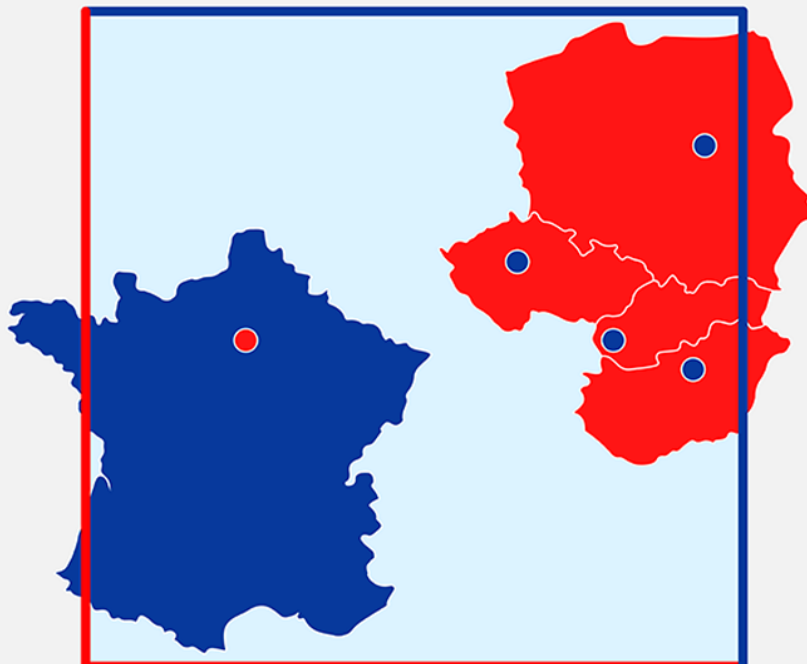


# POLICY PAPER

Current Polish-French relations. Turning points, elements of convergence and the biggest challenges for the future bilateral and European relations

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- **What should be stressed in the first place, from the perspective of the current conservative Polish government, is that history plays a capital role in designing and conducting foreign (in particular European) policy.**



## Introductory and turning points of the Polish-French relation

What should be stressed in the first place, from the perspective of the current conservative Polish government, is that history plays a capital role in designing and conducting foreign (in particular European) policy. In this context, it should be noted the very positive fact that Poland and France do not have such a complicated relationship as in the case of Polish-Russian, Polish-German, or Polish-Ukrainian relations. On the contrary, as stated by Jacek Czaputowicz, Polish Minister of Foreign Affairs in his March 2018 exposé of the priorities of Polish diplomacy: "France remains an important partner for us. We have special historical ties. We remember with gratitude the support of the French for the freedom and independence of Poland; for Great Emigration, Parisian Culture, for Solidarity. Poles highly value French culture"<sup>1</sup>. The head of Polish diplomacy referred to the fact that an independent Polish army called the "Blue Army of General Haller" was created in France in 1917. Subsequently, the French Prime Minister Georges Clemenceau played a significant role in shaping the Treaty of Versailles, which was particularly beneficial to Poland. In addition, France supported the young Polish state in the Bolshevik war. Another little-known fact is that for his service to Poland, the then (in 1921) young officer Charles De Gaulle received the Order of Virtuti Militari – Poland's highest military decoration for heroism and courage in battle. The lack of historical disputes between Poland and France are therefore a big advantage of this bilateral cooperation. In addition to the Polish admiration for French culture, there is without any doubt huge sympathy between these two nations. The French are ranked as the 7<sup>th</sup> most-

liked nation, with 41% (compared with the 1<sup>st</sup> place Czechs with 56%<sup>2</sup>).

Polish-French relations have developed since 1989 in an increasingly stable manner (see section below on rising economic exchanges), but it seems that they have recently entered in their most demanding phase yet.

Since 1989, Polish-French relations have operated on the bilateral, the EU, as part of the informal Weimar Triangle group, NATO and UN levels. The very first turning point in contemporary Polish-French relations was the signature of a strategic cooperation agreement under Nicolas Sarkozy's presidency in 2008. The agreement concerned the following sectors: political, economic, energy, defense, police and legal cooperation, and Schengen. The former President of Poland – Bronisław Komorowski held a similar strategic visit in 2012, which was followed by a visit of President François Hollande in 2013, and resulted in the signing of another cooperation agreement, which was extended to include the cultural and educational sector. The next intergovernmental consultations took place in October 2015, when President Andrzej Duda (elected the same year) paid an official visit to France at the invitation of his counterpart.

