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Chapter 9

Threat Perceptions of Poland and Türkiye - Convergences and Divergences

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Abstract

This chapter explores how Poland and Türkiye assess the main challenges from their respective neighborhoods amid growing geopolitical instability. Poland consistently views Russia as a major concern, with the war against Ukraine, which began on February 24, 2022, solidifying its threat perception. This conflict has shaped Poland's strategic calculations, driving significant changes in its national policies, such as increased defense spending, and influencing its priorities in organizations like NATO, with a focus on deterrence and defense. Türkiye, in contrast, maintains a more balanced approach toward Russia, described as "cooperative rivalry" or "conflictual connivance." Positioned between the Eastern/Black Sea and Southern neighborhoods, Türkiye faces a broader set of challenges. It views its Southern neighborhood as a source of instability and considers terrorism a significant threat. Türkiye's overarching goal is to achieve strategic autonomy, which influences its domestic policies and positions in international forums. This is reflected in its stance on Sweden and Finland's potential NATO membership and its focus on NATO's core tasks.

This chapter highlights the similarities and differences in how Poland and Türkiye navigate current geopolitical instabilities based on their threat perceptions.

Keywords Poland · Türkiye · Russia · threat perception · Sevres syndrome · partitions

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Introduction

In the realm of international relations, the perception of threats by states is a subject of profound scholarly inquiry.[1] This chapter seeks to delve into threat perception of Poland and Türkiye, highlighting the interplay of historical legacies, regional geopolitics, and contemporary challenges that shape their respective security narratives.

Both Poland and Türkiye confront a complex array of security concerns, ranging from traditional geopolitical threats to "existential anxieties".[2] The ongoing conflict between Russia and Ukraine demonstrates the fragility of regional stability, prompting both nations to reassess their strategic postures and foreign policies in response to evolving security dynamics. However, beyond the immediate exigencies of current events, deeper historical undercurrents inform the way in which Poland and Türkiye conceptualize and respond to external challenges. Rooted in centuries of historical experience, the "existential fears" of these nations are shaped by collective memories and national traumas, which continue to shape the two countries threat percpetions.

It is essential to recognize the differences in threat perception that exist between Poland and Türkiye. While both nations may share commonalities in their mental maps of geopolitical risks, their distinct geopolitical contexts and strategic imperatives engender divergent approaches to foreign policy and national security. For Poland, strategic alliances within the European Union and NATO play a central role in shaping its security calculus, while Türkiye's geopolitical positioning as a bridge between Europe and the Middle East introduces unique challenges and opportunities in its pursuit of national interests.

By undertaking an analysis of these factors, this chapter aims to shed light on the complex interplay of historical, cultural, and strategic influences that underpin threat perception in Poland and Türkiye. By examining commonalities and contrasting developments, this chapter seeks to explores the evolving security landscape in these nations and its implications for regional stability and international cooperation.

This chapter is structured into three parts. Firstly, it analyzes the impact of historical legacies on the self-identity of the two countries, with a particular focus on Sèvres syndrome. Secondly, it delves into the respective policies of the two countries vis-à-vis Russia, exploring the approaches each nation adopts in response to an increasingly complex geopolitical landscape. Lastly, the third part is dedicated to juxtaposing Türkiye's multifaceted regional identity with Poland's position within Central and Eastern Europe.

Sèvres syndrome(s) and threat perceptions of Türkiye and Poland

The concept of the Sèvres Syndrome holds significant importance in understanding Türkiye's historical and contemporary perceptions of external threats. Originating from the aftermath of World War I and the Treaty of Sèvres, which aimed to dismantle the Ottoman Empire and partition Anatolia among foreign powers[3], this syndrome embodies Türkiye's deep-seated suspicions of external intervention

[1] Raymond Cohen, "Threat Perception in International Crisis," *Political Science Quarterly* 1, 93 (1978): 93-107; Janice G. Stein, "Threat Perception in International Relations," in: Leonie Huddy, David O. Sears, Jack S. Levy (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Political Psychology*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 364-394; David. L. Rousseau, Rocio Garcia-Retamero, "Identity, Power, and Threat Perception: A Cross-National Experimental Study," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 5, 51 (2017): 744–771.

[2] On "existential anxieties" of Turkey within the ontological security paradigm see Ali Bilgic, Jordan Pilcher, "Desires, Fantasies and Hierarchies: Postcolonial Status Anxiety through Ontological Security," *Alternatives* 1 (48) (2023): 3-19.

