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POLISH-SUB-SAHARAN AFRICAN ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL RELATIONS AFTER 1989

ABSTRACT

The main objective of this study is to examine the developments of political and economic relations between Poland and Sub-Saharan Africa. The article is written from the Polish perspective. The author is fully aware that the perception of Sub-Saharan Africa as a homogeneous region must result in multiple oversimplifications. However, an analysis of the Polish “African discourse” indicates that political and business elites are not aware of the heterogeneity of the continent and the latter is perceived as a “single unit”. The article demonstrates that after the eastward enlargement of the European Union in 2004 Poland realized its principal goal of foreign policy and did not attempt to redefine its role and place in international relations in terms of its potential and assets. Since 2013, the relations between Poland and Sub-Saharan states have been intensified, but it is everything but clear whether it will become a permanent trend.

Keywords: Poland, Sub-Saharan Africa, diplomacy, investment, trade

INTRODUCTION

The article's title suggests that there can be parity in the relationship between Poland and Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA). Obviously, an attempt to compare the region populated with almost 1 billion people with a country with less than 40 million people in Central Europe is not justified, not only from the methodological but also commonsensical point of view. Moreover, such a comparison may suggest that we can talk about "one Africa" or "Africa is a country" in international relations¹, which can be compared with the European states². The Author is fully aware of the sensitive and oversimplifying nature of the paper's title. Nevertheless, given the above, it should be noted that in the Polish political discourse Africa is being considered as a whole (only with emphasis on the differences between North and Sub-Saharan Africa), and the most recent political strategies were constructed not in terms of bilateral relations, but in terms of Poland's relation to the entire region.

The text reflects the official Polish perspective (or the lack of such a perspective) on SSA, and its main purpose is to present the evolution of Polish diplomatic and economic engagements in this very region after the fall of communism. The Author's second aim was to examine and evaluate the latest trends in Poland's relations with African countries. Finally, it is intriguing that the current Polish–African relations have not yet been discussed in the literature, not even in terms of bilateral relations, and this very issue deserves to be covered.

The discussed developments are presented in the chronological order. The major research techniques implemented during the work on the article included the following: critical analyses of the Polish discourse on Africa, analyses of materials provided by the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, contextualization, and direct observation.

The article is divided into four parts. The first section briefly presents Polish–African relations before 1989. The Polish People's Republic was much more active in Sub-Saharan Africa than the Third Republic, and the communist period is the most important reference point in the current narration on the necessity of a "rediscovery" of Africa by the Polish political elite and business. The second section outlines developments of the Polish foreign policy towards Sub-Saharan Africa after 1989 and distinguishes four phases of Polish–African relations. In the third section, the Author focuses on the evolution of the trade patterns between Poland and SSA. Subsequently, the issues of development aid, scientific co-operation and unused assets in Polish–Sub-Saharan relations were taken into consideration. The last section concludes the article.

¹ D. Kopiński, A. Polus, W. Tycholiz, *Europe-Africa on the Global Chessboard. The New Opening*, Warsaw 2013.

² The ephemerality of the concept of Africa was aptly captured by Ryszard Kapuściński, when he stated: *The continent is too large to describe. It is a veritable ocean, a separate planet, a varied, immensely rich cosmos. Only with the greatest simplification, for the sake of convenience, can we say 'Africa'. In reality, except as a geographical appellation, Africa does not exist*, R. Kapuściński, *The Shadow of the Sun*, trans. by K. Glowaczewska, New York 2002.

I. POLISH–AFRICAN RELATIONS BEFORE 1989

Africa has never been prioritized in Poland's foreign policy. Nevertheless, during the communist period, Polish involvement on the continent was substantially larger than after 1989. The remembrance of the relatively intensive Polish–African relations in the 1960s and 1970s is one of the main points of reference during the current debate on the need for the “rediscovery of Africa” by Polish entrepreneurs.

The Polish policy towards Africa was determined by the Cold War rivalry. In 1988, Poland had seven more diplomatic and trade missions (Embassies and Offices of Commercial Affairs) in Sub-Saharan Africa than it has today. Among many initiatives, the most prominent were Poland's involvement in three United Nations missions, sizeable support given to the South West Africa People's Organization (SWAPO)³ in Namibia, and the People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA)⁴, as well as the credit actions⁵, infrastructural investments⁶ and educational co-operation which was reflected in the relatively high number of Africans enrolled at the Polish Universities. Finally, Polish–African relations were among the most important factors related to the development of African studies in Poland⁷. It is worth noticing that in the 1960s and 1970s over 3,000 Poles worked in Nigeria (mainly medical doctors, builders, technicians, and academics) who additionally supported Polish–Nigerian co-operation. Poland, as the only communist state, was requested by the Nigerian government to be a part (together with the United Kingdom, Canada, and Sweden) of the Observer Team Nigeria (OTN) in 1968 during the Biafran war. In reference to the Biafran war, it is worth to remark that the Biafran air forces were organized and commanded by the legendary commander of the Polish

³ Poland provided medical assistance to over 100 SWAPO fighters. The Polish government also provided education to the SWAPO fighters and their children. Thanks to the “Africa Fund” (pol. *Fundusz Africa*) several dozen of Namibians were educated at Polish universities.

