Weekly Briefing

Poland external relations briefing:
Summary of 2019, foreign policy of Poland

Joanna Ciesielska-Klikowska
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In recent years the Polish-American relations have been developing faster than usual. In the opinion of Polish authorities, Donald Trump’s assumption of the office of president in 2017 created favourable conditions for the development of bilateral cooperation. Relations between the two countries have always been extremely important for Warsaw, but for none of the previous ruling teams - both the government and the president - these relations did constitute such a strong foundation for creating a comprehensive foreign policy as for the PiS government under Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki, and the President Andrzej Duda. The year 2019 brought confirmation of this assumption, because it abounded in significant decisions, summit meetings and declarations that will result in the intensification of Polish-American cooperation on many levels. What is significant, these relations are also very well evaluated by Polish citizens, who in their majority (53%) perceive Washington as Warsaw’s most important partner.

Looking back over the past twelve months, it must be admitted that the year 2019 was very successful in terms of Polish-American affairs. The relationship with the United States was raised in public debate first of all by the Middle East conference, organized in Warsaw on February 13-14, in which high-ranking American administration representatives - Vice President Mike Pence and Secretary of State Mike Pompeo - took part. The topic of two-day discussions among the representatives of over 60 countries was the general security in the Middle East, although the most important issues were Iran and the war in Yemen and Syria. After the summit, its value was emphasized in terms of building a new political climate for security talks in the Middle East. At the same time, however, the absence of many essential politicians as well as the deepening divisions were pointed out, due to the sharp and explicit foreign policy of the USA towards the EU and its selected member states as well as Muslim countries and Israel.

2019 was also a special year for historical reasons - Poland and the USA celebrated the 100th anniversary of establishing diplomatic relations. Moreover, the celebration of the 80th anniversary of the outbreak of World War II, and the first partial-free parliamentary elections in 1989 were recognized as key diplomatic events. They constituted the framework for
conducted conferences, seminars and meetings, of which the most important were summits of leaders of both countries, that resulted in many important and future-oriented decisions.

**Duda - Trump meeting in June 2019**

Indeed, Presidents Andrzej Duda and Donald Trump met twice in 2019 - first in Washington, DC, in June, then in September in New York. As a result of the visit to the White House in spring (June 12-18), President Andrzej Duda and President Donald Trump signed a “Joint declaration on defence cooperation in the presence of the United States of America armed forces on Polish territory”. According to this document, the US plans to increase its current military presence in Poland. In the near future, this permanent attendance is expected to increase by about 1,000 soldiers (around 4,500 US soldiers are currently stationing in Poland). Declaration states moreover, that Poland plans to provide and maintain jointly agreed infrastructure for the initial package of additional Polish-American projects, without costs for the United States and taking into account the planned level of its use by the US Armed Forces.

As President Duda emphasized, “this declaration about further cooperation in the field of defence and the US military presence in Poland was a breakthrough one”. In addition, the Polish head of state declared Poland’s readiness to purchase 32 multi-purpose F-35 combat aircraft.

During the state visit to the USA, apart from his wife Agata Kornhauser-Duda, the president was accompanied by a large delegation of ministers and high-level officials, who also signed contracts, including of an economic nature and home affairs. Talks were held i.e. on the situation in Ukraine and energy cooperation. The result of the dialogue in this matter was the signing, negotiated in the preceding weeks, of an agreement between the Polish PGNiG group (Polskie Górnictwo Naftowe i Gazownictwo - Polish Oil and Gas Mining, the largest Polish company dealing with exploration and extraction of natural gas and crude oil) and the American company Venture Global. It provides for the delivery of further batches of LNG to Poland. According to the contract, PGNiG will import 3.5 million tons of gas annually from Louisiana terminals (for USD 8 billion). A memorandum of cooperation in the field of civilian use of nuclear energy and an agreement on strengthening cooperation in the field of preventing and combating serious crime were also signed.

An extremely important declaration for Poles was also made during this state visit - the American president expressed hope that Poland would join the visa-free travel program very quickly, which the country has been unsuccessfully seeking for decades. As Trump stated, “perhaps this will happen in the next 90 days; we want Poland to belong to this elite group.” President Duda complimented on the other hand, that “this is the first American administration
to approach the issue of visa waiver for Poles in such a serious and such a comprehensive manner."

For the Polish President, the exceptionally long, 6-day visit to the USA, was an "absolutely strategic visit" in which both the political and economic components discovered a key role. In fact, it was indeed a visit of great importance, also in the context of the security of the entire region of Central and Eastern Europe, which was emphasized in the following days by the leaders of the Visegrad Group countries and the Baltic states.

**Duda - Trump meeting in September 2019**

For the second time this year, both presidents met in New York (September 23), during the 74. UN General Assembly session. Both heads of state signed then a “Joint declaration deepening the Polish-American military cooperation”.

