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GEOPOLITICAL STRATEGY OF SMALLER STATE: THE CASE STUDY OF POLAND'S PRESENCE IN THE EU

INTRODUCTION

The aim of the article is to analyse strategic choices made in international relations by a smaller state that does not have the status of a great power, and is involved within the structures of regional integration. The analysis will focus on the country that has low international standing, because of its geographical location and its small geopolitical potential. It seems that Poland, because of its relatively small geopolitical (economic, demographic, military, etc.) potential, and because of its location on the eastern border of the European Union may be regarded as an example of such a state. The specific, to some extent peripheral location of Poland is underscored by the fact that it is situated on the border of two geopolitical blocks, i.e. between the West (whose core members are the US and the biggest EU countries) and Russia and its sphere of influence. Poland's location is also adjacent to other peripheral countries that are the scene of rivalry between Russia and the West (among these countries, Ukraine is the most important case in point.)

Studies of international relations often focus on the role of great powers, as these countries obviously have the greatest impact on shaping the international order and geopolitical relations. Scholars pay much less attention to smaller countries, especially those considered to be peripheral. In the theoretical part of this article, I will offer a survey of selected academic approaches that focus on the role of states in the international order. In

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particular, I will endeavour to show how the selected theories present the differences between the role of powers and of smaller states, and whether individual theories present the relationships between them as hierarchical or relatively equal. Another element of my analysis is an attempt to answer the question what strategic choices are made in the area of foreign policy that can boost the influence of smaller states in the geopolitical order and improve their autonomy in relation to regional and global powers. Finally, I will also offer an overview of the situation in regional integration in Europe. I will consider whether the EU is a special case that requires a separate theoretical approach, or whether the situation in the EU can be viewed as a confirmation of the tenets of existing international relations theories. After these theoretical considerations, I will move to analyse Poland's presence in the EU in the light of the considerations outlined above. I will analyse Poland's geopolitical strategy in recent years¹, starting from the country's accession to the EU in 2004 and ending my analysis at the end of 2015. In analysing Poland's geopolitical strategy, I will be interested primarily in evidence of long-term actions in relations with Poland's most important allies both within the EU and beyond, with the main geographical directions

¹ For the purposes of this article, **strategy** is defined as a direction and mode of action which a state (or another international relations actor) intends to adopt in the long term, in order to achieve its goals and gain political advantage. Strategy therefore involves long-term actions taken on the international arena in response to changes in international relations, to ensure the country's long-term survival and improvement of its international standing. The term **geopolitics** is used in the literature in two meanings: either to denote a theoretical approach to international relations, or to refer to applied actions taken by different actors in the wider social, economic or international context. In the latter usage, the classical geopolitical approach involves references to geography and international politics, and thus to the spatial development of relations between countries and the role of geographical location in international relations. In more general terms, it refers to power and broadly-conceived political actions that involve e.g. the realm of ideas, culture, identity, ecology, economics and international relations. In this article I use the term geopolitics primarily in relation to the concept of power in international relations and in the context of various types of strategic actions that can enhance the autonomy of smaller or peripheral states, and improve their position within the international system. More on this subject in: Flint, C. 2012. *Introduction to Geopolitics*, New York, London: Routledge, pp. 31, 39; Tuathail, G.Ó. 2006. General Introduction. Thinking Critically about Geopolitics. In: Tuathail, G.Ó, Dalby, S., Routledge P. eds. *The Geopolitics Reader*. New York, London: Routledge, pp. 1–14; Agnew, J. 2003. *Geopolitics. Re-visioning world politics*. London, New York: Routledge, pp. 86–93.

and objectives of Poland's foreign policy, as well as with the biggest threats defined by decision-makers.

AN OVERVIEW OF SELECTED THEORIES PERTAINING TO GREAT POWERS AND SMALLER AND PERIPHERAL COUNTRIES

Among theories of international relations there are essentially two main approaches: realist and liberal. The former approach focuses primarily on large countries, referred to as great powers, i.e. countries that have the greatest geopolitical potential and a leading role in the geopolitical structure². They guarantee the peace and security of the geopolitical system (either regional or global)³. At the same time, they seek to maximise their own influence (as posited by the offensive realist approach), or to defend the *status quo* (as posited by the proponents of defensive realism). Representatives of the realist approach usually devote much less attention to smaller or peripherally located states. However, it is clear that within this paradigm, smaller states are seen as objects of domination or influence of great powers. Smaller countries must be subordinated to the rules of the international order outlined by great powers⁴. If the category of power is introduced into the study of international relations, we can assume that some actors have power over others, and thus can influence their actions according to their own interests⁵. States which have greater geopolitical potential will thus have more power in international relations. We can therefore talk about both hierarchical and direct *relational power* of stronger countries over weaker ones, or about voluntary adjustment of weaker countries to stronger countries' preferences, which is referred to as *structural power*⁶.

² Waltz, K.N. 1979. *Theory of International Politics*. New York: McGraw Hill; Mearsheimer, J.J. 2001. *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*. New York – London: W.W. Norton & Comp., pp. 2–3, 19, 21.

³ Bull, H. 1977. *The Anarchical Society: A Study of Order in World Politics*. New York: Columbia University Press, p. 202.

⁴ Waltz, K.N., *op. cit.*; Mearsheimer, J.J., *op. cit.*, pp. 3, 5.

⁵ One could apply Robert Dahl's classical definition here: the **power** of one entity over another means that the latter takes actions that it would not otherwise take without the pressure of the former entity. Cf. Dahl, R.A. 1969. The Concept of Power. In: Bell, R., Edwards, D.V., Wagner R.H. eds. *Political Power: A Reader in Theory and Research*. New York: Free Press, pp. 79–93.

⁶ Strange, S. 1987. The Persistent Myth of Lost Hegemony. *International Organization*, vol. 41, no. 4.

According to Kenneth Waltz, the primary objective of all countries, including smaller ones, it is to preserve sovereignty. He defines sovereignty in an utmost way, as the desire to maintain the state's independence (or simply, statehood, as seen from the formal and legal standpoints.) But Waltz's approach can also be modified towards a more nuanced perception of sovereignty, so as to include the notion of political autonomy (or the actual scope of the country's sovereignty in the sphere of domestic affairs or foreign policy)⁷. All countries seek to enhance their position on the international scene, although smaller ones have a worse starting position, are more heavily punished for making mistakes, and have a smaller risk margin in relations with stronger players⁸.

It is safe to assume that in realist terms, 'the tragedy of small states'⁹ lies in the fact that they are pawns in a power game between great powers. The decisions that weaker countries are allowed to make often boil down to choosing the lesser evil or a more liberal patron, which will give them more benefits and more autonomy in internal or international affairs. At the same time, they have much less leeway for making mistakes and a greater risk of losing independence.

On the other hand, in the liberal approach, the role of political rivalry, and the hierarchy of power between great powers and smaller states loses much of its importance¹⁰. Countries are no longer perceived as the sole actors in international relations. The role of 'big business' or corporations is more pronounced, and there is more research into the role of international networks of social and economic connections that influence and moderate the logic of international rivalry. Another factor mitigating the hierarchical relationships between states is the growing role of economic interdependence and of international institutions and international law in containing geopolitical conflicts¹¹. Within the liberal paradigm, internal conditions in individual countries play a considerable role¹², with special emphasis on democracy,

⁷ Czaputowicz, J. 2013. *Suverenność*. [Sovereignty.], Warsaw: PISM.

