Spain’s and Poland’s Road to NATO: the problem of continuity and change in the foreign policy of a democratising state

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The aim of this article is to compare the Spanish and Polish road to NATO from the perspective of the shape of the foreign policy and its possible restructuring in states undergoing the process of democratic transformation. The study of both cases shows that the reorientation of the foreign policy of a democratising state results to a large extent from external conditions at the global and regional levels although the internal conditions may hinder or accelerate the reorientation. The example of Spain demonstrates that in a firm and stable international system (the bipolar system) it is extremely difficult to change the direction of foreign policy, even if there are internal premises such as democratisation, well-organised opposition supporting the change and social support. In the case of Poland, the flexible and unstable international system made it possible to radically change the direction of its foreign policy. The existing internal premises without the appropriate external context would not have been enough to generate the reorientation of foreign policy. The comparative study of Spanish and Polish cases should be treated as an introduction to the broader analysis on the subject of the restructuring of foreign policy in the democratising state. Democratic transformation processes which took place in Europe from the mid-1970s provide broad empirical material for further scientific work in this area.

Keywords: Poland; Spain; NATO; democratic transformation; foreign policy change

Researchers investigating the histories of Spain and Poland like to refer to the thesis of Joachim Lelewel of 1820. The famous Polish historian was the first to point out the similarities between the histories of the two states.¹ The comparative element introduced by Lelewel can be treated today as an interesting reference source in the bibliography of the subject. However, it found continuation after 1989 in the context of the transformation in Central and Eastern Europe.

Seeking a model of democratic change, researchers and politicians pointed to Spain, which in the 1970s (1975–1982) experienced a transition from authoritarian rule to democracy. The interest in the Spanish transformation was the impetus for developing some comparative analyses of the two processes.² Unfortunately, the foreign policies of the two states remained a marginal issue in the research.³ In this context this work is an attempt to relate to one of the key aspects of the foreign policies of both states in the democratisation period, i.e. Spain and Poland achieving their memberships of NATO. The problem deserves some attention from the perspective of change/continuity of the foreign policy of a state striving for democracy. It is, in fact, part of the broader issue concerning the restructuring of foreign policy.

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The knowledge of the shape of the foreign policy and its possible restructuring in states undergoing the process of democratic transformation is still incomplete and requires supplementing. Theorists define the restructuring of foreign policy as ‘major, comprehensive change in the foreign policy orientation of the nation, over a relatively short period of time, as manifested through behavioural changes in a nation’s interactions with other actors in international politics’. Restructuring can manifest itself in a change in the intensity of involvement in international relations. However, the main symptom of the restructuring of a foreign policy is a change in the direction/orientation of foreign policy. It manifests itself in replacing or complementing the already existing relations with states, organisations and alliances, following which the area/region of interest of a given state or the priorities of its foreign policy change. The change in the direction/orientation of foreign policy may of course occur in all states, regardless of whether they are democratic or authoritarian. However, it is fairly commonly believed that it is more probable or in fact inevitable in the case of a democratic transformation. A comparative analysis of the Spanish and Polish process of accession to NATO makes it possible to question the thesis and state that democratisation does not have to lead to a reorientation of foreign policy. Spain’s accession to NATO indicated in fact a continuation of the foreign policy, whereas Poland’s accession meant a reorientation of the foreign policy.

What is the connection between democratisation and accession to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization in the cases of the two states? Did external factors more significantly affect the process of Poland and Spain reaching NATO? These are questions worth considering and employing a comparative analysis for the purpose.

1. Stages in Spain’s and Poland’s journey to NATO

Spain became a member of NATO in 1982, whereas Poland joined the North Atlantic Treaty Organization in 1999. Both events were preceded by a process which lasted for several years and which, both in the case of Spain and in the case of Poland, can be divided into a number of stages.

Until the end of the 1940s, Spain remained internationally isolated. Thanks to the changes in the international arena after the beginning of the Cold War, this country, enjoying a favourable geo-strategic situation, managed to establish contacts with the United States. A turning point was the agreement signed between Spain and the United States in September 1953, renewed subsequently in 1963, 1969, 1970 and 1976. Following the agreement, American military bases were established on the territory of Spain. Admittedly, the relationship between the two states lacked balance, but thanks to it Spain was included in the transatlantic security system based on the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. Spain’s participation in the system was indirect and conditional upon maintaining good relations with the USA.

