



## *Polonia, una potencia «atlantista» en un marco europeo*

### *Resumen:*

*Desde su creciente apertura internacional a finales del siglo XX, la República de Polonia ha prestado especial atención a la seguridad y defensa de su territorio. Frente a un pasado histórico marcado por la resistencia a transgresiones fronterizas y su localización geográfica a las puertas de la Federación Rusa, Polonia ostenta un enfoque destacado en la protección de su territorio.*

*No obstante, conscientes de sus limitadas capacidades armamentísticas, las instituciones polacas han abogado por participar en organismos de carácter global para asegurar su estabilidad nacional, como son la OTAN y la UE. El vínculo especial con Estados Unidos, así como su potencial militar, han llevado a un significativo compromiso polaco con la Alianza Atlántica. En el caso de la Unión Europea, donde en ocasiones se ha aspirado a un creciente centralismo, Polonia también está dispuesta a cooperar, mas no a ceder su soberanía nacional. Polonia busca una creciente cooperación europea compatible con la OTAN, que facilite la eficiencia en seguridad y defensa, pero que a su vez le permita mantener la autonomía estratégica nacional y su vínculo especial con Estados Unidos y la Alianza.*

### *Palabras clave:*

*Polonia, seguridad, defensa, OTAN, UE, autonomía estratégica, soberanía, PESCO, coordinación, PCSD.*

### **How to cite this document:**

JIMÉNEZ LENDOIRO, Paula María. *Poland, an «atlanticist» power in a European Framework*. IEEE Opinion Paper 51./2024.

[https://www.ieee.es/Galerias/fichero/docs\\_opinion/2024/DIEEO54\\_2024\\_PAUJIM\\_Polonia\\_ENG.pdf](https://www.ieee.es/Galerias/fichero/docs_opinion/2024/DIEEO54_2024_PAUJIM_Polonia_ENG.pdf) and/or [link bie](#)<sup>3</sup> (accesed day/month/year)

## Introduction

The disintegration of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) heralded the beginning of a new historical period for Poland. Although the establishment of an independent and autonomous state was not a novelty for Polish citizens, the fall of Communism in the 1990s brought with it the opening of Poland to the Western international order, an opening consolidated between 1999 and 2004. In March 1999, the then Prime Minister and President of the Republic of Poland, Jerzy Buzek and Aleksander Kwaśniewski, ratified Poland's entry into the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) as agreed in the Sejm (Polish bicameral Parliament)<sup>1</sup>. Accession to this international organization meant greater state security and increasing global relevance that would establish Poland as one of the main bases for NATO forces and a barrier against antagonistic powers. Poland's international engagement with Western countries was enhanced in May 2004 with their entry into the European Union (EU) supported in 2003 by 77% of voters<sup>2</sup>.

This growing relevance would position Poland to become the sixth largest power in the European Union<sup>3</sup>, behind Germany, France, Italy, Spain and the Netherlands, with a development perspective that could place it among the five main European forces in the coming decades. Its economic progression, as well as its geostrategic position, have instituted Poland as a state of great international interest, especially in terms of security and defense. Despite the historical complications of its central position on the European map with powers such as Germany, the USSR or even Ukraine, its role is of great relevance. Poland borders seven countries, including three non-EU and non-NATO states, one currently allied power, albeit with a controversial past, Ukraine, and two rival states, the Russian Federation and the Republic of Belarus. This geographical location, and the historical past that surrounds it, have marked the Polish perspective in terms of the willingness to integrate in defense and security matters in the EU and NATO.

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<sup>1</sup> Available at: <https://www.sejm.gov.pl>

<sup>2</sup> DELOY, C., LEVY, H., & FOUNDATION ROBERT SCHUMAN. «Referendum on UE Membership 2003 Poland», *La Fondation Robert Schuman le centre de recherches et d'études sur l'Europe*. 8th June 2023. Available at: <https://www.robert-schuman.eu/en/monitor/205-all-together-the-poles-say-yes-to-their-country-s-entry-into-the-european-union>

<sup>3</sup> MCEVOY, O. «GDP of European countries 2022», *Statista*. 20th June, 2023. Available at: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/685925/gdp-of-european-countries/>



Figure 1. Symbol of Polish participation in the EU and NATO. Source: *The Wall Street Journal*.

