

Dossier stratégique

# Dossier stratégique: La Pologne, un acteur de la défense européenne.

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**Editorial:**

*Par le général de division (2S) Maurice de Langlois et Barbara Jankowski, IRSEM*

En 2014, la République de Pologne célèbre les anniversaires d'événements qui ont marqué son histoire récente : le 25e anniversaire des premières élections libres, les 15 ans de son adhésion à l'OTAN et ses 10 ans d'intégration à l'Union européenne. Sur le plan économique, la Pologne connaît une croissance ininterrompue depuis vingt ans, certes ralentie en 2012 et 2013, mais affichant toutefois un taux de 1,6% de croissance l'an passé. Elle est le seul pays de l'UE à ne pas être entré en récession après la crise de 2008. Cette santé économique se traduit dans le domaine de la défense. Les recettes fiscales ont certes été affectées par le tassement de la croissance mais les dépenses militaires n'en ont pas souffert, puisqu'avec un budget de 7,7 milliards d'euros, elles ont connu une hausse de 2% en 2013, qui se répètera en 2014. Un plan de modernisation des forces armées sur dix ans prévoit une enveloppe de 33,6 milliards d'euros notamment pour renouveler la flotte de sous-marins, acquérir des hélicoptères et des drones et se doter d'une défense aérienne. Au-delà du fait qu'il s'agit d'une nation traditionnellement amie de la France, ces raisons justifiaient de proposer un dossier stratégique sur la Pologne, qui a d'ailleurs été initié bien avant que ne s'aggrave la crise entre l'Ukraine et la Russie qui préoccupe tant les Polonais.

Ce dossier porte sur la stratégie de défense et de sécurité de la Pologne et sur les rapports qu'elle entretient dans ce domaine avec ses principaux partenaires. Il est le fruit d'une collaboration entre l'IRSEM et quelques organismes de recherche français et polonais : la Fondation pour la recherche stratégique (FRS) et le Centre d'études et de recherches internationales (CERI) pour la France, le PISM (Institut polonais des affaires internationales), l'institut de relations internationales de l'université de Varsovie, l'académie de la Défense nationale et le think tank Stosunki Miedzynarodowe, pour la Pologne. Il fait suite à des échanges amorcés à l'automne 2013 entre l'IRSEM et ces institutions polonaises. Ce dossier comporte dix articles rédigés en français et en anglais.

A la lecture de ce dossier, le lecteur pourra percevoir qu'il n'y a pas une vision unique de ce qui fonde la sécurité de la Pologne. C'est l'un des intérêts de cette réflexion réunissant des universitaires et experts des deux pays et qui conduit à réaliser combien les tropismes nationaux sont persistants.

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**Potentials and pitfalls of the Weimar triangle**

*Par Krzysztof Soloch, Head of Nordika Programme, Fondation pour la Recherche Stratégique*

Immediately after the collapse of the former Soviet Bloc, relationship between Eastern and Western Europe did take a major U-turn. In the geostrategic reshuffle that followed the end of the Soviet domination of Eastern and Central Europe, Germany was soon to be reunified. Such perspective opened as much hopes as fears among Eastern countries with which Germany did not yet construct fruitful and trusted relationships exemplified by the Franco-German entente. For historical and political reasons modern Poland, whose territory was extended on former German historical lands by Stalin after the communist dictator decided to stretch Soviet territory on former Polish lands, could easily feel uneasiness with its immediate western neighbor. Because of such historical legacy it appeared that better fluidity could be given to German-Polish relationship if, also, encapsulated into a broader framework which could include France, a historical friend of Poland, and a key driver of the European construction in close partnership with Germany. Hence, during a tripartite foreign affairs ministerial meeting in the splendid city of Duchess Anna Amalia, on August 1991, relationship between the then EEC and the Central and Eastern countries were discussed. Talks gave birth to the "Weimar triangle" which linked Warsaw, Berlin and Paris together in a new set of triangular relations aimed at discussing and working on solving pending problems related to the European construction into which Poland would be part of. The date and location are symbolic as the German poet Goethe was born on August 28th in Weimar and the city itself was the birthplace of the fragile and short lived Weimar Republic, the first German experiment in democracy. The initial objective of the Triangle was to help Poland to overcome the difficulties of the transition from a totalitarian regime to democracy and also support its intention to build closer relations with the Europe that was in a process of deep transformation with the Maastricht treaty to be signed few months later and NATO.

