

Transition and Continuity

The Polish Army's March into the Third Republic and into NATO, 1989–1999

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ABSTRACT

Poland's transition from an authoritarian communist regime to a liberal democracy and market economy and from an army controlled by the country's only party, the Communist Party, to actual civilian control started at the end of 1989, in particular after Lech Wałęsa was elected president. Unlike many other post-communist states, especially Germany, Poland regards the army as an institution that is the nation's school, the bearer of national unity and the guarantee of the state's existence. The *Armia Ludowa* – people's army – of communist Poland took over many national traditions of the Polish army, combined them with Marxist and pro-Soviet ideology, and stayed out of political games despite being controlled by the political main directorate of the party. Both the party and the army derived their legitimacy from the people. After the declaration of martial law in 1981, the army unexpectedly found itself with all the power and this was a serious blow to the prestige of the army in the eyes of the people.

The changes made at the beginning of the 1990s were small at first: members of the high command of the army were released from duty or resigned, but younger officers, many of them former members of the party, stayed on. The patron saints of the units and pre-war traditions were restored and field ordinariates of the three biggest churches were established, although there were Catholic chaplains in the Polish army also before 1989. Two crises were important from the viewpoint of civilian control: the first of them was related to the attempt by the conservative Defence Minister Jan Parys to cleanse the ranks of officers and the other to the public non-confidence motion against Defence Minister Piotr Kołodziejczyk by the Chief of the General Staff. The position of the Chief of the General Staff (i.e. the army) in relation to the Defence Minister, the parliament and the President was regulated thereafter. The military intel-

ligence created after World War II similar to the Soviet Army was reorganised as late as 2006.

The transition to democratic civilian control was driven more by the desire of Polish politicians and generals to join NATO than internal developments in Polish politics and the army. In Poland, the army is regarded as a national institution that has certain immunity. The example of Poland shows that the post-communist transition of the army to democratic civilian control is in many respects comparable to the post-fascist transition of the armies in Germany, Italy, Spain or Portugal.

The integration of a significant number of former Warsaw Pact member states, including Poland, into NATO was one of the most visible manifestations of the fundamental turnaround from “East” to “West” undertaken by those countries after 1989–90. Next to extensive material, technological and organisational changes, this metamorphosis implied a fundamental politico–normative reorientation from communism to democracy.

In the light of the established perception of democratic opposition movements in those countries having “defeated” the respective communist regime (after a longer or shorter period of “resistance”), it would seem that those normative changes had essentially already happened before the event, fuelled not least by a transnational human rights discourse in the wake of the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE) process.¹ Beyond any doubt, this was a crucial element of preparing regime change; but one rather pervasive problem with opposition studies (on any country) is the question of how representative those “democratic” opposition activists² were for the general public and its political views. Moreover, just as important as the transnational context were country-

¹ See Sarah B. Snyder, *Human Rights Activism and the End of the Cold War. A Transnational History of the Helsinki Network* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), esp. ch. 5, 115–134; more generally: *Entangled Protest: Transnational Perspectives on the History of Dissent in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union*, ed. Robert Brier (Osnabrück: Fibre, 2013).

² A discussion of the question of which of the anti-communist forces in Poland united until 1990 under the *Solidarity* label were actually democratic in a Western liberal sense would require a separate paper.

specific domestic attitudes towards principles of societal organisation and the question of to which degree the rulers and the ruled agreed on those issues.

In Poland, there is an especially strong idea of a national “spirit of freedom” that is embedded in a romantic narrative of the divided nation and its pervasive “resistance” during the “long 19th century” that was renewed under communist rule. While this is not the place for a general critique of this view, at least concerning post-World War II Poland, later than 1956 one cannot speak of a particularly repressive regime (notably if compared with the Soviet Union or East Germany). Rather, the main tool employed by the Polish communist regime to achieve political legitimacy and societal cohesion was that very romantic narrative and its nationalist implications.

This, along with the fact that within that narrative a military and indeed militarist dimension was pivotal, makes it appear reasonable to reflect upon the role of the Polish Army within the transition process: How did the most important pillar³ of the Polish communist regime react to the changing international security situation, and how did it manage in 1989–90 to survive regime change and integrate into the new domestic and international order?

Introduction: Systemic transition as a civil–military process

The transition from communism (or, real socialism) that the countries of Central and Eastern Europe (CEEC) began in 1989–90, has generally been held by scholars to be specific because it comprised a considerable change of both the political and the economic structures while most of the comparable cases, notably dictatorships in Southern Europe and Latin America, were already part of the West (in the sense of: the capitalist world)

³ In Poland, the civilian Security Service (*Urząd Bezpieczeństwa*) wielded little public respect, notably because of its complete association with the weak party, and thus was of secondary importance for regime stabilisation.



Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in Warsaw (2011). Wikimedia Commons

when their reform process began, which thus was largely confined to the political dimension (democratisation).⁴ Moreover, this complex internal process in the CEEC was accompanied, and partially determined, by a reorientation/readjustment of external relations. In concrete terms, that meant the (gradual) replacement of the Warsaw Pact and COMECON (Council for Mutual Economic Assistance) as supportive communities by NATO and the European Union, which supervised and influenced the process from without. Therefore, not only the principles of the domestic political order were to be screened and likely changed but those of the foreign and security policies of those countries, as well.

⁴ See: Juan J. Linz and Alfred Stepan, *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation. Southern Europe, South America, and Post-Communist Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996); Gerardo L. Munck and Carol Skalnik Leff, "Modes of Transition and Democratization: South America and Eastern Europe in Comparative Perspective," *Comparative Politics* vol 29, no 3, April, Special Issue: Transitions to Democracy (1997): 343–362.

According to liberal/idealist theory, there should be little difference between those two fields, holding that foreign policy be widely the reflection of domestic interest representation and decision-making, with everybody tending towards a more and more peaceful and cooperative policy culture. In contrast, realist theory sees foreign policy, i.e. its actors, rather as an autonomous expert group serving the protection of a fairly stable national interest that is informed not (in the first place) by the domestic policy process but by assumedly permanent values and interests of an equally permanent nation/body politic. This topic became relevant in the Central European (and other) transition situations.⁵

Important here is that the “West”, from which the countries in transition sought advice, has itself never been unanimous as to the validity of either of those theories. This has to do with the wide range of systemic outlooks within the “West” and equally with different political traditions. Similarly, the very term “transition” is problematic regarding its implication of clearly defined goals, in this case liberal democracy and market economy, even if these goals are in reality fairly general and leave considerable leeway for “individual” shaping.

