

Aleksander M. Lubojemski
Leiden University (Netherlands)

Finding Poland's International Position

Abstract: The changing political system of the XXI century has brought many shifts not only in the global balance of power but also in various regional balances scattered across the globe. The rise of national power in countries beforehand classified as small powers or other equivalents has forced to once again place these states in the newly created balances of power. Amongst these states is Poland, whose national power has grown substantially in the last decade. Hence, it is necessary to analyze how Poland compares to other states in the international system, on a global and regional level, and through this evaluate what Poland's international position is. The article aims at assessing Polish national power and roles in regional initiatives to examine how Poland is placed in the global and regional balance of power.

Keywords: *national power, middle power, regional power, Poland, militaristic capabilities, economic strength, Eastern Europe*

Introduction

The international balance of power at the beginning of the 21st century is changing. Many former great powers and superpowers are now declining and new states are destined to take their places. The developing situation in world politics calls upon scholars, analysts and politicians to take a closer look at which states are gaining national power, thus, climbing the ranks of the international political stage and which are losing their former positions. China, Brazil or India have been named by some (Białoskórski, Kobryński, Sułek, 2017) as the next superpowers which will undoubtedly decide on the most pressing matters in international relations. However, apart from potential and existing great powers or superpowers, it is also vital to examine other positions in the international system, such as middle powers, small powers and regional powers.

Poland has been seen by some authors as a rising power in the international system (Friedman, 2009) and therefore may play an integral part in world, or local, politics. This paper seeks to examine the current position of Poland in the global context and in the

regional or local background. The main research question placed in this paper is: what is Poland's position on the global and regional level of the international system? It therefore inquires about how Poland and its national power relates to other states in the system, both in the global and regional contexts.

The working hypothesis of the paper is that Poland is a middle power in the global international system, having national power on a medium level, and that Poland is aspiring to become a regional power or leader in its local "neighborhood". The methods used to analyze Poland's position in the world will be mainly qualitative with case study methods, thus evaluating Poland as a middle power and regional power/leader, being the main focus. Process tracing will also be used in the last part of this study, to examine the initiatives Poland has taken to put itself in the position of a regional power.

The article will start by analyzing national power and especially its components, which will help to compare it with the power of other states in the international system. After this, a brief look at how national power corresponds to the various international positions or roles that exist in scholarly debate. Thirdly, the components of Poland's national power shall be examined in the global sense, hence compared to all the countries in the global system of politics and through this, Poland's position may be deduced. Lastly, Poland shall be studied in the regional context. Its national power shall be compared to other countries in the local vicinity and an analysis of initiatives and policies which try to place Poland as a regional power will be conducted.

Measuring Power

Power is one of the most essential components of international politics. Power relations and capabilities define in many ways the foreign policy a state is able to produce and how it may behave in the international system. Many theorists have studied what political power is and how it is used in the international system (Mearsheimer, 2001, p. 32–34; Waltz, 1979, p. 194), yet the most important manifestation of power in international relations is national power (Morgenthau, 1965, p. 102). National power is made up of many components or elements that combined give a better image of general state capacity and strength. Hans Morgenthau, one of the pioneers of international relations as an academic field, established some of the most important components of national power. Among them were such materialistic factors as population, the size and strength of an army or the availability of natural resources and non-materialistic factors such as national morale, national character or the quality of government (Morgenthau, 1965).

Evaluating and assessing the relative strength of a country may pose various problems for academics and politicians alike. No one method of assessment and calculation of national power has been created that all scholars would agree upon. A multitude of methods of evaluating national power have been created since international relations and strategic studies have flourished as academic disciplines (Höhn, 2011). These models and formulas

have all counted upon diverse components of a state's power and how they correlate to each other.

The most important factors must be underlined to be able to determine the national power of Poland and to further establish its position in the international system. The key indicators of the strength of a state are without a doubt the economic factors, militaristic capabilities, population and geographical territory; with economic output and militaristic strength being the most substantial (Sułek, 2001, pp. 90–91). These components may be assumed as the most vital elements of national power and should always therefore be considered when evaluating the relative strength of a state in the international system.

