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# Poland's support for Ukraine's aspirations to NATO membership

## Introduction

It has been in Poland's strategic interest since the 1990s to join Western integration and allied structures, including NATO. Almost since the very beginning of the debate on this issue, Ukraine has been positive about it. This happened despite the fact that the authorities in Kiev feared that in reaction to Poland's accession to NATO, Russia could try to rebalance this by rebuilding its influence in the post-Soviet zone, including putting pressure on Ukraine.<sup>1</sup> Poland reciprocated this support, becoming one of the strongest advocates of Ukraine's NATO membership. This was due to the converging interests of the two countries, as a sovereign Ukraine rooted in Western allied structures would significantly increase Poland's security.

The article analyses and evaluates Poland's attitude towards Ukraine's aspirations to NATO membership. It answers the question whether the authorities of sovereign Poland unequivocally supported the idea of Ukraine's NATO membership and whether they undertook measurable actions for its implementation. Since the 1990s, the Polish authorities have been in favour of NATO's 'open door' policy, including Ukraine's full membership in the organization. Ukraine's accession to NATO constitutes Poland's strategic interest, as a significant part of its eastern

<sup>1</sup> P. Żurawski vel Grajewski, *Polish-Ukrainian Relations 1991–2002*, p. 11, Fundacja Batorego, [https://www.batory.org.pl/ftp/program/forum/eu\\_ukraine/polish\\_ukrainian\\_relations.pdf](https://www.batory.org.pl/ftp/program/forum/eu_ukraine/polish_ukrainian_relations.pdf) [accessed: 18 January 2023].

border would be secured. Despite diplomatic efforts, the Polish authorities failed to convince NATO allies to accept Ukraine. The main reason was the fear of Russia's reaction, and the secondary reason was Ukraine's inadequate preparation for membership. After Russia's aggression against Ukraine in 2022, Poland has become strongly involved in helping Ukraine and maintains the support for its membership in NATO. The article uses the method of content analysis of text sources.

## Poland's political support for Ukraine's aspirations for NATO membership

In 1991, Poland and Ukraine joined the North Atlantic Cooperation Council (NACC), and in 1994 – the Partnership for Peace (PfP) programme, which gave the countries extensive opportunities for political and military cooperation. In 1997, the Charter on a Distinctive Partnership was signed, which established the NATO-Ukraine Commission (NUC). The Charter includes a provision on NATO's support for the creation of the Polish-Ukrainian peacekeeping battalion and on the promotion of defence cooperation between Ukraine and its neighbours.<sup>2</sup> After Poland's accession to NATO in March 1999, it sought to maintain the 'open door' policy in the Alliance and supported the Baltic states and Ukraine in their efforts to become members of the organization. This was due to the fact that Poland did not want to be a NATO frontline state, bordering on an area where there was no stabilized political and military situation. This was especially problematic in the context of the possibility of a resurgence of expansionist and imperialist tendencies in Russia.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, Poland tried to carry out its own adaptation to NATO efficiently enough to increase the possibility of the Alliance's members agreeing to further enlargements.<sup>4</sup>

Poland's attempt to shape a safe international environment in its surroundings and to build trust with non-NATO partners coincided with supporting democratic processes in its eastern neighbours, including Ukraine.<sup>5</sup> At the same time, Poland counteracted Russia, which tried to hinder the political transition of these countries and their tightening of relations with the West. Polish presidents Aleksander Kwaśniewski and Lech Wałęsa were involved in the Orange Revolution in Ukraine

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<sup>2</sup> *Charter on a Distinctive Partnership between the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and Ukraine*, 9 July 1997, [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official\\_texts\\_25457.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_25457.htm) [accessed: 10 January 2023].

<sup>3</sup> Z. Kuśmierk, *Rozszerzenie NATO – implikacje dla Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej*, [in:] *NATO a Europa Wschodnia. Rozszerzenie NATO na Wschód – ostatnie wyzwanie europejskie XX wieku*, eds. K.A. Wojtaszczyk, J.M. Niepsuj, Dom Wydawniczy Elipsa, Warszawa 1998, pp. 97–98.

<sup>4</sup> A. Krzeczunowicz, *Krok po kroku. Polska droga do NATO 1989–1999*, Znak, Kraków 1999, pp. 235–236.