Another theoretical body that concerns the transition process, is the teaching on *civil-military relations*, especially where it deals with the specificity of civilian control in communist regimes⁶ and the necessary transition from one-party/authoritarian to democratic (or, “real”) civilian control. Although in the CEEC, this aspect was less crucial than in the aforementioned “Western” ex-dictatorships where the military had long wielded a much larger influence and had their own political agenda,⁷ it was nevertheless important.

There are two further issues that should be considered in this context: First, which are the values that worked in domestic politics – before and

⁵ See for a neorealist approach: Tom Dyson, *Neoclassical Realism and Defence Reform in Post-Cold War Europe* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

⁶ For a Western account in the late stage of the Cold War see: Amos Perlmutter and William M. LeoGrande, “The Party in Uniform: Toward a Theory of Civil-Military Relations in Communist Political Systems,” *The American Political Science Review* vol 76, no 4 (1982): 778–789.

⁷ Aurel Croissant and David Kühn, *Militär und zivile Politik* (München: Oldenbourg, 2011), 195–196.

after 1989–90 – and thus would, to a larger or smaller degree, impact on foreign policy, too, not least in the field of security and defence policy? Precisely if the military does obey the civilian leadership, it is crucial to know what goals leadership pursues, and how “civilian” these goals actually are.⁸ And second, with which historical precedents (whatever way interpreted) are those values associated?

Other theories of civil–military relations, too, will be tried to apply in this paper: Samuel Huntington’s definition of “subjective” and “objective” civilian control of the military, and Amos Perlmutter’s concept of the “praetorian army”. However, the author would already like to claim here that none of these approaches seem to fit the rather *sui generis* case of communist and post-communist Poland in a convincing manner.

The Polish case of systemic transition

Among the countries that shed communist rule between 1989 and 1991, Poland represented a specific type that was different from two other types: on the one hand, East Germany whose state vanished, along with its army NVA, as a result of German reunification on October 3rd, 1990, and on the other, the post-Soviet states that either resumed older national structures and traditions (such as the Baltic States) or effectively had to invent new ones (such as Ukraine). Crucially, Poland, similarly to the other states in the former Soviet zone of influence that remained intact in regard to their territorial status, did not experience after 1989 any significant formal changes to its status under international law, either. Neither was the state’s institutional structure fundamentally modified, except for communist bodies such as the State Council already disappearing under the “mixed” regime in force during the year between July 1989 and July 1990. This way, in Poland there was a fairly large continuity of formal sovereignty and state institutions dating back to 1944 (or, depending on the

⁸ On this issue cf. Karen E. Smith, “Still ‘civilian power EU?’” London School of Economics European Foreign Policy Unit Working Paper 2005/1, <http://www.sv.uio.no/arena/english/research/projects/cidel/old/WorkshopOsloSecurity/Smith.pdf> (accessed 16.5.2014).

point of view, even to 1918). Essentially, Poland's international position (e.g. its membership in international organisations such as the UNO and the CSCE) remained unaltered, with the main change in foreign relations being – as indicated – its reorientation from the obsolete Eastern bloc organisations towards the Western ones.

Regarding domestic structures, the main task for the new *Solidarity*-based political class that gradually took over in 1989–90, was to free state institutions from the overarching control structures of the ruling party PZPR (*Polska Zjednoczona Partia Robotnicza* – Polish United Workers Party) and in turn submit them to democratic control. This was – understandably – interpreted as a “return to normalcy”; however, what was not reflected there was the fact that even before the era of “alien occupation”, which lasted, in a popular view, from 1939 through to 1989 (as Nazi German, Soviet, and later Polish communist rule),⁹ Poland had not been a democracy but a semi-dictatorial military regime, and that accordingly a simple “return” to pre-communist times might be difficult. In light of the theory of civil–military relations, the crucial point to be obeyed here – but which was not so well reflected by Polish politics and society at any moment after 1944 – is the difference between *civilian* control in general and *democratic* civilian control in particular. According to the mainstream opinion of Western research, only the latter is compatible with the way that a Western-style democracy is supposed to relate to its armed forces and accounts for the difference between democratic and non-democratic “civilian” regimes.¹⁰ This is as well the necessary reference framework for a proper definition of “freedom”, “national community” and other terms concerning social organisation.

⁹ As an intellectually high-ranking and balanced presentation of this (nevertheless questionable) perspective, see: Andrzej Friszke, *Polska. Losy państwa i narodu 1939–1989* (Warszawa: Iskry 2003).

¹⁰ Douglas Bland, “Patterns in Liberal Democratic Civil–Military Relations,” *Armed Forces and Society*, Summer 27, no 4 (2001): 525–540.

The Army as a pillar of communism and guarantor of national existence: Regime-independent features of civil–military relations in communist Poland

However, the sources of Polish thinking about civil–military relations visibly were and still are mainly rooted in the era preceding such reflective, and often deconstructionist, liberal considerations. They illustrate especially well the ambiguous issue of regime change in a country whose politico–spiritual basis is not only the myth of a 50-year “fight for freedom” from 1939 to 1989 but also the continued romantic idea of the nation as a primordial and invariable entity. A characteristic feature was here that the numerous changes of government in the 19th and 20th centuries – comprising both Polish and “foreign” (Russian, German, Austrian) regimes – had made Polish political thinking focus on statehood and formal independence as central goals while reducing the normative base of any given regime – and thus domestic politics in general – to a matter of secondary importance as long as it could prove its “Polishness”. This was not an ethnic/racist point of thought, but referred, in the tradition of, e.g. Johann Gottfried Herder, to the nation as a historical and cultural collective. This view was obviously irreconcilable with the actual nature of the so-called First Republic, the multi-ethnic and multi-denominational kingdom ruled *de facto* by the most influential aristocratic families; but by 1914/18, the “modern”, ethnocentric type of nationalism had taken hold among a large part of the Polish social elites, especially those with a (lower) middle class background.

In any case, this romantic view served to establish a strong nationalism and, in particular, an explicit veneration of anything military that was hard to reconcile with the notion of liberal democracy. For it was the various regular and irregular military units that were regarded – at least with hindsight – as the decisive forces to maintain by their physical performance and sacrifice the Polish claim to statehood and independence during the “long” 19th century: beginning from the Kościuszko uprising of 1794 via the Legions in Italy and the Polish troops fighting with Napoleon’s Grand Army between 1812 and 1815, the abortive risings of 1830,

1848 and 1863 to the border fights against all neighbours between 1918 and 1921. The complex mix, especially within the early phases of this long period, of class and “national” perspective and interests tended to be neglected, as well as the fact that the peasant majority of the ethnic Poles came only slowly to be taken into account by the elite as fellow-citizens with a legitimate claim to political participation.¹¹

As one consequence of this, in independent Poland after 1918 the Army has not only enjoyed a vast degree of normative and practical autonomy – under *every* regime, with today’s Third Republic certainly going furthest in terms of civilian control – but it actually maintained the idea of its being the “school of the nation” and guarantor of national existence. During the Second Republic (1918–1939), especially since the May Coup of 1926, the Army was even, under its leader Józef Piłsudski, the main authority in the state and its leadership was the *de facto* government,¹² which contributed to an ambivalent foreign policy including errant assessments of both political goals and the actual power relations in Europe.

