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Rooted in identity, aimed at security: Polish politics towards Ukraine and its ontological security foundation

Ryszard Szynowski and Piotr Gil

Faculty of Applied Sciences, Department of Security Sciences, Dąbrowa Górnicza, Poland
Corresponding author: Piotr Gil; Email: piotr.gil@doktorant.wsb.edu.pl

Abstract

This article aims to explicate the mechanisms underlying Poland's support for Ukraine amid the Russian invasion by unravelling the puzzle of the swiftness, strength, and scope of Poland's efforts, thereby challenging the latter's potential explanations on the grounds of political realism. The authors achieve that by tapping into Ontological Security Theory (OST) and investigating how the ontological security needs of Poland, first, underpinned and directed the strategy and conduct of its security and foreign policy towards Ukraine during the first year of the war, which constituted a critical period for Poland's national and identity security; and, second, how those needs fuel Poland's diplomatic resolve and efforts to persuade the West to support Ukraine. This process is unpacked through an outline of the historical-cultural roots of Ukraine's significance for Polish national identity, a review of Polish national security and foreign policy strategy documents, and an analysis of Polish political discourse regarding Poland's national identity and Ukraine's relevance to it. While drawing their conclusions, the authors focus on their applicability beyond the case of Poland.

Introduction

Poland's actions to support Ukraine have been decisive and uncompromising, which is unsurprising given its geopolitical location and re-emerging Russian expansionism and imperialism. However, the scope of the process seems to transcend the logic of geopolitics. That was the case especially in the first year of the war, which represented a particularly serious challenge for Poland's geostrategy and military security, but also for its identity and societal security. For this reason, the authors have decided to dedicate their study to the first year of the war, deemed as a critical period for Poland.[1]

Only two days after the invasion, the President of Poland advocated 'an express path for Ukraine's membership in the European Union'.[2] By mid-February 2023, Poland had sheltered

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[1]The authors are aware of and appreciate the importance of the developments taking place throughout 2023 and 2024 that have undermined the relationship between the countries and put to the test Poland's resolve to support Ukraine relentlessly. At the same time, they believe that this matter falls outside the scope of this paper, whose main focus is on the strategic rationale and its ontological security roots that prompted Poland to provide Ukraine in the first year of the war with support that exceeded what would have been reasonable on the grounds of the logic of realpolitik alone. Nevertheless, the authors are convinced that the above-mentioned matter deserves close examination in another paper.

[2]President of Poland, 'An express path for Ukraine's membership in the European Union' (22 February 2022), available at: {https://www.president.pl/news/an-express-path-for-ukraines-membership-in-the-european-union,49514}.

almost 10 million Ukrainian refugees.[3] It also provided Ukraine with at least 260 post-Soviet tanks,[4] numerous infantry vehicles (IFV: BWP-1, BWP-1-WZM), and self-propelled howitzers (SPH: Krab), man-portable air-defence systems (MANPADS: Piorun), rifles (Grot, Beryl), and munitions. Based on the data (accurate as of 7 December 2022) included in the Ukraine Support Tracker, Poland ranked fifth in total nominal commitments (3.001 billion €), which also makes it third in total commitments as a percentage of GDP (0.505%).[5]

This support, though at first glance comprehensible on the grounds of geostrategy, represents a serious burden for a national strategy and requires careful examination. One could point to several factors that could have lessened the swiftness, strength, and scope of the actions undertaken or even prevented some of them from materialising. This paper aims to shed light on those that could unravel the ambiguous nature of Poland's support for Ukraine by going beyond the logic of realpolitik and geopolitics. It provides theoretical and analytical benefits through a more comprehensive and multifaceted approach to examining numerous other cases of interstate relations in which the political and geopolitics fall short of grasping the complexity beyond the conduct of state policy.

The authors intend to examine four aspects of such complexity regarding the case in question. First, for Poland, NATO's frontier state which is undergoing a process of transforming its armed forces, providing Ukraine with a substantial share of its military resources before the completion of this process, and replenishing those resources, makes for a dicey move. By so doing, Poland has effectively impaired its ability to defend its borders against a potential Russian retaliation, despite the claims that it is more advantageous to have the Ukrainian army do this for Poland, thus keeping Russia away from Polish borders and preventing it from attacking. Second, Poland is expected to align its efforts with those of its NATO partners, not to step out of line before an agreement on arms supply is reached across the Alliance. Since international politics is characterised by unequal distribution of power and polarity,[6] it is the great powers that call the shots, and the agency of states such as Poland is limited. Therefore, Poland's initiatives such as the proposition to send the German Patriot systems to Ukraine (which eventually happened)[7] can run counter to the United States' (as NATO's strongest military power) national interests, such as preventing China from becoming the hegemon in the Indo-Pacific.[8] Third, the financial cost of the support overlapped with several economic challenges faced by Poland, such as the aforementioned overhaul of its armed forces. The cost of arms supply and financial support to Ukraine and Ukrainian refugees poses yet another substantial economic challenge that is difficult for Poland to sustain. A survey by CBOS (Public Opinion Research Centre) confirmed Polish citizens' willingness to support Ukraine and its citizens but also indicated concern about the socio-economic burdens arising from the extent of this support, such as hardships concerning access to the healthcare system, finding or retaining jobs, and access to the real estate market.[9] Last, but not least, the relationship between Poland and

[3]Straż Graniczna [The Polish Border Guard], 'Rok od wybuchu wojny na Ukrainie' [A year from the outbreak of the war in Ukraine] (24 February 2023), available at: {https://www.strazgraniczna.pl/pl/aktualnosci/11380,Rok-od-wybuchu-wojny-w-Ukrainie.html}.

[4]Artur Kacprzyk, 'West increases heavy arms deliveries to Ukraine', *Polish Institute of International Affairs* (24 January 2023), available at: {https://pism.pl/publications/west-increases-heavy-arms-deliveries-to-ukraine}.

[5]Kiel Institute for the World Economy, 'Ukraine Support Tracker: A database of military, financial and humanitarian aid to Ukraine' (7 September 2023), available at: {https://www.ifw-kiel.de/topics/war-against-ukraine/ukraine-support-tracker/}.

[6]Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (New York: McGraw-Hil, 1979).

[7]TVP World. 'Patriot systems for Ukraine are our diplomatic success: Polish PM' (7 January 2023), available at: {https://tvpworld.com/65529638/patriot-systems-for-ukraine-are-our-diplomatic-success-polish-pm}.

[8]Elbridge A. Colby, *The Strategy of Denial: American Defense in an Age of Great Power Conflict* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2021).

[9]Jonathan Scovil, 'Polacy wobec wojny na Ukrainie i ukraińskich uchodźców' [Poles in the face of war in Ukraine and Ukrainian refugees], CBOS [Public Opinion Research Center] (October 2022), pp. 9–10, available at: {https://www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2022/K_101_22.PDF}.

Ukraine, despite the recent rapprochement, is still far from being unproblematic. Numerous unresolved historical issues and tensions remain on both sides, the most painful of them for Poland and its people being the Volhynia massacre (the term used by the Polish Institute of National Remembrance) and Ukraine's glorification of the OUN-UPA nationalists who were responsible for the it.[10]

Therefore, for Poland to adopt and maintain such a sweeping stance despite numerous and serious obstacles, the perception of the Russian threat and the willingness to provide Ukraine with costly support must arise from a mindset that is not limited to reasoning in terms of geopolitics, geostrategy, realpolitik, and military security. What could it be rooted in instead? A possible avenue for investigation is that of Poland's national culture and identity. This refers to the prospect of Russia overcoming Ukraine and not only posing a military threat to Poland but also dragging it back into its sphere of influence, referred to as the 'Russian world' (*Russkiy mir*), representing a civilisation that Polish people consider to be alien, barbaric, and hostile. Such a scenario would constitute a direct threat to Poland's physical and also ontological security, with Russia being securitised as such. To that end, the authors have employed a theoretical framework comprising Ontological Security Theory and securitisation theory to serve as a vehicle for embarking on the aforementioned avenue. Both theories serve to elucidate how Poland's ontological security needs have enabled a practice of national security and foreign policy that has been noticeably incongruous with the precepts of realpolitik, which are to ensure the achievement of national interests and goals that do not exceed a given state's national power and without inducing unnecessary and undesired risks and threats.

The authors have sought to achieve this goal in four steps. The first was to lay out the conceptual framework by tapping into OST and explicating how ontological security needs drive national security and foreign policy and to what effects. Securitisation theory also supplements OST to demonstrate the process of discursive construction of threats for Polish national and ontological security. The next part outlines the history of relations between Poland and Ukraine, illuminating the importance of the latter for Polish national and identity security. The study then focuses on the strategic aspects of the relations between the two countries as determined in Poland's National Security Strategies and other strategic documents. Finally, the authors conducted an in-depth analysis of the political discourse of Poland's leaders regarding support for Ukraine and studied the narratives constructed by the president of Poland, the prime minister, and the minister of foreign affairs to pinpoint the identity foundations of the political actions they undertook.

Methodology of research

The point of departure of this study is the perception of nation and national identity as phenomena whose nature is neither objective nor fixed but constantly (re)imagined and (re)constructed, often to align them with politically defined national interests.[11] Significantly, national identity, though anchored in historical legacy, cannot exist without being practised in the present.[12] For

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[10]Polish Press Agency, 'Polish MFA unhappy about Ukrainian nationalist leader's commemoration' (1 January 2023), available at: {https://www.pap.pl/en/news/news%2C1516667%2Cpolish-mfa-unhappy-about-ukrainian-nationalist-leaders-commemoration.html}; Instytut Pamięci Narodowej [Institute of National Remembrance], 'The Volhynia massacre victims database' (8 July 2020), available at: {https://eng.ipn.gov.pl/en/news/4326,The-Volhynia-Massacre-Victims-Database.html?search=7633915}.

[11]Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 2016); Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008); Bill McSweeney, *Security, Identity and Interests: A Sociology of International Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); David Campbell, *Writing Security: United States Foreign Policy and the Politics of Identity* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998).