There are three main reasons for the recent above-mentioned aggravation of the Polish-French relations:

Firstly, the withdrawal by the newly elected Polish government, in October 2016, from the contract for the purchase of 50 multi-purpose Caracal helicopters, produced by the Franco-German-Spanish armaments concern Airbus Helicopters, significantly affected the Polish-French bilateral relations. The general crisis in relations caused by this decision resulted in limiting contacts at the highest political level, which contributed to the lack of Presidential visits in

<sup>1</sup> Information of the Minister of Foreign Affairs on the tasks of Polish foreign policy in 2018, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Poland, 21 March, 2018, [www.msz.gov.pl](http://www.msz.gov.pl).

<sup>2</sup> „Relation to other nations”, Centre for Public Opinion Research, 7 February 2019, <https://www.cbos.pl/PL/szukaj/szukaj.php>.

both directions. The withdrawal provoked the following direct consequences that symbolized the “cooling” of relations: 1) Former President François Hollande canceled his visit to Poland scheduled for 13 October 2016 as part of ongoing intergovernmental consultations; 2) The French, with the opposition of Germany, decided that there would be no meeting of the heads of the states of the informal Weimar Triangle group, scheduled for the beginning of November 2016 in Paris; 3) The French side cancelled its invitation for the Polish delegation for the EURONAVAL international armaments fair, which took place in Paris in October 2016. In addition, the Weimar Triangle de facto ceased to function at the highest political level, which also led to a reduction of cooperation with another key ally of Poland in the EU - Germany. This situation confirmed the traditional dependence: the crisis in Polish-French relations is the main factor of the dysfunction of the Weimar Triangle.

Secondly, one of the main determinants of recent Polish foreign policy towards France has been the election of the 39-year-old liberal and centrist Emmanuel Macron. Macron’s arrival to power was associated with significant socio-economic and political changes in one of the key partners and allied countries of Poland. First of all, France has embarked in in-depth structural reforms (reform of the labor market, restoring of public finances, etc.). Secondly, the successes of the presidential camp resulted in the marginalization of the existing mainstream parties, i.e. the Republicans and Socialists, as well as a generational change in the French political class. From Poland's perspective, such radical changes in the political situation in France installed an important amount of uncertainty and doubts in the Polish foreign policy towards the new French administration.

The third point that has contributed to a worsening of the relations was the debate on the future of the EU, which involved both individual member states and EU institutions, mainly the European Commission. From the Polish perspective, Macron’s concept of “multispeed Europe”, the core of which would be the Franco-German tandem, a more deeply integrated euro area, with a separate budget and executive, stood in contradiction with the main line of Polish European policy. Moreover, during the first months of Macron’s presidency, he became very popular internationally and his great capacity to influence the European agenda concerned the Polish authorities. Most of all, the Polish government strongly advocated maintaining the EU's unity and postponing the decision on Poland's accession to the euro area. Therefore, the change of government in France, instead of bringing a “new opening” in relations between the two states, has rather contributed to maintaining this deadlock since Autumn 2016. Polish foreign policy has also failed to break this impasse, despite the high intensity of meetings at the ministerial level. One of the main reasons are the political, ideological and cultural differences between political elites which govern these two countries. On the one hand, a new liberal and an ‘ever closer union’ oriented French elite and on the other, as put forward by Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki, the conservative concept of the “Europe of Fatherlands”<sup>3</sup>.

President Macron’s position has however recently been weakened internally (because of the so-called “Yellow Vests” protests) and at the European level. First of all, the multispeed Europe, or “avant-garde” of Europe, focusing mostly on eurozone integration, has been marginalized. However, his approach goes beyond the single currency and could mean a division of member states according to their

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<sup>3</sup> Isabelle Lasserre, *Pologne : Réponse aux donneurs de leçons*, interview with Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki, *La Revue Politique internationale*, n°162, 2019.

degree of readiness for deeper integration. Second, it reduces the likelihood of making the availability of European funds conditional to the rule of law. Thirdly, the president wants to make dependence on paying them to respect the mechanism of relocation of refugees, a proposal opposed by the Polish government. Moreover, given France's disappointment with the lack of support from Germany on key policy issues, Macron may increase his interest (and thus economic investment) in additional alliances, for example in the most dynamically developing region in the EU: Central Europe.

