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# GEOGRAFICKÝ ČASOPIS

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## **GEOPOLITICAL PATTERNS OF CONTEMPORARY POLAND**

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The aim of the contribution is to introduce new geopolitical position of Poland after the fundamental global changes between the years 1989-1993. During that period Poland's neighbours completely changed, without any changes in boundary line of the country. These changes are considered from Polish point of view as positive. Poland gained again full political independence and wants to play active role as in global European as well in local integration initiatives. The analysis of the recent state and future perspectives of the integration process and the role of Poland in it is the main part of this study.

Key words: Poland, frontier, integration, Europe, neighbours, geopolitic.

1. In mid - 1989 during the breakdown of the "Socialist empire" in Central Europe began. Poland was the first country to regain political independence. A few months later the so-called "people's democracies" overcame their subjection to the Soviet Union. Two years after that, in 1991, the Soviet Union collapsed and disappeared from the political map of the world. Its component parts - the former Soviet Socialist Republics, including the Russian Federation-Russia officially declared independence. During the period under study, that is 1989-1991, fundamental global changes took place. The division of the world into two opposed political blocks, supported by two blocks of military forces, centered around the USA and the USSR, is no longer actual.

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2. In this new situation the countries of the Central Europe are looking for their place in the emerging new European and global order. These countries have to overcome the troublesome inheritance resulting from the 45 years long subjection to the Soviet Union. After half a century of functioning in this system Central European countries must not only get rid of it in its national life on different levels and in nearly all areas, but also adapt themselves to new requirements of the market economy, democracy, and integration processes in Europe and the development of the world economy. The 50 year gap must be bridged in the much shorter period.

3. From the beginning of its political independence Poland was determined to participate in the West-European integration processes. Such an option is determined by strong sense of belonging for over 1000 years (since the introduction of Christianity in 966) to the Western culture, inherent in our national consciousness. This awareness has never been wiped out by the partitioning of Poland at the end of 18th century, or by the fact that a considerable part of Poland's territory was annexed by Russia, and during 19th and early 20th century underwent intensive Russification. The Sovietisation actions after the second world war were not able to efface it either.

The decision to participate in the integration process had resulted in a number of initiatives:

a) Becoming a full member of the European Economic Community is definitely the main priority. Poland is presently an associate member of the EEC (the ratification by the EEC countries is in process now), with a view to full membership after the necessary adaptation period. Poland is also a member of numerous European organization, participating actively in their work. In addition to the above-mentioned strategic purpose Poland aims at close ties with the European defense organization - NATO.

b) The policy of integration with Western Europe does not interfere with regional integration initiatives. Poland is one of the organizer of the so-called Wyszehrad Group, which is an economic and political agreement between actually four countries: Czechia, Slovakia, Hungary and Poland, which was signed in 1991. It should be noted that all these countries opt for association with the EEC. In December 1992 the above countries decided to establish a free trading area (CEFTA), which came into force on 1 March 1993. There also exist certain geopolitical tendencies and local perception of threats, but nevertheless the Wyszehrad Group is an economic reality now, although its future development might be hampered by a number of obstacles, which is quite understandable.

c) Poland participates in a regional organization called "Central-European Initiative", which comprises Italy, Austria, Czechia, Hungary, Slovakia, former Yugoslavia (now Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Macedonia) and Poland. This group has no strictly defined identity. It is primarily an "initiative" concerning attempts to resolve a number of problems with regard to legislation, environment protection, trade, communication and transport, etc., it represents an attempt at forming a kind of community of interests and decision, an area of harmonious coexistence. This "Initiative" concerns the area between Baltic Sea and Adriatic Sea.

d) Another important initiative is participation in activities aimed at the integration of the countries surrounding the Baltic Sea: the initiatives concern the waters protection, collaboration of port cities, economic and cultural co-operation, etc. Poland is an active participant with a view to establishing important and advantageous contacts.

