



PISM

POLSKI INSTYTUT SPRAW MIĘDZYNARODOWYCH
THE POLISH INSTITUTE OF INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

STRATEGIC FILE

NO. 6 (98), JULY 2021 © PISM

Editors: Sławomir Dębski, Patrycja Sasnal, Wojciech Lorenz

Relaunching Polish-U.S. Relations in the Biden Era

Andrzej Dąbrowski

Łukasz Kulesa

Mateusz Piotrowski

The overall importance of the United States for Poland cannot be overstated. The defence dimension remains paramount, but there is also an increasingly visible economic and energy aspect to the relationship that is becoming more important as both sides deepen their trade relations. While controversies around Nord Stream 2 have had a negative impact, the overall positive dynamics in bilateral relations can be continued under the Biden administration. Given the broad overlap of the U.S. administration's and Poland's foreign and security policy goals, and their similar assessment of the challenges, there is potential for the partners to quickly bounce back from the turbulence of the first half of 2021.

PISM STRATEGIC FILE

The relationship with the U.S. is inherently asymmetric. Still, since the 1990s, Poland has been playing a vital role in the American strategy of making Europe whole, free, and at peace.¹ More recently, Poland's membership in the European Union and NATO, location in the centre of Europe, pivotal role on the Alliance's Eastern Flanks, as well as political, economic, and military potential, have attracted considerable American attention.

With the arrival of the presidency of Joe Biden, questions may be posed about the future of the bilateral relationship. In the first half of 2021, the intensity and quality of the bilateral dialogue plummeted, which can only partially be explained as a consequence of the transition between U.S. administrations. Germany seems to have emerged as the principal interlocutor and partner for the U.S. on a range of issues, both European and China-related, with potentially detrimental effects for

If mismanaged, all these developments can have a long-term negative impact that would not only hurt Poland but also complicate the implementation of the U.S. policy agenda in Europe and beyond.

Poland. At the same time, quality-of-democracy and rule-of-law issues are likely to be raised by the Biden administration with Poland much more forcefully than during President Donald Trump's term in office. If mismanaged, all these developments can have a long-term negative impact that would not only hurt Poland but also complicate the implementation of the U.S. policy agenda in Europe and beyond.

This Strategic File is an overview of the state of the bilateral relationship and highlights its comprehensive scope, no longer limited to political and military issues. It then makes the case that both sides can build upon existing cooperation. Given the broad overlap of the Biden administration's and Poland's foreign and security policy goals, there is potential for the U.S.-Polish relationship to bounce back from the initial turbulence of the first half of 2021. New areas for cooperation are opening up, for example, connected with support for the democratisation of Belarus or fighting illicit financial flows. This does not mean turning a blind eye to the disagreements, but it should be possible to set the relationship relatively quickly on the right track.

The Legacy of the Trump Years and the Arrival of the Biden Administration

Trump's election in 2016 was perceived by the Polish government as an opportunity to increase bilateral cooperation with the U.S. Despite the challenges posed by Trump's opinions regarding NATO and the EU, as well as his personal views on Russia, all of which the Polish authorities viewed as unfavourable, Poland decided to actively engage the administration. While ideological similarities played a role, the main goal for the Polish authorities was very much traditional, pursued by all Polish governments in relations with all U.S. administrations: to engage the U.S. in deepening the security relationship. This was presented to Trump by President Andrzej Duda in 2018 with the proposal of establishing a permanent presence of U.S. forces on Polish soil, with Poland partially financing the undertaking—it ultimately resulted in signing the Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA) in August 2020.² Another important aim was to broaden the relationship beyond the military dimension. Poland and the U.S. jointly pursued several economic initiatives and cooperation in other areas (see "The State of Poland-U.S. Relations", below). The Trump administration strongly supported the Three Seas Initiative (TSI), and U.S. president took part in the TSI summit which took place in Warsaw in 2017.

As Polish-U.S. relations expanded, Poland faced, however, allegations that it was valuing its bilateral bond with the Trump administration more than European unity. Poland became associated with

¹ G. H.W. Bush, "A Whole Europe, A Free Europe," speech delivered on 31 May 1989, Mainz, Federal Republic of Germany, In S. Dębski, D.S. Hamilton (Eds.), "Europe Whole and Free: Vision and Reality", PISM, 2019, pp. 353–361.

² A. Cowell, "Fort Trump? Poland Makes a Play for a U.S. Military Base," *The New York Times*, 19 September 2018, www.nytimes.com.