[12]David McCrone and Frank Bechhofer, *Understanding National Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015); Michael Billig, *Banal Nationalism* (London: SAGE Publications, 1995).

politicians, invoking national identity is one of the most effective means of rallying citizens around their political goals. To that end, national identity tends to be used as a narrative, especially when constructed by tapping into the national collective memory[13] and with the use of discourse.[14] To unravel the puzzle of the impact of striving to fulfil security and identity needs on the politics of Poland towards Ukraine, the Polish National Security Strategies issued between 1992 and 2020 and two strategic foreign policy documents are examined and juxtaposed with statements, addresses, and interviews delivered by the Polish authorities, including the president of Poland (PoP), the prime minister (PM) and the minister of foreign affairs (MFA), the latter studied through discourse analysis. First, this method is employed for the identification and explanation of pertinent utterances and the message they convey to the public. Second, it is used to gain insight into how these utterances emerge from deeply embedded, multifaceted structures of Polish national identity and how they establish a cognitive and analytical framework for the conduct of Polish politics towards Ukraine.

Theoretical framework

National security remains a fuzzy notion with vague content and conceptual framework, which has not changed much despite the efforts to widen the latter, most notably by Buzan and the Copenhagen School.[15] As a result, national security is seen as a combination of the material (i.e. 'hard') and non-material ('soft') elements, the former comprising the physical survival of the state and the latter the protection of its national culture, identity, and values.[16] Regrettably, the interplay between both dimensions has been understudied, rendering the concept nebulous and in dire need of clarification.

OST, which can be considered an offshoot of the 'widening debate', represents one of the constructivist and identity-oriented currents in security studies, bridging the gap between the key aspects of traditionally understood national security (i.e. physical survival, preservation of territorial integrity, deterrence of military threat, etc.) and those of identity security (upholding the concept of the collective Self, determining the national vision and mission, maintaining social cohesion, etc.) and permitting a more comprehensive understanding of the role played by identity in shaping national security and foreign policy. Importantly, identity constitutes a value to be protected in the societal sector of security as per the fundamental assumptions of securitisation theory, according to which the cohesion of society on the grounds of shared identity matters not only for the well-being of the society itself but also for the stability and efficiency of the state in its pursuit of national interests.[17] Even though in securitisation theory identity has been predominantly theorised to be an attribute of society and its asset vis-à-vis its relation with the state, it has been made clear in the International Relations (IR) literature that states themselves do possess identities of their own that determine their conduct in the international environment, especially

[13] Anna Chabasińska, 'Państwo i tożsamość narodowa' [State and national identity], *Studia Administracji i Bezpieczeństwa*, 11:1 (2021), pp. 179–91 (p. 187–8); Stefan Berger, 'On the role of myths and history in the construction of national identity in modern Europe', *European History Quarterly*, 39:3 (2009), pp. 490–502 (p. 492); Ola S. Stugu, 'Myths, history and the construction of national identity', European Summer University conference 'The Misuse of History', Strasbourg (2003), p. 3.

[14] Ruth Wodak, Rudolf de Cillia, Martin Reisigl, and Karin Liebhart, *The Discursive Construction of National Identity* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009).

[15] Barry Buzan, *People, States and Fear: An Agenda for International Security Studies in the Post-Cold War Era* (Colchester: ECPR Press, 2016), Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver, and Jaap de Wilde, *Security: A New Framework for Analysis* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1998); Barry Buzan and Lene Hansen (eds), *International Security. Volume III: Widening the Agenda of International Security* (London: SAGE Publications, 2007); Ken Booth, *Theory of World Security* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Ian Manners 'European [security] Union: From existential threat to ontological security', Copenhagen Peace Research Institute (December 2001), p. 9.

[16] Witold Pokruszyński, *Współczesne bezpieczeństwo narodowe* [Contemporary national security] (Jóezefów: Wydawnictwo Wyższej Szkoły Gospodarki Euroregionalnej im. Alcide De Gasperi, 2009), pp. 11–12.

[17] Ole Wæver, Barry Buzan, Morten Kelstrup, and Pierre Lemaitre (eds), *Identity, Migration and the New Security Agenda in Europe* (London: Pinter Publishers, 1993); Buzan, *People, States and Fear*, pp. 38, 95, 109, 111.

concerning other states with distinctively different geopolitical, civilisational, ethnic, or religious identities. With that being said, those identity-based cleavages can be and very often are securitised for political purposes, which contributes to making the Wendtian culture of anarchy one of a Hobbesian nature.[18]

To achieve the goal of bridging this gap, it must be determined how the functions of national identity can reinforce national security. First, national identity permits an understanding of what it means to be oneself (both individually and collectively). In this context, a nation's identity denotes primarily its sameness,[19] often equated with homogeneity.[20] When a nation's self-understanding is clear and firm, its stability becomes more likely, whereas disturbance of its identity entails undermining said stability, thus eliciting the feeling of anxiety or threat.[21] Moreover, as hinted at before, a lack of internal stability renders states weak and jeopardises their national security. Second, national identity is instrumental in enabling the state's agency. As mentioned above, a weak state is incapable of acting beyond its borders due to being enmeshed in domestic issues. However, even a strong state that is not troubled by such issues must have a guidepost for its collective action. On constructivist grounds, this social phenomenon is deemed a crucial factor in the formation of national security doctrine and foreign policy (in both democratic and non-democratic states).[22]

Therefore, national security is contingent on the preservation of identity security, which is achieved by sustaining a nation's character that encompasses its identity in the face of threats such as suppression of identity expression, competing identities, migration, and others.[23] However, the interweaving of national identity and (in)security reaches deeper than that. To fully comprehend this phenomenon, it is necessary to unravel what constitutes a nation's ontological security. OST, though originating from the individual level of analysis,[24] is well suited for analysing national identity as a critical factor underlying overarching national security, since it furnishes a more illuminating insight into the essence of national identity and its impact on the conduct of state politics, especially security policy.

The aforementioned insight is achieved by OST approaching a nation's identity as its very soul.[25] The practical utility of this approach has been proven, e.g. in attempts to explicate the identity-related roots of the revisionist foreign policy of the Russian Federation, its attitude toward the

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[18]Campbell, *Writing Security*; Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

[19]Anita Jacobson-Widding (ed.), *Identity: Personal and Socio-Cultural. A Symposium* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1983), p. 13

[20]Natividad Gutiérrez, 'The study of national identity', in Alain Dieckhoff and Natividad Gutiérrez (eds), *Modern Roots: Studies of National Identity* (London: Routledge, 2020), pp. 3–17; Richard Handler, 'Is 'identity" a useful cross-cultural concept?', in John R. Gillis (ed.), *Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), pp. 27–40.

[21]Jerzy Stańczyk, *Formułowanie kategorii pojęciowej bezpieczeństwa* [Formulating the conceptual category of security] (Poznań: Fundacja na rzecz Czystej Energii, 2017), p. 219.

[22]Jarrod Hayes, *Constructing National Security: U.S. Relations with India and China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp. 1–7; Ted Hopf, *Social Construction of International Politics: Identities & Foreign Policies, Moscow 1955 and 1999* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2002), pp. 89–92; Ronald L. Jepperson, Alexander Wendt, and Peter J. Katzenstein, 'Norms, identity, and culture in national security', in Peter J. Katzenstein (ed.), *The Culture of National Security: Norms and Identity in World Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), pp. 33–75.

[23]Wæver, Buzan, Kelstrup, and Lemaitre (eds), *Identity, Migration*, pp. 23, 42–6; Jef Huysmans, *The Politics of Insecurity: Fear, Migration and Asylum in the EU* (London: Routledge, 2006); Monika G. Bartoszewicz, *Festung Europa* (Kraków: Ośrodek Myśli Politycznej, 2018).

[24]Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1991).

[25]Jelena Subotić, 'Narrative, ontological security, and foreign policy change', *Foreign Policy Analysis*, 12:4 (2016), pp. 610–27 (p. 621).

West,[26] and its aggression towards Ukraine.[27] OST holds that states seek 'the security as Being' and to maintain 'consistent self-concepts', which they strive to achieve through autobiographical narratives.[28] One reason for doing so lies with the aforementioned aspect of identity termed sameness, i.e. the need to know what it means to be 'Us'. Also, they intend to establish their distinctiveness,[29] which can only be done vis-à-vis others, often in the Saidian fashion,[30] predicated on the discursive construction of the Other that serves as the backdrop against which to construct identity. Without the latter, the ontological security of the state's members is endangered,[31] and the very existence of the nation is impossible.[32] Thus, the state can be regarded as an 'ontological security providing institution,'[33] which fulfils its role through securitisation that in this case can be termed 'securitisation of Otherness'[34] and 'ontological securitisation', the latter consisting in framing Otherness as a threat for the state's distinctiveness and homogeneity.[35] The importance of this type of securitisation stems from the fact that, according to Floyd,[36] 'the key to ontological security is a sense of societal security'. This goal is pursued by 'managing' what Agnew terms geopolitical imagination,[37] associated with national geopolitical codes[38] and visions.[39] Both approaches represent, respectively, what are described as endogenous and exogenous perspectives of ontological security.[40]

The existence of collective geopolitical representations and of what Wendt[41] termed cultures of anarchy can lead to two opposing scenarios, both underpinned by the necessity to satisfy ontological security needs. First, in the case of the Hobbesian culture of anarchy,[42] driven by the logic of difference and, as a result, conflict, states may seek to petrify 'a harmful or self-defeating relationship' for the sake of satisfying ontological security needs.[43] This stems from the duality of the sameness versus distinctiveness mechanism and is deeply rooted in historical enmity and civilisational incongruity, examples of which are China and Tibet or Russia and Poland. History matters here because of the importance of political memory, challenges which lead, according to Subotić, to 'a profound sense of insecurity' and 'puts in question the state sense of self, its relationships with

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[26]Flemming S. Hansen, 'Russia's relations with the West: Ontological security through conflict', *Contemporary Politics*, 22:3 (2016), pp. 359–75; Aliaksei Kazharski, 'Civilizations as ontological security? Stories of the Russian trauma', *Problems of Post-Communism*, 67:1 (2020), pp. 24–36.

[27]Brendan Chrzanowski, 'An episode of existential uncertainty: The ontological security origins of the war in Donbas', *Texas National Security Review*, 4:3 (2021), pp. 11–32.

[28]Brent J. Steele, *Ontological Security in International Relations: Self-Identity and the IR State* (London: Routledge, 2008), pp. 2–3, 51, 71–3.

[29]Jacobson-Widding (ed.), *Identity*, p. 13.

