – the Piast and Jagiellonian dynasties. The oldest doctrines, which go back to the heyday of the Polish state, serve as models for imitation and are projected by contemporaries onto reality. The Piast concept aims at intensified cooperation with Germany and a parallel passive or even confrontational attitude to relations with Poland's eastern neighbors. The Jagiellonian, in contrast, focuses on active expansion in the direction of Belarus, Lithuania, Ukraine, and Russia; it professes the idea of "conquering the East" and the formation of a multinational state with its center in Warsaw. These two doctrines formed the basis of the foreign policy concepts of the Second and Third Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. In the 20th and early 21st centuries, the traditions of the implementation of Poland's policy towards Ukrainians, formed in previous centuries, were consolidated and supplemented with a new vision. They were adapted to new geopolitical realities and acquired new features of manifestation.

Keywords: Poland, concepts of foreign policy, traditions, modernity, Jagiellonian concept, Piast concept

Introduction

Among the oldest foreign policy doctrines developed and implemented by the Polish political elite are the Piast and Jagiellonian concepts. Both have their roots long before the 20th century, but the postulates that underlie them have become popular in Polish society and go back to the traditions on which modern Polish foreign policy is based. The main ideas of the Jagiellonian and Piast concepts formed the grounds for the latest doctrines of foreign policy and received a new lease of life in the implementation of policy in the 20th and early 21st centuries. The Russian researcher O. Nemensky, having considered the work of Polish scientists, determined that the first concept aims to intensify cooperation with Germany and develop a parallel passive or even confrontational attitude to relations with Poland's eastern neighbors. The second, in contrast, focuses on active expansion in the direction of Belarus, Lithuania, Ukraine, and Russia; it promotes the idea of "subjugating the East" and the formation of a multinational state with Warsaw as its center.[1]

The Piast concept and the mononational state: intensifying cooperation between Poland and Germany

The Piast concept is based on the doctrine of "Sarmatism," which traces the origin of the Polish gentry to the Sarmatians. It glorifies the role of the Piast Dynasty, which opened Poland's doors to the Western civilization of the Carolingians, bringing Christianity in 966. The framework of the concept distinguishes the "theory of the platform and the foreshore," where the country acts as an outpost of Western Christianity – the last bastion of Latin culture in the east of Europe. In this, the anti-German idea of R. Dmowski[2] can be distinguished, which emphasizes that between Russia and Germany, there is no place for a weak Poland; the country should possess all the lands dominated by Polish populations.[3]

The Piasts saw Poland as a mononational state; that is, national minorities had to be either assimilated or evicted. The interwar Polish politician R. Dmowski, one of the developers of this concept, believed that Poland's main task was to seize as much territory as possible, in particular Ukraine, Belarus, and Lithuania, and assimilate their inhabitants. The confrontation between the Jagiellonian and Piast concepts continued throughout the 20th century.[4] We will analyze Dmowski's ideas regarding the implementation of Poland's foreign policy in more detail in the following sections, but for

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[1] O. Nemensky (2007). *Spaces and ideologies of Poland's eastern policy. Europe old and new*. http://www.perspektivy.info/oykumena/europe/prostranstva_i_ideologii_vostochnoiy_politiki_polshi_2007-8-13-16-8.htm [accessed 20.03.2022].

[2] R. Wapinski (1989). *Roman Dmowski*. Wydawnictwo Lubelskie. Lublin, p. 185.

[3] W. Roszkowski (2009). *Najnowsza historia Polski (1914–1945)*. Świat Książki. Warszawa, p. 688.

[4] *Ethnopolitical context of sociocultural transformations in modern Ukraine*. (2017). I.F. Kuras IPiEND of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine. Kyiv, p. 512.

now we will dwell more specifically on the idea of "Sarmatism" as one of the defining postulates of the Piast concept.

Referring to ancient authors, who believed that the Sarmatians (Sauromatians), like the Scythians, were barbarian warlike tribes inhabiting Sarmatia, Polish historians asserted: "We are the Sarmatians, and therefore what was written about the Sarmatians should be correctly considered written about our ancestors."[5] The basis for defining the common ancestors of the Polish, Czech, and Russian peoples was outlined in the story of the three brothers – Lech, Czech, and Russ – the mythical progenitors of the three Slavic tribes. The Polish versions attested to Lech's seniority and his initiative to found the city of Gniezno, the ancient capital of the Polish state. This myth not only performed a genealogical function; it also emphasized the hierarchy and structure of relations within a single community, which was united by both blood kinship and common "character."