Based on the “Joint declaration” signed on June 12, 2019, Duda and Trump decided to continue work on a plan to strengthen military ties between Poland and the United States, as well as US defence capabilities and deterrence in Poland. In the new memorandum Poland and the United States have agreed locations for the planned increased US military presence:

- **the city of Poznań** was designated as the headquarters of the Advanced Division and a support group at the theater of the United States Land Forces;
- **Drawsko Pomorskie** was selected as the headquarters of the Combat Training Center for joint use by the Armed Forces of Poland and the United States;
- **Wrocław-Strachowice** has been designated as the headquarters of the United States Air Force loading and unloading base;
- **Łask** was chosen as the headquarters of the squadron of remotely controlled aircraft of the United States Air Force;
- **Powidz** was nominated as the headquarters of the air combat brigade, the battalion of combat logistics support and the special forces facility;
- **and Lubliniec** was designated as the lodging of another special forces facility.

In addition, Poland and the United States decided to conduct an extensive dialogue on the most suitable location in Poland for the armoured brigade combat group. These discussions are still ongoing, reflecting close operational and strategic cooperation between Poland and the United States.
Both presidents reaffirmed moreover their shared will to pursue international agreements and arrangements necessary for the implementation of increased cooperation in the field of infrastructure and defence cooperation, including the improvement of the functioning of the United States Armed Forces in Poland, which should further strengthen bilateral partnership and the security of the North Atlantic Treaty area.

Referring to the important issue of visa waiver for Poles, Trump admitted during a press conference with President Duda, that “it will be possible in a very short time, as all data will be confirmed.” He added that the visa issue should be completed within a few months. “You can tell your compatriots in Poland and the United States that President Trump has succeeded, and no one else has succeeded in that issue before” underlined the American President.

**Visa waiver for the US**

Indeed, in less than two months since the New York meeting of both leaders, on November 6, 2019, the Ambassador of the United States in Poland, Georgette Mosbacher announced that the US abolishes the visa requirement for Poles.

On that day, the US President signed the document authorizing Poland to join the American Visa Waiver program - today this program covers 38 countries in the world, mainly European. Their citizens do not need to obtain an entry visa to the USA, but must register with the special Electronic System for Travel Authorization (ESTA) prior to departure to the United States. Poland has applied for admission to this program for almost 30 years, but the percentage of visa refusal rate was for many years too high (over 3%), which made Poles not eligible for the program. Starting from November 11, 2019 – exactly on Polish Independence Day and the 101st anniversary of regaining sovereignty by the Polish state - Poles have achieved the right to go to the United States for tourist or business purposes for 90 days without the need to obtain a visa first.

This decision, in diplomatic and social terms, was of great importance. It underlined the weight of the Polish-American partnership, so favored by the current ruling team. Secondly, it indicated that Poles are no longer “second-class” citizens and can enjoy the same rights as citizens of Western countries. The decision was also of great significance to the American Polonia (the 10 million Poles currently living in the USA), who appreciate President Trump’s gesture and the efforts of the Polish administration. This decision also emphasized the alliance that connects both countries on many levels.
In a practical sense, however, joining the Visa Waiver Program does not mean, that every Pole will definitely enter the US. The decision will be made by a US immigration officer at the airport or port during passport control.

**Conclusions**

To sum up the bilateral relations, it should be stated that in fact 2019 brought them a great revival - the meetings of both presidents were a clear example of this. Undoubtedly, visa waiver for Poles who want to go to the USA for 3 months has also become key moment in a symbolic sense.

At the same time, despite all the declarative sphere, America remained very difficult partner for Poland. In general, the successes of President Duda himself and the PiS government in terms of security policy, are rather moderate. Of course, in the current geopolitical situation - the reviving Russian imperialism and the internal crisis of the European Union - it is difficult to overestimate the importance of the presence of NATO troops on Polish territory. It is also difficult to overestimate the importance of the alliance with the US for Polish national security. That’s why, the planned visit of Donald Trump to Poland on the 80th anniversary of the outbreak of World War II (September 1) was to confirm the effectiveness of PiS diplomacy and the idea of the ruling party for international politics. It has been speculated that decisions about the building of the so called “Fort Trump” in Poland will be made. Nothing happened, however, because the visit to Poland has not been realised, and both leaders met only three weeks later in New York.

In the same period it also turned out that American investments in Poland would be frozen – it’s about investment projects worth over USD 130 million that were to be created as part of the European Deterrence Initiative (i.e. the ammunition depot, barracks and the aviation fuel depot at the Powidz airport). The freezing of these investments results from Trump’s decision to use USD 3.6 billion for the construction of the wall at the Mexican border from the Pentagon budget originally allocated to other projects. Despite the declared strategic alliance between Washington and Warsaw, Poland (after Germany, Japan and Great Britain) is the fourth country in terms of the value and the number of frozen American investments.

In fact, by isolating from Western European allies (which was repeatedly pointed out to Warsaw in Berlin, Paris or Brussels), the government of Mateusz Morawiecki and President Duda himself put everything on the alliance with the US and de facto found themselves at the
mercy of President Trump. Clapping the ego of the American president managed to get i.e. promises regarding the increased presence of American troops in Poland.

Yet, when it comes to negotiating the conditions under which Trump’s promises are to be fulfilled, the current Polish authorities are not doing so well, what means that these talks can cost Poland a lot - both financially and politically. Time will tell if the commitments, projects and plans made in 2019 can be realized for the benefit of both countries - not only for the United States.