⁸ Waltz, K.N., *op. cit.*

⁹ This sentence paraphrases the title of John J. Mearsheimer's seminal monograph. Cf. Mearsheimer, J.J. *op. cit.*

¹⁰ Doyle, M. 1986. Liberalism and World Politics. *American Political Science Review*, vol. 80, no. 4.

¹¹ Friedman, T.L. 1999. *The Lexus and the Olive Tree: Understanding Globalization*. New York: Farrar; Mansfield, E.D. 1994. *Power, Trade, and War*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

¹² Some realists (especially the proponents of the classical theory) also take into account the role of internal conditions for the actions on the international arena. Cf.

the rule of law and respect for human rights¹³. Within this paradigm, the abovementioned factors are credited with reducing the tendency to increase the hegemonic influence of superpowers (or great powers) at the expense of smaller states.

It should be noted, however, that even analyses written by the representatives of the liberal approach tend to contain some references to hierarchy of power in international relations and to the division between dominant and weaker countries¹⁴. In the liberal perspective, great powers are seen as providers of stability and security in the international system. Smaller countries need to abide by the rules of the game, outlined by dominant actors. In this way, smaller countries lose at least a part of their autonomy in exchange for increased security. They also receive some unquestioned benefits, e.g. the possibility to allocate funds earmarked for defence spending to other public policy objectives. The authority of great powers is one of the key categories within the liberal paradigm. It pertains to the powers' right to lead other countries, legitimised by the international community. The leadership of powers is seen as beneficial for the stability of the entire system and it also helps to uphold the respect for international law¹⁵. There is also the possibility of 'sharing sovereignty' in such a way that smaller countries retain their autonomy in internal affairs, and surrender to great powers in the area of foreign policy¹⁶.

Some liberal scholars also refer to the concept of the geopolitical spheres of influence, in which smaller countries are subject to the domination of world or regional powers. Great powers can be seen as maintaining and cultivating their separate spheres of influence. This model was especially pertinent to the bipolar world order between 1945 and 1989, but its traces are also perceptible after the end of the Cold War. This approach posits that powers seek to establish and expand their exclusive spheres of influence¹⁷. Within this model, weaker states have a limited choice of a possible patron,

Kirshner, J. 2015. The Economic Sins of Modern IR Theory and the Classical Realist Alternative. *World Politics*, vol. 67, no. 1.

¹³ Fukuyama, F. 1992. *The End of History and the Last Man*. New York: Free Press; Brown, M.E., Lynn-Jones, S.M., Miller S.E. eds. 1996. *Debating the Democratic Peace*. Cambridge: MIT Press.

¹⁴ Lake, D.A. 2014. Status, Authority, and the End of the American Century. In: Paul, T.V., Larson, D.W., Wohlforth, W.C. eds. *Status in World Politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 251.

¹⁵ Lake, D.A. 2009. *Hierarchy In International Relations*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

¹⁶ Lake, D.A. 2014. Status, Authority, and the End of the American Century, p. 253.

¹⁷ *Ibid*, p. 254.

and their possibilities of manoeuvring between competing powers are also severely limited. It is great powers which divide the spoils, and which can decide to establish a zone of common influence or designate some territories as neutral or exempt from the unequivocal domination of one power.

In order to better understand the fate of small countries with a peripheral status, one should also refer to the concept of the world system, related to the Marxist paradigm. In accordance with Marx's precepts, this concept emphasises the dominance of economic interests over geopolitical ones. The representatives of this approach assume that big capital from central areas (or central states) seeks to expand its dominance on a global scale, spreading its influence to subordinate and exploit peripheral areas¹⁸. The geopolitical clout of great powers serves these goals, which in practice leads to the development of hierarchical relationships between central and peripheral countries. The founder of this approach, Immanuel Wallerstein, argues that geopolitical might of great powers allows them to impose asymmetrical rules of the game on peripheral states. This leads to uneven distribution of costs and benefits in relations between the centre and the peripheries. The practices of dominance include forcing the opening of internal markets in peripheral countries to foreign investors, which gradually leads to the demise of local companies which cannot hold their own against more competitive rivals from central countries, who also have access to bigger reserves of capital¹⁹. Even when they have some resources, peripheral countries do not accumulate wealth, but allow external actors to exploit them. The attitudes of local elites, which bow to foreign political and economic pressure or are actually under direct influence of great powers, play a key role in this process. It is accompanied by a cultural domination of the centre over the peripheries, which may be visible in the spheres of language, social values, political traditions, etc.

These recurring mechanisms of centre-periphery relations also caught the attention of sociologists and political scientists²⁰. Whereas scholars from these disciplines do not focus on the international scene (concentrating instead mainly on internal relations), their findings are still pertinent to the case in hand. They tend to show that peripheries are most often subordinated, administratively and politically, to the centre, and are at the same time dominated on the economic level. The local economic model

¹⁸ Wallerstein, J. 2004. *World – System Analysis. An Introduction*, Durham – London: Duke University Press.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, pp. 28, 55.

²⁰ Rokkan, S., Urwin, D.W. 1983. *Economy, Territory, Identity. Politics of West European Peripheries*. London: SAGE Publications, pp. 2, 19.

is frequently exogenous, and therefore it is conditioned by decisions taken in the metropolis or by business entities that have external ties. Overall, it is a perfect exemplification of the classic geo-economic relationship in which the distribution of costs and benefits in an economic exchange is determined by political power²¹. Local elites retain administrative functions but instead of making decisions in the interest of local communities, they rely on recommendations and suggestions proposed by the centre. The centre's decisions shape 'the structure of opportunities', or the potential for success for peripheral populations. That 'structure of opportunities' determines who among the locals will be offered a chance to join the power elite or achieve a financial and professional success. The domination of the centre over peripheries is exacerbated due to provincialism, increased cultural marginalisation and stronger and stronger cultural hegemony of the centre. Stein Rokkan and Derek Urwin, who study the issue of peripheral identities in Europe, demonstrate the existence of a very clear distinction between the centre and peripheries. Western Europe is clearly the centre, whereas peripheries include the southern and eastern areas of the continent²². In this perspective, Poland is classed as a peripheral country that has been historically dominated by the centre (mainly the West, but in some periods also the East, i.e. Russia).

THE RELATIONS AMONG GREAT POWERS AND SMALLER STATES IN INTEGRATING EUROPE

Regional approaches to international relations promise to be a fruitful academic framework for the analysis of relationships between great powers and smaller states in integrating Europe. The regional approaches are frequently eclectic in nature. For example, Barry Buzan and Ole Wæver²³

²¹ Luttwak, E.N. 1990. From Geopolitics to Geo-Economics: Logic of Conflict, Grammar of Commerce. *National Interest*, no. 20 (1990 summer); Moisiu, S., Paasi, A. 2013. From Geopolitical to Geoeconomic? The Changing Political Rationalities of State Space. *Geopolitics*, vol. 18; Blackwill, R.D., Harris, J.M. 2016. *War by Other Means. Geoeconomics and Statecraft*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press; Grosse, T.G. 2014. Geoeconomic Relations Between the EU and China: The Lessons from the EU Weapon Embargo and from Galileo. *Geopolitics*, vol. 19, no. 1.