<sup>5</sup> J. Kaczmarek, *NATO – Europa – Polska 2000*, ATLA2, Wrocław 2000, p. 224.

at the turn of 2005, which was a manifestation of pro-democracy and pro-Western aspirations of part of Ukrainian society, including its rapid integration into the European Union and NATO.<sup>6</sup> After Lech Kaczyński took over the presidency in 2005 and the Law and Justice party formed a coalition government, supporting Ukraine's aspirations for NATO membership became one of the main priorities of Poland's foreign and security policy.<sup>7</sup> The tightening military cooperation between Poland and Ukraine was opposed by Russia, which considered it anti-Russian.<sup>8</sup> Poland provided strong impulses for NATO and the EU to look more seriously at Ukraine as a potential candidate for membership in these organizations.<sup>9</sup> At the same time, Poland took steps to make Ukraine energy independent from Russia, including by pushing for the construction of the Odessa-Brody-Płock oil pipeline.<sup>10</sup>

During the NATO summit in Bucharest in April 2008, together with the United States, Poland pushed the concept of including Ukraine and Georgia in Membership Action Plans (MAPs), which was supposed to open the way to their quick inclusion in NATO.<sup>11</sup> This was opposed by Western European allies who did not want to worsen relations with Russia.<sup>12</sup> As part of the compromise, NATO only declared that these countries would be admitted to the Alliance in the future.<sup>13</sup> The promise and the announcement of a review of Ukraine's and Georgia's progress on the road to membership were the result of efforts by American and Polish diplomacy.<sup>14</sup> The Russian-Georgian war of August 2008 was intended to block Georgia's pro-Western aspirations and to warn Ukraine to review its policy towards NATO. During the war, President Kaczyński built a regional front of resistance against Russia, but this was not supported by the West.

<sup>6</sup> S. Kudelia, G. Kasianov, *Ukraine's Political Development after Independence*, [in:] *From "the Ukraine" to Ukraine: A Contemporary History, 1991–2021*, eds. M. Minakov, G. Kasianov, M. Rojansky, ibidem-Verlag, Stuttgart 2021, p. 25.

<sup>7</sup> R. Kupiecki, *Główne aspekty polityki bezpieczeństwa Polski*, „Rocznik Polskiej Polityki Zagranicznej” 2006, pp. 69–70.

<sup>8</sup> H. Gardner, *American Global Strategy and the "War on Terrorism"*, Routledge, New York 2016, p. 136.

<sup>9</sup> S.N. MacFarlane, *Russia, NATO enlargement and the strengthening of democracy in the European space*, [in:] *NATO–Russia Relations in the Twenty-First Century*, ed. A. Braun, Routledge, London 2008, p. 47.

<sup>10</sup> L.A.M. Bandeira, *The Second Cold War: Geopolitics and the Strategic Dimensions of the USA*, Springer, New York 2017, p. 51.

<sup>11</sup> T. Haesebrouck, S. Taghon, H. Van Coppenolle, *The War in Ukraine: March–April 2022*, “GIES Occasional Paper” 2022, vol. 1, p. 6.

<sup>12</sup> R. Zięba, *Polityka zagraniczna Polski w strefie euroatlantyckiej*, Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, Warszawa 2013, p. 59.

<sup>13</sup> *Bucharest Summit Declaration. Issued by the Heads of State and Government participating in the meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Bucharest on 3 April 2008*, NATO, 03 April 2008, [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official\\_texts\\_8443.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_8443.htm) [accessed: 10 January 2023].

<sup>14</sup> M. Madej, M. Terlikowski, *Polityka bezpieczeństwa Polski – wymiar polityczno-wojskowy*, „Rocznik Polskiej Polityki Zagranicznej” 2009, p. 49.

After the annexation of Crimea by Russia and the outbreak of war in the Donbas at the NATO summit in Newport in September 2014, the allies condemned the illegal aggression and called on Russia to withdraw its troops. The Polish delegation was in favour of far-reaching aid to Ukraine, including providing it with weapons. Since most Allies opposed this, the possible supply of weapons to Ukraine was left to the discretion of individual countries. NATO just decided to undertake 'additional efforts to support the reform and transformation of the security and defence sectors and promote greater interoperability between Ukraine's and NATO forces.'<sup>15</sup> In 2015, NATO countries – the USA, the UK, Canada, Poland, Denmark, Lithuania – and non-NATO member Sweden established the Multinational Joint Commission (MJC), under which have been providing reforms and training for the Ukrainian army and police. In 2016, the Ukraine Defence Reform Advisory Board was established to define the main directions of the defence sector reform in Ukraine, in which Poland has been participating from the very beginning. At the NATO Summit in Warsaw in July 2016, the Comprehensive Assistance Package (CAP) was adopted, under which NATO supports the transformation of Ukraine's security and defence sector, including through consulting and a range of capacity-building programmes and initiatives.<sup>16</sup> The CAP was established to support Ukraine in achieving the strategic goal of NATO membership, which was included in Ukraine's numerous internal documents, including the special legislation (2017), the amendment to the Constitution (2019), and the Security Strategy (2020).<sup>17</sup> In July 2020 in Lublin, Poland, Lithuania, and Ukraine created the Lublin Triangle initiative which aims to strengthen cooperation between these historical members of the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth and support Ukraine's accession efforts to the EU and NATO.<sup>18</sup> As part of the initiative, Poland once again supported the NATO Membership Action Plan for Ukraine,<sup>19</sup> which was in line with the

