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AMERICA - POLAND'S PERFECT ALLY

The new Polish reality, which started to take shape after the breakthrough of 1989, entered the world of relations with the United States with incredibly positive baggage. America has traditionally occupied a special place in the Polish collective consciousness. It constituted the myth of a better, more affluent and ideal world. Throughout the decades successive generations of highlanders, peasants, the poor, as well as the representatives of the intelligentsia and aristocracy made their way across the Ocean and later sent letters home with a description of paradise. This oasis of prosperity was at the same time a mainstay of liberty, democracy, strength and hope. The American myth of the country with model values was particularly vibrant during the cold war period, and it was dominant not only in the Polish consciousness but it was collectively referred to in various countries in the communist part of Europe. However, in Poland the American model was exceptional and strengthened by the sense of shared historical experiences associated with people and facts that were symbolic for Polish-American relations, such as Tadeusz Kościuszko, Kazimierz Pułaski and President Thomas Woodrow Wilson with his "14 points" which spoke of rebuilding the independent Poland. When communism was in decline President Ronald Reagan was also a symbolic figure as he had the courage to call the Soviet Union "an empire of evil" and he became as popular in Poland as Lech Wałęsa. At the time Poles saw in Washington hope for change and the only power which was able to overcome Moscow.

Thus, when the West, and to be more precise the United States, had won the Cold War and we regained freedom while the Soviet Union was shattered, the western direction of our foreign policy, referred to as the Atlantic azimuth seemed natural and included a close alliance with the United States and with Western Europe (in this particular order). The embodiment of these relations was to be Poland's accession to NATO and membership in the European Union. For the sake of clarity it should be added that it meant an almost complete change in the strategy of Polish foreign policy, which in communist times was oriented towards an alliance with the Soviet Union and involved close cooperation with other countries of the Soviet bloc. Yet, it cannot be forgotten that even in the times of the Polish People's Republic the relations between Poland and the US were, as for the Soviet bloc, of an exceptional nature. As many as three US presidents visited communist Poland including Richard

Nixon, Gerard Ford and Jimmy Carter. Also, in 1974 Edward Gierek, the Secretary of the Polish United Workers' Party visited the United States, and in 1985 even the instigator of martial law in Poland, Wojciech Jaruzelski went to the U.S. (although only to New York for the United Nations General Assembly).

In 1989 having rejected Soviet dominance we felt completely free and sovereign, independent in our choices and actions in the international arena, and we made our choices. Consequently, close cooperation with the United States became the paradigm of our "new" foreign policy, especially in the realm of security expressed in the consecutive exposes delivered by the prime ministers and foreign ministers of the Republic of Poland, beginning with Krzysztof Skubiszewski and ending with Radosław Sikorski. Consistently, throughout the entire last twenty years Warsaw has made efforts to establish, maintain and develop special relations with Washington.

Indeed, this was hardly surprising. Apart from the above mentioned American myth as a starting point for shaping foreign policy in the Republic of Poland with reference to the USA, the objective reality was also inductive to such a direction. The United States came out from the Cold War as an unquestioned victor with unprecedented military, economic, cultural and political potential, with the last attribute accumulating the former three. The world seemed to follow the rhythm of *Pax Americana*, and it was Washington which had a decisive influence on the solution of the major problems and disputes of the post-cold war period. Thus, it was worth to have such an ally and to endeavour after it.

A lot was in our favour. We had the right to feel the initiator and the leader of changes in Central and Eastern Europe. The claim that the myth of "Solidarność" (Solidarity) was relatively vibrant and strong in the United States is no exaggeration. It was anyway strengthened by Wałęsa's visit paid across the Atlantic Ocean in November 1989, and especially by his memorable speech, "We, the People..." delivered to Congress and received with enthusiasm by American politicians. In a way we were thus "morally entitled" to strive for special treatment.

