

TOMASZ STĘPNIEWSKI

## THE PLACE OF CENTRAL ASIA IN POLAND'S FOREIGN POLICY

### INTRODUCTION

The collapse of the bipolar division of the world was followed by a change in the balance of power in East-Central Europe. The transformation of the balance of power provided an opportunity for Poland to shift the direction of its foreign policy from the East to the West. In the 1990s, an integration with the western structures – NATO and the European Union – was a priority, or, to put it differently, the eastern direction of the Polish foreign policy was overshadowed by the western (Euro-Atlantic) one. As for the East, traditionally, Poland was more focused on Ukraine and Belarus due to stronger historical ties and a common Slavic heritage, and to a lesser extent on Moldova. The South Caucasus (and Central Asia) were not a part of Poland's regional activity.<sup>1</sup>

In contrast, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, a reconstruction of Poland's policy towards the region of Central Asia began. As long as Poland remains a member of the anti-terrorist coalition in Afghanistan, its perception of the region will depend on the state of security in the area and in the neighbouring countries. Once the Polish troops have left Afghanistan, the approach to the adjacent region, i.e., Central Asia,<sup>2</sup> will have to be revised.

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<sup>1</sup> Wider: M. KLATT, T. STĘPNIEWSKI, *Normative Influence. The European Union, Eastern Europe and Russia*, Lublin–Melbourne: Wydawnictwo KUL 2012.

<sup>2</sup> More on the region of Central Asia in the 21<sup>st</sup> century in eg.: J. BOONSTRA, *Reviewing the EU's approach to Central Asia*, "EUCAM Policy Brief", no. 34, FRIDE, Madrid, February

It is also worth noting that the policy of Poland towards the East is strongly affected by the historical factor. Apart from geo-political and economic issues, Poland's eastern policy relies heavily on mythological and emotional elements – references to the Eastern Borderland, the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, the federalism of Józef Piłsudski, the Promethean attitude – dating back to the times of the First Republic of Poland (*Pierwsza Rzeczpospolita*), which stretched out far to the east (compared with the current eastern boundary of Poland).<sup>3</sup> Poland's strategic goal in regard to the eastern countries amounts to establishing the West in the East – i.e., stabilisation, modernization and westernization of the eastern countries. The question of the Polish Diaspora – Poles living in the countries of Central Asia – is another factor influencing the shape of the Polish policy towards that region.

#### POLITICAL RELATIONS AND VALUES

Although, after 1989, Poland's foreign policy focused on the West (Euro-Atlantic integration), relations with the post-Soviet states, particularly those in Eastern Europe, followed by those in the South Caucasus and Central Asia, could not be neglected. When discussing the Polish policy towards the region of Central Asia (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbek-

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2015; A. COOLEY, *Great Games, Local Rules*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 2012; J. BOONSTRA, *EU Central Asia Policy: Steady as She Goes*, "Central Asia Policy Brief", no. 4, August 2012, FRIDE, Madrid; M. LARUELLE, S. PEYROUSE, *Mapping Central Asia*, Farnham–Burlington, VT: Ashgate 2011; A. WARKOTSCH (ed.), *The European Union and Central Asia*, London–New York: Routledge 2011; R.M. FREIRE, E.R. KANET (eds.), *Key Players and Regional Dynamics in Eurasia: The Return of the "Great Game"*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan 2010; A. SENGUPTA, *Heartlands of Eurasia: The Geopolitics of Political Space*, Lanham–Boulder–New York–Toronto–London: Lexington Books 2009; E. CHUNG, *Multiple Regional Security Frameworks for Central Asia: NATO, CSTO, OSCE, SCO*, "Sejong Policy Review", 3-1(2007); F. TOLIPOV, *Central Asia is a Region of Five Stans*, "Central Asia and the Caucasus", no. 2(38), 2006, pp. 17-26; N. SWANSTRÖM, *The Prospects for Multilateral Conflict Prevention and Regional Cooperation in Central Asia*, "Central Asian Survey", vol. 23, no. 1, March 2004, pp. 41-53; P.J. LUONG (ed.), *The Transformation of Central Asia: States and Societies from Soviet Rule to Independence*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press 2004; A. BOHR, *Regionalism in Central Asia: New Geopolitics, Old Regional Order*, "International Affairs", vol. 80, no. 3, 2004, pp. 485-502; S. BLANK, *The United States and Central Asia*, [in:] R. ALLISON, L. JONSON (eds.), *Central Asian Security. The New International Context*, London: The Royal Institute of International Affairs, Brookings Institution Press 2001, pp. 127-151.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. A. BALCER, K. WÓYCICKI, *Polska na globalnej szachownicy*, Warszawa: Wydawnictwo POLTEXT 2014, p. 281.

