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SOME REFLECTIONS ON THE 25TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE POLISH–GERMAN TREATY

1. There is a term *Vertragswerk* in diplomatic German which does not have an exact equivalent in Polish or English. It can be understood as a comprehensive regulation of a crucial issue in one broad agreement or a set of international agreements. Undoubtedly, the Polish-German Treaty “of good neighbourship and friendly cooperation” falls within this category, though it certainly – due to its relevance to the relations of independent Poland with unified Germany and its symbolic value for the directions of changes in Poland’s foreign policy after 1989 – has a much broader dimension.¹ Arguably, due to this symbolic meaning, the Treaty is a source of political controversy at a time when the main directions of Polish foreign policy, mapped out in the first years after the regaining of independence, are being questioned.

The Treaty itself is not a particularly long document: it has 38 articles and also contains an exchange of letters relating to five substantive issues. A lawyer analysing the individual provisions of the Treaty 25 years after its signing would easily determine that the majority of them have been implemented or in fact “consumed” by further development: the security clauses (articles 6 and 7 of the Treaty) became moot when Poland gained membership of NATO. Similarly, most of the provisions (articles 11 to 36) relating to particular areas of cooperation lost their practical relevance after the conclusion of the Association Agreement and subsequently Poland’s accession to the European Union. Twenty-five years after the Treaty became effective only the articles on regular political consultations (Article 3), parliamentary cooperation (Article 4), commitment to continue work on the return of cultural goods (Article 28) and the creation of a joint award “for outstanding contribution to Polish-German relations” (Article 35) still have direct operative value. Even the controversial provisions of the Treaty relating to the protection of Germans and Poles (in Poland and the Federal Republic of Germany, respectively) have been formulated more precisely thanks to the development of an international standard for the protection of minorities. Such a standard, which was not yet clearly defined at the turn of the 1980s and 1990s when

¹ Cf. articles included in a collection titled *Przełom i wyzwanie. XX lat polsko-niemieckiego Traktatu o dobrym sąsiedztwie i przyjaznej współpracy 1991-2011* (ed. W. M. Góralski), Warsaw 2011 (in particular those by J. Sulek).

the treaty was being negotiated (at that time, it was possible to refer mainly to political documents: the Council of Europe Recommendation and the CSCE Copenhagen Document), was strongly reinforced by a number of international conventions and Poland's membership of the European Union (it is often forgotten that member states are obliged to take action to guarantee national identity to their nationals who identify with the nationality of another member state). The modern international standard differentiates among minority groups (national, ethnic, linguistic, etc.), requiring the state in which a certain minority resides to provide adequate support for the preservation of their identity. The Treaty, on the other hand, contains a dynamic clause (Article 20 paragraph 2) obliging the parties to apply its provisions "in line with international standards on minorities" (a provision of which many critics of the Treaty appear to be unaware). This provides a good reference point for demands for adequate support and protection for the Polish minority in the Federal Republic of Germany.

So what is the operational and symbolic meaning of the Treaty today? What strategic elements does it point to that would promote the main values of Poland's status in international relations? Above all, they concern three closely related issues:²

- the merging of a series of decisions taken at the end of 1989 and then between 1990 and 1991 into a coherent concept of political and legal foundations for good neighbourship between independent Poland and unified Germany;
- the assurance of territorial stability for the development of the Polish state and similar stability in the regions adjacent to Poland – in accordance with the relevant principles of international law (observance of territorial integrity, inviolability of borders, ban on the use of force, illegality of annexation);
- the securing of Poland's position in the community of democratic countries, which on the European continent assumed the form of the European Communities and now the European Union (EU membership and a position at the centre of the EU decision-making process); naturally also membership of NATO (and reinforcement of the security clauses of the Washington Treaty) and participation in the systems aimed at protecting human rights and the rule of law (primarily membership of the Council of Europe).

2. It appears that the second point should be discussed first, since the issue of clarity with regard to the Polish border with a unified Germany in the light of international law was of fundamental importance and was the point of reference for all other activities. The "Big" Treaty was a kind of buckle tying up a number of important decisions. Its very idea was born in the context of the "2+4" Conference dealing with the "external aspects" of German reunification, which included, among others, confirmation of the Polish-German border and discussion of a bilateral treaty confirming that border.

² Reflections concerning these matters are based on the author's article *Doktryna Skubiszewskiego*, published in: *Krzysztof Skubiszewski. Minister Spraw Zagranicznych RP 1989-1993*, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, Warsaw 2016.