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/poland-nato-christian-russia-west-c0165b4c>

### European reluctance?

Occasionally there has been a desire to convey Polish willingness to leave the European Union through ideas such as "polexit"<sup>4</sup>. The refusal of British citizens to remain in the EU in 2016 opened a path of speculation among certain countries, including Poland. However, the exit of the sixth power from the Union is not something that has been truly contemplated. The Polish stance towards the European Union has focused on the limitation of supranational competences, but not on a rejection of the European body. The case of former Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher could be seen as a historical analogy. Despite her essentially economic focus, Thatcher also sought to reduce the granting of state responsibilities. It is precisely this point that has manifested itself in Poland, the reduction of the gradual ceding of powers to Brussels. Former Prime Minister Mateusz Jakub Morawiecki showed the need to limit centralism in Brussels and increase the principle of subsidiarity<sup>5</sup>, thus achieving a more balanced body with greater state

<sup>4</sup> Poléxit: a concept associated with a hypothetical exit of Poland from the European Union

<sup>5</sup> The principle of subsidiarity is one of the regulatory bases of the exclusive competences of the European Union. This principle states that the EU; as a supranational body, will only intervene in the decision of the Member States and the practices that they entail, when it can be more effective in achieving objectives. Pavy, 2023. Available at <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/factsheets/es/sheet/7/el-principio-de-subsidiariedad>

autonomy<sup>6</sup>. The return of the former President of the European Council as a Prime Minister of the sixth European power, Donald Tusk, leaves the door open to further European integration. So far, however, his intentions in security and defense matters, as far as the Union is concerned, have persisted along the historical line of continued cooperation between the EU and NATO.

## Poland in the NATO framework

The Republic of Poland has stood out for its transcendental support to NATO, whose deterrence and intergovernmental nature have been key to its expansion and persistence over time. Unlike the EU, an essentially political body with legal personality<sup>7</sup> and a certain supranationality, NATO has focused on the creation of an interstate alliance centered on the defense of member states. Its primarily defensive focus has facilitated its efficiency, limiting the emergence of other issues such as political differences. Likewise, the continuity and support for this international organization can be attributed to its inter-statal emphasis. While it is true that the principle of intergovernmentalism entails significant limitations on joint decision-making, as has been seen recently in the accession processes of Finland and Sweden, it allows states to maintain national sovereignty. In the case of Poland, it is precisely this state autonomy that has been one of the key reasons for its continued support for the Atlantic Alliance.

In opposition to the particular Polish involvement in security and defense issues promoted by the European Union, in the case of NATO, Poland has historically been more active and consistent. Since its inception in 1999, Warsaw has always shown itself to be a loyal partner of the Alliance as noted by specialist Agnieszka Bieńczyk-Missala<sup>8</sup>. Regardless of the political party in charge of the government, Warsaw has traditionally manifested

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<sup>6</sup> SERVICIO DE LA REPÚBLICA DE POLONIA. «Europa ante un momento decisivo de la historia: «Europa ante un momento decisivo de la historia: El primer ministro Mateusz Morawiecki sobre el futuro de Europa». 20th March 2023. Available at: <https://www.gov.pl/web/espana/europa-ante-un-momento-decisivo-de-la-historia-el-primer-ministro-mateusz-morawiecki-sobre-el-futuro-de-europa>

<sup>7</sup> BUX, U., & MACIEJEWSKI, M. «Las fuentes y el ámbito de aplicación del derecho de la Unión Europea», *Fichas temáticas sobre la Unión Europea*. Parlamento Europeo, November 2023. Available at: <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/factsheets/es/sheet/6/las-fuentes-y-el-ambito-de-aplicacion-del-derecho-de-la-union-europea>

<sup>8</sup> More information: REPUBLIC OF POLAND. «Poland in NATO - More than 20 Years». Ministry of National Defense. Available at: <https://www.gov.pl/web/national-defence/poland-in-nato-20-years>

strong support for the Alliance<sup>9</sup> and has focused on making sure that the EU's security and defense competences did not limit the Atlanticist orientations embodied in the Washington Treaty. Poland discerns its international security and national defense as dependent on NATO, mainly because of its limited military capabilities compared to its main concern, Russia.

However, the European power is also aware that its geographical location and economic growth are assets of great interest to the Alliance. Poland has a decisive geographical location<sup>10</sup>, due to its border with the Russian Federation, the Republic of Belarus and Ukraine, in addition to being one of the Member States with the highest economic growth and the one with the highest proportion of real GDP allocated to defense.<sup>11</sup> Aware of the importance of Polish territory for the defense of its interests in the West, the United States has focused on maintaining mutually positive relations with Poland, including various bilateral security and defense projects. These initiatives encompass the growing presence of U.S. military personnel in Poland, the establishment of U.S. military bases on Polish territory, and economic cooperation in military armaments.

In August 2020, the then US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo announced the withdrawal of about 11,900 American soldiers from German territory.<sup>12</sup> A significant part of the military personnel was repatriated to The United States, and almost half of the soldiers were redeployed among NATO member countries, Poland being one of the main destinations on the occasion of The Defense Cooperation Agreement<sup>13</sup>. This act was a significant message for Polish citizens, since, in addition to having a growing number of allied armed forces on their territory, they could feel that they had been chosen over their traditionally antagonistic power, Germany.