<sup>15</sup> *Wales Summit Declaration. Issued by the Heads of State and Government participating in the meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Wales*, NATO, 05 September 2014, [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official\\_texts\\_112964.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_112964.htm) [accessed: 10 January 2023].

<sup>16</sup> *Warsaw Summit Communiqué. Issued by the Heads of State and Government participating in the meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Warsaw 8–9 July 2016*, NATO, 09 July 2016, [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official\\_texts\\_133169.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_133169.htm) [accessed: 10 January 2023].

<sup>17</sup> M. Minakov, M. Rojansky, *Democracy in Ukraine*, [in:] *From "the Ukraine" to Ukraine...*, *op. cit.*, p. 327.

<sup>18</sup> C. Obregón, *Conflict and Resolution: Includes Comments on the Russia-Ukraine War*, University Editions, Montevideo 2022, p. 103.

<sup>19</sup> *Joint Declaration of Foreign Ministers of the Republic of Poland, the Republic of Lithuania and Ukraine on establishing Lublin Triangle*, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, Lublin, 28 July 2020, <https://mfa.gov.ua/en/news/joint-declaration-foreign-ministers-republic-poland-republic-lithuania-and-ukraine-establishing-lublin-triangle> [accessed: 12 January 2023].

provisions of the 2020 National Security Strategy of Poland.<sup>20</sup> Although Ukraine was not included in the MAP, Poland's support contributed to further deepening of the partnership with Ukraine in 2020, when it received a status of an Enhanced Opportunities Partner. There were even proposals for the United States to invite Ukraine and Georgia to contribute to the Forward Presence battle group in Poland. This was to be facilitated by Poland's unwavering support for the inclusion of these countries in NATO. Such a decision would constitute a precedent of a non-NATO member country participating in the Forward Presence Mission.<sup>21</sup>

The Russian aggression against Ukraine in February 2022 was strongly condemned by NATO. Poland has provided Ukraine with huge support, accepting millions of refugees, becoming the main hub for the shipment of Western weapons, and the second largest donor of armaments to the Ukrainian army, after the USA. In the first months of the war, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy did not raise the issue of NATO membership, focusing on soliciting supplies of military equipment by NATO countries. This changed at the end of September, when he signed a formal bid for Ukraine's accelerated NATO membership. He justified the motion with the blood shed by the Ukrainians in defence not only of their country, but also of the Alliance's security. This application was supported in a joint statement by the presidents of several NATO countries from the CEE region, including Poland.<sup>22</sup> The Western allies were much more sceptical about this, despite reaffirming in the June 2022 NATO Strategic Concept the Alliance's 'open door' policy and the 2008 Bucharest Declaration.<sup>23</sup>

The war in Ukraine is unresolved and if negotiations between the parties to the conflict begin, many solutions are possible and will depend on the situation on the front. One of them is Ukraine's quick accession to NATO, which Poland favours the most. Another is a transitional period in which Ukraine could receive bilateral security guarantees from the US and other NATO countries, including Poland. Moreover, Ukraine would abandon its NATO membership aspirations in exchange for alternative security guarantees, such as a regional alliance with US involvement.

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<sup>20</sup> *Strategia Bezpieczeństwa Narodowego Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej 2020*, Warszawa 2020, BBN, p. 25, [https://www.bbn.gov.pl/ftp/dokumenty/Strategia\\_Bezpieczenstwa\\_Narodowego\\_RP\\_2020.pdf](https://www.bbn.gov.pl/ftp/dokumenty/Strategia_Bezpieczenstwa_Narodowego_RP_2020.pdf) [accessed: 12 January 2023].

<sup>21</sup> R. Zabakhidze, *United States partnerships with Georgia and Ukraine: Prospects for advancing military cooperation*, Middle East Institute, Washington D.C. 2021, pp. 14–15.