²² Rokkan, S., Urwin, D.W., *op. cit.*, pp. 20, 43.

²³ Buzan, B., Wæver, O. 2003. *Regions and Powers. The Structure of International Security*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 34–36.

follow the tenets of realism when they assume that great powers have the biggest influence on the development of regional governance and that smaller countries only adapt to the rules laid down by the powers. On the other hand, Buzan and Wæver also adhere to some liberal tenets, which is visible in the close attention they pay to internal conditions and the ways in which these conditions create preferences and influence behaviour in foreign policy. Another liberal inspiration in their analysis is the belief in the increasing role of European institutions for the development of regional governance. Yet another liberal trait is Buzan and Wæver's insistence on the role of economic interdependences and on the growing importance of business entities and economic stakeholders for the functioning of the regional order.

Buzan and Wæver's eclecticism is very pronounced in their analysis of the role of smaller countries in Europe. On one hand, pursuant to the liberal paradigm, they tend to play down the rivalry between regional powers for leadership in the region. They argue that the EU creates a community in which internal war is inconceivable²⁴. This situation naturally guarantees a higher level of security for smaller states, and potentially gives them a higher degree of autonomy, and even a greater measure of influence on the external policy of the EU itself. On the other hand, the same scholars perceive Europe as a centre-peripheral structure composed of concentric circles of influence. The heart of this system is Western Europe, namely the team of France and Germany. The Member States of Central and Eastern Europe and the South make a secondary, less influential circle of integration. On the outside of this concentric system there are the states subjected to the influence of the EU, including some former Soviet Union republics, which are simultaneously included in the Russian sphere of influence. The concept of concentric circles involves hierarchical relationships between European countries, whereas peripheral states have significantly less impact on the geopolitical order. It is especially true for the countries belonging to the outermost circle that are not formally members of the EU.

A simultaneous analysis on both the regional and the global level is highly beneficial for the regional approach in international relations²⁵. Naturally, on the regional level, one can primarily observe the rivalry between regional powers. Apart from *centred* regions (i.e. regions that are firmly under the influence of one regional power), Buzan and Wæver also distinguish *standard*

²⁴ *Ibid*, p. 57.

²⁵ Lake, D.A., Morgan, P.M. 1997. *Regional Orders: Building Security in a New World*. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press.

regions, where, in pursuance of the mechanism of balance of power, several regional powers vie for control. The situation is made even more complicated by the fact that some regions are also affected by the actions of great powers that aspire to the role of global superpowers and which seek to extend their influence beyond their own regions. In turn, regional powers seek to maintain their exclusive spheres of influence and thwart the world powers' aspirations in their regional spheres of interest²⁶. This mechanism explains for example the US's attempts to influence the situation in East and South-East Asia, and the actions of China trying to reduce the geopolitical and economic influence of the US in its neighbourhood. In a similar way, the United States is tries to extend its influence to Eastern Europe and Central Asia, where Russia is endeavours to thwart the American attempts and maintain its sole influence over these areas. The scramble for influence over Ukraine can therefore be seen as a natural clash of interests between a superpower and a former superpower with trans-regional ambitions.

In the case of the European Union, the regional analysis has to take into account the external influence of the USA, both on the internal policies of the organisation, and (even more strongly) on its external policy. The US plays a particularly large role with regard to the defence and security of the EU. The influence of the US is mostly indirect, realised primarily through NATO²⁷ and through some EU Member States which are America's most faithful allies. Russia endeavours to exert similar influence over the EU, but manages to succeed to a much lesser extent²⁸. It is worth noting that the regional analysis assumes that smaller countries are simultaneously under the influence of larger EU Member States and external powers. This fact often increases the possibilities of manoeuvre for smaller or peripheral countries, as they can chose with whom to ally themselves. It also leads to differentiating spheres of influence (e.g. a country can have a closer relationship with a world power on the geopolitical plane and at the same time maintain a stronger cooperation with the largest EU Member States in the economic sphere).

²⁶ Lake, D.A. 2014. Status, Authority, and the End of the American Century, p. 269.

²⁷ Buzan, B., Wæver O., *op. cit.*, pp. 344, 373.

²⁸ Some researchers, e.g. Buzan and Wæver completely disregard such influence of Russia in their analyses. But Russia's attempts to influence political parties in the EU are well-documented, as is evidenced e.g. by this report: Political Capital Policy Research & Consulting Institute. 2014. *The Russian connection. The spread of pro-Russian policies on the European far right*. Budapest. Available at: www.riskandforecast.com/useruploads/files/pc_flash_report_russian_connection.pdf [Accessed: 29 January 2016].

But in terms of the regional analysis, the most compelling question is whether apart from the abovementioned external influences, the EU is also an area of rivalry between the largest Member States. Perhaps, as a result of growing institutionalisation, the EU will become a new type of regional power? According to Buzan and Wæver, the situation in Europe is ‘a halfway house’ between the two models. Many scholars of European integration pay great attention to the development of distinct European identity in external policy, which is oriented towards peaceful and diplomacy-based resolution of disputes and towards strict adherence to international law²⁹. They also recognise the growing role of EU institutions in shaping the EU foreign policy. Meanwhile, the experience of the Ukrainian crisis, which started in 2013, shows that the main actors are still the largest Member States and that EU institutions and their representatives still act on their behalf, and EU institutions’ own agency is only of secondary importance. Moreover, in this conflict, even the largest European countries seem to cede centre stage to external actors: on the one hand, they appear to lose the initiative to the US and its global ambitions, on the other hand, they also succumb to Russia and its agenda to protect the *status quo* and safeguard its own geopolitical standing³⁰. While France and Germany were negotiating a truce between Ukraine and Russia in Minsk in February 2015, but on the eve of these negotiations Chancellor Merkel had consulted with US during her visit to Washington.

WHAT ARE THE POSSIBILITIES OF INCREASING THE AUTONOMY OF SMALLER COUNTRIES?

There are various factors to consider in order to analyse ways in which smaller states can increase their autonomy. In realist terms, the stability of the geopolitical system is of the fundamental importance. The more stable the system, the higher the security of subordinated states, but also the lower their political autonomy. Signs of weakening of the leading powers

²⁹ Manners, I. 2002. Normative Power Europe: A Contradiction in Terms? *Journal of Common Market Studies*, vol. 40, no. 2; Sjusen, H. 2006. The EU as a ‘normative power’: how can this be? *Journal of European Public Policy*, vol. 13, no. 2.

³⁰ Mearsheimer, J.J. 2014. Why the Ukraine crisis is the West’s fault: the liberal delusions that provoked Putin. *Foreign Affairs*, no. 93/5; Sarotte, M.E. 2014. *1989: the struggle to create post-Cold War Europe*. Princeton: Princeton University Press; Sakwa, R. 2015. The Death of Europe? Continental fates after Ukraine. *International Affairs*, vol. 91, no. 3.

or of rising influence of other, aspiring actors can be seen as symptoms of destabilisation. In structural terms, the evidence of this process would be a change of geopolitical potentials between great powers, leading to a reconfiguration of power relations between them, or even to replacing the old system of international institutions with a new one. A period of destabilisation would potentially create a window of opportunity when hitherto dominated countries could increase their autonomy, but it would also increase the risk of war and other costs resulting from the change in the international order. Such a change most often allows small or peripheral countries to emancipate themselves from the control of one power only to fall under the spell of another power. Therefore, it would not necessarily lead to a substantial increase of international autonomy of smaller countries.