However, the Piast legend did not become part of the Sarmatian myth, because the former aimed to consolidate the rights of the royal dynasty, which by the 16th century no longer occupied the throne; the state system had also undergone significant changes by that time. A new myth was needed; the legend of the Piasts remained in the chronicles as proof of the antiquity of the Polish state. Therefore, at the initial stage of the formation of the Sarmatian theory of the origin of the Polish people and the formation of policy towards Poland's neighbors, the authors' conscious construction of the myth stands out. The biblical version of the origin of the Slavs requires a logical connection of ethnic commonality with ancient peoples, and the "migration" theory hardly fits with the legend of the three brothers. The "migration" theory emphasizes the connection of the Polish people with the ancient peoples of European civilization; the legend of the three brothers primarily emphasizes the All-Slavic genetic community.[6]

The analysis of the sources proves that it was more important for Polish chroniclers to fit Polish history into that of the world (that is, Europe) than to emphasize Slavic unity. They were also more interested in the search for roots and first foundations than in the genealogy of the rulers, because since the beginning of the 16th century the king had been less powerful than the gentry. Therefore, the first version did not develop by chance. The Polish sociologist and researcher S. Ossowski, assessing the role of ethnic myths in the formation of Polish self-consciousness, wrote that the legend of Lech, Czech, and Russ testified that the relevant nations traced their descent from conquering warriors rather than the blood kinship of the three Slavic peoples.[7]

Summarizing, we can say that at the initial stage, when the Sarmatian origin of the Poles united them with other Slavs, the unity or belonging of the Polish people to

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[5] M. Bielski (1597). *Kronika Polska*, vol. I. https://jbc.bj.uj.edu.pl/dlibra/doccontent?id=230623 [accessed 20.03.2024], k. 2, s. 6.

[6] M. Leskinen (2002). *Myths and Images of Sarmatism: The Origins of the National Ideology of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth*. Moscow, p. 178; Leskinen M. (1998). *The national ideal of the Pole in history: The image of the Sarmatian gentry*. In M. Robinson (ed.), *Slavic almanac*. Indrik. Moscow, pp. 256–280.

[7] S. Ossowski (1948). *Więź społeczna i dziedzictwo krwi*. Spółdzielnia Wydawnicza «Książka». Warszawa, p. 287.

the Slavic European community was the main idea. Simultaneously with the search for common features, one can find the idea of glorifying the Polish people through their historical past, because ethnic self-identification, like national self-identification, is based on two foundations: the image of the "alien" and the image of one's "own."

The Jagiellonian concept and the idea of "subjugation of the East": the role of Poland as a defender of Western values

In parallel with the formation of the Sarmatian myth and the Piast concept among the Polish political elite, the Jagiellonian concept also developed. The latter is based on memories of the mighty Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, which emerged during the Jagiellonian era and was the result of a series of successful unions and alliances, in turn leading to the formation of a multinational state body. The Jagiellonian concept is characterized by an anti-Russian orientation (the Russian Empire arose later and expanded mainly through a policy of conquest) and differs from the Russian doctrine in that it is based on a peaceful political, economic, cultural, and religious expansion to the east.[8]

The main postulate of the "Jagiellonian heritage" is the recognition of Poland's belonging to the Western Christian civilization; however, its historical path differs from that of Western Europe due to Poland's location on the border between the West and the East and its role of a representative and defender of Western values. In addition to the geopolitically induced differences in Poland's historical fate, the doctrine emphasizes the peculiarities of its political culture and the practice of political life, which has developed since the 16th-century Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth according to the model of a noble republic. According to the theory, the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, carrying out its colonization of Eastern Europe in relation to the West and the East, was politically and spiritually self-sufficient and had the potential to create a special intermediate civilization. This concept served the need to connect the Polish historical heritage with the Slavic and Western European worlds for the further revival of an independent Polish state.[9] The most radical supporters of this concept defended the thesis that Poland's rights to Russian and Lithuanian lands arose from its civilizational merits.[10]

Ukrainian historians claim that the policy of the ruling Jagiellonian dynasty, with which the Polish-Lithuanian period of Ukrainian history is associated, was negative towards Ukrainians and Orthodox Christians. However, this statement is not always correct. In particular, at least in relation to the affairs of the Orthodox Church, there was the restoration of the Galician Orthodox Metropolitanate in 1371 (the Catholic

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[8] A. Koniuszewski (2012). *Meandry geopolityki. Wpływ gry mocarstw na położenie Polski*. Wydawnictwo Prasy Lokalnej. Warszawa, p. 194.