[30]Edward W. Said, *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978).

[31]Jennifer Mitzen, 'Ontological security in world politics: State identity and the security dilemma', *European Journal of International Relations*, 12:3 (2006), pp. 341–70 (p. 352).

[32]Tomasz Kośmider, *Bezpieczeństwo państwa polskiego: Rozważania w kontekście historycznych doświadczeń* [Security of Polish state: Reflections in the context of historical experiences] (Warsaw: Difin, 2018), p. 140.

[33]Ayse Zarakol, 'States and ontological security: A historical rethinking', *Cooperation and Conflict*, 52:1 (2017), pp. 48–68 (p. 49).

[34]Ana Ivasiuc, 'Watching over the neighbourhood: Vigilante discourses and practices in the suburbs of Rome', *Etnofoor*, 27:2 (2015), pp. 53–72 (p. 53); Chengxin Pan and Linus Hagström, 'Ontological (in)security and neoliberal governmentality: Explaining Australia's China emergency', *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, 67:3 (2021), pp. 454–73 (pp. 460, 463).

[35]Alina Jašina-Schäfer, 'Agents of social change: Cultural work, institutions, and the (de)securitisation of minorities', *Central European Journal of International and Security Studies*, 17:2 (2023), pp. 164–91 (pp. 168–9).

[36]Rita Floyd, 'Ontological vs. societal security: Same difference or distinct concepts?', *International Politics* (7 June 2024), p. 4.

[37]John Agnew, *Geopolitics: Re-visioning World Politics*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2003), p. 6.

[38]Colin Flint, *Introduction to Geopolitics* (London: Routledge, 2006), pp. 55–6.

[39]Gertjan Dijkink, *National Identity and Geopolitical Visions: Maps of Pride and Pain* (London: Routledge, 1996).

[40]Marco A. Vieira, 'Understanding resilience in international relations: The Non-Aligned Movement and ontological security', *International Studies Review*, 18:2 (2016), pp. 290–311 (pp. 293–4).

[41]Wendt, *Social Theory*.

[42]Ibid.

[43]Jennifer Mitzen, 'Ontological security', p. 342; see also Elke Krahmann, 'The market for ontological security', *European Security*, 27:3 (2018), pp. 356–73 (p. 358).

others'.[44] Rumelili holds that 'the establishment of an object of fear … provides answers to existential questions about being, self concerning external world and others, by constructing the object of fear as the Other, radically different, inherently incompatible, and morally inferior'.[45] Besides fear, as aptly demonstrated by Campbell and Hayes, clinging to such conflictual relations can also result from deliberate decisions to securitise internal and/or external Others to uphold national identity or retain political power.[46]

It is, however, possible, as stressed by Mälksoo, to 'break away from the old and possibly harmful routines for both themselves and their "others"; in a nutshell, the ability to renew oneself, not just survive as a certain sort of being'.[47] It can be argued that OST allows for a different perception (and also practice) of national security and foreign policy than the one represented by its realistically oriented scholars, for whom international relations are inexorably grounded in distrust, conflict, and violence. In the opinion of Rumelili,[48] there exists the possibility of a distinct vision of international relations, national security, and foreign policy that need not be based on securitisation. As pointed out by Wendt, one of the possible cultures of anarchy is the Kantian one,[49] which is reflected by the mode of thinking represented by Opperman and Hansel, who turn to OST to elucidate the reasons for states to establish special relationships based on positive distinction, rather than on the mechanisms of othering and securitisation.[50] They are important because, as pointed out by Ejdus, 'the relational aspect of ontological security is about the constancy of relationships with a particular set of significant others'.[51] In both scenarios, we are dealing with routines that can be perceived as patterns, enabling researchers to unpack states' behaviours by tracing them back to their identity-related foundations. In the case of the 'special relationships', ones that are grounded in the Kantian culture of anarchy and based on the logic of amity rather than enmity, it becomes possible to unpack those states' behaviours that appear to be confusing and seemingly illogical on the grounds of realpolitik.

To speak of relations and routines points to the issue of agency, another vital aspect of OST. According to Mitzen and Larson, 'Ontological security analyses draw analytic attention to the centrality of a sense of (the socially constructed) self for intentional action'.[52] As indicated by Mitzen, 'agency requires the cognitive certainty … routines provide'.[53] The mechanism of routinisation, in the opinion of Mitzen, applies also to the analysis of interstate behaviours, including those that put national security at risk.[54] A striking illustration of such a case is provided by Steele, in which he described the relentless stance of Belgians during the First World War, who chose to protect their honour rather than national security and refused to surrender to German aggression following the violation of their territory, even facing certain peril.[55] In his opinion, which is crucial for

[44]Jelena Subotić, 'Political memory, ontological security, and Holocaust remembrance in post-communist Europe', in Catarina Kinnvall, Ian Manners, and Jennifer Mitzen (eds), *Ontological Insecurity in the European Union* (London: Routledge, 2020), pp. 48–65 (p. 51).

[45]Bahar Rumelili, 'Ontological (in)security and peace anxieties: A framework for conflict resolutions', in Bahar Rumelili (ed.), *Conflict Resolution and Ontological Security: Peace Anxieties* (London: Routledge, 2016), pp. 10–29 (p. 16).

[46]Campbell, *Writing Security*; Hayes, *Constructing National Security*.

[47]Maria Mälksoo, '"Memory must be defended": Beyond the politics of mnemonical security', *Security Dialogue*, 46:3 (2015), pp. 221–37 (p. 231).

[48]Bahar Rumelili, 'Identity and desecuritisation: The pitfalls of conflating ontological and physical security', *Journal of International Relations and Development*, 18:1 (2015), pp. 52–74.

[49]Wendt, *Social Theory*.

[50]Kai Oppermann and Mischa Hansel, 'The ontological security of special relationships: The case of Germany's relations with Israel', *European Journal of International Security*, 4:1 (2019), pp. 79–100 (pp. 81, 83–6).

[51]Filip Ejdus, *Crisis and Ontological Insecurity: Serbia's Anxiety over Kosovo's Secession* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), p. 21.

[52]Jennifer Mitzen and Kyle Larson, 'Ontological security and foreign policy', *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics* (22 August 2017), p. 5.

[53]Mitzen, 'Ontological security', p. 342.

[54]Ibid., pp. 346–7, 352–4.

[55]Steele, *Ontological Security*, pp. 94–114.

this study, from the viewpoint of OST protection of national identity values can be not only more important than the struggle for physical security and survival but, in fact, also reasonable, as long as it serves the purpose of preservation of that state's ontological security needs.[56] This suggests that both types of security are at the same time distinct and interlinked.[57] As for the distinction, importantly, Mitzen and Larson emphasise that ontological security, unlike national security, is pursued subconsciously and can only occur in the moment of crisis.[58] That could explain why the pursuit of ontological security needs leads at times to behaviours that are incongruous with the commonsensical and realistic logic of political conduct.

However, as far as the interlinkage of ontological and national security is concerned, a conscious and deliberate pursuit of the former does seem feasible. Political leaders, as representatives of the state which is the ontological security provider, may conduct policies based on deeply embedded precepts that stem from ontological security needs and at the same time make calculated efforts to embody those needs, and collective representations underlying them, in strategic documents (such as national security strategies) that mark out directions for those policies and stimulate the state's agency. Therefore, (ontological) securitisation need not take the form of speech acts, as was theorised in the works of the Copenhagen School, but instead, could find a more procedural outlet. Such a possibility, particularly evident in the context of the securitisation of migration, has been stressed by several scholars who have complemented and refined securitisation theory, including Huysmans[59] and Léonard and Kaunert.[60]

Agency is also needed to improve the state's position, which relates to what Kinnvall terms 'the intersubjective ordering of relations – that is, how individuals define themselves concerning others'.[61] Inherent in this intersubjectivity is the status game that every ontological security-seeking state must play. This game involves, on the one hand, striving to preserve the state's superiority;[62] and, on the other, attempting to overcome its inferiority.[63] Thus, the agency of states matters as it improves their status and 'the structural power position they are currently in'.[64] Leveraging the state's position in the international order is an intrinsic part of the pursuit of national mission, which is an extension of national identity[65] and a principal element of ontological security. According to Browning, 'Beyond demands for welfare and physical safety, political leaders are expected to provide a coherent narrative of society, its nature, and place in the world, through the outlining of a sense of national mission and purpose'.[66] Therefore, state leaders are not only responsible for ensuring physical security but also for the implementation of the mission, which constitutes an outlet for the nation's identity and ontological security needs.

As has been demonstrated so far, identity, national security, and foreign policy can neither exist separately nor be so considered. On the contrary, they stem from and reinforce one another. National security cannot be fully achieved without ensuring its physical, societal, and ontological dimensions. Preservation of physical security alone is unlikely to guarantee the survival of a nation,

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[56] Ibid., pp. 96, 106–12.

[57] Rumelili, 'Identity and desecuritisation'.

[58] Mitzen and Larson, 'Ontological security, pp. 3–4.

[59] Huysmans, *The Politics of Insecurity*

[60] Sarah Léonard and Christian Kaunert, *Refugees, Security and the European Union* (London: Routledge, 2020).

[61] Catarina Kinnvall, 'Globalization and religious nationalism: Self, identity, and the search for ontological security', *Political Psychology*, 25:5 (2004), pp. 741–67 (p. 748).

[62] Dmitry Chernobrov, *Public Perception of International Crises: Identity, Ontological Security and Self-Affirmation* (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2021).

[63] Ayse Zarakol, 'Ontological (in)security and state denial of historical crimes: Turkey and Japan', *International Relations*, 24:1 (2010), pp. 3–23 (pp. 9–11); Molly Krasnodębska, *Politics of Stigmatization: Poland as a 'Latecomer' in the European Union* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021); Peera Charoenvattananukul, *Ontological Security and Status-Seeking: Thailand's Proactive Behaviours during the Second World War* (London: Routledge, 2022).

[64] Kinnvall, 'Globalization and religious nationalism', p. 749.

[65] Dijkink, *National Identity and Geopolitical Vision*.