Nevertheless, we also received positive gestures from the United States. When at the turn of 1989 and 1990 Chancellor Helmut Kohl was waging his campaign to reunify Germany, the Polish government under Tadeusz Mazowiecki, without looking at the neighbouring countries won support in Washington for our efforts to obtain final legal regulations concerning the Polish-German border. The fact that President George H. W. Bush senior had included a provision about the integrity of the present borders in Europe in the list of American desiderata which he presented to Kohl in February 1990 was of crucial importance. Winning American support for the Polish demands concerning participation in the "2+4" talks was of similar importance. The Americans managed to break the reluctance on the German side and Minister Skubiszewski was invited to the round of talks concerning the reunification of Germany which concerned the borders of the future German state.

At the beginning of the 1990s it was also the Americans who had a decisive impact on the settlements concerning the reduction of the Polish debt in the Paris Club which were beneficial for Poland. This was anyway a kind of reciprocation

by Washington for the help of the Polish intelligence service in evacuating from Iraq, and in this way saving CIA agents. For this action the officers from the Polish security service (until recently operating within the structures of a communist state) were decorated with American medals. In this way the cooperation between Poland and the USA was being established in the most sensitive, but also most troublesome domains from the point of view of state security.

The new catalogue of examples of the new openings in Polish-American relations should also include American help and support for our efforts towards economic transformation. Although the help actually received was not proportional with the scale that was expected by some Polish politicians. Lech Wałęsa spoke of the need to launch a new Marshall plan for Eastern Europe but the help eventually received involved much smaller funds and a limited support in the area of consultancy. A new opening also took place in trade exchange, however until today our exports to the United States has been of no relevance when compared with trade within the European Union (for example, in 2007 exports to the USA was worth \$2 billion, whereas exports to the EU was worth \$108 billion; the USA is not even in the top ten of our trade partners). As a result, in terms of economic profit it would be difficult to talk about great and spectacular successes.

Yet, this not very profitable trade or economic balance was not able to weaken the conviction which was dominant after 1989 that special relations with Washington are the cornerstone of our foreign policy. This attitude was not changed even by the fact that the United States for some time clearly blocked the main objective of our efforts in the international arena, namely our membership in NATO. The pursuit to join this elitist club and to become a member of the most efficient and the strongest political and military structure in the world was dictated by two reasons. First of all, obviously the aim was to escape from "the grey area" concerning security which we entered with the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact, and to obtain guarantees of protection and defence. Nevertheless, the conviction that by joining NATO we would also raise the quality of our relations with the United States was of no less importance. After all, the U.S. as the most powerful member state of the Pact would primarily become the major guarantor of our security.

However, two successive American administrations, the first one run by Bush senior and primarily the second one under William J. Clinton, were not eager to provide a positive reply to the readiness to join NATO declared by Poland and other countries from Central-Eastern Europe.

It was then that a question could have been asked about whether our love for America was indeed reciprocal. However, the heart of the matter was not in the realm of emotions and psychology but in the realm of the political interests of the superpower, and these forced the United States to take into account the attitude of Russia. It was first of all the objection of Moscow concerning the accession to NATO of its former satellites, including Poland which decided about the attitude assumed by Washington. Bill Clinton's administration, in which politicians sympathizing with the post-Soviet Russia played important roles, for example Strobe Talbott, did not

want to evoke bad emotions in the Russian state with which it even tried to establish "strategic partnership". As a result, at some point Poland was losing against Moscow. In the calculations done by Washington Russia was more important with its nuclear potential which was difficult to play down and with the impossible to foresee future which, as it was estimated, could be negatively affected by bringing NATO closer to the borders of the Russian state.

Poland found it very difficult to break through American reluctance, and what seems quite symptomatic, it was then that we received more support in our accession efforts from Germany than from America, our most perfect ally. However, when in 1996 the United States "crossed the Rubicon" (largely in effect of a change of attitude by Talbott himself who succumbed to the arguments presented by Jerzy Koźmiński, the Polish deputy Foreign Minister) and acknowledged that it is in their own interest to expand the zone of security and allied guarantees to include Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary (expanding NATO means stronger ties between Europe and the USA, and thus strengthening their position in the world); it was of crucial importance for opening up the Pact towards the East. In effect, the United States, despite their earlier Fabian tactics, sustained their positive image in Poland. The Americans opened for us the door to NATO and helped to achieve the objective so important for our national interest.

In the area of diplomacy and politics this meant that Poland felt it, its duty to show even more loyalty towards the ally from across the Atlantic. We showed it almost the day after joining NATO, in March 1999 when without a moment of hesitation we gave our support to the military intervention of NATO in Yugoslavia initiated by Washington. Then the United States and their allies were in the right. After all the aim was to defend the Kosovar Albanians who were suffering repressions from Serbs. We were proud to be in the same camp with the U.S. and to intervene in the name of human rights (de facto our participation was expressed only by political support). In contrast with some other NATO member countries where the military intervention, which compromised the sovereignty of states and which did not have the UNO mandate caused severe controversy and social protests, in Poland a decisive majority of the Polish public, as well as politicians and experts were united in their common front supporting the NATO war against Yugoslavia. Scant voices of criticism heard in post-communist circles caused rather widespread irritation than called for any reflection.

The successful outcome of the war in Kosovo, as well as the confirmation of the huge military potential of the United States (because of the advanced American military technology used in the conflict, which was called the first war of the 21st century) only strengthened the conviction of Warsaw about the righteousness of our Atlantic orientation and the reasonableness of our efforts to build special relations with Washington. Thus, when in Europe the discussions about the need to shape one's own policy concerning defence and security as a necessary attribute of the European Union were becoming more and more daring, we consistently opted for the dominant role of NATO and the indispensability of maintaining strong trans-At-

lantic ties. In reply we heard voices, which came especially from the river Seine that we are the "Trojan horse" of America in Europe. Also, in Moscow we were regarded to be the agency of American interest in Europe, and this opinion was affecting more and more the relations with our eastern neighbour.

The most interesting aspect of the matter was that loyalty towards America, care invested in obtaining the best ratings in Washington, and endeavours to win the favours of the American ally were a feature of all governments of Republic of Poland, irrespective of their historical origins, political orientation and the people involved. The pro-American orientation of the Solidarity team seems completely understandable and almost natural. To some extent it was dictated by the inner debt of gratitude for the moral support as well as for financial help in the "grim" times of communism, and to some degree by the ideological and political closeness. However, the near servile attitude of the post-communist government exhibited especially by Alexander Kwaśniewski towards Washington throughout the entire period of his presidency can seem to be surprising but not difficult to explain. It was the best way to legitimize their power, to prove that we have finally broken away from the loyalty towards Moscow, and that now we have become not only true democrats but the implementers of the vital interests of Poland which were understood as maintaining close relations with the United States. It seemed that good ratings in the White House guaranteed popularity among voters. Although in the political campaigns the populist forces voiced accusations that once homage was paid to Moscow whereas now directives come from Washington (or Brussels), these arguments were unable to affect the support of the voters. Neither did they provide grounds for a deeper reflection or public debate.

In this nevertheless understandable and fully justified care for good relations with America and the demonstration of our liking for the superpower from across the Atlantic which translated itself into positive feelings towards the successive presidents, we in fact differed from other European communities, especially from the Germans and the French. In those countries the anti-American orientation has for a long time been shaping the attitudes of the elites as well as of young people. Although it did not lead to larger dissonance in relations on the governmental level it did affect the mood of the mutual relations and the perception of the American superpower. Poland where the U.S. still was breaking the record as the most liked country was indeed almost an exception.

Anyway the Polish political decision-makers and the Poles themselves welcomed the election of George W. Bush junior as the president of the United States in a certainly different way than Western Europe. For the majority of Europeans he was the "polluter from Texas" or "the cowboy ignorant", whereas the Poles had no problems with accepting the new conservative American leader. And when during his first visit to Europe in June 2001 he also visited Poland and delivered a famous speech in the Warsaw Library in which he quoted the words of a Polish hit he won sympathy of young and older Poles; we felt almost singled out and appreciated. Polish politicians irrespective of their orientation (the right-wing AWS was in the

government, Aleksander Kwaśniewski was the president, and the Democratic Left Alliance – SLD was getting ready to come to power) were making efforts to meet the American president. One could be certain that special relations with the United States will remain the cornerstone of our foreign policy, and a factor which strengthens our national interests.

In such a situation the reaction of Warsaw towards the September 11, 2001 seemed natural and obvious, and anyway we only joined the widespread world front of support, solidarity and compassion for America following Al Qaeda's attack. After all, even the leftish and traditionally anti-American "Le Monde" wrote after the attacks on Washington and New York, "We are all Americans", and in Germany the left-wing coalition government of the SPD-The Greens declared "unlimited solidarity" with the United States. Poland together with the other NATO members took unprecedented steps and brought into effect art. 5 of the Washington Treaty ("one for all, all for one") which meant our complete readiness to cooperate with America in their fight against Al Qaeda.

The attack of the United States on Afghanistan where Osama bin Laden, the leader of Al Qaeda was hiding also received quite widespread support and acceptance from an international public. Besides, in formal terms it was the operation of the entire NATO with the UNO mandate. In fact, however, it was carried out almost exclusively by American forces together with the small participation of British troops, and on land with the help of the Afghan Northern Alliance. Notwithstanding, Poland tried in some exceptional way to demonstrate its solidarity with America and readiness to take part in the war on terrorism that was announced by President Bush. Such message was inscribed in the special conference of the countries of our region in Europe which was organized by President Kwaśniewski in October 2001, and which apart from the protest against terrorism was primarily a demonstration of Poland's pro-American attitude.

The next stage of the war on terrorism implemented by the Bush administration proved to be exceptional and caused a lot of controversy in the international arena. Also Poland, the faithful ally of the U.S. was involved in the swirl. The announcement of the so-called Bush Doctrine in September 2002 and pointing out Iraq as the next target in the war on terrorism by the American administration caused a sharp and incredibly critical reaction on the part of some U.S. allies including Germany, America's most loyal partner on the European continent. There is not enough room in the present article to analyze the reasons and the nature of the dispute. Suffice it to say that there was no acceptance of the conception according to which America claimed the right to intervene in any place on the premises that: we decide who poses a threat to the world. The arguments used by the Bush administration boiled down to the thesis that the scale of the new danger, mainly terrorism, the emergence of the so-called bandit countries, and finally the threat of the expansion of weapons of mass destruction made it necessary to use other, more efficient means, even if they broke the accepted rules and were exempt from the principles adopted so far.

In this dispute Poland decisively took sides with the United States and with President Bush. Although we found ourselves in the same group as Great Britain, Italy, Spain and Denmark we were also on the opposite side to France, Germany, Belgium and Russia, as well as the clear majority of European and international public opinion. In this way we found ourselves in conflict with two of the largest and most important countries of the European Union which we were "just about" to join. Notwithstanding, the authorities in Warsaw not only rejected the offer from European companies and decided to purchase American F-16 jet aircrafts instead of European gripen planes (this does not mean that it was a bad decision), but in February 2003 they also became the signatories of the famous letter of the "eight" which was an expression of support for President Bush and his plans of settling old accounts with Saddam Hussein's regime.

However, one cannot unambiguously condemn the actions of the then left-wing government under Prime Minister Leszek Miller (as well as President Kwaśniewski), who assumed such a pro-American attitude, even if we accept that one of the reasons behind it was the desire of the SLD politicians with communist roots to become legitimized. To some degree it must have been a result of recognizing American arguments and the will to fight against the tyrant who, as it was then believed, had been building a deadly arsenal. However, this decision was also influenced by the calculated desire to bond with the superpower and earn its favours. Finally, our most important ally was going to war and it was Poland's duty to offer it our support. Anyway, the result was that when in March 2003 Americans attacked Iraq we sent our special commando squad, and after the victory we received a Polish occupation zone, which then for us seemed to be a great distinction. Because of that the government in Warsaw did not place on Americans any terms and conditions and did not issue any concrete expectations addressed towards Washington.

All these moves not only did not win approval in Berlin and Paris, that is from our future main partners in the European Union but they, on the contrary caused irritation and the memorable reproach by Jacques Chirac, the French President became a symbol of this attitude. In Germany, at the same time it became popular to talk about Poland not only as the "Trojan horse" of America but, to be more precise, "a mule". Undoubtedly, the attitude of France, Germany and other members of the "denial front" confrontational towards the United States was driven by many complexes of a weaker partner and by the desire to demonstrate independence and autonomy, and lay an emphasis on the growing position of the integrating Europe. However, for Poland it meant that suddenly one's attitude to America became an index of European identity. In a way we became less worthy of Europe because we were too pro-American.

Thus, we paid a bitter price for our loyalty towards the United States on the European arena, especially in our relations with Paris and Berlin. Notwithstanding, there were no measurable profits of our engagement in Iraq. Certainly in terms of economic gain there was no reason to talk about great success. Although "Bumar" signed contracts with Iraq worth 400 million dollars for an arms delivery, the Polish

participation in the Iraq war itself cost us over 200 million dollars; we also did not reclaim 830 million dollars from the Iraqi debt. We receive military aid from America but it is around 32 million dollars per year (the US defence budget is over 500 billion dollars).

Although in the political sense we could enjoy being labelled as America's faithful and loyal ally and we even had delusive hopes that Washington will see in us a strategic partner, in fact we were only included in the "new" pro-American Europe by Donald Rumsfeld, the American defence secretary, and contrasted with the "old" Europe which was reluctant towards America. In addition, Warsaw made plans to become a bridge to rebuild good relations between Washington Berlin and Paris. However, the ambitions of Poland only irritated the Germans and the French. Anyway, they found their own way to Washington, especially after the change of government in Germany and in France. Chancellor Angela Merkel proved to be more pro-American than Gerhard Schröder, and Nicolas Sarkozy also deviated from the traditional anti-American attitude in French politics. Besides, both countries, and especially Germany were too precious as partners for Washington to keep on holding grudges. In fact, the "old" Europe seemed tired of the "tug-of-war" and declared their willingness to improve relations with America.

The rebuilding of the trans-Atlantic alliance, visible already during Bush's second term of office in the White House meant that Poland was returning to the real position in relations with the United States which resulted from its potential, rank and attributes. Thus, we were still regarded to be a loyal partner but this did not mean that the visa requirement would be lifted (after all Poles by working illegally in the USA not only were breaking American regulations but also acting against their economic interest – sic!). On the other hand, American experts and commentators were making Polish politicians aware of the fact that we would matter in the American calculations depending on how good our relations are with Germany, which again became an important point of reference for Washington. This was due to the change in American diplomacy which started to do away with the tendency to divide Europe, to turn some countries against others and deepen animosities, as this strategy has brought more harm than good.

Nevertheless, the conclusion that even the greatest power in the world cannot by itself cope with the challenging threats of the present times and must act multilaterally was accompanied by the cold calculation of the potential and importance of having European allies. This was of big relevance in the context of the situation in Afghanistan where the NATO forces were operating. Washington counted on a larger military effort from the European members of NATO because without it would be difficult to think about the success of the operation. In consequence, although Polish soldiers were still in Iraq despite the fact that other nation's troops were gradually pulled out and irrespective of the fact that in Afghanistan the Polish contingent as one of few operated without the so-called brackets (the conditions under which soldiers of a given country could take military action) still our exceptional relations

with America and our dream status of a strategic partner were remaining in the realm of rhetoric. At the same time Bush's administration was doing everything to win the Germans and the French over and rebuild close partnerships with them.

Yet, it was precisely then that a definite chance for raising our relations with America to a higher level occurred. The question of installing in Poland some elements of the American anti-missile defence shield in a way fitted into the traditional trend of our attitude towards the American superpower. Already during the rule of the Democratic Left Alliance it seemed that Poland was primarily interested in having the NMD (National Missile Defence) installed on its territory. Indeed, the idea appeared really attractive, and locating the defence base in Poland would strengthened our ties with the United States as they would put special care into the country where they have their own military installations.

A similar point of view was represented by the new government which in 2005 came to power in Poland. The Lech and Jarosław Kaczyński brothers did not hide their liking for the United States. Similar to other governments they were striving to win favours with the White House and they kept to the line of uncritical alliance with the USA. This attitude could mean that we would accept the shield on our territory without laying down the terms and conditions. The way we were treated by Bush's administration when in 2006 the American offer concerning the shield presented to Poland by an American diplomat included a template for a positive answer was indeed very telling.

However, it was then that a new element in our bilateral relations occurred. It was introduced by the then current Defence Minister, Radosław Sikorski who was undoubtedly irritated by the arrogance and disrespect demonstrated by American diplomacy, and who had a better knowledge, than anyone before him, of the American reality and American political backstage. His point of view can be summarized in the following way: a new opportunity has opened up before Poland because we have 300 hectares of land for the construction of the base in a place which suits America. We therefore should start tough negotiations being aware that we do not have to have the base. More so that the location of the shield on our territory puts our country at risk of a new danger because for this particular reason it can become the target of an attack.

Sikorski's opinion had its special justification. Namely, for some time there has been a clear reshuffling concerning assessment of the United States, Bush's administration and the Polish-American alliance. At the beginning of 2007 only 38% of Polish people positively assessed the role of the USA in the world in contrast to 62% who thought so a year earlier. It was an unprecedented drop of support for the American superpower. By the same token we came dangerously close to the majority of the world's nations which were critical towards America. What is more, the idea of placing some elements of the anti-missile shield in Poland stimulated a debate focused not only on the issue of accepting an American military installation but first of all on the validity and on the consequences of such close ties with America, especially in the situation when we were already a member of the European Union and therefore our interests should be localized primarily in Europe.

The scale and fierceness of this discussion which involved politicians, as well as the intellectual elite, specialists and ordinary Poles could suggest that Poland and Poles needed "the vision of a distant paradise" less and less. Mundane realism has entered our life and it is killing the myth of America. Heroism, sacrifice, devotion for the "American dream" is replaced by a calculation of gains and losses, a more critical judgment and more balanced assessment. The new reality was taken into account, in which the United States as a result of, among others, too arrogant but also the too idealistic politics of Bush have been losing their significance, importance and authority. For many Poles, just like for the substantial part of the international opinion, as well as for the leaders of various countries America has ceased to be the attractive and perfect ally, and in recent years it has rather become skilled at building a coalition against itself than around itself. It would be difficult for this substantial qualitative change in the international arena to come unnoticed also in Poland.

Thus, a pragmatic rationale was behind Radosław Sikorski when he was warning the American side not to belittle Polish worries and postulates because the entire Polish public can become discouraged towards the U.S. However, minister Sikorski was not able to continue his mission of convincing Washington in the government headed by J. Kaczyński since in early 2007 he resigned from the office of Defence Minister. Then it could be expected that the Kaczyńskis' team will give consent to the shield without additional guarantees of security, remaining in this way faithful to the so far binding line of the policy towards Washington, although to some it seemed to be a kind of anachronism. This became more likely when in July 2007 President L. Kaczyński made such a declaration during his visit across the Atlantic Ocean. To many it was astonishing.

The political breakthrough which took place in Poland in the autumn of 2007 when Donald Tusk's party the Civic Platform (PO) came to power opened up new opportunities for Polish diplomacy. It was then that Sikorski became the Minister of Foreign Affairs. Personally, Prime Minister Tusk was not convinced as to the righteousness of having the elements of the anti-missile system installed in Poland. It also seemed that the uncritical alliance with the United States, and first of all the unconditional acceptance of the anti-missile shield was not on the list of the most urgent matters for his government. Instead the exposé of Prime Minister Tusk included plans to withdraw Polish troops from Iraq in the autumn of 2008 and these promises were delivered. The aim was accomplished by Tusk in a cool manner and in cooperation with the American side. However, the main and primary objective of Tusk's government in the area of diplomacy was to repair what it had inherited after its immediate predecessors: tense relations with Germany, conflict with Russia, and not the best atmosphere in relations with the European Union. These issues absorbed most of the energy of Polish diplomacy.

Yet, paradoxically it was precisely the issue of the shield and obtaining additional guarantees and military benefits for Poland which became the cause of incredibly dramatic moments which in the summer of 2008 resulted, among others, in the dismissal of the deputy Foreign Minister, Witold Waszczykowski, who was negotiat-

ing with the United States on matters related with the shield. Anyway, it was beyond doubt that the government under the Civic Platform (PO) and the Polish People's Party (PSL) has redefined the place of Poland in the international arena, especially with reference to the European Union and its closest neighbours, but also with reference to the United States. While maintaining the importance and significance of close relations with Washington, it nevertheless showed more care for mutuality in relations even at the risk of causing irritation in the Presidential palace, where the binding strategy was "yes to the shield at all costs", the idea which was also close to Witold Waszczykowski, the dismissed deputy Foreign Minister.

The Declaration concerning strategic cooperation which accompanied the agreement on the installation of elements of the anti-missile shield in Poland signed in August 2008 was confirmation of the new quality in Polish-American relations. Although, truly nothing was decided 100% because the signatory on the American side was George Bush's administration, which was leaving the government in the following months, Poland, at least on paper, gained "something for something". It succeeded in obtaining what it fought for. In consequence, among others, the support of the Polish people towards accepting the American installation on Polish territory rose. To show the full picture of the situation it needs to be added that all that was happening in the tense atmosphere caused by the conflict in Georgia, which also in Poland contributed to the growing fear of a threat from the Russian side. In these circumstances the promise of sending to Poland the US Patriot missile battery together with a small number of American soldiers, as well as the plans for wider military and technological cooperation seemed to be a valuable and significant benefit. It provided a positive note at the end of Bush's government.

When in January 2009 the new President Barack Obama moved into the White House, the Polish Minister of Foreign Affairs, Radosław Sikorski published an important article in the Polish daily newspaper, *Gazeta Wyborcza* (20 Jan 2009). He wrote about the tasks which are ahead of America's first black president, and he formulated the Polish expectations from the new administration concerning, among others, the issue of the realization of the provisions written in the August Declaration about strategic cooperation. It was not a letter by an acquiescent and entirely dedicated ally but by a representative of a state conscious not only of the country's own interests and needs but also of a global dimension. The head of Polish diplomacy wrote,

"The United States with President Obama are facing a unique chance to rebuild the 'soft power' potential which constitutes the indispensable component of the non-confrontational global leadership of the USA. Such leadership conducted in close cooperation with the European partners serves well the interests of a free democratic world". When making reference to Polish-American relations Sikorski added, "We believe that the bilateral cooperation between Poland and the USA during the presidency of Barack Obama will enter a higher level in terms of quality. Over the past years we have laid solid foundations for our relations [...]. We have reasons to believe that using these agreements and relying on the so far experiences we will be able [...] to develop our cooperation with benefits for the interests of both countries."

These are the expectations of Polish diplomacy towards Obama's administration. It is important however, not to overestimate our realistic assets and capabilities in relations with the American superpower, as it is common knowledge that we are not able to meet the criteria of a strategic partner. Being aware of it we need to look at America not as our perfect ally at all costs but as a powerful and valuable partner from whom we expect mutuality.