

**Poland in the Eyes of Neighbors,
Neighbors in the Eyes of Poles**

POLISH-GERMAN RELATIONS

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SCIENTIFIC REDACTORS

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Introduction

Poland's borders are 3,511 kilometres long. 467 kilometres of this distance makes up the border territory with Europe's largest economy – Germany. This state of affairs is extremely beneficial for the development of neighbourly relations between the two countries.

In describing the bilateral relations between Poland and Germany, it is worth approaching the subject in a holistic way, taking into account the various planes on which these countries cooperate. To complete the picture, however, one should also address the shared, often difficult history, of both countries. The course of this history has undoubtedly influenced the current shape of cooperation between Berlin and Warsaw. In order to maintain research consistency in the process of analysing the mutual relations between these countries, this monograph contains texts on economic, geopolitical, historical, and cultural issues. Some of these areas naturally overlap and thus drive the cooperation of both countries. This is described in individual subsections of the book.

The shared border, the history linking the two countries, and the common membership in international organisations such as the United Nations, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, and the European Union, are further factors that strengthen the relationship between Poland and Germany. The cooperation between Poland and Germany in the international arena should be considered with a view that considers not only the activities in organisations with a global reach, but that is also based on the achievements of smaller entities. It is also worth mentioning slightly smaller, regional initiatives, such as the Eastern Partnership, which are described in this publication. The characteristics of Poland and Germany also include the willingness to adhere to shared democratic values, such as freedom and equality of all citizens.

A similar understanding of these values is undoubtedly a very important factor in strengthening cooperation and deepening relations between countries.

Economic relations are often the most important factor in cooperation between neighbouring countries. This is evidenced by the mutual benefit of the countries, which results from intense trade and numerous investments made by cooperating entrepreneurs on both sides of the border. An ideal example of this is the economic relationship between Poland and Germany, which, apart from their shared border and history, have also had strong economic links for decades. As a European economic power, Germany has been Poland's most important trading partner for years. On the other hand, in addition to attractive sales markets, Germany can also find qualified employees in Poland. These individuals are often ready to take up employment in German companies and change countries permanently. A very important role in creating relations between neighbours is played not only by representatives of the authorities, but also by international actors. These may be entities such as domestic companies and global corporations. It is also worth mentioning at this point the numerous undertakings based on cross-border initiatives which are carried out by Polish and German companies. A good example of this is the Oder-Partnership, whose representatives take practical advantage of the fact that four Polish voivodeships and four German federal states are direct neighbours. Thanks to the wise use of geographic proximity, investors have the chance to deepen their political, economic, and infrastructural links. Within this context, another important factor is the exchange of skilled labour in the framework of cross-border cooperation. This is greatly facilitated by the fact that both Poland and Germany are in the Schengen area. Both countries, due to similar historical circumstances, have had to face analogous problems and challenges, which have also significantly affected their current economic situations. The reprivatization of properties, which is described in this publication, and the resulting implications are a good example of this.

The geographical location of Poland and Germany determines the possibility of their cooperation on many levels, including non-economic ones. Since the earliest times, the relationship between Poland and Germany has also been greatly influenced by the state of cooperation between Berlin and Moscow. The nature of German policy towards Russia has a direct impact on the situation

in Poland, if only because of its location between these powers. One of the areas that is affected by German–Russian relations is the Polish security policy. Energy security, which is still dependent on gas supplies from Russia, remains an important aspect here.

In a monograph on Polish–German cooperation, it is impossible to omit concepts that take advantage of the territorial potential of Poland and Germany, such as the concept of the Three Seas Initiative. In this publication, it is juxtaposed with Friedrich Naumann’s term “Mitteleuropa” and Milan Kundera and Czesław Miłosz’s “Central Europe”. This juxtaposition allows for the comparison of a historical project from the time of the Second German Reich with contemporary theories. This procedure makes it possible to show the evolution of geopolitical thought in the region, as well as its influence on the formation of current relations between Poland and Germany.