[3] Zenonas Tziarras writes that „[t]he signing of the Sèvres Treaty was a devastating development for the Ottoman Empire as it left it 'only a rump state in northern Asia Minor with Istanbul as its capital.' Furthermore, it provided for an Armenian state in the east, French mandates over Syria and Lebanon, British mandates over Palestine, Transjordan

and efforts to undermine its territorial integrity and sovereignty. While its roots lie in historical events, the Sévres Syndrome continues to exert a profound influence on Turkish foreign policy and national consciousness.[4]

At its core, the Sèvres Syndrome encapsulates a pervasive "culture of insecurity" within Turkish society, wherein the specter of past betrayals and territorial losses looms large in the collective memory. This enduring sense of vulnerability shapes Türkiye's approach to contemporary regional and international affairs, informing its strategic outlook and diplomatic engagements. Dorothée Schmid notes that the historical effect of the treaty survives in the form of a syndrome, which explains a vision of a nation under siege struggling for survival, and waging an "interminable war".[5] Zenonas Tziarras, citing other athors writes that

> *Despite the fact that the Treaty of Sèvres was never enforced it severely scarred the Turkish nation. As Mümtaz Soysal notes, the treaty's map of the region 'remained in the schoolbooks as a symbol of hostile intentions on the last piece of land left to the Turks at the end of their historic adventure from the steppes of Central Asia to the centre of Europe.' When stirred, this Turkish collective memory brings back feelings of 'contraction, repulsion, expulsion, defeat, dismemberment, and disintegration'; feelings that have 'produced an unhealthy mind-set, obsessive and paranoid, among the governing elite.' It is thus no surprise that this 'obsessive and paranoid' mind-set has had a serious impact on TFP since the establishment of the Turkish Republic. In Malik Mufti's summary, TFP under the influence of the Sèvres Syndrome (or the Sèvres Complex) is characterised, by a conviction that the external world is essentially hostile and threatening; an anxiety about the ability of external enemies to infiltrate the body politic by exploiting internal divisions, leading to a preoccupation with national unity and homogeneity; a strong bias in favour of the geopolitical status quo; and a powerful aversion to foreign entanglements.*[6]

Hence, the Sèvres Syndrome serves as a lens through which Turkish policymakers interpret and respond to perceived threats from foreign powers. Whether in moments of heightened tension with Western allies or amidst regional conflicts, references to the Sèvres Syndrome often feature prominently in Turkish political discourse, underscoring the enduring relevance of historical traumas in shaping national identity and security perceptions. This unique psychological complex, a complex of continuous threat and mistrust towards the external world, this syndrome of danger, almost siege-like, continues to significantly shape Ankara's foreign policy.

The perception of foreign interference in Türkiye's internal affairs, which intensifies after the failed coup attempt of July 15, 2016, indeed ties closely to "Sèvres Syndrome." After the botched coup attempt, this sentiment intensified as many leading Turkish actors, both within the government and the opposition, accused the United States of sheltering and even supporting Fethullah Gülen and his movement, which was held responsible for orchestrating the coup. This belief reinforced fears of foreign intervention and betrayal, with the Sèvres Syndrome shaping public perceptions of external

and Iraq (including Mosul); an Italian sphere of influence in southwestern Asia Minor, a promise for Kurdish autonomy and the right to appeal to the League of Nations for Kurdish independence." Zenonas Tziarras, *Turkish Foreign Policy. The Lausanne Syndrome in the Eastern Mediterranean and Middle East*, (Cham: Springer, 2022), 20-21.

[4] Fatma Müge Göçek, *The Transformation of Turkey. Redefining State and Society from the Ottoman Empire to the Modern Era*, (London: Tauris Academic Studie, 2012), 98-184; Buğra Sarı, "Culture of Insecurity and Production of Foreign Policy Crises: Turkey's Sèvres Syndrome and Syrian Support for the PKK during the 1998 October Crisis," *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies* 1, 24 (2022): 138-157;

[5] Dorothée Schmid, "Turquie: le syndrome de Sèvres, ou la guerre qui n'en finit pas," *Politique étrangère* 1, (2014): 199-213.

[6] Tziarras, *Turkish Foreign Policy. The Lausanne Syndrome in the Eastern Mediterranean and Middle East*, 21.

powers, particularly Western allies. The strain in US-Türkiye' relations post-coup, especially regarding Washington's refusal to extradite Gülen, further solidified this narrative of external threats to Türkiye's sovereignty. Likewise, in Syria the activites of Kurdish Democratic Union Party (PYD)—an affiliate of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), recognized as a terrorist organization by the United States, the European Union, and Türkiye, and the support extended to the organization by the US also elicited "Sèvres Syndrome" and stirred concerns in the Turkish elites and society at large, that foreign interference may lead to the establishment of a hostile political entity on Türkiye's southern border.[7]

Indeed, the resurfacing of the Sèvres Syndrome during periods of diplomatic strain highlights its enduring significance as a touchstone for understanding Türkiye's geopolitical mindset. By acknowledging the historical backdrop against which this syndrome emerges, one can gain deeper insights into the complexities of Turkish foreign policy decision-making and the underlying motivations driving Ankara's interactions on the global stage.

