

Poland “faces tragic decision” after Trump election

Clara Weiss

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Poland’s leading conservative newspaper *Rzeczpospolita* (Republic) believes the country “faces a tragic decision” in the wake of Donald Trump’s inauguration as US president. Given the rapidly intensifying tensions between Washington and Europe, Poland must, according to the newspaper, make a “devilish decision” between an alliance with Washington and an alliance with Germany. The comment provides an indication of the conflicts taking place within Polish ruling circles over foreign policy.

In the January 19 comment, J?drzej Bielicki summed up the radically changed situation in which the Polish ruling elite finds itself since the Trump election: “For the first time the [interests of] the United States and Europe are in conflict. Should we rely on an alliance with the US or prefer Germany? What is more important, NATO or perhaps the EU? Poland will certainly soon have to answer these fundamental questions. And all of this because of Donald Trump.”

Bielicki referred to the interview that Trump gave to the *Bild* newspaper and Britain’s *Times*, in which he became the first US president to openly question the EU’s existence, openly attacked Germany and welcomed Brexit. The newspaper then cited German Chancellor Angela Merkel, who answered Trump’s radical statements by declaring, “We Europeans have our fate in our own hands.”

Bielicki warned of a possible deal between Washington and Moscow at Europe’s expense and predicted Ukraine, a close Polish ally, would be the first victim of a US foreign policy reorientation towards the Kremlin. Bielicki surmised that the choice between Germany and Europe, on the one hand, and the US, on the other, posed the Polish ruling elite with a practically irresolvable dilemma. The situation, according to Bielicki, was “tragic.”

Bielicki emphasised the importance of the EU for Poland and wrote that a decision between Washington, Brussels and Berlin was “not easy and requires detailed consideration.” Significantly, Bielicki then indicated that an alliance with Germany would make more sense.

Although the US had in the past been the only country

capable of protecting Poland militarily from Russia, it may no longer be prepared to do so under Trump for political reasons. By contrast, according to Bielicki, Germany is much less inclined to “leave” its neighbour “to Putin.” His argument amounts to the view that Germany, with the vast expansion of its military and plans for a European army, could soon be in a position to replace the US as Poland’s protector.

He concluded by criticising the monopolisation of all foreign policy decisions by the PiS (Law and Justice) government under Defence Minister Antoni Macierewicz. According to Bielicki, this had excluded the foreign ministry. He ended with the remark, “It is certainly realistic that the dilemma posed to Poland by Trump will [now] be decided for decades, over a period of time in which PiS will no longer be in power. One must always consider that.”

The article exposes the tensions within the Polish ruling class over foreign policy. The Polish bourgeoisie has always been dependent upon imperialism, especially that of the United States. Between the two world wars, the regime of Josef Pilsudski sought to manoeuvre between the great powers, above all Germany, the Soviet Union, Britain and France. This attempt ended with the occupation of Poland by the Nazis in World War II, which, when one excludes the numerous deaths of people from other countries on Polish territory, claimed the lives of some 8 million Poles.

With the intensification of the conflicts within Europe and in particular between Germany and the US, the Polish bourgeoisie is once again objectively in the same position. As a deputy of the liberal opposition Nowoczesna party (Modern), Joanna Scheuring-Wielgus, remarked, “I fear that the geopolitical situation recalls what happened in the 1930s.”

Since capitalist restoration, the bourgeoisie has been united on a close orientation to the United States. In 1997, Poland joined NATO. In 2004, it was—not least thanks to pressure from the US—brought into the EU. Washington has systematically developed the country over the past quarter century into a bulwark against Russia and provided it with

military supplies. The stationing of the first contingent of US troops took place on Russia's doorstep in eastern Poland this month, with a total of 3,500 soldiers to be sent to the region.

In this context, a break with the US would be a radical step, which would not only have huge consequences for Poland, but for the entire balance of forces within the EU.

Along with the fear of a deal between Washington and Moscow at Warsaw's expense, hard-nosed economic interests and dependencies are playing an important role in the foreign policy conflicts. Poland's most important economic relations are with EU countries, above all Germany, the largest trading partner by far. Compared to this, trade ties with the US, apart from the military sector, are minimal. Since Poland's entry into the EU in 2004, the volume of German-Polish trade has more than tripled.

At the end of 2015, foreign direct investment in the Polish economy amounted to €159 billion. Of this, €30.3 billion came from the Netherlands, €27.3 billion from Germany, €19.3 billion from Luxembourg and €17.9 billion from France. The largest share of foreign investment goes to the industrial sector (€53.8 billion in 2015), followed by the finance and insurance sector (€31.4 billion). According to the central state statistics office (GUS) there were 26,464 firms with foreign capital. In 2014, 89.7 percent of foreign capital came from the EU. In the industrial sector, 45.8 percent of all workers were employed in firms with shares held by foreign capital.

PiS has begun to "re-Polandise" the banks with a new law, but German, Italian and Swiss capital continues to play a crucial role in the financial sector. Of particular importance are Kommerzbank, Raiffeisenbank and the Italian bank Pekao. Germany also plays an important role in the media. Many influential media outlets, including opposition newspapers like *Newsweek Polska*, are owned by the Springer company.

In addition there is the substantial amount of EU funding, which helps in Poland to secure minimal standards in social infrastructure and maintain low levels of unrest among the impoverished population. The single market is not only important for selling products, but also with regard to the several million Polish workers who earn money in other countries and make it easier for their families in Poland to survive.

PiS is currently pursuing a future foreign policy alliance with Britain, which is soon to exit the EU, and the US government under Trump.

Over recent months, the PiS government has undertaken deliberate efforts to expand these ties and at the same time establish close ties with the Brexit government of Theresa May. In November, the first bilateral conference took place in London at which high-ranking officials of both

governments participated to discuss a Polish-British alliance.

Marek Magierowski, from the chancellery of the president Andrzej Duda, told *Wpolityce.pl*, "The better the military and political relations between the US and Britain are, the better the relationship we can expect between Poland and the United States." At the same time, PiS hopes that an improvement in US-Russian relations will not materialise, not least because of the opposition from both Democrats and Republicans to Trump's position on this.

The news portal also cited politicians who noted that Barack Obama's period in office had begun with pledges to "reset" relations with Russia, but these had very rapidly deteriorated.

But PiS is also opening the door to a closer alignment with Germany, with which relations have worsened under the PiS government. Party leader Jarosław Kaczyński, who has emerged as one of the sharpest critics of Germany and of the pro-German orientation of the liberal opposition, has in recent times, according to the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, adopted a more conciliatory tone.

Leading party representatives have repeatedly expressed the hope that German Chancellor Angela Merkel will be re-elected this year. President Andrzej Duda has met with outgoing German President Joachim Gauck more often than with any other head of state.

The FAZ commented that, given the threatened break-up of the EU and the coming to power of the Trump government, Germany was just as dependent on an alliance with Poland as Warsaw was on securing its partnership with Berlin. The German government was therefore working to, according to the FAZ, "summarise points of dispute." Referring to an upcoming meeting between Merkel and Jarosław Kaczyński in February, the FAZ wrote that "pragmatic progress" in the bilateral relationship was possible.



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