Therefore - and this is the main thesis of this article – all the above political dynamics represent a favorable terrain for relaunching the Polish-French relation on several levels.

## Convergences and opportunities

On the one hand, economic exchanges represent the best example of how the Polish-French relations could be efficient. On the other hand, there are still great economic potentials that have not yet been fully developed. France is the fourth global largest recipient of Polish goods in the world. Trade in 2018 increased over the previous year from 19.4 billion up to 20.5 billion dollars<sup>4</sup>. This surplus in trade has been in favor of Poland since 2013, with about 4 billion euros a year.

France is also the third (last year the fourth) largest foreign direct investor in Poland, after the Netherlands and Germany - with a share of around EUR 17.8 billion for 2017. Moreover, the further potential can be seen in the results of the recent research carried out by the Polish-French Chamber of Commerce. In 2017, French companies reinvested 3.6 billion PLN in Poland, which accounted for as much as 48 % of their profits<sup>5</sup>. Data shows that the French

companies not only have been so far satisfied with their operations in Poland, but also that they are planning to increase their investments. It is understandable when we take into account that Poland is globally the fifth most attractive economy for foreign direct investment according to the latest „Global Best to Invest” ranking. It is clear for both parties that in the near future, the priority in economic relations should be investments of small and medium-sized companies from both countries, in particular in the innovative economy sector (electric cars, defense, renewable energy sources, start-ups, etc.).

A certain convergence of visions should also be noted at the global level. Both current governments want to strengthen European industry in a situation of global competition, primarily with China and the US. There is a consensus that this situation could be beneficial for these two economies at the bilateral, European and global level. The same applies to the common desire to tax digital giants and combat tax havens. Another common business opportunity in cooperation with Germany should be noted: the Franco-German cooperation for the development of batteries for electric cars, which will also represent an opportunity for Polish companies.

In this context, over the course of a year and a half, there has been a big change on the Polish side. At the beginning of Macron's term, Warsaw's reactions to Macron's proposals either did not exist or were very critical, but a lot has changed since. Bruno Le Maire, the Minister of Economy of France, has already called the strong language previously often used by president Macron (f. i. “Poland can not decide on its own future” or “the Poles deserve a better government”) in relation to Poland a mistake<sup>6</sup>. Moreover, he stated in this article that “France should become yet more open for cooperation with the Central European countries”.

Defence industry and military cooperation represent the second most promising sector from the perspective of

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<sup>4</sup> Łukasz Jurczyszyn, “Polish Foreign Policy Towards France”, *Yearbook of Polish Foreign Policy 2018*, Polish Institute of International Affairs, 2019, (p. 14).

<sup>5</sup> “25 Years of the Polish-French Partnership. French Investments in Poland”, Polish-French Chamber of Commerce, 2019.

<sup>6</sup> Jean-Dominique Merchet, “Bruno Le Maire: «La France a eu tort de mépriser la Pologne”, *L'Opinion*, 21 May 2019.

the Polish-French relations. The Polish government is on the same line as France over the concept of the single set of forces for the national, European and NATO levels and on the necessity to increase defense spending. Poland has already fulfilled its NATO obligations to spend 2% of its GDP on defense. France plans an increase in spending of 5% of the current defense budget (€1.8 billion) to €34.2 billion in total (about 1.8 2% of GDP). The most up-to-date long-term framework for French defence expenditure (2019-2025) guarantees an annual increase of €1.7 billion (until 2022), so that French defence spending will reach the NATO target of 2% of GDP by 2025. Moreover, the budget for military operations abroad is expected to increase from €450 million in 2017 to €650 million this year, and up to €1.1 billion by 2022.

In this context, the above-mentioned cancelation of the purchase of French helicopters has meant that cooperation in the field of defense industry has not only decreased, but has also been practically disrupted. However, as the author already pointed out in *Yearbook of Polish Foreign Policy* in 2016<sup>7</sup>, the failure of negotiations on Caracals does not mean that armaments cooperation with France is over; it is quite easy to find the capabilities that the French defense industry can offer and which Polish armed forces could usefully dispose of. In the long-term, this field of cooperation will determine on the one hand the status of France as one of the main global arms exporters, and on the other the modernization needs of the Polish armed forces and the finances allocated for this purpose.

