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## The Influence of Integration Processes on Relations Between Minor and Major Players.

*A Case Study of Polish-Russian Relations*

**Abstract.** The author analyzes the problem of Russian-Polish relations in the context of theories related to the institutionalization of international relations to explain the related phenomena. He also proposes the thesis that it was the integration processes in Central and Eastern Europe and the reaction to them in Poland and Russia that have largely determined Russian-Polish relations. Moreover, the author emphasizes that in the context of changes in the architecture of European security, the activity of minor states such as Poland has significantly influenced relations with Russia, which is trying to maintain its influence in Central and Eastern Europe.

**Key words:** integration processes, Polish-Russian relations, Poland, Russia.

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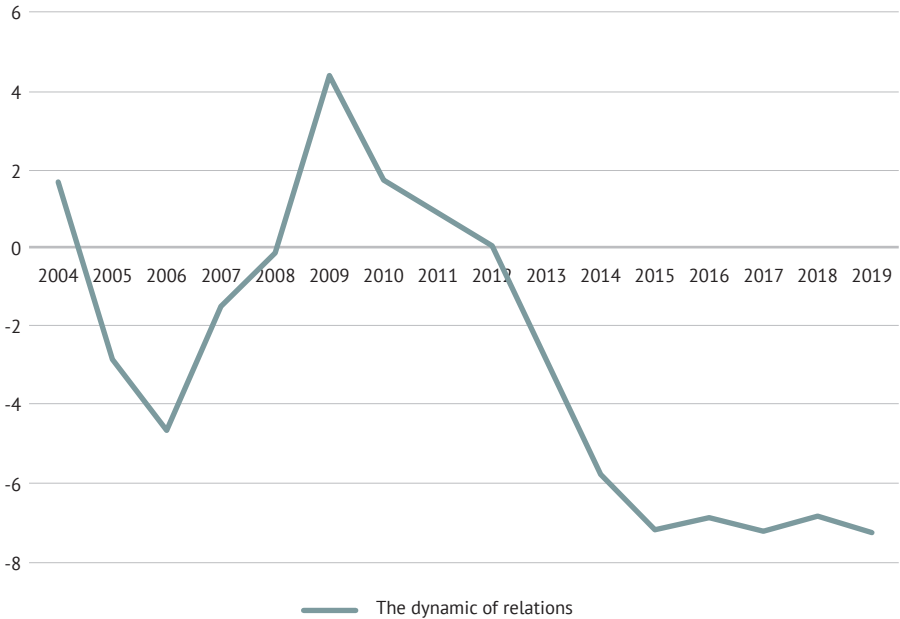
Introduction

The main thesis presented in this manuscript is that the challenges of Russian-Polish cooperation can be associated with the issues of institutionalization of international relations. To verify it, the author will refer to theories of institutionalization of international relations, as they largely explain the nature of Russian-Polish relations.

Since the 1990s, Russian-Polish relations seem to be strongly influenced by the integration choices of both countries and particularly dynamized by Poland’s accession to NATO and the EU. The model of Russian-Polish relations presented below indicates that the turning points for these relations were primarily related to integration processes.

The following chart is a graphical presentation of a proprietary model of Russian-Polish relations developed, which takes into account the whole range of factors that make up the state of Russian-Polish relations (from political to economic). The results of this modeling gave rise to a closer look at the theory of institutionalization of international relations and its relation to Russian-Polish relations.

Graph 1. The graph presenting the dynamics of Russian-Polish relations. The declines are related to the challenges of the institutionalization process.



