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## CIVIC PLATFORM'S CONCEPT OF EUROPEAN SECURITY

Recent unprecedented changes in the international arena, such as Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, sparked a political debate over Europe's security, prompting politicians to diagnose the reality and look for solutions to ensure the security of European states. This paper focuses on the Polish political party Civic Platform, which represents the liberal strain in Polish political thought. The study is concerned with the 21st century, which has brought at least three turning points: (1) the Russian Federation's questioning of the post-Cold-War order; (2) The compromising of Central and Eastern Europe's security after Western European politicians proved to be weak-willed, a notable example of which was their "soft" position after the Russian attack on Georgia in 2008; and (3) the emergence of new challenges for Poland, primarily after Russia launched its war against Ukraine.

**Keywords:** European security, political thought, Civic Platform.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 was intended to overturn the current political and security order in Europe and to fundamentally revise the existing global order in which Western states, led by the US, play an important role. Security experts emphasize that it has already been safe in Europe. We have received this dividend of years of peace. Today, in the face of the aggression of the Russian Federation against a sovereign state, the security order has collapsed. These unprecedented changes in the international arena sparked a political debate on Europe's security and prompted politicians to diagnose the reality and look for solutions to ensure the security of European states.

This study focuses on the Polish political party Civic Platform (Polish: Platforma Obywatelska Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej – PO), which represented the liberal strain in Polish political thought. It was established as an association on 24 January 2001 and became a registered political party in 2002. Between 2007 and 2015, the Civic Platform (CP) was the dominant political force in the Polish Parliament and Senate. It had formed a coalition with the Polish Peoples' Party (Polish: Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe – PSL/PPP) to gain parliamentary support for the Government<sup>2</sup>. One of CP's notable politicians was

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<sup>2</sup> Support for Civic Platform in parliamentary elections: 2001 (12.7%), 2005 (24.14%), 2007 (41.51%), 2011 (39.18%), 2015 (24.09%), 2019 (27.4%). Since 2015, CP has been part of the parliamentary opposition.

Bronisław Komorowski – the President of the Republic of Poland in 2010–2015. The study is concerned with the 21st century since it brought at least three turning points: (1) the Russian Federation questioned the post-Cold-War order; (2) Central and Eastern Europe's security was compromised, and Western European politicians proved to be weak-willed, a notable example of which was their "soft" position after the Russian attack against Georgia in 2008; (3) new challenges emerged for Poland, primarily after Russia had launched a full-scale war against Ukraine. This paper aims to explore Polish liberals' outlook on the international community and their views on European security. Like other political circles, CP had to take an international stance on security and answer the key question: what pillars should Poland's and, more broadly, Europe's security rest on? Our research procedure relied on methods and techniques specific to studies on the history of ideas. To solve the research problem, we conducted desk research and content analysis of source documents. In addition, the examined literature provided us with helpful insights into the political thought related to European security.

## 2. PERCEPTION OF SECURITY AND INTERNATIONAL ORDER

Liberal theories of international security rested on the assumption that security was one of the state's objectives – not always the primary one – and that since states are interdependent, it would be unprofitable for any party involved to resort to force and undermine the international order. Unlike realists, liberals defined the state's power as primarily stemming from relational unevenness rather than from military potential. They believed it was vital for Polish interests to maintain a strategic Polish-American partnership and ensure a US presence in Europe. Poland considered this to be its "insurance policy".

The liberal outlook – in which internal considerations determined external factors, and collectively established rules and laws governed the international order – was the central reference point for appraising Poland's international position in the early 21st century. There was the realisation that globalisation and growing interdependence had blurred the lines between internal and external state policies and between the military and non-military dimensions of international security. International relations came to be regarded as a positive-sum game – a win-win arrangement. In line with the liberal paradigm, geographic determinism and categories specific to realism and geopolitics – such as power, force, influence and dominance – were marginalised in international relations.

