

Tomasz Pawłuszko  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-5572-3199>
University of Opole

The Foreign Policy of Poland and the Problem of Political Rationale

Abstract: The aim of the paper is to use international relations theories to explain the views of Polish elites in the field of foreign policy. The concept of political rationale in foreign policy, introduced by Fred Chernoff, is utilized to achieve this goal. The structure of the text is threefold. The first part introduces the theoretical approach. It is believed that it is possible to derive foreign policy mental maps from leading international relations theories such as realism, liberalism, and constructivism. The second part describes how foreign policy is understood by three groups of Polish elites. The third part compares decision-makers views identified in the second part with the theoretical models developed in the first part. In conclusion, the theory's usefulness in explaining Poland's foreign policy concepts is evaluated. The text presents an attempt to connect the issues of theory with observable political practice on the example of Poland's foreign policy after the end of the Cold War. As a result, the paper shows the linkages between chosen International Relations (IR) theories and the state's foreign policy. In this way, it incorporates the mainstream IR theories into the reflection conducted primarily in the Foreign Policy Analysis field.

Keywords: foreign policy, Poland, rationale, constructivism, liberalism, realism, security

Introduction

Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA) is one of the outstanding fields of international studies. Over the course of several decades, FPA has developed a whole range of empirical research to study such phenomena as decision-making, bureaucratic politics, and comparative studies (Hill, 2003; Hudson, 2005). An important role in this research is played by source works (memories, diaries, reports of government agencies), qualitative research (interviews, surveys, focus groups), and access to the think tank industry (advocacy, policy papers, consulting, periodicals). The post-Cold War FPA research development had a lot of autonomy in

International Relations, which for decades dealt mainly with the international system and power politics (Kaarbo, 2015). Psychological, organizational, and legal factors play a large role in explaining the behavior of states in the FPA (see, for example, Mintz, 2005; Redd and Mintz, 2013; and case studies in Smith, Hadfield and Dunne, 2016). At the same time, the rationale of politicians on international relations played a minor role. Scholars have little access to decision-makers and often can only afford to analyze official documents, speeches, or diaries. Therefore, IR theories' role in explaining states' foreign policies was relatively smaller. This text will show the linkages between chosen IR theories and a state's foreign policy implementation. In this way, I am trying to incorporate the general IR theories into the reflection conducted primarily in the FPA.

The aim of the paper is to use IR theories to explain the views of state elites in the field of foreign policy. To achieve this goal, I intend to use the concept of political rationale. As Fred Chernoff claims, the rationales are necessary to understand how theories play a role in choosing a policy (Chernoff, 2007, pp. 7–14). The discussion of policy options is intended to show how a reasonable policy maker who has a clear set of goals would select a policy. The rationale is socially constructed (culture, political myths, knowledge of international politics) and serves as the theoretical justification and explanation of the views, statements, and actions of politicians on international affairs. In this text, political rationales will be assigned to selected IR theories. The policy options and rationales are offered for illustration and do not exhaust all possibilities.

The structure of the text is as follows. The first part introduces the theoretical approach. Due to the fact that so far in research on Polish foreign policy, mainly realism and liberalism have been used, the application of constructivism is an innovative element in this paper. The second part describes the way of understanding foreign policy on the example of Poland as a selected state. The third part compares decision-makers behavior with the theoretical models developed in the first part. In conclusion, an attempt was made to evaluate the theory's usefulness in explaining Poland's foreign policy concepts. The aim of the work is to connect the issues of metatheory and theory with observable political practice.

1. Theoretical framework: realism, liberalism and constructivism

The issues of metatheory dominate the debate on the condition of international relations theories in the 21st century. At the turn of the century, Barry Buzan and Richard Little drew attention to the fact that International Relations “had failed as an intellectual project” and could not produce a language that would be recognized in other social sciences (Buzan and Little, 2001). For example, the concept

of the international system has lost its rivalry with the idea of the world-system advocated by Immanuel Wallerstein. For decades, scholars of international relations rarely appeared in the media and had little influence on the practice of foreign policy, as well as on reports, analytics, and think tank industry (Oren, 2009). Only such metaphors as: “clash of civilizations”, “end of history”, “risk society” or “the great chessboard” gained some popularity and influenced the public debate on international relations outside the academy.