Source: own elaboration

### **Theories of institutionalization of international relations vs. Russian-Polish relations**

To a large extent, the relations between Russia and Poland reflect the classic international relations between powers and subordinate states. The general theory of international relations does not offer many opportunities for minor and medium-sized states to impact those relations. Much of how major powers interact with subordinate states, whether through coercion or positive incentives, is by influencing their foreign policy behavior to better suit the preferences of the major power. This is especially true since major powers are more likely to join asymmetric international organizations in which they can be leaders (Palmer G. et al. 2006: 82). When considering the interactions between major and subordinate powers, many researchers focus on the coercive power that major state actors have over minor ones (Barnet M., Duvall R. 2005). Major powers have both material and social resources, which are desired by minor states and can be used to influence their behavior. The influence of major powers on other actors through coercion is a fact, even if it is not explicit and intentional (Barnet M., Duvall R. 2005). In cases where there is no direct coercion, minor entities will receive protection or economic rewards in exchange for concessions. A certain community of interests and mutually provided services is created between the dominant and dependent states. For example, when minor powers join alliances with great powers or accept troops of great powers in their territory, it is expected that the great patron will provide protection to the protégé (Lake D. 2009: 134, 139). Protection is 'outsourced' by finding a patron or entering an integration institution, which usually has specific leaders.

The theory of hierarchy in international relations, as proposed by David Lake according to this logic, also has an economic dimension, which is important for Russian-Polish relations. Both the security and the economic hierarchy increase the subordinate state's commercial openness, especially towards the dominant state. This also leads to economic dependence on the stronger state. Subordinate states also join military coalitions led by the dominant state. Under this extreme market dependency model, the parties decide to trade, invest, or otherwise engage in economic interactions similar to security diplomacy while retaining full sovereignty. Not unlike diplomacy, market exchange comes close to the ideal of Westphalian sovereignty. An example is the contemporary economic relations of the United States with countries in western Europe and Africa. With thriving relations of exchange with the former, and anemic relations with the latter, the USA does not exercise any significant power over the economic policies of states in any of the regions. At the opposite end of this model, a subordinate state transfers power over all its economic policies, including the currency, to another state. Both the 'unadulterated' dependence

and the full market model are rare; more often hybrid forms can be observed more often. As with security relationships, several indirect forms of economic relationships can be identified while recognizing the considerable variability within each ideal type. In economic zones, which are roughly equivalent to zones of influence in the sphere of security, the subordinate state cannot grant market privileges to third party actors or make economic transactions that grant other players influence over their affairs. In weaker models of dependence, dependent partners have a more extensive ability to make sovereign decisions, as exemplified by Russia's relations with Kazakhstan and Belarus in the 2000s. (Lake D. 2009: 56–57).

Jesse Johnson showed that states enter into alliances at an expense. Minor ones sacrifice their sovereignty but gain protection; major ones increase their power and influence, albeit bearing the expense of operating cost of the alliances. At the same time, minor states enter alliances to pursue their national interests, including increasing the probability of victory over their opponents, which is unavailable alone (Johnson J. 2015). At the same time, by agreeing to accept patronage, minor states can reduce their spending on armaments and allocate it to other purposes, in addition to increasing national security. This points to the internal conditions of the alliance-building process (Kimball A. 2010).

These considerations are very valuable to understanding the tensions in Russian-Polish relations. They could suggest that Poland, by entering into integration institutions such as NATO and the EU, tried to increase the possibility of realizing its national interests. At the same time, by assuming the role of a member of these organizations, it could risk a conflict with Russia, which tried to maintain its influence and build its own integration institutions. Stephen M. Walt suggested that minor states could use the balance strategy against similar potential adversaries, but against powers they will use the bandwagoning strategy (Walt S. 1985). This can be observed in Poland's accession to NATO, caused by the fear of a revival of Russia's power.

