

POLITICAL RELATIONS BETWEEN POLAND AND THE REPUBLIC OF AZERBAIJAN

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Abstract

Poland was one of the first countries to recognize the independence of the Republic of Azerbaijan. However, the political co-operation between the two countries was established only at the end of the last decade of the 20th century, during the presidency of Aleksander Kwaśniewski. The next Polish president – Lech Kaczyński – intending to diversify the energy sources, maintained political relations between Poland and the Republic of Azerbaijan on very friendly terms. Despite its lesser political engagement in the issues of the Southern Caucasus region, Poland confirmed its co-operation with the Republic of Azerbaijan in the energy sector.

Key words: *Poland, Azerbaijan, international relations*

INTRODUCTION

Poland was one of the first countries to recognize the independence of the South Caucasus states and to establish diplomatic relations with them. The first of those states was the Republic of Azerbaijan, with whom Poland established such relations already on 21st February 1992. The initial contacts between the two states were rather sporadic and related mainly to the economic co-operation. Their frequency increased at the end of the last decade of the 20th century and following the execution by the EU of the Partnership and Co-operation Agreements in 1996. Mutual visits were conducted at several levels: presidential, ministerial and parliamentary.

The visits were initiated by the head of the Republic of Azerbaijan. Heydar Aliyev, following the invitation by president Kwaśniewski, paid his official visit to Poland from 26th to 28th August 1997. During the visit the parties executed 8 interstate agreements, among them the declaration on the development of friendly relations between the two states, declaration on economic co-operation and trade, declaration on avoiding double taxation, on mutual investment promotion and protection, on civil air transport, on co-operation in the field of tourism. The documents formed foundations for further co-operation between the two states. President Aliyev emphasized that the objective of the Republic of Azerbaijan was to

integrate with the European structures and to establish co-operation with NATO. The latter was to help solving the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh. Aliyev also pointed to the need for considering the idea of regional co-operation between the Baltic States, the Black Sea States and the Southern Caucasus States. He stressed that the idea could materialize in the field of road and railway transport development. For any activities to be successful it was required to open a Polish embassy in Azerbaijan (on 23rd August 2001) and Azerbaijani embassy in Poland (on 30th August 2004) (*Rocznik Polskiej Polityki Zagranicznej* 1998: 314). Bilateral talks were continued during the first visit of Aleksander Kwaśniewski to the Republic of Azerbaijan, which took place on 27th and 28th of October 1999. The talks conducted then resulted in the execution of the following agreements: joint declarations of the President of the Republic of Poland and the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan and the letter of intent on mutual co-operation between Polish oil and Gas Company (PGNiG) and the State Oil Company of Azerbaijan Republic (SOCAR) in the field of exploration and extraction of oil and its transport to Poland (*Rocznik Polskiej Polityki Zagranicznej* 1999: 351). The agreements formed basis for further co-operation. The Polish party emphasized the need to strengthen economic co-operation between the two countries, pointing to the fact that the commercial contacts between Poland and the Caucasus States are centuries-old, dating back to the Middle Ages. The parties agreed that democratic governance, respect for human rights and free-market economy are of key significance for the development of relations between the countries. The partners advocated peaceful settlement of conflicts, in accordance with the UN Charter and relevant OSCE documents, as well as political dialogue in bilateral relations and among international organizations. Acknowledging the increasing importance of Azerbaijan in the global arena, Poland supported its efforts to become a member of WTO and the Council of Europe. It is considered that an important element of the bilateral relations was the project of TRACECA transport system - called the silk road of the 21st century – connecting Europe and Asia. The two conferences held in Baku in 1998, during which the documentation for TRACECA route was prepared, were attended by experts from Poland. Moreover, Poland expressed a wide interest in the implementation of the programme of extraction and transport of Azerbaijan oil and the construction, in co-operation with the Republic of Ukraine, of the pipeline Odessa-Brody-Gdańsk (*Wizyta prezydenta Kwaśniewskiego w Azerbejdżanie 2000*). The idea was taken up during the discussions with Vilayat Guliyev, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Azerbaijan, in Warsaw in May 2000 (*Rocznik Polskiej Polityki Zagranicznej* 2000: 362).