This also fosters a strong belief that only an independent, autonomous Türkiye can play a significant role in world affairs. This can be achieved through a policy of equidistance from international partners, whether from the Western bloc or the emerging 'rest'. The statement made by President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in an interview with PBS New Hour in 2023[8], with the symptomatic snippet "I trust Russia as much as the West" underscores Türkiye's perception of itself as an independent and sovereign actor on the global stage. President Erdoğan's assertion that Türkiye trusts Russia to the same extent as it trusts the West reflects Ankara's strategic calculus, wherein the pursuit of national interests necessitates a balanced approach to relations with major powers.

This reflects a broader reorientation in its foreign policy calculus, characterized by a desire to diversify its diplomatic partnerships and reduce its dependence on any single actor or alliance. In this context, Ankara's pragmatic approach to relations with both Western powers and Russia underscores its commitment to advancing its national interests without succumbing to external pressure or influence. Such an approach also prompts Türkiye to actively seek partnerships with countries from the Global South, broadening its diplomatic engagements and forging alliances beyond traditional Western-centric/regional-centric frameworks.[9] The structural changes occurring in global politics and economy – the shifting of the center of gravity towards Asia at the expense of Europe, and more broadly the West – also necessitate a shift in the thinking of Turkish elites about the priorities of their country's foreign policy. This can be seen as Türkiye's strategy of positioning itself in response to systemic transformations, primarily the decline of the West.

Consequently, central to Türkiye's foreign policy paradigm is the concept of "strategic autonomy," a notion increasingly resonant in the discourse surrounding international relations.[10] While historically associated with the European Union's aspirations for geopolitical independence, the concept of strategic autonomy finds a parallel application in Türkiye's policies and strategic outlook. In essence, autonomy serves as a guiding principle for Ankara's engagement with the international community, underpinning its efforts to assert its sovereignty and safeguard its national interests. For Türkiye, strategic autonomy represents more than just a diplomatic strategy; it embodies a fundamental imperative for safeguarding its security and preserving its independence in an increasingly complex and

[7] Jana Jabbour, *Turkey in Syria after a U.S. withdrawal: A poisoned chalice*, GMF Insights, 12 March 2019, https://www.gmfus.org/news/turkey-syria-after-us-withdrawal-poisoned-chalice.

[8] *Turkey's Erdogan says he trusts Russia as much as the West*, PBS, 18 September 2023, https://www.pbs.org/video/one-on-one-1695062192/.

[9] Ariel González Levaggi, Federico Donelli, "Turkey's Changing Engagement With the Global South," *International Affairs* 4, 97 (2021): 1105–1124.

[10] Mustafa Kutlay, Ziya Öniş, "Turkish Foreign Policy in a Post-Western Order: Strategic Autonomy or New Forms of Dependence?," *International Affairs* 4, 97 (2001): 1085–1104; Hakan Yavuz, "The Motives Behind the AKP's Foreign Policy: NeoOttomanism and Strategic Autonomy," *Turkish Studies* 5, 23 (2002): 659-680.

volatile geopolitical environment, in the face of the transformations that the global order is currently undergoing. By asserting its autonomy, Türkiye seeks to carve out a space for itself as a regional power capable of pursuing its own agenda and navigating the shifting currents of global politics.

Poland, akin to Türkiye, maintains a profound sensitivity towards its sovereignty, a sentiment which could be referred to as "Polish Sèvres Syndrome" as aptly highlighted by Robert Rokicki in his article for Hürriyet.[11] This sensitivity is deeply rooted in Poland's tumultuous historical experiences, which have left an indelible mark on the nation's collective psyche and national consciousness. The traumatic partitions of the late 18th century stand as a seminal moment in Poland's history, marking a period of subjugation as the nation was forcibly divided among neighboring powers. Following the decline of the First Republic, there ensued a period of statelessness lasting for one hundred and twenty-three years, from 1795 to 1918. This tragic chapter resulted in the erosion of Poland's territorial integrity, leaving a lasting scar on the Polish collective memory. This persistent focus on past grievances, including lost battles, massacres, partitions, and martyrdom, constitutes what Janusz Tazbir identifies as "Polish national neurosis."[12] This mindset and inclination to dwell on historical wounds and injustices serve to perpetuate a collective sense of victimhood and a fixation on past traumas.