kistan), it has to be noted that the region has always been present in the programming documents of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, where relevant departments were established to deal with the post-Soviet states, including Central Asia. In November 1992, Krzysztof Skubiszewski, the Minister of Foreign Affairs at the time, declared that "the economy should be an overriding factor in the Polish policy towards that region and should determine all its political activities."<sup>4</sup> It can be stated that, in the 1990s, the Polish policy towards Central Asia centred on energy issues. The significance of Central Asian states to Polish politics increased after the so-called war on terrorism and the ISAF mission in Afghanistan began.<sup>5</sup> The involvement of the Polish army in the operation meant that the region of Central Asia was looked at through the lens of Afghanistan.

Poland has been politically involved in the region of the South Caucasus, less so in the region of Central Asia. This must change, if it wants to become more influential in that area.<sup>6</sup> In order to achieve that, more emphasis should be placed on synchronising Poland's policy towards Central Asia with other Central European states, notably Germany (highly committed to the region) and Turkey.<sup>7</sup> According to Adam Balcer and Kazimierz Wóycicki, the globalisation of the Polish foreign policy should encompass the South Caucasus (particularly Azerbaijan) and Central Asia, which are more important and where Poland has a much stronger position than in regions such as Sub-Saharan Africa. The authors believe that the region should be given proper attention in the context of relations with China, Turkey, and – in the future – with Iran, whose significance in the post-Soviet area is increasing steadily.

When it comes to discussing values, the Polish Diaspora (*Polonia*) in the area of the former USSR has to be mentioned. The problem of the Polish community in the post-Soviet area has been one of the most prominent aspects of the Polish policy towards the East since the 1990s. At least 2.7 million people of Polish origin inhabit the post-Soviet states, mostly Belarus (900,000) and Ukraine (900,000), as well as Lithuania (300,000) and Russia (300,000).<sup>8</sup> In Central

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<sup>4</sup> *Przemówienie wygłoszone na wspólnym posiedzeniu pięciu komisji parlamentarnych, 18 listopada 1992 r.*, [in:] K. SKUBISZEWSKI, *Polityka zagraniczna i odzyskanie niepodległości: przemówienia, oświadczenia, wywiady 1989-1993*, Warszawa 1997, p. 286.

<sup>5</sup> ISAF is a UN-mandated mission created on the strength of the Resolution no. 1386 from December 20<sup>th</sup>, 2001.

<sup>6</sup> A. BALCER, K. WÓYCICKI, *Polska na globalnej szachownicy*, p. 315.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 316.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. A. WŁODKOWSKA, *Polityka Polski wobec państw Azji Środkowej*, [in:] A. GIL, T. KAPUŚNIAK (eds.), *Polityka wschodnia Polski. Uwarunkowania – koncepcje – realizacja*, Lublin–Warszawa: Instytut Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej 2009, p. 295.