The crushing defeat of that regime in September 1939 and the consequent German–Soviet occupation of Poland escalated the aforementioned focus on foreign and security policy to a veritable obsession. Against this background, the Polish communists who took over power in autumn 1944, too, resorted to the Army as a physical and spiritual anchor. To be sure, it was *their* Army that had been created in 1943 on Soviet territory and been trained by the Red Army. Not only was this new military instrumental in establishing communist rule in the country – and notably in the hitherto German territories in the West – but between 1944 and 1947/53¹³ it waged a veritable civil war against the remnants of the wartime *Armia Krajowa* (Home Army) that had been commanded

¹¹ Paul Latawski, “The Polish Armed Forces and Society,” – *Soldiers and Societies in Post-Communist Europe. Legitimacy and Change*, ed. Anthony Forster, Timothy Edmunds and Andrew Cottey (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 26–28.

¹² Andrew A. Michta, *The Soldier-Citizen. The Politics of the Polish Army after Communism* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1997), 25–28.

¹³ The *Home Army* officially stopped fighting in 1947, but the last anti-communist resistance groups were eliminated only in 1953 by the Polish and Soviet security services.

by the right-wing government-in-exile in London. At the end of the war, most Poles sided with the *Armia Krajowa*; yet, after its destruction the communist armed forces took over from their enemies the bulk of military habits and traditions, as a lever to win the hearts and souls of the anti-communist majority of the Poles.¹⁴ Although at least until 1956 these national traditions were combined with Marxist and pro-Soviet ideology, they remained in place – if with a partially new, class-based interpretation – and indeed fulfilled their educational and legitimising role. After 1956, the national outlook of the Army became almost complete again in terms of the pre-war pattern, only notably adapting its militant self-perception as both conquerors and defenders of “Polish soil” to the changed geopolitical and transnational situation, i.e. the “historically necessary” alliance with the Soviet Union.

In this context, it was anything but an insignificant detail that the Communist Army in July 1944 shed from its name the word “People’s” (*Ludowe*) that had indicated its class-related origin and further was called simply the *Polish Army* (like the pre-war army). This was both a signal of historical continuity and an offer to the public to accept the new army in the name of national unity. The crucial reference was now made to *external* enemies, notably “West German revisionism;”¹⁵ the wartime memories invoked by this slogan, sufficed to discipline the majority of the Poles and rally them, at least temporarily and to a minimal degree, behind the communist leadership. Not least in this context, the Army appeared – and to many Poles appears to this day – as an autonomous, apolitical institution that protects national independence as the highest public good, and thus cannot be tainted by the ill-doings of any regime.

Obviously, the organisational and ideological amalgamation of army and party, the period of Sovietisation between 1948 and 1956 as well as the close integration of the – since 1952 – “Polish People’s Republic” (*Polska Rzeczpospolita Ludowa*) into the Soviet external empire led to a

¹⁴ Marcin Zaremba, *Im nationalen Gewande. Strategien kommunistischer Herrschaftslegitimation in Polen 1944–1980* (Osnabrück: Fibre 2011), 145–184.

¹⁵ A. Kemp-Welch, *Poland under Communism. A Cold War History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 180.

characteristic perception of external and internal security of the socialist state as being inseparable, and of internal “enemies” as being equally dangerous as external threats.¹⁶ However, the semantic interpretation of what constituted that enmity was widely conditioned, the latest since the Polish–Soviet standoff in October 1956, by the nationalist narrative rather than by the logic of class consciousness.

The Army as political agent in the 1970s and 1980s

In 1970–1971 the Army took part in the bloody quelling of workers’ riots in the seaports of Gdańsk, Gdynia and Szczecin, which led to serious problems with some soldiers’ loyalty. The recurring problem for the Army of squaring the circle between external alliance (and thus regime) solidarity and internal “positive nationalism” had been expressed in an exemplary way by Minister of Defence Wojciech Jaruzelski after the aforementioned clashes. During a meeting with shipyard workers in January 1971, he asked whether these would want “to have an army that would install or change the government [---] as in Latin America and Africa, to have a government of colonels and generals?”¹⁷

This statement deserves some reflection in the light of, in particular, Amos Perlmutter’s theory of the “praetorian army” that was developed primarily on the basis of analyses of civil–military relations in “developing polities.”¹⁸ Provided that one regards the communist regimes of the time as such polities, the notion of a “politicised” army with the potential to step in for a civilian leadership failing to build legitimacy¹⁹ seems fairly

¹⁶ F. Rubin, “The Theory and Concept of National Security in the Warsaw Pact Countries,” *International Affairs* vol 58, no 4, Autumn (1982): 650–651.

¹⁷ Quoted from a 1985 Polish underground collection of sources on recent Polish history, in Andrew A. Michta, *Red Eagle. The Army in Polish Politics, 1944–1988* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1990), 69.

¹⁸ Amos Perlmutter, “The Praetorian State and the Praetorian Army. Toward a Taxonomy of Civil–Military Relations in Developing Polities,” *Comparative Politics* vol 1, no 3, April (1969): 382.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 383.

useful for explaining Polish politics at the time, especially with a view to the 1981 introduction of martial law. There, one might well identify the Polish Army as a praetorian army of the “arbitrator type” – a professional officer corps with limited own political interest and prepared to hand back power to the civilians after a period of stabilisation.²⁰ However, three *caveats* seem to be in place about this approach with a view to the Polish case: First, the “praetorian army” has been examined by Perlmutter primarily in its relationship with the civilian leadership but less so with the general population. In “communist” Poland, both army and party would refer throughout their legitimacy principally not to “abstract” Marxism but to the nation, if in an authoritarian manner. Second, those two main forces of Polish politics did not clash even in 1981 since the army acted in direct support of the dwindling party structures.²¹ And third, most fundamentally, most of the social and political conditions for a praetorian army’s takeover as defined by Perlmutter were not in place in People’s Poland in the 1970s.