### **The reasons for tensions between Russia and Poland**

The above comments can largely explain many reasons behind tensions in Russian-Polish relations. Why is it then that all EU and NATO states, or their new members, do not have the same tense relations with Russia as Poland? The other V4 states also joined NATO and the EU, but, apart from the Czech Republic, no significant tensions or structural discrepancies were observed here, contrary to Russian-Polish relations. The reason is probably due to Poland's foreign policy toward the European Union and NATO. By entering the area of influence of the Russian Federation, Poland is pursuing an active foreign policy. As a state with no more than an average potential, it was more

determined to change the balance of power in Europe from the early 1990s, according to the institutionalism theory. Glenn Palmer and T. Clifton Morgan observed an interesting phenomenon that is important for Russian-Polish relations. They verified the popular statement of realists that in international relations it is the powers that have a greater chance to achieve their goals, and it is them that generally moderate them, as opposed to the subordinate states. The researchers found that it is often minor states that are more motivated to seek various solutions and changes in the system when their needs are not met. Therefore, they shed new light on the dependence between preferences and opportunities in international relations, pointing out that there is no constant dependence between them (Palmer G., Morgan T. 2006: 104). This important study showed that the reasons behind tensions in Russian-Polish relations could be the efforts of the minor state, i.e. Poland, to change the international system by changing the geopolitical position of the Eastern European states and Russia itself, regardless of the success of these efforts.

The above-mentioned research could suggest that the change of integration vectors in Poland's foreign policy after 1989 (from Soviet institutions to the western ones, i.e. NATO and the EU) caused tensions in bilateral relations with Russia, followed by economic repercussions, e.g. in the sanctions policy. Such tensions are not observed in the relations between Russia and other post-communist European states (except possibly the Baltic states) or the Federal Republic of Germany. This is probably because Poland is quite intensively involved in the institutionalization of international relations in Eastern Europe. Moreover, as Mansfield points out, the potential profits from trade with Poland do not balance the broadly understood threats to the security of the Russian Federation, especially in view of Poland's tertiary importance for Russia and Poland's close allied relations with the USA. In comparison, Germany, which is more distanced from the US and at the same time brings it great profits from economic cooperation, compensates for these security threats in terms of economic cooperation with Russia (Mansfield E. 2002: 170).

It can be therefore concluded that the transformation and integration processes are of great importance in understanding the causes of tensions in Russian-Polish relations. First, Poland chose a different type of political and economic model than Russia. Secondly, Poland entered the integration institutions that competed with Russian economic and political integration projects and began to support the expansion of these institutions to the East. From this point of view, research and theories on the above-mentioned issues should also be mentioned.

The consequences of Poland's membership in the European Union and NATO can also be found in the case of the Russian sanctions policy and its reactions to the actions of the West. It seems that Russia has perfectly sensed

the problem noted in the sanctions theory, where minor states try to use their membership in integration organizations to increase their influence over another entity external to this organization. In the case of the sanctions policy, minor states try to act together and use the platform provided by the organization of which they are members. On the other hand, major countries, such as Russia, usually act more unilaterally in their sanctions policy, which is also close to realistic ideas on the nature of international relations (Martin L. 1992: 90–92; Mansfield E. E. 2002: 179–180). These authors note that the model of cooperation within institutions is very common among the Member States of the European Union (Keohane R., Martin L. 1995). Powers often interpret the action of international institutions, such as the EU, as a result of the influence of certain member states or external entities that often inspire these members. In the case of Russian-Polish relations, Poland is recognized in Russia as an unfavorable EU member state, often cooperating with the United States in this process.

### **Institutions as foreign policy tools — implications for Russian-Polish relations**

Theorists point to the role of international institutions and regimes in international relations. Poland's integration with western institutions, such as the European Union and NATO, first redefined the importance of Poland in international relations through membership in these institutions. Secondly, it affected the implementation of certain international regimes, norms and behaviors, also in the economic aspect. According to M. Pietraś, states chose various forms of institutions, striving to balance the dynamics of opportunism and costs, depending on the needs and character of the regulatory area. Thanks to institutions, the states cut the costs of functioning in the international system and increased their opportunities. The variety of institutionalization forms results from the rational choice of states that adapt institutional solutions to the implementation of various goals and interests (Pietraś M. 2015: 129). The author supports the opinion of L.L. Martin and B.A. Simmons stated that international institutions should be treated both as an objective of strategic choice and as a means of curbing of the actors' behavior. This is known to researchers, however, it has been neglected in many debates between realistic and institutionalist researchers of international relations (Martin L., Simmons B. 1998). These utilitarian advantages of the institutions were the motives behind Poland's entry into the integration institutions of the West. For Russia, they guided the integration institutions it created in the post-Soviet area. However, the institutions to which Poland enrolled and which Russia created were competitive with each other, and this led to tensions in Russian-Polish relations. Institutional issues had an indirect impact