At the end of the first decade, there was a noticeable call to develop analytical eclecticism (Katzenstein and Sil, 2010; Lake, 2013). Many researchers have understood that a real influence on the education of the elite in the field of international affairs requires policy relevance (Avey and Desch, 2014). As a result, in the second decade of the 21st century a certain division in the group of IR scholars emerged. One group delved into further metatheoretical disagreements with the aim of making international relations research “more scientific” (Rosenberg, 2016; Hamilton, 2017; Wight, 2019). Many representatives of this school believe that there is a strong need for a “better theory” in IR (Mearsheimer and Walt, 2013).

The second group of researchers is decided to use IR theories to analyze current international politics. This approach is preferred by authors associated with the think tanks industry, former politicians, journalists, and media commentators. As a result, numerous works have been created that have attempted to translate the language of scientific theories into useful policy concepts. Such proposals include, among others, the works of Fred Chernoff, who in 2007 published a valuable monograph entitled “Theory and Metatheory in International Relations” (Chernoff, 2007). In this work, Chernoff built his own matrix for comparing IR theories, and then linked real actions in foreign policy with their theoretical explanations. In this way, Chernoff analyzed various problems of the U.S. foreign policy towards Iraq, China and North Korea. In this paper, I will try to develop this method of work on the example of the Polish foreign policy.

According to Fred Chernoff, theory is (1) an organized set of propositions that specifies the boundaries of the part of the world it seeks to account for its domain; (2) includes general principles (either universal generalizations or probabilistic generalizations) encompassing key factors or variables that help researchers to organize observations (that is, to describe the part of the world in the domain of the theory); (3) explains (often understood as “causally explains”) the patterns or regularities stated in the generalizations; and (4) generates predictions, which may be probabilistic or deterministic (Chernoff, 2007, p. 38). According to Chernoff, the theory of international relations should explain a certain class of phenomena. It is necessary to standardize the theorist’s expectations in relation to the theory. According to Chernoff, eight dimensions of the theory were proposed (Chernoff, 2007, pp. 40–46). They are listed below:

1. What is the proper level of analysis?
2. Are states unitary actors?

3. Do states generally act rationally?
4. Do states have fixed preferences and identities?
5. Do states always expect conflict?
6. Is there a chance of overcoming the violent effects of anarchy?
7. What is the relationship of moral principles to theories?
8. How important are International Institutions?

The “eight dimensions of the theory” is an attempt to juxtapose classic issues of international studies with the problem of actual foreign policy. Chernoff selected three general traditions of thinking about international relations for analysis: political realism, liberalism, and constructivism. We can see the effects of this analysis below:

Table 1. Dimensions of competing theories

Dimensions of Theories	Realism	Liberalism	Constructivism
Level of analysis	System state	System state, nonstate	System state, mutually constitutive nonstate
Unitary actor assumption	Yes	Yes	No
Rational actor assumption	Yes	Yes	No
Fixed preferences of actors	Yes	Yes	No
Relative/absolute gain framework, expectation of conflict	Relative	Absolute	Absolute
Possibility of the progress of cycles of war	Cycles	Progress	Progress
Role of morals	No	No	Yes
Value of international institutions	No	Yes	Yes

Source: Chernoff, 2007, p. 74.

There are many schools of reflection within realism, liberalism, and constructivism. Therefore, the above matrix of the IR theories is obviously based on the simplification represented by Chernoff’s “eight dimensions of theory”.

The theories of realism and liberalism were fully crystalized during the Cold War, and their aim was to study the rivalry between states for power (realism) and the development of state cooperation institutions (liberalism). Both currents of those theories had many views and many representatives (for instance, Donnelly, 2000; Moravcsik, 1997). For realists, the study of state policy is based on such assumptions as the autonomy of politics, the rationality of the state in order to maximize power, and the balance of power and security. For liberals, concepts such as cooperation, prosperity, interdependence, and capitalism are more important. According to realists, international politics is a state of international anarchy, which means that the struggle for political status is often determined by material resources and the distribution of capabilities. According to the liberals, politics resembles a market where different states and different standards compete. That is why liberals often stress the importance of internal policies and institutions such as democracy and the rule of law. These issues are important because they shape state preferences and dictate optimal behavior to survive in the “market”.