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<sup>9</sup> BIEŃCZYK-MISSALA. «Poland's foreign and security policy: Main directions», *UNISCI Journal*. January 2016. Available at: <https://www.ucm.es/data/cont/media/www/pag-78913/UNISCIDP40-6ABienczyk-Missala1.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> BURAS, P. «East side story: Poland's new role in the European Union. ECFR». 16th February 2023. Available at: <https://ecfr.eu/article/east-side-story-polands-new-role-in-the-european-union/>

<sup>11</sup> NATO. «Defence expenditure of NATO countries (2014-2023)». July 2023. Available at: [https://www.nato.int/nato\\_static\\_fl2014/assets/pdf/2023/7/pdf/230707-def-exp-2023-en.pdf](https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/2023/7/pdf/230707-def-exp-2023-en.pdf)

<sup>12</sup> FRANCE 24. «US to withdraw 11,900 troops from Germany, about half to be redeployed in Europe», *France 24*. 29<sup>th</sup> of July 2020. Available at: <https://www.france24.com/en/20200729-us-to-withdraw-11-900-troops-from-germany-about-half-to-be-redeployed-in-europe>

<sup>13</sup> U. S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE. «Agreement between the Government of the United States of America and Poland». The United States of America, & The Republic of Poland, 2020. Available at: <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/20-1113-Poland-EDCA.pdf>

The military engagement between the quintessential leader of the Alliance and Polish institutions remained continuous over time despite political changes, reaching its peak two years later. In June 2022, the White House announced the establishment of a new American military base on Polish territory, situated in Poznań<sup>14</sup>. The base will receive the name *Camp Kościuszko*<sup>15</sup>, paying tribute to Tadeusz Kościuszko, a Polish military man considered one of the symbols of the nation due to his defense of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in the 19th century. Moreover, in addition to its national positioning, Tadeusz Kościuszko played a relevant role in The American Revolution, thus showing the historical ties between the two Western countries. This link is in turn distinguishable in the American presence in NATO tasks in Eastern Europe. Regardless of its presence in different missions and territories in the European region, the United States only commands the battle group established in Poland.<sup>16</sup>

Growing bilateral relations and Britain's formal exit from the EU in 2020 established Poland as the perfect American partner within the European body. The United States sees Warsaw as a defender of its own and NATO's interests on the continent, buffering the collision of European and Atlantic Alliance purposes, and greater European independence on security and defense issues. Poland also regards the United States as a historically key power for its survival, as Paul Taylor points out<sup>17</sup>. At present, Polish institutions perceive the American power as a consolidator of defense in the East of the continent and as an instrument to limit greater European defense centralism.

In recent years Poland has accused Brussels of a lack of interest in the protection of the Eastern borders, regarding Mediterranean security as paramount. This issue was precisely a topic of discussion in the process of Poland's accession to PESCO (Permanent Structured Cooperation) in 2017<sup>18</sup>. The Polish incorporation to this initiative

<sup>14</sup> SHALAL, A., & LANDAURO, I. «Biden bolsters long-term U.S. military presence in Europe», *Reuters News Agency*. 29<sup>th</sup> June 2022. Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/world/us/biden-says-us-changing-force-posture-europe-based-threat-2022-06-29/>

<sup>15</sup> REPUBLIC OF POLAND. «Increasing the US military presence in Poland». Ministry of National Defense. Available at: [https://www.gov.pl/web/national-defence/increasing-the-us-military-presence-in-poland#:~:text=U.S.%20Army%20Garrison%20Poland%20\(USAG%2DP\)&text=The%20unit%20is%20being%20established,military's%20forward%20outposts%20in%20Poland](https://www.gov.pl/web/national-defence/increasing-the-us-military-presence-in-poland#:~:text=U.S.%20Army%20Garrison%20Poland%20(USAG%2DP)&text=The%20unit%20is%20being%20established,military's%20forward%20outposts%20in%20Poland)

<sup>16</sup> NATO. «NATO's military presence in the east of the Alliance». 15th March 2023. Available at: [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics\\_136388.htm#:~:text=The%20four%20north%2Deastern%20battlegroups,Northeast%20Headquarters%20in%20Szczecin%2C%20Poland](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_136388.htm#:~:text=The%20four%20north%2Deastern%20battlegroups,Northeast%20Headquarters%20in%20Szczecin%2C%20Poland)

<sup>17</sup> TAYLOR, P. «“For Trump” or Bust? Poland and the Future of European Defense», *Friends of Europe*. 2018.

<sup>18</sup> More information: <https://www.pesco.europa.eu/about/>

focused on coordination and collaboration in territorial defense, through programs such as the development of defensive capabilities or military interoperability, was marked by a clear debate centered on the lack of attention to the Eastern front of the Union as Terlikowski points out<sup>19</sup>.

