

CANADIAN GLOBAL AFFAIRS INSTITUTE
INSTITUT CANADIEN DES AFFAIRES MONDIALES

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April 2025

BRIEFING NOTE

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Prepared for the Canadian Global Affairs Institute
Suite 2720, 700 – 9th Avenue SW., Calgary, AB T2P 3V4
www.cgai.ca

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ISBN: 978-1-77397-339-5

Since the Russian invasion of Ukraine, Poland has proven itself as a key NATO and European ally and provided significant support in efforts to strengthen the defence investment, military technologies and ties with Baltic and Scandinavian states around the region. To get the Polish perspective within the European security order and its position , Canadian Global Affairs Institute organized a roundtable on March 26, 2025 with Dr. Paweł Markiewicz, the Executive Director of the Washington D.C. Office of the Polish Institute of International Affairs (PISM).

First, he explained that Poland still experiences what can be called a post-USSR invasion trauma, dating back to 1919. Sharing a history similar to what Ukraine is living through gave Poland the momentum to re-invest on its defence capacities, to the point of soon reaching 5% its GDP in defence spending (as of April 2025). In another words, Poland's leaders view Russia's full-scale invasion as an existential threat to the region, or "a close enemy breathing down the[ir] neck." The shared border with Belarus, a Russian ally, adds a layer of threat for Poland to consider. Consequently, Poland has been heavily investing in its defence, for which it received praise from the United States for being a very good example of a military ally, a reassuring situation given the current complex political climate.

Second, he elaborated on Poland's current numbers of armed forces recruitment. Due to challenges related to recruitment and retention at a time it is trying to grow, Poland is looking for to adopt a Finland model type of conscription. For reference, Finland employs a universal male conscription model, requiring all physically and mentally capable men to serve for 165, 255 or 347 days, depending on the training, from the year they turn 18 until the year they turn 29. After completing their service, conscripts are mustered into the reserve, contributing to Finland's defence capabilities. Whereas the Polish Armed Forces currently (2025) consist of approximately 198,000 soldiers, including 130,000 professional soldiers, with an aim to reach a total of 300,000 and more personnel until 2030. Therefore, having a reserve-back system would be attractive for Poland.

Third, another reason why Poland has been investing on its security posture is due to its ties to economic security. Critical infrastructures are targets, threatening the economic security of the country. Russia has made semi-covered threats by organizing and executing military exercises and simulations of attack on Poland, and Belarus operatives have been found on Polish soil committing petty crimes and acts of sabotage. There are also concentrated attacks on the pipelines in the Baltic region.

This building of Poland's security posture and defence capabilities is not occurring without serious planning and considerations for capabilities. Dr. Markiewicz underlined

that Polish companies are currently developing unmanned aerial vehicles, and expanding land and air defence capabilities. However, Poland's naval capabilities are considered as the "Achilles heel "of Poland. Another difficulty is the diversity in the origins of Poland's military capabilities. Currently, Poland has a mix of Soviet-era, American (like Abrams tanks and Patriot systems) and increasingly South-Korean made (K2 tanks and K9 howitzers) equipmenst. Poland is being careful not to "panic buy" to backfill the reconstruction and modernization of the Polish military. But while procurement and acquisition are going relatively well, the real challenge lies within the building of the personnel side of the armed forces.

Finally, many articles refer Poland's capacity of becoming the next defence leader in a European Union more forthcoming on defence (e.g., the mention of the creation of a European Defence Agency and statements from President of the European Commission Von der Leyen on a "European Army" named ReArm Europe, with a proposition of up to 800EUR million financing). Poland remains cautious in the face of greater defence enthusiasm on the part of the EU and awaits a concrete plan before committing to any developments that would run parallel to NATO.

In sum, due to its traumatic Soviet past, Poland sees its heavy investment on its security and defence posture with deep support to Ukraine as inevitable. The question is whether other NATO allies will follow the Polish footsteps on reconstructing its armed forces, investing on new military technologies, and increasing the per GDP spending in near future.

About the Author

Ezgi Yazicioglu *is currently working at the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung Canada (KAS) Office as a Project Coordinator. Prior to joining the KAS, She worked at NATO Science and Technology Organization in Paris, France, where she managed different projects on Emerging Disruptive Technologies and previously was involved in different political and economic consultancy firms, think tanks, non-governmental organisations and media outlets such as CEIDES, IRIS, Export Enterprises, Mensajeros de la Paz, Istanbul Economy Research and NTV News Channel. She was also recently selected as the Turkey-Europe Future Forum Fellow in 2022 by Stiftung Mercator and TUSIAD. Her research foci are nuclear arms deterrence policies; non-proliferation efforts in the MENA region; nuclear disarmament; chemical, radiological, biological, nuclear and high yield explosives (CBRNE) countermeasures; emerging disruptive technologies and transatlantic security. She is a polyglot, operating in five different languages in her daily life (English, French, Turkish, Spanish and Italian). She earned her master's degree in international security and Geopolitics from Institut Catholique de Paris, in International Relations from IRIS SUP' and her bachelor's degree from Ozyegin University. An advocate for mental health issues, migration policies in Europe and children's education, she is also a member of Darussafaka Society.*

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