PISM STRATEGIC FILE

some of the Trump administration's policies deemed highly controversial by other European states and by the political opposition, namely the Democratic Party, in the U.S. One example was the role Poland played in facilitating and co-hosting the international conference on the Middle East in February 2019, which was portrayed by the international media as an element of the U.S. "maximum pressure" campaign on Iran.³ Poland also faced criticism in the U.S., for example, from then presidential candidate Biden, over internal developments.

The Biden administration seemed to have little incentive to bolster diplomatic contact with Poland immediately after the president took office in January.

Given these factors, the Biden administration seemed to have little incentive to bolster diplomatic contact with Poland immediately after the president took office in January. Obviously, the domestic situation in the U.S. and dealing with the pandemic were seen as the priority. The lack of full staffing of relevant parts of the administration, in particular the State Department, Department of Defence,

and NSC structures, also had an impact.

However, the main factors influencing foreign policy conduct in the early days of Biden's presidency were prioritisation and timing. The most pressing issue for the U.S. was to extend the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (New START).⁴ Next, the administration focused on the Indo-Pacific region, with bilateral talks with Japan and South Korea,⁵ the Quad Summit,⁶ and a meeting in Alaska with Chinese representatives.⁷ Only afterwards came Europe. The European tours of Secretary of State Antony Blinken and President Biden, including summits with the EU and NATO, served to confirm the "America is Back" message and U.S. return to multilateralism. However, they also showed that the administration focused principally on revitalising the relationship with the EU and Western European states, seen as the main political points of contact in transatlantic relations. The administration signalled its willingness to maintain the dialogue with its CEE partners, as shown by Secretary Blinken's discussions with the foreign ministers of the Visegrad Group⁸ and by President Biden's meeting with the leaders of three Baltic countries and President Duda on the margins of the NATO Summit in June 2021. But these initial meetings were symbolic rather than substantive.

Despite the emphasis on dialogue and consultations with allies, a key feature of the "America is Back" policy expressed by both President Biden and the Secretary of State, the U.S. administration decided in May 2021 to waive sanctions on non-Russian companies involved in Nord Stream 2, in contravention to its previous acknowledgement about the hazards posed by the project.⁹ The decision came as a surprise not only to the Polish authorities but also other CEE allies and Ukraine. The waiver was granted apparently following negotiations undertaken directly with Germany—the host nation to companies involved—and was opposed by officials from the State Department.¹⁰ Such conduct of U.S. policy triggered vocal discontent from the Polish government.¹¹ According to critics—among whom were prominent Democratic senators, the chair of the U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, Bob Menendez,¹² and chair of the Europe and Regional Security Cooperation

³ P. Sasnal, B. Wiśniewski, "After the Middle East Conference in Warsaw," *PISM Spotlight*, 18 February 2019.

⁴ A. Kacprzyk, "Extension of the New START Treaty," *PISM Spotlight*, No. 10, 28 January 2021.

⁵ O. Pietrewicz, "U.S. Secretaries of State and Defence Visit Japan and South Korea," *PISM Spotlight*, No. 25, 19 March 2021.

⁶ P. Kugiel, "Quad Summit—Reaffirming the Pivotal Role of the Format in the Indo-Pacific," *PISM Spotlight*, No. 23, 16 March 2021.

⁷ A. Dąbrowski, M. Przychodniak, "U.S.-China Meeting—Monologues Instead of a Dialogue," *PISM Spotlight*, No. 26, 22 March 2021.

⁸ M. Piotrowski, M. Terlikowski, "U.S. Secretary of State's First European Visit," *PISM Spotlight*, No. 27, 26 March 2021.

⁹ A. Shalal, T. Gardner, S. Holland, "U.S. waives sanctions on Nord Stream 2 as Biden seeks to mend ties with Europe," *Reuters*, 19 May 2021, www.reuters.com.

¹⁰ J. Hudson, "Among internal disputes over Russia policy, Biden has chosen a mix of confrontational and cooperation," *The Washington Post*, 16 June 2021, www.washingtonpost.com.

¹¹ "Minister Zbigniew Rau's interview to *Rzeczpospolita*," 11 June 2021, www.gov.pl.

¹² "Chairman Menendez statement on State Department's Nord Stream 2 report," 19 May 2021, www.foreign.senate.gov.

PISM STRATEGIC FILE

Subcommittee, Jeanne Shaheen¹³—by avoiding talks with interested partners before deciding on the NS2 waiver, the administration proved more interested in engaging Germany than supporting the CEE, impacting West-Russia relations and NATO deterrence.

Meeting Global and Regional Challenges Together

The core of the relationship between the United States and Poland remains intact.