4. From the geographical viewpoint Poland occupies a central position on the main

European geostrategic axis running across the great planes of our continent from the west to the east. Today, in view of the disappearance of artificial divisions introduced after the second world war, this axis is of particular importance as far as transport is concerned. The Territory of Poland is crossed by two main transport routes for rail and road transport, and from here they branch out to the areas of the former USSR.

a) The first route runs from Western Europe via Berlin, Warsaw, Brest and Minsk to Moscow.

b) The second one runs across the south of Poland. It connects Western Europe via Wrocław, Katowice, Cracow and Rzeszów with Lwów, Kiev and Odessa (in Ukraine).

c) Warsaw (and Berlin) obtained in 1993 a regular railway connection with Tallinn and other Baltic republic, and next also with St. Petersburg. It is the first stage of the planned "Via Baltica" which is to run across the above mentioned republics, and lead to Finland (ferry passage across the Finnish Bay) and to the north-western part of the Russian Federation-Russia to the White Sea.

d) The territory of Poland is also out by the shortest links between Scandinavia and the Baltic republics on one hand, and the Danubian basin countries and the Balkans and Turkey on the other. The existing railway lines need modernizing in some sections. Another noteworthy project is the planned construction of a transeuropean meridional motor-way, some sections of which have already been built on the Polish territory.

e) In addition to these links in 1993 was opened a regular railway connection between Western Europe and Kaliningrad (the capital of the Russian Federation exclave on the Baltic Sea) via Berlin, Poznań, Malbork and Kaliningrad.

5. During the last few years (1989-1993) Poland's neighbors changed, without any changes in Poland's boundary line. The number of neighboring countries grew from three (GDR, Czechoslovakia and USSR) to seven (the Federal Republic of Germany, the Republics of Czechia, Slovakia, Ukraine, Bielorrussia, Lithuania, and the Russian Federation -Russia), or even to eight, including the European Economic Community.

a) On the western side Poland borders upon united Germany (German Federal Republic). The frontier on the Odra and Nysa Łużycka was confirmed at the Paris conference in 1990 (the 4 + 2 Conference) and in the treaty on neighbourly relations and friendly cooperation (signed also in 1991). This treaty provides a new basis for the development of bilateral relations in all areas - politics, economy and culture. Poland counts on the results of this treaty being similar to those of the Treaty of Versailles of 1963, which created a basis for broad co-operation between France and Germany. The introduction of regular annual meetings and consultations of the foreign ministers of our three countries might signify the institutionalisation of trilateral co-operation, and the structure thus created might have a stabilising effect in Europe. Local and regional German-polish co-operation in the field of spatial and economic development, regional and inter-frontier contacts, etc., is flourishing. Old border passes are being rebuilt and expanded, and new ones are opened. Round the southern section of this border an international "Nysa Euroregion" is already functioning with the participation of Poland, Germany and Czechia. These countries united their efforts mainly to prevent further environmental degradation caused by brown coal deposits exploitation. There are plans for creation of other transborder "Euroregions", eg. "Pomerania Euroregion".

Poland's western frontier is also the EEC's "internal" border due to the fact that Poland has recently become an associate member with a view to being granted full membership. Consequently, Poland's eastern frontier on the Bug river is in a sense

EEC's "external" boundary. In view of recent decisions regarding the immigration policy this frontier has a special importance not only for Poland.

b) Southern frontier. Since 1 January 1993 Poland's territory facing the south borders on two new states: Czechia and Slovak Republic. These countries along with Poland and Hungary constitute the previously mentioned Wyszehrad Group. At the end of 1992 they constitute an agreement regarding the creation of a free trade zone, which has been in operation since 1 March 1993, comprising now 65 million inhabitants. Co-operation in the frontier region between Poland, Czechia and Slovak Republics is growing, also with respect to environment protection. A separate and controversial issue was the establishment in 1993 of the so called Carpathian Euroregion, comprising parts of territories belonging to Poland, Ukraine, Slovakia and Hungary. Controversy might arise over not very clear criteria of the region's boundaries demarcation, and over the purpose of its formation.

c) Eastern and north-eastern frontier. As result of the collapse of the USRR in 1991 Poland adjoins now four new states: Ukraine, Bielorrussia, Lithuania, and the Russian Federation-Russia (in its Kaliningrad exclave). In 1992 Poland concluded agreements on friendship and neighbourly relations with Ukraine, Bielorrussia and Russian Federation. The rapid development of all-embracing relations is taking place in spite of difficulties resulting from the fact that three of our neighbors haven't embarked yet upon the process of economic reform, while former economic structures are breaking down.