The fundamental assumption was clear and unambiguous: the restoration of a democratic and independent Poland must take place in stable conditions based on the territorial *status quo*. Such an assumption was fully justified taking into account Polish historical experience, especially the most recent experience related to the change of borders in the aftermath of World War II. On the eve of political transformation, the question of the stability of Poland's borders had two principal aspects: western and eastern.

The former focused on the Polish-German border; however, it should be remembered that the changes in Poland coincided with the reunification of Germany. Good neighbourship with the unified Germany became one of the pillars of Tadeusz Mazowiecki's policy, and putting an end to all doubts concerning the international and legal status of the Polish-German border raised by the German side would be a basis for such good, predictable and lasting neighbourship. Nowadays, it is becoming more and more popular to seek the source of the "border conflict" in the propaganda of the People's Republic of Poland, which looked for arguments to support the idea of the national integrity of the state in the face of German revanchism. There is a lot of truth in that, although it blurs the crux of the matter somewhat: decades after the war, according to the official position of the Federal Republic of Germany, the Oder-Neisse line was considered to be a temporary arrangement – *modus vivendi* – within the meaning of international law.

There is no room here for a detailed discussion of this issue;³ nevertheless, its essence was aptly described by Krzysztof Skubiszewski in his major monograph *Zachodnia granica Polski w świetle traktatów* (The Polish Western Border in the Light of the Treaties),⁴ where he underscored the destructive effect of questioning the legal status of the territorial *status quo* in the light of international law, indirectly referring to the position adopted by the Federal Republic of Germany in the postwar period: "If, however, the domination of the state in the territory can be contested in the light of international law, although it is not necessary that legal uncertainties be associated with a diplomatic or military operation, then the state's position concerning such a fundamental component of its existence as its territory becomes unclear."⁵ The reunification of Germany was the right time to resolve the issue once and for all. In Poland, Skubiszewski, now as Minister of Foreign Affairs, was confronted with allegations that he was guided by "domestic policy issues".⁶ On the other hand, experts

³ Cf. e.g.: J. Barcz, *Dwadzieścia lat stosunków Polski ze zjednoczonymi Niemcami. Budowa podstaw prawnych*, Warsaw 2011.

⁴ K. Skubiszewski, *Zachodnia granica Polski w świetle traktatów*, Instytut Zachodni (Institute for Western Affairs), Poznań 1975.

⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 325.

⁶ "Nie znam kulisów mojej nominacji". Z profesorem Krzysztofem Skubiszewskim, byłym ministrem spraw zagranicznych, rozmawia Klaus Bachman ["I do not know the inside story of my nomination." An interview with Professor Krzysztof Skubiszewski, former Minister of Foreign Affairs, conducted by Klaus Bachmann], *Dziennik Bałtycki*, 7 January 1994. The text can be also found in: R. Kuźniar (ed.), *Krzysztof Skubiszewski – dyplomata i mąż stanu* (Krzysztof Skubiszewski – diplomat and statesman), Warsaw 2011, p. 464.

in international law pointed out that, after all, the unified Germany would be bound by the border agreements previously concluded by both German states – the Democratic Republic of Germany and the Federal Republic of Germany. Poland's demands in this area (participation in the "2+4" Conference to the extent necessary, conclusion of a treaty confirming the borders) did not initially meet with understanding in the Federal Republic of Germany. Nevertheless, Minister Skubiszewski remained adamant: "It had to be done. It would have been a diplomatic mistake not to take the opportunity and leave the problem solely to the four great powers."⁷

Minister Skubiszewski's actions to confirm the status of the Polish-German border in the light of international law (taken in full cooperation with then Prime Minister Tadeusz Mazowiecki) are now regarded as an example of effective and efficient diplomacy, and are considered fully justified. They brought about (through provisions of the 2+4 Treaty and of the bilateral treaty confirming the border) the exclusion of a potential conflict-forming element from Polish-German bilateral relations, and thus opened the door to a meaningful political dialogue, mutual understanding and reconciliation. This is worth recalling, since Polish-German relations, in view of their history, are a very delicate matter. The first decade of the twenty-first century showed that they can easily fall prey to populist politicians on both sides. The exclusion of the "border issue" from the discussion, a matter of vital importance for the Polish state, is a crucial issue for Poland and Polish-German relations.