When considering Polish–German relations, the political elite’s approach to cooperation with neighbouring countries plays a key role. The perception of a particular neighbour, or group of neighbours, as a key partner affects the development of the country’s foreign policy as a whole, which consequently affects the economy. It also affects society, which consequentially creates an image of the ideal position of its country in the international arena. This is based, to some extent, on the vision created by the governmental authorities. In this context, it is also worth considering the perspective of the Polish “turn to the West”, an approach that characterises the method of looking at Polish politics from the point of view of political realism. A deepening of this reflection is contained in one of this publication’s articles. Such an approach is directly related to the rejection of focusing mainly on cooperation with the neighbours across the Eastern border. Such an attitude therefore presents the opportunity to both strengthen Polish–German cooperation and to instil in the Polish people a sober approach to reality, which is specific for Germany.

A comparison of the two countries can also be made by analysing the situation of both countries in the political scene. The best research approach to such a problem is to illustrate it with specific examples. This publication presents a comparison of the crises of social democratic parties in Germany and Poland. The search for an answer to the question regarding the sources of social democracy’s failures in both countries allows for an analysis to be made

of the trends and changes which are shared and differentiated between both countries within the political and social spheres. These, and the considerations discussed in the following chapters, allow us to reflect on the axiological foundations of the Polish and German political systems.

In describing the historical aspects of the cooperation between Germany and Poland, the authors chose to focus mainly on the events of the interwar period, in addition to the most important events that influenced the current shape of relations between the two countries. Poland's regaining of independence in 1918 was inextricably linked to the process of forming new European borders, a process that lasted until 1923. Under the numerous agreements that were concluded in subsequent years with the intention of establishing the principles of neighbourly exchange, a gradual process of regulating trade cooperation between Poland and Germany began. At the same time, smuggling between the neighbours flourished. This publication will also examine the impact of German-Polish relations on smuggling in the interwar period. The formation of Poland's borders after World War I was associated with many challenges. These were certainly felt by the inhabitants of Upper Silesia during the Silesian Uprisings in 1919–1921, when they had to express their political preferences and make breakthrough decisions for future generations. In this book, these events are described based on the analysis of sources found in the collection of the Silesian Uprising Museum in Świętochłowice.

Apart from geopolitics and economy, cultural and social issues are also important aspects of cooperation between countries. This area of discussion also includes the problem of the functioning of different national and ethnic groups in society. Evidence of the cooperation between the Polish and German communities can be found in the history of the inhabitants of Bamber, who assimilated peacefully into the Polish culture. Another example of an ethnic minority that is found both in Poland and Germany is the Indian diaspora. A comparison of the manner in which this diaspora functions in both countries indirectly allows for a further comparison to be made of migration policies, integration migration programmes, as well as the overall openness of society in Poland and Germany. An interesting phenomenon that has been intensified in the 21st century is also the issue of Slavic separatism in Germany. This publication therefore presents the results of a comparative analysis that was made on

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the application of selected legislative instruments to specific groups of Slavic origin. The Slavic ethnic group of Serbs was selected for the study, as well as the activities of contemporary political parties and regional groups committed to an independent Serbia.

The great thematic diversity of the articles contained in this monograph only confirms the statement that both the historical and contemporary relations between Berlin and Warsaw have been, and are being, deepened and developed on many levels. Thanks to the general research perspective, the reader will have the opportunity to learn more about the neighbourly relations between Poland and Germany from the historical, economic, social, and geopolitical perspectives.

* * *

During the preparation of this monograph, one of the most prominent experts on German issues in Poland, Professor Erhard Cziomer, passed away. It is a great honor for us that the Professor participated in our conference on Polish-German relations and submitted a contribution to the monograph prepared after the meeting. It is with deep sorrow that we learned of the Professor's death, knowing what great a loss this is for academia.