In any case, after the 1970 the Polish military leadership under Jaruzelski was visibly eager to avoid any violent development in domestic politics that would have burdened it with an undesirable responsibility. Accordingly, during the 1970s it sought to stay out of the vicissitudes of “politics” and rather focused on technical modernisation and soldiers’, especially officers’, professionalisation.²² Unchanged, the military leadership continued to serve as the surest guarantors of Soviet hegemony in Poland. Ten years later, during the crisis over *Solidarity* in 1980–81, the Army acquired – rather unexpectedly – a much more active role, indeed, a “government of colonels and generals” was established. This happened because its special status in the eyes of both party leaders and the general public allowed the Army to introduce martial law on the 13th of December 1981 and so to take over the state openly in defence of the commu-

²⁰ Perlmutter, “Praetorian State”, 392.

²¹ Mark N. Kramer, “Civil–Military Relations in the Warsaw Pact: The East European Component,” *International Affairs* vol 61, no 1, Winter (1984–1985): 45.

²² Jerzy J. Wiatr, *The Soldier and the Nation. The Role of the Military in Polish Politics, 1918–1985* (Boulder & London: Westview Press, 1988), 118–122.

nist regime – which meant, in the first place, keeping Poland within the Warsaw Pact and proving its reliability as long as Soviet support seemed to be indispensable. Thus, the regime’s references and appeals to *patriotic* rather than socialist/communist values and interests to justify the tough measures against the “counterrevolutionary” activities of *Solidarity*,²³ were not merely a smoke screen to disguise an actually “communist” policy, but at a second glance they *did* reveal the actual motives of the military leadership: To them, “Polish socialism” was a governance model necessary to safeguard the “national interest” predating communism, and the entire socialist outlook of the country mainly a tool for embedding the Soviet alliance into that national interest. Significantly, the point of martial law allegedly being a measure preventing an invasion by the other Warsaw Pact countries – notably the Soviet Union, the GDR and Czechoslovakia – was raised by Jaruzelski only much later; at the time of events, they acted in full agreement with their allies.²⁴

In any case, the Army’s reputation hardly suffered from its leadership’s role during martial law because society mainly tended to blame the party for the breakdown of relations between the regime and *Solidarity*.²⁵ This distinction that was wholly unreal given the amalgamation of army and party leadership, showed how deeply the described popular pro-militarism was rooted. Also, after the formal end of martial law in 1983, the Army remained in practical control of the country. When after 1985 the international situation showed signs of a fundamental challenge to the communist regimes (mostly on part of the new Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev), the Polish civil–military leadership began to look actively

²³ Jan Olaszek, “Antysolidarnościowa propaganda władz PRL,” – *NSZZ Solidarność 1980/1989*, Vol. 7: *Wokół Solidarności*, wyd. Łukasz Kamiński i Grzegorz Waligóra (Warszawa: IPN, 2010), 178–181; Michta, *Red Eagle*, 207–208.

²⁴ On the motives for action on the part of the Polish and Soviet leaderships, see the account by Mark Kramer, “The Soviet Union, the Warsaw Pact, and the Polish Crisis of 1980–1981,” – *The Solidarity Movement and Perspectives on the Last Decade of the Cold War*, ed. Lee Trepanier, Spasimir Domaradzki and Jaclyn Stanke (Kraków: Krakowskie Towarzystwo Edukacyjne, 2010), 27–66.

²⁵ See an independent opinion poll on the trustworthiness of institutions of May/June 1981, KARTA Archive Warsaw, Sign. AO IV/68.3: Ankiety do niezależnych badań socjologicznych, Nr. 1; also Wiatr, *Soldier and Nation*, 147–148.



Common exercise of c. 800 NATO specialists on Weapon of Mass Destruction for NATO Response Force in Drawsko, Poland (2008). General Staff of the Polish Army (SGWP)

for an exit strategy; its leaders were flexible enough to strike a deal with *Solidarity* in 1989 that allowed for the survival of the Army and almost complete impunity of its leading members. This development confirmed that the question of regime and normative issues mattered little for an officer corps whose values were fairly autonomous, even solipsist, focused on their own peer group and with little reference to the civilian environment.²⁶ So, their “patriotism” – with regard to civil–military relations – was of a particular, rather flexible nature; at the same time, society continued to receive its own ideas of “patriotism” largely mediated through public display of military power.

²⁶ On such corporative interest representation see: Croissant and Kühn, *Militär und zivile Politik*, 196–197.

Change and continuity in Polish military policies after 1989

This was relevant for the fate of the Army after the takeover by a *Solidarity*-led government of the country in August 1989, as a result of the *Round Table* talks of spring that year. Initially, the Ministry of Defence and the other “force institutions” (notably the Ministry of the Interior) remained under control of the party and thus of the military elite. This was first questioned by Lech Wałęsa after his election as State President in December 1990, and further when in July 1990 a new all-*Solidarity* cabinet took office. Now, while on one hand communist influence in the Army could finally be significantly reduced, on the other, several problems made themselves felt with respect to the need of putting the Army under the control of the new civilian powers. Generally speaking, the restructuring of the Polish Army was burdened not only, as in all post-socialist countries, by such issues as budget constraints, the need to adjust training goals and methods, and the definition of national security priorities, but also by the uncertainty about the purpose and attitude of the Polish officer corps.

First of all, ironically, the dismantling of party structures in the Army, notably of the *Main Political Administration* (Główny Zarząd Polityczny) as a de facto branch of the Polish United Workers Party (PUWP, in Polish: PZPR), prompted the military establishment to demand “freedom at last” from civilian interference. Obviously, they didn’t acknowledge that until then they had closely cooperated with those party structures, nor did they (want to?) understand the concept of civilian control to be inherent to democracy. Rather, they favoured a model of a loyal but independent army that stood at an equal level with the government, a partner rather than a subordinate institution. One reason for this was certainly that, as with so many other things, the communists’ pervasive claim of truth had distorted the generally sound principle of civilian control;²⁷ in the Polish case, however, the reliable pro-military attitude in the civilian public worked also. Against this background, the Army leadership were hardly

²⁷ Michta, *Soldier-Citizen*, 7–8.

ready to acknowledge any responsibility for the repeated violent incidents with military participation during communism;²⁸ in their own eyes, they had always simply done their duty, and this way, continued the argument of “historical necessity” and of the primacy of external security. Visibly, the generals considered neither the tensions between that principle and civic liberties, nor the fact that the regime change should have an impact on their relationship towards civilian leadership.