In its appraisal of Poland's security environment, CP recognised the information revolution and globalisation while being cognisant that traditional threats became less significant instead of the asymmetrical ones involving non-state, transnational and sub-national actors. However, conventional crises and conflicts – spurred by military, economic or energy blackmail – continued to be considered a possibility (*vide* Czaputowicz, 2007; Halizak, 2005; Lewandowski, 2018).

In 2017, Donald Tusk defined the three major European and global security threats: 1) the new geopolitical situation in the world (increasingly assertive China, especially on the seas, Russia's aggressive policy towards Ukraine and its neighbours, wars, terror and anarchy in the Middle East and Africa, with radical Islam playing a major role); 2) the rise in anti-EU, nationalist and xenophobic sentiment in the EU itself; and 3) "the state of mind" of the pro-European elites (doubt in the fundamental values of liberal democracy). Tusk also warned against national egoism as a dangerous alternative to integration and the tendency to favour ideology over the interests and emotions of the people (Tusk, 2017; *vide* Applebaum, Tusk, 2021).

### 3. EU'S MAINSTREAM

European integration was the key driver of CP's regional and subregional policies. The party's prevailing view was that a gradual integration of Poland's closest neighbours with the European Union would act in favour of the Polish *raison d'état* (Platforma Obywatelska RP, 2011). Drawing on historical analogies, Radosław Sikorski compared the Community to the Roman Empire, calling it "an organism that [...] established a pattern of settlement, a road network and a legal legacy we use to this day". The boundaries of European integration were decisive for the security and power of Western civilisation. They extended along with European law – "after German reunification, this line shifted to the Oder. In 2004, it moved further to the Bug" (Sikorski, 2013).

CP's foreign policy between 2007 and 2015 was to reduce Poland's Central European and US alliance efforts to the bare minimum and instead enter the political mainstream of the EU. In practice, this meant abandoning any objectives and pursuits not approved by Germany. In 2011, Radosław Sikorski expressed his unequivocal approval for a strong German leadership in Europe in the face of the economic crisis.

CP's politicians were committed to strengthening Poland's bilateral ties with EU partners – Germany and France. They believed that among the members of "a family of nations with which we have the closest civilisational affinity (Tusk, 2007), Germany was the most important partner despite the burden of its history with Poland and some ongoing political disputes (activities of the Centre Against Expulsions, claims from Germans displaced from Poland and the anti-American policy of the German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder).

A strategic alliance with the Federal Republic of Germany was considered the Polish *raison d'état*, as it elevated Poland's status in the European Union and beyond, including its relations with Russia. And accordingly, it was reasonable to stop "fuelling a spiral of mutual claims and pretences" (Komorowski, 2006; Klich, 2003). Liberals saw Polish-German cooperation as furthering Polish national interests in three ways: by helping Poland to become a NATO and EU member, and later to enter the Union's decision-making centre; allowing Poland to exert influence on Russia; and by providing Poland with opportunities to derive considerable economic benefits from its growing trade with EU Member States (Sikorski, 2011a).

The party in question advocated for the Polish-German community of interests – an idea devised between 1989 and 1991 by Tadeusz Mazowiecki and Krzysztof Skubiszewski. It opposed the counternarrative to this, most notably promulgated by the Law and Justice party (Polish: Prawo i Sprawiedliwość – PiS), according to which such a community of interests would, in fact, cause Poland to be dependent on Germany instead of empowering it. The prevailing liberal opinion was that, despite the clear differences, attributable to demographic and economic potentials, as well as to the geographic location, the two countries had similar views on the Union's eastern neighbourhood policy, shared common democratic values, engaged in joint efforts for the democratisation of southern and eastern Europe (Sikorski, 2011a), supported a common strategic vision of the Union's future, and were in agreement on the solutions for overcoming the economic crisis (Sikorski, 2013). It was opined that "a perfect groundwork – strong economic ties – has been laid to build the Polish-German community of interests, making the success of both nations increasingly interrelated" (Olechowski, 2007).