There is one more aspect of the problem that should be discussed in this context. While working on the change of the German position regarding the Polish border, Minister Skubiszewski also aimed to secure the "withdrawal" of the guarantee given by the allied powers of World War II with regard to the Polish-German border, which referred to a reservation concerning a peace treaty. Some politicians and experts did not quite understand what Skubiszewski had in mind when he declared during the "2+4" Conference, on 17 July 1990 in Paris, that the position of the four powers related to the negotiations which were underway at that time was "not a guarantee for the Polish borders" (even a weakening of the Polish position was suspected). However, Skubiszewski's approach was clear from the very beginning – the idea was to bring about a situation where the Polish-German border would be just a regular border in the light of international law, and not restricted by certain limitations or favoured by certain guarantees. Justifying this position in the lower chamber of the Polish Parliament (the Sejm), the Minister stated:

At the same time the commitment of the superpowers to the definiteness of the existing German borders does not equal their guarantee in the sense of international law. In particular, the Polish-German border is not covered by such a guarantee. From the outset the Polish government held the opinion that the assurances of the great powers on the durability of the border and the elimination of any doubts that are being raised against us are indispensable. The participation of the great powers is necessary. But the guarantee is another thing. After the experience of Yalta we prefer not to have anyone's guarantee. It often produces the opposite effect to what was intended, i.e. reli-

⁷ *Ibidem.*

ability and peace, which the word “guarantee” actually implies. Let the Polish-German border in its present shape be a normal border, just like others, without creating special cases and a special position of the superpowers with regard to this territorial regulation, since that may result in an unwanted development. Sometimes we owe something to the guarantor and sometimes they take advantage of their special status. Polish experience has not been good in this respect. In Paris we reached the right balance between necessary assurances and our independence.⁸

How prophetic these words were. In 2015, the former Minister of Foreign Affairs, Adam Daniel Rotfeld, commented on the guarantees of territorial integrity given to Ukraine in the following words:

Who remembers the Moscow and Budapest agreements of January and December 1994 today? They concerned the giving up of the nuclear weapons which Ukraine inherited after the breakup of the Soviet Union. Ukrainians were aware of what might happen to their country. They negotiated with determination in Budapest. In exchange for giving up their weapons they were assured that the nuclear powers, including the USA and Russia, had confirmed Ukraine’s territorial integrity and sovereignty. The agreements stated in detail that the great powers would not tolerate economic coercion to compel Ukraine to submit to the interests of another country. As long as Ukraine was a dependent country, everything was fine. Then came the year 2014 and it turned out that nobody had guaranteed anything. The nuclear powers had given only non-binding “assurances” and not guarantees. This is an enlightening experience for other non-nuclear countries which have been offered similar “assurances”. (...) What I am driving at is that great powers do not attach much importance to multilateral agreements and institutions. They claim that such agreements and organisations are relevant only when they serve their interests. And when they do not, such “assurances” are ignored and treated as non-binding declarations.⁹

The second aspect of the “border issue” concerned the westward shift of Poland’s eastern borders during World War II and in its aftermath. Potentially, the period of change in the Central and Eastern European region could have given rise to all sorts of actions (and in this case “political warriors” were not difficult to find). The above-mentioned starting point for the discussion – resting on the fundamental assumption of respect for the territorial *status quo* – also presupposes that previous international legal obligations will be respected. This was reflected in a network of bilateral treaties in which, in relations with neighbouring countries, the existing borders were confirmed (it may be worth noting here that the cancellation of the “Potsdam reservations” during the “2+4” Conference also referred to the Polish-Russian border running through the territory of former East Prussia, i.e. the border with Kaliningrad Oblast). Thus, Poland was able to enter a period of deep systemic change and changes on the political map in its immediate vicinity in a context of territorial stability and certainty.

3. As has been mentioned in the introduction, the “Big” Polish-German Treaty should be understood as *Vertragswerk*, not only because of the range of regulations agreed upon but above all due to its connections to other fundamental agreements that were to determine Poland’s relations with the unified Germany in the coming

⁸ Speech in Parliament, 26 July 1990.

⁹ Interview for *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 14-15 February 2015, p. 18.

decades. Above all, it should be noted that a joint statement by Mazowiecki and Kohl, signed on 14 November 1989 during Chancellor Kohl's visit to Poland, suspended for a day due to the fall of the Berlin Wall, was a guidance document that opened the way for the "Big" Treaty. Thus, the adoption of this guidance document coincided with the beginning of the reunification of Germany. Basically, a new political situation developed. However, it did not pose a problem to Mazowiecki's government, as the new democratic opposition in Poland unequivocally supported the right of the German people to self-determination, including the reunification of Germany (as has been pointed out earlier, the issue of confirmation of the Polish-German border was related to this).