Some realists argue that a bipolar order is always more stable than multipolar³¹. In turn, the proponents of the liberal paradigm emphasise the need to introduce durable legal regulations and stable international institutions in order to ensure the stability, security and the increasing autonomy of smaller states. The European Union, with its high level of institutionalisation, is deemed to play a special role in this process. International organisations (whether active on the regional or global scale) do not operate in a geopolitical vacuum. They require support of leading powers (or of groups of allied powers), including prevention of geopolitical and economic crises, and covering the costs of the stabilisation and maintenance of the international system.

In turn, the proponents of the world-systems perspective argue that it is the notion of semi-periphery that plays a crucial role for the autonomy of smaller countries. The *raison d'être* of semi-peripheries is their defence against degradation to the status of peripheries that would be fully dependent on the economic and political centre³². These countries also seek to minimise their distance to the centre, and thus increase their autonomy in international relations. The key to success lies primarily in economic development. A booming economy gives an opportunity to increase geopolitical potential. According to Wallerstein, growth within this paradigm can only be achieved if a country abandons the exogenous model of economy³³. This includes

³¹ Waltz, K.N., *op. cit.*; Mearsheimer, J.J., *op. cit.*, p. 5.

³² Wallerstein, J., *op. cit.*, p. 29.

³³ Economic exogeneity in this article is defined as a given economy's dependence on external funds, technologies or aid in order to achieve growth. A country thus becomes dependent on strategic decisions made by external actors: either centres of political power or foreign investors. Cf. Grosse, T.G. 2012. Europeanization of development

strengthening protectionist support for national businesses in order to help them effectively compete on global markets. By the same token, a semi-peripheral state, and the efficiency of its administration and economic policy become the main stimuli of growth and competitiveness of the local economy and of the local accumulation of capital. In essence, this approach is thoroughly geo-economic, because it implies that the government's economic policy should increase the country's autonomy on the international scene. Likewise, according to Rokkan and Urwin³⁴, economic growth, treated as a primary factor of political advancement, is crucial for increasing the autonomy of peripheral areas. The scholars also point to other important internal conditions, among which the cultural potential is prominent, and especially the ideological invigoration of the local community, based on its shared identity, history, language and customs. Rokkan and Urwin also point to the role of local elites who can seek paths of promotion and advancement not on the basis of connections with the metropolis, but on the basis of the country's autonomy, at the same time building the power of local communities.

At the conclusion of the above discussion on relevant theoretical approaches, one can posit that the crucial decisions pertaining to the international order, and thus to the fate of smaller countries, are taken by great powers, especially those aspiring to world leadership. Nevertheless, smaller states can still enjoy a modicum of autonomy in their decisions. Different scholars point to various factors that allow these countries to increase their autonomy, including the growth trajectory of the local economy, the quality of the state apparatus and administration, qualifications and career models prevailing among the local elites and qualities of the local culture. Regrettably, an analysis of all these factors goes beyond the scope of this text. However, in the following part of the article, I am going to refer to one key element, namely, strategic choices. In this context, I would like to consider what options of geopolitical strategy are available to the elites of smaller countries.

SELECTED STRATEGIES OF SMALLER COUNTRIES

International relations scholarship contains many analyses of geopolitical strategies, though admittedly such analyses mostly focus on great powers. In the case of choices faced by smaller or peripheral states, only some

policy in Poland: comparison with the Chinese model of endogenous growth. *Zeszyty Naukowe WSEI EKONOMIA*, no. 4 (1/2012), pp. 33–53.

³⁴ Rokkan, S., Urwin, D.W., *op. cit.*, pp. 124–129.

strategies available to great powers are practicable (and usually they need to be substantially modified.) It seems that the most productive strategy for smaller states is *bandwagoning*, i.e. attaching oneself to a great power in exchange for support and protection³⁵. This strategy is not unlike the historical institution of patronage. The patron, i.e. a dominant regional or world power, offers its client some share of benefits resulting from the power's privileged position in the international order. Two examples of this type of strategy are the close relations between Poland and the US after 1989 (especially on the geopolitical plane) and between Poland and Germany within the EU (mainly in the economic sphere, in the period 2007–2015). The main threat to this strategy is the asymmetrical relationship between the two parties. It can result in the exploitation of the potential of the peripheral country by the dominant partner, or forcing the former to bear the costs in return for relatively minor economic benefits. It can even lead to the deterioration of the overall safety of the weaker partner, especially if the dominant partner pursues an expansionary or aggressive policy on the international arena. It should be remembered that in an era when great powers possess nuclear weapons, smaller and peripheral countries can easily become the battleground of a military conflict between major powers.

Another basic strategy in international relations is called *balancing*. It is usually defined as an attempt to balance the influence and geopolitical clout of an overly strong actor³⁶. This strategy can be pursued e.g. by means of alliances designed to balance the geopolitical potential of threatening powers. In the case of smaller states, the balancing strategy can be applied in two situations. A smaller state can apply it in a situation of choice between two competing powers or geopolitical systems. However, according to the realist theory, this type of action is possible for smaller states only in exceptional circumstances and usually for a relatively short period of time. Alternatively, a context for using balancing strategy can also arise from escalating rivalry between the powers, or from a change of the international system. An example of this scenario is the situation of Ukraine after the collapse of the

³⁵ Labs, E.J. 1992. Do Weak States Bandwagon?, *Security Studies*, vol. 1, no. 3; Walt, S.M. 1987. *The Origins of Alliances*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press; Mearsheimer, J.J., *op. cit.*, pp. 162.

³⁶ Jervis, R., Snyder, J. eds. 1991. *Dominoes and Bandwagons: Strategic Beliefs and Great Power Competition in the Eurasian Rimland*. Oxford: Oxford University Press; Haas, E.B. 1953. The Balance of Power: Prescription, Concept, or Propaganda? *World Politics*, vol. 5, no. 4; Morgenthau, H. 1973. *Politics among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*. New York: Knopf, ch. 11; Mearsheimer, J.J., *op. cit.*, p. 156.

Soviet Union, and the country's attempts to balance the conflicting influences of the US and the EU, on the one hand, and Russia, on the other. It appears that this policy could only be implemented temporarily, and it led to the geopolitical conflict that broke out in 2014. If solutions of this type should achieve any durability, they must be based on an agreement of the rival powers that divide their zones of influence in a specific area or agree to create a geopolitically neutral zone that would be free from the unequivocal dominance of either power. An example of such a scenario would be the case of Finland during the Cold War.

Another variant of balancing strategy available for smaller or peripheral countries is an attempt to build an *alternative geopolitical core*, composed of smaller countries in the region. An example of this strategy are various groups and agreements in Central Europe, aimed to boost agency and autonomy of the region. The risk of this strategy lies in the ephemeral nature of cooperation between countries that individually have only small geopolitical potential. Because every member of the group is continually tempted to throw in its lot with some great power (which would potentially give the country more economic or political benefits), smaller states enter into regional cooperation with similarly-sized countries in an instrumental way, treating such links as a bargaining chip in other international negotiations, and only rarely perceiving such relationships as permanent and binding within the region.