Despite the NS2 controversy and pause in bilateral contacts, the core of the relationship between the United States and Poland remains intact. The important areas of political, security, economic, and regional cooperation enjoy bipartisan support on the American side, as well as broad backing on the Polish political scene.

Strengthening NATO and making sure all the Allies fulfil their commitments is one common point. As the June 2021 NATO Summit confirmed, the Biden administration is eager to boost U.S. credibility in NATO but also continues to draw attention to the need to address the imbalance in burden-sharing with Europe. It will be crucial to identify a way of maintaining peer pressure on allies as regards their defence expenditures without resorting to Trump-era language about countries “owing money” to the U.S. Poland, which fulfils its NATO obligations as regards the size of the defence budget and the priorities for modernisation of its military capabilities, offers a good example to other European allies.

There is also an important similarity of perceptions between the U.S. and Poland regarding the prospects for EU-U.S. cooperation. During the EU-U.S. summit in June 2021, the two sides agreed to launch a high-level Trade and Technology Council (TTC) with the aim to develop trade and investment relations, as well as to strengthen cooperation on research and development of modern technologies in the digital sector, such as AI.¹⁴ This step, as well as the resolution of the dispute over subsidies for Airbus and Boeing, is perceived in Poland as a positive sign of the readiness of both sides to strengthen and further develop U.S.-EU relations. Such a course will have a positive impact on the overall state of transatlantic relations and will positively affect U.S.-Polish relations. Poland will not always side with the U.S., but most likely will support quick progress between the EU and the U.S. on a broad set of issues. These include the intensification of transatlantic trade, agreeing and cooperating on climate policy goals, and establishing joint rules for cooperation on digital policy and new technologies. Considering the uncertain prospects for a quick end to the COVID-19 pandemic, the U.S. and the EU should also consider strengthening cooperation on combatting this pandemic and future outbreaks to increase the chances of effective action from the outset.¹⁵

Poland will not always side with the U.S., but most likely will support quick progress between the EU and the U.S. on a broad set of issues.

Poland is highly critical of suggestions that the EU’s quest for strategic autonomy should mean competition with the U.S. or maintaining similar distance from both the U.S. and China. Poland sees European strategic autonomy as a broad concept that can be implemented without straining transatlantic relations. It also advocates close institutional cooperation between the EU and NATO, supporting the engagement of the U.S. in PESCO projects and European Defence Fund (EDF) programmes.

¹³ “Shaheen Statement on Nord Stream 2,” 19 May 2021, www.shaheen.senate.gov.

¹⁴ M. Piotrowski, “U.S.-EU Summit—A Return to Transatlantic Cooperation,” *PISM Spotlight*, No. 50, 16 June 2021.

¹⁵ K. Donfried, “The Importance of Transatlantic Cooperation During the COVID-19 Pandemic,” Blog Post, 14 July 2020, www.gmfus.org.

PISM STRATEGIC FILE

Russia is seen as a threat by both the United States and Poland.

Russia is seen as a threat by both the United States and Poland, although the Biden administration is seemingly still calibrating its Russia policy. Importantly, in the administration's perception, corruption and money laundering, which enable Russia to expand its influence in Western states and their economic systems, have not received proper attention in recent years,

a point shared by Poland. Additional actions are also required to address human rights violations, cyberattacks, and disinformation campaigns. In that context, some of the early actions of the Biden administration, including strong language criticising the Putin regime and an additional set of sanctions on Russia related to the SolarWinds and other cyberattacks, were received positively in Poland. In contrast, the NS2 decisions were seen as beneficial to Russia and hazardous not only to EU energy security but also to Ukraine. President Biden's attempt to increase predictability in relations with Russia and engage it in discussions on strategic stability and cybersecurity are broadly seen as worth pursuing but bound to fail.¹⁶

The attitude towards China is more complex. On one hand, Poland shares U.S. criticism of the Chinese conduct in several areas, including human rights, cyberspace, the autonomy of Hong Kong and Taiwan, and the freedom of navigation in the South and East China seas. Poland opts for close alignment of the EU and American policies on China. It also supports NATO's adaptation to the challenges posed by China. On the other hand, Poland maintains dialogue with China and supports mutually beneficial economic cooperation. Thus, for example, it does not consider the recently concluded EU-China Comprehensive Investment Agreement (CAI) to be the optimal solution for European-Chinese trade and investment relations and was critical of its accelerated last phase of negotiations, but recognises CAI's potential to increase reciprocity in economic relations.¹⁷ Poland also remains a participant of the "17/16+1" format, which is meant to facilitate cooperation between CEE states and China.¹⁸ In May 2021, Minister of Foreign Affairs Zbigniew Rau visited China to discuss cooperation prospects.¹⁹

Biden and Bilateral Cooperation

Improving regular channels of dialogue is an immediate priority for the development of bilateral relations.

