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# WHY DID THE SOVIET UNION COLLAPSE? THE REASONS AND EFFECTS FOR POLAND, EUROPE, AND THE WORLD

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## INTRODUCTION

At the end of December 2021, it will have been 30 years since the collapse of the Soviet Union, established after the Russian Revolution and the overthrow of tsarism in Russia. Despite numerous problems, for almost 70 years this entity, which was unprecedented in the history of international relations, existed in the international arena. Just like its establishment in 1922, its collapse also came as a big surprise to politicians and researchers of international relations. It caused radical changes on the political map of Europe and the world. It was also of great importance for Poland and its foreign policy.

The article is dedicated to the internal and international causes of the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 and its geopolitical consequences for Poland's foreign policy at the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century as well as its place and role in international relations, especially in Central and Eastern Europe. Many scientific publications have been written on this subject in Poland and around the world, and in particular, a lot has been written about the factors, the collapse of the Soviet Union, and geopolitical consequences for Europe and the world. Although it has been thirty years since this historic and groundbreaking event for the world, it remains in the centre of interest

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of historians, political scientists, and experts in international relations who investigate how it could happen, why a country which is so powerful in every respect (an empire, a superpower)<sup>1</sup> fell like the proverbial house of cards. They are still seeking answers to many questions related to this event. The collapse of the USSR in 1991 surprised the whole world, although its agony began in the late 1970s, and was accelerated by the Soviet aggression against Afghanistan<sup>2</sup>. The collapse of the Soviet Union came as a surprise to both the international community and the people living in the Eurasian empire. Nobody expected that a power of this rank could collapse quickly and bloodlessly. Researchers and politicians had been speculating for years about the prospects of the collapse of the Soviet Union and wondering how to accelerate it, but no scenario worked out in practice. The Soviet Union de facto disintegrated in an evolutionary, peaceful manner, and did not lead to a bloody revolution or world war as it happened when it was established. Some of the scenarios assumed it. The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics was established in 1922 after the Bolshevik revolution in 1917 and the overthrow of tsarism and the civil war in Russia, which claimed millions of lives<sup>3</sup>.

The purpose of the article is to analyse the internal and international rationale of the collapse of the Soviet Union in December 1991 and its consequences for Poland's foreign policy and its place in Central and Eastern Europe in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It shows the radical geopolitical changes in Europe and in the world caused by the collapse of the Soviet Union. It is assumed that with the collapse of the USSR, the post-war Yalta-Potsdam order also collapsed, the Cold War ended and the process of building a new international order in the world began, which continues to this day.

In the article, the author seeks answers to several research questions concerning the internal and international causes of the collapse of the USSR

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<sup>1</sup> In 1991, the USSR covered an area of 22,402,200 square kilometres, and had a population of 293,047,571 million, and a powerful army of over 5 million soldiers with about 10,000 nuclear warheads and missile vehicles to transport them. For more see: R. Zięba, *Rokowanie w sprawie ograniczenia wyścigu zbrojeń i rozbrojenia*, "Stosunki Międzynarodowe", vol. 15, pp. 123–138.

<sup>2</sup> The decision to intervene in Afghanistan was made in Moscow in the evening on 12 December 1979, but no documents were officially published. The war in Afghanistan lasted ten years and cost the USSR about \$100 billion. See: H. Ćwięk (ed.), *Interwencja ZSRR w Afganistanie*, "Res Polticae", Wydawnictwo im. Stanisława Podobińskiego Akademii im. Jana Długosza, Częstochowa 2013, pp. 56–57.

<sup>3</sup> G. Hosking, *Russia: People and Empire 1552–1917*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge 1997; R. Pipes, *Czerwone imperium: powstanie Związku Sowieckiego*, Magnum, Warszawa 2015.

in 1991 and its geopolitical consequences for Europe and the world, as well as for Poland's foreign policy: to what extent did the Revolutions of 1989, which began in Poland, accelerate the collapse of the USSR and how did it affect the reorientation of Poland's foreign policy and the transformation of the political system in Poland and the countries of Central and Eastern Europe? To what extent did the fall of communism in Poland in the summer of 1989 and the Revolutions of 1989, which spread throughout Central and Eastern Europe, contribute to the disintegration of the Soviet Empire? The author puts forward and verifies several theses and hypotheses related to these research questions. The main thesis of the article is that the collapse of the Soviet Union, apart from many internal (economic, political, social) and international causes, was to a great extent caused by the Revolutions of 1989, i.e. by the process of dynamic and radical system changes in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. It resulted in the dissolution of the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (Comecon) and the Warsaw Pact, which were the pillars of the USSR and the states of the bloc. Moreover, the author states that Poland's foreign policy after the collapse of the USSR was realistic, adequate for the international situation, and consistent with Poland's *raison d'état*. However, nowadays in the era of Russia's neo-imperial policy of Vladimir Putin, it should be more assertive and extend beyond Central and Eastern Europe. It should be based on the Euro-Atlantic system and close relations with Germany, France, the United Kingdom, and the United States. An important role in Poland's foreign policy should also be played by such informal groupings as the Three Seas Initiative and cooperation with the countries of the Visegrad Group and the Weimar Triangle. The author believes that after 1991 Poland's Eastern policy towards the post-Soviet states – especially Ukraine and Belarus – was too passive, excessively focused on weakening and isolating Russia. In practice, it did not achieve the assumed goals; it failed and should be reviewed. The so-far orderly, constructivist international order, which has been disintegrating in front of us, as well as Russia's geopolitical aspirations, including its integration with Belarus or recent Russia's escalating actions on the border with Ukraine, show how much Poland needs not only secure alliances and modern armed forces but also a realistic and far-sighted foreign policy.

The article analyses not only the reasons for the collapse of the Soviet Union and its geopolitical consequences but also internal and international conditions as well as goals, directions, opportunities, and threats for Poland's foreign policy at the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century in the context of the emerging new international order in Europe and the world after the collapse of the

USSR and the end of the Cold War. The most important task for Poland's foreign policy after the collapse of the USSR was to ensure its broadly understood security through accession to the Euro-Atlantic structures, and since the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century until today it has been strengthening its position and role in NATO and the European Union, and the international arena in general. This is an urgent task because contrary to what some researchers write<sup>4</sup>, the role of Poland in the international arena has been decreasing since 2015, and its foreign policy is short-sighted, as it has been subordinated to the immediate (electoral) interests of the ruling PiS (Law and Justice) party, which plays the anti-EU, anti-German, and anti-Russian card. This leads to animosity among the countries of Central and Eastern Europe and is not conducive to cooperation between countries belonging to the Visegrad Group or the Weimar Triangle<sup>5</sup>. Together with the EU and NATO countries, especially with Germany, France, and the United States, Poland should talk to Russia and fight for peace and democratic reforms in Belarus and Ukraine. It is necessary to return to comprehensive cooperation with Moldova, Kazakhstan, and Georgia and to support their efforts to join the Euro-Atlantic structures.