In parallel, an issue on which President Macron has insisted the most regarding EU reform is the further integration of defense efforts, in ways similar to the Polish perspective but without the added emphasis that the EU must be more involved in coordinating national efforts and synergy with NATO. The European Defense Fund represents for the Polish companies and research institutes a huge potential for closer cooperation with more experienced French partners.

In addition, Poland is well aware that France is intensively seeking partners ready to provide military support in various formats and scope for its operational engagements in Europe's southern neighbourhood. The reinforcement of French operations can help open new fields in bilateral cooperation with France or facilitate a consensus being reached on contentious issues, and thus Poland should consider the practical support (for instance, logistical) for French operations. Poland could also consider joining the EUFOR CROC project. The Polish contribution to the force elements catalogue could be, for example, military police units, which have relatively extensive experience from past operations in Africa. At the same time, in NATO and the EU, more attention should be paid to the European Intervention Initiative, which should be developed with NATO operational and defence planning priorities in mind.

Another example of security cooperation is related to the UN format. Poland is currently a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council for the sixth time, and the current mandate expires on December 31, 2019. Taking into account the particularly unsecure world order, this mandate represented a rare momentum for cooperation between Poland and France – a permanent member of the Council – not only in the UN forum, but also on bilateral relations. Another way of Poland supported France was by its return to participation in UN peacekeeping operations in Africa and the Middle East after an absence of 10 years. The special role played by Jean-Pierre Lacroix - UN under-secretary general for peace operations - in convincing Polish authorities should be highlighted here. Poland already declared the participation of police officers in the mission in South Sudan, in autumn this year. In addition, Polish military forces (around 200) will join this Autumn a peacekeeping mission in Lebanon.

Moreover, Germany will begin its two-year term in the Security Council, making it a rare instance when there will be three key European states in this formation, one permanent member of the Council and two non-permanent

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<sup>7</sup> Łukasz Jurczyszyn, "Polish Policy Towards France", *Yearbook of Polish Foreign Policy*, Polish Institute of International Affairs, 2016, p. 115.

states, representing one third of the Union's territory and over one third of its population. This represents a key opportunity to hone a more united European message on issues that go beyond the European agenda.

Last but not least, one of the key areas of cooperation is undoubtedly the fight against climate change. Poland had the honor of hosting the 24th meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP24), where success has been achieved. The Katowice Regulation adopted the Katowice Rulebook - a set of rules for the implementation of the Paris Agreement. Poland is extremely active in promoting the Paris Agreement, a priority of President Macron's foreign policy.

## Main challenges and disaccords

The main challenges in the relationship, going forward, subsist mostly in the realm of social affairs, symbolized by posted workers and mobility package files, which have become very symbolic political topics that also create great emotions among voters in both countries.

Discussions on the posted workers directive were symbolic of the conflictual relations between the two countries at the EU level. One of the reason for that is that Poland was the European leader in purveying delegated workers. On 23 October 2017 in Luxembourg, a meeting of the EU Council took place, during which the EU ministers for employment adopted a position on the amendment of the directive in the shape close to the demands of France. In principle, the Council supported the European Commission's proposal of "equal remuneration for the same work in the same place", arguing that the revision would reduce the so-called "social dumping" in the single market<sup>8</sup>. The Council tightened its position with regard to the maximum posting period, supporting the French proposal to limit it to 12 months, with the possibility of extending it in justified cases by an additional six months. In the summer of 2017, these proposals, constituting one of Macron's election promises,

were opposed by 11 Member States, mainly from Central Europe. In order to achieve the goal and weaken their resistance, the French president planned a diplomatic offensive between August 23 and August 25 2017 when he visited Austria, Romania, Bulgaria and met with the Prime Ministers of the Czech Republic and Slovakia in Salzburg. Poland and Hungary were omitted in these talks, which further aggravated their already difficult relations with France after the election of Macron three months before that. The offensive brought Paris benefits, since only four countries voted against: Poland, Hungary, Lithuania and Latvia, thereby overcoming a blocking minority in the Council. Although, according to French government data, Poland - which is publicly criticized for its dumping practices - was only in fourth place after Spain, Portugal and Germany in terms of delegating employees to France. The subject of further work on the mobility of employees in the EU, in particular truck drivers, is one of the most discussed differences between Poland and France. This was touched upon by Prime Minister Beata Szydło's first (of many) meeting(s) with President Macron, which took place on 23 November 2017 in Paris. The next possible platform for a dialogue on this delicate issue for both sides could represent the first Macron's visit that has been planned and postponed twice since 2018.