Constructivism became popular in the 1990s. According to constructivists, the world is socially constructed (Wendt, 1995; Adler, 1997; Hopf, 1998). This approach notices that concepts such as anarchy, empire, power or security arise in the process of giving meanings by people: the political elite, media, or voters. Politicians have an intellectual horizon that influences their understanding of the world (Kosłowski and Kratochwil, 1994). Constructivism explains the change in state policy by changing the thinking of state elites. Therefore, constructivism can explain the impact of political theories (realism, liberalism, or Marxism) on the actions of politicians. Constructivism can also be one of the political theories as it emphasizes the postmodern volatility of ideas, preferences, values, and actions. In later publications, constructivists pay attention to the linkages of their ideas with pragmatism, theory of practice, and political analytics (Kratochwil, 2009; Adler and Pouliot, 2011).

All these approaches make it possible to analyze foreign policy. In this view, theories can lead to political assumptions about how the world works. Belief about reality in the past and present can influence the understanding of politics and how it works. In this way, theory and metatheory may have an impact on policy.

2. Three concepts of Polish foreign policy

In this part of the paper, I will try to develop three theoretical views of Poland's foreign policy after the end of the Cold War. Then these views will be juxtaposed with the political activities of Warsaw in the international arena.

Poland is the main country in the post-communist Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) region. In 2019, Poland was classified as the 22nd economy in the

world, the 23rd military force in the world, and was 33rd in the world's quality of life ranking. Poland's economic and political history shows well the specificity of the CEE region. Poland experienced the centuries-old domination of the nobility, a long feudal era, power, and the loss of independence as a result of the conquest of its territory by its neighbors. There were numerous wars in Poland, such as the Northern War, the Napoleonic wars, numerous uprisings, and two world wars. After 1945, Poland was one of the largest countries in the communist bloc. In the period 1989–1991, there was a fall of communism in the countries of the Warsaw Pact. Poland turned to the West. Over the course of several years, Poland has gone from communism to democracy and membership in NATO (1999) and the European Union (2004). Currently, Polish politicians are looking for a new political direction for the next decades. However, the political elites in Poland are unable to reach a consensus on the goals of foreign policy (Zajac, 2016). This point will be considered below in order to understand the rationale of the various foreign policy moves.

According to the Polish constitution, foreign policy is primarily the responsibility of the government (article no. 146) and partly the president (article no. 126) (The Constitution of the Republic of Poland, 1997). The control of the executive is carried out in the parliament in the form of standing parliamentary committees. However, the traditions of FPA research indicate the need for a broader approach. Contemporary politics is created by a system of institutions – acts of law, offices, agencies, decisions, and a team of stakeholders directly or indirectly interested in developing relations between a given state and other countries. It is the stakeholders who create both the debate on foreign policy and the background of its conduct by institutions formally appointed to conduct it. What are the stakeholders of Polish foreign policy?

The first circle of stakeholders is political. The main stakeholders are, of course, formal state bodies, their cadres, and politicians from various political parties creating and commenting on international events. It is in this circle that legal acts, government documents, strategies, declarations are created, diplomatic communication, secret intelligence activities, and official state events are conducted. The second group of stakeholders forming the foreign policy debate is made up of experts, analysts, scientists, journalists, and professionals dealing with broadly understood international politics. It is in this circle that expert opinions, analyses, scientific publications, reports, professional journals, media reports, and public commentaries are prepared. The third circle is institutions that do not comment directly on the policy but are vitally interested in information on this subject. These are investors, businesses, the general realm of the internet, and media available to citizens interested in the effects of a given policy.

Observation of political initiatives and reading a total of several hundred publications, programs, projects, analyses, and essays on the issue of Polish foreign policy gives the impression of a dispute mainly between two intellectual

circles – liberal and conservative, which can be associated with mainstream theories of international relations: liberalism and realism. The third group that could be identified is the expert community. The expert community understands the roles of political ideologies and their impact on politics, but experts try to stay outside of political affiliations. Hence, the experts express mostly private opinions and do not have the support of the main political parties. To a large extent, the experts' concepts refer to constructivism.