d) As far as Lithuania is concerned, there is a certain amount of tension in mutual relations, resulting mainly from the attitude of Lithuanian authorities towards Polish population inhabiting this country for several centuries, most densely in Wilno region. People of Polish origin undergo compulsory Lithuanisation, the formation of local governments is obstructed, and it is very difficult for them to regain possession of land under decollectivisation processes. We hope for that the Lithuanian authorities to be able to change this attitude. It would enable our countries to enter into an agreement, which would promote the development of broad relations.

e) Kaliningrad region - an exclave of the Russian Federation. Up till recently it was a closed area, where Soviet military and naval forces were located. Now this territory, having obtained the status of a special economic area, is seeking its place within Central and Eastern Europe. It attempts to attract as much economic and cultural activity as possible, taking advantage of its special rights facilitation the inflow of foreign capital. Poland has extensive relations with this region, and both countries are building up mutual contacts, especially in the field of economy, the development of border passes and transport infrastructure creates conditions favorable to further building up of mutual relations.

6. Poland's eastern border is now in a sense also the "eastern boundary" of the EEC, Poland's association with this Community creates the need to treat this border in a special way due to migration problems. Measure must be taken to control illegal migrations of the citizens of the former Soviet Union or the other countries, who try to reach Western Europe via Polish Territory. The special legislation regarding illegal immigrants is already taken into account in Poland, the imposed restrictions are not aimed at limiting in any way numerous trade relations which are developing rapidly, or co-operation projects with our eastern neighbors. Poland can offer them its experience as regards transformations of economic and social structures being the inheritance

of the communist system. Both Poland and its eastern neighbours are fully aware of benefits brought by the development of mutual contacts in all areas. This opening up to the East is advantageous also the EEC and other European countries. Poland can offer only a good knowledge of realities beyond its eastern border or numerous contact. Due to effective realization of economic reforms and stabilization of internal relations, Poland's is perceived as an attractive area for opening various businesses or undertakings with a view to establishing commercial relations with the East.

7. In Poland the appearance of new neighbours behind the eastern frontier is treated as a geopolitical reality having a stabilising effect upon the political situation in this part of Europe. We should also be aware of the fact that a new "zone" of independent states has emerged, stretching between the Baltic Sea and the Black Sea. It constitutes Eastern Europe in statu nascendi, separating Russia from the Central Europe (with the exception of the Kaliningrad exclave). It should also be noted that this zone has its own history. For over four centuries (XIV-XVIII c.) all this area (apart from present Estonia and a part of Latvia) was included in one state - Polish-Lithuanian Kingdom. As a result of partitioning carried out by Austria, Prussia and Russia at the end of XVIII c. this country disappeared from the political map of Europe. The territories in question were annexed to Russia, and their population underwent extensive Russification. Poland and the three Baltic states regained independence after the first world war. Poland's eastern border was delineated new. Nowadays, after the collapse of the USSR, Ukraine and Bielorrussia are in the process of forming their national consciousness and identity, and their independent statehood. They are also determined to defend their newly gained sovereignty. Similarly to the three Baltic republics, they are interested in the development of neighbourly relations and co-operation with the Russian Federation-Russia, but they are opposed to the rebirth of the Great Russia traditional imperial doctrine and its consequences, among other tendencies to dominate this area. This new conception of Eastern Europe within the emerging new "European order" is quite likely to be realized. It would be of significant benefit to whole Europe. That is why Western Europe's involvement in the construction of this new European "arrangement" should become stronger and more active. There is no escaping the geopolitical reality. The territories of Central and Eastern Europe are too important for the future of "new Europe" to neglect careful consideration of the problems involved, and drawing conclusion. It is not enough to have the awareness of the need to create "new Europe" - it should be supported by actual efforts contributing to this end.

8. Poland is deeply and actively involved in the process of formation of this "new Europe", in so far as its means and resources permit. It is also fully conscious that the road leading to it will be neither short nor easy. However, the option chosen by the majority of the Polish society is quite definite. Poland is determined to seek full integration with the EEC, the existing structures of the European security system (including NATO), and the emerging European Economic Space. Poland also participates in other integrative regional and local initiatives and processes. The country is open to wide co-operation on the basis of equality with the countries of Eastern Europe currently in the process of formation, and with the Russian Federation. Our geographical position determines our choice of options, including also the geopolitical options.