NATO accession was one of the goals already present in Spanish foreign policy in General Franco’s time. Its membership of the Organization was one of the topics of the meeting of the North Atlantic Council in May 1975. However, Norway, Denmark, Iceland, the Netherlands and Great Britain did not consent to the accession of an authoritarian state. The death of General Franco in November 1975, which can be considered as the final moment of the first stage on the road to NATO, meant that the arguments put forward by the states objecting to Spain’s membership in NATO lost their importance.

After Franco’s death, Spain saw the beginning of the transformation towards democratisation. It was preceded by a transition period, between November 1975 and July 1976 – under the rule of Prime Minister Carlos Arias Navarro. This time can be treated as the second stage in Spain’s journey to membership. The declarations of the Prime Minister
indicated that Spain’s accession to the Alliance was perceived as a long-term goal of Spanish foreign policy. On the basis of the Treaty on Friendship and Cooperation, signed by the USA and Spain (24 January 1976), the Spanish–American Council came into being. The Council watched the implementation of the Treaty and at the same time, thanks to the military committee operating in it, functioned as a structure coordinating the cooperation between Spain and NATO. The Joint Coordination and Planning Staff (Estado Mayor Conjunto de Coordinación y Planificación) dealt with developing action plans for the case of an attack against Spain, the United States or Western Europe, coordinated with the NATO plans. The operation of the Council and the Joint Staff seems to have been an efficient mechanism which tightened the cooperation between Spain and NATO and helped Spain prepare for accession to the Organization, especially as the USA provided military aid in the form of loans for the purchase of military equipment and in this manner contributed to the process of preparing the Spanish military forces for NATO standards. The mechanism preparing Spain for membership operated within the bilateral relations, and its role in the process of Spain reaching NATO resulted from the privileged position which the USA de facto had in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.

The third stage on the road to NATO – between July 1976 and February 1981 – coincided with the premiership of the next Prime Minister Adolfo Suárez. In spite of the existence and functioning of the Council and the Joint Staff, the government showed a certain indecision regarding accession to NATO. The internal transformations and the reluctance of the opposition parties (PSOE and PCE) made the government cautious about the issue. As a consequence, the declarations on foreign policy of the years 1976–1977 only indirectly related to the Alliance. Finally in March 1978 the Minister of Foreign Affairs indicated that joining the Alliance was an option profitable for Spain and considered seriously by the government.

The fourth stage started with a declaration by Prime Minister Leopoldo Calvo Sotelo on the intention to commence formal actions aimed at NATO accession. It was presented in Parliament on 18 February 1981 and provoked a lively debate on the purposefulness of accession to NATO, which took place in the second half of 1981. The fourth stage ended in May 1982 with Spain’s accession to NATO.

In the case of Poland it should be noted that its foreign policy pursued in the years 1947–1989 was not sovereign and to a great extent depended on the Soviet Union. It was based on close relations with the USSR and other socialist states of Central and Eastern Europe within the Warsaw Pact and the Council of Mutual Economic Aid and cooperation with developing states. Poland’s relations with NATO were marked by the relations between the two rival blocs – socialist and capitalist, and the two superpowers – the USA and the USSR. Consequently, they were considerably different from the relations which Spain, through the United States, maintained with NATO. From this perspective, Poland’s membership of NATO was a manifestation of abandoning the foreign policy pursued in Poland from the end of the Second World War until 1989 and reflected the reorientation of the Polish foreign policy towards Western Europe.

The beginning of the process that led to Poland’s membership in NATO dates back to the period between the end of 1989 and the end of 1991. Poland, as a party to the disintegrating Warsaw Pact, then had limited possibilities of cooperating with NATO, and thus the dissolution of the Pact, which involved active participation on the part of Poland and took place in July 1991, was an important event for future relations between NATO and Poland. It should also be noted that the Polish official statements of the period related to the idea of NATO membership in a somewhat vague and ambiguous manner. The majority seemed to believe that it was the European Community and the Western European Union, not NATO, that could become a
guarantor of Poland’s security in the longer perspective and the basis of the security policy of that country.23

During the second stage – between the end of 1991 and the end of 1993 – the internal debate took place on the security policy which Poland should pursue in the new international situation. As a result, the Atlantic option replaced the previously considered European variant of national security policy.24 NATO membership was determined as a priority of Polish foreign policy. The turning point was the statement by the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Krzysztof Skubiszewski, on the subject, made in Parliament.25 It was also this period that saw the establishment of the first mechanisms which made tightening of the cooperation between NATO and the states undergoing democratic transformation possible, including cooperation between NATO and Poland (December 1991 – the North Atlantic Cooperation Council). It was also then that the international debate on the enlarging of the Alliance began, which accompanied the Polish road to NATO to the end.

The third stage was the preparation for membership within the Partnership for Peace. This form of cooperation between NATO and the states undergoing the process of democratisation and interested in cooperation formally began in January 1994. In the preliminary phase it was not formally treated as a mechanism preparing for membership. It was only in December 1995 that it evolved in this direction.26 There is obviously a qualitative difference between the Spanish–American Council and the Partnership for Peace, as the former was based on the bilateral relationship between Spain and the USA and established in order to prepare a single state for NATO membership, whereas the latter was based on the principle of individual cooperation between NATO and the several states interested in becoming members of the Organization. Only in the cases of the states particularly interested in membership could cooperation lead to NATO accession. There is no doubt, however, that the goals of the Partnership for Peace – military cooperation and increasing the interoperability of the military forces of the cooperating states and the NATO member states – were close to the goals pursued within the Spanish–American Council. It is also worth noting that the idea of the Partnership for Peace came into being in the USA and the United States played a decisive role in convincing its allies to accept it.27 The preparation for membership was further facilitated by military cooperation between the USA and Poland, increasingly intense from 1993, pursued within the bilateral relations between the two states.28

The breakthrough moment in the preparation period was the invitation for Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary to join NATO, extended during the meeting of the North Atlantic Council in July 1997. The signing of the protocol on accession to NATO in December 1997 was followed by the rather long, as compared with Spain, period of ratification of the documents in the member states. Finally in March 1999 Poland became a member of NATO.

Analysis of the individual stages on the road of Spain and Poland to NATO shows numerous similarities and differences between the two cases. NATO membership was preceded by a preparatory stage lasting several years, during which the USA played a very important role. In both cases an internal debate on the role of NATO in the foreign policies of the two states took place. However, it happened at different moments – in Poland before the preparations within the Partnership for Peace, and in Spain immediately before NATO accession. The Alliance enlargement in the 1990s was also accompanied by an international debate on the issue, almost completely absent in the Spanish case.

The path to NATO may also be viewed from the perspective of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. Accepting a new member with earlier ties with the Organization – the Spanish case – was much simpler than enlarging NATO by several states from Central and Eastern Europe which a few years before had belonged to the hostile Warsaw Pact. Finally, taking into account the criterion of change/continuity in foreign policy, the fact that Spain was interested in
NATO membership as early as during General Franco’s rule, whereas Poland showed her interest only after the democratic transition had started, is particularly noteworthy.

The examples of Spanish and Polish membership of NATO illustrate different tendencies in the foreign policy of the two states. In the case of Spain, the accession to NATO meant a continuation of the goals and direction of the foreign policy established during Franco’s time, whereas in the case of Poland it was a symptom of a changing direction/orientation in its foreign policy. The fact that the foreign policies of two states undergoing a democratisation process show such a far-fetched discrepancy regarding the reorientation of its direction and goals requires attempts at explanations. The subsequent parts of this study analyse the influence of internal and external conditions on both processes of reaching NATO. Both cases are considered in the context of democratisation, which took place in 1975–1982 in Spain and in 1989–1997 in Poland, and against the background of the changes which occurred in the international system in the 1970s and 1990s.

2. Democratisation vs. the process of accession to NATO

The Polish and Spanish democratisation processes undoubtedly differ in many aspects. Relevant research draws attention to the conditions in which the two processes took place and sometimes even questions the purposefulness of the comparisons between them. It is nevertheless true that democratisation, understood as replacing an authoritarian system with a democratic one, led in the two states to the creation of new political founding principles expressed in the respective Constitutions, the Spanish one adopted in 1978 and the Polish one adopted in 1997. As a consequence, the process of shaping foreign policy was adjusted to the principles of the democratic state. This meant limiting the executive power and increasing the importance of the legislative branch in the decision-making process and controlling the operation of the government.

The transformation process was also accompanied by the creation of the system of political parties based on the parties dating back to the old regime and the opposition, advocating breaking away from it. This was also important because in a democratic state the position of a government, both in Poland and in Spain responsible for conducting foreign policy, is measured by the number of seats in the Parliament and the ability to form a coalition.

In the first and the second parliamentary elections in Spain in 1977 and 1979, it was the political parties to some extent connected with the Franco regime that gained the dominating role: the Democratic Centre Union (Unión del Centro Democrático, UCD, 47–48% of seats) and the People’s Alliance (Alianza Popular, AP, up to 4.6% of seats). They had the majority in Parliament and advocated Spain’s membership of NATO. Opposition left-wing parties were elected to Parliament, gathered around the Spanish Socialist Workers’ Party (Partido Socialista Obrero Español, PSOE, 33–35% of seats) and the Spanish Communist Party (Partido Comunista Español, PCE, 5–7%). Both were against NATO accession. A clear change in the proportions between the conservative and opposition forces took place only in 1982, when PSOE gained the majority in Parliament. This was in the period when the democratic changes had practically ended.

During the democratic transformation, which in Poland took place between 1989 and 1997, parliamentary elections were held three times. As a result of the elections of 1989, representatives of the opposition gathered around the Solidarity trade union got into the Sejm, the lower house of the Polish Parliament. They were a minority group. The majority still belonged to the representatives of the Polish United Workers’ Party (PZPR). The changes which took place in the international and domestic arenas in the years 1989–1991 contributed to the quick reversal of proportions. The new Sejm, elected in 1991, included representatives of 26
parties and political groups. Most of them had their origins in the opposition, and the main post-
Communist party, the Democratic Left Alliance, was marginalised. Unlike in Spain, the
opposition already dominated Parliament in the early stages of democratic transformation. In the
elections of 1993, the post-Communists gained as many as 37% of seats in Parliament. Together
with the Polish Peasant Party (the former satellite of the PZPR), which had 28.7% seats, they
ruled in Poland between 1993 and 1997. This marked another change in the political forces in
Parliament, although there was no return to the past.

The transformation resulted also in the growing participation of society and public opinion in
the shaping of the foreign policy of the state. Many Spaniards who had opposed the authoritarian
rule of Franco and in the democratisation period belonged to the electorate of the two main
opposition parties, the PSOE and PCE, perceived the United States as a superpower which had
supported Franco and made it possible for the regime to survive after the end of the Second
World War. This group opposed Spain’s membership of NATO as an organisation dominated by
the USA. On the other hand, for politicians whose history dated back to the previous regime
and who controlled the democratisation process in the years 1976–1982, NATO membership
was a factor which could strengthen the position of Spain in its relations with the USA and help
modernity the military forces. In the case of Polish society, the USA was a symbol of
democracy, and NATO a guarantor of independence from the USSR. Thus, the proposal for
accession to NATO was supported by virtually the whole society.

The participation of the opposition in the formal cycle of foreign policy and the growing role
of society in the shaping of foreign policy could in principle foster the modification of the
direction and priorities of the foreign policies of the two states, i.e. Poland should strive for
NATO membership, whereas Spain should gravitate away from the idea of NATO accession. In
the case of Poland the prognosis did come true, but in the case of Spain the actual events were
different, for three reasons.

First, what Spain saw was most of all a political transformation, whereas Poland underwent
comprehensive social and economic changes, combined with the process of becoming
independent from the USSR. Moreover, from the beginning of the democratisation until its end
(mid 1976 to the end of 1982), the Spanish transformation process was controlled by forces
which did advocate reform, but in fact were to a greater or lesser extent connected with the
Franco regime. Second, Spanish democratisation was not accompanied by radical changes in
the international situation. There were no new threats to the state’s security. Consequently, the
security issue was not a focal point of the transformation and that is why obtaining NATO
membership took place on the margins of Spanish political life until the time when the consent of
Parliament for membership of the Organization became necessary. Third, the priority of Spanish
government was the integration in the European Economic Community. The obstacles set in
1980 by French President Valéry Giscard d’Estaing caused a change in Spanish foreign policy
agenda. As a result, discussion on NATO accession was put off until the last possible moment.

Thanks to the UCD and AP, i.e. parties supporting NATO and having a majority in Parliament,
the government obtained the mandate to start formal preparation for NATO accession. In the
second half of 1981 the Parliament did witness a great debate involving the opponents of the
Alliance (PSOE, PCE) and its advocates (UCD, AP). The NATO issue was also the subject of a
public debate and an electoral campaign conducted by PSOE in the autumn of 1982, i.e. several
months after Spain’s official accession to NATO. After winning the elections the new
government of Felipe González, supported by the PSOE party, which had a parliamentary
majority, decided to ‘freeze’ the process of Spain’s accession to the NATO military structure
until the time of a referendum regarding Spain’s remaining in the Alliance. In spite of the
reluctance towards joining NATO declared by the PSOE, Spain did remain in the Alliance, and
the evolution of PSOE towards pro-Atlantic positions to a great extent resulted from external
pressure supported by the growing American military aid in the years 1982–1986 for the modernisation of the Spanish military forces and from the necessity to adapt to the reality of the Cold War. The referendum of March 1986, in which 52.53% accepted Spain’s remaining in NATO, made it possible to establish the ultimate political and social consensus on NATO membership.38

Due to the situation in Central and Eastern Europe, the issue of guaranteeing security was a priority in Polish foreign policy. Thus, the search for new security solutions dominated Polish foreign policy after 1989. The post-Solidarity forces, which gained the majority in Parliament after the 1991 elections, advocated close ties between Poland and the Western European structures – the EU and NATO39 – and extended definite support for the declarations of Krzysztof Skubiszewski, the Polish minister of foreign affairs, on the accession to NATO as a priority of Polish foreign policy.40 Only the Democratic Left Alliance (SLD), a post-Communist party, opposed Poland’s membership of NATO.41 It was only before the parliamentary elections of September 1993 that the attitude of the Alliance began to evolve towards supporting the idea of membership.42 The government appointed after the elections with the support of the SLD declared its intention to continue the foreign policy pursued by the post-Solidarity governments in the years 1991–1993.43 The consensus on accession to NATO which then occurred made it possible to avoid internal conflicts which accompanied the Spanish path to NATO.

Spain’s accession to NATO shows that internal changes in that state did not lead to the goal defined during Franco’s rule, i.e. NATO membership being abandoned. In the case of Poland, the democratic transformation was accompanied by a change in foreign policy orientation, which manifested itself in the attempts to join the Alliance. In fact, in both states undergoing the process of democratisation, political foundations were established which modified the decision-making process to such an extent that a change in foreign policy direction became possible. The fact that the Polish democratic changes were much more ‘revolutionary’ than those which had taken place in Spain only partially accounts for the continuation of the Spanish policy goals and the change in Polish foreign policy. When taking the decision to resign from NATO membership became possible, after the PSOE took power, the cabinet of González ultimately supported the Atlantic option, contrary to previous declarations. The analysis of the Spanish and Polish cases indicates that democratisation does offer possibilities of introducing substantial changes to the goals and directions of foreign policy, but it does not always lead to a change in the orientation of such policies. The unwilling attitude of the opposition and a part of society did not block Spain’s accession on NATO. In the case of Poland, striving for accession was supported by the consensus of political forces and public opinion. Would Poland’s accession to NATO have happened, however, if not for the favourable international conditions? Could Spain have failed to join NATO in the context of the Cold War? Analysing the international situation seems of key importance for the understanding of the problem of change/continuity in the foreign policies of the states undergoing the process of democratisation.

3. External conditions and accession on NATO

At the time when the respective democratisation processes began, Spain and Poland were on the fringes of the European regional system based on the states integrating in the European Communities/European Union, which had a transatlantic dimension (NATO, relations with the USA). For both states, ‘Europe’ was a reference point and full integration in the European structures was a primary goal. The closeness of the European system was undoubtedly a positive factor for the development of the two states, which at the time of the democratic transformation went through many changes preparing them for membership of NATO and the EC/EU. However, it should be noted that the closeness or participation in the European system imposed
certain solutions and to a considerable extent determined the choices of foreign policy directions in the two states, even more so since both Spain and Poland tried to join a system which for four decades of the Cold War was the main theatre of bipolar confrontation. The strong ties of the European system at the global level influenced the dynamics of regional relations and the process of Poland and Spain achieving NATO membership.

Spain’s accession to NATO took place during the slackening period of crisis and the beginning of the second Cold War. De-colonisation of Africa (independence of Angola and other Portuguese colonies) and the renewed crisis in the Middle East resulted in growing tension between the blocs in the first half of the 1970s. Another period of tensions began in the late 1970s, with the revolution in Iran and the Soviet Union entering Afghanistan. It was the beginning of the so called ‘second cold war’ (1979–1985). Due to these events, in the years 1973–1981 the significance of the Mediterranean region grew as the area of bipolar confrontation. In this context, Spain was becoming increasingly important for NATO. Accepting Spain, which offered direct access to the Mediterranean Sea and North Africa, as well as logistical support for the American actions in the Middle East, strengthened the North Atlantic Treaty Organization from the military perspective.

The transformations in the Mediterranean Basin coincided also with the ‘crisis of hegemony’, which the North Atlantic Alliance experienced in the same period. It turned out that the climate of détente (1962–1979) fostered the deepening of the differences between the European Allies and the USA. This situation weakened the cohesion of the Alliance. In addition, changes in the internal situations of some allies undermined the military credibility of the NATO southern wing and infringed its ideological coherence: the Greek–Turkish conflict over Cyprus, which was almost an open war between two members of the Alliance, for many years limited US access to military bases on the Greek and Turkish territories; the Portuguese revolution questioned Portugal’s membership of NATO; in a democratising Greece, in Italy and in France the cabinets included communists and socialists. As these changes took place mainly in the states of Mediterranean projection at the time when bipolar tension in the Mediterranean Basin grew, Spain’s membership of NATO not only contributed to strengthening the Alliance in military terms, but also became a symbol of its attractiveness and liveliness. In the face of the NATO crisis, the political aspect of the event was of significant importance.

In the international context of low flexibility (bipolar system) and in the face of the existing ties between Spain and the Western European security system, Spain’s joining NATO was not only natural, but in all ways desirable. This was especially so as even before Franco’s death the USA had supported the Spanish attempts to join, and the possibility of a democratising state breaking away from the Western security system could be treated as a result of the activities of the hostile bloc.

The process of Poland obtaining NATO membership coincided with the period after the end of the Cold War. The dissolution of the Warsaw Pact and the disintegration of the Soviet Union, i.e. the events which symbolised the end of the bipolar system, were accompanied by the shaping of the new post-Cold War order with a uni- or multi-polar structure, as some theorists then maintained. The end of the Cold War also coincided with the process of re-shaping relations between the players on the global and regional levels, which could also be observed in Europe. On the one hand, the attempts of the Cold War superpowers to maintain the dominant position in the region could be observed. In this period the USA managed to remain one of the main players in Europe, whereas the influences of Russia/USSR were seriously limited. On the other hand, the striving of the regional actors – the states belonging to the European Community – to strengthen integration in order to defend their interest more effectively was visible. It is worth noting that the tendency was then considered in the USA to be against American interests.
The dynamics of shaping relations at the European level after the end of the Cold War, which to some extent was a reflection of the race for position and influence in the region, had a considerable influence on Polish foreign policy, including the choice of the Atlantic option in Polish security policy. The occurrence of the new international system coincided with Poland looking for new solutions in the area of national security. Poland’s discomfort was provoked by the instability of Eastern and Central Europe, resulting from the political, social and economic transformation of the states of the socialist bloc and the disintegration of the USSR. In this situation, the probability of territorial conflicts increased and new transnational threats emerged, such as proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, migrations and organised crime.

The uncertain international situation and the great flexibility of the transforming international system made it possible for Poland to get close to the Western European security system without provoking violent reactions from Russia. The newly defined international system turned out ultimately to foster Poland’s membership of NATO, which resulted from two factors independent of Poland’s internal situation and the support which the idea of a foreign policy reorientation towards Western Europe enjoyed in Polish society and political elites.

On the one hand, the USA was interested in maintaining its position in Europe, and NATO was a guarantor of the position. After 1989 the USA tried to overcome the identity crisis which the organisation was experiencing as a result of the decreasing importance of the arguments justifying the existence of a defence pact after the end of the Cold War. The process of adapting NATO to the new international reality began as early as in 1989 and had several dimensions. In 1991 the political doctrine of NATO was changed in order to increase the political importance of the Organization. The process began of transforming the Alliance into an organisation which could offer military support to the stabilisation actions undertaken by the UN and CCSE/OSCE in Europe. The unstable situation in the Balkans fostered these transformations. Finally, steps were taken to broaden NATO’s geographical borders, in December 1991 the North Atlantic Cooperation Council was created, a forum of cooperation between NATO and the democratising states of Central and Eastern Europe. Thanks to that, NATO became an instrument for promoting and maintaining democracy and the main element of the new European security system. Soon after that the idea of a Partnership for Peace was born. It meant even closer cooperation between NATO and the democratising states and it ultimately resulted in the enlargement of the Organization in the east.

On the other hand, the emerging EU proved incapable of guaranteeing security to the democratising states of Central Europe. The Common Foreign and Security Policy and the Western European Union did not give Poland such security guarantees as NATO could offer. Obviously, if the USA had not been interested in cooperation with Poland and its membership in NATO, the European option in Polish security policy would have become stronger, but at the time when the interest occurred (end of 1991/early 1992) and consolidated (1993), the Atlantic option could become a priority in Polish security policy.