After more than 20 years of existence, the Triangle has not been able to translate its initial ambitions into a durable alliance able to drive an enlarged Europe. Despite its different failures, the Triangle has still the potential to play a positive role to the benefit of its members as well as to the EU and to become one of these influential groups in European politics, envisaged in the Lisbon treaty. As an example, just before the Polish Presidency of the EU (July-December 2012), the Triangle has resurrected the controversial issue of a permanent EU military headquarters (OHQ) in sending a clear message in that sense addressed to the High Representative Catherine Ashton in December 2010, much to the embarrassment of Westminster.

Recently, the commitment of the three foreign ministers in the Ukrainian crisis goes against those who believe that the Weimar Triangle has fulfilled its original mission and is no longer able to play a constructive role. Thus, Poland's Foreign Minister Radoslaw Sikorski, French Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius and German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier have managed to stop the bloodshed in obtaining an agreement between Viktor Yanukovich and the opposition. Although the agreement was not implemented, the initiative of the Weimar Triangle has shown that joint action (on behalf of the EU) is possible in this format. The joint declaration on Ukraine adopted by the three ministers on April 1 is an important contribution to de-escalate the situation in the region.

Both domestic and external conditions are rather favorable in France, Germany and Poland to transform the Triangle into an effective cooperation mechanism and take on a stronger conceptual role in Europe. Since 2007 Poland has been ruled by the pro-European coalition, supported by President B. Komorowski for which the trilateral cooperation has become a priority during his mandate. Germany has refused for a long time to recognize the political role of the Triangle. Since then, Berlin has strengthened its relations with Warsaw by launching the idea of a partnership for Europe while developing similar relations with Paris. Following the presidential elections, France will need reliable European partners to implement a series of measures to boost European integration. In this context, the Weimar Triangle could help to improve the EU's capacity for strategic coordination and guidance in many areas.

**Potentials of the Weimar triangle**

For Poland, the Weimar Triangle was an element of the return of Poland in Europe and an opportunity to promote its interests in the EU, thanks to close cooperation with the countries considered as the engine of Europe. At the same time, the cooperation with Poland allowed to France and Germany to be present and to have some influence in the region, at the time of political transformation. Including Poland in the trilateral format, Germany and France wanted to stabilize economically and politically Central Europe. By means of the Weimar Triangle, the three countries wanted to ensure the region's predictability.

The Iraqi crisis has not only damaged relations that Poland had with its two partners but also highlighted the fact that the Weimar Triangle did not succeed, through consultation, to avoid such a situation. But since 2006 an intensification

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of cooperation within the Weimar triangle in the field of security and defense is discernible, since Poland has changed its attitude to Europe's defense.

**Return to the cooperation**

In 2006, all three countries part of the Weimar triangle participated in the EU operation in the Democratic Republic of Congo (April-November 2006). The objective of the mission was to ensure security during the presidential and legislative elections. As a framework-nation Germany provided 500 soldiers. Poland provided a contingent of 130 gendarmes. This mission was not only a success but also facilitated an improvement of mutual relations between the three countries.

This mission was the focus of discussion of the three defense ministers, meeting on July 25, 2006 in Wieliczka, Poland. During the meeting, a decision was made to create a Weimar Battle Group. On the 7<sup>th</sup> of December 2006, the Chiefs of Defense Staff of Triangle countries decided that the BG would be operational for the first half of 2013. Germany would provide men to the reconnaissance, civil-military cooperation and logistical support. France would provide medical support. As the framework nation, Poland would provide combat units. It would also provide four infantry companies and three additional companies (command, support and logistics). Poland will also provide three transport helicopters and a gendarmerie unit.