Improving regular channels of dialogue is an immediate priority for the development of bilateral relations. The U.S. and Polish presidents met in Brussels in June 2021, and contacts between members of both governments are already occurring.²⁰ As a follow-up, a Strategic Dialogue session and sectoral dialogues should be scheduled as soon as possible. Due to the high advancement of the vaccination programmes of both countries,

it should be possible to organise high-level visits and consultations. The prompt appointment of the next U.S. ambassador to Poland would greatly improve communication.

¹⁶ A. Dąbrowski, A. Legucka, "No Reset: Biden-Putin Meet in Geneva," *PISM Spotlight*, No. 51, 17 June 2021, www.pism.pl.

¹⁷ M. Przychodniak, "Fake Success: The Conclusion of the EU-China Investment Agreement Negotiations," *PISM Bulletin*, No. 20 (1716), 2 February 2021.

¹⁸ M. Przychodniak, "17+1 Summit: The Crisis in China-Central Europe Cooperation," *PISM Spotlight*, No. 13, 10 February 2021.

¹⁹ "Minister Rau's visit to China," 29 May 2021, www.gov.pl.

²⁰ "Secretary Blinken's Call with Polish Foreign Minister Rau," Readout, 18 June 2021, www.gov.pl.

PISM STRATEGIC FILE

Another short-term task would be to address the anxiety of Poland and other countries in the region as regards U.S. policy on NS2. That the U.S. sees the need to approach Germany as a key economic player in the EU and a vital partner to the Biden administration in its plans regarding China is to a certain degree understandable to CEE countries. The concession made by the U.S. on NS2, though, is being perceived as the crucial element in the American-German relations. Thus, while reversing the NS2 sanction waiver decision would be the most desirable solution for most states in the CEE region, it may not be achievable. The countries of the region will certainly closely follow the progress of Congress' proceedings on amendments to the budget proposals for the fiscal year 2022. For example, an amendment presented in July by –Democratic Rep. Marcy Kaptur and Republican Rep. Andy Harris, is meant to force the administration to impose the full range of sanctions on entities involved in the construction of NS2. To address concerns about the impact of NS2 on regional security, the U.S. should at a minimum confirm its previous military commitments regarding deployments in the region. A stronger reassurance effect could be provided by stepping up U.S. and German support to Ukraine, strengthening the deterrence and resilience potential on the Eastern Flank, and jointly examining the energy-and-security nexus vulnerabilities created by NS2 and agreeing ways to address them through specific projects and commitments.²¹

To address concerns about the impact of NS2 on regional security, the U.S. should at a minimum confirm its previous military commitments regarding deployments in the region.

Beyond these immediate steps, the agenda for cooperation can be shaped as follows:

Security and defence issues will likely remain the backbone of bilateral cooperation. The most prominent dimension will be the full implementation of the provisions of the EDCA (including build-up of infrastructure, depots, and training centres at various locations in Poland), cooperation between their armed forces, and joint exercises, including the large-scale manoeuvres. Both sides should look for opportunities to strengthen the American presence in Poland and on NATO's Eastern Flank. The focus should not necessarily be on increasing the number of troops or changing their mode of deployment to permanent, but rather on getting the most out of the U.S. military presence in Europe. The aim should be to increase the interoperability of U.S. and Polish forces, explore trilateral U.S.-Polish-German training initiatives, and better integrate U.S. and Polish troops in Baltic and NATO-wide cooperation. Building on previous operational engagements in the Middle East and Afghanistan, Poland could also step up cooperation with U.S. troops, potentially in the Indo-Pacific (e.g., training programmes with partners involving special forces, or exchange of experience on cyber and information operations).

The focus should not necessarily be on increasing the number of troops or changing their mode of deployment to permanent, but rather on getting the most out of the U.S. military presence in Europe.

Political-military cooperation in NATO also will be important as the Alliance embarks on the preparation of its new Strategic Concept and adapts to the China challenge.²² U.S. and Polish views on NATO remain broadly aligned. One topic that may become the focal point of the Polish-American agenda is the further eastern enlargement of NATO. Beyond the continuation of NATO's Russia policy, Poland and the United States could jointly suggest a roadmap for implementing the pledges made at the 2008 Bucharest summit concerning membership of Georgia and Ukraine, including the Membership Action Plan phase. Both countries could also look into strengthening cooperation with NATO's partners, especially those in Poland's immediate vicinity—Finland and Sweden. Poland also expects that the U.S. will consult its NATO allies on policy regarding its deterrence posture and arms

²¹ S. Dębski, "Nord Stream 2: German and U.S. Credibility Suffers Security Damage," 10 June 2021, www.pism.pl.