Unlike NATO, which after the invasion of Crimea made clear its interest in the European Eastern front with the 2016 Warsaw Summit<sup>20</sup>, Poland considered that the efforts of the EU in critical areas to its national security were limited. This perception has remained constant over time as is visible in *Poland's 2020 National Security and Defense Strategy*<sup>21</sup>, where it calls for increased EU involvement on the Eastern Front. It is precisely in the latter Strategy, where the need to increase cooperation between the EU and NATO is also included.

Poland has become the main guarantor for the preservation of the Atlantic Alliance. Faced with powers such as France and its desire to increase the Union's defensive capabilities, with declarations about creating a European Army<sup>22</sup>, Poland has always shown the need for projects that are complementary to NATO instead of substitutes. This was another of Warsaw's requirements for joining PESCO. Poland's access to this initiative, besides being conditioned by a growing focus on Eastern Europe, was underpinned by the strengthening of EU-NATO relations and the non-substitution of competences<sup>23</sup>. The support of the European Union and NATO to Ukraine has shown a wide field for cooperation between the two bodies, as well as a historical change in the inter-state relations of Poland and Ukraine.

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<sup>19</sup> TERLIKOWSKI, M. «PESCO: The Polish Perspective», *Institut de Relations Internationales et Stratégiques*. October, 2018. Available at: <https://www.iris-france.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Ares-32.pdf>

<sup>20</sup> More information: CONSEJO EUROPEO. «Cumbre de la OTAN, Varsovia (Polonia), 8 y 9 de julio de 2016». Consejo Europeo & Consejo de la Unión Europea, 2016. Available at: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/meetings/international-summit/2016/07/08-09/>

<sup>21</sup> REPUBLIC OF POLAND. «National Security Strategy of the Republic of Poland 2020». Polish Ministry of Defense, 2020. Available at: [https://www.bbn.gov.pl/ftp/dokumenty/National\\_Security\\_Strategy\\_of\\_the\\_Republic\\_of\\_Poland\\_2020.pdf](https://www.bbn.gov.pl/ftp/dokumenty/National_Security_Strategy_of_the_Republic_of_Poland_2020.pdf)

<sup>22</sup> PONTIJAS CALDERÓN, J. L. *El Ejército Europeo y la Autonomía Estratégica de la Unión Europea*. Instituto Español de Estudios estratégicos, 6th March 2019. Available at: [https://www.ieee.es/Galerias/fichero/docs\\_analisis/2019/DIEEEA08\\_2019JOSPON-EjercitoEuropeo.pdf](https://www.ieee.es/Galerias/fichero/docs_analisis/2019/DIEEEA08_2019JOSPON-EjercitoEuropeo.pdf)

<sup>23</sup> BARANOWSKI, M., & QUENCEZ, M. «An inclusive Pesco moves forward despite remaining concerns», *GMFUS*. 2017. Available at: [https://www.gmfus.org/news/inclusive-pesco-moves-forward-despite-remaining-concerns-:-:~:text=Poland's concerns over PESCO centered, autonomy" and defense industry provisions](https://www.gmfus.org/news/inclusive-pesco-moves-forward-despite-remaining-concerns-:-:~:text=Poland's%20concerns%20over%20PESCO%20centered,%20autonomy%27%20and%20defense%20industry%20provisions)



The European Union and NATO were able to harmonize their capabilities and show a firm response to the invasion of neighboring Ukraine, an event that set alarm bells ringing on Europe's Eastern front. The Russian invasion of Ukraine came as a major jolt to Poland, which found itself on the brink of a full-scale conflict in a country with which it shares strong historical ties. Since the fall of the USSR, ties between Poland and Ukraine have grown not only geographically, but also culturally, religiously, and historically. Both countries were under the leadership of the Soviet Regime during the 20th century (Poland since 1945 and Ukraine since 1922), and both had been part of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in the 16th century. These ties led Poland to be the first European power to visit Ukraine on the occasion of the invasion, to receive refugees, and to send military equipment, leaving behind disagreements, conflicts and massacres such as that of Volhynia in 1943<sup>24</sup>. Polish support for Ukraine, which has certainly remained constant since February 2022 despite various political disagreements, entails an upside for a possible future entry of Ukraine into NATO and the EU.

### **Security and defense within the framework of the European Union.**

Since 2016 Warsaw has strongly defended the preservation of boundaries regarding the European Union in security and defense issues, under the idea of national strategic autonomy. The Polish state has always expressed its desire to continue to maintain full decision-making authority in these pillars of national sovereignty. However, participation in PESCO consolidated the Polish will for an increasing European coordination that would be compatible with its priorities in the East and with The Washington Treaty. Although the certainly limited extent, due to its participation in 6 of the 72 projects<sup>25</sup>, the signing of PESCO meant a growing commitment to security and defense at the regional level. It should also be noted that Poland's involvement in increasing state concord was already remarkable in its participation in CSDP missions and in the number of personnel deployed. Poland has taken part in different missions such as EUFOR Althea in Bosnia