Macron showed great determination in pushing through this amendment for two reasons. First, the issue of social dumping was one of the key issues during the presidential campaign, and the president promised to influence the EU to reduce this phenomenon in France. The reform of the posted workers directive was the first step in showing that Macron could influence European decision-making. Secondly, pushing the amendment of the directive is only a step in the long-term strategy of limiting the internal effects of structural reforms (f.i. lowering labor costs) by reducing the competitiveness of other EU countries. In this context, recent data showing the drastic decline in France's foreign trade value deserves attention.

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<sup>8</sup> Łukasz Jurczyszyn, "Half a year active, but the paradoxical Emmanuel Macron's presidency", *Polish Diplomatic Review*, Polish Institute of International Affairs, nr 1 (2018), p. 100.

The trade deficit in the first quarter amounted to 34.3 billion euros, compared to 23 billion euros in the same period in 2016, which shows the alarmingly low level of competitiveness of the French economy. This is another example of Macron's paradox, who on the one hand liberalises the labor law in France by simplifying regulations imposed on enterprises so that they can invest and increase their competitiveness. On the other hand, the amendment of the directive on delegated work presupposes imposing restrictive regulations that limit the freedom of movement of services, one of the fundamental values of the EU single market. Moreover, as a result of restricting the freedom of competition on the European market, there is a risk that domestic enterprises will be supplanted by cheaper competitors from outside the EU, eg from China or India<sup>9</sup>.

However, if we compare the development and income opportunities that result from the taxation of digital giants and the preparation of European industrial champions for global competition – as mentioned above - they are much larger than the mobility on the market itself.

The second main challenge for Macron is his plan to reform the Eurozone. The Polish government is on principle opposed to the creation of a separate Eurozone budget, and to increasing it in its current form. One of the reasons is that Poland is postponing its obligation to join the Eurozone, a subject that should be dealt by French partners without any stereotypical lenses. As stated by prof. Sebastian Plóciennik, among the explanations of why Poland does not fulfill this obligation, attention should be devoted to the orientation of the Polish capitalism, which is now in the middle of difficult transition from the model of competitiveness based on low costs to competitiveness based on innovations. This systemic change is symbolized by the rising role of the state in the economy and a more ambitious social agenda, which both can be at odds with a

fast track towards the euro<sup>10</sup>. Plóciennik adds that the vision of a “competitive social market economy” in the conservative outline of the actual Polish government is at odds with the membership in the EMU, at least in the foreseeable future. In general, these two elements should support the course towards a more innovative economy by steering capital allocation, speeding up governmental decisions and by making labor more expensive, thus forcing companies to invest in human capital and higher productivity. On the conceptual level, this approach fits into the broader tendency of a more active and interventionist state, which is visible across global economies. However, it may face some limits, in part because of the absence of euro membership, which may eventually limit the virtuous effects of such policies<sup>11</sup>.

In last resort, the migration issue cannot be avoided, as it represents the very subject of divergence not only between France and Poland, but more broadly the Visegrad Group countries. Macron was very vocal on this issue, often criticizing these countries for their “separate” or “isolated” approach to migration policy, mostly in their opposition of the mandatory quota system (and any form of top-down allocation of asylum-seekers).

But going more deeply into the details of the issue, we can list the following views on migration where, apart from main disagreements, we can recognize several challenges and even convergences with the French position:

- The V4 general view is that the European Union should focus efforts on protecting its external borders (eg. V4 supports Frontex operations/ V4 contributes to border protection in Libya with 35 million Euros) rather than relocations because any “encouragement” of further migrant arrivals is against Europe’s interests.
- Macron’s concept of a European border coast guard has not been met with enthusiasm in the

<sup>9</sup> *Idem.*, p. 101.

<sup>10</sup> Sebastian Plóciennik, “Poland’s Reluctance to Join the Eurozone: Why the Vision of Development Matters”, *Policy Paper nr2*, PISM, 2019, p. 1.