Additionally, the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact of 1939 highlights Poland's vulnerability to external threats. This secret deal between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union – the *de facto* "fourth partition" - led to the simultaneous invasion and occupation of Poland, throwing the country into World War II and causing immense suffering for its people. This event emphasizes the importance of protecting Poland's sovereignty and security against outside interference. Hence, the impact of World War II on Poland was profound, leaving lasting scars on the nation's collective memory and reinforcing the importance of protecting its sovereignty.

In the aftermath of the war, Poland came under the sway of the Soviet Union during the Cold War. This alignment with the Soviets brought about various challenges and limitations for Poland. The introduction of communist rule and the establishment of a satellite state model enforced ideological conformity and political subservience. The threat of Soviet intervention was ever-present, underscoring the fragility of Poland's independence as it dealt with competition between superpowers and clashes of ideologies. Początek formularza

Hence, Poland's historical trajectory is fraught with countless challenges to its sovereignty, ranging from foreign invasions and occupations to periods of political turmoil and upheaval. Yet, amidst these trials, the Polish nation has demonstrated remarkable resilience and determination, forging a steadfast commitment to safeguarding its independence and asserting its sovereign rights. In essence, Poland's deep-seated attachment to its sovereignty reflects a fundamental aspect of its national character, rooted in a rich tapestry of historical experiences and struggles for independence. By acknowledging the historical backdrop against which Poland's Sèvres Syndrome emerges, one can gain deeper insights into the complexities of Polish foreign policy and the underlying motivations driving Warsaw's interactions within the international community.

However, Poland has adopted a somewhat divergent approach to safeguarding its sovereignty, independence, and security, compared to Türkiye's strategy. The nation relies heavily on its allies, particularly the United States, for security assurances and guarantees. This reliance stems from a perceived lack of viable alternatives, making trust in American security commitments to Europe and Poland a cornerstone of Poland's strategic calculus. Alexander Lanoszka righlty observes that "Poland sees its alliance with the United States as the primary vehicle through which it can realise its national security

[11] Robert Rokicki, "Polish Sèvres Syndrome: Op-ed," *Hürriyet Daily News*, 20 September 2020, https://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/polish-s-vres-syndrome-op-ed-146704.

[12] Janusz Tazbir, *Długi Romans z Muzą Klio*, (Warszawa: Iskry, 2007), 85.

interests."[13] Poland's approach underscores the importance of transatlantic alliances and partnerships in addressing regional security challenges. By entrusting its security to allies such as the United States, Poland seeks to mitigate potential threats and bolster its defense capabilities within the framework of collective security arrangements.

Cooperative Rivalry with Russia versus Russia as an Existential Threat

In the debate on Türkiye's foreign policy, its relations with Russia have been described as an example of "cooperative rivalry."[14] Although the interests of the two players often contradict each other in many areas, Ankara and Moscow skilfully navigate these differences. They effectively "compartmentalize" their bilateral relations[15], aiming to isolate problematic and contentious issues from their overall relationship. This approach is particularly evident in the separation of economic and political affairs. Cemil İpek and Mehmet Güler tag the relationship "hostile friendship" pointing out to the fact, that both countries use a "compartmentalization" strategy to cooperate and conflict in Syria simultaneously.[16]

Due to this approach, Türkiye's shooting down of a Russian fighter jet over Syria in 2015 (an event called "a stab in the back" by Vladimir Putin), amounting to a potential *casus belli*, sparked little more than a short crisis in bilateral relations which the two countries relatively quickly put behind them, normalizing relations and restoring pragmatic cooperation. The relationship between Türkiye and Russia can hardly be called an alliance; it is rather an opportunistic partnership from which both sides are trying to "squeeze out" maximum profits.

On the one hand, there is close Turkish-Russian cooperation in selected areas, and especially in trade and the energy sector.[17] The most conspicuous event indicating closer Turkish–Russian ties was Türkiye's decision to purchase an S-400 air defence system from Russia (under pressure from its NATO allies, Ankara had previously cancelled a tender won by a Chinese vendor). This has long-term implications going far beyond the mere acquisition itself as it translates into "greater opportunities for cooperation with Russia in almost any field."[18] This strategic decision created "long-lasting mutual dependencies" between Russia and Türkiye.[19] Ankara's move frustrated the US, which excluded Türkiye from the F-35 program and triggered the Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA). Although the sanctions imposed on Türkiye are of limited scope, the mere invocation of CAATSA against an important NATO ally exposes widening rifts in Turkish-Western relations, indicating a process of *de-Atlantization* in Türkiye's foreign policy and a shift towards forging alliances with

[13] Alexander Lanoszka, "Poland in a time of geopolitical flux," *Contemporary Politics* 4, 26 (2020): 463.