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<sup>24</sup> IWANIUK, J. «Poland and Ukraine's calm dispute over Volhynia Massacre for Commemoration», *Le Monde*. 12th July 2023. Available at: [https://www.lemonde.fr/en/international/article/2023/07/12/poland-and-ukraine-s-appease-dispute-over-volhynia-massacre-for-commemoration\\_6050871\\_4.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/en/international/article/2023/07/12/poland-and-ukraine-s-appease-dispute-over-volhynia-massacre-for-commemoration_6050871_4.html)

<sup>25</sup>More information: <https://www.pesco.europa.eu>

and Herzegovina in 2004, EUNAFVOR Irini, or EUTM RCA<sup>26</sup>. In 2020, the Republic of Poland was the power with the highest number of personnel deployed in civilian CSDP missions, with an average of 128 military personnel, 44 points above Germany, the second largest provider<sup>27</sup>. Poland is ready to cooperate, provided that it retains its state competences in security and defense matters, as stipulated in The Lisbon Treaty.

The Treaty of the European Union brought with it greater integration in foreign policy matters through the establishment of the EU as an international political-legal personality. However, and due to the determination of countries such as Poland, The Lisbon Treaty establishes security and defense efforts as exclusive powers of the States, which can be coordinated at the European level in the case of common security and defense policy missions. The political framework of the CSDP is focused abroad, on actions outside the Union's borders, centered on crisis management and the maintenance of international security (art.42.1)<sup>28</sup>, although it also includes a mutual assistance clause for the Member States in the event of being the target of armed aggression. It establishes that, in the event of such an attack, the countries of the Union must provide support and assistance using all available resources (art. 42.7)<sup>29</sup>. A collective principle of support that still leaves the decision making regarding the type of accessible means in the hands of state institutions. At the same time, the Treaty of Lisbon itself leaves the door open to move towards a Community approach in the arena of security and defense, with the possibility of establishing a future common defense if the Council decides so unanimously (art. 42.2)<sup>30</sup>. Powers including France, opposed by countries like Poland, which advocates greater national strategic autonomy, have tried to promote this initiative through proposals such as a European army, attempting to internalize the external focus of the CSDP, and

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<sup>26</sup> REPUBLIC OF POLAND. «European Union (EU) Missions and Operations. Ministry of National Defense». Available at: <https://www.gov.pl/web/national-defence/eu-missions-and-operations>

<sup>27</sup> SMIT, T. «Increasing member state contributions to EU civilian CSDP Missions», *Sipri*. November 2020. Available at: [https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/2020-11/pb\\_2011\\_csdp\\_compact\\_brief\\_1\\_civilian.pdf](https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/2020-11/pb_2011_csdp_compact_brief_1_civilian.pdf)

<sup>28</sup> Article 42.1 Lisbon Treaty : « The Union may use them on missions outside the Union for peace-keeping, conflict prevention and strengthening international security in accordance with the principles of the United Nations Charter».

<sup>29</sup> Article 42.7 Treaty of Lisbon: « If a Member State is the victim of armed aggression on its territory, the other member States shall have towards it an obligation of aid and assistance by all the means in their power».

<sup>30</sup> Article 42.2 Treaty of Lisbon: « The common security and defence policy shall include the progressive framing of a common Union defence policy. This will lead to a common defence, when the European Council, acting unanimously, so decides».

striving to reduce the intergovernmentalism that characterizes the security and defense of the Union.

Since 2018, a year marked by a certain destabilization in NATO motivated by the criticisms of the then US President Donald Trump, and the uncertainty of Brexit, revived political discourse concerning the idea of a European army. Trump's statements regarding NATO's inefficiency, as well as his exit from multilateral organizations such as NAFTA or WTO, generated mistrust in the European context, which was also facing the exit of one of the great military powers of the Union, Great Britain. This uncertainty, added to the current invasion of Ukraine and a possible return of Trump to the White House, has relighted the French idea of creating a common army<sup>31</sup>. Even with the support of historically divergent powers such as Germany<sup>32</sup>, several Member States have shown their opposition. Countries such as Poland have been reluctant, sticking to their position of not ceding defensive responsibilities to Brussels.

It is precisely this caution with regard to excessive cession of authority that led the Republic of Poland to become one of the last countries to sign up for entry into PESCO. However, it was the intergovernmental nature of this instrument and the Polish will for greater coordination, in addition to its compatibility with NATO and the protection of the East, that led to its entry in 2017. Warsaw continues to advocate for greater European collaboration, especially in the face of the invasion of the neighboring state. The former Prime Minister, Morawiecki, argued in the European Parliament for the need to ensure European cooperation, complementary to NATO in support of Ukraine<sup>33</sup>.