This attitude effectuated, among other things, a remarkable difference with the memory culture notably of the German *Bundeswehr*: The latter distances itself in an almost paranoid fashion from both the *Wehrmacht* and the GDR’s *National People’s Army*, and has had, *notabene* under civilian government, extreme difficulty in establishing even the most rudimentary presence in society. In contrast, the Polish Army is not only almost omnipresent in the public space, but has no problem seeing itself as legal and spiritual successor to its namesake from the communist era. On the whole, there was relatively large personnel continuity after 1989. It is true that during the first years, certain groups of high-ranking officers retired either voluntarily or were discharged by the government; this concerned between 1989 and 1991, apart from the last “socialist” Defence Minister, Florian Siwicki (in office until July 1990), about one-third of the generals and many other senior officers.²⁹ Nevertheless, most of the personnel discharges and other reductions after 1989 happened for economic reasons and as part of force restructuring;³⁰ in any case, the bulk of younger officers, including many former party members, remained in their positions.

²⁸ It must be noted, though, that Wojciech Jaruzelski later apologised in public for the role of Polish forces in the crushing of the Prague Spring in 1968 and for the casualties that had occurred under martial law in Poland between 1981 and 1983.

²⁹ Paul Latawski, “Democratic Control of Armed Forces in Post-Communist Poland: the Interplay of History, Political Society and Institutional Reform,” – *Democratic Control of the Military in Post-Communist Europe. Guarding the Guards*, ed. Andrew Cottey, Timothy Edmunds and Anthony Forster (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 23.

³⁰ For an overview of the physical and technical changes in the Polish Army after 1989, see Lech Giermakowski and Tadeusz Keson, “The Post-socialist Demobilization of Poland’s Armed Forces,” – *The Military in Transition. Restructuring and Downsizing the Armed Forces of Eastern Europe*, BICC Brief/Bonn International Center for Conversion, 25, ed. Andreas Heinemann-Grüder (Bonn: BICC, 2002), 10–23.

Another factor favouring continuity is the fact that both the Army and society treat the regime changes as mere external events that do not affect the “inner core” of the Army. As an effect of this, the otherwise heavily displayed anti-communism of the post-*Solidarity* parties and their electorates has hardly affected the military that has after 1989 been widely spared criticisms based on normative categories, and is not associated with any regime but with the nation as an “eternal” institution and thus indispensable.

The only part of the Army against to which criticism has occasionally been directed is the military secret services that were created in the 1940s by Soviet intelligence and in whose leading ranks indeed many cases of corruption, illegal weapon trade, etc., have been detected. This is due to the post-1989 development of mafia-style structures based on the continued connections with post-Soviet military intelligence circles. Only in 2006, after years of parliamentary and public debate, the then right-wing *Prawo i Sprawiedliwość* (Law and Justice) government had the military intelligence service WSI (*Wojskowe Służby Informacyjne* – Military Information Services) disbanded. It was replaced by the new SWW (*Służba Wywiadu Wojskowego* – Military Intelligence Service) and SKW (*Służba Kontrwywiadu Wojskowego* – Military Counterintelligence Service).³¹

In their stubborn attitude, the military top brass were further buttressed by the fact that the new rulers in 1990 decided to leave the Army practically untouched. Understandably, when the Warsaw Pact began to crumble in 1990, this seemed to be no good moment for a complete makeover of the military; rather, the new rulers opted to keep the Army as it was provided, of course, its obedience to the new regime. In different words, the new rulers applied a balanced policy “between decommunisation driven by political necessity and continuity in personnel driven by military requirements”.³² But the continuity went beyond mere pragmatic

³¹ Artur Gruszczyk, “The Polish Intelligence Services,” – *Geheimdienste in Europa. Transformation, Kooperation und Kontrolle*, ed. Thomas Jäger and Anna Daun (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2009), 129–131.

³² Latawski, “Democratic Control,” 22.

reasons to a fundamental normative consensus: The politicians from the *Solidarity* camp who took over the Ministry of Defence in 1991 and applied a specific and rather simple way of “de-ideologising” the Army, namely by reinstating pre-communist traditions: they redrew the lists of eligible name patrons for military units, of “memorable” events in military history (especially battles), of military holidays, etc. This meant not only the review of the “white spots” especially in the history of Polish–Soviet relations – a measure that had been prepared long before 1989 by the oppositional underground – but likewise a fairly carefree invocation of older eras of Polish military history that were represented almost wholly in a positive, uncritical manner. In a speech delivered in May 1991 to the Heads of Educational Services of the Military Districts, the new Vice Minister of National Defence, Bronisław Komorowski (today Poland’s State President) defined as one goal of the new policy “to make visible [again] the withheld leaves of military glory and of the newest history of Poland”.³³ Even in his first order of January 1991, the new Minister, Piotr Kołodziejczyk, had vowed to re-connect to the “chain of generations that ha[d] been interrupted during the half century in the Polish People’s Army that had been consciously cut off from its historical provenance. [Particularly should be invoked] the Poland of the Piasts and Jagiellonians [Poland’s hereditary royal dynasties, J.B.], the First Republic, the Napoleonic epoch, the era of national uprisings, the Second Republic and the fights for independence in the First and the Second World Wars”.³⁴

As a result, practically the entire pre-communist Polish history appeared as “clean” and, thus, eligible. The major error, or suppression, committed by the new defence politicians, was to suggest that in the communist era the nationalist heritage had been too little invoked. Actually, the difference from the preceding era was not too big since the commu-

³³ Speech by Vice Minister of National Defence Bronisław Komorowski of May 1991 in Żagań, quoted by Jerzy Zalewski, *Apolityczność Sił Zbrojnych Drugiej i Trzeciej Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej. Teoria i praktyka* (Warszawa: Dom Wydawniczy Elipsa, 2009), 248.

³⁴ Order no 1 of the Minister of National Defence of 2.1.1991 for the area “Heritage and cultivation of the traditions of the Polish Armed Forces,” quoted *ibid.*, 250.

nists had drawn, with some few politically motivated exceptions – such as the memory of interwar military leader Józef Piłsudski due to his outspoken anti-Russian/Soviet views – on essentially the same nationalist heritage; practically all the new deciders did was remove communist personalities from the list of name patrons. Altogether, the Polish case differed quite remarkably from a pattern that American analysts had observed – or so they thought – in all former satellites of the Soviet Union, namely that “the anti-communist regimes that came to power in many of the East European states after 1989 held antagonistic views toward the military because of the militaries’ decades-long close links to the communists. In an understandable, if rather one-sided, view, the former dissidents distrusted the military, due to the fact that the military had functioned in the context of the Soviet-dominated alliance structure, contained a large number of communist party members, and had participated in various domestic crackdowns [of which] in Poland in 1956, 1970, and 1981 [---]”.³⁵

Indeed, the majority, rather conservative *Solidarity* politicians, were at least as “military friendly” as the communists. Apparently at no moment did they consider introducing a less militant and nationalist education than the one that had been in place throughout the socialist era; after 1989, if anything, education got even more nationalist than before. Tellingly, within the opposition, pacifist groups such as *Wolność i Pokój* (Freedom and Peace)³⁶ had played only a marginal role. Obviously, the Western perspective on the Polish opposition had been guided by the Cold War situation, and thus they had paid little attention to the Central European nations’ own mostly non-democratic pre-war heritage. Thus, Poland’s “return to the West” at least in part looked quite differently from what the Westerners had expected; on the other hand, given the continuity of nationalist compromise in the People’s Republic, the development was not really surprising.