As regards the notion of Germany's regional role, CP differed considerably from the League of Polish Families (Polish: Liga Polskich Rodzin – LPR) and Law and Justice

(LaJ). Where LaJ and the League of Polish Families (LPF) expressed concerns about a strong German leadership in Europe, CP saw Germany – a political and economic powerhouse – as “essential” to Europe. Formidable as it was, Germany’s power seemed less threatening than inertia, especially amidst the ongoing crisis. The idea was that Germany’s potential should be directly proportional to its responsibility for the European order. Germany was expected to assume the role of a regional leader and the EU’s “major stakeholder”, one that is guided by a consultative approach towards other Member States rather than following a policy of dominance, hegemony and supremacy enforced by conventional military methods (Sikorski, 2011b). There was a common agreement that, on the one hand, Germany was too big to be a *primus inter pares*, but on the other, it was also not large enough to assume dominance in Europe. This meant that to bear the heavy burden of responsibility for the region, it needed political support from other EU Member States (Sikorski, 2012).

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Germany’s regional role was seen by CP as important for the Community’s future. Germany – a political and economic powerhouse – was “essential” to Europe, and Germany’s power seemed less threatening than inertia, especially amidst the ongoing crisis. The idea was that Germany’s potential should be directly proportional to its responsibility for the European order. Germany was expected to assume the role of a regional leader and the EU’s “major stakeholder”, one that is guided by a consultative approach towards other Member States rather than following a policy of dominance, hegemony and supremacy enforced by conventional military methods. There was a common agreement that, on the one hand, Germany was too big to be a *primus inter pares*, but on the other, it was also not large enough to assume dominance in Europe. This meant that to bear the heavy burden of responsibility for the region it needed political support from other EU Member States. The idea was that Germany’s potential should be directly proportional to its responsibility for the European order. Germany was expected to assume the role of a regional leader and the EU’s “major stakeholder”, one that is guided by a consultative approach towards other Member States rather than following a policy of dominance, hegemony and supremacy enforced by conventional military methods. CP’s actions coalesced into what seemed a bandwagoning strategy towards Germany. This strategy assumed that Poland should “align with” the strong German partner. On the one hand, its purpose was to avoid rivalry between the two states (defensive alignment). On the other, its aim was also to help gain considerable benefits (defensive alignment) by being part of the European political mainstream.

#### 4. REGIONAL AFFILIATIONS

The Civic Platform considered Europe the core area of Polish foreign activities, a place where “vital Polish political, economic and civilisational” interests played out

(Komorowski, 2006). The party highlighted “the historical modernisation process” that took place in European states. This process ultimately led them to economic power and prosperity, fostering a flourishing democracy, the rule of law and civil society. CP's politicians were aware of the historically determined divisions in Europe. One the one hand, the region included EU states. On the other, it also comprised countries that were “spiritually and culturally” part of the continent but did not belong to the European Union. Until 2004, Western Europe was the dominant subregion, with its Romano-Germanic identity arising from cultural ties and shared historical experiences. The entry of Central and Eastern European states became the first step towards unifying Europe despite their “different historical experience”. “A Europe without divisions” was the ideal model, and CP advocated for the political and economic unification of the continent to avoid “another Berlin wall, “another Iron Curtain” (Schetyna, 2014).

CP's political thought related to regional policy prioritised the East-West axis, i.e., relations between Poland and Western Europe. Conversely, for Law and Justice, the focus was directed on North-South – cooperation within Central and Eastern Europe. “Europeanness” was associated with EU Member States, with CEE states expected to enter the European political mainstream and advance towards the civilisational standards of their Western partners. This was a way of “escaping to the West” and breaking “the circle of Eastern dependencies” (Platforma Obywatelska RP, 2007). Western Europe – the region's core – was meant to emanate systemic values and principles, the Westernisation of the rest of the continent.