Despite different rhetoric, and its deep Atlanticist profile, Poland has remained consistent in its support for European security and defense cooperation, as long as national sovereignty is not at risk. Different Polish governments have taken different positions on the principles of intergovernmentalism and supranationality in European Union policies.

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<sup>31</sup> MINISTÈRE DE L'EUROPE ET DES AFFAIRES ÉTRANGÈRES. «Francia y la OTAN», *Francia Diplomacia-Ministerio para Europa y de Asuntos Exteriores*. March 2022. Available at: <https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/es/politica-exterior/seguridad-desarme-y-no-proliferacion/cooperacion-en-materia-de-seguridad-y-defensa/article/francia-y-la-otan#:~:text=2009%3A%20Regreso%20de%20Francia%20a%20la%20organización%20militar%20integrada>

<sup>32</sup> «What would happen IF America left Europe to fend for itself?», *The Economist*. 14<sup>th</sup> March 2019. Available at: <https://www.economist.com/special-report/2019/03/14/what-would-happen-if-america-left-europe-to-fend-for-itself>

<sup>33</sup> CHANCELLERY OF THE PRIME MINISTER, REPUBLIC OF POLAND. «Statement by prime minister Mateusz Morawiecki in the European Parliament». 19<sup>th</sup> October 2021. Available at: <https://www.gov.pl/web/primeminister/statement-by-prime-minister-mateusz-morawiecki-in-the-european-parliament>

However, no government or president of the Republic has put on the table the transfer of defense and security competencies to the European Union, essentially due to differences in investments, ties with the United States, relations with powers such as Germany, and disparate arms industries.

It is a fact that Poland is the country in the European Union that invests the most in security and defense. While it is true that the Russian invasion of Ukraine has increased military spending on defense in the EU countries, with the exception of Greece, Italy and Belgium, the percentage investment in relation to GDP is still significantly diverse among different countries. While a large number of EU countries do not reach 2 % of real GDP, the countries of the Eastern front or Greece are between 2.2 % and 3.9 %<sup>34</sup> (as shown in Figure 2). Poland is the country in the European Union that allocates the highest percentage of its GDP to national defense, with aspirations to increase it if necessary.

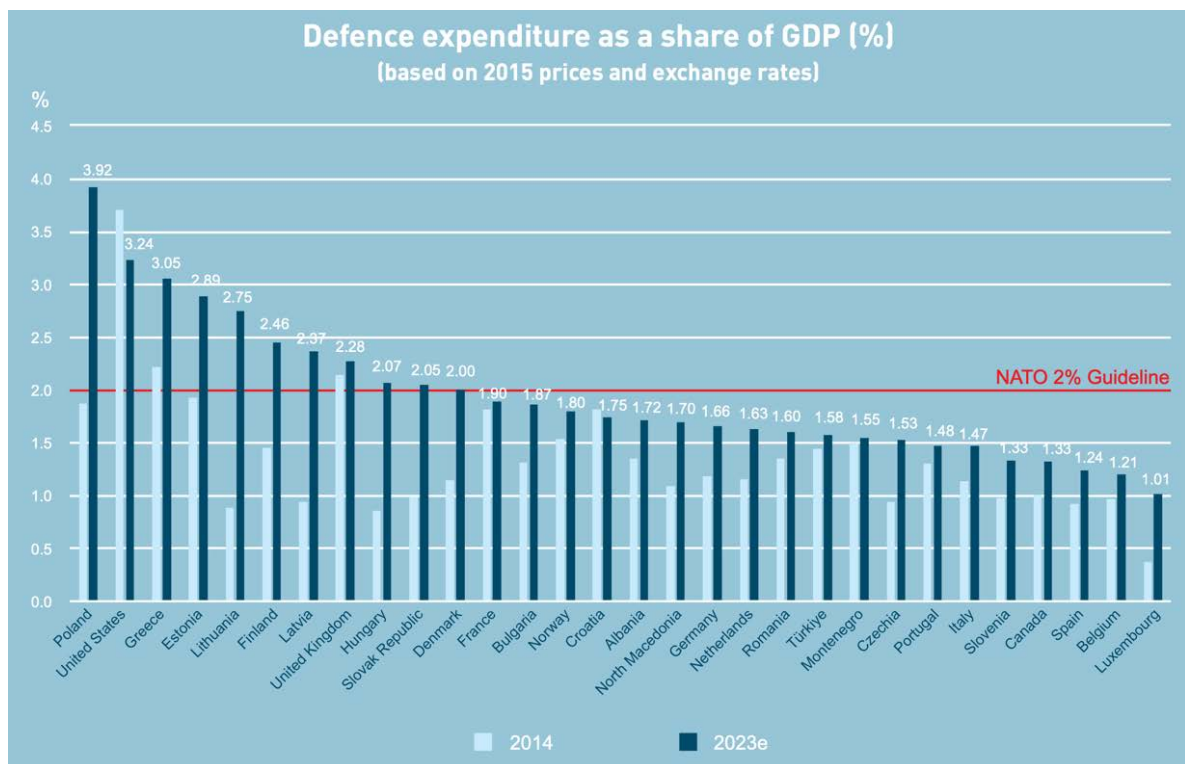


Figura 2. Evolution of defence expenditure within the framework of NATO. Source: The Secretary General's Annual Report, OTAN. [https://www.nato.int/nato\\_static\\_fl2014/assets/pdf/2024/3/pdf/sgar23-en.pdf](https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/2024/3/pdf/sgar23-en.pdf)

