



Poland

Assessment: Good

Trend: ↔

Capital: Warsaw

Type of Government: Republic

Head of Government: Prime Minister Leszek Miller (since 19 October 2001)

Minister of Foreign Affairs: Włodzimierz Cimoszewicz

Population: 38,633,912

Human Development Index Ranking 2002: 37

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Poland had a **good** overall record of supporting the democratic cause abroad, particularly in light of constraints stemming from modest influence and means. Although a coherent strategy for fostering democracy beyond Polish borders has not been among Warsaw's foreign policy priorities, the country has reacted to breaches of democratic procedures in electoral processes, to limitations on democratic freedoms and to other authoritarian or dictatorial practices. With the notable exception of hosting the inaugural Community of Democracies Ministerial, the focus of Polish attention to democracy-related issues has been largely limited to the region of Central and Eastern Europe.

Developments in four countries -- Belarus, Slovakia, Ukraine and Yugoslavia -- are particularly important in assessing Polish involvement in supporting democracy abroad. Polish authorities have frequently and publicly criticized leaders who have not respected democratic procedures in these countries. For example, Poland joined international efforts to isolate the Lukashenko and Milosevic regimes in Belarus and Yugoslavia, respectively. Poland has worked with other governments to help organize and monitor elections in the former Yugoslavia and in some countries of the former Soviet Union.

Poland's preference has been for collective rather than unilateral action in addressing democracy-related issues abroad. With respect to international promotion, ambitious projects other than symbolic ones have generally been beyond Poland's reach. Apart from collective actions of international organizations, Polish governmental activities have included unilateral measures, such as official government statements (executive and legislative branches) as well as bilateral measures. A separate, and quite important, vehicle has been the work of numerous Polish NGOs supporting democratic processes abroad. Myriad organizations, some with funding from the Polish government, have been engaged beyond Poland's borders with activities ranging from grassroots democracy promotion to specialized training for local government officials. Most of these Polish NGOs have been working in the former Soviet Union and in the Balkans.

Notwithstanding these substantive governmental and non-governmental efforts, the Polish record of supporting democracy abroad is deficient in some areas. For example, Poland has been quite reluctant to express its disapproval for notorious breaches of democracy and human rights in powerful countries such as China, with respect to Tibet, and Russia, with regard to indiscriminate use of force in Chechnya. Also, Poland has not had a good record concerning some 22,000 asylum seekers during the 1990s, with only 1,300 being granted the desired status.



FOREIGN RELATIONS BACKGROUND

During the 1990s, Poland's foreign policy goals could be defined as: 1) integration into Western security and economic cooperation structures, 2) maintaining and developing harmonious bilateral relations with its neighbors, and 3) strengthening its regional position through active participation in existing frameworks of regional cooperation.

As a result of Poland's primary role in triggering democratic changes that helped to bring down most of the communist regimes in Central and Eastern Europe, successive Polish governments have acknowledged the country's special responsibility to support democratization processes abroad, and have placed this goal squarely on the foreign ministry's agenda. This duty, however, has never found a clear and consistent formulation in the statements of senior government officials, and has not been translated into a precise strategy or been accompanied by the necessary means and tools to carry it out.

The return of the country to the European political and economic mainstream¹ and, specifically, Poland's accession to NATO and impending membership in the European Union, has been the principal focus of Poland's foreign policy and has largely shaped its international conduct between 1992 and 2002. This goal has enjoyed a broad political consensus and remained constant irrespective of changes of government, foreign ministers and presidents. After Poland became a member of NATO in March 1999, joining the European Union has been at the center of Polish diplomatic efforts.

In terms of bilateral relations, ties with the United States have remained the most important over the course of the 1990s, closely followed by relations with the EU and the European Commission. Next in order of importance came individual EU countries, most notably Germany, France, and the United Kingdom, followed by the Russian Federation.

Most of Poland's diplomatic efforts and resources, therefore, have been consumed by relations with the U.S. and the EU, leaving Polish regional policy suffering from neglect and sparse resources. Poland did undertake some initiatives to provide assistance in the region, but they were usually limited in objectives and scale.² Poland's potential impact in the region as a possible model for, and champion of, democratic transition could have been much greater, especially given its membership in NATO, promising candidacy for EU enlargement and comparative economic strength.