²² "Brussels Summit Communique," Press Release (2021) 086, NATO, 14 June 2021, www.nato.int.

PISM STRATEGIC FILE

control dialogue with Russia in as far as it concerns issues relevant to the Alliance and Poland, such as non-strategic nuclear weapons or European missile defence.

Poland will no doubt continue to be interested in the participation of the American defence industry in the modernisation of the Polish military, albeit preferably with the purchase of U.S. weapons accompanied by the transfer of technological knowledge and enhanced industrial cooperation. Referring to specific modernisation programmes, this may include cooperation on the “loyal wingman” programme for the F-35, acquisition of attack helicopters, and further cooperation in

Identifying areas for cooperation in the emerging and disruptive technologies sector should become part of the bilateral dialogue.

missile and air-defence programmes based Poland’s purchase of the first batch of Patriot systems. Identifying areas for cooperation in the emerging and disruptive technologies sector should become part of the bilateral dialogue. Considering the size of the Polish defence budget—about \$13 billion in 2020, which is almost equal to the other states of the Eastern Flank combined—and Polish plans to increase defence spending towards 2.5% of GDP, the significance of cooperation with

Poland for the U.S. industry can only increase.

The second pillar of Polish-American relations should be economic cooperation, including within energy and climate policies. In addition to established areas of cooperation, Poland could play the role of main partner in the implementation of American energy policy towards Central and Eastern Europe, assisting in supplying American energy resources to neighbouring countries utilising existing infrastructure, as well as looking for opportunities to create new energy transmission infrastructure in the region (LNG and oil terminals, pipelines). This will allow for the diversification of energy sources and building energy independence from Russia (including for a future democratic Belarus). Going a step further, there is a potential for closer bilateral cooperation in renewable energy sources and related technologies, including solar and offshore wind.²³ As regards cooperation with the U.S. in the nuclear energy sector, crucial decisions on the development of the Polish nuclear programme need to be taken promptly. The award of a grant for the development of nuclear energy in Poland by the American Trade and Development Agency for Polish and American companies (in June 2021) is a signal that the U.S. administration perceives potential for deepening bilateral cooperation in nuclear energy. Action in this area will significantly facilitate the transition to a low-carbon energy future. The potential choice of U.S. companies as partners in the nuclear project would obviously have a long-term influence on the bilateral relationship, beyond the business dimension. Poland and the U.S. may be interested in discussing their approaches and ambitions regarding climate policy ahead of the COP26 and future climate summits.

Poland could play the role of main partner in the implementation of American energy policy towards Central and Eastern Europe.

The overall good bilateral relations favour the advancement of trade and investment, which will be helpful with the economic recovery of both countries after the COVID-19 pandemic. This should result in the maintenance of the upward trend in the value of trade exchange. Prior to the pandemic, Poland was home to more than \$54 billion worth of assets belonging to U.S. companies. The value of trade in goods between the two countries reached \$14.4 billion in 2019 (for comparison, U.S. trade with Ukraine was \$3.7 billion; with Romania, \$3.3 billion; Czech Republic, \$8.3 billion; Hungary, \$7.2 billion; and with Lithuania, \$2 billion).²⁴ American enterprises were lead investors in Polish startups and the IT sector, and the U.S. was second on the list of countries from which the companies with the highest revenues hailed. Philip Morris International and CVC Capital Partners were among

²³ Z. Nowak, “Greening the Three Seas Initiative with the U.S.,” *PISM Policy Paper*, No. 4 (190), January 2021.

²⁴ U.S. Department of Commerce data, www.census.gov.

PISM STRATEGIC FILE

the top twenty companies profiting from engaging in Poland's internal market.²⁵ Even during COVID-19, U.S. businesses have been responsible for 46% of all greenfield projects (by capital expenditure).²⁶

The U.S.-China rivalry will affect Polish-American relations.

The U.S.-China rivalry will affect Polish-American relations, for example, in the field of economic cooperation, investment, or scope of technological cooperation. Poland has been cooperating on this issue with the U.S., for

example, signing in 2019—as one of the first countries in Europe—the Joint Declaration on 5G. However, more can be done jointly by the U.S. and Poland in both the bilateral and multilateral setting to limit China's influence, while remaining mindful of the overall EU and Polish policy towards China outlined above. This puts a premium on initiatives that strengthen the international rules-based system and increase economic integration and the technological capacity of like-minded states, rather than projects explicitly aimed at countering China.

