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Contra Mundum: The European Union must seek a Rapprochement with Poland

Relations between the European Union and the Third Polish Republic have grown steadily worse over recent years - to the point where some political commentators have begun to speculate on the future of Poland's membership. The key issues at hand are those of Judicial Reform, the European Migration crisis and responsibility for the refugees crossing the Polish border from the embattled Ukraine. Polish politicians have argued that the European Union is doing both too much and too little - involving themselves too heavily in the internal politics of the Polish state whilst also stymying aid when Poland needs it most. All of these issues play into broader underlying ideological differences between the European Union and Poland, defined by history, shifts in the priorities of the bloc and the modern Polish conception of its own sovereign independence. Given the historic and contemporary dynamics of Poland's relationship with the western states, particularly with Germany, both the power and the will for reconciliation rests with the European Union - it must take the impetus in this reconciliation process to prevent any further Polish retreat into isolation within the Visegrad Group.

On the Thirtieth of July, 1919, President Ignace Jan Paderewski addressed the Polish Constitutional Sejm in Warsaw, commending to the assembled delegates the clauses of the Treaty of Versailles by which, in his words, "all the hopes and desires in which entire generations lived have been fulfilled."¹ After more than a century of "bondage, martyrdom and heroic struggles"² Poland had been at last restored to her rightful place at the heart of the European continent. It was to be a false dawn, one of many in the history of this singularly beleaguered nation. The Second Polish Republic lasted barely twenty years before its old enemies to the West and East conspired to deprive her of her hardwon liberty. Those decades of

¹ Bronislas A. Jezierski, "Paderewski and the Treaty of Versailles," *Polish American Studies* no. 1/2 (1954): 48

² *Ibid.*, 48

servitude beneath Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia have more than anything else served to define Poland's geopolitical outlook today. When Poland broke free from communist rule in 1989, her new Premier Tadeusz Mazowiecki called upon his countrymen to at last "begin a new page in their history".³ Thirty years on, many in the Polish political class question whether anything has truly changed. Poland seems as trapped as ever between East and West, her sovereignty the plaything of greater powers with grander designs. In the general elections of October this year the then incumbent Premier Jaroslaw Kaczynski consistently asserted that his rival Mr. Donald Tusk would be ruled "by a phone call from Berlin or Moscow."⁴ The fear of entrapment - that "sort of lingering anxiety about colonialism" - still haunts Poland.⁵ She is caught "constantly between Russia and Germany."⁶ The nature of the danger varies greatly from East to West, though each is perceived to pose a grave threat to Polish sovereignty. Russia pursues those traditional, forceful methods that have so darkened Poland's past: seeking even now to deprive a close neighbour of her liberty. Perilous the situation might be, it is at least quantifiable. Poland's issues with the West are more complex. The German-Franco led European Union has come to be perceived by many Poles as a cultural and political anathema, perpetuating a system of liberal values that seem quite at odds with the country's identity and heritage. Her animosity towards western Europe exists in tension with her economic status within the bloc - one analyst describes Poland as "the biggest monetary benefactor from the EU."⁷ According to the expenditure and revenue reports of the European Commission Poland spent over eighteen billion euros in 2022 whilst paying in only seven. Her financial reliance on the

³ Ibid., 48

⁴ Sarah Rainsford. "Poles prepare to vote as rivals end acrimonious campaigns." *British Broadcasting Corporation*. October 13th, 2023.

⁵ Andrew Keir Wise. "Postcolonial Anxiety in Polish Nationalist Rhetoric." *The Polish Review* no. 55 (2010): 288

⁶ Ibid., 304

⁷ Katharina Buchholtz. "17 Million fell victim to the Nazi regime." *Statista*. January 26th, 2021.

bloc, whilst it too has become a vehicle for the ongoing political disputes, also maintains the partnership in its most basic sense. Given the nature of the economic relationship, and in the light of October's elections, one can confidently rule out the immediate possibility of a Polish withdrawal from the European Union. However, whilst economics can maintain national ties, they cannot guarantee them forever, and nor are they capable of overcoming fundamental concerns regarding existential questions. It is necessary that a solution, a rapprochement, be found through the auspices of the Union itself. Poland is deeply discontented, but she is not yet lost to western. The onus for change in that relationship lies with the European Union. If Poland is to once again return to good standing within the bloc then the western states must seek to redress her key sources of grievance.

