

A Troublesome Ally? The People's Republic of Poland and the Republic of Poland in the Political Structures of the Warsaw Pact from 1980 to 1991

Abstract

The Warsaw Pact was the obligatory alliance of the European satellite states of the USSR. It served as one of the tools facilitating Moscow's control of the area, at the time considered internationally as the Kremlin's sphere of influence, and strengthened its military position.

The aim of the publication is to show the role of the People's Republic of Poland in the Warsaw Pact in the last decade of its existence and the attitude the Republic of Poland towards its disintegration. The documents in the Annex show, first of all, the activity of the Polish state in the political structures of the Pact. They include reports from meetings of the Political Advisory Committee, the Committee of Foreign Ministers and the mutual current information group, as well as a number of documents presenting bilateral meetings, analyses of the situation and assessments of the steps taken by other bloc countries in relation to conflicts within the Warsaw Pact (for example, with East Germany over the partitioning of territorial waters). The political structures of the Warsaw Pact are broadly understood and also include informal communication channels and bilateral contacts.

Due to its geographic location, size, economic potential, population, the size of its army and its related strategic importance, the People's Republic of Poland was an important member of the Warsaw Pact.

In the period under discussion, the position of the People's Republic of Poland in the Warsaw Pact changed. From the introduction of martial law to the transformation of 1989/1990, communist Poland was economically weak and, until the second half of the 1980s, it was politically isolated in the West, which additionally made it a country disinclined to greater independence from

the Warsaw Pact. The internal problems of those in power weakened Warsaw's position, condemning it to help from Moscow and other members of the bloc. Warsaw did not come up with any major initiatives concerning either the functioning of the Pact or the foreign policy of the bloc. This state of affairs lasted until the second half of the 1980s. The period of transformation in Poland and the Eastern bloc ran parallel to the process of German reunification. In view of the German position, which was unclear from Warsaw's point of view, Poland needed international support, including Moscow's backing for its postulates, primarily those concerning the borderline. This influenced the then formulated positions regarding the functioning of the Warsaw Pact and the date of the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Poland.

In the 1980s, the People's Republic of Poland could be considered a troublesome member of the Warsaw Pact, not because it did not adapt to the lines of the Pact at the level of the state authorities, but because the changes taking place at the social level became a source of problems for the entire alliance. The emergence of the Solidarity movement and the international publicity it gained were problematic for the Eastern bloc, raising concerns about the possible establishment of similar structures in other bloc countries. Martial law, intended to end the problem of a possible breakdown of the monopoly of the communist party in the internal dimension, led to the publicisation of the problem of human rights violations in the communist system. Actions taken by the United States, including armaments, forced a response from the USSR and contributed to the economic collapse.

In a peculiar way, or paradoxically, being one of the leaders of systemic changes in the Soviet bloc, Poland became, to some extent, a troublesome member of the Warsaw Pact in a period when, contrary to the tendencies prevailing in, for example, Czechoslovakia and Hungary, it did not support a quick dissolution of the Warsaw Pact structures.

From the start of the political and economic reforms in the bloc, Moscow attempted to transform internal relations within the Warsaw Pact into a dependency that was softer in form and increased the member states' room for manoeuvring. However, many years of experience of Kremlin rule made these efforts unreliable for societies and the emerging new political elites. This also concerned some activists of the communist parties and governments, who began to be more interested in contacts with the West, which offered opportunities for economic support, than in the reforms of the Warsaw Pact. Moscow must have realised that the states belonging to it were getting out of its control. This was primarily due to the social processes caused by, but not only, economic factors. The societies of the bloc countries were not fully Sovietised and did not give up their attempts to change the political system. Changes in Poland, as well as in other countries, went much further than initially assumed. As a consequence, the Eastern bloc broke up and centrifugal forces emerged in the USSR itself, leading to its dissolution. However, the Warsaw Pact broke up first.