on decisions in Russia's foreign policy towards Poland with regard to economic issues. One example were the sanctions, which, incidentally, were imposed in connection with Poland's commitment to the pro-Western course in Ukraine's policy (2005 and 2014).

The author states that institutionalization was among the most important issues in terms of impact on political relations, trade and investments between Russia and Poland. Moreover, as P.J. Katzenstein, R.O. Keohane and S.D. Krasner point out, the very subdiscipline of international relations, i.e. the international political economy, has been related to the issues of international institutions from the very beginning (Katzenstein P. et al. 1998). Poland tried to use its membership in both the EU and NATO to strengthen its goals in the so-called eastern policy. This is in line with the entire list of authors treating institutions as a kind of tool through which states strive to minimize costs and maximize benefits in pursuing their exogenous interests. Interests, including economic ones, were one of the most important issues in the relations between the state and international institutions (Ruggie J. 1993: 31–35; Katzenstein P. et al., 1998). Please note that in liberal theories, the concept of interests in relation to international institutions could go from the internal state level to pluralistic interest groups (Katzenstein P. et al. 1998). In essence, the authors agree that actors are ontologically primary to structure. This is because actors can create and change institutions, which then reduce transaction costs for international interactions, and can alter the national cost-benefit calculations by rewarding some actions and punishing the other (Caporaso J., 1993: 70; Martin L. 1993: 91). Therefore, due to the institutions, states expand their opportunities. This 'expansion' was to include, in particular, the development of a joint energy policy with other EU countries and subjecting Russia to EU regulations. The case of Russian investments and trade was similar, as Poland was the initiator of solutions that raised objections in Russia itself. Another extremely important issue was the integration of the CIS countries with the EU and NATO, which directly impacted Russian-Polish relations. Russia's reactions to Poland's actions in this respect directly affected trade and investment cooperation, e.g., Russia's efforts to bypass transit countries or the sanctions in Russian-Polish relations. However, please note that institutions face the classic problems of collisions and symmetries of interests between their members (Martin L. 1993:103), which is especially observable with regard to energy interests of Poland and Germany (the Nord Stream problem), which paved the way for Russian diplomacy.

The relationship between the state and international institutions could also take another turn, as observed especially by constructivism. It assumes that actors and institutions are mutually constitutive, as stated e.g., by A. Wendt (1992) or J.T. Checkel (1998). March and Olsen noted that the as-



sumption that in international relations interests are exogenous and thus modeled externally is wrong. The authors believe that the interests of actors are endogenous and therefore can change in the course of interaction with other actors (in common subsystems), as well as when acting as part of an institution with specific norms, rules, and identities (March J., Olsen J. 1998). Participation in institutions forms member states to possibly refer to a different catalog of values than entities external to these institutions.

As noted above in several points with regard to institutionalization theories, the problem of Polish membership in Western institutions also had a flip side. Poland was also becoming a party/element of the policies of these institutions regarding Russia, although largely due to its involvement within the EU and NATO in Russian matters. This had both a positive and negative effect on the mutual relations of these states. The positive is the EU solutions, which created the framework for cooperation with Russia. The negative is, for example, the sanctions that Russia introduced against the entire EU in 2014, and Poland was only one of the member states against which they were executed. In the institutionalization aspect, it was also noticeable that Poland was treated by Russia as a kind of scapegoat when it came to, e.g., identifying the causes of problems in Russia's relations with Western institutions.