The defence of independence is central to modern Polish identity. For centuries it has sought that sole object through a series of heartbreaking betrayals, in 1795, 1939, and 1945. Now at last it has been found. Economic concerns are all very well, but this notion of independence has the ability to overshadow them, as was the case thirty years ago. Timothy Garton Ash argues that the democratic revolution of 1989 came about "...because Poland was bankrupt, sick, undemocratic, but above all because it was not independent."⁸ Poland has no intention of diluting this independence now she has finally won it, and she certainly did not enter into the European Union with any such inclinations; but rather hoped for a union that would still uphold the inherited "Europe of homelands, nation states"⁹ This is a negative independence, one that jealously guards all that is identifiably Polish and bristles at the prospect of European interference in internal affairs. Its shadow hangs over all relations between Poland and the

⁸ Timothy Garton Ash, *The Polish Revolution: Solidarity* (NY, Charles Scribner's, 1984), 91.

⁹ Magdalena Wnuk, "The Rule of Law Conflict between Poland and the EU in the Light of Two Integration Discourses: Neofunctionalism and Intergovernmentalism," *Polish Sociological Review*, 214 (2021): 177.

European Union for, as Wnuk argues, “sovereignty as a notion coming directly from a nation-centred idea of politics does not easily fit into the European discourse of political, social and cultural integration.”¹⁰ Not only does the European Union stand accused of overstepping its political prerogatives in order to violate Polish independence but, in tandem with this, Polish nationalists would argue that the western states are failing to support Poland in her own efforts to protect that independence.

These perceived threats are exacerbated by a specifically Polish interpretation of power dynamics within the European Union. She fears the involvement of those nations which have so often sought to deprive her of sovereignty. Russia is not the only spectre to have haunted Polish history: Germany looms large in her imagination also. The short years of Nazi rule, during which Poland lost a fifth of her population¹¹, arguably left a greater impression upon the nation’s historical consciousness than five decades of communism. Politicians like Kaczynski see no contradiction in speaking of Berlin in the same breathe as Moscow, for both have been dealt the parts of villains in this age-old plot. Perhaps indeed it would be fairer to say that they assumed those parts of their own accord. More so than this now, to bring that history into the context of contemporary diplomacy, Levintova and Coury place Poland and Germany at “the centre stage of the ongoing pan-European argument about continental identities...”¹² Germany in particular is identified as the nation “leading the process of European integration and ...championing liberal democracy.”¹³ Those two objects seem diametrically opposed to Poland’s ambitions for “greater

¹⁰ Ibid., 179

¹¹ Lopez et al. “Total Second World War fatalities as a share of pre-war populations per country or region between 1939 and 1945.” *Statista*, 2023.

¹² Ekaterina Levintova and David Coury. “Poland, Germany and the EU: Reimagining Central Europe.” *Europe-Asia Studies*, 72 no. 7 (2020): 1187

¹³ Ibid., 1187

national autonomy”¹⁴, especially if a Germany-led European Union saw fit (as Poland might view it) to interfere in political matters of a purely national interest so as to impose the graces of its “so-called liberalism.”¹⁵ It is no surprise that Poland’s main attacklines against the European Union has centred upon Germany, nor is it surprising that they should so often invoke the memory of the heinous crimes committed by the Wehrmacht and Waffen-SS against the Polish people. As Poland’s conflict with the European Union has escalated over the past few years so too have the demands of her then-incumbent government that Germany should be “forced to pay Poland €1.3tn (£1.1tn) in reparations,” in order that the wrongs of the war might be righted.¹⁶ Germany stands at the forefront of every Polish dispute with the European Union over the issue of independence because she, alongside the other remaining ‘great partitioner’ Russia, has given Poland the most historical cause to fear for her independence. It matters not as to Germany’s material involvement: her enormous influence within the European Union, together with her past perfidies are more than sufficient enough to feed Polish anxieties. Thus the western threat is not something akin to Russias: assuming a softer, though no less pernicious quality. It is more ideological, a friction between differing worldviews which adds greater, even existential levels of weight to political disputes. Poland’s independence is not simply one demarcated by borders. Identity is requiring of ideology, and ideology combines culture as well as politics. Nationalists would carve out a distinct place in central Europe where, as Wise puts it, “both communism as well as liberalism are alien.” The modern Polish identity of independence is one that has been formed by a heightened fear of the outside. Wise recounts how outsiders “are to be blamed for Poland's problems in the past and in the present.”¹⁷ Within such a broad and inherently fearful

¹⁴ Ibid., 1191

¹⁵ Andrew Keir Wise. “Postcolonial Anxiety in Polish Nationalist Rhetoric,” 304

¹⁶ Sarah Rainsford. “Poles prepare to vote as rivals end acrimonious campaigns.” *BBC*, October 13th, 2023.