A slightly changed variant of this geopolitical strategy is an attempt to 'bind' powers. This strategy was used through history with respect to powers which attempted to conquer or dominate smaller actors. Powers can be 'bound' in a framework of institutionalised international cooperation, preferably on a regional scale. An example of this strategy is the development of European integration, in particular the creation and development of European institutions and European law, which will 'bind' smaller countries and great powers in the same degree. The existence of these institutions may thus serve as a way to limit the natural hierarchy of power occurring between stronger and weaker countries. An application of this strategy to the sphere of Polish-Russian relations would involve an attempt to promote close cooperation between Russia and European institutions, especially those shaping the EU Eastern policy. The biggest threat to this strategy would lie in a scenario in which the largest states seize too much control over international institutions and organisations or attempt to use these bodies to reinforce the hierarchical relationship between central and peripheral countries.

Another important geopolitical strategy is *buck-passing*, which involves pushing responsibility to others. It is somewhat similar to maintaining

neutrality in geopolitical rivalry³⁷. This attitude seems to be completely at odds with the observable behaviour of Polish policy-makers on the international arena. In truth, Poland's attitude can be seen as the opposite of buck-passing, at least after 2003. In fact, Poland was often proactive and 'punched above its weight', particularly when honouring its commitment as a US ally in the face of the conflict between Russia and the West. The buck-passing strategy is especially effective in periods of mounting tension between rival powers, or in situations of an outbreak of armed hostilities between them. The possible benefits of this strategy bring to mind a Polish proverb: 'Where two are fighting, the third wins'³⁸. The application of this strategy involves a waiting game: the smaller country must hope that the rivalry between the two powers will result in weakening of their potentials, which will lead to an increase of geopolitical importance of smaller, or even peripheral, states. The history of Poland in the early twentieth century provides a perfect illustration of this strategy, in the shape of the conflict between the powers who had partitioned Poland in the late eighteenth century. The First World War weakened the potential of all combatants, including Russia, Germany and Austro-Hungary, which had orchestrated the three stages of partitions of Poland in 1772, 1793 and 1795. As a result, in 1918 it was possible for Poland to reunite and regain independence, and even win a war with the Soviet Russia shortly after that (1919–1920).

Yet another geo-political strategy is *appeasement*, which involves giving in to the demands of the dominant state, which pursues an aggressive or revenge-driven policy on the international arena³⁹. The aim of appeasement is finding an amicable solution, and thus ending a conflict without incurring significant costs of war. Appeasement is an especially practicable policy in the case of conflicts with countries that have decidedly more substantial geopolitical potential, and in a situation where war could result in the loss of sovereignty of the weaker state. A textbook example of appeasement are the concessions made by the Czech Republic in answer to the demands of

³⁷ Olson, M. 1965. *The Logic of Collective Action: Public Goods and the Theory of Groups*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press; Olson, M., Zeckhauser, R. 1966, The Economic Theory of Alliances. *Review of Economics and Statistics*, vol. 48, no. 3; Mearsheimer, J.J., *op. cit.*, pp. 157–162.

³⁸ John Mearsheimer also calls this strategy 'bait and bleed', cf. Mearsheimer, J.J., *op. cit.*, pp. 153–154.

³⁹ Gilpin, R. 1981. *War and Change in International Politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 193–194; Rock, S.R. 2000. *Appeasement in International Politics*. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky; Mearsheimer, J.J., *op. cit.*, p. 163.

Nazi Germany in 1938 (which met with the approval of other great European powers).

Yet another viable geopolitical strategy for smaller states is simply the accumulation of wealth⁴⁰, by means of encouraging the growth of the national economy and strengthening the economic potential, which over time could result in an increase of the country's international position. A necessary condition for implementing this strategy is focusing on the endogenous potential of the local economy and reducing excessive economic dependence on external actors. Another condition is continued geopolitical stability and the existence of a stable international order that would facilitate economic exchange.

Some scholars also enumerate other factors that can increase the autonomy of a smaller state, e.g. the possession of nuclear weapons⁴¹. However, the process of acquiring such weapons is very time-consuming and costly (and also likely to encounter many obstacles from the countries which already possess them). Another possible approach is focusing a country's foreign policy actions on a coherent ideological message, e.g. one related to the country's historical heritage, highlighting the need for compensation for previous wrongs perpetrated by great powers. This strategy was applied by Poland during its membership negotiations with the EU⁴².

AN OVERVIEW OF POLAND'S GEOPOLITICAL CHOICES

Following the political and economic transformations in Central and Eastern Europe initiated in 1989, the cornerstone of Poland's geopolitical doctrine has been Atlanticism, i.e. basing the country's foreign policy on a close alliance with the USA. Scholars indicate that Poland's strategy was characteristic of bandwagoning⁴³. Joining the camp of America – the

⁴⁰ Wallerstein, J., *op. cit.*, p. 29; Mearsheimer, J.J., *op. cit.*, p. 143; Grosse, T.G. 2007. *Innowacyjna gospodarka na peryferiach? [Innovative economy on the peripheries?]* Warsaw: ISP; Grosse, T.G. *Geoeconomic Relations Between the EU and China*.

⁴¹ Kuź, M. 2013. Dlaczego potrzebujemy broni jądrowej? [Why do we need nuclear weapons?] *Nowa Konfederacja*, no. 9. [Online] 5–11 December 2013. Available at: <http://www.nowakonfederacja.pl> [Accessed 27 April 2015].

⁴² Schimmelfennig, F. 2001. The Community Trap: Liberal Norms, Rhetorical Action, and the Eastern Enlargement of the European Union. *International Organization*, no. 55.

⁴³ Kuźniar, R. 2008. *Droga do wolności. Polityka zagraniczna III Rzeczypospolitej. [Road to freedom. Foreign policy of the Third Republic of Poland.]* Warsaw: Scholar, p. 297;

undisputed winner of the Cold War – made sense, especially when one takes into consideration America's important position in European geopolitics and its high impact on the EU. The majority of Polish scholars and the public opinion have perceived the alliance with the US very positively. In spite of this, some Polish political scientists register their negative opinions of this alliance. They point to the fact that the relationship is highly asymmetrical, and that the US reaps virtually all the benefits, whereas the Polish *raison d'état* is not sufficiently protected or promoted. The critics of the alliance state that Poland does not receive its fair share of political or economic benefits from the relationship. The alliance is in fact based on the assumption of Poland's unquestioning loyalty, which significantly weakens the country's negotiation position every time when a divisive issue occurs. What is more, this strategy proves to be costly, and sometimes leads to a decrease of national security and to the worsening of relations with the EU partners, including Poland's allies in Central Europe⁴⁴. An example of this attitude was the support for the US's successive actions in the Middle East (in Iraq, Afghanistan, and in 2016-2017 also in Syria), which required the involvement of the military and political support without the expected benefits, such as promised economic contracts or the visa waiver for Polish citizens going to USA. Furthermore, these actions led to acute disputes with some EU countries, for example with France and Germany in 2003, as well as the increased threat of terrorist attacks.