Asia, the biggest concentration of people of Polish origin can be found in Kazakhstan (the Ministry of Foreign Affairs quotes 60,000, the census – approx. 35,000), in Uzbekistan (about 5,000) and in Kyrgyzstan (about 1,500). The estimates of the Polish organizations in Turkmenistan account for about 5,000 people of Polish origin, while in Tajikistan, the number is insignificant.

Poland attaches great importance to promoting such values as human rights, good governance and the rule of law and actively supports the democratization process in Central Asia and the observance of human rights with its activities in international bodies, e.g., OSCE or the EU (Poland is a strong advocate of the EU's activities in the region aimed at development, free-market reforms and democratization). Poland's biggest involvement is in Kazakhstan, where it assists in a political system change, sharing its experiences from the transformation period.

The activities of the Polish non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in Central Asia cannot be underestimated. They have implemented many programmes aimed at the Central Asian societies regarding water security – a key issue in the region – or stimulating the activity of women.

#### TRADE AND ENERGY

According to the Polish Ministry of Economy, of all the countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States, three most immediate ones, i.e., Russia, Ukraine and Belarus, are of the highest importance to Polish trade, accounting for 93.7% of Polish exports to the CIS in 2012 and 98.4% of its total imports from that area. The turnover of commodities between Poland and other markets of the Commonwealth is of a significantly lower order. Among the Central Asian countries, Kazakhstan is Poland's fourth biggest trade partner in the CIS, with Polish exports to Kazakhstan in 2012 corresponding to 3.1% and imports – to 1.2%. The country is regarded as a prospective market and as such, in 2012, it was included in a scheme called "Promotion of the Polish economy in prospective markets 2012-2015."<sup>9</sup> Uzbekistan is Poland's second most important trade partner in Central Asia (see the Table below).

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<sup>9</sup> This paragraph is based on: *Współpraca handlowa Polski z krajami WNP, w szczególności z Rosją, Ukrainą i Białorusią*, Warszawa: Ministerstwo Gospodarki, Departament Strategii i Analiz, styczeń 2014, pp. 9-10.

Table 1. Poland's turnover trading with Central Asian states in 2007-2012  
(in million EUR)

		2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Kazakhstan	Exsports	346	305	319	313	355	441
	Imports	301	348	217	322	371	304
	Balance	45	-43	103	-9	-16	137
Uzbekistan	Exports	46	64	51	57	83	93
	Imports	496	36	21	40	32	25
	Balance	-449	28	30	16	51	68
Turkmenistan	Exports	12	15	18	15	18	29
	Imports	5	758	137	4	2	3
	Balance	7	-742	-119	12	16	26
Tajikistan	Exports	12	10	4	22	6	16
	Imports	9	7	5	1	1	0
	Balance	7	-742	-119	12	16	26
Kyrgyzstan	Exports	20	23	19	18	73	30
	Imports	2	1	1	1	1	0
	Balance	19	22	19	18	72	30

Source: *Współpraca handlowa Polski z krajami WNP, w szczególności z Rosją, Ukrainą i Białorusią*, Warszawa: Ministerstwo Gospodarki, Departament Strategii i Analiz, styczeń 2014, pp. 26-27.

As an example, Polish exports to Kazakhstan in 2012 were mostly in electrical machines (31%), chemical products (approx. 28%) and agricultural and food produce (approx. 15%). Imports from Kazakhstan have always been dominated by mineral products, whose share in 2012 amounted to 78%.

**Energy.** The strategic importance of the region is linked to the availability of petroleum and natural gas resource, as well as with the infrastructure of energy transport routes between Iran, Turkey, Russia, the Caspian Sea and the Black Sea. Such geostrategy creates an opportunity for diversification and assures the security of the EU's energy supplies and supplies for Poland. The territory has great potential, however, it is also exposed to competition for influence between third-party actors who are involved in the region. That is why, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Central Asia and Caucasus became the scene of a power struggle between the most important actors of world politics. Not only has the EU become more involved in it, but also the Russian Federation, the

U.S and China show a growing interest in the region. The European Union has recognised the significance of the region in the transport routes map and has taken actions aimed at linking the countries in question with the EU's internal market.