¹⁷ Ibid., 302

ideology, the forms such outside forces can take are legion, although they are marshalled by those same old enemies of Poland's past.

In their most recognisable iteration these “outside forces” take the form of migrants and refugees: Ukrainian refugees for which the western states take insufficient responsibility, and migrants from Africa and the Middle East, the arrival of which Poland has consistently opposed. The division between the two influxes of people is of considerable importance, for each can be seen to provide different but complementary evidence of western mal-intent. The foreign intakes present a threat to cultural integrity certainly, but they also raise doubts over the Polish government's ability to control its own borders, which are the highest symbols of her national independence. The European Union seems inclined towards some policies and less inclined towards others, always seeming to choose the course of action that is most damaging to the integrity of these borders. One can see the greatest evidence of this ‘picking and choosing’ in the way that the European Union has interacted with Poland on the subject of migrants. It has taken decisive steps to re-allocate Middle-Eastern migrants from the western states into Poland, but it has not taken any such actions to move Ukrainian migrants, believed to be a figure of well over a million,¹⁸ into western states. Whilst the Ukrainian problem is a new one, the situation with migrants entering into southern Europe from across the Mediterranean has been a consistent source of friction between Poland and the European Union for some time. This friction has turned to all-out opposition because, as Milan Caky puts it, “illegal migration by sea, especially on the eastern and Mediterranean routes, is growing radically...numbers arriving...have increased year on year.”¹⁹ The confrontation is not the preserve of party factions, but concerns

¹⁸ *BBC*, “How many Ukrainian refugees are there and where have they gone?,” 4th July 2022.

¹⁹ Jaroslav Mihalik, and Jakub Bardovic. 2019. *Migration: The Challenge of European States*, Stuttgart, 35.

the whole nation. Though Mr. Donald Tusk can be considered more a friend to the European Union than the Law and Justice Party, much of his campaign has nevertheless focused upon this very issue. He has accused the government of “presiding over the “collapse” of border controls”²⁰ and has consistently asserted the need for Poles to “regain control over this country and its borders.”²¹ In the wider context of Poland’s independence-ideology, it is important to note that many Polish politicians hold Germany as being chiefly responsible for the migrant crisis, starting with “the German-inspired and Commission-led effort in 2015 to distribute migrants, largely from Germany, to other member states” in 2015.²² The year 2016 is commonly identified as the origin of the present crisis, and the responsibility for the acceleration in migration that year must be at least in part shouldered by “the German Chancellor’s “Flüchtlinge Willkommen” policy.”²³ This year has witnessed the revival of efforts towards migrant redistribution, which were last proposed in 2015. However, unlike at that time, the European Union is now faced with a determined and united opposition within its own ranks. The ‘Visegrad Group’ of Slovakia, Hungary, The Czech Republic and Poland have been drawn together by ideological consensus, fostered by “hundreds of years” of being “dominated by foreign states.”²⁴ It is on those exact grounds that they reject the “redistribution system enforced at European Union level,” insisting instead “on the principle of self-determination and national identity.”²⁵

The migrant issue assumes such primacy because the only structures capable of enforcing the Poles stringent idea of independence are strong, concrete borders. Any obligatory system that

²⁰ Mathew Day “Donald Tusk accuses Poland of secret open-border policy.” *The Telegraph*. June 24th 2023.

²¹ Nils Adler, “Anti-migrant rhetoric dominates Polish politics ahead of October-vote,” *Al Jazeera*. September 27th, 2023.

²² Desmond Dinan. “Governance and Institutions: The Insidious Effect of Chronic Crisis.” *Journal of Common Market Studies* 55, (2017): 76.