[9] N. Shevchenko (n.d.). *"Jagiellonian heritage" in the light of modern Ukrainian historical studies*. http://dspace.nbuv.gov.ua [accessed 20.03.2022].

[10] Y. Sinkevych (2008). *The problem of the civilizing mission of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in the historiographic work of representatives of the Krakow historical school*. "Scientific works of the P. Mohyla ChMNU", 88(75), 112–115.

Metropolitanate was not created until 1375),[11] the privilege of Vladyslav III on equalizing the rights of the Orthodox clergy with the Catholic in 1443,[12] the formation of the Galician Orthodox diocese in 1539,[13] and so on. Similar examples can be found in other spheres of life.

In contrast to the "Jagiellonian myth," 19th-century Ukrainian historiography put forward its own Cossack myth, which was probably the most suitable for affirming and substantiating the uniqueness of Ukrainians and their identity. Equally, in the Cossack epic, it was possible to find at least some "elements of a separate state organization that connected history and built the strength of the so-called Ukrainian statehood."[14]

Created in the 19th century, the "Jagiellonian myth" and the concept of the "civilizing mission of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in the East" have now received a "second wind" in view of the real mission of Poland as an "advocate" of the former peoples of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, especially Ukraine, in terms of their integration into the European Union. The English researcher T. Snyder emphasizes that from the Jagiellonian historical heritage, Lithuanians idealized the pagan period (up to 1386) and the anti-Polish policy of Vytautas (1392–1430), while Belarusians considered the era before the Union of Lublin in 1569 to be the "golden age" of their statehood. For Poles, the Commonwealth (1569–1795) was the embodiment of their lost greatness.[15]

Within the framework of the Jagiellonian concept, there developed the doctrines of Intermarium and Prometheism. Intermarium (Międzymorze) is a project that envisages the formation of a continental federation of states between the Adriatic, Baltic, and Black Seas based on the heritage of the First Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. This concept is actively supported by the modern nationalist parties of the Republic of Poland, which express fears of the national identity of Poles being lost in European structures; in the 1990s, they even strongly opposed integration into the European Economic Community (EEC).[16]

November 11, 1918, became a landmark date for Poland, because on that day the independent Polish Republic was revived. The emergence of an independent Poland

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[11] T. Hoshko (ed.) (2011). *Guide on the history of Ukraine of the Lithuanian-Polish era*. Lviv, p. 727.

[12] T. Hoshko (2015). *Another era of our history: interpretations of the Lithuanian-Polish era in Ukrainian historiography*. Integration of Science and Education. https://er.ucu.edu.ua/bitstream/handle/1/389/Hoschko_Чужа%20доба%20.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y [accessed 20.03.2022].

[13] T. Hoshko (ed.) (2011). *Op. cit.*, p. 727.

[14] T. Hoshko (2015). *Op. cit.*

[15] T. Snyder (2019, February 29). *Nikt nie uwierzy w niewinność Polski*. https://magazyn.wp.pl/artykul/timothy-snyder-nikt-nie-uwierzy-w-niewinnosc-polski [accessed 20.03.2022]; Osipyan O. (2004). *The long-awaited reconstruction of "unexpected nations" / Timothy Snyder. The Reconstruction of Nations: Poland, Ukraine, Lithuania, Belarus, 1569–1999. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2003. 367 p.* "Ukrainian Humanitarian Review", 10, 160–168.

[16] O. Mikhaliev (2009). *The issue of joining NATO in Polish political discourse (1989–1993)*. "Slovenian Studies", 5, 52.

was marked by the intensification of its foreign policy, especially in the eastern direction. Already on November 22, 1918, J. Pilsudski became the Temporary Chief (head) of the state, while retaining the title of Supreme Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of Poland. That is, he simultaneously headed both the civil and military authorities in the Polish state and exerted a decisive influence on its foreign policy.[17] In his eastern policy, he tried to implement the concept of federalism, which came down to solving the twofold issue of "weakening Russia, which threatened the independence of Poland, and involving in the implementation of this goal the peoples who, along with the Polish people, felt threatened by Russian imperialism."[18] His priority was the east; he hoped to dismember Bolshevik Russia along "national lines, which should lead not only to the decline of the latter, but also to the formation of a block of states allied to Poland in the territory between the Baltic and Black seas."[19]