For example, the need for safe and reliable ICT networks will be paramount to this and all future U.S. administrations. While the United States is deploying troops, supporting American investments, and deepening trade alliances with the CEE, a potential saturation of the ICT (especially 5G networks) with technologies vulnerable to political influence by adversaries might become a major threat factor for the U.S., as well as to the security of the region itself. As Poland embraces the 5G Toolbox presented by the European Commission, bilateral and multilateral cooperation on making ICT architecture more resilient remains in line with both Polish and American interests.²⁷ Cooperation in this area, although it may be developed on the basis of bilateral relations, should be based primarily on the coordination of U.S.-EU policy, including through the recently established TTC.

Bilateral and multilateral cooperation on making ICT architecture more resilient remains in line with both Polish and American interests

Poland and the U.S. should also aim to establish bilateral cooperation in the area of fighting international flows of illicit funds, which is likely to rise on the U.S. agenda as part of Biden's "democracies can deliver" agenda. These activities may include, for example, limiting the grey economy and tax evasion, preventing money laundering, and curbing illicit flows of money—areas in which Poland has relevant experience.²⁸ Such mechanisms could be used to identify and counter non-transparent financial operations of autocratic countries and to create new mechanisms to fight corruption within the EU-U.S. framework.

The policy towards Eastern Europe should become a field of increased bilateral cooperation.

The policy towards Eastern Europe should become a field of increased bilateral cooperation. With regards to Ukraine, joint activities may include increased training for the Ukrainian armed forces, joint support for the implementation of anti-corruption agenda, as well as coordinating humanitarian and development aid for the Donbas. As regards Belarus, both

countries support democratisation of its political system and demand the cessation of the repressions perpetrated by the Lukashenka regime. Closer cooperation on supporting the functioning of free media in Belarus and strengthening civil society through assistance to organisations capable of operating in that country are also worth exploring. There may also be scope for closer cooperation

²⁵ Foreign Direct Investment In Poland, Report By The American Chamber Of Commerce In Poland, December 2020, www.amcham.pl.

²⁶ "Greenfield investments in Poland," AmCham Business and Economics Review, vol. 1/2021, 5 May 2021.

²⁷ A. Dąbrowski, "The Clean Network Initiative as an Element of the U.S.-China Competition," *PISM Bulletin*, No. 4 (1700), 8 January 2021.

²⁸ J. Sarnowski, P. Selera, "Reducing the VAT gap: lessons from Poland," Polish Economic Institute, February 2019, <http://pie.net.pl>.

PISM STRATEGIC FILE

on Russia. Beyond the deterrence dimension and reducing Russia's energy influence abroad, both the U.S. and Poland could launch or support new initiatives to hold Russia accountable for its occupation of Crimea and parts of Donbas, disinformation campaigns, chemical weapons use (e.g. Skripal, Navalny), cyberattacks against Western countries, and human rights violations in Russia.

Poland's active participation in various cooperation formats in the CEE can be seen as an asset facilitating robust U.S. regional engagement.

In all these areas, Poland's active participation in various cooperation formats in the CEE can be seen as an asset facilitating robust U.S. regional engagement. The Three Seas Initiative (TSI) could be strengthened as an instrument that provides infrastructure growth and resilience in the Eastern Flank's North-South corridor. Planned TSI projects could provide for not only civilian use of infrastructure but also serve as a key element for the efficient deployment and movement of troops through seaports, airfields, and road and railways. Furthermore, intensification of activities within the TSI framework with the participation of the U.S., such as the North-South Gas Corridor or Three Seas Digital Highway, would be a good addition to the measures taken so far. Expressions of support of the TSI and for cooperation with members of the initiative by Secretary of State Antony Blinken in February 2021 and by President Biden during the TSI Summit in Sofia in July testify that the American administration sees the potential to strengthen this framework of cooperation.²⁹

Beyond the TSI, Poland participates in the Bucharest Nine (Polish-Romanian initiative bringing together countries of NATO's Eastern Flank), the Visegrad Group (Czechia, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia), and the recently created Lublin Triangle, which brings together Lithuania, Poland, and Ukraine. These forums can be utilised to secure regional buy-in and support for specific initiatives, as well as provide the U.S. an opportunity to engage simultaneously with CEE partners. Poland's chairmanship of the OSCE in 2022 also provides openings to pursue initiatives in line with a Polish-U.S. agenda.

Dealing with Turbulence in the Relationship

Within Europe, Poland is confronted with the new U.S. approach. The Biden administration is making a concerted effort to mend ties with Germany, as well as to reach out to the United Kingdom and

Any indication that the U.S. systematically prioritises the relationship with Western European partners at the expense of Poland and other CEE states would be problematic.