It cannot go unnoticed that the area between the Black Sea and Central Asia appears a feasible option in plans for the diversification of energy sources for the EU market. According to the forecasts by the US Energy Information Administration, an increase in output in the countries of the Caspian Sea Basin from 1.44 million barrels in 2000 to 5.01 million barrels in 2025 will correspond to a quarter of the overall output increase in OPEC countries within the period (from 45.88 million to 6.69 million barrels). This creates ample opportunities for the Caspian-Black Sea region countries considering their high transit potential. Additionally, an actual diversification of energy sources, also from the Black Sea-Caspian region, has to entail a growth in the number of transport routes accessible to operators in the EU member states. Controlling the industrial infrastructure clearly implies a distortion of trade which may lead to a level of output and prices. The diversity of supplies is thus very important as there is a genuine threat of the reserves and industrial infrastructure being used for strictly political purposes. Doubtless, the region of the Black Sea, the Caspian Sea and Central Asia has put the European Union to the biggest test in terms of ongoing diversification activity. The most promising project for gas transport from the Caspian Sea region through the Black Sea region is the Nabucco pipeline. It seems a good idea at this point to compare the EU's project (Nabucco) with other oil and gas transport projects implemented in the analyzed region and to present them in the context of global trends. There are also the INOGATE project (Interstate Oil and Gas Transport to Europe) and the TRACECA (Transport Corridor Europe-Caucasus-Asia) whose aim is to unite the regions of the Caspian and the Black Sea. Poland supports these projects and Polish companies, such as Orlen, Lotos, PGNiG, show interest in developing co-operation with Central Asian companies from the energy sector. They are most vividly interested in the possibility of exploring and extracting the deposits of natural gas in the area of Kazakhstan.

Table 2. shows proven reserves of fossil fuels in Central Asia. The volume of the resources in the region is frequently overestimated, which was especially evident in the 1990s, when the area of Central Asia reemerged on the map of the world after the unravelling of the USSR and captured a lot of attention due to its energy "attractiveness".

Table 2. Proven reserves of fossil fuels in Central Asia (2010)

State	Crude oil	Natural gas	Coal
Kazakhstan	5.5 bln tons	1.8 bln m <sup>3</sup>	33.6 bln tons
Kirgizstan	–	–	–
Tajikistan	–	–	–
Turkmenistan	0.1 bln tons	8 bln m <sup>3</sup>	–
Uzbekistan	0.1 bln tons	1.6 bln m <sup>3</sup>	–
Total	5.7 bln tons	11.4 bln m <sup>3</sup>	33.6 bln tons

Source: BP 2011.

## SECURITY

In 2004 and 2007 the European Union faced new challenges and problems as several Eastern countries joined its structures. Issues of, so far, secondary importance – ones connected with the Eastern neighbours (Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova) and the South Caucasus (Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia) and further Central Asia – started to influence EU's internal policy after the accession of the Central European countries. Problems included migration, energy management, and security.<sup>10</sup> On the other hand, after joining the Union, Poland, as well as other Central European countries, became decision-makers when it came to EU's foreign policy, including policy towards the Eastern countries.

Poland, as a member of the European Union, is trying to pursue the goals of the Community in that region. As is known, the long-term interests of the European Union in Central Asia boil down to the issues of energy, security and stability. When EU documents are consulted, the following core objectives can be identified:<sup>11</sup>

- to ensure the stability and security of the countries of the region;
- to assist in reducing poverty and improving the standards of living in the context of the UN's Millennium Development Goals;

<sup>10</sup> Compare with: T. STĘPNIEWSKI, *Geopolityka regionu Morza Czarnego w pozimnowojennym świecie*, Lublin–Warszawa: Instytut Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej 2011; M. KLATT, T. STĘPNIEWSKI, *Normative Influence. The European Union, Eastern Europe and Russia*.