Moreover, Poland's strategy leads to excessive dependence on the US, accompanied by the complete lack of influence over America's policy⁴⁵. Its obvious result is the 'lack of strategic agency and the demotion of Poland to the ranks of America's satellite states'⁴⁶. For some scholars the continued pursuance of bandwagoning strategy proves that Poland is not adept at defining its own strategic interests, formulating a comprehensive and coherent foreign policy or implementing strategic thinking. It also shows that it is impossible for Poland to 'maintain a serious, non-partisan debate about foreign policy objectives that would be autonomous, and free from external influences'⁴⁷.

Zajac, J. 2009. Bandwagoning w polskiej polityce zagranicznej. [Bandwagoning in Polish foreign policy.] *Przegląd Zachodni*, no. 3.

⁴⁴ Bieleń, S. 2014. Rozważania o polskim interesie narodowym. [Considerations on Polish national interest.] *Stosunki Międzynarodowe – International Relations*, vol. 50, no. 2, p. 65; Kuźniar, R., *op. cit.*, pp. 251–253.

⁴⁵ Kuźniar, R., *op. cit.*, p. 298.

⁴⁶ Brzeziński, Z. 2000. Sojusznik to nie satelita. [An ally is not a satellite.] An interview. *Polska Zbrojna*, no. 14, (March 2000).

⁴⁷ Bieleń, S., *op. cit.*, pp. 68, 69.

The scholars prove that the shallowing of the strategic vision primarily to bandwagoning to the US has been a permanent element of Polish foreign policy after 1989, that can be associated with all successive governments and virtually all top-ranking officials and policy-makers⁴⁸. It can be linked to the model of peripheral state. In such a setup, the initiative is usually shown by the leading powers and the role of smaller countries is often reactive and dependant on the great powers' policy demands. In the reported model a smaller state can have its own strategic objectives but most important of them could be implemented only with the support of the great power. Geopolitical projects undertaken by the Polish government on the international arena are often inspired by the US as the political patron, or at least are greenlit by the Americans⁴⁹. For this reason, the calculation of benefits and costs of the alliance is skewed in favour of the USA. Poland's actions as a loyal ally do not always seem aligned with the country's best interest. According to the scholars⁵⁰, Polish foreign policy shows a marked tendency for grandstanding and swagger, without taking into account the country's real geopolitical standing or potential. An example of these conflicting tendencies are the relations with Russia, wherein Poland's actions often do not take into account the obvious difference of geopolitical potentials between the two countries. Since the escalation of the conflict in Ukraine in 2013, Poland's support for Ukraine has resulted in increasing economic losses and geopolitical risk.

The relationship between the US and Poland, as described above, has numerous ramifications for Poland's position and behaviour on the EU arena. It is not a coincidence that Poland is perceived by its European partners as America's staunch ally in all matters related to EU policies. A case in point is primarily Poland's strong support for fostering transatlantic relations between the EU and America, including the presence of NATO and American troops in Europe. Poland has repeatedly voiced an opinion that NATO plays a leading role in maintaining security of the EU. Poland has also been working in order to bring about the expansion of both NATO and the EU to the east, in order to incorporate such countries as Georgia, Ukraine, Moldova, and the Western Balkans⁵¹. Precisely because of loyalty

⁴⁸ Kuźniar, R., *op. cit.*, p. 300; Bieleń, S., *op. cit.*, p. 63.

⁴⁹ Schweiger, Ch. 2014. Poland, Variable Geometry and the Enlarged European Union. *Europe-Asia Studies*, vol. 66, no. 3, p. 394; Bieleń, S., *op. cit.*, p. 68.

⁵⁰ Zięba, R. 2010. *Główne kierunki polityki zagranicznej Polski po zimnej wojnie*. [Main directions of Polish foreign policy after the Cold War.] Warsaw: Wydawnictwa Akademickie i Profesjonalne, p. 136; Kuźniar, R., *op. cit.*, p. 319.

⁵¹ Schweiger, Ch., *op. cit.*, pp. 412–414.

towards the US, Poland was also initially reluctant towards the development of the Common Security and Defence Policy⁵², especially since the project was interpreted as an attempt to increase the autonomy of the EU in its relations with NATO and the United States. Incidentally, Poland eventually performed a complete U-turn and became an active proponent of this policy, treated as a European 'pillar' of NATO⁵³. Another important consequence of the Polish-American relations is Poland's Eastern policy, and especially Poland's attempts to influence the EU policy in this direction⁵⁴.

Poland's accession to the EU in 2004 was a fundamental decision that had multiple geopolitical objectives. Its most important result was naturally forging stronger ties with the West, including further strengthening of cooperation within NATO, and deepening the alliance with the US, which was the cornerstone of Polish foreign policy. Joining the EU was also meant to stabilise relations with Germany, Poland's neighbour but also its long-time historical rival. Now the two countries would forge closer ties in the broader context of EU institutions. Finally, in a more long-term perspective, Poland's objective was to use the EU potential and institutions in order to shape EU's Eastern policy in line with Warsaw's geopolitical agenda. The Eastern policy is one of Poland's priority interests in the EU, which was evidenced by the launch of the Eastern Partnership, a joined initiative of Poland and Sweden, adopted by the EU Council in 2008. The goal of the Eastern Partnership is to utilise the EU instruments in order to influence Poland's Eastern neighbours, and bind them more closely to the EU, creating an outermost circle of influence and a buffer zone between the EU and Russia⁵⁵. The EU uses soft means of influence, including fostering economic relations, creating investment incentives, offering aid, and promoting Western political ideas and European regulations.

The launch of the Eastern Partnership was undoubtedly a success of Polish diplomacy, even if its effects are somewhat superficial⁵⁶. From the point of view of the Eastern partners, the benefits of the Partnership are not sufficiently attractive, as it does not constitute a track to EU membership.

⁵² Before signing the Treaty of Lisbon, it was called European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP).

⁵³ Zięba, R., *op. cit.*, pp. 117, 125–127, 136; Kuźniar, R., *op. cit.*, p. 206.

⁵⁴ Schweiger, Ch., *op. cit.*, p. 411.

⁵⁵ Copsey, N., Pomorska, K. 2014. The Influence of Newer Member States in the European Union: The Case of Poland and the Eastern Partnership. *Europe-Asia Studies*, vol. 66, no. 3, p. 423.

⁵⁶ *Ibid*, p. 426.

The volume of financial aid is also relatively small⁵⁷. While it can be said that the possibility of accessing the EU internal market is an attractive incentive for Eastern business entities, they can only do so if they adhere to EU regulations (which is discouraging for many). Additionally, fierce competition on the EU market means that this possibility is not as attractive for Eastern actors as it might have been. The implementation of the Eastern Partnership actions, including the negotiation of Association Agreements, proceeded extremely slowly, and the final stages were only achieved in 2014, after the outbreak of the Ukrainian crisis. Regardless of the sluggishness the Polish administration (even though the launch of the Partnership was a Polish suggestion), it has soon transpired that other countries have an axe to grind in this matter. For various reasons and in various degrees, Germany, France and Russia are generally hostile towards the Partnership⁵⁸. The case of the Eastern Partnership illustrates great powers' actual level of influence over EU initiatives that could potentially have important geopolitical implications.