As for the methodology, the author mainly refers to classical realism, the theory of foreign policy, neoliberalism, and constructivism. On the other hand, the dominant research methods in this article are a critical analysis of documents, source materials, and literature on the subject. These theories and research methods are known and well described in the literature on the subject. Therefore, the author does not mention them in the paper or present their essence, because that would be "reinventing the wheel"<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> W. Paruch, *Polityka transatlantycka rządów Prawa i Sprawiedliwości (2015–2019: przesłanki (part 1)*, "Rocznik Instytutu Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej", no. 18(2020), 4, pp. 221–245.

<sup>5</sup> M. Kokot, *Pozorna jedność Grupy Wyszehradzkiej. Czesi i Słowacy dają kosza Orbaniowi*, "Gazeta Wyborcza", 19.02.2021, p. 13; B. T. Wieliński, *Klub marionetek Putina w Budapeszcie*, "Gazeta Wyborcza", 2.04.2021, p. 4; J. M. Fiszer, M. Czasak, *Trójkąt Weimarski. Geneza i działalność na rzecz integracji Europy w latach 1991–2016*, Instytut Studiów Politycznych PAN, Deutsch Polnische Wissenschaft Stiftung, Warszawa 2019.

<sup>6</sup> J. Czaputowicz, *Teorie stosunków międzynarodowych. Krytyka i systematyzacja*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warszawa 2007; A. Skolimowska, *Konstruktoryzm w studiach europejskich*, Oficyna Wydawnicza Łośgraf, Warszawa 2013; K. Kasianiuk, *Analiza systemowa jako narzędzie w badaniach instytucji politycznych. Uwagi wstępne*, "Studia Polityczne", no. 2, vol. 45, 2017, pp. 169–192; M. Kozub-Karkut, *Teorie stosunków międzynarodowych a badanie polityki zagranicznej*, "Stosunki Międzynarodowe – International Relations", no. 4, tom 52, 2016, pp. 34–50.

The author attempts to present the internal and international factors of the collapse of the Soviet Union analysed in the article and its geopolitical consequences for Poland's foreign policy and its place in Central and Eastern Europe in a holistic manner, both in theoretical and utilitarian terms and on a broad background of changes in Europe and the world. This required a wide source query and an analysis of the already rich Polish and foreign literature on this subject. It comprises published documents, monographs, articles, and studies as well as information from the press and the Internet.

## 1. Factors that caused the collapse of the USSR

In Poland and the world there are numerous books about the collapse of the Soviet Union, but this issue is still of great interest to historians, political scientists, lawyers, sociologists, researchers, experts of contemporary international relations, politicians, and journalists. The reasons and effects of the collapse of the USSR are analysed over and over in the light of various research theories<sup>7</sup>. Why? Because the disintegration of such a powerful state in every respect (area, population, natural resources, armed forces etc.) was one of the crucial events of the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, which had a huge impact on international processes in Europe, Asia, and around the world. Undoubtedly, it has become the accelerator. It largely contributed to the collapse of the Yalta-Potsdam order, the end of the Cold War, and the beginning of a new chapter in the general history of Europe and the world. It also had far-reaching consequences for Poland's foreign policy and its place in Central and Eastern Europe at the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The effects of the collapse of the USSR in 1991 are still noticeable in the international arena and evoke positive and negative emotions among researchers of international relations and politicians around the world, as well as among people in Russia, Belarus, Ukraine, and other countries that were founded on the ruins of the communist empire. For many of them, it was a shock, it raised hopes and at the same time fears for their future<sup>8</sup>. It is worth quoting the famous Vladimir

<sup>7</sup> C. Wohlforth, *Realism and the End of the Cold War*, "International Security", no. 3, 1994; R. G. Suny, *The Revenge of the Past: Nationalism, Revolution, and the Collapse of the Soviet Union*, Stanford University Press, Stanford 1993. W. Marciniak, *Rozgrabione imperium. Upadek Związku Sowieckiego i powstanie Federacji Rosyjskiej*, Wydawnictwo Arcana, Kraków 2001.

<sup>8</sup> W. Marciniak, *Mapa i pamięć o imperium. Kartograficzne symbole nostalgii postsowieckiej*, [in:] W. Marciniak (ed.), *Inne wymiary polityki*, Instytut Studiów Politycznych PAN,

Putin's statement that the fall of the USSR was the greatest geopolitical catastrophe in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. *Nota bene*, this assessment determines Russia's international policy under Vladimir Putin's rule, whose strategic goal is to rebuild at least a substitute for the former Evil Empire, as Ronald Reagan described the USSR on 8 March 1983<sup>9</sup>. As the heir to the great empire, the Russian Federation cannot accept the loss of its superpower position and role in the world. Vladimir Putin builds his and Russia's prestige in the international arena by contesting the new, post-Cold War world order and disregarding the norms of international law the examples of which are Russia's aggressive policy towards Georgia and Ukraine and the annexation of Crimea in 2014<sup>10</sup>.

Among numerous factors that led to the fall of the Soviet Union, there are, in general, internal and external, objective and subjective, as well as historical, cultural, political, economic, social, ideological, and international ones. Researchers analyse the factors through the prism of various research theories, but the results of their research are similar. They show that the USSR was an artificial creation, based on a utopian, false communist ideology, and its political system was unreformable, detached from social, political, economic and cultural reality. According to theories of empires and their history, such as the Roman Empire, each empire, due to its nature, sooner or later is doomed to collapse. It is not able to ensure the integrity and security of borders, assimilate so different ethnic and national groups, and merge the conquered territories into one efficient, durable state. In the light of the theory of constructivism, the rise of the USSR was associated with the simultaneous degradation of the identity of the former Russian Empire, and its disintegration was caused, inter alia, by the progressive weakening of

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Warszawa 2013, pp. 149–151; A. Zubow (ed.), *Istoriija Rossii. XX wiek: 1939–2007*, Wydawnictwo Nauka, Moskwa 2009.