[66] Christopher S. Browning, 'Nation branding, national self-esteem, and the constitution of subjectivity in late modernity', *Foreign Policy Analysis*, 11:2 (2015), pp. 195–214 (p. 198).

as it is insufficient without being complemented by identity security, whereas achieving the latter is futile without ensuring the survival of the nation's physical 'body'. It seems then plausible that solving the puzzle of Polish politics towards Ukraine, which bears a strong mark of the security–identity nexus, can contribute to a better understanding of this interplay concerning many other interstate relationships, including those that are far from being self-evident as seen from the realist perspective. Despite the common(sensical) perception of international relations as being governed solely by the logic of physical survival, overcoming threats, and prevailing in conflictual situations, one can point to the cases in which there is a hidden agenda for the very notion of survival, and states' behaviours are dictated by a rationale that exceeds the conceptual apparatus of political realism. The case of Poland's stance towards Ukraine, elucidated by OST, can be instrumental in unpacking such puzzles.

'… **longing, longing for that girl and green Ukraine** …'

The relevance of Ukraine is perceived as a critical factor affecting Polish national security against the threat to it represented by Russia. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union and the Iron Curtain, Poland found itself in dire need of (re)defining its national security and its strategy. In that decade, national security understanding was still immersed in and determined by the logic of the Cold War period.[67] As such, it envisioned a lack of military threats and the preservation of the territorial integrity of the state.[68] Such a perception of national security was reflected in two strategic documents issued on 2 November 1992 by the National Security Bureau, titled 'Założenia Polskiej Polityki Bezpieczeństwa oraz Polityka Bezpieczeństwa i Strategia Obronna Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej' [The premises of Polish security policy and the security policy and defence strategy of the Republic of Poland]. The assumptions towards the importance of Ukraine for the security of the Republic of Poland, given the new geostrategic reality resulting from the demise of the Soviet Union, followed suit.[69] Yet the war between Russia and Ukraine, often presented as a clash between two civilisations in the Huntingtonian sense, demands the adoption of a broader, historical-cultural perspective, to grasp the relevance of Ukraine for Polish national security.

Ukraine's lasting importance for Polish national identity arose in the realm named 'Kresy Wschodnie' or 'Kresy' [Eastern Borderlands or Borderlands] that constituted part of the pre-war Second Republic of Poland, located at its north-eastern and south-eastern fringes, and comprising regions that today belong to Lithuania, Belarus, and Ukraine. According to Żurawski vel Grajewski, before the notion of Borderlands was coined, Ukraine had encapsulated its content.[70] The realm has carried a significant meaning and relevance for both Polish national security and identity. It is associated with military service aiming to fend off invasions threatening Poland, led by Tartars, Vlachs, and Turks.[71] Moreover, it also stemmed from the vision of Poland as the bulwark of Christendom and *Fidei Defensor*[72] against the threats posed by the alien and hostile Eastern barbarism. It has co-constituted Polish national identity for centuries and infused

[67]Barry Buzan and Lene Hansen, *The Evolution of International Security Studies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 106–8.

[68]Anton Grizold, 'The concept of national security in the contemporary world', *International Journal on World Peace*, 11:3 (1994), pp. 37–53 (p. 40); Melvyn P. Leffler, 'National security', *The Journal of American History*, 77:1 (1990), pp. 143–52 (p. 145).

[69]Biuro Bezpieczeństwa Narodowego [National Security Bureau], 'Założenia Polskiej Polityki Bezpieczeństwa oraz Polityka Bezpieczeństwa i Strategia Obronna Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej' [The premises of the Polish security policy and the security policy and the defence strategy of the Republic of Poland], Warsaw (2 November 1992), pp. 4–5, 8–9, 12, 14.

[70]Przemysław Żurawski vel Grajewski, 'Kresy: dzieje pewnego pojęcia' [Borderlands: The history of a certain notion]. *Teologia Polityczna*, 8:1 (2015), pp. 161–82.

[71]Stanisław S. Nicieja, 'Historia i mitologia Kresów Wschodnich Rzeczypospolitej' [The history and mythology of the Eastern Borderlands of the Polish Republic], *Wschodni Rocznik Humanistyczny*, 17:3 (2020), pp. 265–86 (p. 267).

[72]Feliks Koneczny, *On the Plurality of Civilizations* (London: Polonica Publications, 1962)

'national' security policy with a powerful emotional and axiological resolve to stand up to those threats. Accounting for Poland's disposition to fight for its security and freedom and for that of other countries and nations, displayed many times over in Poland's history (an example of which can be the mission embarked upon by King John III Sobieski, who managed to repulse the advance of the Ottoman Empire during the Relief of Vienna on 12 September 1683), is indispensable for comprehending current Polish politics towards Ukraine in the face of the war. It must be stressed that those and other Polish heroics (both victorious and failed) cannot be fathomed without accounting for their common denominator, marked out by ontology security routines.

Moreover, in the apt words of Żurawski vel Grajewski, the Borderlands encompasses an ensemble of famous Polish artists, scholars, statesmen, etc., whose lives were tied to the Borderlands, and of vital institutions, artefacts, and symbols that constitute an integral part of Polish national identity, without which it is essentially incomplete and perhaps cannot even truly exist.[73] The loss of that legacy is what the title of this section, a fragment of the lyrics of the song known as '*Hej, sokoły*' [Hey, falcons] or '*Na zielonej Ukrainie*' [In green Ukraine], refers to. The loss of the Borderlands was also painful as their history is inseparably associated with Poland's heyday between the 15th and 17th centuries as one of the European great powers, which is a part of the Polish national identity.[74] The primary reason for that loss was the Chmielnicki uprising and the Cossack–Polish war, which ultimately contributed to the downfall of both the Commonwealth and Ukraine.[75] Among numerous factors underlying the conflict between the two nations, some scholars have tended to blame the conflict between them on the Polish nobility and their alleged colonisation of Ukraine,[76] although others deem the applicability of the notion of colonialism to the relationship between Poland and Ukraine questionable.[77]

From the perspective of contemporary geopolitics and Poland's ontological security needs, the eastern part of Europe, a major part of which overlaps the former territory of the Borderlands, is still a vital space for Poland to realise its political agency in the hope of bolstering its position in the West, thereby satisfying said needs.[78] That significance of Ukraine has been encapsulated in geopolitical doctrines and ideas, notably, the one developed by Jerzy Giedroyc and Juliusz Mieroszewski, referred to as the Giedroyc–Mieroszewski Doctrine or the ULB (Ukraine–Lithuania–Belarus) or the Jagiellonian idea. The first concerns the importance of Ukraine and its independence for the sake of repelling the threat of imperialistic Russia,[79] while the second, originating from the multinational and multicultural historical experience of the Commonwealth, addresses the role of Poland

[73]Żurawski vel Grajewski, 'Kresy'.

[74]Małgorzata Glowacka-Grajper, *Transmisja pamięci: Działacze 'sfery pamięci' i przekaz o Kresach Wschodnich we współczesnej Polsce* [Transmission of memory: 'Field of memory' activists and the message on the Eastern Borderlands in contemporary Poland] (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, 2016), p. 178.

[75]Andrzej Szeptycki, *Współczesne stosunki polsko-ukraińskie* [Contemporary Polish–Ukrainian relations] (Warsaw: Scholar, 2023), pp. 21–3.

[76]Jan Sowa, *Fantomowe ciało króla. Peryferyjne zmagania z nowoczesną formą* [The King's phantom body: A peripheral struggle with modern form] (Kraków: Universitas, 2011), pp. 323–49.

[77]Tomasz Nakoneczny, 'Dyskurs postkolonialny wobec historii Polski' [Postcolonial discourse in the face of the history of Poland], *Przegląd Historyczny*, 111:4 (2020), pp. 929–53.

[78]Krasnodębska, *Politics of Stigmatization*, pp. 99–100, 103.

[79]Juliusz Mieroszewski, 'Polska "Ostpolitik"' [Polish 'Ostpolitik'], *Kultura*, 309:6 (1973), pp. 68–79 (pp. 74–6); Mieczysław Stolarczyk, *Rosja w polityce zagranicznej Polski w latach 1992–2015* [Russia in Poland's foreign policy in 1992–2015] (Katowice: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, 2016), *passim*; Przemysław Waingertner, 'Jerzego Giedroycia idea ULB: geneza, założenia, próby realizacji. Zarys problematyki' [Jerzy Giedroyc's ULB idea: Origin, premises, implementation attempts. An outline of the problematique], *Studia z Historii Społeczno-Gospodarczej XIX i XX Wieku*, 15 (2015), pp. 143–59 (p. 149); Michał Urbańczyk, 'Idea ULB (Ukraina–Litwa–Białoruś) w myśli Jerzego Giedroycia i Juliusza Mieroszewskiego' [The idea of ULB (Ukraine–Lithuania–Belarus) in the thought of Jerzy Giedroyc and Juliusz Mieroszewski], in Paweł Fiktus, Henryk Malewski, and Maciej Marszał (eds), *'Rodzinna Europa': Europejska myśl polityczno-prawna u progu XXI wieku* ['Familial Europe': European political-legal thought at the 21st century's door] (Wrocław: E-Wydawnictwo. Prawnicza i Ekonomiczna Biblioteka Cyfrowa, 2015), pp. 309–22.

as a civilisational guide for the countries of Eastern Europe.[80] As well as these two ideas, it is also worth bearing in mind the lasting impact of Prometheism,[81] rooted in political romanticism, as an intellectual tradition that has served as a source of inspiration for Polish thinkers and leaders over centuries.[82] The idea of Polish political Prometheism could be best comprehended as a 'proposal for Poland to support nation-building processes that could implode the Soviet empire and give rise to a safety buffer at the eastern borders of the Republic of Poland'.[83] As a result of being 'filtered' through Polish historical experiences, it has been perceived in Polish political culture as not entirely incompatible with the requirements of realpolitik.[84] This was embodied in the geopolitical and geostrategic designs pursued by Marshal Józef Piłsudski, such as the support he provided for the Ukrainian leader Symon Petliura. For Piłsudski, the Polish–Ukrainian alliance against Bolshevik Russia, known as the Treaty of Warsaw of April 1920, was a building block in establishing his geopolitical concept of *Międzymorze* (*Intermarium*). The alliance itself did have a lasting impact: it was rather transient and instrumental from the Polish perspective,[85] but it became a symbol of the possibility of brotherly cooperation between the two nations, which endured in Polish collective memory to this day, despite the troubled history of mutual relations.