In January 2005, Poland was visited by Murtuz Alasgarov- the Speaker of the National Assembly of Azerbaijan. The visit, which took place after the Azerbaijani embassy was opened in Warsaw, aimed at intensification of economic contacts by increasing the share of Polish business in the economy of Azerbaijan, e.g. construction of pipelines and gas pipelines, and restoration of the cotton industry (*Wizyta przewodniczącego parlamentu Republiki Azerbejdżańskiej 2005*). The legal foundations for the co-operation were formed during the visit of President Ilham Aliyev in Warsaw in late March. It was then that the agreements on co-operation in the sectors of defence, economic co-operation, and mutual assistance in customs matters were concluded (*Wizyta oficjalna prezydenta Republiki Azerbejdżanu z*

małżonką 2005). In the wake of the conclusion of the agreement on economic co-operation, the Polish-Azerbaijani Intergovernmental Commission on Economic Co-operation was established. During his visit to Poland, President Aliyev emphasized that inclusion of Azerbaijan in the European Neighbourhood Policy boosted the activities for the integration with EU structures, and stated that the individual co-operation with NATO was realised through the participation of Azeri soldiers in the military contingent in Iraq, Afghanistan and Kosovo (*Wizyta oficjalna prezydenta Republiki Azerbejdżanu z małżonką 2005*). During the meeting with Polish senators, Aliyev suggested establishment of contacts between the parliaments of the two countries (*Wizyta prezydenta Republiki Azerbejdżanu 2005*). In response to that suggestion, a delegation of Polish MPs, including the chairman of the Parliamentary Committee on EU Affairs – Karol Karski, visited Azerbaijan in April the following year. The delegation met with the members of the Azerbaijan-Poland parliamentary group and discussed the forms of bilateral co-operation. During the visit to Azerbaijan of the Senate Speaker – Bohdan Borysewicz – in November 2006, the discussions included also exchange of opinions on how to resolve the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh (*Polska delegacja parlamentarna w Azerbejdżanie 2006*).

Polish approach towards the issue of the Southern Caucasus changed when Lech Kaczyński was elected the next president of Poland. The signs of that were the greater amount of time devoted to the issue and more detailed determination of the place of the region in Poland's Eastern policy. That was then reflected in the declarations of Minister Ann Fatyga regarding Poland's support for political and economic transformations in those countries and their integration with the EU structures (*Wyciszkiewicz 2008: 237-252*). The strategic aim of the Polish policy was to enhance energetic security of Poland and to diversify the sources of energy. That is why relations with Azerbaijan became so important for Poland. In February 2008, Poland was once again visited by President Ilham Aliyev. In recognition of his contribution to the development of co-operation between the two countries, the president of Azerbaijan was awarded with the Knight Cross of Order of Merit of the Republic of Poland. President Kaczyński reiterated Poland's support for Azerbaijan in the attempts to bring the country closer to European and Euro-Atlantic structures. He pointed out that in the Central Eastern Europe the process of solving economic problems, in particular energy ones, is related to political actions (*Azerbejdżan jest strategicznym partnerem Polski 2008*). Kaczyński accepted Aliyev's invitation to hold in Kiev in spring 2009 joint talks with Ukraine on the Odessa-Brody-Gdańsk pipeline. The discussions concerning possible extension of the pipeline lasted since September 2006 and were initiated by the visit of Heydar Babajev, the Minister of Economic Development, with whom the Senate Speaker Borysewicz discussed the involvement in the extension of the pipeline to Płock and later to Gdańsk (*Wizyta ministra rozwoju gospodarczego Republiki Azerbejdżanu 2006*).

Further strengthening of the relation between Poland and Azerbaijan concerned the activities in the field of security. While paying a visit to the Southern Caucasus states in April 2007, the Minister of Internal Affairs - Janusz Kaczmarek, signed in Azerbaijan an agreement between the Polish and the Azerbaijani border guards, which enabled exchange of experience between the border guard officers (Legucka 2011: 398-415).



The significance of the Southern Caucasus states in the foreign policy of Poland increased when Anna Fotyga became the minister of foreign affairs. She attached great significance to the visit to the Republic of Azerbaijan that took place in March 2007. According to the information provided during a press conference by the Minister Of Foreign Affairs of Azerbaijan Elmar Mammadyarov, a memorandum had been signed which provided for „establishment of a consultation mechanism between Poland and Azerbaijan, mainly in the energy sector” (*Wizyta ministra spraw zagranicznych w Azerbejdżanie Anny Fotygi 2007*). In a press interview, Mammadyarov emphasized that Poland was interested in co-operation with Azerbaijan in gas and oil sector as it needed to diversify the supplies of energy resources (*Wizyta ministra spraw zagranicznych w Azerbejdżanie Anny Fotygi 2007*). The concept was supported by the March visit of President Kaczyński to Baku and Astana, in the course of which the Polish party tried to specify in greater detail the plan of the new gas and oil security for Poland. The practical dimension of the bilateral co-operation in the field of energy was brought by the execution of an agreement between fuel sector companies, *Lotos* and *Socar*, on assistance at the expansion of the Polish company (*Kozłowski 2012: 30-58*). The Energy Congress held on 22nd May 2007 in Kraków and attended by the presidents of Ukraine (Viktor Yushchenko), Lithuania (Valdas Adamkus), Azerbaijan (Ilham Aliyeva), Georgia (Mikheil Saakashvili) and the personal representative of the President of Kazakhstan Nursultan Nazarbayev, developed a joint declaration, in which it was decided to create an international working group for energy issues and to establish a company which would handle the extension of the oil pipeline from Odessa to Płock and Gdańsk (*Sarmatia*). The outcome of the agreement signed on 10th October 2007 during the meeting in Vilnius of the presidents of Azerbaijan, Georgia, Poland, Ukraine and Lithuanian, was the establishment of *Sarmatia* consortium. It encompassed the agreements between *Perm Przyjaźń* and *OSA UKrtransznafta* and State Oil Company of the Azerbaijani Republic (*SOCAR*), the Georgian Oil and Gas Corporation and *AB Klaipedos Nafta*, regarding accession to *Sarmatia* company and assuming the construction of Euro-Asian Oil Transportation Corridor. Moreover, the representatives of the attending states signed agreements on co-operation in the field of energy and appointed *MPR Sarmatia sp. z o.o.* to be responsible for preparing the feasibility study for the project. The aim was to extend the oil pipeline Brody - Płock to Gdańsk, relying on a subsidy for the investment from the EU funds.