<sup>9</sup> S. Hoffmann, *Dead Ends: American Foreign Policy in the New Cold War*, Ballinger, Cambridge 1983, pp. 154–155; G. P. Shultz, *Turmoil and Triumph: My Years as Secretary of State*, Charles Scribner's Sons, Nowy Jork 1993, pp. 266–267; R. Ištók, D. Plavčanová, *Russian geopolitics and geopolitics of Russia: phenomenon of space*, "European Journal of Geopolitics", no. 1, 2013, pp. 61–94.

<sup>10</sup> J. M. Fiszer, T. Stepniewski, K. Świder, *Polska – Ukraina – Białoruś – Rosja. Obraz politycznej dynamiki regionu*, Instytut Studiów Politycznych PAN, Warszawa 2019; K. A. Kowalczyk, *Geopolityczne dążenia współczesnej Rosji*, "Przegląd Geopolityczny", no. 27, 2019, pp. 78–92; J. M. Fiszer, *Zadania i cele polityki zagranicznej Władimira Putina*, [in:] "Myśl Ekonomiczna i Polityczna", no. 1(52), 2016, pp. 167–201; R. D. Asmus, *Mała wojna, która wstrząsnęła światem. Gruzja, Rosja i przyszłość Zachodu*, Wydawnictwo Res Publica Nowa, Warszawa 2010.

the dominant, i.e. Soviet identity, and the strengthening of the identity of the enslaved nations and states. This led to the emergence of dissident movements and political opposition in the USSR, e.g. the Democratic Party of Russia, the Popular Front of Latvia etc. Along with the economic crisis and social discontent that had been growing in the Soviet Union since the end of the 1970s, they increased their power and forced its authorities to make concessions in internal and international politics<sup>11</sup>.

In the context of the above, the important reasons for the collapse of the Soviet Union included the termination of the agreement on the establishment of the USSR by the Supreme Soviet of the Georgian SSR (Soviet Socialist Republic) (March 1990), the decisions of the Baltic republics to adopt the Declaration of Independence (March-May 1990), particularly the adoption of the Declaration of State Sovereignty of Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic on 12 June 1990 at the Congress of People's Deputies of the Russian SFSR, which many researchers consider the actual collapse of the USSR<sup>12</sup>. Other union republics, as well as autonomous republics, such as Tatarstan, North Ossetia, South Ossetia, and even Transnistria, which did not have a separate status, made similar decisions<sup>13</sup>. The author believes that the Revolutions of 1989, which started in Poland and by the end of 1989 brought about the collapse of communist regimes in Central and Eastern Europe, also contributed to this<sup>14</sup>.

On 11 March 1985, Mikhail Gorbachev became a new leader of the Soviet Union and contributed to the détente in relations between the East and the West, especially for US-Soviet relations. He was aware of the difficulties in the USSR and the entire Eastern Bloc. He wanted to save communism, and for that, he needed the détente and help from the West<sup>15</sup>. Therefore, to the surprise of all, in April 1985 he announced a programme of reforms,

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<sup>11</sup> A. D. Smith, *National Identity*, Penguin Books, London 1991, pp. 11–19; S. Fitzpatrick, *The Russian Revolution*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1982.

<sup>12</sup> J. Ołędzka, *Współczesna Rosja 1991–2011*, "Humanities and Social Science", no. 1, 2014, p. 133.

<sup>13</sup> W. Materski, *Od cara do "cara". Studium rosyjskiej polityki historycznej*, Instytut Studiów Politycznych PAN, Warszawa 2017, p. 194.

<sup>14</sup> J. M. Fiszer, *The Thirtieth Anniversary of the Sejm and Senate Elections in 1989. Systemic Transformation in Poland and its Consequences for Europe and the World*, "Myśl Ekonomiczna i Polityczna", no. 3(66), 2019, pp. 139–163.

<sup>15</sup> V. Zubok, *A Failed Empire: The Soviet Union in the Cold War from Stalin to Gorbachev*, University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill 2007, pp. 278–279; O. A. Westad, *The Global Cold War. A World History*, Penguin Books, New York 2018, pp. 364–372; H. A. Kissinger, *Dyplomacja*, Philip Wilson, Warszawa 1996, pp. 864–871.

the so-called perestroika and glasnost in the sphere of foreign and domestic policy, which in practice turned out to be counterproductive, i.e. accelerated the collapse of the Soviet Union. These reforms were put in place too late, were not sufficient, and did not enjoy the support of the public. There was dissatisfaction throughout the Soviet Union with the policies implemented by Gorbachev. According to the polls, there were complaints about a drop in living standards, and more than half of the respondents expected an economic disaster. The weakness of the authorities was also criticized. There were demands for a stronger government, and most respondents said they did not trust the authorities. The vast majority expected the system to collapse. Chancellor Helmut Kohl, who at that time fought for the reunification of Germany and often met with M. Gorbachev, wrote: "In my opinion, it was influenced by the fact that at some point the concept of Gorbachev's reform ceased to function in the Soviet Union. The economic factor was certainly decisive here. And thus the precursor of perestroika became its passive observer. The development of events surpassed him"<sup>16</sup>.

From the very beginning, the goal of the USSR was territorial expansion and political demonstration in its immediate vicinity - in Europe and Northeast Asia. Until 1945, the main rivals were the local powers and Germany. After World War II, the United States became the main competitor of the USSR in both these regions, and the US-Soviet rivalry was global and covered all areas of life, especially the economy, defence (arms race), science, technology, culture, ideology, propaganda, and international politics<sup>17</sup>.

With the intensification of the Cold War, Eastern Europe became the strategic area of the Soviet Union's expansion, mostly "liberated" by the Red Army by May 1945. Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania were incorporated into the USSR, as well as the eastern part of Poland and East Prussia, Bessarabia, Northern Bukovina, Czechoslovakian Carpathian Ruthenia, and three scraps of territory on the border with Finland. Bulgaria, Hungary, Poland, and Romania were made USSR satellites shortly after the war. In 1948 and 1949 Czechoslovakia and German Democratic Republic respectively joined the so-called bloc of socialist countries.

The Soviet leaders were also interested in expansion in the Persian Gulf region, particularly in the oil-rich Iran bordering the Soviet Union. In addition, during the Cold War, Moscow sought sphere of influence and allies

<sup>16</sup> H. Kohl, *Pragnąłem jedności Niemiec*, Świat Książki, Warszawa 1999, p. 22. See also: J. Holzer, *Europa zimnej wojny*, Wydawnictwo Znak, Kraków 2012, pp. 837–838.