<sup>34</sup> NATO. «Defence expenditure of NATO countries (2014-2023)». July 2023. Available at: [https://www.nato.int/nato\\_static\\_fl2014/assets/pdf/2023/7/pdf/230707-def-exp-2023-en.pdf](https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/2023/7/pdf/230707-def-exp-2023-en.pdf)

Security and defense are aspects of greater concern among Polish citizens who feel the Russian threat at their doorstep. In this regard, taking into account the limited defense investment in Europe, Polish institutions are not willing to cede their strategic autonomy to Brussels, thus potentially losing ties with their protective ally, The United States<sup>35</sup>. The Republic of Poland considers that, beyond its large defense investment, it is significantly dependent on the United States, whose 2022 spending was of USD 877 billion, compared to the USD 16.6 billion invested by Poland<sup>36</sup>. Aware of its American dependence, of its support in the 20th century (especially during the Second World War and the disintegration of the USSR), and of its role as the main American ally within the European Union, Poland is not willing to cede its defense and security competences, and to allow the possible loss of support from the United States and NATO.

Since the 1950s, alongside the emerging idea of creating a European Security and Defense Community, The United States has sought to protect its interests and priorities in European territory, for which allies such as Great Britain and the Republic of Poland have been key. Through the intergovernmentalism that currently characterizes security and defense in the EU, Warsaw ensures compatibility between the two bodies, as set out in Article 42.2 of The Lisbon Treaty<sup>37</sup>. In addition to focusing on the compliance of both organizations, Poland also seeks to maintain the EU's focus on crisis management outside its borders, and thus allow NATO to maintain its focus on deterrence and defense of European territory.

The European Union arose from peace between nations and the overcoming of recurrent regional confrontations. The EU has shown that through cooperation and interdependence it has been possible to establish a European order based on coexistence. Although it has made possible collaboration and understanding between powers such as Germany and France, we cannot ignore the fact that in certain cases

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<sup>35</sup> BUX, U. y BIENIŃCZYK-MISSALA, A., *op. cit.* «Poland's foreign and security policy: Main directions», *UNISCI Journal*. January 2016. Available at: <https://www.ucm.es/data/cont/media/www/pag-78913/UNISCIDP40-6ABienczyk-Missala1.pdf>

<sup>36</sup> NATO. «Defence expenditure of NATO countries (2014-2023)». July 2023. Available at: [https://www.nato.int/nato\\_static\\_fl2014/assets/pdf/2023/7/pdf/230707-def-exp-2023-en.pdf](https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/2023/7/pdf/230707-def-exp-2023-en.pdf)

<sup>37</sup> BOE. «Versión Consolidada del Tratado de la Unión Europea». 30th March 2010. Available at: <https://www.boe.es/doue/2010/083/Z00001-00388.pdf>

historical conflicts have led to significant limitations, especially in terms of hard power. The case of Poland is genuinely representative, the acts committed by the Nazi regime during the Second World War against Polish citizens still continue shaping certain distrust towards Germany. This relevance and impact is visible through statements by representatives of the Republic such as Andrzej Duda, president since 2019, who stated that the damages caused during World War II had never been compensated<sup>38</sup>. This view adds difficulties to the transfer of national competences to the EU, where Germany has a central role.

Poland also portrays divergences with other member states such as France. Lacking a direct conflict between both countries, the Polish nation feels certain skepticism towards the French Republic due to its historical ties with the Russian Federation and its frequent tensions in its relations with The United States. Thus, former French President Jacques Chirac was critical of Poland's support for NATO in missions such as Iraq<sup>39</sup>. However, in spite of having concrete differences with respect to some countries, Poland feels a certain general rejection towards the Western powers of the Union due to the feeling of abandonment that arose during the 20th century, and which has not yet been digested, as the former diplomat to the Atlantic Alliance, Jerzy Nowak, pointed out<sup>40</sup>. This mistrust has led not only to increased support from the Polish authorities for NATO, but also to the purchase of American weapons equipment. The Republic of Poland has on numerous occasions opted for the purchase of American weaponry such as the 48 F-16s, instead of acquiring it from European companies such as France's Dassault Aviation<sup>41</sup>.

