



Common Memory Offers a Tool for Strengthening Polish-American Cooperation

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Citing and recalling common history is an important element for strengthening Polish-American political relations. Political memory, especially associated with the personages of Tadeusz Kościuszko and Kazimierz Pułaski, can be a useful instrument for deepening contacts with representatives of state governments and increasing Poland's influence throughout U.S. decision-making circles. Building sentiment around the idea of a Polish-American community of history and common values is especially important at a time when threats from authoritarian Russia and China are increasing.

The naming of the U.S. Army V corps headquarters in Poznań after Tadeusz Kościuszko indicates that citing the shared past can help strengthen Poland-U.S. cooperation, especially when threats toward both countries are intensifying. The existing respect in the U.S. for common national heroes like Kościuszko and Pułaski creates opportunities to tighten bilateral relations, for example, based on broadening cooperation at the state and local levels, where the memory of these men is cultivated the most.

Memory of Polish Heroes in the U.S. Kościuszko and Pułaski are two of the most-recognised historical figures in the U.S. They are elements of both Polish and American national identity and associated with the fight for independence. Kościuszko served in the Continental Army with the rank of brigadier general as a military engineer. He designed plans and fortified key defensive positions (e.g., Philadelphia in Pennsylvania and Ticonderoga, Saratoga, and West Point in New York) that helped the colonists defeat the British during the Revolutionary War (1775–1783). Pułaski, who also advanced to the rank of brigadier general in the Continental Army, is recognised as the founder of the American cavalry. His cavalry legion assisted the American army at battles in Charleston, South Carolina, and Savannah, Georgia, where Pułaski died on 11 October 1779.

According to a U.S. National Monument audit, there are 22 monuments to Kościuszko and 51 to Pułaski located throughout the U.S., the first of which were erected in 1825. The majority appear in states traditionally inhabited by the

Polish-American diaspora, including in Illinois, Michigan, Wisconsin, Connecticut, Massachusetts, and New York, as well as in other states, including Georgia, Mississippi, and Florida, and in Washington D.C. In some counties (in Indiana, Arkansas, Kentucky, Missouri, and Virginia) and cities (e.g., in Mississippi, Texas, Iowa, and Tennessee), bridges, highways, streets, parks and schools bear the heroes' names. In 1925, the Kościuszko Foundation was opened in New York City with the goal of broadening the understanding of Poland in the U.S. through, among others, cultural and educational exchange programmes. A resolution passed by Congress in 1929 established 11 October as Gen. Pułaski Day in the U.S. In some states, Pułaski Day is celebrated on his birthday, which falls in March. In 2009, President Barack Obama posthumously conferred on Pułaski honorary American citizenship for his contribution to the development of the United States, a title that to date only eight foreign figures have received (e.g., Winston Churchill and Marquis de Lafayette).

Symbolism in Bilateral Relations. For the multigenerational Polish diaspora in the U.S. (9–10 million Americans, i.e., 2.7–3% of the population, declare Polish ancestry or identify as Polish) Kościuszko and Pułaski are symbols of ties between Poland and the U.S. Based on recent research conducted by the Piast Institute in 2022, 61% of those polled from among the Polish diaspora indicated the contribution of both generals in the American Revolution as definitive in defining the Polish-American experience in the U.S.

The recognition of both heroes in the U.S. provides American politicians the opportunity to evoke sympathies and emotions in voters among the Polish diaspora electorate. Politicians have recalled these ties in past elections and to encourage Americans of Polish descent to military service. Kościuszko's name or likeness has been used for recruitment posters, training camps (e.g., for Polish volunteers from the U.S. in 1917–1919), and military units (e.g., the Polish armed forces air squadron in which American volunteers served in 1920).

After the collapse of the Soviet Union and Poland regaining its sovereignty, Pułaski and Kościuszko became symbols of Polish-American friendship and common values that formed the basis of a post-Cold War European security system. Subsequent U.S. presidential administrations cited these common heroes and values to promote political, economic, and social reforms in Poland, as well as in modernising and expanding Polish military efforts in NATO. In 2000 and 2002, the U.S. transferred two guided-missile frigates to the Polish Navy, which received the names Kościuszko and Pułaski. Poland refers to both heroes and the values they represent to erase the Yalta division of Europe and to promote the expansion of NATO eastward.

Political Potential. The rising threat from Russia demands that Poland create new instruments for influencing the U.S. and strengthening bilateral cooperation. Russia's aggressive position, as well threats posed by the authoritarian China—common dangers for Poland and the U.S.—are associated with the neo-imperial ambitions of these authoritarian powers. Citing common values gains in importance when promoting collective interests, such as strengthening democracy and countering authoritarianism, respecting human rights, supporting democratic standards as well as tightening military security, both bilaterally and within NATO.

Citing shared memory and values based on the recognition of Polish heroes like Kościuszko and Pułaski can help Poland influence U.S. public opinion and decision-makers in relation to strengthening political ties with key allies or permanently increasing the presence of U.S. troops in Poland.

Conclusions and Recommendations. As Poland seeks additional instruments to realize its interests through influencing the U.S, changes in the international order caused by Russia and China's aggressive politics demand an even further tightening of Polish-American cooperation based on shared interests and values—Kościuszko and Pułaski are

symbolic of these aims and ideals among local Americans of Polish descent.

Citing a shared past and common sympathies for Polish heroes can be used in the context of tightening multilateral relations between the U.S. and countries in East-Central Europe (Lithuania, Ukraine, Belarus) that also allude to their history and the values they fought for. This creates possibilities for using these historical figures to, for example, press for continued support for Ukraine or in promoting democratic changes in Belarus.

The best potential to engage with this symbolism, however, lies at the state level. In the U.S. political system, the governor is the highest-ranking official with executive power at the state level. Regarding foreign policy, a governor's competences lie chiefly in seeking international markets for trade in local products or services (e.g., as head of international trade missions) as well as in encouraging foreign direct investment in their state. Representatives of various levels of Polish government should take advantage of Pułaski Day as an occasion for regular political visits to the U.S. Since the day is a federally recognised day of honour, it can be a good occasion to solicit meetings at the state and federal political levels, which should become a traditional element of bilateral contacts.

For this reason, Poland should initiate an association of U.S. states, such as a "Friends of Poland" group, with the goal of increasing cooperation with governors and their administrations in states where the memory of Kościuszko and Pułaski is cultivated. This could lead to developments in economic cooperation, including increased exchange of goods, as well as tech, medical, and educational cooperation. Also important is identifying local heroes, especially Americans of Polish descent, from the past or modern ones that have had a positive impact on bilateral relations, for example, in the security, business, or educational spheres. States within the association could count on financial assistance toward substantive initiatives like educational projects (e.g., scholarships at state universities in the U.S. or Poland) and study trips to Poland for journalists and representatives of state governments. Meetings with state governors with the goal of tightening or initiating cooperation with Poland, for example, in the economic sector, could take place on the sidelines of the annual meeting of U.S. governors, which is organised every January or February in Washington D.C.