<sup>22</sup> The statement was signed by the presidents of the Czech Republic, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, North Macedonia, Montenegro, Poland, Romania and Slovakia: *Joint statement of Presidents of Central and Eastern Europe*, President of the Republic of Poland, 2 October 2022, <https://www.president.pl/news/joint-statement-of-presidents-of-central-and-eastern-europe,59400> [accessed: 12 January 2023].

<sup>23</sup> *NATO 2022 Strategic Concept*, Madrid, 29 June 2022, <https://www.nato.int/strategic-concept/> [accessed: 10.01.2023].

In addition, Ukraine could get a real path of integration with the European Union, which focuses on economic rather than military issues, so accepting this would be more possible for Russia and Western European powers.<sup>24</sup> Poland also strongly supports Ukraine's aspirations to EU membership.<sup>25</sup> However, regardless of the solution adopted, it is necessary to provide Ukraine with real security guarantees. Without this, it will be impossible to ensure the security of the region and start the process of rebuilding Ukraine.

## Polish-Ukrainian military cooperation to bring Ukraine closer to NATO

As part of tightening cooperation with Ukraine, Poland undertook a number of activities in the military area, which brought its eastern partner closer to NATO membership. First of all, these activities concerned the formation of joint military units and operational cooperation within peacekeeping and stabilization missions.<sup>26</sup> In addition, Ukraine has participated in a number of military exercises with NATO armed forces, including the Polish army, like Steadfast Jazz, Sea Breeze, Rapid Trident, Maple Arch, and Three Swords.

In the years 1995–1998, the Polish-Ukrainian Peace Force Battalion (POLUKRBAT) was formed, with headquarters in Przemyśl. The battalion could be used in missions conducted under the auspices of the United Nations or UN-approved missions under the auspices of other international organizations, including NATO and the EU, in the field of preventing international and internal conflicts, providing humanitarian assistance to the civilian population in the conflict areas, supporting the countries affected by conflicts, and counteracting the escalation of threats in Europe and in the world.<sup>27</sup> The battalion consisted of 744 soldiers, including 378 from the Polish 4<sup>th</sup> mechanized battalion of the 14<sup>th</sup> Armoured Brigade from Przemyśl, and 366 from the Ukrainian 310<sup>th</sup> mechanized regiment from Yavoriv. The battalion was to be able to take up an action within 30 days after a request for its use by an international organization. The creation of the battalion

<sup>24</sup> R. Youngs, *Ukraine's EU Membership and the Geostrategy of Democratic Self-Preservation*, Carnegie Europe, 01 April 2022, <https://carnegieeurope.eu/2022/04/01/ukraine-s-cu-membership-and-geostrategy-of-democratic-self-preservation-pub-86771> [accessed: 18 January 2023].

<sup>25</sup> M. Tampubolon, *Russia's Invasion of Ukraine and its Impact on Global Geopolitics*, "European Scientific Journal" 2022, vol. 18, no. 20, p. 55–56, <https://doi.org/10.19044/esj.2022.v18n20p48>.

<sup>26</sup> A. Szeptycki, *Nowa odłona polskiego mesjanizmu na Wschodzie?*, [in:] *Polityka zagraniczna Polski po wstąpieniu do NATO i do Unii Europejskiej. Problemy tożsamości i adaptacji*, ed. S. Bieleń, Difin, Warszawa 2010, p. 296.

<sup>27</sup> A. Drzewicki, *Stosunki z Ukrainą w sferze bezpieczeństwa: polski punkt widzenia*, „Bezpieczeństwo Narodowe” 2011, vol. 17, no. 1, p. 160.

was supported by NATO countries – the USA, the United Kingdom, Canada, and France.<sup>28</sup> After more than a decade of service, the Battalion was disbanded in 2010, as ambitions arose to create a larger joint military unit.