However, it should be remembered that as part of this "preliminary" agreement, the German side unanimously supported the reform programme of the new Polish government, in particular giving firm support to the reduction of Poland's debt, without which the Balcerowicz plan had no chance of success. A number of agreements of great political and practical importance were also concluded: on a youth exchange programme, on scientific and technological cooperation, on health protection and cooperation, on investment protection, on environmental protection, on agricultural cooperation, on posted workers, on vocational training. There were also agreements regarding the establishment of new consulates-general and military attachés at embassies, and on the opening of cooperation in legal matters.¹⁰

The signing of the "Big" Treaty was also accompanied by the finalisation of detailed agreements in key areas: the establishment of the *Jugendwerk* and the institutionalisation of cooperation in the field of environmental protection and cross-border cooperation. At that time, work was also underway on important agreements to resolve the persistent problems of the past (especially the first stage of the agreement on support for slave and forced labourers of the Third Reich), which was important for building a common historical consciousness (an agreement on the meeting centre in Krzyżowa and the establishment of the Foundation for Polish-German Cooperation), and on developing in practice the mutual relations between Poles and Germans (opening of new border crossings, introduction of visa-free travel, introduction of a new social security agreement, clarification of the succession of international treaties which had earlier applied to Poland's relations with the Federal Republic of Germany and particularly with the former German Democratic Republic). Although many of these solutions were quickly "absorbed" in the course of the intensification of Polish relations with the European Union, particularly with regard to economic relations, cross-border cooperation and personal mobility, including tourism and social security, some of them have found a permanent place in relations between Poland and Germany and are now treated as "imperceptible" elements of regular relations. This represents a great success of the "Big" Polish-German Treaty.

¹⁰ Cf. *Polska–Niemcy. Na drodze ku porozumieniu i pojednaniu. Zbiór dokumentów związanych z wizytą Kanclerza Federalnego RFN Helmuta Kohla w Polsce w dniach 8-14 listopada 1989*. Dokumenty, Przegląd Zachodni (Western Review), Poznań 1990.

4. The Polish-German Treaty was also, alongside the treaty with France concluded slightly earlier, the first legal document (agreed upon with a leading EC member) which included a European option for the new Polish foreign policy which was being developed at that time. The preamble to the Treaty emphasises the importance of the Federal Republic of Germany's membership of the European Community for the future relations of both states, and the political and economic inclusion of the Republic of Poland in the Community (point 7). It also makes reference to the significance of good Polish-German neighbourship, referring to the concept of a Polish-German "community of interests" formulated by Minister Skubiszewski (outlined in a speech given at the Sixth Polish-German Forum in Poznań on 22 February 1990). At the same time, it was pointed out how important such a "community of interests" was for the development of the European integration process: in the Treaty, Poland and Germany emphasised their awareness of "the community of interests and common responsibility for building a new and free Europe, united by human rights, democracy and the rule of law" (point 4 of the preamble).

The "Big" Polish-German Treaty precisely defined a strategy (in the majority of its provisions, in fact) aimed at ensuring Poland a permanent place among democratic countries, with an effectively functioning market economy. Minister Skubiszewski was well aware that the only project that would guarantee that kind of development was the Western European (at that time) integration process centred around the then European Communities. He understood very well that the EC had an economic common denominator; nevertheless, it had been from the start a political project whose primary aim was to tie together two long-time enemies, Germany and France, then to counterbalance the Soviet Union (in conjunction with NATO), and eventually to provide Europe with a proper political and economic position in a globalising world. While concluding negotiations on the European Union Association Agreement, Minister Skubiszewski stated that "(...) Poland has been given a historic chance. For participation in the European integration process guarantees security, sustainable democracy and successful economic development."¹¹ He elaborated on this essential strategic element in Polish foreign policy in a speech delivered in the Sejm on 21 May 1992 in connection with the ratification procedure of the Association Agreement:

When discussing our relationships with the Community, we talk primarily about economic issues. But we should remember that the essence of these relationships is related to the political sphere of our security, broadly defined. Today's relations with the Community and tomorrow's accession to it determine the stability of our security. For since the beginning the Community has been and still is a political endeavour. Our Association with the Union, our aspirations to membership are first and foremost of a political nature. What we intend, as was the case with Greece, Spain and Portugal, is to eliminate the spectre of totalitarianism once and for all and secure the future of democracy in our country. Owing to the treaties that laid the foundations for the Community, owing to its activities, the Communities are, alongside the United States, a bastion of democracy in the world.