Power Rankings

Having analyzed the fundamental aspects regarding national power and its components, a short description should be made about the various positions and roles states have in the international system. On a global level the most frequently used positions or ranks of power used in academic debate, and also in politics, are superpower, great power, middle power and small power (Holbraad, 1986; Patience, 2014). This categorization therefore gives a simple division of states based on their national power in the global international system. The main focus of many international relations scholars has been on great powers or superpowers, as these states have the largest influence on global affairs and predominantly govern the whole political arena. Nevertheless, all states have a role to play in international politics and may be categorized into some position. As the working hypothesis for this paper is that Poland, in the global sense, may be categorized as a middle power, it is essential to note what a middle power is. Carsten Holbraad (1986, p. 78–80) in his book *Middle Powers in International Politics* specified middle powers as states in which intermediate power influence which may be best recognized on assessing national power through material and actual indicators such as GNP. Furthermore, while arguing that middle powers have a limited, yet actual role on the global stage of politics, he notices that some scholars also point out that when delimiting a specific region, middle powers may have a more important and powerful role (Holbraad, 1986, p. 74–75). This short characterization should give a good image of what a middle power is and what are some of its features.

Aside from the global level, the research article also asks about Poland's position in the region. To analyze Poland's status in its local vicinity, it is first vital to examine the notion of a regional power and summarize its main characteristics. After the fall of the bipolar world in 1991 many scholars had started to pursue theories of regional security, hence trying to differentiate the different types of powers on the more local level, rather than on the global systematic level (Buzan, Wæver, 2003). This categorization method tries to establish the relative power a country holds in relation to other states in a distinct region and the influence it has over the other states in the region. Consequently, regional powers may be characterized as states that have a large influence on a given region or territory without having large

influence on global politics (Buzan, Wæver, 2003, p. 43–45). Martin Wight (1979) classified the vast majority of states in the international system into two categories: middle powers and regional powers. He characterized the second as states that have a significant amount of national power in a specific region with compelling cultural and economic ties with the states (Wight, 1979, p. 61). According to Detlef Nolte (2010), for a state to be recognized as a regional power, it has to meet a few requirements, some of which are:

- the state articulates the conception of it being the leader of a region that is geographically, politically and economically delimited;
- the state is politically, culturally and economically interconnected with the region;
- the state displays the material (military, economic, demographic), organizational (political) and ideological resources for regional power projection;
- the state exerts its influence in various regional political structures of cooperation and tries to create a regional identity;
- the state defines the regional security agenda in a specific and unique way.

This summary of the traits a regional power should give an excellent insight into the problem of regional leadership and will better help evaluate if Poland may be categorized as such a state.

This part of the paper outlined the fundamental issues concerning the categorization of states in the international system, especially the notions of middle powers and regional powers which will largely help in regards to analyzing Poland's position. The main difference between these two categories is the background on which they are presented. Middle powers are evaluated through the global context based mainly on the national power they possess. Regional powers on the other hand are states that do not influence the global scene in a definite way, but have a large significance in a delimited region or vicinity. It is however noteworthy to remember that many states that have been recognized as regional powers have at the same time been acknowledged as middle powers (Nolte, 2010).

The Global Scene

The first background on which Poland's national power shall be evaluated is the global scene, therefore, whether Poland is a superpower, great power, middle power or a small power. To do this, the economic, military, population and land indicators of national power will be analyzed and, on this basis, compared with the same indicators of the other states in the international system. This should give a comprehensive view on how Poland stands in the global political structure.

The economy of a state may be measured by a multitude of different factors, however amongst the most notable indicators of economic strength some do stand out: gross domestic product (GDP), GDP per capita, GDP growth or the value of exports (and the general balance of trade) with the annual GDP at market prices being presented by scholars as the best indi-

cator of economic output (Holbraad, 1986, p. 78). To receive a good view on how the Polish economy positions itself in as to other economies, all of these factors will be examined.