The defense industry is precisely another reason why Poland is not in favor of ceding its defense competences to the European Union. Moving towards "commonality" in the field of security and defense would mean greater homogenization, which would lead to difficulties for small and medium-sized companies in the Polish defense industry. At the moment, the Polish people have small entities such as Remontowa, Shipbuilding or WB Electronics, and a larger corporation, PGZ, which accounts for the majority of military

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<sup>38</sup> TAYLOR, P. «“For Trump” or Bust? Poland and the Future of European Defense», *Friends of Europe*. 2018.

<sup>39</sup> DEUTSCHE WELLE. «Chirac Comments send a Jolt through EU», *DW*. 19<sup>th</sup> February 2003. Available at: <https://www.dw.com/en/chirac-comments-send-a-jolt-through-eu/a-782707>

<sup>40</sup> BUX, U. y TAYLOR, P., *op. cit.* «“For Trump” or Bust? Poland and the Future of European Defense», *Friends of Europe*. 2018.

<sup>41</sup> ZABOROWSKI, M. «Poland and European Defence Integration», *ECFR*. 25<sup>th</sup> March 2018. Available at: [https://ecfr.eu/publication/poland\\_and\\_european\\_defence\\_integration/](https://ecfr.eu/publication/poland_and_european_defence_integration/)

equipment production in Poland. Polska Grupa Zbrojeniowa comprises more than 60 companies and more than 40,000 workers, a nationally focused corporation controlled by the state, as are the rest of the national companies in the industry<sup>42</sup>.

Aware of the limited international impact and the restricted possibilities of growth in a global market with major European competitors such as Airbus Defense and Space, Thales Group or Leonardo S.p.A., Poland fears that a "Europeanization" of defense would lead to the disappearance of PGZ, which would have a severe economic impact on the country. Thus, in the signing of PESCO, besides taking into account compatibility with NATO and the growing focus on Eastern Europe, Warsaw stated as a conditioning factor the need to take into consideration the arms industries in medium-sized countries such as its own<sup>43</sup>.

### **As a conclusion, what are Poland's aspirations?**

The Republic of Poland seeks greater European cooperation, while maintaining its national strategic autonomy that enables it to make its own decisions. Despite the Eurosceptic vision, which sometimes tends to be attributed to Poland through initiatives such as the "polest", the reality is that it is not ascribable to the field of security and defense. While it is true that throughout its recent history Poland has shown and continues displaying a more stable and categorical position with respect to NATO, mainly because of its support during the turbulent 20th century and its military potential, the Republic of Poland has consolidated a growing concord within the European Union. Since the entry into law of The Lisbon Treaty, which certainly expanded the EU's competences in foreign policy matters, Poland has manifested its desire to increase inter-state coordination and collaboration in security and defense within the Union in order to increase the Union's efficiency and effectiveness.

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<sup>42</sup> *Ibidem*. ZABOROWSKI, M. «Poland and European Defence Integration», *ECFR*. 25<sup>th</sup> January 2018. Available at: [https://ecfr.eu/publication/poland\\_and\\_european\\_defence\\_integration/](https://ecfr.eu/publication/poland_and_european_defence_integration/)

<sup>43</sup> BARANOWSKI, M., & QUENCEZ, M. «An inclusive PESCO moves forward despite remaining concerns», *GMFUS*. 2017. Available : [https://www.gmfus.org/news/inclusive-pesco-moves-forward-despite-remaining-concerns-:-:~:text=Poland's concerns over PESCO centered,autonomy" and defense industry provisions](https://www.gmfus.org/news/inclusive-pesco-moves-forward-despite-remaining-concerns-:-:~:text=Poland's%20concerns%20over%20PESCO%20centered,autonomy%20and%20defense%20industry%20provisions)

The precious national sovereignty, the divergent and limited investment in defense among the member countries, the constant tensions with historically antagonistic powers and the competition in the arms industry, makes it difficult for Poland to move towards "commonality" within the framework of the Union. The possible evolution of the CSDP towards an area of "communitarian" competition could mean for Poland the loss of support from the United States, its essential protective ally for the deterrence of its main threat, the Russian Federation. Thus, Warsaw wants to advance in terms security and defense in the EU, yet not at the cost of weakening NATO or its special bond with The United States. The current intergovernmental framework of the CSDP allows Poland to decide on the compatibility of European proposals with its national interests and with its commitments to the US and NATO.

Nevertheless, in recent years Poland has focused on increasing the synergy between the two bodies ensuring the necessary complementarity desired by state institutions to maintain national security. The coordinated response between the European Union and NATO to the invasion of Ukraine displayed the feasibility of joint management, and the continued focus of NATO and the European Union's increased attention to the East of the continent. Poland seems to be continuously aspiring to increase interstate CSDP cooperation, and to advance NATO-EU engagement, thus consolidating its position as an Atlanticist power within Europe.

*Paula María Jiménez Lendoiro\**

Student of International Relations and Global Communication  
at Universidad Pontificia Comillas