Currently, there is no consensus in Poland on the directions and priorities of foreign policy. On the declarative level, the differences are already visible in the content of the “strategic” documents of the past decade: the liberal “Priorities of Polish Foreign Policy, 2012–2016” are a completely different document than the conservative “Polish Foreign Policy Strategy, 2017–2021” (2017). Let us pay attention to the fact that the two dominant currents of political thought, i.e. simplifying, conservative and liberal, formulate almost contradictory diagnoses as to the international situation of Poland. This translates into chaos in the first circle of stakeholders and affects further circles.

The intellectual disputes of the Polish elite are symptomatic of a peripheral country that is trying to get out of a historically weak position in world politics. Over the last two decades, two schools of Polish security policy have been formed. The first one is associated with liberal parties and can be described as pro-European. The second is related to conservative parties and is essentially pro-American. Despite the dispute, their goal remains common: building a strong position of Poland in the CEE region. Both parties understand the concept of a regional security complex, i.e. the recognition that most threats to states come from their close environment (Buzan and Wæver, 2003). Russia's revisionist policy is the main threat to Poland and the entire CEE region. Besides, liberals and conservatives differ in almost everything: ideas, priorities, partners, rhetoric, language, and practice.

According to the liberals, European cooperation is of key importance for Polish security. European countries are Poland's main trade and technological partners, and the economy is a priority in liberal thinking. The liberals assume that Warsaw's strong economic and diplomatic position would allow it to play the role of one of the European leaders, which would also strengthen Poland's position vis-à-vis Russia. In the field of security, this means closer military cooperation with NATO and EU countries and great openness to American initiatives. More or less such a policy was carried out in the first half of the past decade (liberals ruled Poland in 2007–2015). This policy was in tune with major European partners and with the Barack Obama administration in the U.S. The Minister of Foreign Affairs of that time, Radosław Sikorski, argued that Poland should be “at the European table” and “among the European leaders” (see more: Kuźniar, 2009; Sikorski, 2018; Jelonek and Schnepf, 2022).

Conservative-nationalist parties took power in Poland in the fall of 2015. The thinking of conservative parties is rather realistic or geopolitical. This way of thought emphasizes the importance of traditional bilateral diplomacy and refers to the concept of spheres of influence. In this approach, the priority are not economic but political and military relations. Much more attention is paid to the problem of conflicts in the region. Symbolism and history are also important. Conservatives attach great importance to tradition: historical education, important anniversaries, battles, and uprisings. Historical references to the Jagiellonian era (16th century) and Sarmatism (17th century), when Poland was a regional power, are fashionable. Nowadays, the priority of the conservatives' foreign policy is the development of strategic cooperation with the U.S. (Poland-US Cooperation, 2020). Poland would like to become the main American partner in the region and strive for special relations that Israel and South Korea have with U.S. Polish politicians know that their country is too weak to declare itself the region's leader openly. It is obvious that Germany continues to have the main economic position in the CEE region. Therefore, Polish authorities are trying to win the favor of their neighbors by means of various geopolitical projects, such as the Three Seas Initiative (TSI) in the sphere of economy and B9 in the sphere of security. These projects are to communicate the emergence of a regional space of understanding and create a symbolic impression of the growing importance of the entire region. These agreements' success could strengthen Poland's diplomatic strength as the largest CEE country.

In the outline of these conservative plans, we find echoes of the ideas of the American strategist George Friedman, who advised Poland to become a "US aircraft carrier" in Eastern Europe (Friedman, 2010). Polish conservatives are trying to take advantage of the growing antagonism between the U.S., Russia, and China to strengthen personal relations with Washington and to maintain the U.S.'s long-term interest in the region of NATO's eastern flank. The main European allies were treated by the Polish government with reserve because Poland, due to its historical memory, is uncertain about the behavior of Germany and France in the event of a possible conflict with Russia. In the era of Donald Trump, this meant an increase in the number of Polish-American political and military initiatives, numerous high-level visits, and arms contracts. Cooperation with the Joe Biden administration intensified after the outbreak of the Russo-Ukrainian war. The number of U.S. soldiers deployed in Poland reached about 10,000. Poland also ordered over 350 Abrams tanks (new and used) (Poland signs for Abrams tanks, 2022).