<sup>17</sup> J. J. Mearsheimer, *Tragizm polityki mocarstw*, Wydawnictwo UNIVERSITAS, Kraków 2019, p. 236.



in almost all regions of the Third World, including Africa, Latin America, the Middle East, Southeast Asia, and the Indian subcontinent. Interestingly, the USSR did not pursue territorial conquests and their annexation, but only tried to make the states politically and economically dependent on each other and involve them in global rivalry with the United States. This policy, carried out under the slogans of “international socialism” and “brotherly help”, was very expensive for the Soviet Union and became one of the important reasons for its collapse<sup>18</sup>. It was based on the calculations of relative power, not on political and international realism and communist ideology, which Moscow only referred verbally to. As Barrington Moore writes: “In the international sphere, Russian rulers used primarily the methods of Bismarck, Machiavelli, and even Aristotle, and not the guidelines of Marx or Lenin. They saw international relations as an inherently unstable balance system best described by theories of balance of power”<sup>19</sup>.

The almost 45-year-long, very costly rivalry between the Soviet Union and the United States for control over Europe and hegemony over the world, and the accompanying arms race brought the Soviet empire to the edge of an abyss. In 1989, after a very costly, ten-year-long intervention and the defeat of the Soviet Army in Afghanistan, after the 1986 Chernobyl disaster, and under the influence of the Revolutions of 1989 that began in Europe, the USSR was forced to change direction in its foreign policy and with pain it had to abandon its Eastern European empire. Due to this, the Cold War ended, the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (Comecon) and the Warsaw Pact were dissolved, and the Soviet Union itself, at the end of 1991, disintegrated into fifteen sovereign states<sup>20</sup>.

Almost all analysts who studied these events concluded that the Cold War was over because the leading Soviet politicians, and especially Mikhail Gorbachev in the late 1980s, looked at international relations differently<sup>21</sup>.

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<sup>18</sup> B. Kisiel, *Ruch państw niezaangażowanych w nowych warunkach międzynarodowych*, “Sprawy Międzynarodowe”, no. 7–8, 1991; J. Prokopczuk, *Azja, Afryka i Ameryka Łacińska po drugiej wojnie światowej*, PISM, Warszawa 1983.

<sup>19</sup> B. Moore, Jr., *Soviet Politics – The Dilemma of Power: The Role of Ideas in Social Change*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge 1950, p. 408; W. Zubok, K. Pleszakow, *Zimna wojna zza kulis Kremla: od Stalina do Chruszczowa*, Książka i Wiedza, Warszawa 1999.

<sup>20</sup> A. Bryc, *Cele polityki zagranicznej Federacji Rosyjskiej*, Wydawnictwo Adam Marszałek, Toruń 2004, pp. 16–18; H. Cwiąg (ed.), *Interwencja ZSRR w Afganistanie...*, pp. 59–61.

<sup>21</sup> J. J. Mearsheimer, *Tragizm polityki mocarstw...*, p. 247; A. Korboński, F. Fukuyama (ed.), *The Soviet Union and the Third World: The Last Three Decades*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca 1987.

Namely, instead of striving to increase the relative power of a failing state, they put its economic development first along with limiting the use of force by introducing a system of liberal values and norms. In other words, they abandoned traditional realism in favour of believing in the benefits of international cooperation. The author agrees with Professor John J. Mearsheimer's thesis, who writes that: "The more facts of the decline of the Cold War there are, the more it becomes clear that the original interpretation of Soviet policy was incomplete, if not entirely wrong. An important cause of the collapse of the USSR was the inefficiency of its economy, unable to compete technologically with the world's leading countries"<sup>22</sup>.

The Soviet leaders, led by Gorbachev, until the very last moment were under impression that by having access to Western technologies and loans, it would be possible to stop the economic and political collapse of the Soviet Union. Therefore, in order to obtain help from the West, Moscow chose détente in international relations, i.e. by means of ending the war in Afghanistan, reducing tensions in Europe, starting a disarmament dialogue with the United States, abandoning senseless and costly ventures in the countries of the Third World and liberalizing the system in the USSR. The Soviet leaders, led by Gorbachev, de facto did not intend to abandon the principles of political realism, but to suspend it for a while in order to save the Soviet Union from collapse. Their calculations and the selected strategy prove that the main goal of states is to maximise power as a way to protect themselves against the temptations of their rivals<sup>23</sup>.

Unfortunately, the agony of the Soviet Union could not be contained. It was accelerated by the so-called the August coup on 19 August 1991. It was an attempt to take power by force by the so-called State Committee on the State of Emergency, headed by vice-president Yanayev. As Professor Wojciech Materski writes: "The main goal [of the coup] was to block the signing of the new federation formula, and consequently - as the "rebels" assessed - to block the collapse of the Soviet Union. The coup was stopped thanks to the determination of Moscow's society and the attitude of the president of RSFSR (the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic) Boris Yeltsin who immediately announced his decree and took control over power structures in the territory of the Republic (troops and formations of

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<sup>22</sup> J. Mearsheimer, *Tragizm polityki mocarstw...*, p. 249.

<sup>23</sup> R. G. Suny, *The Revenge of the Past: Nationalism, Revolution, and the Collapse of the Soviet Union*, Stanford University Press, Stanford 1993; C. Wohlforth, *Realism and the End of the Cold War*, "International Security", no. 3, 1994–1995, pp. 91–129.

the Ministry of Defence, the Committee for State Security, the Ministry of the Interior)”<sup>24</sup>.

During the coup, on 19–21 August 1991, Boris Yeltsin issued a number of decrees that directly led to the collapse of the USSR. A few days after the foiled coup, M. Gorbachev decided to step down as the secretary general of the CPSU (Communist Party of the Soviet Union), and on 29 August 1991, the parliament of the Russian SFSR, followed by the republican parliaments, decided to legally ban the activities of the CPSU and to sequester its property. Thanks to this, the system of the Soviet party-state actually collapsed. In Viskuli near Brest on 8 December 1991, Yeltsin, who hated M. Gorbachev, together with the president of the Ukrainian SSR (the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic), Leonid Kravchuk, and the chairman of the Supreme Soviet of the Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic, Stanislav Shushkevich, signed the so-called the Belovezha Agreement on the dissolution of the federation and the establishment of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) in its place – the organisation with the characteristics of a confederation, which was first notified to the United States, and only later to M. Gorbachev. His protests were left unnoticed. The agreement was contrary to the USSR constitution of 1977 and, in fact, had the features of a coup d'état. It should be noted that it was almost identical to the agreement on the establishment of the Soviet Federation of December 1922. In a sense, it closed the “Soviet circle” by consigning it to the ash heap of history<sup>25</sup>.