The accession of Spain and Poland to NATO occurred at two completely different moments in history. It might seem, then, that the external conditions of the two processes were entirely different. However, analysis of the international system from the perspectives of the two states achieving NATO membership shows many similarities in the role external conditions played in the two processes. Without the favourable international system the accession of Spain and Poland to NATO would have been impossible, even if there existed strong internal inclinations in this direction. The case of Spain confirms that in spite of resistance on the part of certain political forces, the international system did enforce Spain’s accession to NATO and remaining in the Organization. Decisions of the most significant importance for the accession of this state to NATO occurred at times when international conditions were most favourable. The international pressure of the years 1974–1976 facilitated the establishment of the Spanish–American
Council, responsible for Spain’s preparations for membership, whereas the decision to commence formal efforts for membership was taken in the years 1980–1981, at the time of growing tension between the two blocs. In the case of Poland, the decision to join NATO was taken between 1992 and 1995, namely at the time when the post-Cold War order was being established, i.e. in a period of great flexibility. The NATO membership of the two states was included in the strategy aimed at overcoming the crisis which the North Atlantic Treaty Organization was experiencing. Consequently, the USA played a decisive role in the whole process, actively participating in creating the mechanisms which prepared Spain and Poland for membership and helping the two states adapt their military forces to NATO.

4. Conclusions

Democratic transformation is identified with change that leads primarily to political reformation, and which may be accompanied by social and economic changes. However, it need not be accompanied by the reorientation of foreign policy. NATO membership, which was a foreign policy goal before and after the commencement of the democratic changes in Spain, and was achieved in the final stage of democratisation, indicates a continuity in the direction of foreign policy, defined in the Franco period.59 In the case of Polish foreign policy in the transformation period, the situation is clearly different. Poland’s membership of NATO indicates a change in foreign policy direction.

A comparative analysis of the Spanish and Polish cases shows that reorientation of foreign policy in a democratising state results to a large extent from external conditions at the global and regional levels. The conditions may hinder or accelerate such a reorientation. The example of Spain shows that in a firm and stable international system (the bipolar system) it is extremely difficult to change the direction of foreign policy, even if there are internal premises such as democratisation, well-organised opposition supporting the change and social support. In the case of Poland, the flexible and unstable international system made it possible to radically change the direction of its foreign policy. Obviously there were internal premises (democratisation, social support, the system of political parties), which would not have been enough to generate the reorientation of foreign policy. It should also be noted that without the changes in the USSR, not even democratisation would have been possible in the states of Central and Eastern Europe. The United States, on the other hand, played a key role in establishing new ties between Poland and the transatlantic security system.

The conclusions of this comparative analysis should be treated as an introduction to a broader analysis on the subject of the restructuring of foreign policy in a democratising state. Democratic transformation processes which took place in Europe from the mid-1970s provide broad empirical material for further scientific work in this area.

Notes


4. See Rosati et al., Foreign Policy Restructuring.


6. This thesis is advocated by, inter alia, Pereira: “Transición y política exterior: el nuevo reto de la historiografía española.”

7. For more on Spain’s and Poland’s road to NATO, see Wojna: La política de seguridad en España y Polonia en la transición hacia la democracia; Wojna: El camino de España y Polonia hacia la Alianza Atlántica.


9. A through analysis of the relations between Spain and United States is given in Viñas, En las garras del águila.


13. It should be noted that it was the period when tensions in the Mediterranean region increased considerably. More information on the issue is given in the section devoted to external conditions.


15. Smith, M. NATO enlargement during the Cold War. New York: Palgrave, 2000, 141. See also Viñas: En las garras del águila, 429–41. There are no monographic studies on the Spanish–American Council (access to the documents in the archives is not allowed). In the understanding of the role of this structure the following may be of help: “Report of the Department of State, February 6, 1976.” Department of State Bulletin 22 March 1976, 362–4; “President Ford’s Message to the Senate, transmitted on February 18.” Department of State Bulletin 22 March 1976, 362; “Statement by Ambassador at Large Robert McCloskey, made before the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations on March 3.” Department of State Bulletin 22 March 1976, 364–6.


19. For more on this issue see Rodrigo, F. “La inserción de España en la política de seguridad occidental.” In Gillespie et al., Las relaciones exteriores de la España democrática, 86–8. See also the statement by the Prime Minister Leopold Calvo Sotelo, Diario de Sesiones del Congreso de los Diputados no. 143 (18 de febrero de 1981): 9156–7.