The Central and Eastern European region was perceived as a geographically close group of countries that constituted an integral part of the continent. Europe was supposed to “breathe with two lungs – one in the west and one in the east”. This could be achieved by allowing the “Eastern Slavic Orthodox world” to embrace the legal and institutional legacy of the European Union. As a result, the European boundaries would extend “past the Dnieper, reaching the borders with China and Korea”. CP had no doubts that the complete unification of the continent according to the EU pattern would, on the one hand, strengthen Poland's international position, putting the country in a secure central location and allowing it to shed its long-time peripheral role. On the other hand, by gaining an extended reach, Russian resources, the EU's economic power and US military capabilities, the West would be in a stronger position to assert its international influence.

From CP's perspective, the EU made Central Europe a free and affluent region, not “a place of historic tragedies”. It was predicted that the civilisational affiliation of Eastern European nations would be critical for the future of Poland and entire Europe – hence the strong emphasis on promoting the EU policy of partnership. At the same time, CP was aware that democratisation, the rule of law and modernisation largely depended on Eastern states. These states faced the dilemma between aiming for modernity and democracy and embracing “a different civilisational model” (Platforma Obywatelska RP, 2007).

On the one hand, CP highlighted that Central and Eastern European states pursued common goals. The key objectives were to solidify their position in European politics and develop European cohesion policy, preserve NATO as a military alliance as opposed to “a political club”, as well as to increase the subregion's presence in international organisations to balance Western Europe's continued “overrepresentation” (Sikorski, 2012b; Sikorski, 2012a). On the other hand – despite being aware that the subregion had common interests – in 2014, Donald Tusk, Poland's Prime Minister at the time, argued that “Poles and Europeans from this part of Europe should not be led on to believe in the vision of an *intermarium*”, “a fictitious alliance of states”, claiming it was “a myth from the past”.

In his opinion, the idea of a common sub-regional policy promulgated by LaJ was a daydream because “a Poland stuck between Germany and Russia, between the East and West” was at risk of losing its independent existence. Only a pro-Western orientation towards the European Union and NATO could guarantee Polish sovereignty (Sikorski, 2012b). Poland’s only chance to advance towards modernisation and make a civilisational leap forward was through EU membership. This should be combined with close cooperation between Central and Eastern Europe and Western Europe – a vision that ran counter to the concept of a bloc of states positioning themselves, in a way, in opposition to the powerful EU Member States and Russia.

In other words, Europe could only achieve full integration through political and economic unity within the EU, and not by strengthening cooperation in Central and Eastern Europe. There were no plans to establish a confederacy in the subregion. For one important reason – such sub-regional integration would represent a competitive project, leading Europe, as a whole, to disintegrate, for European policy was shaped in the EU – the region’s core. The emphasis was placed on bilateral relations with subregional states or *ad hoc* alliances in the EU. Cooperation within subregional alliances, such as the Visegrad Group, was seen as an extension of EU policy, the underlying thinking being that a stronger Poland in the European Union would mean a stronger Visegrad Group (Sikorski, 2013).

The liberal programme rested on the premise that Poland could not influence policy in the *Intermarium* region without succumbing to illusions around the pace and quality of transformation in Poland’s neighbours to the east. Regarding eastern policy, CP branded itself as a continuator of the Mazowiecki-Skubiszewski line (the so-called small realism). It reflected the precept that Poland must strengthen its ties either with Russia or Germany or preferably with both since it is too weak to remain independent.