[14] Joseph Nye, *The Cooperative Rivalry of US-China Relations*, https://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/china-america-relationship-cooperative-rivalry-byjoseph-s--nye-2018-11. Marc Pierini writes about "conflictual connivance". Marc Pierini, *Russia's posture in the Mediterranean: Implications for NATO and Europe*, Carnegie Europe, June 2021, 4 https://carnegieendowment.org/files/2021-06-08_Pierini_RussiaMed_final.pdf [19.04.2023].

[15] Robert E. Hamilton, Anna Mikulska, *Cooperation, Competition, and Compartmentalization: Russian-Turkish Relations and Their Implications for the West*, Black Sea Strategy Papers, Foreign Policy Research Institute, April 2021, https://www.fpri.org/article/2021/04/cooperation-competition-and-compartmentalization-russian-turkish-relations-and-their-implications-for-the-west/

[16] Cemil Doğaç İpek, Mehmet Çağatay Güler, "Turkey and Russia in Syrian War: Hostile Friendship," *Security&Defence Quarterly* 3, (35) (2021): 77-92.

[17] Ziya Öniş, Şuhnaz Yılmaz, "Turkey and Russia in a Shifting Global Order: Cooperation, Conflict, and Asymmetric Interdependence in a Turbulent Region," *Third World Quarterly* 1 (37) (2016): 71-95.

[18] Krzysztof Strachota, Andrzej Wilk, *S-400 dla Turcji. Eskalacja kryzysu w stosunkach turecko-amerykańskich*, Komentarz OSW, 12 April 2019, https://www.osw.waw.pl/pl/publikacje/komentarze-osw/2019-06-12/s-400-dla-turcji-eskalacja-kryzysu-w-stosunkach-turecko;

[19] Galip Dalay, *After the S-400 purchase: Where are Turkish-Russian relations heading?*, Point of View, SWP, 3 September 2019, https://www.swp-berlin.org/en/publication/after-the-s-400-purchase-where-are-turkish-russian-relations-heading,

new partners. Moreover, Russian-Turkish cooperation in the realm of security is also expanding across various other domains.[20]

On the other hand, Ankara's and Moscow's interests diverge in hotspots like Syria, Libya, and Nagorno-Karabakh. In Syria and Libya, they support opposing sides in proxy conflicts, with Russia backing Assad and Türkiye aiming to topple his regime. Despite these differences, they have managed to cooperate through initiatives like the Astana process and the 2019 Sochi Agreement, though tensions remain. Türkiye has also diversified its energy sources, reducing reliance on Russian gas. Additionally, the Black Sea region, crucial for Ukraine's security, is shaped by Ukrainian-Russian and Turkish-Russian dynamics, influencing regional power balances.

Türkiye has been trying to position itself as a mediator between Russia and Ukraine. Türkiye's aspirations to play an active mediating role in the ongoing conflict between Russia and Ukraine have brought to light its perceived policy of cautious neutrality. Since the onset of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Türkiye has stood out as the most accommodating NATO country towards Moscow, having refrained from implementing sanctions or cancelling flights between the two nations. Ankara has been advocating for the Western powers not to abruptly sever communication channels with Russia, but rather to partake in a constructive dialogue with the country in order to pave the way for peaceful reconciliation. At the same time, Türkiye has been committed to maintaining a delicate equilibrium between Ukraine and Russia. In a strategic move, Ankara expediently closed its waterways to military vessels in the nascent stages of the conflict, which acted as a deterrent to Moscow's efforts to augment its naval forces. It has also not refrained from delivering arms to Ukraine. President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has unequivocally showcased a firm dedication to safeguarding the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Ukraine. This balancing act and strategic vacillation between Russia and Ukraine preordains Türkiye, as believed by the country's elite, to mediate between the warring factions and bring peace to the region.

The sources of the antagonistic character of Polish-Russian bilateral relations should be sought in different political, economic, or even geopolitical interests, but also - perhaps above all - in the functioning of both states in two completely different civilizations; it is, to refer to the title of Andrzej Nowak's book, the eternal "neighborhood of freedom and despotism."[21] With the fall of communism, when Poland oriented itself towards Euro-Atlantic institutionms, and Russia, after the *smuta* of the 1990s under Yeltsin[22], increasingly adopted an aggressive direction in its foreign (and internal) policy, this civilizational dissonance once again became evident with full force. Unable to cope with the loss of the Soviet sphere of influence - already in 2005, in his annual state of the nation address, President Vladimir Putin referred to the collapse of the USSR as the "greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the 20th century," and two years later, in 2007 at the Munich Security Conference, he threw, in a spirit of revisionism, a "geopolitical glove" to the United States - Russia not only rhetorically began to question the post-Cold War status quo but through military actions, the first stage of which was the war against Georgia in 2008, initiated the process of "grabbing lands" lost after 1991.