The III Energy Summit in Kiev in 2008 resulted in the drawing up of the following documents: 1/ Joint Statement regarding Euro-Asian Oil Transportation Corridor j; 2/ Joint Statement regarding Caspian-Black Sea-Baltic Energy Transit Area; 3/ Draft Plan of the Caspian-Black Sea-Baltic Energy Transit Area (*Sarmatia*). However, the documents did not contribute to solving the problems. The summit constituted an attempt to create energy security and to ensure independence from the supplies of oil from the Russian Federation.

During the next, the forth, visit of President Lech Kaczyński to Azerbaijan on 2nd and 3rd July 2009, the representatives of *Grupa Lotos* signed a letter of intent with an Azeri oil company *Socar*, according to which certain joint actions were to be undertaken with regard to exploitation and processing of crude oil. However, the signing of the letter had only strategic and propaganda dimensions as only a few days earlier Azerbaijan had signed a gas supply agreement with the government of



the Russian Federation. The idea of President Kaczyński to set up a standing advisory committee consisting of members of both governments failed. The committee was to initiate cooperation between the two partners and to determine its forms (*Oficjalna wizyta prezydenta Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej Pana Lecha Kaczyńskiego z małżonką w Republice Azerbejdżanu 2009*). The Azerbaijani authorities were not interested in that kind of co-operation. The visit of President Kaczyński to Azerbaijan closed the cycle of presidential contacts with the Southern Caucasus states. The problem of energy security was retaken during the visit of the Prime Minister Donald Tusk to the three Southern Caucasus capitals between 11th and 13th March 2010. The first of the capitals was Baku, where the prime minister talked about multilateral benefits of the Eastern Partnership and the EU interest in Nabucco gas pipeline, which could make Western Europe independent from supplies from the Russian Federation.

When Bronisław Komorowski became the president of Poland, the visits to the Southern Caucasus states, including Azerbaijan, became less and less frequent. The president had a more realistic attitude to contacts with the partners, which could not lead to any major changes in the political situation of in the region. The presence of Poland in the area was the indicator of the EU interest. The only visit by President Komorowski to Southern Caucasus states, in July 2011, started in the capital of Azerbaijan – Baku. During the visit, several agreements were concluded, among them agreements regulating co-operation in the fields of culture and science, economy, veterinary matters, and agreement between PAP and Azeri agency *Azer Tass*. Moreover, an agreement granting visa-free regime for diplomatic passport holders (*Prezydent z wizyta na Kaukazie 2011*) was executed. In the course of discussions with President Ilham Aliyev, Komorowski confirmed Poland's interest in the construction of pipeline and the construction of transmission systems and lines, which could solve energy problems of Poland and other EU states. President Komorowski emphasized that the dedication of financial resources for the construction of the pipelines would only be possible once the investment plans had been made more specific and more detailed. During the Azeri-Polish economic forum President Komorowski suggested that the economic co-operation should be extended beyond the energy sector and invited the president of Azerbaijan to take part in the Eastern Partnership Summit in Warsaw in 2011. (*Prezydent o współpracy z Azerami 2011*).

President Aliyev did come to the Warsaw Summit held on 29th and 30th September 2011. However, his presence did not bring about any binding decision with regard to initialling the EU association agreement. The Joint Declaration of the presidents of Azerbaijan, Georgia and Armenia made references to implementation of agreements on visa facilitation and readmission. The participation of representatives of the Southern Caucasus states in the Euronet Parliamentary Assembly was confirmed. The representatives of Azerbaijan participated also in the Eastern Partnership Business Forum that was held in Sopot, where they expressed their opinion that the level of cooperation between the states covered by the initiative was not satisfactory. It was pointed out that achieving the goals was possible as a result of signing by the partners of the agreements on partnership and free trade areas (*Gomółka, Borucińska- Dereszkiwicz 2012: 298-326*). The summit in Warsaw revealed that Azerbaijan did not show interest in executing the EU

association agreement. The promotion event accompanying the summit was the conference „The Eastern Partnership Conference: Towards a European Community of democracy, prosperity and a stronger civil society”, organised by the Polish Institute for International Affairs (Stepniewski 2012:14).