## 5. RUSSIA’S ROLE IN THE EUROPEAN SECURITY SYSTEM

Three premises guided CP’s views on Russia. The first was that Russia followed two conflicting lines of thinking about its future: on the one hand, there was a drive towards economic modernisation and democratisation – the willingness to “open up to the world”, albeit according to a non-Western cultural code; on the other, there was a nostalgia for “the superpower glory and the iron fist of authority”. From a European perspective, Russian democratisation would be the preferable course. The second premise argued in favour of abandoning the binary thinking that “what is bad for Russia must be good for Poland”. Instead, it would be more reasonable to assume that Poland could alleviate its fears of the Russian threat by bolstering its economic potential, strengthening its alliances and building a modern defence system. The third one posited that a conflict-less relationship with Russia would strengthen Poland’s position in Europe without necessarily entailing dependency on its eastern neighbour. A two-pronged approach was necessary: Poland should treat Russia with respect and seek friendly relations with it, all the while keeping the Polish *raison d’état* in mind and making sure that Russia fulfils its international obligations, observes human rights and complies with disarmament and energy agreements (Platforma Obywatelska, 2011; Sikorski, 2011a).

It is worth stressing that, unlike LaJ conservatives, CP’s politicians were oblivious to the Russian threat for a long time. They believed that it was possible to cooperate with Russia on partnership terms and disregard any historical and ideological baggage. While it was clear that Russia would seek to reclaim its superpower status, there was no way for it

to rebuild its empire. Liberals believed that Russia would permanently lose its former international role after the collapse of the USSR.

There was a conviction that Polish-Russian policy should be mediated by the European Union, the rationale being that the stronger Poland's position in the EU, the more regard Russians would have for Poland. An eastern policy guided by EU membership would help Poland be more effective by providing it with "attractive instruments" and reasonable influence in the East. By extension, Poland could become a leader in shaping European-Russian policy (Platforma Obywatelska RP, 2011; Tusk, 2005; Komorowski, 2006). Liberals were certain that the EU, as a whole, had a greater influence over Russia than any of its Member States on its own. Accordingly, CP's leader Donald Tusk proposed a reset policy towards Poland's eastern neighbour. He argued for abandoning the confrontational rhetoric of his predecessors and seeking to build a joint EU-US stance on Russia in security and energy matters.

CP's standpoint was that Poland's geopolitical location in the 21st century, coupled with its international anchoring in the EU and NATO, represented "a historic chance" to strengthen the ties between the entire West and Russia – a prospect that "not long ago could be threatening" for Poland. The liberal approach to Poland's eastern neighbour was reflected in the belief that Russia could embrace democracy and act as a stabilising force in the post-Soviet area while discarding the concept of "multipolar spheres of influence". When Donald Tusk visited Moscow in February 2008, he hoped to "turn over a new leaf" by showing that Poland had been undeservedly labelled "Russophobic".

Foreign policy was to rest on two fundamental objectives – to depart from the balance of power principle and to shun efforts to build a coalition against the most powerful state (the Russian Federation). The East served Poland as a tool to build its image in the EU and NATO arena as an important "Ambassador of the West in the East and of the East in the West" – a country that had risen above its Russophobia to become a reliable partner in international relations. Moreover, under CP-PPP Coalition Government, Prometheism gave way to positivism. This could be seen in CP's belief that Poland could not do more for its eastern neighbours than they themselves could do.

A consistent theme running through CP's communication, reiterated on numerous occasions by Radosław Sikorski, was that "Tusk's Government does not want a confrontation with Russia", nor does it want a new "Cold War". Nevertheless, during his US visit in 2008, Sikorski stressed that Poland could not afford to ignore a replay of the Georgian scenario in Ukraine. He made it clear that any further attempts by Russia to overstep boundaries should be considered a threat to European security and should meet with a NATO response. This stance, however, did not translate into political practice, as the CP-PPP Government did not support President Lech Kaczyński's policy of building a coalition between the Baltic States, Poland, Ukraine and Georgia ("Gazeta Wyborcza", 2008).

Although Polish-Russian relations had become slightly colder after Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014, the policy of improving relations with the eastern neighbour would be continued. CP's response to what happened in Georgia and later in Ukraine aligned with the soft liberal position of Western political elites. CP's political thinking had long operated on the assumption that it was Poland's obligation to recognise Russian interests. The party had been adhering to this mindset despite Russia revealing its true foreign policy goals on numerous occasions. Russia's actions were underplayed as a consequence of adopting the liberal version of the international order, enshrined in the "end of history" myth as a dictum for how to describe reality.

