Witold Waszczykowski, Law and Justice (PiS) MP and vice chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee in the Sejm, talks with WBJ about his party's vision for Poland's foreign policy and his assessment of the roots of the confrontation between PiS and the ruling Civic Platform (PO)

Ewa Boniecka: The Polish government's foreign policy is often an area of heated confrontation between the ruling Civil Platform and your party, Law and Justice. How do you assess Poland's policy towards Europe?

Witold Waszczykowski: Let me start by recalling that the break in Poland's foreign policy began in 2007, when Civic Platform decided at the start of its election campaign that foreign policy would be a field of conflict between it and Law and Justice. Up until 2007, the majority of those in power in Poland presented similar conceptions of our foreign policy, which were expressed by various presidents [including] Aleksander Kwaśniewski and the late Lech Kaczyński.
The view was that Poland should play a proactive role in Europe, so positions were taken to allow us – in institutions such as NATO and the EU, to which we had earlier acceded – to participate in shaping policy, at least towards the east [of the European Union]. This concept of Poland playing a proactive role in European foreign policy was reinforced by our close cooperation with the United States and our role as spokesperson for the interests of the Central and Eastern Europe region. This policy was carried out by all previous prime ministers, ministers and presidents, who made efforts to increase cooperation with the Baltic states and the Visegrad Group [of the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia].
When Civic Platform gained power, they decided that this policy was too ambitious and that our active policy towards Eastern Europe brought us into conflict with Russia and did not benefit us in the EU.
The present government now conducts a minimalist foreign policy, which has led it to rid itself of those instruments which gave Poland influence in European institutions, and is instead satisfied with the position given to us by the strongest of its members, first of which is Germany. And on this clientelist policy, PiS is not in agreement.

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What is PiS offering as an alternative?
We emphasize that to make Polish European policy substantial and meaningful, it is necessary to rebuild Poland's position in our region. We must return to serious talks with the Baltic states and countries in the CEE and assure them that Poland is ready

and willing to be a spokesperson for our region's interests and aspirations in the European Union.
We are a large and politically important European region and a big economic market for the West. But this would only be truly acknowledged by other EU members if we act as a unified whole, with Poland, due to its size, geopolitical location and economic potential, acting as a link between Eastern and Western members. Such a strategy would strengthen the effectiveness of the whole of the EU, as well as cooperation between its members, and should be used as an advantage by Poland's leaders.
PiS emphasizes that Poland should return to such an ambitious policy and lead a meaningful dialogue with countries from the Baltic and CEE regions, who have many common interests and common worries which should be taken into account in shaping EU policy.

Let's turn to some specifics about the present situation in the EU. How do you see the situation, and do you have any suggestions about how to rescue the euro?
I consider the whole concept of introducing the euro 10 years ago to have been wrong and in contradiction to the direction in which the world is developing. In the last 200 years there have been democratic revolutions in many countries, because societies demanded to have an influence on taxes and on shaping budgets. The evident political prerogative of the state is to make decisions about printing money and about its own financial policy.
The euro was introduced without providing the European Union with political control over it, and this was the first mistake.
The second one is economic, because the common currency could [only] apply to areas that have a similar level of development. It is evident now that this is not so, therefore during the present crisis there is discussion about establishing political control over the euro zone and transforming the European Union into a kind of federation. But EU members do not want a federation, so in my opinion it is possible that countries will return to using their national currencies and that the euro will be kept as a nominal currency, used in financial dealings between countries.

It appears as if the Smolensk catastrophe currently plays a dominant role in how PiS formulates its own stance towards Russia. Is this correct?
The issue of the Smolensk catastrophe is a consequence of the "collision character" of Polish-Russian relations, which has been in existence for years, because Poland and Russia have different views about how relations are set in Europe.

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Of course, Putin's biggest ambition would be to recreate the arrangement … of the Cold War, when the world was divided by the decisions of the big two powers, the US and Russia. But however much this is desired by Russia, it is not a realistic plan. So Russia is trying to build a group of countries that are dependent on it, or at least closely tied with it. If this were to happen, NATO and other, European, institutions would be pushed into a second-tier position and Poland would become a third-rate country.Our country's stance is that the European and transatlantic institutions, the EU and NATO, and their enlargement, result in [increased] stabilization and peace in our continent and that their activities are not hostile or confrontational towards Russia. Yet Russia does not accept this and is aiming to return to the 19th century "concert of powers" arrangement, where Russia, with a group of countries of its choosing, makes decisions about international issues.
We do not agree with that philosophy and think that the enlargement of democratic institutions in countries in the east should continue, because it contributes to political democratization and the liberalization of the economy, and would have a positive impact on the peaceful development of the world.
Poland finds itself at the crossroads of two worlds: the integrated West, and the "East," which is getting rid of even the pretense of democracy. So neighboring a country as undemocratic, unpredictable and as dangerous as Russia, we have lowered the level of our security. Yet PM Tusk and Foreign Minister Sikorski are following a policy of "reset" and in fact say: "Let's put aside the issue of the Smolensk catastrophe, to disregard the causes of that tragedy."
PiS does not agree and will never agree to remove that tragedy from the agenda of Polish-Russian relations. We believe that Poland could build relations with Russia on the basis of stronger political and diplomatic instruments practiced by ourselves and in the framework of the European Union.

How do you assess Polish-American relations concerning security, particularly in relation to the planned NATO missile defense system that Poland will host?
Close relations with the US in the field of security are necessary for us, because despite Poland's entry into NATO, the security status of Poland and the whole Eastern European region remains worse than that of Western Europe.
For years we have demanded that this situation be changed, now we demand that NATO's contingency plans for aiding [us] in the case of aggression would have an automatic, rather than a general, character.
I was involved in negotiations about the first project for building a missile shield in Poland during George Bush's administration and I know that it was not the

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Americans who first changed their minds, but Prime Minister Tusk. When, on July 4, 2008, I returned from Washington with an agreement ready to sign, Donald Tusk said that this agreement did not contribute to Poland's security, while the then-President Lech Kaczyński was not informed by the government about what it intended to do.
And the shield could at that time have been implemented, if Poland had ratified the agreement. President Obama would not have changed such a decision. He decided to change the whole concept of the missile shield in September 2009, about a year after taking office, by which time the Polish government had still not ratified the agreement. According to the new plans, the missile shield would be built in Poland in 2018. I want to point out that if Obama were to win a second presidential term, it would finish in January 2017. So, in fact, he said to Russia and the world that during his second term in office there is not going to be a missile shield in Poland, and what happens in 2018 is not his concern.

By the end of this year a base for US F-16 fighter planes will have been established in Poland and for the first time American troops will be present on Polish soil. How do you see this?
This is a small positive step in the right direction. I do not disagree with it and I hope that our cooperation with the US develops further. We look at the US as a European power and we have to make the next American president – whoever it may be – once again show that the US is interested in our region.
I think that American strategists are starting to realize that the policy of "reset" with Moscow has not resulted in an improvement in American relations with Russia, and that a new approach to these relations is now needed. We should observe these trends and be more active in setting our own agenda with the Americans. But to do so, we need the will and the ability.

Source: Warsaw Business Journal. Read more...

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