Security and defense policy is one of the Janus-like areas among the three states. On the one hand, regarding NATO, they hold different views about the future of American nuclear warheads in Europe, with Poland in favor of keeping them, Germany opposed, and France in possession of its own nuclear arsenal; as well as on the balance the Alliance should strike between collective defense, favored by Poland, and expeditionary missions - supported by France and Germany - the latter especially in the light of the anticipated reform of the *Bundeswehr*.

In this context, the development of CSDP appears as the unifying project for the three countries. France, Germany, and Poland have issued a call for enhanced EU defense cooperation. In a letter to EU High Representative for Foreign and Security Policy, Catherine Ashton, the three countries declare their support for transnational combat units, among other policies for closer EU defense integration and for stronger defense ties between NATO and the EU. Ashton is also in charge of the European Defense Agency, a body designed to coordinate EU defense cooperation. "*We see a specific need to improve our capacities to plan and to conduct operations and missions, to strengthen cooperation among our militaries and to create synergies in times of scarce resources, taking due care for complementarity with national and NATO planning capacities... Germany, Poland and France will enhance their cooperation within the Battlegroup which they are to provide in the first half of 2013,*" the letter stated. In the conclusions of EU Council of 31 January 2011, member countries have welcomed this initiative. "*The Council welcomes the Weimar letter of 6 December 2010 signed by France, Germany and Poland as an important contribution to stimulating the agenda for the development of Common Security and Defense Policy, including with a view to strengthening military and civilian capabilities in Europe, building on the efforts and achievements undertaken during recent Presidencies.*" Lady Ashton, in her response from January 2011, agreed that there was a "need to find a new momentum" on CSDP and also to revise the crisis-management structures. She welcomed the "pragmatic approach" about the Weimar proposition on enhanced use for Battle Groups, as a significant development if the other states agree collectively on the issue.

Unfortunately this initiative has not been translated into concrete acts because of the lack of British support but the joint letter is an example of increasing influence of the revitalized Weimar Triangle. The forum has found new momentum through a mutual desire to develop European defense and security capabilities.

Warsaw has underlined its commitment to continue strengthening CSDP during the Polish presidency of EU. Four priorities have been put forward:

- 1) Development of military capabilities, with a focus on pooling and sharing and the revival of the discussion on the increase of usefulness and flexibility of EU Battle Groups.
- 2) Strengthening EU capabilities, reform of its command structure, in particular improvement of planning capabilities and conducting operations at the strategic level.
- 3) EU-NATO relations.
- 4) Bringing the EU's Eastern partners closer to CSDP activities.

The Union's response to the economic crisis has been a priority under the Polish Presidency. Despite the unfavorable context, some progress has been registered. The EU's Defense and Security Procurement Directive, adopted in August 2011, provides a framework for cross-border defense procurement between member states. As such, it goes some way towards fighting against national protectionism, which has proven to be one of the biggest blocs for establishing joint military production initiatives between EU member states. This new directive, introduced during Poland's presidency,

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is a first step towards improving competition and achieving lower prices within the European defense industry. Furthermore, during the Polish Presidency, *Athena* mechanism and *Althea* operation were revised.

**Future potential trilateral cooperation**

Closer cooperation can refer especially to some capabilities which are particularly expensive to be developed autonomously and are especially vital for conducting external operations, such as strategic transport, reconnaissance or logistics. Pooling resources would have the obvious advantage of helping EU governments find savings in their defense budgets. In this context, the Weimar Triangle could play a significant role trying to launch joint projects.

In contrast with most of the EU member states, where spending on military is declining as a result of the financial crisis, defense expenditure in Poland will increase from \$8.84bn in 2012 to \$10.55bn in 2015. During the same period, spending on defense investment (equipment procurement and R&D), which accounts for about 25% of total defense expenditure, is also expected to grow from \$2.21bn in 2012 to \$2.64bn in 2015. Throughout the next four years a few significant defense tenders will be finalized, the biggest among them are: training and simulation systems, (including Integrated System for Pilot Training), transport helicopter, air and missile defense, unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) and command and control systems. As a result of relatively high level of defense expenditure (1.95% of the previous year's GDP), Poland will maintain its position as the regional leader in terms of defense spending and also joins the club of emerging economies alongside Brazil, India and Russia. In this context Poland became an attractive partner for France and Germany since the modernization of Polish armed forces offers opportunities for long-term cooperation.