²³ Jaroslav Mihalik et al. (Milan Caky) *Challenge of the European States*: 36

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 41

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 41

moves people across such borders will be inevitably viewed in a poor light, especially when that system is the answer to a crisis caused by those nations with whom Poland has had such historically poor relations. The European Union has several responses to such opinion, the foremost being that Poland ought not to be excepted from responsibilities incumbent upon all nations within the bloc. The unfair distribution of migrants in some states represents an “external pressure that prevents them from exercising their sovereignty.”²⁶ By seeking to preserve her own independence so absolutely, Poland is depriving other nations of their own. The European Sovereignty Index believes that the European Union cannot afford such “weak links”, arguing that “all member states...need to contribute their fair share.”²⁷ However, the concurrence of the Ukrainian and Middle Eastern issues undermines such arguments to a significant extent. Poland has answered the plea of her neighbour more so than any other single nation within the European Union, displaying a spirit of solidarity that has stood in stark contrast with the edgy, non-committal attitude of Germany, who has only recently begun to take a stand against Russia that is worthy of her position as the leading nation in Europe. As for talk of “weak links” and “fair shares” a Pole has only to observe that, whilst the western powers have been forthcoming with funds and arms for Ukraine, they have been less willing to accept the arrival of those Ukrainian refugees who dwell in effective limbo in Poland’s borderlands. Poles would argue that they are not appealing to some point of grievance or prejudice, but rather to a universal maxim of human justice - *as ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise.*²⁸

²⁶ Jana Puglierin, Zerka Powel. “European Sovereignty Index.” *European Council on Foreign Relations*. June, 2022.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, *Overview*

²⁸ Luke 6:31 (King James Bible).

The two-fold asylum crisis has been something of a *casus belli* for the Visegrad alliances, sparking a ideological union that has holds implications extending far beyond these original disputes. Levitnova and Coury believe that the Visegrad group sees itself as an “authentic confederation in the heart of Europe that would form a buffer between the decadent West and the neo-Marxist East.”²⁹ Those four nations have “always been part of a single civilisation sharing cultural and intellectual values and common roots in diverse religious traditions.”³⁰ Their opposition to spiking mass migration from Islamic nations, which they attribute either to the incompetence or the willing collaboration of the western powers, is an expression not just of the political independence of single nations, but of the independence of central Europe in its position between East and West. The drawing inwards of Poland and her neighbours is perpetuated by a vicious cycle of events, realised in what Caky calls the “crisis of values on which the European Union is created.”³¹ Having long opposed the welcoming policies of the bloc, and having been reviled as result, Poland is now expected to help western Europe out of a dilemma for which it alone is responsible. Poland and her allies have realised, through the medium of this crisis, that they exist in a far deeper, broader conflict with the liberal democracies. The conflict can be maintained, perhaps even without end, because of the power dynamics inherent to the relationship. It is the West which holds the reins of political power, it is the West which has the keys to prosperity, and it is the West, most especially Germany, which is directing the policy of the European Union. Poland’s powerlessness is displayed both in her inability to resist the commands of the European Union regarding migrant quotas and in her inability to persuade the

²⁹ Ekaterina Levintova and David Coury. “Poland, Germany and the EU: Reimagining Central Europe”: 1195.

³⁰ Ibid., 1195

³¹ Jaroslav Mihalik et al. (Milan Caky) *Challenge of the European States*: 29

member states to take action over the refugees in Ukraine. The only place to turn is inward, into the isolation and assurity provided by the Visegrad alliance.

The unbalanced nature of this relationship is best captured in the second issue of Judicial reforms. The content of these proposed reforms is not directly pertinent, excepting only to say that they would certainly affect the clear separations of powers that are expected within the constitutional settlement of a liberal democracy. The crux of the issue is, in the words of former Foreign Minister Witold Waszczykowski, “not so much about the contents of a statute adopted by the Polish Parliament, but rather about the extent of interference by European institutions into the internal affairs of the Member States. In other words, it is about the sovereignty of the Republic of Poland”³² The European Union must understand that those most recently in power in Poland are less concerned by the actual validity of concerns regarding judicial reforms, and more concerned as to whether they ought to be the concern of outsiders. This view holds some credibility for, as Wnuk recounts, “the breaches of values did not regard the EU legislation directly, they were a matter of domestic law.”³³ Interestingly the European Court of Justice does not dispute this claim, arguing instead that the integrity of Poland’s “rule of law” is “an integral part of the very identity of the European Union.”³⁴ This might be seen as an appeal to that higher ideological, value driven battle which informs all of these disputes. As with the migration issue the European Union has taken concrete steps to conform Poland to its will, in this case by “withholding large amounts of funds” explicitly “over the politicisation of Poland's courts.”³⁵ There is some suggestion that these measures might allow the bloc to simply ‘wait Poland out’,

³² Desmond Dinan. “Governance and Institutions: The Insidious Effect of Chronic Crisis”: 80

³³ Magdalena Wnuk, “The Rule of Law Conflict between Poland and the EU in the Light of Two Integration Discourses: Neofunctionalism and Intergovernmentalism” : 175

³⁴ “Top EU court rules Poland’s justice reforms infringe EU law.” *Al Jazeera*, June 5th, 2023.