Nowadays, the most impactful of those doctrines is arguably the Jagiellonian idea, finding its outlet, as indicated by Reeves, in Poland's contribution to the Eastern Partnership programme[86] or participation in the Orange Revolution of the year 2004, when the president of Poland Aleksander Kwaśniewski,[87] acting upon unambiguous domestic support for the Ukrainian cause, assumed the role of one of the mediators between the Ukrainian authorities and the opposition. According to Reeves, 'It could be argued that Poland's intervention in 2004 in support of the pro-democracy forces in Ukrainian politics owed at least something to the old civilizing mission of the Jagiellonian idea.'[88] In Poland's efforts to champion Ukrainian advances towards the West and to advocate its accession into NATO and the European Union (EU), interwoven are two mutually convergent goals. One of them, as mentioned before, is to ensure that Ukraine is not drawn into the Russian sphere of influence or annexed by Russia, rendering the latter an immediate neighbour of Poland. Crucially, Polish support for Ukraine (especially during the ongoing war) is meant not only to strengthen Ukraine but also to weaken Russia in the process, thereby increasing the region's security.[89] The second one is to fulfil Poland's civilisational mission aimed at re-establishing its influence

[80]Władysław Konopczyński 'O idei Jagiellońskiej' [On the Jagiellonian idea], in Władysław Konopczyński, *Umarli mówią: szkice polityczno-historyczne* [The dead speak: Political-historical studies] (Ostrów Wielkopolski: Wielkopolska Księgarnia Nakładowa Karola Rzepeckiego, 1929); Christopher Reeves, 'The Jagiellonian idea and Poland's eastern policy: Historical echoes in today's approach', *Politeja*, 14:6 (2017), pp. 141–163.

[81]Jan J. Bruski, *Pomiędzy prometeizm a Realpolitik. II Rzeczpospolita wobec Ukrainy sowieckiej 1921–1926* [Between Prometheism and realpolitik: The Second Polish Republic toward the Soviet Ukraine 1921–1926] (Kraków: Historia Jagiellonica, 2010), p. 10; Sergiusz Mikulicz, *Prometeizm w polityce II Rzeczypospolitej* [Prometheism in the politics of the 2nd Republic of Poland] (Warsaw: Książka i Wiedza, 1971), pp. 11–13; Robert Kłaczyński, 'Prometeizm: utopijna idea czy realne narzędzie polskiej polityki wschodniej' [Prometheism: An utopian idea or a real tool of Polish eastern policy], *Studia Politologica*, 18:247 (2017), pp. 50–60.

[82]Grzegorz Kucharczyk, *Polska myśl polityczna do roku 1939* [Polish political thought until 1939] (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Dębogóra, 2010), pp. 165–9, 173–8, 191–2.

[83]Bruski, *Pomiędzy prometeizm a Realpolitik*, p. 10, authors' own translation.

[84]Kucharczyk, *Polska myśl polityczna*, pp. 165–6, 192.

[85]Bruski, *Pomiędzy prometeizm a Realpolitik*, pp. 28–39, 135–47; Piotr Wandycz, 'Z zagadnień w współpracy polsko-ukraińskiej w latach 1919–20' [The issues of Polish–Ukrainian cooperation in 1919–1920], *Zeszyty Historyczne*, 12:145 (1967), pp. 3–24; Jan Pisuliński, *Nie tylko Petliura: Kwestia ukraińska w polskiej polityce zagranicznej w latach 1918–1923* [Not only Petliura: The Ukrainian case in Polish foreign policy in 1918–1923] (Toruń: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu Mikołaja Kopernika, 2013), pp. 230–47.

[86]Reeves, 'The Jagiellonian idea', pp. 142–3, 148–51.

[87]Paulina Polko, 'Security policy of the presidents of Poland (1990–2017)', *Security Forum*, 3:1 (2019), pp. 143–58 (p. 149).

[88]Reeves, 'The Jagiellonian idea', p. 156.

[89]Artur Drzewicki, 'Stosunki z Ukrainą w sferze bezpieczeństwa: Polski punkt widzenia' [Relations with Ukraine in the sphere of security: Polish perspective], *Bezpieczeństwo Narodowe*, 17:1 (2011), pp. 151–68 (pp. 154–5).

in Ukraine, thus stimulating the eastern component of Polish national identity and preserving Polish ontological security.

Polish politics towards Ukraine: In doctrine and (discursive) practice

The foreign policy considered here is one rooted in national identity and mediated by security needs and goals. Those are not confined to their purely material, objective(-ised), and realist dimension due to the nature of security being, primarily, 'a value as such'.[90] From this perspective, examined below are the remarks concerning Ukraine with respect to Poland's national security and foreign policy, which are included in, first, Polish National Security Strategies and in Polish strategic foreign policy documents; and, second, addresses and official statements made by Polish authorities including those by the PoP, the PM, and the MFA. The scope of the analysis is intentionally narrowed to make it reflect the strategic level of national security and foreign policy and thus deeply embedded structures of national identity and strategic culture, instead of becoming enmeshed in daily political squabbles.

National Security Strategies (NSS)

In the aforementioned documents titled 'Założenia Polskiej Polityki Bezpieczeństwa …' [The Premises of the Polish Security Policy …], remarks concerning Poland's attitude towards Ukraine are few and rudimentary. Ukraine is mentioned mostly in the context of the collapse of the Soviet Union and its ramifications for the Central and Eastern Europe (CEE).[91] In the only instance when Ukraine is mentioned separately, it is stated that 'It is particularly the cooperation of Poland with Ukraine that should become a significant factor to stabilise the situation in our region'.[92] It should be borne in mind here that the Polish leaders in the early 1990s concentrated on the preservation of national security in its old-school sense since Poland had just regained its independence and was still *in statu nascendi*. Put simply, for Poland it was the time to harden and consolidate as a state and as a nation, not to contemplate its identity or values (terms absent from both documents). However, a powerful statement is made regarding Poland's ambition towards the CEE. According to the authors, 'Poland aims to ensure inclusion of the countries of Central and Eastern Europe into the Euro-Atlantic security system. We support the efforts of the countries of this region to establish ties with the Western countries and align their structures with democratic standards.'[93] On top of the geopolitical and security implications of this declaration, it can be interpreted as a token of willingness to act as an emissary of the West and its civilisational soft power. However, in the context of this research, it can also be read as symptomatic of Poland's inclination to attempt to induce the West towards inviting other CEE countries to join its ranks. As indicated below, that statement was to become a guidepost for Poland regarding its role (underpinned by its ontological security needs) in the creation of regional security.

The significance of Ukraine in Polish National Security Strategies increased in the year 2000, when more concrete and explicit statements were made in this regard in the NSS issued at that time. One of them concerns Poland's aspiration to 'develop a strategic partnership with independent and democratic Ukraine, which constitutes one of the most important stability and security factors in Europe'.[94] Speaking on behalf of the nation, the authors pledge to 'provide support, as

[90]Bogdan Szulc, 'Dylematy tożsamościowe nauk o bezpieczeństwie' [Identity dilemmas of security sciences], in Ryszard Szpyra (ed.), *Nauki o bezpieczeństwie: Poszukiwanie podstaw.* [Security sciences: In search of foundation] (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Akademii Sztuki Wojennej, 2022), pp. 35–49 (p. 44), authors' own translation.

[91]Biuro Bezpieczeństwa Narodowego, 'Założenia Polskiej Polityki Bezpieczeństwa', pp. 5, 8, 12.

[92]Ibid., p. 12, authors' own translation.

[93]Ibid., p. 5, authors' own translation.

[94]Biuro Bezpieczeństwa Narodowego [National Security Bureau], 'Strategia Bezpieczeństwa Narodowego RP' [The National Security Strategy of the Republic of Poland], Warsaw (4 January 2000), p. 13, authors' own translation.

far as possible to the democratic authorities in Kyiv for their efforts to consolidate the independent and stable existence of Ukraine and to strengthen ties to European integration structures.'[95] What is more, it is also stated that 'Poland considers the development of cooperation between NATO and Ukraine and the Alliance's support for efforts and reforms undertaken by that country towards consolidating independence, building a modern democratic state, and strengthening ties with European integration structures to be one of the most important security factors in Europe.'[96] This implies that for Poland a rapprochement between Ukraine and NATO matters not only as a regional security factor but also, as mentioned before, as an opportunity to act as a 'broker' between the geopolitical and geocivilisational realms of the West and the East, based on Polish geopolitical concepts and ideas. It is an evident display of the concept of Prometheism, a twin sister of the Jagiellonian idea. Also, it corresponds with point 1.2.3 of the section 'Basic principles of Polish security policy', referring to security and preservation of national identity as one of the elements of the common European good.[97]

In the two following strategies from 2003 and 2007, little was added besides reiterations of statements on the pursuit of strategic partnership with Ukraine and supporting its integration with the West. Then, in the strategy from the year 2014, the focus concerning Polish relations with Ukraine and its national mission in the region shifted from an individual endeavour to bring the Eastern European countries closer to the Western structures to tapping into the potential of the latter by invoking the Eastern Partnership programme as the means to ensure those countries' rapprochement with EU and NATO.[98]

In the strategy in force from the year 2020 is a strong supportive voice with a Promethean undertone. In the section titled 'Bilateral, regional and global cooperation', strategic goal no. 2.3 is to 'undertake actions toward strengthening the independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity of Ukraine, Georgia, and the Republic of Moldova, including support for their efforts to realise European and Euro-Atlantic aspirations and engagement in stabilising actions in Poland's eastern environment'.[99] Regardless of the moral and strategic merit of Poland's support for those aspirations, such a statement is strong and raises the question of timing. In hindsight, was such a declaration timely or was it premature in terms of Poland's Western partners' readiness? In other words, was it the upshot of Poland's superior strategic judgement, or did it result from Poland's deeply embedded Promethean drive to satisfy its ontological security needs, regardless of the circumstances at the time and the feasibility of such a political design? It is then not only a question of timing or strength but of which security (physical or ontological) is ultimately more impactful.