The gross domestic product (at current market prices) of the Polish economy for the year of 2017 was a little bit over 526 billion USD, placing it as the 23rd strongest economy in the world (World Bank, 2018). The Polish economy is placed in the same place when considering purchasing power parity (World Bank, 2018). The GDP growth was according to one source 4,81% in 2017 (World Bank, 2018), however the OECD had presented data indicating that the Polish economy will grow over 5% in 2018, which will be one of the highest values in Europe (OECD, 2018, p. 173). The GDP per capita at purchasing power parity, a good indicator of the standard of living in a country, in Poland in 2017 was around 29 thousand dollars, placing Poland at the 44th place. Lastly, the Polish balance of trade has substantially risen, both in values of export and import and in the latest years has obtained a positive trade balance, as indicated in Table 1. According to the CIA World Factbook, the value of Polish exports in 2017 was 221 billion USD, which positioned Poland as 26th largest exporter in the world (CIA World Factbook, 2018). This summary gives a short yet comprehensive insight into the status of the Polish economy and how it correlates with other states in the international system.

Table 1. Polish balance of trade 2005–2016

Year	2005	2010	2016
Import (in millions of dollars)	101538,8	178062,9	200672,4
Export (in millions of dollars)	89378,1	159757,6	205047,7
Balance of trade (in millions of dollars)	-12160,7	-18305,3	+4375,3

Source: Own elaboration based on data from Yearbook of Foreign Trade Statistics of Poland published by the Central Statistical Office, Warsaw 2017.

The militaristic factor is the second most important aspect of national power. Military strength is seen by some scholars as a crucial aspect of international politics and an essential feature of power relations among states (Mearsheimer, 2001, p. 57). Hence, analyzing the militaristic factor of national power is inescapable when establishing the position of a state in the international system. Militaristic power is deemed by some as the decisive aspect of world politics however as the strength of a military depends in many ways on economic factors, military expenses being a clear example of this (Sułek, 2001), it was imperative to first present the state of Poland's economy and then the strength of its armed forces.

The Polish Armed Forces account to 105 thousand active professional soldiers with 20 thousand in reserve and 4 thousand currently undertaking training which gives around 129 thousand soldiers taken all together (Ministry of National Defence, 2017). In 2018 however, the Ministry of National Defence had stated that the army now accounts to over 140 thousand soldiers, because a new territorial military formation was formed (Ministry of National

Defence, 2018). With around 460 aircrafts, over 4000 mechanized vehicles and 83 naval ships Poland remains a strong militaristic power in Europe (GlobalFirePower, 2018).

Poland currently spends 2% of its GDP on the military, although this number is supposed to rise in the upcoming years to 2,2% by 2020 and 2,5% by 2030 (Palowski, 2017). Even though the Polish government spends a high percentage of its GDP in comparison to other European countries (SIPRI, 2018), some sources state that many aspects of the Polish army are out of date (Supreme Audit Office, 2017). Even though some aspects of the Polish military may be archaic or obsolete, GlobalFirePower, one of the leading analytical rankings on national militaristic power, places Poland as the second most powerful army in Eastern Europe and the sixth most powerful in Europe and the 22nd most powerful in the world (GlobalFirePower, 2018). Furthermore, close relations with the United States within NATO and on a bilateral basis bolsters Polish security with the construction of an American anti-ballistic missile defense system in Redzikowo or the purchase of the Patriot rocket system being clear examples of this. Poland is also a member of the Permanent Structured Cooperation within the Common Security and Defense Policy of the European Union, further enhancing its security.

The last two components of national power are population and land. The current estimated population of Poland for 2018 was around 38 million inhabitants, which places Poland as the 37th most populated country in the world (CIA World Factbook, 2018). However, the population growth rate for Poland stands as one of the worst on the globe, as the CIA World Factbook positions the Polish growth rate at the 206th place (CIA World Factbook, 2018). This does not bode well for Poland, as population has a severe impact on both the economy, through the amount of workforce, and the military, through the number of soldiers a country possesses. The territory under control of the Polish state accounts to over 312 thousand square kilometers which places it as the 71st largest country in the world (CIA, 2018). Although the territory is not large, it has the advantage of being a 'bridge' between the "East" and the "West", which may give gains to the economy through being a transport and logistical pathway.