Boris Yeltsin insisted, and within two weeks the remaining union republics joined the Belovezha Agreement. On 16 December 1991, on the emergency meeting of the foreign ministers of the European Communities on the accession agreement with Poland, a statement was adopted recognising new international entities established after the collapse of the Soviet Union<sup>26</sup>. Shortly after, on 26 December 1991, the Supreme Soviet of the Soviet Union adopted a declaration on its dissolution, and the day before the act was

<sup>24</sup> W. Materski, *Od cara do “cara”...*, p. 195; A. Koreżakow, *Borys Jelcyn: od świtu do zmierzchu*, Oficyna Wydawnicza RYTM, Warszawa 1998, pp. 95–112.

<sup>25</sup> W. Marciniak, *Rozgrabione imperium...*, pp. 184–186; K. Świder, *Ewolucja elity władzy w Związku Radzieckim i Rosji w kontekście przemian ideowych, politycznych, społecznych i ekonomicznych*, Instytut Studiów Politycznych, Warszawa 2013, p. 127; W. Materski, *Od cara do “cara”...*, p. 197; P. Kuspys, *Wspólnota Niepodległych Państw – stan faktyczny i perspektywy*, “Biuletyn Opinie”, no. 10, 2009, pp. 2–26.

<sup>26</sup> A. Stępień-Kuczyńska, *Unia Europejska–Rosja*, [in:] J. Juchnowski, M.S. Wolański (ed.), *Studia nauk społecznych i humanistycznych*, Uniwersytet Wrocławski, Wrocław 2008, p. 615.

supposed to be initialled, M. Gorbachev resigned from the function of the president of the USSR and handed the function of head of the armed forces with codes for nuclear weapons use over to B. Yeltsin. On 30 December 1991, a meeting of the CIS states was held in Minsk, which finally sealed the fate of the USSR<sup>27</sup>. Thus, almost on the anniversary of its establishment (30 December 1922), after 69 years, the Soviet Union ceased to exist as a subject of international law and disappeared from the political map of the world.

## 2. The Effects of the collapse of the USSR on Poland's foreign policy and its place in Central and Eastern Europe at the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century

The collapse of the Soviet Union had far-reaching consequences for the entire world and especially had great significance for the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. It caused radical geopolitical and geo-economic changes in the region. Until now, countries dependent on the USSR, under the strict control of Moscow, could not conduct sovereign internal and foreign policy in accordance with their *raison d'état* until the collapse of the "Evil Empire". The Revolutions of 1989, which began with the systemic transformation in June 1989 in Poland, quickly spread to all the countries belonging to the Soviet bloc. Although it led to the collapse of communist regimes in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, which – as it has been already mentioned – accelerated the collapse of the USSR, Soviet troops were still stationed in these countries as part of the Warsaw Pact, and until 1991 limited the possibility of pursuing a fully sovereign foreign policy due to unpredictable reaction of Moscow. Poland is an example of this because, until the collapse of the USSR, it had to pursue a cautious, double-track foreign policy towards Moscow and other countries of Central and Eastern Europe<sup>28</sup>.

<sup>27</sup> M. M. Kosman, *Konflikt rosyjsko-ukraiński o Krym (2014–2019)*, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Kazimierza Wielkiego, Bydgoszcz 2020, pp. 13–14.

<sup>28</sup> J. L. Gaddis, *International Relations Theory and the End of the Cold War*, "International Security" 1992–1993, no. 3, vol. 17, pp. 54–59; R. Kuźniar, *Ewolucja zewnętrznych uwarunkowań polskiej niepodległości*, "Stosunki Międzynarodowe – International Relations", no. 1 (vol. 54), pp. 21–39; J. M. Fiszer, *Transformacja ustrojowa w Polsce po 1989 roku oraz jej sukcesy i porażki*, [in:] J. Wojnicki, J. Miecznikowska, Ł. Zamecki, *Polska i Europa w perspektywie politologicznej*, Oficyna Wydawnicza ASPRA-JR, Warszawa 2020, pp. 73–98.

After the collapse of the USSR, Poland primarily tried to strengthen its sovereignty and position in post-communist Europe. To this end, it tried to settle all disputes with its neighbours. The strategic goal of Poland's foreign policy was to strengthen its security by joining the Euro-Atlantic structures, i.e. NATO and the European Union. Moreover, until 2004, Poland was still too weak to assume the role of a leader or a regional power. It was only in 2005–2007, i.e. after Poland joined NATO in 1999 and the European Union in 2004, when the cabinet of PiS (Law and Justice party) set such a goal. Unfortunately, premature elections and the PO–PSL (Civic Platform–Polish People's Party) coalition coming to power hampered the plans. On the other hand, in 2007–2015, the Polish authorities opted for an alliance and cooperation with big neighbours: Germany and Russia, and the United States. At the same time, Poland supported pro-Western tendencies in the foreign policy of Ukraine and Belarus, but these countries pursued a policy of balancing between Poland and Russia and between Russia and the European Union. Poland's eastern policy encountered opposition from Russia and, contrary to appearance, did not enjoy the support of most European Union countries<sup>29</sup>.

After joining NATO on 12 March 1999, and the European Union on 1 May 2004, like other member states, Poland has not completely lost its national sovereignty and cultural identity, although there are politicians who think so. However, our political sovereignty has been limited, but this is the case whenever a state voluntarily becomes a member of an alliance or international organisation, as it has to comply with the organisational and legal rules. However, it gained new allies and partners for cooperation, as well as the greater trust of neighbours, and it began to be perceived as a democratic, stable, and predictable country. Poland has become an active participant in international relations. Poles strove at all costs to integrate our neighbours with NATO and the European Union. The efforts have been successful: Czechs, Slovaks, Hungarians, Lithuanians, our direct and more distant neighbours in the region today are Poland's allies and partners. Polish people continue to support the efforts of Belarusians and Ukrainians to

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<sup>29</sup> J. Tymanowski, *Ukraina między Wschodem a Zachodem*, Wydział Dziennikarstwa i Nauk Politycznych Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, Warszawa 2014; O. Barburska, *Polityka Wschodnia Unii Europejskiej jako część składowa polityki zagranicznej UE*, Oficyna Wydawnicza ASPRA-JR, Warszawa 2018. J. M. Fiszer, *Zadania i cele polityki zagranicznej Władimira Putina*, "Myśl Ekonomiczna i Polityczna", no. 1 (52), 2016, pp. 167–201; O. Czarny, *Die Ukraine und die Europäische Union: Stand und Perspektiven bilateraler Beziehungen*, Diplomica – Verlag, Hamburg 2009.

join NATO and the EU and should seek an agreement with Russia. After 2004, i.e. after joining the EU, Poland took over the management of its eastern policy i.e. by undertaking subsequent initiatives: from the European Neighbourhood Policy to the Eastern Partnership. Once again, it encountered sharp opposition from Russia and the ambivalent stance of most European Union countries, including Germany and France, which are in favour of cooperation with Moscow.