As mentioned, the main goal of the liberals in foreign policy was to strengthen Poland's position in Western Europe. Good relations with Germany and France made Poland one of the EU leaders, especially in the countries of the former Eastern Bloc. Meanwhile, conservative thinking proposed a return to building a regional bloc of the CEE countries. Conservatives referred to old ideas such

as the “Jagiellonian idea” by historian Oskar Halecki and the pre-war Intermarium project, which was once supposed to bring small states from Finland to Romania to an agreement. The Intermarium project was discussed in 1922, but the idea of such an alliance fell after the Treaty of Rapallo (Pietrzyk-Reeves, 2017; Reeves, 2017). The process of restoring old geopolitical ideas is related to the return of geopolitics as a school of thinking about international relations (especially: Sykulski, 2018 and 2022; Bartosiak, 2017 and his think tank “Strategy & Future” are active in the Polish debate). The geopolitical community has translated numerous Western geopolitical publications and remains active in many communication channels (social media, books, opinion weeklies, etc.). Geopolitics enthusiasts are definitely on the right-wing side of the political scene.

The idea of building regional geopolitical projects appeared in the intellectual circles of the Polish right in 2014–2015 in opposition to the liberal pro-European policy pursued by the government of Prime Minister Donald Tusk (Pawłuszko, 2021). In 2016, the new right-wing government, based on the earlier (liberal!) concept of the EU’s Eastern Partnership, decided to refer to the pre-war idea of the Intermarium. The new project was called the Trimarium. The idea of the Three Seas Initiative was defined as one of the main goals of Polish foreign policy. In 2016, Croatia organized the first diplomatic summit of the entire region to adopt the Dubrovnik Declaration (Dubrovnik, 2016). Polish politicians deliberately supported a smaller state (Croatia) as the project’s initiator to avoid being accused of Polish “imperial” ideas. Poland does not have the economic or political potential to lead a large international group. Moreover, smaller countries feared the Polish-Russian antagonism known in Europe. On paper, the project was presented as a regional lobby within the European Union to promote the development of European infrastructure in the North-South belt. In practice, the TSI project could be perceived as an idea of building a regional bloc of small states as a counterweight to Germany and Russia. However, the TSI has proved unsuccessful over the years. The member states of the initiative failed to collect even a third of the planned EUR 5 billion investment fund. The region’s investment needs are estimated at over EUR 500 billion (The Road Ahead, 2017; Wiśniewski, 2019). The TSI, therefore, remains a rather limited political initiative within the European Union. Political thinkers associated with the conservative faction in Poland indicate that the TSI format could be extended to include Ukraine in the future (Żurawski vel Grajewski, 2021).

The second project promoted by Polish foreign policy was the initiative of the Bucharest Nine (B9). B9 appeared in 2015 as a joint project of Poland and Romania, which are the two largest countries of NATO’s eastern flank (Popławski, 2020). Its formula is very similar to the TSI: two CEE countries are trying to build a platform for intergovernmental consultations in a selected field. The proposed formula is conference diplomacy, i.e. meetings of country leaders in the form of summits. According to the geopolitical approach, direct contacts between heads

of state are emphasized. Therefore, the TSI secretariat is set up only for the organization of the summit. In addition, intergovernmental and interparliamentary meetings are held. The TSI is a political forum, which is also a lobby for the interests of the region in wider structures, such as NATO or the EU.

There are more similarities to the TSI. While the key issue in the TSI was to overcome backwardness (in the EU), the aim of the B9 project is to strengthen the military position of the CEE region (in NATO). Also in this situation, the united region needs a political patron, as the small CEE countries do not have significant military potential. The patron of the B9 group within NATO is, of course, the United States (Hodges, Bugajski and Doran, 2018; Fabian, Gunzinger, Van Tol, Cohn and Evans, 2019).