One should also remember that the EU Eastern policy promoted by Poland, treated by the Kremlin as an intrusion into Russia's geopolitical domain of influence, has contributed to the weakening of the relationships between the EU's Eastern neighbours and Russia. The Eastern policy proposed by Poland has been inspired by the thought of Jerzy Giedroyc and Juliusz Mieroszewski, according to whom Poland's strategic objective should be to weaken Russia. To this end, Warsaw should try to 'prize' its neighbours from the Russian sphere of influence and bind them to Poland (in the case of the Eastern Partnership, this would be done using the EU instruments)⁵⁹. As one scholar claims, the post-1989 Poland 'has not formulated any comprehensive Eastern doctrine other than the Promethean vision outlined by Giedroyc'⁶⁰.

⁵⁷ Lavenex, S., Schimmelfennig, F. 2008. Relations with the Wider Europe. *Journal of Common Market Studies, Annual Review*, no. 46.

⁵⁸ Copsey, N., Pomorska, K. 2014. The Influence of Newer Member States in the European Union, pp. 435–437.

⁵⁹ Such ideas were proposed and promoted e.g. by government think tanks (The Polish Institute of International Affairs (PISM) and The Centre for Eastern Studies (OSW) and by some political scientists. Cf. Gil, A., Kapuśniak, T. eds. 2009. *Polityka wschodnia Polski. Uwarunkowania, koncepcje, realizacja.* [Poland's Eastern policy. Conditions, concepts, and actions.] Lublin – Warsaw: Instytut Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej; Kolegium Europy Wschodniej im. J. Nowaka-Jeziorańskiego. 2013. *Polska polityka wschodnia.* [Poland's Eastern policy.] Wrocław.

⁶⁰ Kowal, P. 2012. *Między Majdanem a Smoleńskiem.* [Between Maidan and Smolensk.] Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, p. 153.

The fundamental weakness of Poland's Eastern strategy is its complete disregard for the actions and objectives of Russia, which remains the region's biggest power. It is also difficult to imagine that Poland could pursue its policy in relations with Russia without incurring significant costs, especially as the geopolitical potentials of the two countries are completely disproportionate. For this reason, a more productive strategy for Poland would be seeking to stabilise the situation beyond its borders, and in the long-term, attempting to 'bind' Russia with Europe and integrate it closer with the EU structures. Poland could also try to use the Russian market as an outlet for Polish products, thus fostering its own economic growth and increasing the geopolitical importance of Warsaw. The currently pursued policy of weakening the Russian sphere of influence, thus reducing Russia's geopolitical status, seems too ambitious and well beyond Poland's present capabilities. What is more, Poland's agenda is perceived as threatening or as being out of line with the EU interests by many European Member States (even in Central Europe). But, it seems to be consistent with the strategy of Washington, at least after 2010 (when Putin was elected President for a third term). All in all, Poland's Eastern policy is the absolute opposite of *buck-passing* (i.e. maintaining passivity and pushing the responsibility to other actors). It also does not have the marks of a *balancing* strategy, wherein Poland would try to balance the power of Russia by binding it more and more closely to the European Union. It seems that Poland pursues a *bandwagoning* strategy, binding itself very closely to America as its dominant partner.

Some scholars argue that the dominant strategy of the Member States on the EU forum is a flexible exchange of temporary alliances, which are forged around a particular issue, and then disband⁶¹. This policy could be useful in the first period of Poland's membership, when Polish decision-makers had a stance that was not only pro-American, but was also characterised by a marked distrust of Germany and a reluctance against deepening the integration with the EU (and hence was sometimes explicitly called Euro-sceptic)⁶². However, since 2007 (and until 2015), Polish government pursued its EU policy in close cooperation with Germany⁶³, endeavouring

⁶¹ Wallace, W. 2005. Post-Sovereign Governance. In: Wallace, H., Pollack, M.A., Young, A.R. eds. *Policy-Making in the European Union*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 502.

⁶² Schweiger, Ch., *op. cit.*, p. 399; Kuźniar, R., *op. cit.*, pp. 207, 282.

⁶³ The cooperation effectively ended after the change of government in 2015. Copsey, N., Pomorska, K. 2014. The Influence of Newer Member States in the European Union, p. 433.

to maximise Poland's influence in the EU, but also becoming a supporter of the German agenda within the European Union⁶⁴. Again, Poland's actions seem to follow the bandwagoning strategy (this time with Germany as the dominant partner). Poland's cooperation with Germany was focused solely on internal EU issues and economic matters, and seems to be only of secondary importance for Poland's decision-makers in comparison with the all-important American alliance.

Another geopolitical development are the attempts to shape alliances in Central Europe. The most important of these is the Visegrad Group, which dates back to 1991. The obvious goal of stronger cooperation in Central Europe was strengthening the role of Poland both in the region and on the European arena⁶⁵. However, Poland's instrumental approach to fostering regional cooperation has often been jarring for smaller states, which have accused Warsaw of a dearth of real commitment to the region's future and of being too forceful in promoting its own agenda. Two ideas Warsaw insists on are harnessing the Visegrad Group into supporting Poland's vision of Eastern policy, and widening the regional cooperation to include more countries such as the Baltics and countries participating in the Eastern Partnership⁶⁶.

Scholars point out that the effectiveness of the Visegrad Group (the so-called V4) has been startlingly low. Over the years the Group has managed to cooperate on a range of issues (including the EU cohesion policy and foreign and defence policies), the level of cooperation has been usually relatively low, and tended to be limited to political rhetoric and declarations⁶⁷. The interests of the V4 countries have been diverse, and this fact has been often used by great powers, when they wanted to destroy the Group's unity for their purposes. Some partners also have raised objections to what they have perceived as excessive pro-American or anti-Russian stance of the Polish government. As a result, Poland's attempts to build a regional geopolitical core in order to balance the influence of the biggest regional powers has turned out to be quite unsuccessful. This strategy has also been of secondary importance, as *bandwagoning* has taken clear precedence.

⁶⁴ For example, Poland's presence in the Weimar Triangle was often perceived as a boost of Germany's position in relation to France. Cf. Schweiger, Ch., *op. cit.*, p. 398.

⁶⁵ Törő, C., Butler, E., Grüber, K. 2014. Visegrad: The Evolving Pattern of Coordination and Partnership After EU Enlargement. *Europe-Asia Studies*, vo. 66, no. 3, p. 372; Schweiger, Ch., *op. cit.*, p. 400.

⁶⁶ Törő, C. et al., *op. cit.*, pp. 376–377.

⁶⁷ *Ibid*, pp. 366, 378; Bieleń, S., *op. cit.*, p. 62.

