

## 'Poland, a future NATO ally' from NATO Review (October 1994)

**Caption:** In October 1994, Piotr Kolodziejczyk, Polish Defence Minister, writing in the NATO Review, analyses the new partnership relations between Poland and the Atlantic Alliance.

**Source:** NATO REVIEW-WEB EDITION. [ON-LINE]. [Brussels]: NATO, [03.02.2005]. Disponible sur <http://www.nato.int/docu/review/1994/9405-2.htm>.

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## Poland - a future NATO ally

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European security is indivisible, although not everybody realizes this or is ready to accept this obvious fact. Regional conflicts and civil wars on our continent have many transborder effects including waves of refugees fleeing the conflict; constraints on international trade in the area and the necessity to participate in peacekeeping activities. The international community must therefore not stand idly by, looking on passively, as a number of local and regional conflicts unfold, as in the case of the conflict in the former Yugoslavia.

It is worth emphasizing that Poland has not been involved in any conflict for over 40 years now, nor is there any danger of this in the foreseeable future. But of course, there is no guarantee of a lasting peaceful international environment for Poland in the years to come.

It is thus high time for an effective conflict prevention and crisis management mechanism to be established - a mechanism that would help to prevent war from breaking out or a crisis from escalating into war. At the same time, international peacekeeping forces must be provided with a broader mandate, allowing them not only to supervise a truce between warring parties, but also to establish or even to enforce peace. To achieve this goal, the international community must redefine the roles and functions of the existing security institutions and organizations. From this point of view, a new role and shape for NATO is of particular significance.

A transformed North Atlantic Alliance should be the foundation on which a new European security system is established. However, many politicians in Brussels, flushed with victory at the end of the Cold War, following the collapse of the Warsaw Pact and the disintegration of the Soviet Union, are reluctant to think about adapting the Alliance to the necessities of the new era of international relations on the continent of Europe.

Poland, striving for NATO membership, has no intention of suggesting that the expansion of the Alliance towards the East should be realized at the expense of the less prosperous NATO member states - that is, by diverting economic and military assistance provided to them by the more prosperous member countries. Rather, we see a possibility for the Central European countries and the less affluent members of NATO to create a kind of "common cause" in order to acquire the modern high-tech equipment we need.

The collapse of Communism brought the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact and the fall of the Iron Curtain, decreasing dramatically the danger of nuclear or large-scale conventional war in Europe; but, at the same time, it has led to new kinds of risks and threats. The bipolar order has been replaced in Europe by geographic zones with different degrees of security. The result is that Poland and other Central European countries find themselves in a kind of security vacuum between the Western zone, which possesses an effective defence system, and the unstable former Soviet republics, with Russia attempting to create a new security structure around itself. The countries of Central and Eastern Europe have no formal guarantees of military assistance in case of threat or potential aggression against them. They hope to alleviate this through close cooperation with NATO, leading to membership of the Alliance in the foreseeable future.

Poland, striving for its own place in the European security structure, has established a wide network of bilateral agreements on military cooperation, not only with neighbouring countries - the maintenance of good neighbourly relations being one of the pillars of our foreign policy - but also with many members of the Atlantic Alliance, including the United States, Germany, France, the United Kingdom, Canada, Turkey and Greece.

### **Real and robust partnership**

At the NATO summit last January, in proclaiming the Partnership for Peace (PFP) initiative, Allies stated: "We expect and would welcome NATO expansion that would reach to democratic states to our East... ." I

am convinced that now, several months later, we can say we have begun to translate this political declaration into action. Poland has undertaken the Partnership for Peace programme as the best route towards its goal of full integration with the Alliance.

The idea seems at last to be increasingly accepted in the West. President Bill Clinton's statement in Warsaw last July, suggesting that consultations would commence next year to broaden the Alliance, indicates that most of the doubts about the necessity of that step have disappeared. Now, only such questions as when? and how? remain.

We treat our participation in the Partnership for Peace initiative as the path towards NATO. This is stressed very clearly both in the Polish Presentation Document and in the Individual Partnership Programme which we concluded with the Alliance in July.