From the point of view of Polish elites, as one of the initiators of the B9 group, Poland should strive for a strategic partnership between the CEE region and the U.S. in the field of security. During Donald Trump's tenure, Polish decision-makers sought to conclude many political and military agreements in order to position themselves as the CEE leader and its representative in relations with the U.S. Polish military expenditure accounts for half of the expenditure of the entire region (Da Silva et al., 2022). In 2015–2022, a dozen or so contracts were concluded for the supply of arms and energy resources from the U.S. to Poland (Szopa, 2019; Da Silva et al., 2022). The United States pledged to provide military support to NATO's eastern flank region. The Polish authorities believe that the presence of American and allied troops will increase the deterrence potential of the Polish Armed Forces and that energy cooperation will diversify the energy supply to the Polish economy. Both sectors are key to strengthening Poland's resilience against Russia, which is also mentioned in the new National Security Strategy of the Republic of Poland of May 12, 2020 (National Security Strategy, 2020). By investing in closer relations with the U.S., Poland wants to be perceived as a reliable partner and a leader in the region, and the B9 project would be an attempt to extend cooperation with the U.S. to the entire Central and Eastern Europe (Terlikowski, Józwiak, Ogrodnik, Pieńkowski and Raś, 2018). Summing up, the abandonment of close political relations, especially with Germany and France, signifies the willingness of conservative Polish politicians to focus on building a regional security complex in Eastern Europe. The expected long-term patron of this initiative would be the United States.

The differences between liberals and conservatives are considerable. Let us look at how the effects of this disagreement involuntarily affect the other circles of stakeholders. The disagreement effect is, of course, duplicated. There are two discourses on foreign policy in the media space. According to conservative, Poland gained "subjectivity" by taking care of "national affairs." According to the second, liberal, Poland has lost its political potential and is currently on the periphery of Western diplomacy. Both languages interpret reality differently. For one narrative, the TSI project is a "real success", for the other – "geopolitical

daydreaming.” For the supporters of the first narrative, Poland has become an “assertive player” in the EU, for the supporters of the second – Poland has lost its (once respected) international position. For some, the goal is to build a “new central Europe with U.S. support,” and for others, “to join the group of leading countries in the EU.” On paper, these goals do not have to be contradictory, but in practice, they are incompatible.

An attempt to propose a “third way” in thinking on Polish foreign policy could be found in experts’ concepts (Grudziński, 2008; Balcer and Wóycicki, 2014; Kowal and Orzelska-Stączek, 2019; Zięba, 2020; Jurasz, 2022). Polish experts believe that diplomacy should be the most objective possible activity that serves the state. They also criticize polarization and partyism in Polish political thinking. According to most experts, the period of recovering from the COVID-19 pandemic should be used to rethink the strategy of constructing Polish foreign policy, especially since the validity period of the “Polish Foreign Policy Strategy 2017–2021” has already ended (no new strategy has been developed). This approach highlights in particular institutional issues: building a consensus for a state-wide (cross-party) foreign policy; use of strategic analysis and foresight tools in order to develop relations with the key European and global players (G-20); strengthening the Baltic and eastern policy; development of economic as well as cultural and scientific diplomacy tools; digitization of the state’s foreign activity (especially in the area of promoting Polish culture).

Three visions of Poland’s foreign policy have been basically defined above. The table below summarizes the political views of the Polish elite regarding the conduct of the state’s foreign policy. The following columns highlight concepts that correspond to three specific schools of thought about Poland’s position in international relations in reference to twenty identified rationales (marked as R1, R2, R3, etc.).