At this point, the issue of Poland's geopolitical aspirations concerning its desired role as the broker, guide, and leader for the CEE countries, considered against the backdrop of the Polish national identity and national security (with its ontological security dimension), deserves more attention. Analysis of Poland's national security strategies reveals the chief importance of Ukraine for Polish national security, owing to geostrategic factors and the indispensable role played in the creation of the Polish national identity by the historical and cultural legacy of the realm referred to as Kresy. However, there is a catch. Whenever the legacy of Kresy is invoked, it must not be limited to Ukraine but should also encompass Belarus, all the more so in light of the ULB doctrine. Therefore, Belarus could be expected to trigger Poland's ontological security needs, translated into the Polish NSS, just as much as Ukraine does. Notwithstanding, the content of

[95]Ibid., authors' own translation.

[96]Ibid., p. 9, authors' own translation.

[97]Ibid., p. 3, authors' own translation

[98]Biuro Bezpieczeństwa Narodowego [National Security Bureau], 'Strategia Bezpieczeństwa Narodowego RP' [The National Security Strategy of the Republic of Poland], Warsaw (5 November 2014), pp. 10, 28.

[99]Biuro Bezpieczeństwa Narodowego [National Security Bureau], 'Strategia Bezpieczeństwa Narodowego RP' [The National Security Strategy of the Republic of Poland], Warsaw (12 May 2020), p. 25, authors' own translation.

the NSSs does not corroborate this hypothesis. It has only been stated superficially in strategies from 2000[100] and 2007[101] that democratic transformation in Belarus would contribute to Poland's security. From the geostrategic and military security standpoints, Belarus is a country of critical importance for Poland and the Eastern Flank of NATO, due to its connection with areas of substantial geostrategic significance such as the Smolensk Gate and the Suwałki Gap.[102] On the other hand, Belarus does not seem to represent an equally important value (compared with Ukraine) in terms of Polish national identity and ontological security that could substantiate Poland's more serious engagement with it. Regarding the identity-related importance of Belarus for Poland's ontological security, it is noteworthy that the rapprochement between Belarus and Russia could be perceived as going against Poland's efforts to draw the former Soviet republics as well as countries from within Russia's so-called outer wall,[103] such as Georgia, into the realm of the West as the community of 'mutually shared values'. Conceivably, it is for the same reason(s) that, as mentioned before, strengthening Georgia's 'independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity' is one of Poland's 2020 National Security Strategy goals. Ever since the memorable speech delivered by the PoP Lech Kaczyński in Tbilisi on 12 September 2008, during his precarious visit five days after the outbreak of the war, Georgia has received continuous support from Poland on the former's efforts towards integration with the EU and NATO. The close relationship between the two countries culminated in the signing of the Agreement on the Strategic Partnership in December 2017.[104] Arguably, the risk of antagonising Russia involved in the overt support for Georgia, a country whose geostrategic significance for Poland's national security is much lower than Ukraine, could signify yet another instance of ontological security needs overriding political realism in the reasoning of Polish elites. Whether or not, however, Poland would venture to support Georgia militarily in the event of a full-scale war with Russia remains open to speculation.

Coming back to the security goals in the NSS in force, they are for the first time aligned with those on national identity (also formulated for the first time), as per goal no. 1.3 in the section titled 'National identity of the Republic of Poland', which is to 'utilise Poland's international activity for promotion and protection of … Polish national identity, culture and tradition'.[105] Such a more comprehensive approach to national security and foreign policy, seen as mutually complementary and reinforcing and undergirded by national identity and values, could indicate an increase in the quality of the strategic culture[106] of Poland. According to Krasnodębska,[107] this culture comprises a 'historically shaped set of collective beliefs, norms, and values, and patterns of behaviour that guide a state's pursuit of ontological security'. In this context, the latter constitutes not only 'the output',[108] i.e. an objective to be achieved, but also an asset driving a country's national mission and geopolitical vision and national security and foreign policy.

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[100]Biuro Bezpieczeństwa Narodowego, 'Strategia Bezpieczeństwa', 2000, p. 13.

[101]Biuro Bezpieczeństwa Narodowego [National Security Bureau], 'Strategia Bezpieczeństwa Narodowego RP' [The National Security Strategy of the Republic of Poland], Warsaw (13 November 2007), pp. 8, 13.

[102]Jacek Bartosiak, *Rzeczpospolita Między Lądem a Morzem: O wojnie i pokoju.* [Poland and Intermarium between the Land and the Sea Powers] (Warsaw: Zona Zero, 2018), *passim*.

[103]Alba I. C. Popescu, *The Domination Zones of the Empire: The Grand Strategy to Turn Russia into a Hegemon of Eurasia* (Bucharest: Top Form Publishing House, 2022), p. 33.

[104]Sejm Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej [Sejm of the Republic of Poland], 'Strategiczne partnerstwo Warszawy i Tbilisi' [The strategic partnership of Warsaw and Tbilisi] (18 December 2017), available at: {https://www.sejm.gov.pl/sejm8.nsf/komunikat.xsp?documentId=91D8E4FEF602366EC12581FA003072DF}.

[105]Biuro Bezpieczeństwa Narodowego, 'Strategia Bezpieczeństwa' (2020), p. 28, authors' own translation.

[106]Jack L. Snyder, 'The Soviet strategic culture: Implications for limited nuclear operations', Rand (September 1977), available at: {https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/reports/2005/R2154.pdf}, p. 8.

[107]Krasnodębska, *Politics of Stigmatization*, p. 65.

[108]Ibid., pp. 61–2, 66.

Strategic documents on foreign policy

Nowadays, the multifaceted nature of national security is realised more often by those (scholars and officials) who deal with this type of security system.[109] In the last decade, two such documents were created, namely 'Priorytety Polskiej Polityki Zagranicznej 2012–2016' [The priorities of Polish foreign policy 2012–2016] in the year 2012 and 'Strategia Polskiej Polityki Zagranicznej 2017–2021' [The strategy of Polish foreign policy 2017–2021] in the year 2017. In terms of the general framework of Polish national security and foreign policy and concerning the problematique of this paper, both documents define the status quo in a fashion similar to that of the National Security Strategies, emphasising the significance of the rapprochement between Western structures and Eastern European countries in the face of the threat posed by Russia. The same applies to the approach to Polish–Ukrainian relations. It is explicitly stated that 'the development of relations with Ukraine, our strategic partner, is particularly important for Poland. Consistent support of the EU aspirations for Ukrainian society and deepening of NATO–Ukraine relations constitutes one of the priorities of Polish foreign policy.'[110] Arguably, if support for Ukrainian aspirations does indeed emerge from Poland's ontological security needs, it translates neatly into the premises of its foreign policy.

However, one can also notice more pronounced references to civilisational and national identity and values as premises of Polish foreign policy. In the context of the Eastern dimension of regional cooperation, in the first of those documents it is claimed that 'in the civilisational sense, having partners on both sides of the border who share the same values is worthwhile.'[111] With tensions concerning regional security being exacerbated by the increasingly and overtly expansionist and imperialistic Russian stance after it annexed Crimea in 2014 and the war with Georgia in 2008, the authors of the second document contend that 'in the forthcoming years the situation in Eastern Europe will remain one of the biggest challenges for Polish foreign policy.'[112] Having elaborated on the causes of that situation, they stress 'the important place of supporting pro-European and pro-transatlantic reforms in the politics of the countries of Eastern Europe.'[113] The basis of this and other goals of Polish foreign policy are sharply outlined. As the authors emphasise, 'We find the historical and civilisational dimension of our aspirations in the roots of the Western world and native independence and patriotic thought.'[114] This credo is then followed by a list of clearly defined premises of the Polish *raison d'état*, comprising 'democracy, the rule of law and respect for human rights and Christian values.'[115] It is stated that:

> Their propagation on the global scale is in the interest of the Republic of Poland as they constitute the best guarantee of peace, stability, and progress in the world. Thus, their promotion is to be considered a token of appreciation of their axiological dimension and one the ways of bolstering security and ensuring an environment that is conducive to civilisational growth for Poland.[116]

In a nutshell, the military and ontological aspects of Polish national security policy and the geopolitical and axiological aspects of its foreign policy dovetail (very) nicely. For Poland to be (militarily and ontologically) secure, what is essential is to enact its Promethean national mission

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[109]Ryszard Szynowski, 'The views on the development of the national security system of the Republic of Poland between 2003 and 2013'. *Security Forum*, 3:1 (2019), pp. 133–41 (p. 137).

[110]Ministerstwo Spraw Zagranicznych [Ministry of Foreign Affairs], 'Priorytety Polskiej Polityki Zagranicznej 2012–2016' [The priorities of Polish foreign policy 2012–2016], Warsaw (March 2012), p. 18, authors' own translation.

[111]Ibid., p. 17, authors' own translation.

[112]Ministerstwo Spraw Zagranicznych [Ministry of Foreign Affairs], 'Strategia Polskiej Polityki Zagranicznej 2017–2021' [The strategy of polish foreign policy 2017–2021], Warsaw (2017), p. 9, authors' own translation.

[113]Ibid.

[114]Ibid., p. 5, authors' own translation.

[115]Ibid., p. 11, authors' own translation

[116]Ibid., pp. 21–2, authors' own translation.

to draw its Eastern 'significant Others' into the Western geocivilisational realm of mutually shared values, thereby undermining the Russian sphere of influence and repelling its expansionism and bolstering regional security in the process.

The analysis of Polish strategic documents reveals an interesting process of maturing awareness concerning the interlinkage of Polish civilisational-national identity and mission and the pursuit of national and ontological security. With every new version of those documents, that awareness has been taken one step closer to its completion, its significance comprehended more deeply and its role in the premises and conduct of Polish foreign policy articulated more clearly.

Public discourse by authorities of the Republic of Poland

As expected, public discourse on the war in Ukraine by authorities of the Republic of Poland pertains primarily to its strategic goals and daily efforts to provide military, diplomatic, and humanitarian support to Ukraine. It is meant to indicate the political and military outcomes to be achieved and to define the measures that lead to them. As such, it mostly comprises facts, numbers, names, places, etc. However, these tangible factors are bound together by a narrative that is more concerned with the axiological and identity foundations of political conduct. It is through this narrative that this conflict is being expounded as a clash between not only good and evil but also between civilisation as represented by the democratic and (international) law-abiding countries and barbarism as represented by Russia. First, it is stressed that ensuring Ukraine's victory is in line with the Polish *raison d'état*, given that the opposite outcome of the war would put Poland in jeopardy and elevate the level of threat posed by Russia. Second, Polish authorities insist that Poland must support Ukraine on moral grounds to abide by its national identity and the mutual historical legacy of both nations. Last, but not least, Ukraine's desire to join the geopolitical-civilisational community of the West is championed as an endeavour that would not only satisfy moral duty on the part of Europe but also bolster its security.