³⁵ Thomas S. Szayna, F. Stephen Larabee, *East European military reform after the Cold War. Implications for the United States* (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 1995), 9–10.

³⁶ The only relevant publication on this movement is Anna Smółka-Gnauck, *Między wolnością a pokojem. Zarys historii Ruchu “Wolność i Pokój”* (Warszawa: IPN, 2012).

This general pro-military attitude in Polish society and politics led to a renewed – after the decade-long pursuit of “socialist military education” in People’s Poland – close cooperation between the Ministries of Defence and Higher Education in the field of “patriotic” and “defence-minded” education of the youth.³⁷ Likewise, even though since 1988 in Poland there had existed the option of civilian instead of military service, this was hardly made use of until the suspension of universal service in 2010. In particular, students continued to serve in the Army under privileged conditions that secured them the status of at least a reserve non-commissioned officer. Even after 2010, the economic crisis has again increased many students’ interest in a military career.³⁸

One measure aiming at “re-civilising” the Army was the (re-)establishment of field ordinariates for the Roman Catholic, Polish Autocephalous Orthodox and Protestant Churches in 1991, 1993 and 1995, respectively.³⁹ However, it must be mentioned that before 1989 the Polish Army had allowed – as the only Warsaw Pact army – the activity of ca. 45 Roman Catholic military deans, which is to be seen as another step to minimise the distance to civil society.⁴⁰

The second problem with regard to civilian control of the Army aggravated the first one: For a couple of years after 1990, the President and the Parliament struggled over who should execute the civilian control over the Army. This paralysed them both; consequently, the Polish General Staff could play their own game by exploiting the new civilian rulers’ lack of experience. According to Andrew Michta, the Polish generals – and likewise, to different degrees, their counterparts in other post-socialist

³⁷ See, e.g. the agreement DKOW-CB-043/10/08 between the Ministries of National Education and of National Defence of 21.10.2008 regarding cooperation “in the field of civic, patriotic and defence-minded education of the school youth”, website of the Polish Ministry of National Education, http://www.men.gov.pl/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=154%3Aporozumienie-z-ministerstwem-obrony-narodowej&catid=204%3AArchiwum-aktualnosci&Itemid=249 (accessed 25.11.2013).

³⁸ See the article “Wojskowe szkolenie dla studentów” (Military training for students) in the internet-based journal *Polska Zbrojna* (Armed Poland) of 2.6.2013, <http://www.wykop.pl/ramka/1540485/wojskowe-szkolenie-dla-studentow> (accessed 30.11.2013).

³⁹ Latawski, “Polish Armed Forces and Society,” 33.

⁴⁰ Zalewski, *Apolityczność*, 248, footnote 152.

countries – were “soldier-citizen[s] reflect[ing...] the transitional nature of the post-communist state” after the demise of the old regime and before the stabilisation of the new one.⁴¹ While this may at first glance sound similar to the German concept of the “citizen in uniform”, the setting in Poland was quite opposed since the Polish generals’ attitude towards the Third Republic’s civilian leaders clearly lacked identification with these: not only did the generals do everything to evade civilian oversight but they even sought to influence the government’s military policies, which they justified with their self-attained role as the actual guardians of the country. However, some civilian politicians did not behave in so constructive a manner, either; indeed, one can argue that the lack of experience with democratic government and subsequent uncertainty of civilian politicians was a major trigger for military disobedience.⁴² To be sure, the Polish Army at no moment willingly endangered the general transition process towards democratic rule and a market economy; but the military leaders’ behaviour made clear in an exemplary manner the significant difference between mere “national” and actually democratic political culture.

At this point, Samuel Huntington’s theory of civil–military relations (CMR) as explained in his famous book “The Soldier and the State” deserves to be checked against the empirical case of Poland both before and under martial law.⁴³ His “subjective” model of CMR assumes a close entanglement of the civil and the military sphere embodied by an officer corps consisting of “citizen-soldiers” with an essentially civilian view to matters of security policy and limited military professionalism. Likely, the country that comes closest to this “ideal” is Germany in the way described above, but certainly not Poland (at any moment pre- or post-1989). But neither allows the Polish military elite’s life-rescuing support in 1980–81 for the ruling party – to whose leadership they belonged themselves – to

⁴¹ Michta, *Soldier-Citizen*, 10.

⁴² Latawski, “Democratic Control,” 28.

⁴³ A recent re-assessment is given by Dayne E. Nix, “American Civil–Military Relations. Samuel P. Huntington and the Political Dimensions of Military Professionalism,” *Naval War College Review* vol 65, no 2, Spring (2012): 88–104.

speak of separate spheres of activity with the civilian and military elites, with the latter one restricting itself to mere advisors as suggested by Huntington's "objective" CMR pattern. Altogether, his approach is little suitable for analysing non-democratic regimes, on whatever ideological basis those may rest.

Indeed, Andrew Michta was right in identifying the Polish generals of 1989–90 as "soldier-citizens" rather than "citizen-soldiers"; to them, a "soldierly" set of values was clearly available from Polish military tradition but hardly a civil-democratic one.