Yet another initiative taken on the geopolitical plane were the attempts to counteract divisions within the EU, mainly opposing the processes of differentiated integration between the euro area and the rest of the Member States. According to Polish elites, such division could lead to further strengthening of the European centre and sealing other countries' peripheral status. Therefore, such attempts can be regarded as manifestations of the balancing strategy. Initially, Polish government announced that it was going to put the country on the fast track to the monetary union (in 2008, the Prime Minister Donald Tusk unexpectedly announced Poland's readiness to enter the eurozone in 2012). However, the deepening economic crisis in Western Europe put a check on these ambitious plans. The government decided to postpone the decision on entering the euro area, and at the same time was trying to be involved in the initiatives undertaken during the crisis, whose goal was to reform and strengthen the monetary union. Such actions can collectively be described as 'leaving one's options open'. The Polish authorities joined all subsequent anti-crisis initiatives (the Euro-Plus Pact, the Fiscal Compact, the Banking Union, etc.). In 2012, the Polish government adopted a resolution saying that Poland will enter the common currency system only when both sides are ready. In other words, Poland will not enter the eurozone until the country's economy has shown symptoms of increase in competitiveness, and until the euro area has recovered from the crisis⁶⁸. It should be also noted that Berlin supported the strengthening of Poland's ties with the euro area and Poland's attempts to become part of the subsequent anti-crisis initiatives, even though the Polish government was postponing its final decision to adopt the common currency. Poland's policy of 'keeping its options open' has been actually feasible thanks to the strong support of Germany, and therefore – thanks to *bandwagoning*. Once again, this geopolitical strategy has proved its effectiveness. Other Polish geopolitical actions can either supplement it or are of only secondary importance.

CONCLUSION

The new right-wing government after 2015 elections has come into sharp conflict with the European institutions over the compliance with the EU values, including the rule of law and democratic principles. It also has a completely different vision of the future of the EU from the most

⁶⁸ Schweiger, Ch., *op. cit.*, pp. 405–410.

of other Member States. It wants to reduce and re-nationalise EU powers instead of further advancement of integration. Against this background, the relationships between the Polish and the German governments have cooled considerably. In these conditions, the Polish government's policy aims to strengthen cooperation within the Visegrad Group and to reinforce the transatlantic relations. In addition, the Polish government has sought to strengthen the Three Seas Initiative, a new version of regional cooperation in Central Europe extended to twelve EU Member States.

The alliance with the USA has been the cornerstone of Poland's foreign policy since the 1989 transformation, and the *bandwagoning* strategy in relation to America as the dominant partner has taken centre stage, and overshadowed all other strategic actions. It has been by far more important than the alliance with Berlin and intermittent attempts to build a regional geopolitical centre of power in Central Europe. As I said above, before 2015 Poland treated the Visegrad Group rather instrumentally, and used its leading role in the Group often as a tool to boost its own international standing, without too much concern for the Group's future. Smaller countries in the region resented this attitude, and for this reason they sought alternative political alliances, either bilateral or region-wide (but without Poland). An example of such an initiative is the Slavkov Triangle – an alliance of Austria, the Czech Republic and Slovakia, the launch of which can be seen, among others, as a result of dissatisfaction with the confrontational attitude of the Polish authorities with regard to the conflict in Ukraine⁶⁹.

In conclusion, Poland's reliance on the bandwagoning strategy can be seen as moderately successful, but it also comes at a price, and may lead to increased risks to national security. Poland's actions show no evidence of employing other geopolitical strategies, such as *buck-passing* (maintaining passivity and pushing the responsibility to others), or *appeasement*. To a small degree, it utilised *balancing*, but Poland's balancing actions were only of secondary importance, and they were always subordinated to the primary geopolitical strategy. Polish decision-makers seem to neglect one of the most promising strategic actions that can be implemented by smaller or peripheral states, namely geoeconomic support for the domestic economy in order to strengthen the country's geopolitical potential. Poland's economic policy has relied on creating incentives for foreign investors and on the absorption of EU aid in the spheres of agricultural policy and cohesion. Even though this policy

⁶⁹ Kałan, D. 2015. The Slavkov Triangle: A Rival to the Visegrad Group? *The Polish Institute of International Affairs Bulletin*, no. 19(751) 16 February 2015.

has resulted in GDP growth and a boost of domestic demand, it has not led to deep structural changes and a sustainable increase of the competitiveness of the Polish economy. To the contrary, it has contributed to increasing economic dependence on the external inflow of capital and technology and reliance on the European centre⁷⁰. In addition, the economic advantages of low production costs in Poland can run out over time, especially when wages or energy costs increase⁷¹. A sign of this trend may be the weakening of productivity of the economy and the growing threat of the so-called 'middle income trap'⁷².

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⁷⁰ Grosse, T.G. 2014. The golden straitjacket of Poland's membership in the EU. *Yearbook of Polish European Studies*, no. 17; Nölke, A., Vliegenthart, A. 2009. Enlarging the Varieties of Capitalism The Emergence of Dependent Market Economies in East Central Europe. *World Politics*, vol. 61, no. 4; Epstein, R.A. 2014. Overcoming 'Economic Backwardness' in the European Union. *Journal of Common Market Studies*, vol. 52, no. 1.

⁷¹ Orenstein, M.A. 2014. Poland. From Tragedy to Triumph. *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 93, no. 1.

⁷² The middle income trap is a economic development situation, where a country which attains a certain income (due to given advantages and development) will get stuck at that level.

- Copsey, N., Pomorska, K. 2014. The Influence of Newer Member States in the European Union: The Case of Poland and the Eastern Partnership. *Europe-Asia Studies*, vol. 66, no. 3.
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GEOPOLITICAL STRATEGY OF SMALLER STATE: THE CASE STUDY OF POLAND'S PRESENCE IN THE EU

Summary

The aim of the article is to analyse strategic choices made in international relations by a smaller state that does not have the status of a great power and is included within the structures of European integration. In the theoretical part of this article a survey of selected academic approaches that focus on international order is presented, with special reference to regional integration. The aim of the analysis is to show how the selected theories present the role of smaller states and their basic geopolitical strategic choices. In the empirical part Poland's geopolitical strategy is analysed, with particular significance of the role of regional integration in that strategy.

STRATEGIA GEOPOLITYCZNA MNIEJSZEGO PAŃSTWA: STUDIUM PRZYPADKU OBECNOŚCI POLSKI W UE

Streszczenie

Celem artykułu jest analiza wyborów strategicznych dokonanych przez mniejsze państwo, które nie ma statusu wielkich mocarstw i wchodzi w struktury integracji europejskiej. W teoretycznej części artykułu przedstawiono wybrane podejścia akademickie, które koncentrują się na sytuacji państw w ładzie międzynarodowym, ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem integracji regionalnej. Celem analizy jest pokazanie, w jaki sposób wybrane teorie prezentują rolę małych państw i ich podstawowe strategiczne wybory geopolityczne. W części empirycznej analizowana jest strategia geopolityczna Polski, ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem roli integracji regionalnej w tej strategii.

ГЕОПОЛИТИЧЕСКАЯ СТРАТЕГИЯ МЕНЬШЕГО ГОСУДАРСТВА: ТЕМАТИЧЕСКОЕ ИССЛЕДОВАНИЕ ПРИСУТСТВИЯ ПОЛЬШИ В ЕС

Резюме

Цель статьи – проанализировать характер стратегического выбора, сделанного малым государством, которое не обладает статусом великой державы и входит в структуру европейской интеграции. В теоретической части статьи представлены выбранные академические теории, которые концентрируются на ситуации государств в условиях международного порядка, с особым учётом региональной интеграции. Целью статьи является демонстрация того, каким образом выбранные теории освещают роль малых государств, а также особенностей их главного стратегического выбора. В эмпирической части исследования представлен анализ геополитической стратегии Польши, с особым учётом роли региональной интеграции в данной стратегии.