The themes outlined above are found in statements, addresses, and interviews with Polish authorities, namely the PoP, the PM, and the MFA. The analysis comprised approximately 200 statements and texts from February 2022 to January 2023. Initially, these were selected based on a content analysis aiming to identify all the expressions, including any substantive references to Polish national security and identity, being used as premises for Polish support for Ukraine. Next, they were narrowed down to exclude those consisting of diplomatic clichés devoid of pertinent content. In the end, only relatively few remained, but the messages they carried proved to be sufficient to verify the validity of the premise concerning ontological security needs as the underlying factor in Polish politics towards Ukraine. The analysis focuses on particular themes in the content, treating them as a flexible ensemble of interwoven ideas rather than a rigid and linear narrative. It helps to consider them as two mutually interlinked categories of 'what' (are the goals to be achieved) and 'why' (must they be achieved).

Of paramount importance are the unceasing declarations of support for Ukraine's intention to be admitted to the EU and NATO. Importantly, this stance had been taken by Polish leaders and political elites long before the Russian annexation of Crimea and the outbreak of the current war (at least from the Orange Revolution on), and ever since the latter it has been retained, cemented, and intensified. As early as 28 February 2022, the PoP, joined by the presidents of Bulgaria, Czechia, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Slovakia, and Slovenia, signed an open letter to express that they 'strongly believe that Ukraine deserves receiving an immediate EU accession perspective'.[117] In the same vein, the presidents called on 'EU Member States to consolidate highest political support to Ukraine and enable the EU institutions to conduct steps to immediately grant Ukraine an EU candidate country status and open the process of negotiations'.[118] What matters

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[117]President of Poland, 'Support of Ukraine's swift candidacy to the EU' (28 February 2022), available at: {https://www.president.pl/news/open-letter-by-presidents-in-support-of-ukraines-swift-candidacy-to-the-european-union,49584}.
[118]Ibid.

here is not only the intention to support Ukraine's desire to join Western structures but the stress on the urgency of fulfilling this scenario, as illustrated by the use of the words 'immediate' and 'immediately'.

More light was shed on the intention behind this letter through the address by the PoP when he declared: 'We champion Ukraine's efforts to become a member of the European Union.'[119] Nine days later, the PoP mentioned that he had accepted the proposition by the president of Slovakia to lobby for Ukraine among the Western EU member states.[120] Next, the PM used an even stronger expression when during his meeting with the ambassadors of the Republic of Poland he stated: 'We are the main ambassadors of Ukraine in the EU.'[121] Moreover, Poland also displayed support for Ukraine's accession to NATO, which was confirmed by the PoP in his interview given to BBC News in which he emphasised in the forum of leaders of NATO that 'the open-door policy must be applied to Ukraine'.[122] It was then reiterated in the joint declaration at the Second Lublin Triangle Summit by the format's leaders (the presidents of Ukraine, Poland, and Lithuania).[123] This standpoint was later confirmed by the MFA and also by the secretary of state.[124] Arguably, it is an evident illustration of the strength of Poland's support for Ukraine, explaining an aspect of the latter's puzzling nature. Championing Ukraine's accession to NATO, given the ongoing hegemonic competition between the United States and China (with Russia considered to be capable of tipping the scale in either competitor's favour), is a scenario that is not easy to execute. Moreover, from the geostrategic perspective, it could potentially increase the likelihood of an open kinetic conflict between the Alliance and Russia. Thus, such declarations can be considered evidence of Poland's rationale being grounded not only in realpolitik but also in its Promethean identity, whose fulfilment constitutes a part of Poland's ontological security needs.

That Promethean stance is also associated with the second theme in the discourse, which can be treated as the basis of the endeavours of the Polish authorities. It refers to the historical and axiological underpinning of the relationship between Poland and Ukraine, signified by certain words and expressions with distinct emotional and symbolic undertones. Those are used mostly by the PoP, who has referred to Ukraine on several occasions as the 'brother nation', 'brotherly nation', and 'friend'.[125] The last is used most consistently, as the PM and the MFA have designated Poland

[119] President of Poland, 'Message from the President of Poland' (2 March 2022), available at: {https://www.president.pl/news/message-from-the-president-of-the-republic-of-poland,49785}, authors' own translation.

[120] President of Poland, 'Oświadczenie Prezydenta RP po spotkaniu z Prezydent Słowacji' [Statement by the President of Poland after the meeting with the President of Slovakia] (11 May 2022), available at: {https://www.prezydent.pl/aktualnosci/wypowiedzi-prezydenta-rp/wystapienia/oswiadczenie-prezydenta-rp-po-spotkaniu-z-prezydent-slowacji,53562}.

[121] Prime Minister of Poland, 'Premier spotkał się z polskimi dyplomatami w ramach narady Ambasadorów RP' [The Prime Minister met Polish diplomats during the council of the Ambassadors of Poland] (21 June 2022), available at: {https://www.gov.pl/web/premier/premier-spotkal-sie-z-polskimi-dyplomatami-w-ramach-narady-ambasadorow-rp}, authors' own translation.

[122] President of Poland, 'Wywiad Prezydenta RP dla BBC' [The President of Poland's interview for the BBC] (2 July 2022), available at: {https://www.prezydent.pl/aktualnosci/wypowiedzi-prezydenta-rp/wywiady/wywiad-prezydenta-rp-dlabbc,56379}, authors' own translation.

[123] President of Poland, 'Joint declaration by the Presidents of Poland, Ukraine, and Lithuania' (11 January 2023), available at: {https://www.president.pl/news/joint-declaration-by-presidents-of-ukraine-poland-and-lithuania,63122}.

[124] Minister of Foreign Affairs, 'Wspólne oświadczenie Ministrów Spraw Zagranicznych Republiki Litewskiej, Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej i Ukrainy w drugą rocznicę ustanowienia Trójkąta Lubelskiego' [Joint statement by the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia, the Republic of Poland and Ukraine on the second anniversary of establishment of the Lublin Triangle] (28 July 2022), available at: {https://www.gov.pl/web/dyplomacja/wspolne-oswiadczenie-ministrow-spraw-zagranicznych-republiki-litewskiej-rzeczypospolitej-polskiej-i-ukrainy-w-druga-rocznice-ustanowienia-trojkata-lubelskiego}; Secretary of State, 'Sekretarz Stanu Szymon Sękowski vel Sek z wizytą w Szwecji' [The Secretary of State Szymon Sękowski vel Sek's visit in Sweden] (26 August 2022), available at: {https://www.gov.pl/web/dyplomacja/sekretarz-stanu-szymon-szynkowski-vel-sek-z-wizyta-w-szwecji}.

[125] President of Poland, 'Wypowiedź po spotkaniu z Premierem Kanady' [Statement after a meeting with the Prime Minister of Canada] (10 March 2022), available at: {https://www.prezydent.pl/aktualnosci/wypowiedzi-prezydenta-rp/wystapienia/wypowiedz-po-spotkaniu-z-premierem-kanady,50292}, authors' own translation; President of Poland, 'President's speech marking the central celebrations of the National Day of the Third of May' (3 May 2022), available at:

as a friend of Ukraine by stating that 'We are proud to be able to call ourselves your allies and friends'[126] and 'Poland is a friend of Ukraine'.[127] As for the source of such a relationship, it is hinted at not by references to a common historical legacy, but by appeals to shared values of Western descent that feature in the discourse. The PoP expounded it when he characterised the initiative of lobbying for Ukraine to be granted the status of candidate state as 'a visible sign of the opening of the European Union, this proverbial West, to Ukrainian society and Ukraine in general; as showing that the community of cultures and principles of the very Western Europe, of this world, is a place where Ukraine can – if it wants – belong'.[128] Moreover, as argued by the PM in his conversation with the president of the European Commission, 'Ukraine, which is defending its territorial integrity and its independence, is standing up for European values'.[129]

At this point, a crucial theoretical remark is to be made. One could indicate one more aspect at play regarding the aforementioned invocations of Poland's brotherly affection towards Ukraine and the inclination to act as a 'broker' between Ukraine and the West. This stance clashes with a severe national trauma arising from the unresolved historical issues between Poland and Ukraine. Both the commitment to the national memory and the desire to fulfil geopolitical ambitions are undoubtedly underpinned by ontological needs, which are at variance with one another. However, the latter appears to have overridden the former or proven to be strong enough not to be undone by it. In other words, Poland's desire to bolster its national (military) security and to leverage its geopolitical status through establishing a 'special (positive) relationship' with Ukraine could be considered stronger than the attachment to the 'harmful and self-defeating' relationship, based on historical ressentiment and securitisation of Otherness. That would corroborate a proposition that ontological security needs of the state might vary in their significance owing to certain mediating factors, one of which, in the case under consideration, is national (military) security. Consequently, the rift between the aforementioned discordant ontological needs faced by Poland can be patched up, and the two can be reconciled.

The binding function of values manifested itself a month earlier (on 1 February), when the PM during his visit to Kyiv called upon 'the entire Europe' and 'the entire Western world' to 'unite in aid of the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of Ukraine'. As he said, 'We know very well that these very values also constitute the Ukrainian *raison d'état*, but also the European and Polish ones'.[130] The appeals to the leaders of both the European Union and its Western member states to open the door to Europe for Ukraine dovetail nicely with the discursive framing of Ukraine as a country that not only abides by Western values but also champions and defends them in its clash

{https://www.president.pl/news/presidents-speech-marking-the-central-celebrations-of-the-national-day-of-the-third-of-may,53322}; President of Poland, 'Wywiad z Prezydentem dla "Polski Times"' [Interview with the President for 'Polska Times'] (19 May 2022), available at: {https://www.prezydent.pl/aktualnosci/wypowiedzi-prezydenta-rp/wywiady/wywiad-z-prezydentem-dla-polski-times,53937}, authors' own translation

[126] Prime Minister of Poland, 'Premier Mateusz Morawiecki: Ukraina udowadnia, że jest prawdziwie niepodległa' [Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki: Ukraine is proving to be truly independent] (24 August 2022), available at: {https://www.gov.pl/web/premier/premier-mateusz-morawiecki-ukraina-udowadnia-ze-jest-prawdziwie-niepodlegla}, authors' own translation.