Table 2. Polish rationales and policies

Rationale	Policy no. 1 Conservative	Policy no. 2 Liberal	Policy no. 3 Constructivist
R1 The CEE region, thanks to Poland, can create a new center of strength in Europe	X		
R2 A return to geopolitical initiatives is needed	X		X
R3 Russia must be deterred and U.S. support must be enlisted	X	X	X
R4 Poland may be the region’s leader	X	X	X
R5 Germany and Russia are Poland’s rivals in the CEE region	X		

R6 Emphasizing assertiveness and sovereignty in foreign policy is important	X		
R7 Polish democracy is a success and an opportunity for strong Polish soft power in the post-Soviet region		X	X
R8 Poland should co-rule Europe together with Germany and France		X	X
R9 Poland is more important to Germany than Russia		X	
R10 If the U.S. helps Poland, then it will strengthen its leadership in NATO	X		X
R11 Poland should develop the Eastern Partnership and a civilization alternative against Russia		X	X
R12 Poland should develop TSI and B9 projects	X		
R13 The position of Poland is determined by military strength and moral reasons	X		
R14 Poland's position is determined by its economic potential, technologies and alliances		X	
R15 Poland should join the G20 instead of Russia	X	X	X
R16 Poland cannot count on help from Germany and France	X		
R17 Poland should work closely with the EU to strengthen its position in the West and to balance larger European states		X	X
R18 Poland should be guided by interests, not values - cooperation with China is possible	X		X
R19 Conflicts with neighbors are possible – especially in the area of memory and historical politics	X		
R20 Poland should cooperate with Turkey	X		

Source: own study.

As seen above, there are very few common rationales in Polish foreign policy (R3, R4, R15). It can only be confirmed that the common priority of all three circles influencing Polish foreign policy is building a stronger position of Poland in the CEE region. The different decision-making options assign different roles to Germany, Russia, the U.S., and the European Union. Many of the Polish political elite have anti-German views, although Poland and Germany are important trade and technology partners. For at least twenty years, there has been no consensus on the Polish dimension of soft power (Surowiec, 2017). As a result, the communication strategy of Polish diplomacy remains inconsistent. Poland has the ambition to be a regional leader, but for several years Polish politicians have been involved in numerous diplomatic conflicts that do not build trust in the state in the long term perspective. Moreover, Polish public opinion does not attach much importance to foreign policy, which means that the discussion on the shape of the Polish strategy takes place mainly in circles of conflicting elites.

3. Identified foreign policy concepts in the context of introduced theories

The table below summarizes the main policy options of Polish foreign policy in recent years (“Policy” column) and relates them to theoretical concepts popular in International Relations (“Theory” column). Additionally, particular policy options are associated with named previously “rationales” and identified “general principles”.

Table 3. Rationales for Polish foreign policy

Policy	Rationale	General principle	Theory
Focus on the CEE region	R1, R2, R4, R12	Smaller countries can be easily dominated	Realism, constructivism
Use a policy of deterrence against Russia.	R3, R11	Throughout history, Russia has been a threat to the CEE region. Security is the fundamental problem in international relations.	Realism, liberalism, constructivism

The “ULB” doctrine. Polish support for Ukraine, Lithuania, and Belarus (and the Eastern Partnership initiative in the EU)	R2, R3, R4	The state is developing soft power in the areas of its historical sphere of influence. Weaker countries accept bandwagoning strategies to get out of backwardness and avoid political risks.	Realism, liberalism, constructivism
Focus on cooperation with Germany and France	R8, R14, R15	Strong countries can be won over to cooperate thanks to the bandwagoning strategy	Liberalism, constructivism
Criticism of EU policy	R6, R13,	The idea of sovereignty is more important than the treaties	Realism, constructivism
Cooperation with the EU	R14, R17	International organizations reduce transaction costs and reduce the advantage of large countries over small ones.	Liberalism
Close cooperation with the U.S.	R3, R4, R10	Cooperation within the alliance increases the potential for deterrence	Realism, liberalism, constructivism
Poland’s soft power as a leader in democratic transformation	R7, R11	The image of a successful country strengthens its position in the international arena	Liberalism, constructivism
Poland should oppose Russia’s imperial policy	R1, R3, R5, R11	Democratic countries build peace in international relations	Liberalism, constructivism
Poland should be assertive and seek the realization of interests all over the world, also in authoritarian countries	R15, R18, R20	Power and security, which are the main interests of the state, should be pursued	Realism

Source: own study.

The table above shows a broad spectrum of available directions of Polish foreign policy. Poland is the largest country and the leading economy in the CEE region. Many politicians and journalists claim that Polish regional position should incline Poland to pursue assertive policy in the spirit of political realism.