In 2005–2007, after our active participation in the “Orange Revolution” in Ukraine, the gas crisis between Russia and Ukraine became a manifestation of the negative trends in Poland’s eastern policy. Despite the threats it posed, this problem opened the way for a wider diplomatic action by Warsaw within the European Union, consisting in the promotion of its preferences in relations with the East. The Ukrainian-Russian gas dispute convinced Europe that it is necessary to ensure diversification of energy sources and new transit routes, which would free the European Union from the negative actions of Russian monopolists in this sector. It should be added that regarding the issue of energy within the EU there has never been unanimity between the “old fifteen countries” and the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. That is why Poland’s initiatives to solve the problem of energy security encountered resistance from individual states, including the neighbours who were afraid of Moscow’s reaction. This was the case with Warsaw’s offer to solve the problem of energy security by creating a special pact, commonly known as “NATO energy”. Ultimately, the project was not approved within the EU. To other partners, it seemed inadequate to the political situation prevailing on the Old Continent, due to the idea to unite NATO countries, the European Union, and the territories of Russia’s “near abroad” within one organisation. The EU member states argued that the idea resembled a kind of cartel, aimed strictly at Russia’s interests, which could not be understood. It was commonly argued that the solutions proposed by Poland proved the lack of proper understanding of European politics. Priority was to be given to the recommendations of the European Commission, published as the so-called green paper<sup>30</sup>.

It is quite commonly read in the literature on the subject that after joining NATO and the European Union, Poland, having achieved the strategic goals of its foreign policy, seems to take a rest and failed to develop a new concept of foreign policy. It is pointed out that Poland has adopted a reactive

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<sup>30</sup> P. Świeboda, *Strategiczne wyzwanie dla Unii Europejskiej. Kształtowanie zewnętrznego wymiaru polityki energetycznej*, Raport demos Europa – Centrum Strategii Europejskiej, Warszawa 2006, pp. 12–19.

attitude, that it has tried to stay in the mainstream, the direction of which was determined by other powers – the United States in NATO and Germany and France in the European Union. It should be emphasised that Poland's efforts to join NATO and the EU were not treated by Poland as an end itself or a panacea for solving all the problems that faced new democracies in Central and Eastern Europe, but both these structures were, are, and should be considered important instruments for implementing the assumptions of the development and security strategy of Poland and other countries in the region, especially our neighbours.

Moreover, as it has been already mentioned, Poland's foreign policy should consistently aim to achieve Poland's leadership position in Central and Eastern Europe and a significant role in Euro-Atlantic structures. This status is real for our country, as demonstrated by the "Orange Revolution" in Ukraine and the subsequent situation in that country, especially the Russian-Ukrainian war and the 2014 annexation of Crimea by Russia. Poland's leverage here consists in the geopolitical location, size, and potential, as well as good relations with the United States. At the same time, Poland cannot think of itself in the category of an endangered country, surrounded by countries that wish us no good or are even enemies.

Unfortunately, as Roman Kuźniar writes: "There are periods in the history of Poland when our country has difficulties with conducting a regular foreign policy. Normality in foreign policy is somehow unacceptable. There is megalomania, loss of sense of reality, desire, behaviour like "one against all", slogans and gestures of a "proud nation" that is allegedly more "proud" than others, and therefore others must recognise its claims to prestige, its role, accept its ideas of what Europe should look like etc. (...) Poland is characterised by its periodic inability to perform an ordinary, and therefore careful, well-thought-out, professional, precise, predictable, and consistent foreign policy, in which important goals are achieved with appropriate measures, in which interests can be distinguished from empty gestures, and real influence on the environment is distinguished from superficial and impermanent signs of prestige. This normality of foreign policy is sometimes unacceptable to the Polish political class."<sup>31</sup>

However, the reason for the weakness of Polish foreign policy is not the specificity of some Polish politicians and the shortcomings in the substantive preparation of Polish diplomacy and many of our diplomats, but rather

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<sup>31</sup> R. Kuźniar, *Droga do wolności. Polityka zagraniczna III Rzeczypospolitej*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe SCHOLAR, Warszawa 2008, p. 319.

objective factors. According to some researchers, Poland is a country too big to remain in the group of small European countries, and at the same time too small (weak) to be treated as a European superpower. Polish politicians try to solve this dilemma by pursuing policy in an exaggerated way, which in practice does not give the expected results and is a source of frustration. In order to avoid this, it is worth recalling the advice of Jan Nowak-Jeziorański, who often said that: “the Republic of Poland is not a superpower and should not pursue a policy in an exaggerated way. Poland is a regional state and its interests do not extend beyond the European continent”<sup>32</sup>.

Poland lies in Europe and should pursue its basic national interests with the help of the European Union and NATO. Therefore, it is in our national interest to shape the further process of European integration in such a way so as to make the Union more consistent and efficient, and to strengthen its international position. The European Union should be a pillar of Poland’s economic security. Within the Union, we should especially cultivate relations with our neighbours – big and small ones. In relations with smaller neighbours, we should be guided by the principle of disinterested kindness, consider and support their needs and demands, thanks to which Poland will gain a strong position in the region, the status of a regional power, and a leadership position among small countries in Central and Eastern Europe.

On the other hand, the Atlantic Alliance should be treated as the foundation of Poland’s security policy. Not only because of its strength and credibility in the Euro-Atlantic and global security environment but also because it is a platform for the strategic unity of the West, i.e. close ties between Europe and America and its political and military presence on the Old Continent. For Poland, both are irreplaceable. Poland should also cultivate and develop comprehensive relations with the United States, but at the same time, we should not support those directions (aspects) of Washington’s policy that do not serve the interests of the West, or the stability and peaceful international order, and undermine the credibility of NATO, the EU, and the UN, or are designed to create unnecessary conflicts and divisions in Europe and the world<sup>33</sup>.