Infamous markers of that Polish state of uncertainty became incidents that disclosed a deep mutual distrust between the military elite and the civilian government, rendered the necessary internal reforms more difficult and created confusion as to the actual distribution of power. One of these incidents was the so-called Parys Affair. Taking over as Defence Minister in December 1991, the arch-conservative and nationalistic Jan Parys set out to a veritable purge of the officers' corps, driven by strong anti-communism and a related fear of continued Soviet/Russian influences. This led to numerous dismissals of officers considered to be "red", among others the former members of the *Military Council for National Salvation* (*Wojskowa Rada Ocalenia Narodowego* – WRON) that had been the main governing body during martial law (1981–83). Apart from alienating this way the military elite, the minister also clashed with State President Lech Wałęsa over the prerogatives in security affairs that were not defined clearly under the existing constitutional law; and the "Small Constitution" adopted in 1992 did not make things much clearer. Finally, failing to gain support by Parliament due to his confrontational attitude, Parys had to step down in May 1992.⁴⁴

The takeover by a left-wing government in October 1993, dominated by the post-communist *Alliance of the Democratic Left* (*Sojusz Lewicy Demokratycznej* – SLD) did little to alleviate civil–military tensions. Indeed, the political and normative confusion of the officers became clear from the fact that on one hand these expressed a continued preference for

⁴⁴ Latawski, "Democratic Control," 28–29.

leftist views and parties,⁴⁵ but at the same time the presence of left-wing politicians in the Ministry of Defence after 1993 made parts of the military establishment suspect that the Ministry “had become an outpost of the SLD”.⁴⁶

The second significant crisis concerning democratic civilian control of the Army evolved on the occasion of a dinner reception at the military training centre at Drawsko in Pomerania⁴⁷ in September 1994 where, in the presence of State President Wałęsa, the then Chief of Staff, General Tadeusz Wilecki, expressed his distrust of the Minister of Defence, Piotr Kołodziejczyk, which apparently accelerated the latter’s resignation. He was even suspected by some to aim himself at the office of Prime Minister, which was an idea wholly incompatible even with the moderate scheme of a “partner army”. This time, however, Parliament sided with the Defence Minister. Both were at the time sidelined by State President Wałęsa who aimed at subordinating the Army to himself by maintaining good personal relations with the General Staff and favouring it over the Defence Minister. But this policy ended when in 1995 Wałęsa lost the presidential elections to the socialist candidate Aleksandr Kwaśniewski. The new President who was eager to even Poland’s path into the Western organisations, cooperated with the government and Parliament towards a more cooperative and effective civilian control scheme.⁴⁸

The first main result of this was the adoption in 1996 of a new *Law on the Minister of National Defence* that integrated the General Staff clearly inside the Ministry of National Defence, and subordinated its chief to the Minister, i.e. to civilian control. In article 137 of the “Large Constitution” of 1997 then, the General Staff was finally subordinated to the President – who acts through the Minister of Defence – and to parliamentary control; as Supreme Commander the President appoints the Chief of Staff

⁴⁵ Michta, *Soldier-Citizen*, 17–21.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 91.

⁴⁷ The military history of this place goes back to Prussian and German times, then still by the name of Dramburg.

⁴⁸ Michta, *Soldier-Citizen*, 91–92; Latawski, “Democratic Control,” 29–30.

and the Heads of the different arms of the armed forces. Moreover, it created a National Security Council (*Rada Bezpieczeństwa Narodowego* – RBN) as advisory body to the President and successor to the socialist era's Committee for National Defence (*Komitet Obrony Kraju* – KOK). Here, Poland was obviously following the US model. Since even 1991 it has acted as a National Security Office (*Biuro Bezpieczeństwa Narodowego* – BBN) connected to the Chancellery of the President.⁴⁹

NATO integration as factor of change in the Polish military

The *external* dimension of military reform comprising relations with the USA and NATO as well as strategic and doctrinal considerations proved to be less burdened by such fundamental contradictions. As one thing, here the military experts were on their actual turf (differently from politics), which fact was generally acknowledged by the civilians; moreover, there was general agreement between civilian and military leaders as to the changed security environment after 1990 and the desirable goal of integration with the Western organisations, in particular NATO.

The General Staff has therefore had an important share in the planning and implementation of subsequent strategic documents aimed at preparing the Army for its Western integration. The first document, the *National Security Strategy* of 1992, anticipated that development but was naturally much influenced by the “limbo” situation after the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact in 1991. Poland's accession to NATO in 1999 was followed already in January 2000 by an updated *National Security Strategy* that set out equally Polish engagements out-of-area under the Atlantic Alliance and territorial defence, or security, tasks at home. However, any employment of the Army in the domestic context, apart from disaster relief, is highly unlikely in the light of history.⁵⁰ In this respect, Poland has joined a European standard pattern.

⁴⁹ Latawski, “Democratic Control,” 32–35.

⁵⁰ Michta, *Soldier-Citizen*, 48–49; Latawski, “Polish Armed Forces and Society,” 29–31.

Tellingly, it was to a large degree Poland's negotiations about joining NATO that finally gave the Polish politicians the necessary momentum to force the military into subordination. One very visible signal was the demise in March 1997, on the eve of NATO's decision on Poland's accession, of "troublemaker" General Wilecki as Chief of the General Staff.⁵¹ Since NATO insisted on the implementation of evident democratic control and the Polish military most of all wanted to be accepted by their Western peers, they finally accepted what can be labelled the Western liberal model of civil–military relations. From February to April 1999 lasted the process of adopting new statutes for both the Ministry of Defence and the General Staff that streamlined and simplified the internal structures of these bodies, bringing them to NATO standards.

This means that it was to a large degree respect for NATO and especially its lead nation, the US (rather than for their own politicians), which made the Polish generals give in. Moreover, those civilian politicians, too, who were just as interested in being accepted by their Western counterparts, still had to learn how to apply such an effective control of the Army. One factor that greatly helped this adaptation process was the Polish participation in numerous multinational structures, beginning from the *Partnership for Peace* programme (PfP) in 1994, and activities that have also served to provide a certain cohesion among the post-socialist countries "heading west".⁵²

If theories are employed here such as *institutional socialisation*⁵³ or *epistemic communities*⁵⁴ both essentially suggesting a converging influence of national personnel's activity within an international organisation or another (long-term) cross-border professional framework, then

⁵¹ Michta, *Soldier-Citizen*, 104.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 50; Latawski, "Democratic control," 38.

⁵³ Alastair Johnston, "Treating International Institutions as Social Environments," *International Studies Quarterly* 45 (2001), 487–515; David H. Bearce, Stacy Bondanella, "Intergovernmental Organizations, Socialization, and Member-State Interest Convergence," *International Organization* 61, no 4, Fall (2007): 703–733.

⁵⁴ Peter M. Haas, "Introduction: Epistemic Communities and International Policy Coordination," *International Organization* 46, no 1, Winter: *Knowledge, Power, and International Policy Coordination* (1992): 1–35.

such effects can be expected rather for those younger officers that have served within NATO structures or at least in connection with the Polish Army's adaptation to NATO. The Social Research Division of the Polish Ministry of National Defence's Military Centre for Civic Education (*Wojskowe Centrum Edukacji Obywatelskiej*) has, since 1991, run regular (half-yearly) opinion polls among professional officers⁵⁵ regarding their assessment of, among other things, the anticipated and/or experienced effects of Poland's NATO membership. As a general trend, the interviewed officers, while acknowledging that the exchange of experiences with soldiers of other armies during common exercises etc. had significantly enhanced their professional skills as well as technical modernisation, also blamed the adaptation process for personnel reductions, a loss of social prestige and instances of internal "disorganisation".⁵⁶ In any case, the issues addressed in those polls were mostly interest-related and hardly of a normative nature. True, the younger officers' generation very likely has been growing since the 1990s into some sort of transnational military culture, but this process was not accompanied by any (at least official) critical assessment of the Army's pre-1990 policies.