France. At the technical level, this has understandably led to less frequent contacts between the U.S. and Poland. However, any indication that the U.S. systematically prioritises the relationship with Western European partners at the expense of Poland and other CEE states would be problematic. To some Polish observers, the Biden administration's "improving transatlantic relations" agenda only refers to Germany and seems to make a distinction between partners in Europe, ranking some first or second tier in the U.S. perception. Ironically, this may end up as a mirror image of Trump's European policy, at that time criticised

by Western European allies.

Any U.S. strategy for Europe that relies only on one country or region risks being unstable and ineffective. With such an approach, the U.S. may find it difficult to achieve its foreign policy goals in Europe because cooperation with the EU and within NATO cannot develop without the consent and support of all the respective members. Rallying European partners to pursue common policy towards China and Russia could also be hindered by the lack of broad consultations. More U.S. attention

²⁹ "U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken expressed US support for the Three Seas Initiative," 17 February 2021, www.3seas.eu.

PISM STRATEGIC FILE

should be devoted to the CEE countries, including Poland, which remains a key country on the Eastern Flank of NATO with strong military capabilities and an important actor as regards developments in Eastern Europe, as well as the co-convenor of regional cooperation formats. It is also a hub of the U.S. military, a place of significant economic investment, and has a large energy presence in the region.

For the Biden administration, rule of law and human rights are vital issues in relations with Poland.

For the Biden administration, rule of law and human rights are vital issues in relations with Poland. The Polish authorities categorically rebuff the charge that Poland is experiencing democratic backsliding. Diverging assessments regarding the internal developments in Poland are likely to persist in the present political conditions, and tensions seem inevitable. The question is how to handle their impact. The U.S. concerns should

not be dismissed out of hand in Warsaw or countered with easy criticism of the state of American democracy. They should preferably become a topic in the bilateral conversation, perhaps as a separate track within the Strategic Dialogue. Direct engagement may be more effective than megaphone diplomacy.

Conclusions

Considerable progress has been made in the last several years in Polish-U.S. relations. A number of factors beyond the peculiarities of Trump's European policy contributed to that effect. Poland actively encouraged more U.S. engagement in all fields of cooperation, not limiting its outreach to that president. In most areas, U.S. policy towards Poland under Trump displayed a great deal of continuity with the efforts of the previous administrations, both Democratic and Republican.

The Biden administration's "America is Back" approach ought to be embraced. Revival of U.S-EU contacts and repairing American relations with Western European allies are important for the future of transatlantic cooperation. An improvement in that sphere should be welcomed and supported by Poland. The bilateral Polish-U.S. relationship is not predestined to deteriorate. The two countries share a long list of common interests, and several areas of cooperation can be developed further.

PISM STRATEGIC FILE

Summing-up the key recommendations:

- Restoring regular bilateral channels for consultation and reassuring Poland and the CEE of the steadfastness of U.S. policy on Russia should be addressed as short-term priorities.
- In security and defence, the main focus should be on increasing the “value added” of the U.S. military presence in Poland (including interoperability and cooperation with regional partners, deployments, and exercises involving the most advanced U.S. weapons);
- As regards preparations for the new NATO Strategic Concept, Poland and the U.S. could look jointly into the issue of further eastern enlargement of NATO and suggest a way forward;
- While safeguarding its national interests, Poland can shape the EU-U.S. relationship in the direction of closer cooperation rather than competition;
- Poland should assume the role of leader in supplying American energy resources to neighbouring countries, as well as step up cooperation with the U.S. on climate policy, renewable energy and energy efficiency, including solar and offshore wind technologies;
- The Three Seas Initiative should be strengthened, both as a U.S.-supported framework for closer regional cooperation and as a component of strengthening infrastructure resilience along the North-South corridor, which is vital to defence planning on the Eastern Flank of NATO;
- Poland, as the leading TSI state, and a major market for ICT and 5G services, can be crucial in U.S. efforts in proofing telecommunications in the region from becoming vulnerable to malign influence by state and non-state actors, through cooperation with the European Union;
- Cooperation on Poland’s nuclear energy programme should be explored further, at the expert and industry levels;
- The global fight against international flows of illicit funds could become a new area of cooperation;
- New joint policy initiatives towards Belarus, Ukraine, and Russia should be launched;
- U.S. concerns about the internal developments and rule of law in Poland could become a topic of the bilateral conversation.

These issues could become the backbone of the agenda of sessions of the Polish-U.S. Strategic Dialogue and the Strategic Energy Dialogue, which should be convened as early as possible.