In this view, Poland should focus on security policy in order to stop Russian revisionism in Eastern Europe. A realistic approach views international politics as competition for power or a fight of interests, not cooperation. Conservative politicians are also distrustful of the EU and new political trends (green transformation, technological changes).

Supporters of the liberal approach treat politics like a market game and believe that Poland should be an important player in the mainstream of European politics and focus on modernization and the economic interests of the society. The basic interests of the state in the liberal approach are related to good relations with its main trading partners (Germany, France, the Netherlands, the U.S., etc.) and with the regulator of standards of the “market” (European Union). According to the liberal approach, Poland should limit cooperation with authoritarian countries and promote liberal values (modernization, freedom, rationalism, human rights, the rule of law, and meritocracy). Contemporary liberal authors believe Poland should join the group of EU leaders and join the G-20 group as soon as possible. What is more, Poland should develop modern national branding and soft power.

Representatives of the third approach believe that they stand on the side of the main political dispute in Poland and follow mostly the assumptions of constructivism. According to constructivism, the state is a complex of interdependent ideas. Citizens constantly reproduce political ideas *via* civic education, interpretations of history, and changes in the hierarchy of state values. The task of politicians is to discover the optimal benefits for the state that a specific policy can bring. Most experts believe that in today’s world, cooperation outweighs conflict and brings more benefits. Therefore, they pay attention to the practical possibilities of gaining material (trade, migrants, resources) or non-material (image, soft power) influences. As Piotr Buras (ECFR) pointed out, Poland needs its “foreign policy compass” (Buras, 2021).

However, expert visions of policy generate limited amounts of political emotions, thus, the expert discourse is marginalized in the debate of the mainstream Polish elites, which focus on issues that lead to political polarization. Constructivism often advocates similar policy solutions to realism or liberalism but does so for different reasons. Realism and liberalism are also driven by ideas such as interest, security, and cooperation. However, both of these approaches have different hierarchies of values, which influence the perception of chosen policy ideas. Meanwhile, experts’ pragmatism notes that the state should benefit from every situation, but at the same time, they make their pragmatic views politically and ideologically fragmented.

Summary

The theories of international relations have developed many valuable approaches to world politics. Numerous concepts have been introduced, such as anarchy, the balance of power, security, power, interdependence, alliance, hegemony, the international system, national interest, diplomacy, and globalization. International Relations gained its own scientific language, but unfortunately, it remained a niche compared to other social sciences. Most of these terms are not widely used (see: Oxford Concise Dictionary of Politics, 2003). Scholars have serious problems with the operationalization of scientific language and its adaptation to practical use in non-scientific domains of discourse.

This article shows that theory can be used to explain the foreign policy beliefs of state elites in their political practice. It was indicated that the decision-makers' beliefs about the reality may shape the direction of foreign policy, and influence state strategies and documents, as well as the media, experts and other stakeholders. The use of general terminology from the IR theories to the analysis of middle-range states brings interesting conclusions. The example of Polish foreign policy shows that the policy of the middle-range state draws from various intellectual traditions because it does not have clearly defined priorities (common goals, interests, or strategies recognized by the entire political class). This knowledge allows us to adjust the conceptual language of International Relations to the selected case study. The example of Poland shows that decision-makers are often aware of the intellectual traditions they follow. Their rationale is often based on specific political beliefs rather than professional knowledge. On the other hand, there is no consensus about the content and effects of foreign policy. Politicians are unable to establish a common catalog of priorities. Furthermore, politicians often do not know if their policies will bring the expected consequences, therefore, they are able to formulate completely contradictory diagnoses. Consequently, it also leads politicians to pursue different policies.

The IR theories allow for top-down ordering of various approaches to foreign policy and may be useful for the practice and prediction of politicians' actions. On the other hand, the FPA approach can provide a different level of analysis, that is, the bottom-up process of creating a given policy. Therefore, we need both general concepts from the IR theories and current sources of political knowledge provided by lawyers, policy analysts, journalists, etc. The final result comes from the synergy of the acquired knowledge.

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