Hence, historically, Poland has harbored concerns about Russia, stemming from past conflicts and territorial disputes. However, the conflict initiated by Russia against Ukraine on February 24, 2022, served as a pivotal moment in shaping Poland's threat perception. This event fundamentally altered how Poland views its relationship with Russia, leading to a marked shift towards a zero-sum perspective.

[20] Oya Dursun-Özkanca, *Turkey–West Relations: The Politics of Intra-Alliance Opposition*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2019), 113-125.

[21] Andrzej Nowak, *Polska i Rosja. Sąsiedztwo Wolności i Despotyzmu X-XXI w.*, (Kraków: Biały Kruk, 2022).

[22] Andrei P. Tsygankov, *The Strong State in Russia: Development and Crisis*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 87-100.

In the aftermath of the Ukraine conflict, Poland's rhetoric and actions reflect a hardened stance towards Russia. Minister Rau's speech on the priorities of Polish foreign policy underscored this sentiment, with Russia mentioned 145 times and a notable absence of any positive messaging.[23] This emphasis on Russia as a primary concern highlights the gravity of the perceived threat posed by Moscow. Poland has emerged as a vocal supporter of Ukraine. Demonstrating a robust stance, Poland has advocated for the delivery of arms to Ukraine, viewing it as crucial support in Ukraine's defense against external aggression. Additionally, Poland has been at the forefront of efforts to impose harsher sanctions on Russia in response to its involvement in the conflict.

Polish priorities in NATO encompass strengthening alliance deterrence and defense on the eastern flank. This involves enhancing military readiness, deploying allied troops, conducting joint exercises, and developing infrastructure to ensure a credible deterrence posture.

Secondly, Poland has consistently advocated for the policy of further expanding the alliance by including partners capable of bearing membership responsibilities. This stance should be juxtoposed with Türkiye's position - Sweden's bid for accession to NATO has faced a significant hurdle due to opposition from Ankara. The primary rationale cited by Türkiye for blocking Sweden's accession is its alleged support for Kurdish PKK terrorist organization. This issue stems from Türkiye's longstanding conflict with Kurdish PKK separatist movements within its own borders and its concerns about external support for these groups.

Thirdly, in terms of military spending, Poland holds the absolute record, with expenditures reaching 4.3 percent of GDP in 2023; in 2025, it will sepond 5 percent.[24] Hence, Poland stands out as one of the few NATO member states that have consistently met the 2% defense spending pledge. This commitment underscores Poland's dedication to bolstering its defense capabilities and fulfilling its obligations within the alliance. By allocating a significant portion of its GDP to defense expenditures, Poland not only enhances its own national security but also contributes to the collective defense posture of NATO.

This comparative analysis illuminates a disparity in the approaches of Poland and Türkiye towards their perceptions of Russia. While Poland's outlook is characterized by a view of Russia as a primary and enduring source of (existential) concern, underscored by the transformative impact of the conflict with Ukraine on its threat perception and strategic calculations, Türkiye adopts a more nuanced stance.

Uniregional verusus Multiregional Identities of Poland and Türkiye

Türkiye's identity – recently reshaped by the Ottoman nostalgia - can be characterized as multi-regional, reflecting its unique position at the crossroads of Europe, the Balkans, Caucasus and the Middle East. Bahar Rumelili and Rahime Süleymanoğlu-Kurum discuss Türkiye's liminal identity, referring to other concepts from geopolitical discourse, such as hybridity, marginality, cuspness, and liminality, which capture Türkiye's in-betweenness.[25] Needless to say, in popular discourse, Türkiye has often been dubbed 'a bridge'.

While often considered a European nation, Türkiye's roots delve deeper into the southern regions of the continent, particularly the Balkans, owing to its close proximity to the Balkan Peninsula and the historical connections it has cultivated in the region. Over centuries, Türkiye's influence has permeated

[23] *Informacja Ministra Spraw Zagranicznych o Zadaniach Polskiej Polityki Zagranicznej w 2023 r.*, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Poland, 13 April 2023, https://www.gov.pl/web/dyplomacja/informacja-ministra-spraw-zagranicznych-o-zadaniach-polskiej-polityki-zagranicznej-w-2023-r.