During the Eastern Partnership summit in Warsaw, certain activities were undertaken to strengthen the administration in the countries covered by the initiative, and so, in September 2011, the establishment of Eastern Partnership Academy of Public Administration was announced. Its task was to educate administration officers from Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Belarus, Ukraine and Moldova. The training was to be conducted through special modules. In 2012, the Academy conducted a training on „Managing by values”, which was participated by 23 people – including 5 from Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan each. „Economics of Public Funds” is the title of the second module, which was participated by 4 persons from Armenia and 5 from Georgia and Azerbaijan each. The third module dealt with „Security and defence policy”. The programme was attended by 12 persons - 4 from Armenia, Georgia and Azerbaijan each. In the course of the subsequent edition of the training, a computer game was used that simulated management in a crisis-struck country. The participants played the roles of different internal and international entities. The simulation focused on negotiations, leadership workshops and elements of crisis management (*Warsztaty SENSE, Informacja z Akademii Administracji Publicznej Partnerstwa Wschodniego 2012*). In 2012, a total of 69 persons from the Eastern Partnership countries were educated at the Academy (*Program Akademii Administracji Publicznej Partnerstwa Wschodniego 2012*).

After 2011, the frequency of the bilateral contacts between Poland and Southern Caucasus countries decreased at the presidential level. The weight was shifted into parliamentary dimension. On 24th May, the Poland-Azerbaijan Parliamentary Group of 14 persons commenced its activities. The Group assumed co-operation with its counterpart in Azerbaijan.

The events of the Vilnius Eastern Partnership Summit of 2013 resulted in a freeze in bilateral political relations between Poland and Southern Caucasus states, Azerbaijan included. This, however, did not imply a cessation of economic relations. An important role in the bilateral co-operation with the Southern Caucasus states was played by non-governmental organizations. The leaders of the co-operation were organisations formed at the turn of the century as well as those established at the beginning of the second decade of the 21st century. The co-operation was dominated by the following topics: promotion of democratic state, education of leaders in a society that undergoes transformations, and contacts between self-governments. Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights organised summer and winter training programmes on human rights and respect for human rights for participants from beyond Poland, including Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan (*Letnie zimowe szkoły Praw Człowieka*). Polish NGOs devoted a lot of attention to co-operation with local authorities of the Eastern Partnership countries. Of particular importance were the activities of the Foundation for the Development of Civic Society which conducted programmes with Azeri partner using USAID funds. Under regional East-East Open Society programme, Stefan Batory Foundation implemented the project “Increase in the engagement of public life actors in the

creation of county budgets” organizing a study visit to Poland for the local authorities of Shaki.

The Eastern Partnership initiative increased the involvement of non-governmental organizations in its implementation. The “School for Leaders” association conducted a programme entitled “School for Political Leaders of the Eastern Partnership”, the aim of which was to support the development of civic societies in the states covered by the initiatives (*Szkoła Liderów Politycznych Partnerstwa Wschodniego*). The beneficiaries of the programme that included seminars, study visits and exchange of good practices were the current and the prospective leaders of public life in those countries.

CONCLUSIONS

Poland was one of the first countries to recognize the independence of the Republic of Azerbaijan. Political relations between the two countries commenced only at the end of the last decade of the 20th century. By this time Poland had already established commercial relations with Azerbaijan, yet Poland’s foreign policy did not reach that area as it concentrated on the neighbouring countries. The fact that in April 1996, Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan signed the EU Partnership and Co-operation agreements changed that perspective. Poland, being an EU associated country, tried to establish closer relations with the foreign partner, and during the meetings at presidential level the process of executing the agreements boosted. The establishment of bilateral co-operation took place during the presidency of Aleksander Kwaśniewski, whose main focus was co-operation with Azerbaijan. In President Kaczyński’s concept, relations with Georgia played the most important role. Bearing in mind the planned diversification of the resources, the relations with the Republic of Azerbaijan were very friendly. A change in the policy towards the Southern Caucasus states occurred when Bronisław Komorowski was elected the president of Poland. His presidency has been characterised by a much more realistic approach to relations with Azerbaijan. Polish diplomacy has realised that relations with this country cannot lead to any major changes in the political situation of the region and that the presence of Poland in the area is only an indicator of EU interest. However, Poland has confirmed its interest in co-operation in the energy sector.

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