RESPONSE TO OVERTHROW OF DEMOCRATICALLY-ELECTED GOVERNMENTS

During 1992-2002 there were no cases of overthrow of democratically elected government in Central and Eastern Europe. As a routine exercise, Poland's foreign ministry has issued statements condemning coups d'état all around the world during the past decade and supported sanctions imposed on the offending governments by the EU, UN, and other organizations. However, no unilateral action was pursued. Though Poland eagerly participated in operation "Desert Storm" in Kuwait in 1991, the principal motive behind this involvement was to enhance Polish relations with the U.S. and its allies, with whom Poland hoped to advance the case for NATO membership and Poland's integration into European security and economic structures more generally. "Desert Storm" should not, therefore, serve as an example of genuine Polish government will to foster democratic order beyond its borders.

RESPONSE TO MANIPULATION OF ELECTORAL PROCESSES

Between 1992 and 2002 Poland reacted to the manipulation of electoral processes abroad mainly by supporting the resolutions and collective actions of the Council of Europe, the Organization of Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the UN, and by signing the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe, managed under the auspices of the European Union. The Office of Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), part of the OSCE and which is based in Warsaw, has been the main institution through which Poland participated in election monitoring and reported on flaws in electoral processes abroad. Poland served as OSCE chair in 1998, intensifying the country's involvement in promoting democracy, and spawning more efforts by foreign policymakers to boost Poland's engagement in democracy building in Eastern Europe and the Balkans.

Poland has called attention to, and strongly criticized, the manipulation of presidential and parliamentary elections in Belarus since Lukashenko came to power in 1994. Poland joined the international community in condemning the practices of the Lukashenko government, and in exerting pressure to move in the direction of democratic reform. But Poland also did not view isolation of Belarus as a viable strategy. Hoping to break the impasse and restore some degree of dialogue within the country, Poland made several attempts beginning



in the mid-1990s to organize a “round table” in Belarus, bringing together the government and opposition with assistance of Polish mediators.³

Another example of Poland’s forceful objection to rigged elections was its participation in the international protest against the Milosevic regime. Poland joined with many of the Western countries in October 2000, when the dictator’s reign in Yugoslavia was in doubt, in expressing its unequivocal support for the democratic forces and then in welcoming the new democratic president.⁴ Poland enthusiastically supported the return of democracy in the whole of the Former Yugoslavia; the Polish Foreign Ministry issued several statements concerning elections in Serbia, Montenegro, and Macedonia.

Polish opposition also mounted in response to the electoral manipulation and authoritarian tendencies exhibited by Ukrainian President Leonid Kuchma. Shortly after coming to power in 1994, Kuchma systematically increased his presidential power at the expense of the parliament and judiciary and undertook a number of actions designed to limit freedom of speech and association. Political opposition grew, and culminated in large street demonstrations in March 2001. Polish officials expressed sympathy with many opposition demands. A delegation of opposition political forces visited Poland and held highly visible consultations with Polish parliamentarians.⁵ Polish President Aleksander Kwasniewski offered his good offices to help resolve the impasse between Kuchma and his opponents and expressed his wish for the victory of democracy in Ukraine.⁶

PROMOTION OF INTERNATIONAL DEMOCRACY

Between 1992 and 2002, Poland displayed readiness to promote and support the democratic cause abroad, again, most often through collective initiatives. Poland has been especially active in the Council of Europe, OSCE, the Stability Pact, and in less institutionalized fora such as the Visegrad Group, Council of the Baltic Sea, and the Central European Initiative. Poland has contributed both civilian and military personnel, as well as some modest funds, to the mission of building democracy and strengthening democratic institutions carried out by these organizations, primarily in the Former Yugoslavia and the Former Soviet Union.