[24] *Poland to spend 5% of GDP on defence in 2025, says foreign minister*, Reuters, 13 July 2024, https://www.reuters.com/business/aerospace-defense/poland-spend-5-gdp-defence-2025-says-foreign-minister-2024-07-13/.

[25] Bahar Rumelili, Rahime Süleymanoğlu-Kurum, "Brand Turkey: Liminal Identity and its Limits," *Geopolitics* 3, (22) (2017): 549-570. See also Efser Rana Coşkun, "Liminal Identity of Turkey in Humanitarian Government," *Globalizations* 7, (7) (2023): 1120-1143.

the Balkans, shaping cultural, economic, and geopolitical ties with neighboring nations and contributing to the complex web of regional dynamics. Shared historical bonds with the region make Türkiye an increasingly influential — though not always uncontroversial — player in the Balkans.[26] Ankara seeks to stabilize the region, leveraging shared ties, particularly with Muslim-majority nations like Bosnia, Albania, and Kosovo, while also maintaining robust economic and political relations with Serbia. This balancing act reflects Türkiye's broader "strategic depth" doctrine.[27]

Moreover, Türkiye's significance extends beyond Europe into the Middle East, where it holds considerable historical and contemporary stakes. Situated at the nexus of Europe and Asia, Türkiye's geographical location positions it as a vital player in regional affairs, exerting influence and navigating complexities in both regions. This dual identity as a bridge between continents underscores Türkiye's pivotal role in shaping regional dynamics and fostering diplomatic engagements across diverse geopolitical landscapes. Tarık Oğuzlu, in his much-quoted article writes about the Middle Easternization of Türkiye's foreign policy.[28]

In essence, Türkiye's identity is inherently multi-regional, embodying a fusion of European, Balkan, and Middle Eastern influences. This diversity of regional affiliations profoundly shapes Türkiye's foreign policy objectives and strategic engagements. From the ongoing conflict in Syria to the persistent threat of terrorism, Türkiye's strategic location renders it susceptible to diverse threat perceptions, necessitating a more diversified approach to diplomacy and security.

This has praticial implications for Turkish foreign policy, and more specifically, shapes Türkiye's threat perception. Turkish foreign policy, above all, focuses on issues related to the activity of Kurdish PKK separatist movements in southeastern Türkiye and in Iraq, as well as in the area concerning the activities of the Democratic Union Party/PYD on the border with Syria. Consequently, as reagrds Türkiye's priorities in NATO, Ankara advocates for and supports initiatives that prioritize the enhancement of cooperation among Allies in combating terrorism and addressing security threats emanating from the Southern Flank. Türkiye's NATO policy entails a commitment to supporting the alliance's three core tasks: collective defense, crisis management, and cooperative security.

Poland's geopolitical identity is firmly anchored in Central Europe, a region it views as crucial to its historical, political, and economic identity. Needless to say, as a member of the European Union and other international/global organizations, Warsaw pursues a more multidirectional policy and engages in areas beyond its closest neighborhood, yet it is the embeddedness in the region that shapes its primary strategic and political calculus. This Central European perspective is deeply influential in shaping Poland's foreign policy, as it seeks to promote regional stability, cooperation, and security in the face of challenges posed by external powers, particularly Russia. Poland sees itself as a leader among its Central European neighbors and has taken active roles in regional organizations such as the Visegrad Group, the Bucharest Nine, and the Three Seas Initiative.

The Visegrad Group, comprising Poland, Hungary, Czech Republic (Czechia), and Slovakia, is one of the key platforms for Poland to coordinate efforts with its neighbors. This group allows Poland to promote shared interests, such as economic growth, energy security, and political cohesion within the European Union, while also addressing regional security concerns. Through this collaboration, Poland works to ensure that Central Europe remains a cohesive bloc with a unified voice in both European and transatlantic affairs. As Ryszard Zięba notes, "the Visegrad Group increased in importance again at the

[26] For recent publications on Turkish rising infuence in the Balkans see for instance: Ahmet Erdi Öztürk, *Religion, Identity and Power: Turkey and the Balkans in the Twenty-First Century*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2022); Ertan Efegil, Murat Bayar, *Turkey's Return to the Western Balkans*, (Cham: Springer, 2023).

[27] M. Szpala, *Bromance. Turkey's activity in the Western Balkans*, OSW Commentary, 22 November 2022, https://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/osw-commentary/2022-11-22/bromance-turkeys-activity-western-balkans.