It is important to note that the eastern policy implemented by Donald Tusk's Government had been notably coordinated with German policy. CP's eastern policy concept, on the one hand, drew on the positive legacy of the Third Polish Republic (except for the time when LaJ was in power), but on the other, reflected a critical evaluation of LaJ's eastern policy. Putting Poland's policy towards Russia into a broad European context and promoting Poland into the role of an EU expert on eastern matters was a core element of the party's agenda. The prevailing liberal opinion was that Russia followed two conflicting lines of thinking about its future: on the one hand, there was a drive towards economic modernisation and democratisation – the willingness to “open up to the world”, albeit according to a non-Western cultural code; on the other a nostalgia for “the superpower glory and the iron fist of authority”. Among CP's politicians there was a consensus that Russian democratisation would be the preferable course from a European perspective (Sikorski, 2011a).

CP renounced the binary thinking that “what is bad for Russia must be good for Poland”. Instead, it would be more reasonable to assume that Poland could alleviate its fears of the Russian threat by bolstering its economic potential, strengthening its alliances and building a modern defence system. The party's prevailing view was that a conflict-less relationship with Russia would strengthen Poland's position in Europe without necessarily entailing dependency on its eastern neighbour. A two-pronged approach was necessary: Poland should treat Russia with respect and seek friendly relations with it, all the while keeping the Polish *raison d'état* in mind and making sure that Russia fulfils its international obligations, observes human rights and complies with disarmament and energy agreements (Sikorski, 2010a; Sikorski, 2010b). It is worth mentioning here that liberals considered remembrance policy (they avoided the term “historical policy” on purpose) in international relations to be of marginal importance. This attitude also informed Poland's relationship with Russia. The marriage of liberalism and positivism led to an attitude of indifference towards historical issues. CP's politicians were largely in favour of an academic approach to history that left little room for debating the meaning of past events. In this way, they hoped to minimise political disputes on historical subjects.

## 6. CONCLUSIONS

The above discussion of the European security concept as defined by liberal political thought has led us to four conclusions.

First, liberals attached profound significance to European integration while recognising that Europe would not be safe without American (NATO) guarantees. Accordingly, the Old Continent's security was to rest on two pillars: the European Union and NATO.

Second, by entering the European political mainstream, Poland would have a chance at bolstering its security. Liberals hoped to ensure this by forming a strategic alliance with Germany and by cooperating with France. A core element of Civic Platform's agenda was to align Poland's eastern policy with mainstream European (*vide* German) politics and, consequently, to discontinue efforts to form a coalition of Central and Eastern European states around a common energy policy geared towards reducing dependence on Russian resources.

Third, the Civic Platform believed that Central and Eastern Europe could achieve empowerment on the primary condition that CEE states enter mainstream Western European politics and align with the Western European value system. Any ideas involving “deals” outside the EU framework were considered attempts at disintegrating Europe.



Accordingly, the United Right's (Polish: Zjednoczona Prawica) theories that the empowerment of Poland's neighbours in CEE should be sought primarily through broad regional arrangements were dismissed as daydreaming. Liberals refused to subscribe to the idea that forming a bloc of states based on their shared history, cultural heritage, and economic interests would strengthen Poland's position in the EU and at the same time thwart Russia's imperial ambitions.

Fourth, between 2007 and 2010, CP saw the Russian Federation as an indispensable part of the European security system. The pulling of Russia to the West and establishing trade ties with the country, with liberals' tacit permission for Germany's break with European solidarity (the Nord Stream II project) and Russian violations of international law. The liberal agenda aimed at making Russia a predictable and cooperative state that would eventually embrace democracy. All hopes in this regard were definitively abandoned on 24 February 2022 after the Russian Federation attacked Ukraine.

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