## GEOPOLITICKÉ POSTAVENIE SÚČASNÉHO POLSKA

V rokoch 1989 až 1991 prebehli zásadné zmeny v globálnej geopolitickej situácii. Skončilo sa rozdelenie sveta na dva súperiace politické bloky sústredené okolo USA a ZSSR. Bývalé "ľudovo-demokratické" krajiny v strednej Európe sa zbavili svojej závislosti na ZSSR v roku 1989 a samotný Sovietsky Zväz sa o dva roky neskôr rozpadol. V tejto novej situácii hľadajú krajiny Strednej Európy svoje miesto vo vznikajúcom novom európskom a svetovom poriadku.

Poľsko patrí od svojho pokresťančenia pred vyše tisícročím do západnej kultúrnej sféry. Túto skutočnosť nedokázala prekonať ani rusifikácia po rozdelení Poľska na konci 18 storočia a ani 45-ročná sovietskizácia po skončení druhej svetovej vojny. Po opätovnom získaní plnej politickej nezávislosti sa Poľsko opäť jednoznačne orientuje na začlenenie do západoeurópskych integračných štruktúr, najmä do Európskej únie a NATO. Poľsko sa stalo pridruženým členom EÚ.

Politika integrácie do západoeurópskych štruktúr je podporovaná aj regionálnymi integračnými iniciatívami. Poľsko je spolu so Slovenskom, Českom a Maďarskom členom tzv. Vyšehradskej skupiny. Tieto štyri krajiny spolu s Rakúskom, Talianskom a niektorými krajinami bývalej Juho-slávie tvoria spolu aj ďalšie regionálne združenie - Stredoeurópsku iniciatívu. Tretím smerom regionálnej integračnej aktivity Poľska je jeho zapojenie sa do integračných iniciatív krajín na pobreží Baltského mora.

Z hľadiska geografickej polohy sa územie Poľska nachádza v strede hlavnej európskej geostrategickej osi, vedúcej zo západu na východ kontinentu. Táto skutočnosť je po odstránení politických bariér významná najmä z dopravného hľadiska. Cez Poľsko vedú v súčasnosti dve hlavné cestné a železničné línie. Prvá vedie zo Západnej Európy cez Berlín, Varšavu, Brest a Minsk do Moskvy a druhá vedie južným Poľskom cez Wrocław, Katowice, Krakov, Lvov a Kyjev až do Odesy. Územie Poľska je tiež najkratšou spojnicou medzi škandinávskymi a baltskými krajinami na jednej strane a podunajskými a balkánskymi krajinami na strane druhej.

V rokoch 1989 až 1993 sa bez zmeny poľských hraníc úplne zmenili všetci susedia Poľska. Počet susediacich krajín sa zvýšil z troch (NDR, ČSSR a ZSSR) na sedem (Nemecko, Česko, Slovensko, Ukrajina, Bielorusko, Litva a Rusko). Najvýznamnejšia z hľadiska Poľska je zmluva s Nemeckom z roku 1991 potvrdzujúca západné hranice Poľska na Odra a Nise. Tieto hranice sú zároveň hranicami s Európskou úniou.

Južné hranice s Českom a Slovenskom sú hranicami v rámci Vyšehradskej skupiny, kde platí od marca 1993 dohoda o voľnom obchode. So svojimi východnými susedmi Ruskom, Ukrajinou a Bieloruskom má Poľsko tiež podpísané vzájomné dohody o priateľstve a susedských vzťahoch. Jedinou výnimkou je Litva, kde existuje určité napätie vo vzťahoch kvôli útlaku poľskej menšiny v tejto krajine.

Z hľadiska Poľska je vznik nových štátov na východ od jeho hraníc a rozbitie sovietskeho impéria stabilizujúcim faktorom politickej situácie v tejto časti Európy. Základným problémom je upevnenie národnej a štátnej identity týchto novovzniknutých štátov, väčšina ktorých bola štyri storočia súčasťou Poľsko-Litovského kráľovstva. Tieto krajiny musia rozvíjať dobré susedské vzťahy s Ruskom, ale zároveň sú proti znovuoživeniu veľkoruskej imperiálnej doktríny. Zo strany vyspelých európskych krajín je potrebné efektívne podporiť toto nové usporiadanie vo Východnej Európe. Jeho stabilizácia je významná pre celú budúcu "novú Európu". Poľsko môže vzhľadom na svoju geografickú polohu zohrať aktívnu úlohu pri jej formovaní.