This does not mean that the Polish approach to Partnership is focused exclusively on purely formal aspects of NATO membership. On the contrary, we strongly believe that, taken seriously by every participant, the PFP concept has a real chance of becoming an important factor in strengthening security all across the continent. Intensification of political dialogue accompanied by an engagement in joint activities, such as peacekeeping and humanitarian and rescue operations, will lead us to the most important goal, that is, the creation of a new Europe without divisions. With that idea in mind, we also appreciate Russian participation in the Partnership programme. We hope that PFP will draw Russia closer into Europe. It will facilitate both its playing an important role on the international scene and achieving democratic control of its armed forces and transparency in its military planning.

### **A step by step process**

I am aware that Poland cannot be fully incorporated and integrated into the NATO structures overnight. The process of adaptation of the Polish armed forces to Western standards will take some time, particularly as far as technical aspects are concerned. First of all, we must strive for compatibility of our command, control and communications systems. Next, we have to achieve standardization of command procedures and even maps. Then, even if we were not yet a NATO member, our defensive potential could be effectively supported in time of need, based on and following appropriate consultations. In that respect, we hope that PFP will be useful in making it possible for Polish and NATO forces to fit together like "Lego building blocks". Such operational compatibility would not need, at the moment, to be a component of a comprehensive and fully compatible defensive wall, but it should strive to fit this future structure.

On its path towards the Euro-Atlantic security structures, Poland does not want to be a poor relation or a burden to anyone. It is obvious that our equipment is mostly obsolescent - perhaps one generation behind - but this can be rectified provided time and money are available. Nevertheless, it is overall military power which counts on the modern battlefield and, in general, despite the fact that we have to compensate quantity for quality, our military power remains substantial.

The process of modernization of the equipment in the inventory of the Polish armed forces requires time - it may take several years, or even more. This process will require large investments and, first and foremost, Western technological support. Otherwise, we would have no alternative to using only Russian military technology and that would obviously raise doubts about the credibility of our sovereignty. A country doomed to procure equipment and weapons from only one source has its hands tied. This is something we cannot accept.

This does not mean we will cease negotiating, talking or trading with the Russians. Nonetheless, we must be open to Western technologies and there are some signs of progress in this respect. At the Warsaw meeting of the German, French and Polish ministers of defence last July, the idea of establishing a trilateral working group was accepted without any objections, to help draw Poland deeper into a process of joint research and development as well as acquisition of new weapons for our armed forces. I do hope we have finally broken the deadlock, although from our point of view, this has happened fairly late. Now is the time for us to catch up at last.

## **Polish advantages**

Poland is in the lead among countries undertaking the process of profound economic and political transformation which represents a substantial defence potential, despite any shortcomings. It should be considered as a reliable, credible and well-tested partner. Poland, which has no contentious issues with any of its neighbours, in fact enjoys good relations with virtually all its neighbours and has concluded bilateral friendship treaties, as well as agreements on military cooperation with several of them. Poland is also making its own contribution to the development of regional structures of cooperation, such as the Visegrad Group, the Central European Initiative and the Baltic Council. We also participate in the activities of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE), supporting the elaboration of pan-European standards concerning the conduct of states. In my opinion, all of this indicates that as a democratic, economically growing and internationally active country, we are well qualified for membership in the Western institutions.

Poland also has a long tradition of active participation in various peacekeeping operations around the world. At present, we have units stationed in the former Yugoslavia, Lebanon and Syria. Now, we have earmarked additional units to be prepared to operate together with NATO in bringing peace to conflict areas. Hopefully, we will be able to contribute to future endeavours of the UN and CSCE in conflict prevention and crisis management by, among other means, developing, together with NATO, the interesting concept of Combined Joint Task Forces.

Of course we have problems. Our economic situation continues to limit our capacity to develop our armed forces, including the prospects for our cooperation with the Alliance. Nonetheless, we know that the ticket for a security train must be purchased with our own money.