Poland with a strong position in the EU, good relations with its neighbours, without seeking unnecessary “rescue” from Russia, whose rhetoric must not be confused with its actual capabilities, will mean more for Washington. In

<sup>32</sup> J. Nowak-Jeziorański, *Rzeczpospolita atlantycka...*, p. 12.

<sup>33</sup> R. Kuźniar, *Droga do wolności...*, p. 323. See also: R. Ciborowski (ed.), *Rola Polski w polityce Unii Europejskiej wobec krajów Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej*, Uniwersytet w Białymstoku, Wydział Ekonomii i Zarządzania, Białystok 2007.



this context, the attempts made by Warsaw in 2005–2007 to be involved in a “war on two fronts”, largely determined by the domestic historical policy, were a sign of weak imagination<sup>34</sup>. It is regrettable that Poland returned to this policy after 2015. Since the presidential elections in 2015 and the parliamentary elections in 2016, Poland’s political system has been heading in an increasingly anti-democratic direction. If we stand in the position of classical realism, i.e. we believe that foreign policy is a function of domestic policy, then, since 2015/2016 Poland’s foreign policy has been also moving more and more in a direction contrary to the Polish *raison d’etat*. It has been more and more ideologised and put under pressure of one political party – PiS (Law and Justice). So it is not the state’s policy, but rather a party’s policy, detached from international reality and Polish national interests. It is a short-sighted policy that weakens Poland’s position and role in the international arena. As Olaf Osica writes: “The result is a growing gap between the political narrative about Poland in international politics and our everyday experience of the world. Between a story with no geopolitical ambitions, power, and threats, on the one hand, and the creaking reality of the Polish army, public institutions, or the quality of political debate, on the other. Between faith in the ideas of European integration and Atlantic cooperation and growing economic protectionism or pressure to choose technologies and tax solutions. This clash of theory and practice is not unique in the world. Many countries underwent or are going through a similar process, grappling with their old, “domestic” identities and the new ones that are being shaped in front of their citizens. However, it becomes troublesome. A foreign policy that is put aside real social, political, and economic processes becomes a burden. And this inability to adapt will pave the way for extreme ideas for which the divergence of the dominant narrative with everyday experience will fuel the negation of everything that has been built in the past 30 years”<sup>35</sup>.

In the theoretical aspect, foreign policy should strengthen the state in the international arena, its role, and its authority in international relations. It must always be carried out in the interest of the state and its citizens; it cannot satisfy the ambitions or the politicians’ imaginations that are detached from

<sup>34</sup> A. Niedźwiecki, *Polska polityka europejska w latach 2005–2007. Zarys problemu*, “ATHENAEUM. Political Science”, vol. 19, 2008, pp. 39–53; M. Musiał-Karg, *Polska polityka europejska w latach 2005–2007*, [in:] R. Podgórzńska (ed.), *Polityka zagraniczna Polski w warunkach członkostwa w Unii Europejskiej*, Wydawnictwo Adam Marszałek, Toruń 2009, pp. 200–221.

<sup>35</sup> O. Osica, *Nowa polityka zagraniczna | Res Publica Nowa*, [https://publica.pl/teksty/osica-polska-i-swiat-67468.html?utm\\_sou](https://publica.pl/teksty/osica-polska-i-swiat-67468.html?utm_sou) (6.04.2021).

reality. Foreign policy should not be conducted in the interest of one political party and cannot be subordinated to its ideology, which unfortunately is the case in Poland today. Disregarding the role and will of the nation negatively affects the international image of the state and does not serve its *raison d'état*. In the international environment, a country in which the ruling parties appropriate and politicise foreign policy is losing importance<sup>36</sup>.

In the light of the English School, Poland is seen as a peripheral country, torn between East and West, whose position is beyond the core of the international community<sup>37</sup>. Therefore, in the current situation in Europe and in the world, it should pursue a more active and realistic foreign policy, i.e. should not give in to illusions but keep both feet on the ground<sup>38</sup>. Poland cannot leave NATO or the European Union. On the other hand, Poland should change its foreign policy towards the European Union, which Poland often treats only as a source of easy money or as a “treasury of wisdom” from which Poles should thoughtlessly “import” the rules of the game and values. Neither of these paths will allow us to make the most of the potential of the EU membership. Finally, it is necessary to determine what we want to achieve in the European Union and through the EU, treating it, however, not as a charitable organisation, but as a place where the interests of states and economic entities that are much stronger than Poland and Polish companies clash. Therefore, Poland needs to be more active in the EU today and less reactive, but estimate chances of what can be achieved, and be able to form coalitions. Both spectacular gestures in defence of what is impossible to implement, and the uncritical adaptation to all the ideas of the stronger members of the European Union is a way for Poland to go astray. The European Union is a place where it is possible to achieve political and economic goals together with other members. Acting in defiance of the entire EU will not bring any results<sup>39</sup>.

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<sup>36</sup> J. Nowak, *Czym jest polityka zagraniczna*, [in:] W. Malendowski and Cz. Mojsiewicz (ed.), *Stosunki międzynarodowe*, Atla 2, Wrocław 1998, pp. 75–119; A. Czarnocki, D. Kondrakiewicz, *Uwarunkowania, koncepcje i realizacja polityki zagranicznej Polski*, [in:] M. Pietraś (ed.), *Międzynarodowe stosunki polityczne*, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Marii Curie-Skłodowskiej, Lublin 2007, pp. 601–659.

<sup>37</sup> R. H. Jackson, *Pluralism in international political theory*, “Review of International Studies”, no. 18(3), 1992, pp. 271–282; M. Wight, *Systems of States*, Leicester University Press, Leicester 1977.

<sup>38</sup> D. Woźniak-Szymańska, *Pozycja Polski w społeczności międzynarodowej, czyli jak wraść na peryferiach Europy?*, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, Warszawa 2021.

<sup>39</sup> M. Tomecki, *Dojrzały związek z UE – co to znaczy?*, Kongres Obywatelski, Instytut Badań nad Gospodarką Rynkową, Warszawa 2021, pp. 1–7.

