

"Polish Experiences and Further NATO Enlargement"

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Robert Ponichtera, East European Program, The Woodrow Wilson Center

Regional stabilization was the central theme of the conference, "Polish Experiences and Further NATO Enlargement," held in Kraków on 14-15 May 1998. According to the organizer of the event, Bogdan Klich (director of the Institute of Strategic Studies at the International Center for the Development of Democracy in Kraków), the Institute sought to outline to representatives of East European governments and NGOs the measures taken by Poland in its campaign to join the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. Klich noted that by sharing its experience with other countries, Poland fulfilled its own "political mission," since this knowledge would serve to help integrate these countries into Western political and security structures. Thus, an additional (albeit implicit) theme of the conference was Poland's role as a regional power.

Representatives of the Polish government began the conference with a description of Poland's strategy to gain NATO membership. Vice Minister of National Defense Robert Mroziewicz reviewed Poland's record of military cooperation with NATO before the accession process and the subsequent history of the negotiations. During the accession talks (conducted in September and October, 1997), the Polish side assured Alliance representatives of Poland's preparedness to fulfill all the obligations of membership. According to Mroziewicz, Poland also agreed, among other things, to place all its operational armed forces at the disposition of the Alliance, to take part in all NATO defense systems, including nuclear planning, and to be responsible for 2.48 percent of the Alliance's total budget.

Mroziewicz noted that working contact between representatives of the Polish ministry of national defense, NATO headquarters, and SHAPE (Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe) took place parallel to the accession talks. During this process, Poland presented the

Alliance with an overall description of its armed forces as well as its modernization and development plans for the next five years. An important aspect of this contact was to discuss goals for achieving interoperability with the armed forces of NATO members. Toward this end, Polish military leaders predicted that approximately one-third of their country's armed forces will attain this level by the year 2003.

Over the next two years, Poland has a number of tasks to realize. In order to act as a host country for NATO operations, Poland will have to adapt certain railways and air/sea ports for military transport and supply; insure the adequacy of engineering, logistical, and medical support; and create a central base for data on the infrastructure of the country as it affects military operations. The armed forces must incorporate Poland into the NATO Integrated Air Defense System; finish work on creating a system for managing air space (an Air Sovereignty Operations Center); install the IFF (Identify Friend or Foe) system in all Polish military airplanes that will operate in NATO-controlled space; reorganize (and upgrade to NATO standards) the tactical and operational command structure; provide for the security of signal and communications systems in accordance with NATO standards; and prepare military personnel (through language and other training) to cooperate with NATO command structures. Army planners also need to perfect the interoperational aspects of the Polish units designated to serve as NATO Immediate Reaction Forces and Rapid Reaction Forces. Accordingly, work is underway on unit organization, command systems, training, and military preparedness and support.

Other government representatives addressed various aspects of the Polish experience in the accession process. Among these were Andrzej Krzeczunowicz, the former ambassador of Poland to Belgium, who discussed Poland's attempts to promote its interests among NATO member-states. Krzeczunowicz declared that in order to join the Alliance Poland had to conduct "a continual, non-stop lobbying effort." Government agencies and representatives held frequent press conferences and also sponsored exhibits in the West — all undertaken with the singular goal of "never losing an opportunity to show Poland in its best form." He noted, however, that the best promoter of Poland was the country itself; if it showed itself to be a promoter of stability in the region and continued economic growth, if it succeeded in the reform process and demonstrated that democratic reforms were irreversible, then it would be obvious to the West that Poland would be a good security partner.

Krzeczunowicz argued that Poland still needs to "promote" itself eastward, to Ukraine and Russia, to show that it is not a threat to either country. He suggested that despite tensions over NATO, Russo-Polish relations are at present satisfactory. After all, he claimed, disputes over the Alliance are currently but one area of disagreement, and "that's pretty good for 300 years of conflict."

The afternoon session of the first day was devoted to the opinions and attitudes of current NATO member-states regarding the enlargement of the Alliance. Robert Ponichtera of the Woodrow Wilson Center (Washington, DC) evaluated the treaty ratification process in the United States. Despite noting that U.S. Senators are well-disposed toward Eastern Europe, Ponichtera cautioned that the countries of the region still striving to join the Alliance faced a

tough road ahead. The most daunting obstacle, he argued, is the general lack of interest among American policy makers on issues of foreign policy. Members of Congress, after all, tend to focus on issues of most interest to their constituencies — jobs, pensions, or health care, but certainly not Eastern Europe. Moreover, he claimed, certain negative perceptions about the region and NATO continue to linger within the U.S. policy-making community. The first is an antiquated understanding of the U.S.-Russian relationship, based less on current trends in the politics of Moscow, but rather thoroughly immersed in the Cold War, U.S.-Soviet, bi-polar world. The second is the refusal to consider the changing nature of NATO in the post-Cold War era. It is becoming more and more apparent, he claimed, that NATO is less of a military alliance directed against an external threat than it is an institution that functions to insure peace and stability among its member states. Until this evolution is taken seriously by all U.S. policy makers, similar arguments will continue to crop up in the future.

In turning to European security institutions, Volker Stanzel, an expert on foreign affairs for the Social Democratic Party in the German *Bundestag*, called for an “independent European pillar” that would shoulder its own share of security responsibilities and burdens without having to rely on American military strength. He suggested that the Western European Union (WEU) and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) were the two structures that could strengthen this pillar. Stanzel noted that the WEU was created to conduct “humanitarian actions, and peace-keeping and peace-enforcement measures.” In 1996, the NATO Foreign Minister Council provided for WEU deployment institutions within the Alliance’s command structure, established “rules for the deployment of NATO capabilities under the political control and strategic leadership of the WEU, [and for] military planning and exercises for WEU-led operations using NATO resources.” He also claimed that the OSCE, by observing elections and through its efforts on arms control and trust- and security-building measures, will prove to be “a major instrument of preventive diplomacy for conflict prevention and of crisis management.” While admitting that the military capabilities of these institutions is currently inadequate, Stanzel insisted that Europe could “remain a viable partner of the U.S.,” and the stability of NATO could continue another 50 years, only if Europeans develop their own security structures.

On the second day of the conference, representatives from Bulgaria, Romania, Lithuania, Slovakia, Slovenia, and Ukraine described their strategies to join the Alliance. For example, Petras Vaitiekunas, head of the Central European section at the Lithuanian ministry of foreign affairs, argued that his country should become a NATO member-state for the sake of the “new architecture of European security.” This new structure, which would include closer association with Russia, would give every European country that shares common values “equal access to sources of security.” He argued that European security can no longer be carved up into separate entities. “There is no difference between the Baltic and other Central European countries,” he claimed, “because the role of the Alliance is to consolidate democracy, stability, and security throughout Central Europe.”

Since NATO membership is still being debated in Ukraine, policy makers and NGOs are just beginning to map out a long-term strategy for accession. Oleg Strekal of the National Institute of Strategic Studies (Kyiv) acknowledged that any number of factors — from domestic

politics to the deteriorating economy — could prevent the country from joining the Alliance. Nevertheless, he argued, it is possible to establish a number of priorities for the future. One would be to attempt to make the values, norms and principles of Ukraine’s internal political and social life compatible with those of the West (by “introducing democratic principles of inclusiveness and transparency into the state decision-making process,” supporting a free press, and giving society a say in political decisions). Another would be to establish democratic control over law enforcement agencies and particularly over the armed forces. Finally, Strelak noted that it would be necessary to reach “a nation-wide consensus regarding ties to NATO.” Without widespread domestic support for accession, Ukraine “will face a permanent risk” of remaining outside the Alliance.