As for operational cooperation in foreign military missions, Ukraine deployed its armed forces in Kosovo alongside Polish troops. From July 2000, POLUKRBAT was deployed as part of NATO-led Kosovo Force (KFOR) Multi-National Task Force (East), with 545 Polish and 267 Ukrainian soldiers.<sup>29</sup> POLUKRBAT performed tasks in the southern part of Kosovo, on the border with Macedonia. In Iraq, Ukrainian troops were deployed in the central-south zone in 2003 as part of the Multinational Division Central-South (MND C-S) under Polish command. A contingent of 1,800 soldiers sent by Ukraine allowed the formation of a brigade that took responsibility for the security of the Wasit province.<sup>30</sup> After losing 18 soldiers and due to social expectations, in the spring of 2005, the Ukrainians began withdrawing the contingent from Iraq. On a much smaller scale, the Ukrainians supported the Poles in maintaining security in the Ghazni province in Afghanistan, where they had sent several soldiers to each shift. In general, Ukraine's involvement in the NATO mission in Afghanistan was small, ranging from a few to 28 soldiers.<sup>31</sup> However, the Ukrainians turned out to be very helpful in the air transport of Polish soldiers to Afghanistan. The experience gained by the Ukrainian army during the military missions carried out together with the Poles is invaluable in the context of learning procedures and increasing interoperability with NATO troops.

In the years 2009–2016, the Lithuanian-Polish-Ukrainian Brigade (LITPOLUKRBRIG) was formed, with headquarters in Lublin. LITPOLUKRBRIG consists of manoeuvre battalions – the Lithuanian Army Land Forces Grand Duchess Birutė Uhlan Battalion (Lithuania), 3<sup>rd</sup> Mechanized Battalion of the 19<sup>th</sup> Mechanized Brigade (Poland), 1<sup>st</sup> Air Assault Battalion of the 80<sup>th</sup> Airborne Brigade (Ukraine), and a number of battle support and logistic units.<sup>32</sup> The battalion's 4,000 soldiers are stationed with their home units on a day-to-day basis. The brigade is not formally a NATO unit, but it applies all the NATO procedures and aims to be interoperable

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<sup>28</sup> P. Żurawski vel Grajewski, *op. cit.*, p. 13–14.

<sup>29</sup> *Polish-Ukrainian Peace Force Battalion*, Ministry of National Defence of the Republic of Poland, <https://web.archive.org/web/20070927222951/http://www.wp.mil.pl/strona.php?lang=2&cidstrona=129> [accessed: 18 January 2023].

<sup>30</sup> A. Tyszkiewicz, *Doświadczenia i wnioski z przygotowania i udziału pierwszej zmiany dywizji międzynarodowej w misji stabilizacyjnej w Iraku*, „Przegląd Wojsk Lądowych” 2004, no. 8 [supplement], p. 7.

<sup>31</sup> *International Security Assistance Force. Troop Contributing Nations*, NATO, 15 January 2014, [https://www.nato.int/isaf/placemats\\_archive/2014-01-15-ISAF-Placemat.pdf](https://www.nato.int/isaf/placemats_archive/2014-01-15-ISAF-Placemat.pdf) [accessed: 12 January 2023].

<sup>32</sup> *LITPOLUKRBRIG. History*, LITPOLUKRBRIG, <https://litpolukrbrig.wp.mil.pl/en/pages/history-2019-08-21-3/> [accessed: 18 January 2023].

with Alliance operations.<sup>33</sup> The brigade plays an important role in implementing NATO standards in Ukraine's Armed Forces, and its main activities include 'training Ukrainian officers and military units in these standards, planning and conducting operational tasks, and maintaining operational readiness.'<sup>34</sup> The Brigade has the potential to support Ukrainians' efforts to join NATO.<sup>35</sup> In the future, it could even be used as a contributor to the NATO Response Force. Joint Polish-Ukrainian units have brought Ukraine significantly closer to NATO.<sup>36</sup>

After the outbreak of the war in the Donbas, Poland became involved in the next stage of training Ukrainian soldiers. Poland is one of the few countries that have agreed to join the Joint Multinational Training Group – Ukraine (JMTG-U), established in 2015 by the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, and Ukraine. The goals of JMTG-U include training, equipping, developing training centre capacity, and doctrinal assistance to the Ukrainian Armed Forces. International forces advise, train, and support the Ukrainian army in developing operational capabilities in accordance with NATO standards. Initially, the training was held at the battalion level, and since 2019, also at the brigade level. Three sites, in Khmelnytskyi, Kamianets-Podilskyi, and Yavoriv, have been set for the training of Ukrainian soldiers. Since 2019, Polish and Lithuanian officers and non-commissioned officers have been participating in training within LITPOLUKRBRIG. Poles trained the Ukrainians at the Combat Training Centre – Yavoriv, acting as advisers in the headquarters of Ukrainian brigades and battalions, including providing advice on the use of NATO procedures in the decision-making process.<sup>37</sup> Polish generals have been advisors to the Ukrainian commanders at the highest levels, for example Lt. Gen. Bogusław Samol.