The political project that Pilsudski implemented between the two world wars was called Prometheism. The idea of peaceful state-building inspired the federal concept he embodied, the purpose of which was not just to revive Poland after the First World War, but, above all, to create a federation of Poland, Lithuania, Ukraine, and Belarus. In the predominantly eastern direction of expansion declared by the Polish leader, the Ukrainian issue played a dominant role; the aim was to weaken Russia.[20]

After the Second World War, the traditions formed in previous historical periods by the Polish political elite were preserved in the views of Polish political émigrés from the Parisian "Culture," particularly J. Giedroyc and J. Meroszewski. Giedroyc gathered intellectuals who formed the institution of Polish oppositional thought, offering a completely new vision of postwar international relations, which envisaged the independence of Ukraine, Belarus, and Lithuania[21]. At a time when Polish society was still not ready to abandon the idea of reviving the Polish state within the borders of the First Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, a Polish public intellectual claimed that "there will be no truly free Poles, Czechs or Hungarians without free Ukrainians, Belarusians or Lithuanians."[22] Therefore, a free Ukraine personified the inevitability of the collapse of the USSR, which in the 1970s and 1980s seemed to be a fantasy.[23]

Meroszewski, a London correspondent of the magazine *Culture* and a close friend of Giedroyc, was a supporter of the reconciliation of Poland with the nations on its eastern border; therefore, the "Doctrine of Giedroyc-Meroszewski" was also called the "ULB" from the names of the countries (Ukraine, Lithuania, and Belarus). The essence of this doctrine was that it was necessary to recognize the irreversibility of the territorial

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[17] V. Komar (2011). *The concept of Prometheanism in the politics of Poland (1921–1939)*. Misto. Ivano-Frankivsk, p. 74.

[18] J. Piłsudski (1939). *Pisma zbiorowe*, vol. V. Warszawa, p. 512.

[19] *Ibidem.*

[20] V. Suelya (2018). *Jozef Pilsudski*. Dukh i Litera. Kyiv, p. 618.

[21] J. Piłsudski (1939). *Op. cit.*, p. 512.

[22] L. Strilchuk (2019). *Modern Polish nationalism and Ukrainian-Polish contradictions – new faces of old problems*. "Historical and political studies. Scientific journal", 64(1), 192–200.

[23] *Deklaracja w sprawie ukraińskiej*. (1977). "Kultura", 5, 66–67.

changes that had occurred due to the Second World War.[24] Polish acceptance of the loss of Vilnius and Lviv was considered the main condition for reconciliation with its eastern neighbors and, in the future, for the independence of the Central and Eastern European countries controlled by the Soviet Union.[25]

Conclusions

Geopolitical changes in Central and Eastern Europe, associated with the crisis and collapse of the socialist system and the decline of the Eastern bloc, coincided with the rapid development of democratic processes in the countries of the region. For Poland, the fall of the Berlin Wall and the unification of Germany, and the crisis and subsequent collapse of the Soviet Union, brought to the fore the issue of finding a new niche in world politics and the need to develop new foreign policy doctrines with a clear definition of national priorities. The policy of "two ways," formulated and implemented by the first Solidarity government, became one such new doctrine.[26] Over the next decade, the Republic of Poland successfully implemented an Eastern policy in which Ukraine occupied an important place. In the western direction, in the 1990s and early 2000s, Poland actively and successfully paved its own way into European and Euro-Atlantic structures.

Two political doctrines – the Piast and the Jagiellonian – formed the basis of the formation of the foreign policy concepts of the Second and Third Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. In the 20th and early 21st centuries, the traditions of the implementation of Poland's foreign policy towards Ukrainians, developed in previous centuries, were consolidated and supplemented with new visions. They were adapted to new geopolitical realities and acquired new features of manifestation.

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[24] L. Strilchuk, Pasichnyk J. (2020). *Presidential dimansion of contemporary Ukrainian-Polish relations*. Terezy. Lutsk, p. 360.

[25] J. Meroszewski (2005). *Russian "Polish complex" and the ULB space. Space of freedom. Ukraine on the pages of the Parisian "Culture"*. Krytyka. Kyiv, pp. 195–209.

[26] L. Strilchuk (2013). *Ukraine – Poland: from good-natured relations to strategic partnership (the end of the XXth – the beginning of the XXIst century)*. Volynski Starozhytnosti. Lutsk, p. 608.

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