In her work verifying the assumptions of the democratic peace theory, J. Gowa pointed out that the expansion of democratic institutions in the world (including Western integration institutions) could cause tensions. Gowa notes that the strategy of expanding Western democracy could be dangerous to the international order. First, this is because countries undergoing transformation could be more prone to crises and conflicts, including international ones. Second, the 'export' of democracy itself causes international tensions and could even create new opponents (Gowa J. 1999: 109–114). According to Gowa, the coalition of alliances (including economic ones) implies a certain amount of conflict between competing alliances (Gowa J. 1994: 7, 120). This can be observed in the case of Russia and Western institutions of which Poland is a member. President Putin assessed Western integration institutions from the point of view of Russia's interests during his famous speech at the Munich peace conference in 2007, when he criticized the expansion of NATO, violations of alleged agreements with Russia, and disregarding the interests of the Russian Federation (Vystupleniye., 2007). These interests were relatively precisely defined a year later in the so-called Medvedev's plan on a new vision of European security. The essence of this plan was the division of the spheres of influence in Europe. In the East, its border was to run along the eastern borders of the countries already admitted to the European Union, i.e. the Baltic states, Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, and Romania (Kaczmarek M. 2008). Although the West did not accept Medvedev's plan, Russia was offered



the Partnership for Modernization economic program. Please note that the Partnership for Modernization, which was a German initiative, was launched right after the unfavorable reception of the EU Eastern Partnership program in Russia, authored by Poland and Sweden. In both the Partnership for Modernization and the Eastern Partnership, the economic elements were very clear. The Partnership for Modernization was designed to support the development of economic cooperation between the European Union and Russia and the economic modernization of Russia itself. The Eastern Partnership, in turn, brings the six countries that neighbor the European Union in the East (Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan) closer to EU standards. It is worth mentioning that the addressees of the Eastern Partnership program are very important for Russia's foreign policy. Therefore, the Partnership became the direct cause of the deepest crisis in Russia-West relations since the end of the Cold War.

### Conclusions

The processes of institutionalization of international relations in Europe seem to be crucial for understanding the dynamics of Russian-Polish relations. Institutionalization theories offer plenty of sources of tensions in Russian-Polish relations. First, the processes that post-communist countries joined the West after the collapse of the USSR redefined the development trajectories of international relations in Europe. At the same time, they rebuilt the architecture of European security. The revival of Russia's potential made it come back in the game in Europe. By that time, post-communist countries such as Poland had joined NATO and the EU. What is more, they began to influence the policy of these institutions towards Russia, which was met with a response from Moscow. The cause of tensions in the Russian-Polish relations itself lies in Poland's efforts to deepen the changes in the architecture of European security (e.g. to support Ukraine's integration with the West). On the other hand, when strengthened, Russia began to articulate its national interests very clearly, also in the so-called 'near abroad' and tried to stop the countries of the Eastern Partnership on their way to integration with the West.

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## ВЛИЯНИЕ ИНТЕГРАЦИОННЫХ ИНСТИТУТОВ НА ОТНОШЕНИЯ МЕЖДУ МАЛЫМИ СТРАНАМИ И БОЛЬШИМИ ИГРОКАМИ. ПРИМЕР ПОЛЬСКО-РОССИЙСКИХ ОТНОШЕНИЙ

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**Аннотация.** Автор для анализирует проблему российско-польских отношений в контексте теорий, связанных с институционализацией международных отношений. Он также выдвигает тезис о том, что именно интеграционные процессы в Центральной и Восточной Европе и реакция на них в Польше и России во многом определили российско-польские отношения. Более того, автор подчеркивает, что в контексте изменений в архитектуре европейской безопасности активность малых государств, таких как Польша, существенно повлияла на отношения с Россией, которая пытается сохранить свое влияние в Центральной и Восточной Европе.

**Ключевые слова:** интеграционные процессы, польско-российские отношения, Польша, Россия.