³⁵ Sarah Rainsford. “Poles prepare to vote as rivals end acrimonious campaigns.” *BBC*, October 13th, 2023.

hoping that a change in government might bring about a satisfactory conclusion. While it is certainly the case that the judicial reforms were furthered “mostly by the governments’ proponents and less by the opposition” Wnuk maintains that “the sovereignty arguments at some point were relevant to all parties.”³⁶ The fierce Polish fixation upon an independent sovereignty is the driving force behind arguments over the judiciary and migration. It represents an ideological chasm between the European Union and Poland: a blanket word that can be thrown over an unquantifiable history of grievances that have crystallised in a contemporary cultural-political outlook of fearful suspicion. Looming above this great nation is that lingering and vital question: why should history not repeat itself, and tragedy be turned to farce? Why should the Polish people place any trust in those powers which have time and again proven themselves unworthy of it? These questions cannot be elected away, they will merely find different political avenues for their expression. At some point they must be contended with.

Given the dynamics of power it seems doubtful that any further pursuit of a direct, confrontational approach on the part of the European Union will prove conducive to rapprochement. Such heavy handedness is simply drawing reciprocal action from the Polish government. The Law and Justice Party has appeared to double-down in its reforms the more the European Union has attempted to oppose them. Levintova and Coury believe that Poles cannot “acknowledge the slide into illiberalism” because they are much more concerned with “protecting their national interests.”³⁷ Whilst the reforms themselves might well be altered or discarded with a change government, the symbolism that they assumed as a principle of Polish Independence will not be so easily be forgotten. The protection of independence is a concern for

³⁶ Magdalena Wnuk: 178.

³⁷ Ekaterina Levintova and David Coury. “Poland, Germany and the EU: Reimagining Central Europe”: 1204

Poles of every party and will rear its head once again if the European Union continues its pursuit of ideological-value alignment. The European Union has rightful fears: Poland may be an avowed enemy of Russia, but it is undeniable that she is exhibiting many similar patterns of behaviour to those powers, like Belarus and Hungary, who have been recently drawn into Russia's orbit. This has happened to Hungary in spite of the professed aims of the Visegrad group towards Central-European solidarity. Poland is far from being in a like-situation, but it would be strategically nonsensical for the European Union to bankroll governments that seem to be gravitating away from her values and, seemingly, towards those of Russia. Here again the fear of the western european powers regarding those "weak links...that other powers could use to divide them" arises as a foremost consideration.³⁸ However, Poland would naturally question exactly what degree of security the European Union desires, and whether in fact its strategic concerns are but a front for the ideological intolerance of the western states. Poland's defensive capabilities are, according to ECFR* analysis, "one of the most promising member states in the field."³⁹ Poland has contributed significantly to the defence of Europe in recent times, and is quite obviously no friend of Russia. Wnuk's interviews with conservative MEPs in the Polish Sejm confirms they consider the European Union to be of value so long as it "could be beneficial to the Polish state."⁴⁰ The Republic strives not for the disintegration of the bloc, but for a different future for it built on "national autonomy, minimal interference from supranational institutions, and a more intergovernmental EU."⁴¹ Ostensibly these are not aims that ought to place a member state in poor standing. Poles might view the European Union's apparent inability

³⁸ Jana Puglierin, Zerka Powel. "European Sovereignty Index." June, 2022

³⁹ Karolina Muti, "Charting a new course: How Poland can contribute to European defence." *European Council on Foreign Relations*. 28th April, 2021.

⁴⁰ Magdalena Wnuk, "The Rule of Law Conflict between Poland and the EU": 171

⁴¹ Desmond Dinan. "Governance and Institutions: The Insidious Effect of Chronic Crisis": 77

to accept a more transactional, economic and defensive role (explicitly as the servant rather than the master of the nation states) as further evidence of both the blocs' adherence to Franco-German ideas of integration and intolerant liberalism. Some high-ranking Polish politicians certainly feel this way, specifically the Polish Justice Minister Zbigniew Ziobro who, on the issue of Judicial reforms, "compared the Commissioner's intervention with German oppression in Poland during World War II."⁴²

Such incendiary rhetoric would seem absurd, even grotesque, if it referred only to a