[28] Tarık Oğuzlu, "Middle Easternization of Turkey's Foreign Policy: Does Turkey Dissociate from the West?," *Turkish Studies* 1, (9) (2008): 3-20.

end of the first decade of the twenty-first century, when Poland used the group to promote the proposed confirmation of NATO's defensive function during work on Alliance's new strategic concept for the years 2010-2020, and in latter efforts to strengthen NATO's eastern flank. Poland also expanded consultations and cooperation with the V4 with regard to creating the Visegrad EU Battle Group."[29] Paradoxically, it was the security conundrum—the outbreak of the Russian war against Ukraine—that tarnished the V4's unity, with Hungary taking a relatively lukewarm stance on the aggression, revealing the divergence of threat perception among Central European countries.

Similarly, Poland's participation in the Bucharest Nine, an alliance of Eastern NATO members, is centered on bolstering security and defense in response to threats from Russia. As a founding member, Poland uses this platform to enhance cooperation on military strategies, defense infrastructure, and intelligence sharing with countries along NATO's eastern flank. The Bucharest Nine enables Poland to actively shape NATO's strategic posture, emphasizing the importance of deterrence and collective defense in the region.

The Three Seas Initiative, which focuses on infrastructure development and economic cooperation between Central and Eastern European countries, further highlights Poland's ambition to lead regional development efforts. This project harks back to Intermarium, a Polish, pre-II WW geopolitical concept for organizing Central-Eastern Europe, which been an important part of Poland's geopolitical identity.[30] Through the Three Seas Initaitve, Poland aims to reduce reliance on Russian energy, expand transport links, and promote digital and economic integration between its neighbors. This initiative not only advances economic growth but also strengthens regional solidarity and resilience against external influences. Gorana Grgić, in the context of the 3SI emphasizes the "durability and vibrancy of subregional cooperation initiatives", pointing out that "[a]t the core of the initiative has been the desire to not only improve the functional cooperation among the involved nation-states, but also of the TSI bloc with the Western Europe in order to accelerate the economic development of the newer EU member states."[31]

For Poland, Central Europe is more than just a geographic concept—it represents a community of shared values, common historical experiences, and a collective future. This sense of regional belonging informs Poland's strategic calculations as it seeks to enhance its influence within the European Union, strengthen NATO's eastern defenses, and foster regional economic cooperation. By aligning itself with its Central European neighbors, Poland aims to ensure the security and prosperity of the region, while reinforcing its own role as a pivotal actor in both European and transatlantic affairs.

Conclusions

The analysis deminstrates Poland and Türkiye face significant challenges in navigating the complexities of their respective geopolitical neighborhoods. For Poland, the conflict between Russia and Ukraine has served as a pivotal moment, shaping its threat perception and strategic calculus. This conflict has not only prompted a substantial increase in defense spending but has also led to a reevaluation of priorities within international organizations like NATO, with a heightened emphasis on deterrence and defense.

[29] Ryszard Zięba, *Poland's Foreign and Security Policy. Problem of Compatibility with the Changing International Order*, (Cham: Springer, 2000), 204. On Visegrad countries military cooperation see Jakub Bornio, *The development of military cooperation as part of multinational units among Visegrad countries (V4) in 2023*, IEŚ Commentaries 952 (200/2023), Institute of Central Europe, 20 September 2023, https://ies.lublin.pl/en/comments/the-development-of-military-cooperation-as-part-of-multinational-units-among-visegrad-countries-v4-in-2023/.

[30] Robert Istók, Irina Kozárová, Anna Polačková, "The Intermarium as a Polish Geopolitical Concept in History and in the Present," *Geopolitics* 1, 26 (2021): 314-341.

[31] Gorana Grgić, "The Changing Dynamics of Regionalism in Central and Eastern Europe: The Case of the Three Seas Initiative," *Geopolitics* 1, 28 (2023): 216, 223.

On the other hand, Türkiye's approach to Russia is characterized by a nuanced balance between cooperation and rivalry, reflecting its position at the crossroads of key geopolitical regions. While Russia remains a factor, Türkiye's threat perception extends beyond it, encompassing concerns about instability in its Southern neighborhood and the threat of terrorism. This perception drives Türkiye's pursuit of strategic autonomy and its aspirations to assert itself as a global player.

By shedding light on these similarities and differences in threat perceptions and responses, this chapter contributes to a deeper understanding of how Poland and Türkiye navigate the current geopolitical landscape. It underscores the importance of contextualizing their actions within the broader dynamics of their respective regions and highlights the diverse strategies employed to address evolving challenges. Ultimately, this comparative analysis serves as a valuable tool for policymakers and analysts seeking to comprehend and anticipate the complexities of contemporary international relations.

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