30. The Spanish Constitution was adopted at an early stage of the transformation, whereas its Polish counterpart was adopted only in the final period of democratisation. From 1992 until the Constitution was adopted in 1997, the so-called small Constitution was in force, i.e. the “Constitutional Act of 17 October 1992 on the mutual relations between the legislative and executive authorities of the Republic of Poland and on territorial self-government”. On the Spanish constitution, see Villeamí, O. Comentarios a la Constitución Española de 1978. Madrid: Cortes Generales, Editoriales de Derecho Reunidos, 1998; Falla Garrido, F. Comentarios a la Constitución Española. Madrid: Civitas, 1980. For more information on the Polish constitution, see Witkowski, Z., ed. Prawo Konstytucyjne. Toruń: TNOIK, 2002.


32. Between 1978 and 1981 the number of opponents to NATO accession increased from 15% to 43%, and the number of proponents fell from 27% to 13%. Data quoted after: Arija, J.M. “Los españoles ante la OTAN.” Las ideas para la democracia no. 1 (1984): 296 (monographic issue La política de defensa y la OTAN).

33. Consideration of the relationship between the Spanish membership of NATO and external conditions should include a mention of the unsuccessful military coup of 23 February 1981. The NATO supporters argued later that membership of the organisation would help them achieve democratic and civilian control over the military forces. It should be remembered, however, that the decision on Spain’s accession to NATO had been taken by the Spanish government before the coup, not after it. Thus we can discuss only the influence of the coup on the decision already taken, not on the process of reaching it.
34. See “Polacy w NATO i Unii Europejskiej.” Report prepared in February 1997 by Ośrodek Badań Opinii Publicznej, Warsaw, archives of OBOP. Between 1992 and 1997 the support for NATO membership ranged from 77% to 90%.

35. On the relationship between NATO accession and EEC integration see Rodrigo, F. “La inserción de España en la política de seguridad occidental.” In Gillespie et al., Las relaciones exteriores de la España democrática, 83–6.

36. Transcripts of the debates in Diario de Sesiones del Congreso de los Diputados. Comisión de Asuntos Exteriores no. 41, 42, 43, of 6, 7 and 8 October 1981, 1802–2048; Diario de Sesiones del Congreso de los Diputados no. 191, 192 and 193 of 27, 28 and 29 October 1981, 11295–11454.

37. Speech by Felipe González, candidate for the presidency of the government of 30 November 1982, Diario de Sesiones del Congreso de los Diputados no. 3, 30 de noviembre de 1982, 333.

38. The PSOE evolution in this period was discussed by Mendez Lago, M. La estrategia organizativa del Partido Socialista Obrero Español (1975–1996). Madrid: CIS, 2000. The new pro-Atlantic position of the PSOE government was illustrated by the speech of F. González of 23 October 1984. In the so-called ‘Decalogue’ the president of the government advocates Spain’s remaining in NATO on three conditions: Spain should remain outside the military structure of the Alliance, its territory should be de-nuclearised and its policy in the Western European Union should be active. Diario de Sesiones del Congreso de los Diputados no. 157, 23 de octubre de 1984, 7070–7092. The PSOE evolution in this period was discussed by Mendez Lago: La estrategia organizativa del Partido Socialista Obrero Español (1975–1996).


42. The change in the attitude of the SLD can be explained as a consequence of an adjustment of the party to the new international and home situation.


46. The ruling elites were aware of the growing importance of Spain and tried to take advantage of the fact in order to achieve Spain’s integration in NATO. Informe anual sobre Ejércitos Extranjeros (1974). Instrucción 269–2 del EMC, Madrid, Estado Mayor Central del Ejército, 2ª Sección, octubre 1975, difusión limitada (limited circulation), 4–5.


49. In the context of the Arab–Israeli war of 1973, A.A. Hartman said that the national interests of the Alliance members won above the interests of the whole bloc. “The impact of the Middle East Crisis on the Atlantic Alliance.” Statements by Arthur A. Hartman, Assistant Secretary for European Affairs, before the Subcommittee on Europe and the Subcommittee on the Near East and South Asia of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, on 19 February, in The Department of State Bulletin, 8 March, 1974, 279.


55. It seems that in the first years after the end of the Cold War, the USA perceived the EU involvement in Central Europe as a factor which could result in weakening the American position. American actions (including the development of bilateral relations with the states in the region and supporting the idea of NATO enlargement) were consequently aimed at increasing US influence in the region. The thesis may be too far-reaching, but the memoirs of the Secretary General of Western European Union seem to confirm it. Van Eekelen, W. Debating European security 1948–1998. Bruxelles: Sdu Publishers, Center for European Policy Studies, 1998, 75–8. See also the transcript of the so-called Bartholomew Telegrams in Van Eekelen, 340–4.


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Bibliography