Both Poland and the U.S. could also look into the feasibility of re-launching the Strategic Dialogue for Democracy.

Both Poland and the U.S. could also look into the feasibility of re-launching the Strategic Dialogue for Democracy. The work programme could include both internal matters and external issues, such as facilitating new initiatives advancing democratic values in the region (especially in Belarus and Russia) and globally (Summit for Democracy).

PISM STRATEGIC FILE

THE STATE OF POLAND-U.S. RELATIONS

Military Cooperation

4,500 U.S. soldiers stationed on a rotational basis in Poland (most importantly, a U.S. Armoured Brigade Combat Team)

Joint Declaration on Defense Cooperation Regarding U.S. Force Posture in Poland, announced on 12 June 2019, stipulated a rotational deployment of an additional 1,000 U.S. soldiers, as well as several new projects and infrastructure investments to host U.S. troops³⁰

Joint Declaration on the Deepening of Defense Cooperation, signed on 23 September 2019, identified the locations of most U.S. units

Deployment of the U.S. Army V Corps' Forward Command in Poland (2020)

Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA), signed on 15 August 2020, provided the legal framework for the stationing of the additional U.S. forces and defined Polish financial and material support for the U.S. military presence³¹

Modernisation of the Polish Armed Forces with U.S. Military Equipment

Two Patriot air-defence batteries equipped with a state-of-the-art IBCS command system, known as Phase One contract, worth about \$4.75 billion (March 2018)³²

HIMARS mobile rocket artillery systems squadron, worth about \$400 million (February 2019)

32 F-35 fighters, worth about \$4.6 billion (January 2020)

Economic relations

Regular increase in the value of imports and exports of goods: from \$9.7 billion in 2015 to \$14.4 billion in 2019.

The United States is second, after Germany, in investments in Poland, with a share of 11% and a value of 4% of Polish GDP. There are about 1,500 companies with American capital in Poland, including Microsoft's \$1 billion investment plan in the Polish Digital Valley and Amazon's numerous investments in logistics infrastructure, totalling \$14 billion

³⁰ The declaration envisaged adding 1,000 U.S. rotational military personnel to those already deployed and establishing an Army Division Headquarters (forward-deployed); a joint Combat Training Center; a U.S. Air Force MQ-9 Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance Squadron; an Aerial Port of Debarkation; an Army Area Support Group (ASG); and a U.S. Special Operations Forces capability in Poland. Poland also declared it would finance or construct several elements of infrastructure relevant to the stationing and operational capabilities of American forces.

³¹ *Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement*, 13 November 2020, www.state.gov.

³² Poland selected Raytheon's Patriot air defence system already in 2015, but subsequently decided to divide the contract into two phases, with two batteries acquired in Phase One and six in Phase Two.

PISM STRATEGIC FILE

Energy Cooperation

Polish companies, including Orlen and Lotos, import small quantities of American crude oil (since 2017)

The first-ever LNG shipment from the U.S. was received in June 2017

Joint Declaration on enhanced cooperation in the field of energy security, signed on 8 November 2018, created a political framework for increased purchases of natural gas by Poland; since then, about 9.3 bcm³³ of gas has been contracted from American-based companies (to be delivered by 2023), which accounts for about half of Poland's current demand

Strategic Energy Dialogue (initiated 2018) on the diversification of energy sources in Central and Eastern Europe, LNG exports, and cooperation in the field of nuclear energy technology

Memorandum of Understanding on Nuclear Energy Cooperation, signed on 12 June 2019, is a commitment to long-term cooperation in the development of Poland's civil nuclear programme, with the context of plans to develop 6-9 gigawatts of nuclear power capacity³⁴

Cooperation in other areas

Science and Technology Cooperation Agreement (April 2018)

Agreement on cooperation in the field of biomedical sciences (July 2018)

Agreement with the U.S. Strategic Command to exchange data on space situational awareness (April 2019).

Joint declaration on collaboration on 5G security (September 2019)

Inclusion of Poland into U.S. Visa Waiver Program (November 2019), possible thanks to the reduction in the number of rejected visa applications below the 3% threshold of all visa applications submitted.

U.S. declaration of financial contribution to the Three Seas Initiative (TSI) Investment Fund (February 2020): no less than 30% of the overall commitments to the fund, which amounted to \$300 million allocated by the U.S. International Development Finance Corporation³⁵

³³ Calculations based on data published by www.pgnig.pl on long- and short-term contracts.

³⁴ "Energy Policy of Poland until 2040," Ministry of Climate and Environment, p. 13, www.gov.pl.

³⁵ "\$300 million for the Three Seas Fund by DFC," www.3seas.eu.