<sup>11</sup> *Idem.*, p. 10.

V4. They argue that that extension of agency competences may affect members states sovereignty (transferring new competencies to the EU level does not correspond to the V4's general attitude about EU integration). So they emphasize the need to preserve Frontex's supporting role in relation to national border authorities, on top of pointing out the huge costs that would be engendered.

- The V4 emphasizes the need of cooperation with countries of origin and transit (eg. under the EU-Turkey deal). Thanks to this cooperation the number of illegal border-crossings into the European Union has heavily dropped.
- The V4 emphasizes the need to strengthen the European Union's development policy (PM Morawiecki suggested in his speech in the European Parliament that we need a new "Marshall plan" for Africa).

What kind of agreement can be obtained in this matter? In this direction, a French Ambassador in Central Europe stressed during one of the discussions in the frame of the project on the V4-France cooperation that the French perspective on the issue of migration is not so far from the Polish one. Convergence points are found on France desiring more assistance from source countries, the expansion of Frontex, and increasing the number of returns. Another key argument in this context, is that the current migration policy of France is very restrictive, focused on increased controls and a faster processing of asylum applications<sup>12</sup>. As always, the differences are in the details. Poland and the Visegrad Group will certainly not agree to increase the competences of Frontex officers so that they can act without consulting the border services of individual states, but the issue of establishing a European asylum agency, the greater harmonization of processes, and exchange of information provide a basis for necessary EU discussions.

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<sup>12</sup> Łukasz Jurczyszyn, "Reform of immigration and asylum policy in France", PISM Bulletin nr 1457, 26 April 2018.

## Conclusions and recommendations

Bilateral Polish-French relations have recently found themselves at their most demanding moment since 1989. This situation could change, and indeed, there is now an urgent need for a state visit by President Macron to Poland, since the postponement of the one that was planned for April 2019. The Polish ruling party did not want to take the risk of such a visit just before the European elections, considering the electoral language of the French president too risky, as he radically divided EU governments into populists/conservative/anti-European versus liberal pro-European forces. At this point, it is however unlikely that the situation will improve until the Polish parliamentary elections in Autumn, and it therefore also seems that any visit by Macron could take place only after the elections. What we already can observe from the French perspective is that the current Polish government is no longer treated as an accidental power. Therefore, in today's situation it is no longer possible to implement an effective European policy bypassing Poland. Simultaneously, we can see growing ambitions of Poland to lead more sovereign foreign policy and not to close itself only in the frame of the proven partners of the Visegrad Group. Poland is planning, in the long-term perspective, to establish better cooperation with major partners, primarily with France, Germany, Spain and Italy and the UK - and to play a bigger role in decisions about the future of the Union – thanks to Poland's rising advantages, such economic and social growth and its increasing role in transatlantic relations. Poland is the very rare current example in the EU of a very both pro-European and pro-American (even during president Donald Trump's term) state. Besides, currently, the tough language and political misunderstandings are certainly more visible in the relations between France and Viktor Orbán's government than in the case of Poland.

Without any doubt, defense is an area of cooperation that can be quickly repaired after the Caracal fiasco, with the French still expecting that Poland will purchase its



submarines. Moreover, Paris emphasizes the fact that the development of the European Defense Fund and the PESCO mechanism, in particular for Poland, presents the potential to be used in cooperation with France. Defense can also take on a political dimension and become an opportunity to reactivate the Weimar Triangle. The joint plans of Berlin and Paris to build a new main battle tank and fifth generation fighter jet could be compromised due to the tensions between them, meaning there is potential for Poland to balance their relations. However, the initiative to reactivate the Triangle shall come from Paris. However, at this point priority should be given to the recovery of bilateral relations: Poland and France should first "find each other" again before focusing on the potential benefits of trilateral relations.

In order to reach this objective, there is first the need to overcome this huge amount of misunderstanding between respective public opinions, reflection circles and most of all political elites. To this end, a Polish-French Institute in Warsaw should be created to improve the image of Poland in France and vice-versa, through broader media communication, animation of public debates or exchange of elites. Without any doubts, 2019 represents a very good moment to launch a new phase in the Polish-French relations, taking into account both the positive and motivating points, and the simple fact that it is hard to imagine these relations getting any worse.



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