<sup>11</sup> Based on: European Community, *Regional Strategy Paper for Assistance to Central Asia for the Period 2007-2013*, [http://eeas.europa.eu/central\\_asia/rsp/07\\_13\\_en.pdf](http://eeas.europa.eu/central_asia/rsp/07_13_en.pdf).

– to facilitate/promote closer regional co-operation, both within Central Asia and between Central Asia and the EU, particularly in the sectors of energy, transport, higher education and environment conservation.

Apart from the particular objectives, the EU also puts emphasis on the protection of human rights, observing the rule of law and reducing the trans-regional problems in Central Asia which have a direct or indirect impact on the interests of the European Union.<sup>12</sup>

It is a challenge to the EU to support reforms, encourage the Central Asian countries to turn into stable, peaceful, and secure actors that would create good neighbourly relations in this unstable region. That is why it is so important to remember that the EU's policy in the Caucasus region will be complete only when the Union is actively engaged in problem-solving and when it takes action to build a civil society.

Without correct relations based on trust among the Central Asian countries, it will not be possible to build a stable situation in the region. The European Union has to face the new challenge and assume the role of a constructor of mutual trust and an understanding culture, which is a prerequisite for a genuine dialogue to take place in Central Asia.

The withdrawal of Western troops from the area of Afghanistan will be an opportunity for Poland to change its attitude towards Central Asia. While, at present, the military operation in Afghanistan continues to provoke interest and be the focus of attention of the Polish policy-makers, after 2014 it will become possible to redefine Poland's policy towards the region.

#### DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE

Poland has been involved in Central Asia through multilateral assistance schemes as it operates within international bodies, namely, the UNO, the UE, the World Bank, and through bilateral actions – as part of the Polish Development Assistance programme. In 2012, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan were high on its list of priority states, owing to their low development indices (both are listed by the OECD DAC among the least developed countries). Poland has adopted the “Multi-year programme of promoting development cooperation for 2012-2015,” which stipulates that it will foster self-government and

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<sup>12</sup> T. STĘPNIEWSKI (ed.), *The New Great Game in Central Asia*, Lublin: Wydawnictwo KUL 2012.



strengthen local communities, provide assistance to small and medium companies, create jobs and improve the sanitary and water conditions. The elimination of poverty is a common denominator to all assistance operations in Central Asia.<sup>13</sup> With a view to achieving that goal, in 2013, Poland allocated 700,000 EUR to Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, and in 2010, the Polish Ministry of Finance granted 100 million PLN worth of credit to Kyrgyzstan. It is particularly noteworthy that the volume of the Polish assistance to the Central Asian states has been increasing by several percent each year: in 2007 the development assistance accounted for 0.11%, in 2010 – 0.17% and in 2015 it is to amount to 0.33% of the GDP.<sup>14</sup>

The coordination of the assistance to the Central Asian countries lies in the competence of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and, to some degree, of the Ministry of Finance. Moreover, the Ministry of Science and Higher Education participates in the activities by granting scholarships and providing internships to students from Central Asia. In 2013, a Government Scholarship Scheme was set up aimed at young scientists from Russia, Ukraine, Belarus and the Central Asian and South Caucasus countries. Candidates for the scheme have to prove some scientific achievements and are offered an opportunity to do a research period in Poland.

Non-governmental organizations and the Roman Catholic Church also participate in supporting the Central Asian countries. The organizations include: the Polish Humanitarian Action (PAH, humanitarian aid for Kazakhstan, mainly for schools and hospitals), Caritas-Polska (supporting the Polish community in Kazakhstan), the Stefan Batory Foundation and other. The goal of the schemes is to assist in the development of civil societies in Central Asian states.