Having examined the most significant elements of national power, it is now vital to analyze Poland's position in the global balance of power. The hypothesis of this paper is that Poland may be classified as a middle power, as many scholars and analysts have labeled Poland as such in the past (Patience: 2014; Holbraad, 1983, p. 90) and present (Zajęc, 2016; Spero, 2009; Nagorski, 2006). The overall Polish national power should therefore confirm this and with a GDP which places it as the 23 biggest economy in the world, militaristic strength ranking as the 22nd army in the world, a population of around 38 million people and a territory of 300 thousand square kilometers Poland may be categorized as such. According to two indexes of national power Poland is ranked as either the 25th most powerful country in the world (Białoskórski, Kobryński, Sułek, 2017) or the 27th most powerful (Instytut Europa, 2017).

Poland and the Region

Having analyzed Poland's position in the global political system, it is important to view the region of which Poland is a part of and how it correlates with it. The short characterization of a regional power developed earlier in the paper will help study Poland as such a state, therefore, firstly it is imperative to establish which region shall be analyzed. Nolte had written that a regional power be interconnected by culture, economy and politics with the states encompassing its region of influence. In the case of Poland, this region would encompass both the Central-Eastern European territory, thus the countries of Hungary, Czech Republic and Slovakia, with which Poland has historical together with political ties (Batt, 2002) and large parts of Eastern Europe, therefore Ukraine, Belarus and Lithuania, territories that were once part of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth as well as later the Second Polish Republic which share strong cultural, political and historical binds (Prizel, 1998). Focusing on these two territories allows a better analysis on Poland's position in its local vicinity and its possible aspirations for becoming a regional power.

To examine potential Polish leadership in these regions, it is once more important to analyze Poland's national power, however this time, in comparison to the regional background. As was pointed out, the Polish gross domestic product for 2017 was over 526 million US Dollars, which makes it the largest economy in the Central-Eastern and Eastern Europe area, excluding Russia, with a GDP over two times bigger than the second state in this ranking, the Czech Republic. Accordingly, the GDP growth of Poland for 2017 was one of the highest in Eastern Europe, falling behind only Romania and Slovenia (World Bank, 2018).

Table 2. Gross domestic product for countries in Central-Eastern and Eastern Europe

Country	Gross domestic product at market prices in 2017 in millions of USD
Poland	526,465
Czech Republic	215,725
Romania	211,883
Hungary	139,135
Ukraine	112,154
Slovak Republic	95,769
Bulgaria	58,220
Croatia	55,213
Belarus	54,456
Slovenia	48,769
Lithuania	47,168
Serbia	41,431

Source: Own elaboration based on World Bank data (2018, November 2018).

While Poland's foreign trade and exports have grown in general, as seen in Table 1, the number of these exports to the Central-Eastern European region remains low however – an important indicator on how Poland cooperates with regional countries. Even though there was over a 22% increase in exported goods to the region, the export to Central-Eastern Europe accounts to a little over 5,5% of the overall share of Polish export for the first three quarters of 2017 (CSO, 2017). The Polish government has stated that one of the main goals of regional cooperation in the upcoming years is to increase the number of exports to countries in Central-Eastern Europe (Strategia Polskiej Polityki Zagranicznej, 2017). This value should rise if Poland would want to increase its influence in the region and pursue a leading political position.

Polish FDI (Foreign Direct Investment) in the Central-Eastern and Eastern European region remains low. The highest Polish FDI outflow in 2016 was to Luxembourg being over 4800 million US dollars, where Hungary is at the top of Central-Eastern Europe with a little over 900 million US dollars in 2016 (National Bank of Poland, 2017), with other countries being even lower. This does not present a good situation for Polish investments in the neighboring region. Although Polish FDI in the region was not as high as some would hope it would be, Poland still has important investments made in neighboring countries – a clear example is “Orlen Lietuva” the largest company in Lithuania that is owned by the Orlen, a national Polish concern.

Economically, Poland is the strongest, excluding Russia, country in Central-Eastern and Eastern Europe dominating in terms of GDP. However, Poland's economic interactions within the region still remain low, thus creating obstacles in establishing itself as a potential regional power. It is noteworthy to mention that according to the Globalization and World Cities Research Network the Polish capital, Warsaw, is an alpha global city, the only such city in Central-Eastern and Eastern Europe (GaWC, 2016), which adds to Polish prestige in the region on an economic and social level.

In Eastern and Central Eastern Europe Poland's military is therefore either the second strongest, if counting Russia, or the strongest, if excluding Russia. Poland remains as one of the most important allies of the United States in Eastern Europe, with the relocation of NATO troops in Poland. The close relationship between the United States and Poland may seem attractive to countries in the Central Eastern European region that also prefer to maintain close relations with the United States and with Poland having a strong partnership, these states may view favorable terms with Poland as a way to strengthen their ties with the United States, hence may tend to see Poland as an important country in the regional balance of power (Zaborowski, Longhurt, 2003).

In terms of the additional elements of national power, Poland ranks as the second largest state in the region and the second most populous, being behind of Ukraine in both instances (CIA World Factbook, 2018). Combining all these components of power, a clear image may be seen as Poland being the strongest, or at least one of the strongest, states in the Eastern European region. In accordance to the theoretical aspects of regional powership analyzed

beforehand, possessing the necessary resources to project state power into the region is one of the conditions of being recognized as a regional power. Consequently, Poland seems to fulfill this aspect, therefore, it is now vital to analyze the different methods of power projection in the region, especially based on initiatives and structured cooperation.

The first regional political initiative in which Poland plays a key part is the Visegrad Group. Established in 1991 to create a decent arena for cooperation to help the four countries of Central-Eastern Europe to repair their economies and social institutions with the goal to rejoin the “West”. After all of the V4 countries had joined NATO and the EU, the group seemed to lose its meaning, however tensions with the European Union and the events in Ukraine from 2014 onwards have given new purpose for the group. The Visegrad countries have earned a reputation of being opposed to many political aspirations that many mainstream EU politicians hold deep and they have been called more than once “illiberal democracies” (The Economist, 2016). Right wing parties that have started to take hold of governments in Poland, Hungary, Slovakia and the Czech Republic have created a new political direction in the regional sense, one that is opposing mainstream European politics. The governments of Poland and Hungary have been seen as the leaders of this new political wave, yet as Hungary does not have the national capabilities of Poland, the Law and Justice government may acquire the position of leadership. The image of Poland as a leader of these so called growing “illiberal democracies” is important in determining the position of Poland in the regional system. Through common political visions regional countries may put faith in Poland’s national capabilities, hence, start treating them as a regional power. Common views on European politics may develop into a unified agenda with Poland as their leader in a “fight” with some EU institutions.

An important project inside the Visegrad Group in which Poland has underlined its leading position is the Visegrad Battlegroup. The Visegrad Battlegroup is a security initiative functioning in the system of European Union battle groups, a form of activity regulated by the Common Security and Defense Policy in which one battlegroup, made up of soldiers from neighboring countries, shall be on standby (Quille, 2006). The Battlegroup had been formed to form better security cooperation in the Visegrad Group with the first standby rotation took place in 2016. Right from the beginning the governments of all V4 countries had stated that they wished to keep the Battlegroup as a permanent initiative (Visegrad Group, 2014). The Battlegroup underlines Poland’s regional position through many ways. Apart from the fact that the Polish military is the strongest out of the whole Battlegroup, Poland is the official “framework nation” when the group is on standby, meaning it leads the group, and the operational headquarters were located in Kraków during the first rotational standby. The Visegrad Battlegroup is deemed as an important regional undertaking and Poland’s role in it is of utmost importance, hence, also raising Poland’s position in the Visegrad Group as a whole.

The second political initiative in which Poland has been taking part in, and even created, that clearly underlines a possible leading role in the near future is the Three Seas Initiative.

The Three Seas Initiative was brought into life by Poland and Croatia and groups together twelve countries of Eastern Europe, from Estonia to Bulgaria, who in theory share various sorts of problems and challenges with each other. The main objectives of the Three Seas Initiative are the construction of new sets of infrastructures for the region, energetic cooperation and digital communication (Joint Statement on the Three Seas Initiative, 2016). The first summit took place in Dubrovnik, Croatia and the second summit took place in Warsaw, Poland, where the President of the United States, Donald Trump, participated – a widely discussed topic in various Polish news outlets.

The construction of a new set of roads linking these countries together, such as Via Carpatia or Via Baltica, are surely one of the main undertakings in trying to obtain the first aim of the initiative. This would fit to the plans of the Polish government to stimulate more trade with the countries of Eastern Europe. The idea of creating a gas port in Świnoujście, Poland and may be called an ambitious plan to create a regional gas hub out of Poland. This has been criticized by some, because the Three Seas countries have no true reliable source of gas, therefore, they would still need to import it and would do so from the United States for example. Donald Trump taking part in the Initiative's summit and the US support for creating a gas hub out of Poland may be a way to export their own gas to these countries (Engdahl, 2017).

In Poland the Three Seas Initiative has brought up memories of the “Intermarium” – a geopolitical vision of regional leadership brought into international politics by Józef Piłsudski in the interwar period. The Three Seas Initiative however is, at least for now, strictly an economic project that aims at integrating the countries of Eastern Europe, therefore, the Three Seas Initiative is not the modern embodiment of Piłsudski's political vision (Góraszopiński, 2017). It is however possible that Poland may use the Initiative in the future to further its geopolitical interests in the region (Nałęcz, 2017).

Having outlined the two main regional initiatives in Central-Eastern and Eastern Europe, a proper image has been made on how international politics have been unfolding in the local vicinity. Poland has been playing an active part in both initiatives, trying to obtain the position of a leader. Whether these initiatives, and Polish activity within them, will bring Poland enough prestige and influence for it to be recognized as a regional power will yet to be seen. However, in regards to the characterization of a regional power outlined at the beginning of the paper, a few things may be analyzed. Firstly, Poland is connected through historical, cultural and political ties with its neighboring country, thus delimiting a clear region in which it acts. Secondly, Poland's national power is by far the strongest in the region, creating an open position for it to be a local leader, and possibly a regional power. Thirdly, Poland tries to exert its influence through structured regional cooperation, both as a leading member of the Visegrad Group and the same in the Three Seas Initiative. Lastly, it tries to create a semi-security agenda, as may be seen through the example of the Visegrad Battlegroup and close relations with the United States. This summary should show that Poland may indeed possess the characteristics of a regional power and in the future may be recognized as one.

Conclusions

This article tried to analyze and determine Poland's position in the international system, both in a global and regional context. Through examining national power and power rankings in world politics, it had tried to grasp how Poland compares with other states. According to two indexes of national power Poland is ranked as either the 25th most powerful country in the world (Białoskórski, Kobryński, Sułek, 2017) or the 27th most powerful (Instytut Europa, 2017). Its economic and militaristic strength combined with territory and population clearly qualify Poland as being a middle power in the global balance of power.

The second part of the article tried to analyze Poland on a more regional level. Thanks to having outlined what characterizes a regional power, some guidelines have been made to further evaluate Poland's possible position as such a state. Poland indeed is the strongest state in its region, which it is interconnected with through historical and political ties. Furthermore, Poland has played a major part in regional structured cooperation, trying to ascertain its position as a potential leader in the local vicinity and tries to formulate a regional security agenda. Poland is also seen by some as a leader of the infamous "illiberal democracies" of the Visegrad Group, which are in opposition to many mainstream EU policies. This may give Poland a new momentum in trying to obtain a powerful position in its region. However, Poland's economic connectivity with its regional partners is still low and new security initiatives on a pan-European level, such as PESCO, may have obstructed Poland's ideas of regional security cooperation, especially in regards to the EU Visegrad Battlegroup. Moreover, different political views in regards to Russia, the United States and the European Union may also cause tensions within these regional initiatives. Whether Poland will be recognized as a regional power, will be seen in the upcoming years and will be mainly based on the possible further growth of its national power, especially in regards to economy, and the potential effectiveness of the regional initiatives in which it takes part.

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Author

Aleksander M. Lubojemski

Leiden University, Department of Political Science.