¹¹ *Krzysztof Skubiszewski – dyplomata i mąż stanu ...*, p. 475.

On the other hand, it is about ensuring that our country has a safe place in Europe. This goal is more important for us than for the countries that are today Member States. Needless to say, during the last two centuries not only the Polish borders, not only Poland's independence, were threatened, but also the survival of the nation. The Association with the Community will guarantee us, as well as other Member States, not only economic and social development, but above all the preservation and emanation of our national existence.¹²

Poland's accession to the European Communities (later the European Union) and its subsequent active role therein was therefore regarded as an essential element that would guarantee the country's development as an independent democratic state, and at the same time as a great opportunity of historical significance: "Our Association with the European Union stands among the great events of our history – those that opened up new prospects and gave hope; our history does not know many such occasions."¹³

In the 1990s there was no doubt as to the ultimate goal, and after some initial reservations expressed by some political parties with regard to this challenge (and the joining of NATO) a cross-party political consensus was reached, which played an important role in the consolidation of the systemic changes in Poland. This consensus was not that unanimous at later times (starting with the first period of rule by the Law and Justice party) and sometimes led to situations where Poland was pushed to the margins of the European integration process, although at the beginning "political skirmishers" were quite numerous: it is enough to mention the NATO-bis and EEC-bis concepts, which appeared in 1992.

From the beginning, clear consequences were associated with the fundamental goal. Firstly, they related to the desire to anchor Poland firmly in (Western) European integration and security structures. Minister Skubiszewski stated that "From the beginning of our policy we have rejected the possibility of Poland's being treated as part of a 'grey', 'buffer' or neutral zone – in the central region of the continent. Such a zone inevitably leads to rivalry or domination of the stronger states in its territory. The area that separates Germany from the European East, including Russia, cannot be reduced to a frontline for foreign strategy."¹⁴ NATO membership was considered "the highest level of security", and "the historical experience of Poland has urged us to strive to achieve the highest level of security."¹⁵

Secondly, the achievement of this ultimate goal indicated the erroneous nature of not only "indirect" solutions, but also alternative ones aimed at seeking Poland's security only in regional constellations, or the return to the concept of "Intermarium" (Polish *Międzymorze*; of course "dominated" by Poland). In this context, Minister Skubiszewski stated unequivocally: "(...) Beware of wishful thinking. There is a West-

¹² K. Skubiszewski, *Polityka zagraniczna i odzyskanie niepodległości. Przemówienia, oświadczenia, wywiady 1989-1993*, Warsaw 1997, pp. 225-226.

¹³ A lecture delivered on 28 December 1993 at the International Cultural Centre in Kraków and published in *Gazeta Wyborcza* on 8-9 January 1994. The text can be also found in: *Krzysztof Skubiszewski – dyplomata i mąż stanu ...*, p. 509.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 511.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*.

ern security zone: Poland needs to insist on its expansion to the East. Such aspirations must not be sacrificed for ephemeral ideas.”¹⁶

Later, “absent-mindedness” in Polish foreign policy manifested itself mainly in departures from these basic assumptions. The primacy of the integration option in Polish policy was questioned in general, and bureaucratic intra-EU games and internal Polish political disputes began to overshadow the fundamental value of the country’s EU membership. Poland’s membership of NATO, as well as the significance of the Alliance itself for the security of the state and European Continent, started to be deprecated, and alternative solutions based on a “strategic, bilateral partnership” with the United States began to be taken into account. The revival of the *Intermarium* concept as a major guarantee of Poland’s security has been seriously considered. Zbigniew Brzeziński succinctly summed up the attempts to introduce this kind of concept into political practice, stating that “unnecessary teasing of one’s neighbours” has nothing to do with foreign policy,¹⁷ and the annexation of Crimea by Russia and the war in Ukraine should be a cold shower for advocates of such a concept.