*The European Council for Foreign Relations

judicial dispute. It can only make sense when this dispute, and others, are placed in the context of Poland's unabating fear for her sovereign independence. Those ideological bonds, that friendly liberalism which brings together the Low Countries, Germany and France has its own corresponding rival in the Visegrad states. The trajectory of this alienation between Western and Central Europe may (though not directly imminent) yet become "so bad, it could undermine Poland's membership of the EU itself."⁴³ There are prominent voices in Poland who portray the European Union as "but the latest phase in the process of denationalisation of Poles"⁴⁴: an institution that does not break from the past, but fits quite naturally into the twin narratives of Germanification and Russification that have so defined Polish history. Reconciliation, the rapprochement, can only be arrived at via an understanding of this fundamental ideological conflict. The present isolation of Poland, especially the self-awareness that she has of her own

⁴² Desmond Dinan. "Governance and Institutions: The Insidious Effect of Chronic Crisis": 80

⁴³ Sarah Rainsford. "Poles prepare to vote as rivals end acrimonious campaigns." *BBC*, October 13th, 2023.

⁴⁴ Andrew Keir Wise. "Postcolonial Anxiety in Polish Nationalist Rhetoric.": 304

powerlessness, which has been reinforced by several heavy handed interventions by the European Union, can only be repaired by good-will.

Germany clearly has an outsized influence on how the policies of the entire bloc are being negatively perceived in Poland. Such has been the historical one-way flow of oppression and terror that it seems unlikely whether this image of Germany could be purged from the Polish imagination in the foreseeable future. It is necessary to de-escalate these ideological confrontations, and Germany taking a backseat in Polish-European Union negotiations on Judicial reforms seems imperative to this. There are, however, certain things that Germany might do, starting with Germany entering into direct negotiations with Poland over war reparations, not necessarily as a commitment to such an idea, but more as a display of good faith. This is far preferable to the outright rejection that Poland has experienced thus far in the matter. More concrete action might be taken over the issue of Ukrainian refugees. A German-led expansion of aid to Poland might serve to repair the reputation she holds in that country as far as the Ukrainian war is concerned. The Ukrainian War, and the refugees Poland has received from that conflict, might in turn prove something of a useful pretext for delaying negotiations over migrant quotas. Taking this more all-encompassing approach to the dual-migration issue may make Poles more receptive to the idea of hosting the Ukrainian refugees in the country long term. In this rough framework a rapprochement might well be possible; the dual migrant issues trade off to the mutual benefit of both parties. An aid first, reforms second approach, as opposed to the current coercive methods favoured by the European Union, ought to mitigate the damaging power

dynamics within the partnership, making Poland less sensitive towards what Dinan calls “the perceived condescension of Western European elites.”⁴⁵

History seems to be the most vital factor in the ideological interplay between Poland and the European Union: in particular that history of oppression and continued betrayal which has left modern Poland in a permanent state of suspicion. The expectations of the European Union, most energetically pursued by Poland’s historic enemy Germany, are not well received because they appear as potential threats to the Polish definition of sovereignty, which is reliant on a strict sense of independence as regards her borders, her politics, and her culture. The interplay of these factors has created broad ideological differences between Poland and the European Union, the escalation of which threatens to permanently damage, and perhaps even end the relationship that began between the two in 2004. The answer for both parties, particularly in the context of a renewed Russian threat, is de-escalation. Given the present and historic power dynamics between Poland and the western European powers, de-escalation can only come from the European Union. The elections of mid-October, where the former President of the European Commission Mr. Donald Tusk gained a large number of seats, have shown that the Polish people do not desire isolation. The door of rapprochement stands unlatched, if only the European Union were willing to take the initial steps to push it open. The new elections were positive, but they cannot heal those fissures that run far deeper than the immediate issues. These stem from an ideological, perhaps even civilizational disconnect on values. If the European Union wishes to retain its fifth largest member - “the most powerful country in central and eastern Europe”⁴⁶ - then it must abandon those dogged ideological pursuits and find areas of common interest with Poland. Both

⁴⁵ Desmond Dinan. “Governance and Institutions: The Insidious Effect of Chronic Crisis”: 77

⁴⁶ Jana Puglierin, Zerka Powel. “European Sovereignty Index.” *European Council on Foreign Relations*. June, 2022.

look eastwards with more than a small amount of trepidation, fearful of the expansive policies of Russia. Both have awoken to the cultural and infrastructural threats posed by uncontrolled migration, albeit only more recently in the west. Both have a strategic reliance on the other: the Poles in a monetary sense, and the west in their strategic need to retain a friend in an increasingly hostile central Europe. There are grounds enough here for a rapprochement, but the European Union must provide Poland assurances of its independence, and show itself capable of working with good-will towards that end.

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