After the outbreak of a full-scale war in Ukraine, one of the training objectives has been to teach the Ukrainians how to use military equipment provided by NATO countries, including the USA and Poland. For this purpose, in July 2022, the Americans established the Security Assistance Group – Ukraine (SAG-U) in Wiesbaden,

<sup>33</sup> O. Gain, *Lithuanian-Polish-Ukrainian Brigade: We Are United for Peace*, Defence Blog, 13 February 2017, <https://defence-blog.com/litpolukrbrig-we-are-united-for-peace/> [accessed: 18 January 2023].

<sup>34</sup> *Meeting of Foreign Ministers of Poland, Lithuania and Ukraine*, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Poland, 28 July 2020, <https://www.gov.pl/web/diplomacy/meeting-of-foreign-ministers-of-poland-lithuania-and-ukraine> [accessed: 12 January 2023].

<sup>35</sup> M. Fryc, *The Lithuanian-Polish-Ukrainian Brigade's development potential in the context of regional security*, "Scientific Journal of the Military University of Land Forces" 2020, vol. 52, no. 1, pp. 6–7, <https://doi.org/10.5604/01.3001.0014.0247>.

<sup>36</sup> M. Żyła, *Polish-Ukrainian Military Units in the Years 1991–2018*, "Security and Defence Quarterly" 2018, vol. 22, no. 5, p. 150, <https://doi.org/10.5604/01.3001.0012.6501>.

<sup>37</sup> O. Slobodianiuk, *Wielonarodowa Grupa Szkoleniowa na Ukrainie*, Polska Zbrojna, 17 September 2019, <https://polska-zbrojna.pl/home/articleshow/29249?t=Wielonarodowa-Grupa-Szkoleniowa-na-Ukrainie> [accessed: 18 June 2023].



Germany, and nominated Maj. Gen. Jarosław Gromadziński as its deputy commander. By January 2023, about 500 Ukrainian soldiers were being trained each month. Poland also plays a leading role in the European Union Military Assistance Mission in support of Ukraine (EUMAM), established in October 2022. The mission assumes the coordination of the training of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, including the Territorial Defence Forces, provided by the European Union countries. As part of the EUMAM, the multinational Combined Arms Training Command (CAT-C) was established in Poland under the command of Maj. Gen. Piotr Trytek. As part of the mission, at least 15 thousand of Ukrainian soldiers are to be trained in EU countries, mainly in Poland. The potential future accession of Ukraine to NATO will depend on the ability of the Ukrainian army to defend the state against Russian aggression, in which Poland strongly supports its neighbour.

## Conclusions

Due to the strategic importance of a sovereign Ukraine and its integration with Western allied structures, Poland consistently strongly supports its aspirations to join NATO. Poland was involved in the democratic processes in Ukraine, which went hand in hand with the adoption of a pro-Western direction in its foreign and security policy. Poland also tried to counteract Russia's actions limiting Ukraine's independence in the international arena and torpedoing its pro-Western aspirations. Poland opted for Ukraine's inclusion in the MAP, but was unable, even together with the United States, to build a coalition that would push this idea through. Poland also undertook military activities to bring Ukraine closer to NATO, mainly through the creation of joint military units and operational cooperation in military missions. In recent years, Ukraine's foreign and security policy has been unequivocally pro-Western, which is conducive to Poland's support for Ukraine's aspirations for NATO membership. The Russian aggression against Ukraine in 2022 did not change Poland's attitude.

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### Poland's support for Ukraine's aspirations to NATO membership

#### Abstract

The aim of the article is to analyse and evaluate Poland's attitude towards Ukraine's aspirations to NATO membership. The main research problem is the question whether the authorities of sovereign Poland unambiguously supported the idea of Ukraine's membership in NATO and whether they took measurable actions to implement it. The Polish authorities, regardless of political provenance, have invariably been in favour of NATO's 'open door' policy since the end of the Cold War. They have supported the idea of including the post-Soviet republics, including Ukraine, in the Alliance. Ukraine's entry into

NATO is in Poland's strategic interest, as it would almost cease to play the role of the Alliance's flank state, which would significantly increase its security. The Polish authorities failed to convince NATO allies, mainly Western European countries, to include Ukraine in NATO, which was due to Russia's strong opposition. However, new circumstances appeared with the Russian aggression against Ukraine in 2022. During the research, the method of content analysis of text sources was used.

Keywords: Ukraine, NATO membership, Poland, NATO 'open door' policy, war in Ukraine