## CONCLUSIONS

The collapse of the USSR was caused by many objective and subjective, internal and international factors. The Soviet system turned out to be unreformable, which was finally confirmed by the perestroika announced by M. Gorbachev, which was not implemented eventually. Moreover, the practice has shown that communism was a utopian ideology and was systematically losing public support. The author believes that the main cause of the collapse of the USSR was its poorly implemented economic policy, which systematically led to the economic catastrophe. Moreover, the USSR was unable to compete with America and its anti-Soviet policy in the long term so the imposed arms race forced Moscow to change the direction in international politics.

The collapse of the USSR in 1991 opened the way to a reorientation of Polish foreign policy and the normalisation of Poland's relations with close and distant neighbours. After that, the "iron curtain" and the division of the world into East and West disappeared, and the Cold War ended. The geopolitical situation in Central and Eastern Europe and throughout Europe has also changed. Thanks to this, Polish national and international interests were reinterpreted. A sovereign Poland could finally decide on its own about its foreign policy, as well as national and international security.

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Poland should seek close allies and strive for cooperation in the international arena within the Euro-Atlantic structures and such groupings of states as the Three Seas Initiative, the Visegrad Group, and the Weimar Triangle. As a result, Poland should become one of the key countries in the EU and NATO and be present in their leading bodies, as well as become a leader among the countries of the Central and Eastern Europe region. It should cooperate with all powers, especially France, Germany, the United States, Russia, and China, which are currently playing a major role in the international arena<sup>40</sup>. It should be kept in mind that medium-sized countries,

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<sup>40</sup> R. Zięba, *Poszukiwanie międzynarodowej roli dla Polski – konceptualizacja roli państwa "średniej rangi"*, [in:] S. Bieleń (ed.), *Polityka zagraniczna Polski po wstąpieniu do NATO i do Unii Europejskiej. Problem tożsamości i adaptacji*, Difin, Warszawa 2010; J. Zając, *Role międzynarodowe państwa średniego – aspekty teoretyczne*, "Krakowskie Studia Międzynarodowe", vol. X, no. 3, 2017; J. M. Fiszer, *Polityka zagraniczna Polski w XXI wieku: cele, wyzwania, kierunki, szanse i zagrożenia*, "Myśl Ekonomiczna i Polityczna", no. 2(65), 2019, pp. 141–172; D. Woźniak-Szymańska, *Pozycja Polski w społeczności międzynarodowej, czyli jak wzrastać na peryferiach Europy?*, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, Warszawa 2021.

including Poland, have limited possibilities to shape their international roles. Firstly, due to their limited potential, they do not have enough effective means of influence, and secondly, their insignificant international position does not make them fit for global or universal roles. A medium-sized country is important for neighbouring countries that are geographically close and those that have developed cooperation in a given field.

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## WHY DID THE SOVIET UNION COLLAPSE? THE REASONS AND EFFECTS FOR POLAND, EUROPE, AND THE WORLD

### Abstract

The paper is aimed at analysing the domestic and international determinants of the collapse of the Soviet Union, and the consequences for Europe, the world and Poland, as well as its place in Central and Eastern Europe. It demonstrates geopolitical changes that took place in Europe and the world, as well as their effects on the reorientation of Poland’s foreign policy at the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

In the article, the author attempts to answer a few questions and verify several theses and hypotheses related to the reasons and effects of the collapse of the USSR. The key thesis is that the fall of the Soviet Union was provoked not only by the internal factors but also to a great extent by the

international situation in Europe and the world, including the Revolutions of 1989 in the states of Central and Eastern Europe.

The analysis shows that the collapse of the Soviet Union has had a positive impact on Europe, the world, Poland, and its foreign policy. It contributed to the end of the Cold War, the collapse of the Yalta-Potsdam order, and the creation of a new international order. After the fall of the USSR, Poland's foreign policy was consistent with the Polish *raison d'état* and was of great importance for Central and Eastern Europe. It was based on the Euro-Atlantic system and close relations with Germany, France, the United Kingdom, the United States, and the countries of Central and Eastern Europe.

In the article, the author refers to classical realism, the theory of foreign policy, and constructivism and applies the following research methods: description and critical analysis of documents and literature on the subject. The source base comprises Polish and foreign published documents, monographs, articles and studies, and press releases.

Key words: Soviet Union, collapse, geopolitics, Poland, foreign policy, Central and Eastern Europe

## DLACZEGO UPADŁ ZWIĄZEK RADZIECKI? PRZYCZYNY I SKUTKI DLA POLSKI, EUROPY I ŚWIATA

### Streszczenie

Celem niniejszego artykułu jest analiza przesłanek wewnętrznych i międzynarodowych upadku Związku Radzieckiego oraz jego skutków dla Polski i jej miejsca w Europie Środkowej i Wschodniej. Ukazuje on zmiany geopolityczne, które dokonały się wówczas w Europie i na świecie oraz ich wpływ na reorientację polityki zagranicznej Polski na przełomie XX i XXI wieku.

W artykule staram się odpowiedzieć na kilka pytań oraz weryfikuję kilka tez i hipotez związanych z upadkiem ZSRR. Główną tezą jest konstatacja, że do upadku Związku Radzieckiego oprócz przyczyn wewnętrznych w dużym stopniu przyczyniła się ówczesna sytuacja międzynarodowa w Europie i na świecie, w tym "jesień ludów 1989" w państwach Europy Środkowej i Wschodniej.

Przeprowadzona analiza pokazuje, że upadek Związku Radzieckiego miał pozytywne znaczenie dla Europy, świata i Polski oraz jej polityki zagranicznej. Przyczynił się do zakończenia zimnej wojny, upadku ładu jałtańsko-poczdamskiego i rozpoczęcia budowy nowego porządku międzynarodowego. Polityka

zagraniczna Polski po upadku ZSRR była zgodna z polską racją stanu i miała istotne znaczenie dla Europy Środkowej i Wschodniej. Została oparta na systemie euroatlantyckim i bliskich relacjach z Niemcami, Francją, Wielką Brytanią, Stanami Zjednoczonymi oraz z państwami Europy Środkowej i Wschodniej.

Przy pisaniu artykułu wykorzystałem teorię realizmu klasycznego, teorię polityki zagranicznej państwa i teorię konstruktywizmu oraz takie metody badawcze jak opis i krytyczną analizę dokumentów i literatury przedmiotu. Bazę źródłową stanowią polsko- i obcojęzyczne dokumenty publikowane, prace zwarte, artykuły i studia oraz informacje z prasy Internetu

Słowa kluczowe: Związek Radziecki, upadek, geopolityka, Polska, polityka zagraniczna, Europa Środkowa i Wschodnia

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