There is yet another extremely important issue stemming from the initial assumption, namely the necessity of taking active steps first to gain membership of the European Union, and then to increase the cohesion of the European integration process and to ensure that Poland has a strong position in it. Minister Skubiszewski derived the importance of this assumption from historical experience, stating that: “The political fragmentation of our continent continues. This creates a soil for chaos, conflicts and waste. The tendency for states and nations to unite, voluntarily forming organic groups in order to ensure peace, solidarity and progress, counteracts such fragmentation. This is how I have always viewed the European Community, and so I see today’s European Union, which was built on this foundation. This organisation is heading in the direction of a genuine political and economic union, including a monetary one. The best federal rules are applied, particularly the principles of subsidiarity and decentralisation.”¹⁸

The above assumption should serve as an important guideline, especially now in the context of increasing diversity within the European Union and the building of a centre of European integration (“core”) around the euro zone, even at the expense of the consistency of the process. Maintaining a procrastinating policy, which also appeals to populist arguments and fear, with regard to Poland’s entry into the euro zone leads to weakening of the country’s position in the European Union and threatens to push it towards the periphery of the European integration process. The destabilisation on the Polish eastern border clearly shows that the country’s place is at the centre of

¹⁶ *Krzysztof Skubiszewski, first Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Third Republic of Poland for Tygodnik Powszechny*, *Tygodnik Powszechny*, 17 April 1994. This interview can be also found in: *Krzysztof Skubiszewski – dyplomata i mąż stanu ...*, p. 476.

¹⁷ Z. Brzeziński in an interview for *Polityka* (7 June 2008, p. 55).

¹⁸ A lecture delivered on 28 December 1993 at the International Cultural Centre in Kraków and published in *Gazeta Wyborcza* on 8-9 January 1994. The text can be also found in: *Krzysztof Skubiszewski – dyplomata i mąż stanu ...*, p. 510.

European integration, in the “hard core” of the Union, and the euro zone – the highest level of integration of European countries – is not just a matter of business and economy, but above all represents the political crowning of the process of unification of European countries. Poland must be at the centre of such a process, because it is related to its *raison d'état*.

5. To conclude our reflections on the 25th anniversary of the “Big” Polish-German Treaty, it is worth recalling the names of prominent figures who played an important role in the negotiation of the Treaty and whose names are now hidden in the “shadow of political forgetfulness”. At that time it was of utmost importance that foreign policy was in the hands of Krzysztof Skubiszewski, a politician who was forward-looking and far-sighted in his understanding of the Polish *raison d'état* and at the same time belonged to a group of outstanding experts in international law. He did not, however, dogmatise the importance of legal (status) issues – he saw their solution as a starting point for long-term strategic policy. The Prime Minister of the first government of independent Poland appreciated these qualities of Minister Skubiszewski, strongly emphasising in his farewell speech: “He was a gift to me.”¹⁹

It is not without significance that also other politicians who exercised a decisive influence on the shaping of Polish foreign policy – Prime Minister Tadeusz Mazowiecki, Bronisław Geremek, Mieczysław Pszon (a plenipotentiary appointed by Mazowiecki to negotiate the Joint Statement) Janusz Ziółkowski (advisor to President Wałęsa), Władysław Bartoszewski (acting for Polish-German reconciliation) – demonstrated a deep understanding, due to their own generational experience, of both the historical determinants of Polish-German relations and the importance of a Polish *raison d'état* focused on the necessity of establishing good Polish-German neighbourship, for which an indispensable prerequisite was to put an end to all doubts that had been put forward by the German side as to the status of the border. It was of paramount importance that the generation of politicians who, on the one hand, had first-hand experience of World War II and the postwar period, and on the other hand, fully appreciated the importance of strengthening Poland’s position in (Western) European political and economic integration processes and building solid Polish-German relations as a prerequisite for such a policy direction, was entrusted with the shaping of Polish policy towards Germany during the political transition.

We wish they were with us today.

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¹⁹ *Pożegnanie Profesora Skubiszewskiego. Był dla mnie darem*, Gazeta Wyborcza, 22 February 2010, p. 22.

ABSTRACT

The Polish-German Treaty of Good Neighbourship and Friendly Cooperation became a symbol of a new foreign policy of the independent Poland after the systemic change of 1989. Its significance has a bilateral dimension in relations with the unified Germany and a general dimension as well. As concerns the former aspect, the Treaty together with the confirmation of the Polish-German border opened up the way to building a Polish-German community of interests in all political areas and in interpersonal relations. As to its general import, the “Big” Polish-German Treaty was the first major signal of a turn in foreign policy of the independent Poland towards aspiration to membership of the then European Communities (later the European Union) and NATO. Thus, it paved the way to initiating Poland’s cooperation in all the basic areas of relations with the Western Europe of those times.