## CONCLUSION

The significance of the region of Central Asia to Poland is due to its supply of energy resources and to security issues. The fact remains, however, that Russia and Ukraine are of key importance to Poland in the group of the post-Soviet countries, and the role of the Central Asian states is marginal.

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<sup>13</sup> After: Ministerstwo Spraw Zagranicznych RP, Polska Pomoc – Azja Centralna, <https://www.polskapomoc.gov.pl/Azja,Centralna,916.html> (access: 10.09.2014).

<sup>14</sup> Ministerstwo Spraw Zagranicznych RP, <http://www.polskapomoc.gov.pl> (access: 10.10.2014).

Among the latter, Kazakhstan is the most prominent, as it boasts the most developed economic relations with Poland and is the most prospective in terms of cooperation. We are presently (2015) witnessing a transformation, with the West withdrawing from the region and opportunities being created for Poland to step in. The chances for Poland to be able to influence the situation in the region are slim, therefore our activities focus on supporting modernization schemes and building a civil society.

The area of Central Asia is characterised by a very high dynamics of economic growth and has substantial reserves of raw materials – a capacity which cannot go unnoticed by the Polish government. That is why the issue of energy production calls for urgent and specific action – it is necessary to establish a plan for energy cooperation with the countries which are of utmost importance to Poland's interests, i.e., Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. This regards, primarily, the future of the Nabucco project, the question of the transit of raw materials from Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan to the EU or a further development of infrastructure under the INOGATE project.

It is in the interest of Poland that the area of Central Asia be stabilized, particularly after 2014 and the termination of the ISAF mission in Afghanistan. Some claim that the events of 2014 are bound to become a turning point in the recent history of Central Asia, comparable with that of 1991. If this proves to be true, the Polish government and all the EU countries should strive to increase their influence in the region. However, it seems most likely that the role of the West in the area will decrease for the benefit of Russia. As Maciej Falkowski and Józef Lang rightly observe, the repercussions of the Ukrainian crisis and its impact on the Russian policy towards Central Asia (e.g., the Russian pressure on reintegration within the post-Soviet area – a Eurasian Union) will be noticeable. The above events will considerably affect the geo-political situation in the region and its security, which is crucial both to the region itself and to the EU member-states.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> M. FALKOWSKI, J. LANG, *Zakładnicy Moskwy, klienci Pekinu. Bezpieczeństwo w Azji Centralnej w dobie malejącej roli Zachodu*, „Prace OSW” (Warszawa), nr 51, październik 2014, p. 5.

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## THE PLACE OF CENTRAL ASIA IN POLAND'S FOREIGN POLICY

### S u m m a r y

The aim of the study is to show the evolution of the Polish foreign policy towards the region of Central Asia. Since its accession to the European Union (EU), Poland's policy towards the region has been notably trending towards the EU's policy which is still under construction. Whereas in the 1990s, financial (technical) assistance was the objective of the EU's policy, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century its character and scope changed, which was not without consequences for the shape of the Polish policy.

**Key words:** Poland, Central Asia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan.

## MIEJSCE AZJI CENTRALNEJ W POLITYCE ZAGRANICZNEJ POLSKI

### S t r e s z c z e n i e

Celem niniejszego artykułu jest ukazanie ewolucji polityki zagranicznej Polski wobec regionu Azji Centralnej. Od momentu wstąpienia Polski do Unii Europejskiej (UE) coraz wyraźniej obserwowana jest tendencja do opierania polityki Polski wobec tego regionu na polityce UE. Polityka Unii Europejskiej wobec regionu Azji Centralnej jest w trakcie konstruowania. O ile w latach dziewięćdziesiątych XX w. polityka ta była ukierunkowana przede wszystkim na pomoc finansową (techniczną), o tyle w wieku XXI zmienia swój charakter i zakres działania, co też nie pozostaje bez wpływu na kształt polityki Polski.

**Słowa kluczowe:** Polska, Azja Centralna, Kazachstan, Kirgistan, Tadżykistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan.