Polish and German security cultures – a comparison

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Introduction

Views that range from polarized to aligned and interests that diverge on some issues and converge on others are common among the states of the western security community. Debates between Poles and Germans are no exception. Nowadays, such debates usually concern the nature and role of The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in Europe vis-à-vis the Ukrainian conflict, the aggressive policies of Russia, terrorist threats and America’s involvement in Asia. National positions have been influenced by geopolitics and expectations regarding security. Poland’s wish is for the Alliance to strengthen its emphasis on collective defence. Germany, which previously supported Poland’s bid to NATO and European Union (EU) membership, shares that view but also believes in a closer relationship with Russia and in creating a new forward-looking pan-European security architecture.

The core assumption in this paper is that a profound collective historical experience exists that has the power to influence the motivations and behaviours of both Polish and German actors in a changing international environment. The differences and similarities of opinion on security matters between Poland and Germany can be explained by exploring the national security cultures of both states. To that end, one needs to assume the existence of a cumulative national historical experience and a specific

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system of collectively shared norms and practices concerning state security, and specifically threats to national sovereignty, the use of military force and the perceptions of allies and foes. Historical experience works as a prism modifying the perception of changes in the international environment. Such experience is also a factor in shaping the behaviour of states. Norms define the range of possible strategic actions that states take and lend them legitimacy. Links between historical experience and specific actions can be described as norms which form a profound permanent fabric of interpretation, shape basic national interests and bring out the distinct nature of the national security culture. The impact of such culture on behaviour depends essentially on the predispositions to certain behaviours exhibited by political elites. The norms, which rest on a consensus between political elites concerning the legitimacy of foreign and security policies, can easily be discerned.

The origins of Poland’s security culture

Poland’s post-1989 pivot towards the West can be viewed in the context of the native security culture that constitutes the main driving force behind the decisions of actors shaping Poland’s new foreign and security policies, i.e. after 1989 (Longhurst and Zaborowski, 2007; Zaborowski and Dunn, 2003; Prizel, 1998; Kuźniar, 2001; Malinowski, 2003). This orientation is an upshot of the dramatic events of World War II. The 1939 experience of a victim of both German and Russian aggression towards Poland (and the close cooperation between the two aggressors) perpetuated the traditional belief that German and Russian policies were aimed at subjugating Poland to a greater or lesser extent. The British and French policy of appeasement and especially the positions assumed by Western powers at Yalta left a profound imprint on the political awareness of Poles. This experience was soon embraced in the symbolism of national trauma. While Poland’s military defeat of September 1939 was seen mainly as the result of aggression of the Germans and the Soviets and their collaboration against Poland, it was also associated with the memory of the French refusing to “die for Danzig (Gdańsk)” (“Pourquoi mourir pour Dantzig?”) (Moczulski, 1990).

The post-war experience of Yalta was associated primarily with the division of Europe and the Soviet Union’s hegemony over Poland. It also became synonymous with betrayal and abandonment by the Western allies. Poland’s traditional strategic stance of perceiving its alliance with the
Western powers as an effective counterbalance to both Germany and the Soviet Union became seriously questioned.

Yet, a half a century later, following the end of the Cold War, the traumatic experience lost its historical dimension. The political discourse on Poland’s role in Europe, originally begun by Poles in exile, focused on the need to rethink and reshape the historically troubled relations with the neighbouring countries of Ukraine, Belarus, Lithuania and Russia and – last but not least – Germany. Such reconsideration was viewed as necessary to overcome the oppressive Yalta order and dismantle Russian hegemony over Central and Eastern Europe. It proved to be the only way to liberate Poland from its fatalistic view of itself as a pawn and a victim of major powers. Having overcome its negative perception of Germany, Poland witnessed a breakthrough in its bilateral relations in the form of far-reaching political agreements. These included the treaty on the confirmation of the Oder–Neisse frontier between Germany and Poland (of 14 November 1990) and the Treaty on Good Neighbourliness and Friendly Cooperation (of 17 June 1991). As for relations with Russia, its neo-imperial sentiments towards Eastern Europe fit well into the traditional perception patterns.

Poland adopted a clearly defined security culture. One of its features was a reorientation towards the West, seen in Poland’s post-1989 foreign policy and especially in its efforts to regulate geopolitical aspects of relations with Germany, the West and the Soviet Union/Russia and to accede to the Euro-Atlantic security institutions. Poland’s security culture is highly sensitive to threats generated by strategic imbalances in Central Europe, such as the growing indifference on the part of the Western powers to securing strategic stability in the region. The main features of Poland’s behaviour could be explained by reference to the national strategic culture and its norms, which drive it to adopt a strategy of:

- preventing Russian hegemony over Central Europe by forging alliances with the “West” and specifically with NATO and the EU, which implies a strategy of leaving Russia outside of the scope of the exclusive security communities of the West;
- concluding agreements and establishing alliances with the “West”/Western powers, and specifically with NATO and the EU as an assurance of Poland’s security and Poland’s contribution to the stability and coherence of the Euro-Atlantic system;
• keeping Germany within the Euro-Atlantic system as a keystone of both NATO and the EU and – in a broader sense – “preventing” Germany from taking the Sonderweg, i.e. returning to the past, and establishing well-balanced bilateral relations/ cooperation;
• strengthening the status and powers of Central Europe as a precaution in view of the region’s vulnerability to Russia’s aggressive politics and out of concern that, faced with threats and crises, “Western powers” (i.e. key EU member states) might relegate Poland to a peripheral role and use it for possible concessions to Russia (Malinowski, 2003, pp. 37–38).

Historical experience has been a key influence on Poland’s foreign and security policy towards the West. By and large, the former democratic opposition, which has been the mainstay of Poland’s political system since 1989, approached the traumatic national history pragmatically as well as flexibly. The new political elites were far from viewing Poland’s position solely in terms of its historical experience or responding to it emotionally. The geopolitical window of opportunity that opened up through the collapse of the Eastern block and, even more so, that of the Soviet Union, was seen as a chance to overcome Poland’s perception of its geopolitics as a historically sealed fate that doomed it to being unalterably positioned between the two imperial powers of Russia and Germany. In a nutshell, Poland’s strategy focused primarily on ways to strengthen its own geopolitical and strategic position as well as that of all of Central Europe. This strategy relied on international constellations which could either be optimal or destructive to Poland’s interests. The norms therefore helped identify threats and ways to avert them in the long run. Above all, they have showed that the priority objective of Polish foreign policy has been to avoid loosening transatlantic ties and prevent the disintegration of the European Union, the adverse consequences of which for Poland could be at least twofold: having key EU member states and the U.S. lose interest in Central Europe (and especially Poland) and having Russia redouble its efforts to restore its influence in the region.

*Poland and the use of military force*

Support for the use of military force can be seen as a reliable basic indicator of a country’s security culture. In the case of Poland, the main political
parties in place from 2001 to 2005, i.e. the ruling leftist coalition (the Democratic Left Alliance and the Polish People’s Party) and the right-wing opposition (Civic Platform, Law and Justice) generally agreed on the issue. The same can be said for the Law-and-Justice-party-led right-wing coalition and the opposition (Civic Platform) in the period from 2005 to 2007. However, the deployment of Polish troops in Afghanistan and especially in Iraq was debated in parliament and was seen mainly as a long-term investment in Polish security within the NATO framework. Poland’s involvement could be interpreted as established by the cultural norm, implying an interest in maintaining a coherent transatlantic community. However, criticism over involvement in Afghanistan and Iraq grew in the Civic-Platform-led coalition government (2007–2011) as did the view that NATO’s excessive focus on out-of-area operations came about at the expense of the core function of collective defence.

Since the traumatic experience of aggression from Poland’s neighbouring countries, Poland’s security culture has tended to focus on external threats. Discourse in Poland centred on the memory of dangers arising from the use of force by neighbouring countries and how to prevent them. This explains the overall approval for the use of force.

**Germany’s security culture**

The new post-war state of West Germany was to become an antithesis to the Third Reich, i.e. the opposite of an anti-democratic Germany that is out to establish its hegemony over the European continent. As a concept of renouncing shameful history, Stunde Null was premised on distancing the country from militarism and nationalism and developing a whole new set of foundation models for Germany.

First of all, two norms were of key importance for Germany’s new identity, which called for refraining from repeating wrong historic choices. One of them required Germany to avoid acting single-handedly on the international scene or, in other words, required it to dispense with the so-called separate German way, i.e. attempts to dominate other European countries. It was meant to stimulate West Germany’s integration with the trans-Atlantic and European systems (Westbindung) in keeping with the slogans of “Nie wieder Alleingang” (“No more going it alone”) and “Nie wieder Sonderweg” (“No separate way again”) (Winkler, 2014). The other norm referred to the commitment to avoid war and aggression, as summa-
rized in the slogan “Nie wieder Krieg” (“No more war”). Both were to rehabilitate West Germany within the framework of the Western alliance. The “Nie wieder Krieg” norm initially symbolized a general aversion to military matters and stood for the demilitarization policy that the Western powers adopted towards West Germany. Over time, the norm was modified to fit the concept of allowing the Federal Republic of Germany to maintain a large military within the Western security system, so to ensure protection from the Soviet Union. Both norms were to rest on critical reflection on Germany’s history and establish a specific brand of security culture. They may be interpreted as an expression of pragmatism adopted in post-war West Germany as well as that of the fear that, by going it alone, Germany would end up in diplomatic isolation and in conflict with its allies.

Secondly, West Germany’s security culture was not only derived from internal sources and the shock resulting from the failure of nationalism and the need for rehabilitation. It was also a consequence of the role in the post-war political system of the West that was ascribed to Germany, which was one of a bulwark protecting the Western political system against threats from the east. The expectations of the Western allies influenced the approach by West German society and elites, which wrangled over ways to resolve the issue of Germany’s future division. Under a concept proposed as an alternative to Westbindung, both German states were to be reunified and neutralized. The close links that were to form between Germany and its security politics on the one hand and the U.S. and the community of western European nations on the other were expected to bring Germany under control. A number of restrictions were imposed on Germany such as bans on holding nuclear weapons, filling prominent military positions in NATO and establishing close links between the Bundeswehr and NATO. Germany was also required to commit to democratize its armed forces and establish a universal conscription duty. The German public and political establishment came to believe that incorporating West Germany into the Western security system offered the only effective protection against the threats posed by the Soviet Union. The measure was also thought to ensure an effective rehabilitation of the German state.
Germany’s multilateralism

Furthermore, (West) German multilateralism is a practice of developing cooperation within the framework of international institutions (Baumann, 2006). Its specific nature stems from its link to the aforementioned ideology of Germany’s behaviour and its strong internalization within the German political class forming, as it were, its “genetic code” (Goetz, 1996, p. 24). The penchant for operating within the allied institutions has become part and parcel of Germany’s specific security culture. What set the country’s behaviour apart were its motivations. Germany’s clear engagement in the institutions resulted from shared convictions rather than the will to maximize its own influences. This distinctive predilection for acting within NATO has become West Germany’s general mode of operation in international politics.

During the “old” Federal Republic period (1949–1990), differences existed in the understanding of German multilateralism. Some extended the definition of multilateralism to include Westbindung and European integration. Since the 1970s, as part of the Ostpolitik of détente, the definition of multilateralism also included active policies towards Eastern Europe (Link, 1987, p. 400). At the time, multilateralism was also used in reference to Germany’s involvement in such institutions as NATO, the European Community (EC) and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE). These differed in terms of their value for Germany. The slogan “Nie wieder Sonderweg” was applied to the collaboration by West Germany within the framework of the Western alliance rather than Germany’s relations with the Eastern Block or Germany’s presence in the OSCE. However, in time, the involvement in all kinds of institutions became Germany’s trademark. The legacy of the Ostpolitik and the détente concepts in the policies of reunified Germany was dialogue with Russia on pan-European security solutions. During the Cold War era, NATO too began to be treated as an institution of cooperative security used to engage Russia in collaboration.

Germany and the use of military force

Next, the caution with which Germany approached military affairs did not mean the military was negated altogether. In its renunciation of the Nazi
past, West German society initially disapproved of the military factor and of maintaining German armed forces.

This antimilitary stance by the West German public clashed with the interests of Western powers and those of Germany’s emerging political elites who viewed the restoration of the armed forces as a means of strengthening the reborn Germany on its pro-western course. The reinstatement of the armed forces, also referred to as remilitarization (Wiederbewaffnung), was considered to be a step towards recovering self-sufficiency and rehabilitating Germany. Antimilitarism was enshrined in the Constitution (Grundgesetz), which condemned preparations for an aggressive war (Article 26), enabled Germany’s accession to “mutual allied defence systems” (Article 24), i.e. NATO and the Western European Union (WEU), and established the right to refuse military service (Article 4) (Grundgesetz für die Bundesrepublik Deutschland, 1949). The attachment to territorial defence (Bündnisverteidigung) within the framework of collaboration with Western allies lent legitimacy to the Bundeswehr (Meiers, 2006, p. 76). Preventing war by way of deterrence was the Bundeswehr’s prime motto. Any use of the armed forces in ways not permitted by the Washington Treaty was out of the question. Article 87a item 2 of Germany’s Basic Law (“Apart from defence, the Armed Forces may be employed only to the extent expressly permitted by this Basic Law”) was to be interpreted politically. Any Bundeswehr operations which did not involve defending the Alliance (NATO and WEU) were seen as unconstitutional. Over time, this rooted itself deeply not only in public opinion but also among experts (Haftendorn, 2001, p. 392).

Following the reunification of Germany, a turning point was reached in the form of the Federal Constitutional Court ruling of July 12, 1994. Under its new interpretation, the Bundeswehr was allowed to participate in foreign operations with the approval of the Bundestag. The Bundestag was to define the terms and scope of its involvement in the decision-making process. The interpretation reduced the role of the executive branch of the government while underlining the decision-making powers of the parliament. Nevertheless, the political consensus regarding the terms of the Bundeswehr’s involvement in international operations remained incomplete. It was not until the special law of 2004 on the involvement of the parliament (Parlamentsbeteiligungsgesetz) that a limited reform was adopted which increased the powers of the executive branch while reasserting the Bundestag’s right to contribute to decision-making. This specific feature of the decision-making process resulted from the penchant for...
a traditionally prudent approach to the use of military force. This law has had specific implications for the Bundeswehr’s involvement in NATO operations in Afghanistan, limiting its broader involvement in combat operations (Brose, 2013).

Antimilitarism was evident not only in the legal system but also in the organizational structures of the Bundeswehr. It was characterized by close ties with society. While on the one hand, the Bundeswehr formed a link between the military and the public, it also connected the citizens to the state. The Bundeswehr was considered a citizens’ army and, as such, as an effective barrier to the re-emergence of militarism. Its civic nature was guaranteed by a universal conscription duty.

In the post-Cold War era, the concept of territorial defence gradually faded and was replaced by measures aimed at preventing crises and handling external conflicts. As new threats emerged, the need arose to develop professional forces and move away from universal conscription duty. The redrafting of NATO strategy following 9/11 had particular impact on German security culture. The restructuring of the Bundeswehr was prevented by a number of financial and military deficits as well as its specific decision-making process. Even before that, faced with conflicts in the Balkans, the governments of Chancellors Helmut Kohl and Gerhard Schröder ran into a serious dilemma of whether to retain the existing model of the military or replicate the British and French models in the Bundeswehr at the risk of sparking a domestic dispute with the prevailing advocates of the traditional role of the Bundeswehr. Reluctance to create out-of-area capabilities resulted from the belief that such capabilities would revolutionize Germany’s security policy. As a consequence, the successive reforms of the Bundeswehr that followed retained its dualism. Although the precautionary approach to the use of military power grew increasingly weaker, it nevertheless retained a limited significance. On the other hand, the existing value system was modified thoroughly in the course of the Bundeswehr’s growing, albeit limited, involvement in allied operations (in the Balkans and Afghanistan). On the other hand, cultural restrictions on security policy could also be felt. In March 2011, the Chancellor-Merkel-led CDU/CSU-FDP government not only abstained from voting in the UN Security Council on Resolution 1973 on establishing a no-fly zone over Libya but also refrained from taking part in the NATO operation that was designed to put it in place.

An environment conducive to quitting all these political balancing acts and launching a true reconstruction of the Bundeswehr came with the re-
newal in 2014 of a public debate in Germany on the need to strengthen the country’s role and make strategic adjustments in NATO in response to Russia’s aggression against Ukraine.

All in all, the legacy of World War II, the phenomenon of *Stunde Null* and the “Nie wieder Sonderweg” imperative explain the post-war security culture and Germany’s behaviour with respect to security policy. Notably, today’s security culture is also characterized by precaution in the use of military force and the recognition that, as an exporter of security in international relations, Germany should engage primarily as a soft power, in contrast to the Western powers which view the use of military force as a legitimate foreign policy instrument.

The security cultures in Poland and Germany and their implications

A wide range of implications for mutual relations between Poland and Germany result from the security cultures of the two countries. Three cases can be cited to illustrate the various discrepancies that exist between the security interests of Poland and Germany. These can be explained by the profound impact of security culture in the both states.

1. Tactical nuclear weapons in Europe

Poland expressed concerns over Germany’s view on the withdrawal of American tactical nuclear weapons from Europe as being excessively one-sided and having the potential to further increase Russia’s already massive nuclear advantage (British American Security Information Council, 2010, p. 3). Germany’s line, pursued actively by the CDU/CSU-FDP government’s Foreign Minister Guido Westerwelle (Hecht, 2012), constituted an evident complication for protecting Poland’s security interests. As the Alliance’s front country, Poland has an interest in having the Russian Federation’s tactical weapon stockpiles reduced under a broad diplomatic agreement to eliminate Russia’s disproportionate advantage in this type of weaponry. Poland’s position, therefore, is a far cry from the unilateral disarmament proposed by Germany. Nevertheless, the conflict in Ukraine makes it harder for Berlin to achieve its disarmament objectives.
2. Missile defence shield

Between 2005 and 2007, the Law-&-Justice-led governments stepped up their efforts to conclude an agreement with the U.S. on building a missile base in Poland as part of a missile defence shield designed to protect U.S. territory against ballistic missile attacks. Continued by Donald Tusk’s administration ruled by the Civic-Platform-led coalition, the negotiations led to the conclusion of an agreement with the U.S. on 20 August 2008. In Poland’s view, the missile defence shield was a bilateral concern of Poland and the U.S. – the idea was to tighten cooperation with America in the field of security and increase America’s political engagement with Poland and as part of its trans-Atlantic relations. Poland’s aim was to achieve an additional bilateral security guarantee beyond that offered by NATO. Poland never considered that such an approach would create a precedent in Europe. The claims, heard from Germany, that Poland undermines European unity by interfering with the American defence system\(^3\), were but an example of patronizing Poland and a convenient interpretation of the hierarchy between Germany and Poland.

The German CDU/CSU-FDP government viewed the matter in terms of German-Russian relations and the implications that the initiative might have for German-American relations (Jäger and Dylla, 2008, p. 312). Hence, Germany remained restrained in its official statements. Some politicians saw the U.S. initiative as an attempt to dominate Europe and believed that Germany should have greater influence over the project. The CDU/CSU-SPD coalition government saw the initiative as a source of complications and rifts rather than an added value for the Alliance’s security. The German government was sharply divided on the issue. Whereas the Christian Democrats regarded the project quite favourably\(^4\), Social Democrats pointed out the inherent security risks which the missile defence shield project could pose for NATO/EU – Russia relations\(^5\).

Germany requested the participation of Russia in the dialogue on the missile defence system\(^6\). At a Munich security conference in 2009, Chancellor Merkel emphasized that NATO’s strategy should incorporate coop-
eration with Russia and, most of all, its inclusion in Europe’s security architecture (Merkel, 2009).

As the technological aspects began to prevail in 2008, Germany offered its moderate support for the project. One of the reasons why the Obama administration abandoned the shield project in September 2009 was its famous reset of relations with Russia which played conveniently into the hands of Chancellor Merkel’s CDU/CSU-FDP government. The U.S. made an additional commitment to build the missile defence system as part of a broader agreement within NATO with an important role reserved for Poland and Romania. Its flexible approach received the support of Germany, which made no secret of the fact that the continued construction of the system within NATO and the achievement of a modus vivendi with Russia on the issue was in its vital interests when it came to developing the missile defence system. Germany reiterated this position at the NATO summit in Lisbon on 19–21 November 2010 (Thränert, 2010, p. 1). Nevertheless, Germany remained anxious about Russia’s response and was quite relieved with the U.S. decision to abandon any future installation of latest-generation missiles (SM-3 IIB) in Poland.

From the viewpoint of Poland’s security interests, Germany’s openness to Russia’s involvement in the missile defence system was fairly unclear. Poland’s misgivings concerned excessively yielding to Russian demands for being assigned a defence responsibility zone in Central Europe motivated by Russia’s desire to achieve a disproportionately privileged position in the project. As Germany viewed its Russian relations as a priority, it was certainly interested in tightening them with the use of the missile defence system while giving a new momentum to NATO-Russia relations on security matters.

3. Article 5 of the Washington Treaty

Poland prefers an Article-5-centered Alliance which maintains a defence capability against conventional threats. It envisages the collective defence function as the groundwork for the future Alliance.

The Russian invasion of Georgia in 2008, Russian army’s exercises, including a simulated nuclear attack on Poland in 2009, as well as Russia’s aggression in the Crimea and eastern Ukraine, have upset Central and Eastern European members states. Poland called for guarantees to be made more credible by establishing a mechanism that would make their applica-
tion inevitable (Nowak, 2010). The reassurances it demanded concerned updating contingency plans for external aggression, strengthening NATO’s presence in the region by creating a proper alliance infrastructure and holding military exercises (Madej, 2010). Russia’s protests received partial support from Germany. NATO agreed with Russia’s claim that the Founding Act of 1997 (i.e. Founding Act on Mutual Relations, Cooperation and Security between NATO and the Russian Federation signed in Paris on 27 May 1997) ruled out the deployment of the Alliance’s larger military forces in Poland. This stance was manifested during the Ukrainian conflict. Germany saw Article 5 to be more of a political declaration than a security guarantee which requires practical measures to back it up. However, at the Newport Summit of NATO in September 2014 Germany agreed to strengthen the Alliance’s territorial defence and launch the Readiness Action Plan. By the same token, Germany recognized Poland’s expectation of having NATO’s collective defence function strengthened, although it continues to oppose the establishing of NATO bases in Poland.

Three cases have shown that prior to the escalation of the conflict with Russia over Ukraine, Germany preferred to see NATO as an organization which institutionalizes political cooperation with Russia rather than one which requires its members constantly to renew their collective defence commitments. In creating its security policy in relation to Poland, Germany has been largely restricted by Russian considerations and by its own highly inclusive approach to Russia. To recapitulate, Germany’s usual policy line of catering to Russia’s interests and continued reluctance towards Polish key demand for making reassurances (in the form of NATO bases in Poland) the Alliance’s primary mission, has never been aligned with the Polish position on the future of NATO. By and large, Poland and Germany differed on a number of security issues. Germany’s overall position on the above concerns followed from the country’s historic presumption of the need to integrate Russia into the Euro-Atlantic security structure and bring about a security relationship with Russia to a higher level at any cost.

Conclusions

The above brief overview of the main distinctive features of the Polish and German security cultures shows pronounced divergences. Firstly, the primary role in the Polish national security culture was played by a discourse on external threats to Poland, on the constellations which create the kinds
of threats that are considered to be existential, and on ways to keep Poland secure. In other words, security culture defines who, when and on what terms becomes Poland’s adversary and who is its ally. In the case of Germany’s security culture shaped by the renunciation of militarism and the public aversion to military matters, the discourse on the use of military might resulted from reflection on the threats which Germany historically posed to Europe’s security.

Secondly, Germany’s security culture was a consequence of the broader identity-building processes of the post-war state of West Germany created as an antithesis to the Third Reich and any ideas of German hegemony and domination over other European states. The imperative of avoiding the Sonderweg lay at the heart of debates in West Germany regarding Germany’s integration with the West (Westbindung) and the durability of bonds with the West in its foreign policies. In time, this “western” imperative began to fuel the “European” imperative which required Germany to engage in European integration. Germany was thus to resolve the hegemony dilemma by anchoring itself in two mutually complimentary institutional systems. The discourse on Germany’s avoidance of hegemony as a precondition for European balance corresponded with the predominant canon of Poland’s security culture. It was also premised on maintaining balance in Europe by lastingly anchoring Germany in Western structures. What mattered was not only the motivation to establish “control”, i.e. contain any hegemonic tendencies on the part of Germany. In time, yet another aspect came to the forefront. In the face of stronger integration trends in Western Europe and the disintegration of Eastern Europe, Germany increasingly became the fulcrum of both the trans-Atlantic system and the European Union. In other words, Germany became a power that is indispensable for the preservation and growth of both of these institutions that are essential for Poland’s security.

Thirdly, one of the incompatibilities between Poland’s and Germany’s security cultures lies in the divergences in the two countries’ understanding of Russia’s strategic role and significance for European security. Poland’s security culture leans toward a more cautious view of Russia as an integral part of Europe’s security. German security culture tends to be more open to embracing Russia whom it considers to be a strategic partner. This stems from its traditional multilateralism and a preference for a cooperative approach to security. As a consequence, up until the Ukrainian conflict, NATO was seen as an institution of political dialogue.
The above-mentioned lessons-learned lead to the final conclusion, i.e. that the core assumption which was posed at the beginning of the paper has been confirmed. This means that a profound collective historical experience exists, and that has the power to influence the motivations and behaviours of both Polish and German actors in a changing international environment.

Summary

The core assumption in this paper is that a profound collective historical experience exists that has the power to influence the motivations and behaviours of both Polish and German actors in a changing international environment. The differences and similarities of opinion on security matters between Poland and Germany can be explained by exploring the national security cultures of both states. To this end, one needs to presume the existence of a cumulative national historical experience and a specific system of collectively shared norms and practices concerning state security and specifically threats to national sovereignty, the use of military force and the perceptions of allies and foes.

Keywords: Germany, military force, multilateralism, Poland, security, security culture

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