An assistance beneficiary for most of the 1990s, Poland has slowly emerged as a donor country. Poland’s provision of aid to the new

members in the Council of Europe well illustrates this evolution. Some of the projects managed and financed by Poland within the framework of the Council of Europe include an ambitious training program for local government activists from Albania, implemented by the Foundation in Support of Local Democracy, with the participation of the Polish Foreign Ministry, as well as training in Poland for judges from Ukraine, and more recently, from Kosovo.⁷

To further assist in the international promotion of democracy, Poland hosted the first Community of Democracies ministerial meeting, which was held in Warsaw in June 2000. Then Foreign Minister Bronislaw Geremek was personally committed to the initiative, noting that he hoped Warsaw would no longer be associated with the Warsaw Pact of Soviet times but with the Warsaw Declaration of the new democratic era.

POLICY TOWARDS ENTRENCHED DICTATORSHIPS

During 1992-2002 there were two clear cases of dictatorships or *de facto* dictatorships in Central and Eastern Europe: Slobodan Milosevic in Serbia and Alexander Lukashenko in Belarus, and both were successful in manipulating electoral processes to consolidate autocratic rule.

On many occasions, Polish officials criticized the practices of the Belorussian dictator. Since 1994, dozens of official statements were issued to condemn the conduct of the government in Belarus. Polish presidents, ministers of foreign affairs, prime ministers and parliamentarians all expressed their indignation over developments in Belarus.⁸ In order to communicate disapproval and exert pressure on Lukashenko, the Polish government downgraded diplomatic ties with Belarus, accelerating the already worsening relations that are now limited to bilateral trade on a small scale.⁹ Poland supported the EU and the Council of Europe sanctions against Belarus.¹⁰

At the same time, the Polish government’s efforts to support the Belorussian opposition fell short of expectations in both countries. It seems that most of those opposing the Lukashenko regime have found shelter in neighboring Lithuania rather than Poland. The Republic of Poland joined the chorus of international criticism towards Lukashenko, but offered relatively little to his opponents.

The case of Yugoslav president-dictator Slobodan Milosevic is comparable to that of Lukashenko in Belarus. Milosevic came to power in



accordance with democratic procedures, but soon moved to eliminate all political opposition and consolidate power. Poland froze its relations with the Milosevic regime in 1992-1993 in compliance with UN resolutions, and only renewed them after the sanctions were lifted.¹¹ Then, in 1999, his campaign against Kosovars brought about a collective international intervention. Poland has frequently expressed its concern and outrage with Milosevic's

ethnic cleansing operation in Kosovo.¹² As a member of NATO, Poland also participated in the military operation against the Milosevic regime in spring 1999, and joined UN and EU sanctions against the Former Yugoslavia. Since 2000, when the regime was finally ousted, Polish governments have joined all international efforts to restore peace and democracy in the Balkans.

¹ This goal has been listed as a top priority of Polish foreign policy since the first free elections after the fall of communism in 1989.

² One such example is the Polish Know How Foundation, which assists several countries in Central and Eastern Europe, mainly through sharing Polish experiences related to successful economic transition.

³ Exposé by Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Poland Bronisław Geremek to the Diet of the Republic of Poland on the Main Lines of Polish Foreign Policy, Warsaw, 5 Mar. 1998.

⁴ EU Official statements on the FRY elections. <http://www.ceps.be/Pubs/SEEMonitor/Monitor15.php>.

⁵ *Rzeczpospolita* 14 Apr. 2001.

⁶ *Rzeczpospolita* 24 Apr. 2001.

⁷ Rybicki, Marek. "Poland's Ten Years in the Council of Europe." www.msz.gov.pl/english/polzagr/10_rybicki.htm

⁸ Information by the Minister of Foreign Affairs on the Fundamental Directions of Polish Foreign Policy (presented at the 16th session of the Sejm on March 14 Mar 2002).

⁹ Snyder, Tim. "Look East, Face West." *Transitions Magazine* (1998).

¹⁰ The official web page of the Directorate General for External Relations of the European Commission: http://europa.eu.int/comm/external_relations/belarus/intro/index.htm

¹¹ Czaplinski, Marcin. "Polish relations with the Countries of the Former Yugoslavia and Albania."

¹² Declaration of the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs concerning the military operation of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia Targeting the civilian population of Kosovo, Warsaw, 30 Mar. 1999.