The political will is the key to success. In the absence of this one, no cooperation is possible. The election of Francois Hollande and the arrival of a new Defense minister offered a new opportunity to strengthen this cooperation in future if both Warsaw and Paris are able to identify common interests and common goals. In this context, the meeting between the Polish and French Ministers of Defense on March 21<sup>st</sup> in Warsaw was particularly important. The two ministers underlined the need to continue political dialogue while strengthening cooperation within the Weimar Triangle.

Three areas for potential cooperation come to mind.

The first one is about working together in adjusting the European Security Strategy from 2003 to the new international situation, particularly in the context of the crisis in relations with Russia that seems lasting. It is the only document delivering an analysis of the international situation and placing EU in this context; but it also has obvious deficits such as not showing how the EU's available resources can be matched with its goals.

The second involves the Weimar Battle Group (BG). Its first operational standby occurred in the first semester of 2013. Poland and France together with Germany should consider bringing the concept of BG to life (till now none of EU BG has been in use). In this context, the crucial decision would therefore be to make use of the Weimar BG should a suitable situation arise such as, for instance in the Balkans or in Sahel. Furthermore, the officers of three countries could provide valuable assistance in the transformation of the Ukrainian Armed Forces

The third possible area of cooperation is the reform of the European Neighborhood Policy, in particular of the Eastern Partnership. The failure of the EU in the management of the Arab Spring and the lack of response from the Union in the first phase of the crisis in Ukraine shows that the European Neighborhood Policy requires a profound reform.

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**Conclusion**

Weimar Triangle's States are crucial players in the field of European policy and have big influence on decision making process in Council of the European Union and European Parliament. Continuation of dialogue within a frame of Weimar Triangle gives hope for more effective common debate about fundamental questions like global threats and challenges for Europe. It is very important to initiate and stimulate new activities around common interests but before then, France, Germany and Poland have to intensify efforts to identify them.

The Triangle can be useful for consulting and searching consensus within the EU, but it will not be easy because lack of success with this project stems from a structural disproportion in the development of bilateral relations among the three partners.

Reset in relations between France and Poland that seem to operate could make sense for the strategic partnership that has remained a hollow shell. The absence of a real strategic partnership between France and Poland was one of the reasons of the weakness of the Triangle. This has forced Poland to be closer to Germany with which Warsaw has built a partnership based on common interests.

The Weimar initiative on CSDP and recently in the context of Ukraine crisis demonstrated that this structure is capable of acting timely and on sensitive issues. But to make this, the political will is needed. The EU goes through an unprecedented crisis. While the Member States are increasingly tempted to defend their national interests at the expense of the Union, the Weimar cooperation makes perfect sense. To contribute to the strengthening of the EU, the three countries must seize the concrete and realistic projects left to be less ambitious but more effective. The Weimar Battle Group is an interesting example but only if its use is not limited by national interests.

**Notes de bas de page :**

1. *The Founding Fathers of the Weimarer Triangle were foreign ministers Krzysztof Skubiszewski (Poland), Hans-Dietrich Genscher (Germany) and Roland Dumas (France)*
2. *See: Weimar Triangle: joint statement on Ukraine by foreign ministers of Germany, France and Poland: [http://www.london.diplo.de/Vertretung/london/en/\\_pr/Latest\\_News/04/Weimar-Triangle.html](http://www.london.diplo.de/Vertretung/london/en/_pr/Latest_News/04/Weimar-Triangle.html).*
3. *Claudia Major, A Civil-Military Headquarters for the EU. The Weimar Triangle Initiative fuels the Current Debate, SWP Comments 31, December 2010*
4. *Press Release, 3065th Council meeting, Foreign Affairs, Brussels, 31 January 2011, p.21*
5. *See the focus about Armed Forces Development Program 2009-2018 in annex.*