However, what had worked with the pre-democratic military leadership of 1989–90 regarding their giving in to NATO pressure with a view to effective civilian control, was mainly, as indicated, the prestige-guided wish to gain official recognition by their Western, notably American, peers. That the Generals' generation on the whole did not undergo any significant learning process in terms of a reformed attitude towards civil–military relations, which fact was no little furthered by the aforementioned lack of essential normative (in contrast with procedural) changes on part of the new *Solidarity*-affiliated leadership of the Ministry of National Defence after summer 1990.

⁵⁵ The Centre runs similar opinion polls among conscripted soldiers (until 2011, there was compulsory military service in Poland), but here I focus on those soldiers who have tied their career to the Army and need to identify with it in a substantial manner.

⁵⁶ Katarzyna Anna Gronek, "Konsekwencje wynikające z przystąpienia Polski do NATO w ocenie środowiska wojskowego," *Bezpieczeństwo – obronność – socjologia. Biuletyn* nr 1, April (2014): 3–21.

Taking the view once more to the external dimension, obviously, and similarly as with the later enlargement of the European Union in 2004, Poland (and other countries concerned) was admitted into NATO in 1999 before it had reached full technical and normative compatibility⁵⁷ because the receiving community itself expected to gain something from this: in the case of the EU this was the enlargement of the Common Market, in the case of NATO the wish to remove the grey security zone that the demised Warsaw Pact had left behind and to calm down the region, and even more urgent, the need for a unified deployment area for the war against Yugoslavia in summer 1999. In this situation, quite a number of unresolved issues were tacitly superseded, or rather, postponed.

While today Poland has doubtless grown into NATO's structures and already gained its own (ambiguous) experiences of the practical working within that alliance, the indicated domestic uncertainties as to the purpose and practical capacity of its civilian and military security structures have not disappeared. This was highlighted, e.g. by the tragedy of the 10th of April 2010 when the presidential plane crashed near Smolensk which killed not only the President, his wife and several deputy government ministers but as well the Chief of Staff and the Commanders of the Army, Navy and Air Force. As one thing, the subsequent investigations hinted at a serious long-term neglect of security rules such as by far too few flight-training hours on the account of the presidential pilots, in a country that spends vast sums on representational (cavalry) troops and the celebration of military holidays. Just for the sake of completeness the fact shall be mentioned here that after the incident of the 10th of April 2010 a fundamental rift (re)opened between, roughly speaking, the (national-)liberal and the (national-)conservative forces in Polish society (and media), with the latter group effectively blaming President Bronisław Komorowski and Prime Minister Donald Tusk with murder of then President Lech Kaczyński in the framework of a pro-Russian conspiracy. This "Polish-Polish" cultural war has helped to undermine, at least to some degree,

⁵⁷ For an overview of the technical integration of the Polish Army in NATO structures see: Mieczysław Cieniuch, "The Polish Armed Forces' Role and Development," *Military Technology* 35, no 8 (2011): 20–23.

popular certainty about the achievement after 1990 of a minimal democratic consensus among the political parties. Differently from the Catholic Church, the Polish Army has widely steered clear of that controversy, being widely occupied with its own internal restoration and adaptation to the new global security environment.

An issue that remains, however, is the attitude of the Polish Army towards the normative basis of democracy and its impact on national education: Without doubt, the Army is loyal to the Third Republic (as it had been to the People's Republic); but so far, there is little evidence for any fundamental withdrawal of either military or civilian educators (at schools, museums, etc.) from the established, widely non-civilian narrative of national strength, heroism, sacrifice and military victory as keys to political success.⁵⁸ In the first place, it will be economic and civilisational progress made by Poland within the European Union – and the dwindling attractiveness with young people of the military profession – that may set here a counterpoint in favour of a more civilian notion of politics.

Concluding remarks

Summing up, one can identify two major phases regarding the evolution of Polish thinking about security and defence, and the related practice: First, more or less throughout the 20th century until the early 1990s, a national-militarist discourse based on a “realist”, i.e. antagonistic and essentialist, perception of international relations that was essentially home-made but reinforced by the Second World War and subsequent Sovietisation. And second, from the early 1990s onward, a gradual learning process on part of the Army that led to an – at least superficial – “civilisation” of civil–military relations and foreign policy; there, external influences notably from the US were crucial for overcoming the Polish military leadership's stubborn self-centredness and lack of responsibility.

⁵⁸ For some information on this topic see my article “Militär- und Kriegsmuseen in Deutschland und Polen. Eine Betrachtung erinnerungspolitischer Tendenzen,” *Inter Finitimos. Jahrbuch zur deutsch-polnischen Beziehungsgeschichte* vol 10 (2012): 36–53.

The fact that after 1990 this military establishment was exchanged only in part and mostly due to technical and economic, but not political, reasons was due, on one hand, to pragmatic considerations, but arguably no less to the mythical, i.e. non-critical, image of the Army as an untouchable “national institution”.

Concerning the issue of how to characterise theoretically the positions and policies taken by the Polish Army before, during and after the “break” of 1989–90, this article has argued that none of the referred-to major Western theories are able to explain in a satisfying way the crucial motives and behavioural patterns at work there. Without excluding that other post-communist armies may show similar features, Polish civil–military relations appear rather peculiar in terms of the far-reaching continuities in their ideological underpinnings across both the 1944–45 and the 1989–90 systemic change thresholds.

The fact that during the 1990s the Polish Army could relatively smoothly become integrated into NATO was obviously owed in the first place to its organisational, technological and armament-related adaptation to Alliance standards. This included, as mentioned, common training and qualification measures and the establishment of effective democratic control; the latter, however, was at the time a necessary and thus pragmatic step that said little about the Polish military leadership’s actual normative views. At the same time, this process may be taken as a hint at NATO’s incumbent members’ attitude towards the post-communist candidates: Being sufficiently pragmatic to consider those elites’ views mainly with regard to their significance for Alliance cohesion and effectiveness, and presented with the former Soviet allies’ passionate desire to become “Western”, they did not investigate too much time in assessing the actual motives behind this attitude. This way, they followed an established pattern that had worked in other countries before, e.g. in Germany, Italy, Spain or Portugal. Arguably, this is a point where the post-communist transition much resembled the post-Fascist one.

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