[127] Minister of Foreign Affairs, 'Przewodniczący OBWE Zbigniew Rau przebywał z wizytą na Ukrainie' [OSCE' Chairperson-in-Office Zbigniew Rau visited Ukraine] (2 August 2022), available at: {https://www.gov.pl/web/dyplomacja/przewodniczacy-obwe-zbigniew-rau-przebywal-z-wizyta-na-ukrainie}, authors' own translation.

[128] President of Poland, 'Wypowiedź Prezydenta RP po rozmowach z Prezydentem Słoweni' [Statement by the President of Poland after the talks with the President of Slovenia] (20 May 2022), available at: {https://www.prezydent.pl/aktualnosci/wypowiedzi-prezydenta-rp/wystapienia/wypowiedz-prezydenta-rp-po-rozmowach-z-prezydentem-slowenii,53986}, authors' own translation.

[129] Prime Minister of Poland, 'Premier w Brukseli: Ukraina staje w obronie wartości europejskich' [The Prime Minister in Brussels: Ukraine stands in defence of European values] (1 March 2022), available at: {https://www.gov.pl/web/premier/premier-w-brukseli-ukraina-staje-w-obronie-wartosci-europejskich}, authors' own translation.

[130] Prime Minister of Poland, 'All of Europe and entire Western world must unite for sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity of Ukraine, says Prime Minister Morawiecki during visit to Kyiv' (1 February 2022), available at: {https://www.gov.pl/web/primeminister/all-of-europe-and-entire-western-world-must-unite-for-sovereignty-independence-and-territorial-integrity-of-ukraine-says-prime-minister-morawiecki-during-visit-to-kyiv}.

with Russia, discursively framed as a civilisational Other and an Enemy due to its barbarism and hostility. Through this discourse, the demarcation line between both opposing geocivilisational realms has been drawn clearly in the Saidian fashion, and Ukraine is being drawn from the in-between zone into the promised land of the West.

Yet the rationale for Ukraine's admission into the EU is not only being framed in terms of a moral duty or civilisational affinity. To make it clear for the hesitant leaders of the Western member states, Ukraine's membership in the EU is also championed as a matter of security not only for Poland but for the whole of Europe. First, ensuring the successful defence of Ukraine and stopping Putin's invasion is presented by the PoP as being 'in the interest of Poland'.[131] Two months later, the PoP stated that 'by supporting Ukraine we are realising the security interest of the Republic of Poland'.[132] Second, as emphasised by the PM right before the outbreak of the war, 'a safe Ukraine constitutes also the Polish and European *raison d'état*'.[133] Therefore, the civilisational identity and military security dimensions are inextricably interwoven. Ukraine must be supported and admitted into the European (and Western) family of nations not only because the geostrategic rationale so dictates, but also because it has proven to be 'one of our own' on civilisational and moral grounds. Thus, the dilemma as to whether to open the door to Europe for Ukraine or to keep it shut pertains not only to military but also to ontological security.

Moreover, it seems that when it comes to fulfilling its ontological security needs, Poland is attempting to kill two birds with one stone. On the one hand, by acting as Ukraine's diplomatic proponent on the stage of international politics, Poland is trying to abide by its deeply embedded values and ideas, thereby cementing its identity and avoiding shame that would result from violation of the former.[134] But on the other hand, for Poland, it is also an opportunity to leverage its status vis-à-vis other Western countries, which appear to be too sluggish, indecisive, unwilling to engage, or even more favourable towards Russia than Ukraine. In comparison to such states, according to the PoP, Poland 'is gaining prestige as a strong state'. As he contended, 'We have proved to be a serious state during the war in Ukraine … capable of making decisions and realising important goals'.[135] What is more, the decisions to which the PoP refers, are difficult, costly, and, most importantly, risky. As he has stressed on numerous occasions, 'we have sent 260 tanks, over 100 armoured vehicles, hundreds of thousands of weapons and millions of munitions';[136] 'We have already spent over 2.3 billion dollars on military aid to Ukraine alone. For us, it is an enormous expense and an enormous sacrifice. But we know that we are doing it to build security in our part of Europe. We are doing it and we will continue to';[137] 'as regards providing the Leopard tanks to Ukraine, the

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[131]President of Poland, 'Wywiad dla telewizji CNN' [Interview for CNN] (7 April 2022), available at: {https://www.prezydent.pl/aktualnosci/wypowiedzi-prezydenta-rp/wywiady/wywiad-dla-telewizji-cnn,51800}, authors' own translation.

[132]President of Poland, 'Wywiad Prezydenta RP dla TVP Katowice i PR Katowice' [The President of Poland's interview for TVP Katowice and PR Katowice] (7 June 2022), available at: {https://www.prezydent.pl/aktualnosci/wypowiedzi-prezydenta-rp/wywiady/wywiad-prezydenta-rp-dlatvp-katowice-ipr-katowice-calosc,56543}, authors' own translation.

[133]Prime Minister of Poland, 'Premier Mateusz Morawiecki: Bezpieczna Ukraina to także polska i europejska racja stanu' [Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki: A safe Ukraine constitutes also the Polish and European raison d'état] (4 February 2022), available at: {https://www.gov.pl/web/premier/premier-mateusz-morawiecki-bezpieczna-ukraina-to-takze-polska-i-europejska-racja-stanu}, authors' own translation.

[134]Steele, *Ontological Security*, pp. 53–5.

[135]President of Poland, 'Wywiad Prezydenta RP dla Gazety Polskiej' [The President of Poland's interview for Gazeta Polska] (5 October 2022), available at:{https://www.prezydent.pl/aktualnosci/wydarzenia/wywiad-prezydenta-rp-dla-gazety-polskiej-,59521}, authors' own translation.

[136]President of Poland, 'Rzym. Wywiad Prezydenta RP dla RAI News' [Rome. The President of Poland's interview for RAI News] (18 October 2022), available at: {https://www.prezydent.pl/aktualnosci/wypowiedzi-prezydenta-rp/wywiady/rzym-wywiad-prezydenta-rp-dlarai-news,60150}, authors' own translation.

[137]President of Poland, 'Wywiad Prezydenta RP dla telewizji Euronews' [The President of Poland's interview for the Euronews TV] (23 January 2023), available at: {https://www.prezydent.pl/aktualnosci/wypowiedzi-prezydenta-rp/wywiady/wywiad-dla-telewizji-euronews,63822}, authors' own translation.

case is clear. Those are not easy decisions. … Currently … we are at the stage of purchasing modern tanks and these Leopards are a part of our fleet of tanks. Therefore, for us, it is a problematic decision.'[138]

As we have then seen, the political discourse of Poland's leaders reveals all three aspects of the puzzle that this research was meant to unravel, that is, swiftness, strength, and scope of the support for Ukraine. Poland had begun to act before the outbreak of the war and pressed its Western partners to expedite their actions. Moreover, Poland's initiatives and declarations (in some cases, demands) regarding sanctions against Russia and support for Ukraine have been far from moderate, but, on the contrary, resolute and uncompromising. Finally, despite its limitations and various obstacles (such as discontent expressed by some of its European allies or unresolved historical issues with Ukraine), Poland's stance has been unshaken.

Conclusion

The study of Poland's historical legacy, strategic documents, and political discourse in the first year of the war has revealed substantial evidence that Poland's national security and foreign policy are not only grounded in an objective national security rationale but also underpinned by ontological security needs. It demonstrates that for Poland and its authorities, national identity constitutes a cognitive framework for developing a political strategy in times of peace and a set of practical guidelines for coping with international crises such as the ongoing war in Ukraine. This identity not only affects the perception of the international environment and the relations with significant others (both allies and adversaries)[139] but also constitutes a substantial axiological asset, mobilised[140] to generate much-needed resolve among Polish people to support Ukraine despite the hardships and risks it entails. Based on the logic of the military (physical) dimension of national security, underpinned by political realism and pragmatism, the risk and ramifications associated with the *modus operandi* adopted by Poland should have either discouraged it from adhering to it or at least lowered its resolve. However, the power of deeply embedded identity structures and ontological security needs has made it possible to achieve an outcome that would have probably been unattainable through the logic of realpolitik alone. Importantly, garnering the resolve needed to sustain unwavering support for Ukraine, despite all the hardships associated with it, has been facilitated by the securitisation of Russia as a source of not only military but also ontological threat to Poland.

This proves that the pursuit of ontological security is compatible, as Steele and Mitzen indicate, not only with hazardous initiatives but also with the pragmatic logic of national security, despite ontological security having a logic of its own. The study of the identity foundation of Polish politics towards Ukraine conducted in this paper not only informs a more comprehensive understanding of the nature of national security but may also serve as an incentive for further research on the problematique of the relevance of pursuing ontological security needs by other IR actors, including supranational organisations such as the EU.[141]

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[138]President of Poland , 'Wypowiedź podczas spotkaniu z Prezydentem Czech' [Statement during a meeting with the President of the Chech Republic] (24 January 2023), available at: {https://www.prezydent.pl/aktualnosci/wypowiedzi-prezydenta-rp/wystapienia/wypowiedz-podczas-spotkania-z-prezydentem-czech,63875}.

[139]Chernobrov, *Public Perception.*

[140]Kinnvall, 'Globalization and religious nationalism', p. 745.

[141]Christopher S. Browning, 'Geostrategies, geopolitics and ontological security in the Eastern neighbourhood: The European Union and the "new Cold War"', *Political Geography*, 62 (2018), pp. 106–15.

Ryszard Szynowski, PhD, DSc, Associate Professor at the Faculty of Applied Sciences, Department of Security Sciences, WSB University in Dąbrowa Górnicza, Poland, works in the field of security sciences. His main research interests include security systems in Poland's neighbouring countries, transborder security between Poland, Slovakia, Czechia, and Ukraine, international security of Central and Eastern Europe, and social security.

Piotr Gil, MA, PhD candidate in the field of security sciences at the Faculty of Applied Sciences, Department of Security Sciences, WSB University in Dąbrowa Górnicza, Poland. His main research interests include ontological, cultural, and societal security, the interplay between national identity and national security, and identity-related aspects of geopolitics.