

The North Eastern Question - The Poles

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The N.E. Question is about the geopolitical condition of Poland, sandwiched between Russia, Prussia and Austria in the late 18th century, divided from 1795 to 1918 between these empires, with the lion's share going to the Tsardom of Russia, again sandwiched 1919 to 1939, and more so when transferred westwards as a result of the WW II. Poland lost large territories around Lviv (Lvov, Lemberg) and was compensated to the west with historic German lands, namely East Prussia, Dantzig (Gdansk), Pommerania, Silesia. Yet, after the re-unification of Germany (1990) Poland feels again uneasy; to the west a strengthening Germany, to the east Russia, Belarus and a Russian-friendly initially, mainly Orthodox, Ukraine. Traditionally pro-polish France and an enlightened Germany under Helmut Kohl endeavored to accommodate history grown, justified concerns of Warsaw. They set up the Triangle of Weimar (1991), sort of unspoken guarantee of Poland's security and territorial integrity, in the way of its NATO and EU accession. This was never enough. Polish Diaspora worked for anchoring Poland to the US under the guidance of Zbigniew Brzezinski, sidelining both Paris and Berlin.

The prospect of deepening ties among the Franco-German tandem and the Russian Federation was a constant nightmare for Polish people. Energy links, the backbone of co operation between Russia and geographical western Europe, became an anathema to the national minded circles in Warsaw. They revisited the "Intermarium" of the inter war era, a loose, swallow geo political project of their historic leader marshal Pilsudski, in their angst to create geopolitical breathing space between weimar/nazi Germany and Soviet stalinist Russia. Thus, they devised, not to the enthusiasm of Brussels EU, the so called Three Seas Initiative (2015), encompassing all the formerly communist Eastern European countries -in the meantime members of NATO and the EU- plus the legally neutral Austria. In the wake of this, they neglected the Weimar Triangle and became receptive to the idea that Poland is bound to become the new leading EU country. They relied excessively on Washington to the point that former and current Foreign Minister Radek Sikorski celebrated the destruction of the sea bottom gas pipeline Nord Stream I and II, September 2022.

But Russia, after 2014 and even after its wholesale invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, unsurprisingly has so far exhibited resilience and endurance, while Ukraine, deprived of geopolitical compass, its expanses having being a millenary apple of discord between Poland/Lithuania and the Tsardom, is being hard pounded.

Now, a new realism seems to be dawning in Warsaw, notably after the pro-European political forces under Prime Minister Donald Tusk regained power; the

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sleeping beauty of Weimar triangle was called back to life. The three countries met at Foreign Minister s level in Paris, a month ago. The summit of Berlin involving Macron-Scholz-Tusk (15.03.2024) after prolonged indifference by Warsaw, signifies a return to European political and geopolitical pragmatism.

Admittedly, even without re-election of Donald Trump in November 2024, prudence requires a better calibrated policy of Poland between its European allies, partners and neighbors on the one hand and the Anglo-saxon allies on the other.

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