⁴ Poland sold arms and provided technical support to MPLA. Ministerstwo Spraw Zagranicznych RP, *Afryka Subsaharyjska, Stosunki dwustronne z państwami regionu*, at <http://www.ms.gov.pl/pl/polityka_zagraniczna/inne_kontynenty/afryka/stosunki_dwustronne_afryka/>, 7 September 2015.

⁵ Poland granted preferential credits to: Mozambique (90 mln USD), Sudan (52,4 mln USD) and Angola (137,7 mln USD). K.J. Ners, *Odpowiedź podsekretarza stanu w Ministerstwie Finansów – z upoważnienia ministra – na zapytanie nr 2425 w sprawie zwrótu kredytów udzielanych przez Polskę innym państwom przed 1990 r.*, at <<http://orka2.sejm.gov.pl/IZ3.nsf/main/1788E8EF>>, 7 September 2015.

⁶ In the 1960s and 1970s Poland built in Ghana, among other things, a sugar mill and a clinker factory. Polish constructors were involved in Abuja planning and building. Ministerstwo Spraw Zagranicznych RP, *Afryka Subsaharyjska, Stosunki dwustronne z państwami regionu: Ghana*, at <http://www.ms.gov.pl/pl/polityka_zagraniczna/inne_kontynenty/afryka/stosunki_dwustronne_afryka/ghana?printMode=true>.

⁷ K. Czernichowski, D. Kopiński, A. Polus, ‘Polish African Studies at a Crossroads: Past, Present and Future’, *Africa Spectrum*, Vol. 47, No. 2-3 (2012), pp. 167-185; I. Kowalski, ‘African Studies in Poland’, *Journal of Modern African Studies*, Vol. 5, No. 2 (1967), pp. 269-272, at <<http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S0022278X00019133>>.

Fighter Squadron No. 303, lieutenant colonel Jan Zumbach, who provided detailed description of the course of the war in his autobiography⁸.

In 1985, during the famine and floods in the Horn of Africa, Poland sent three MI 8 helicopters and 22 pilots in order to supply food to the most inaccessible areas of Ethiopia as a part of the UN humanitarian mission. It is estimated that Polish pilots saved tens of thousands of lives⁹. Besides purely humanitarian reasons, the decision to send Polish soldiers to Ethiopia was also politically motivated. General Jaruzelski wanted to improve Poland's international image which was severely damaged after the introduction of martial law in December 1981. As noted by Grzegorz Ciechanowski: "the communist government needed spectacular humanitarian action in order to improve Poland's reputation abroad"¹⁰.

The Polish government supported anti-apartheid movements in South Africa. Paradoxically, the black workers of Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) strongly supported the Solidarity trade union in Poland¹¹. During the struggle against apartheid, Poland did not maintain diplomatic relations with the Republic of South Africa (RSA); however after 1994 the RSA became Poland's most important African trading partner. Another, rather underexplored research field, has to do with the role of Polish advisors during the South African round table negotiations.

During the Polish Round Table negotiations, which led to the political transformations in Central Europe, Mikhail Gorbachev introduced the politics of détente which resulted in the withdrawal of Cuban forces from Angola. This paved the way to the independence of Namibia. Self-determination of Namibia was supported by Polish authorities. Polish soldiers (373 officers and soldiers responsible for logistics) and election observers (20 military officers, and 42 civilian observers) participated in the United Nations Transition Assistance Group (UNTAG) mission in Namibia¹². The UNTAG mission was the largest Polish military involvement in Sub-Saharan Africa so far. This very mission is also symbolic because its purpose was to create a new state and Poland began it as a communist country, and ended it as a multiparty democracy.

⁸ J. Zumbach, *Ostatnia walka. Moje życie jako lotnika, przemysłowca i poszukiwacza przygód*, trans. by R. Witkowski, Warszawa 2007.

⁹ B. Popławski, 'Udział Polaków w misjach pokojowych na terenie Afryki Subsaharyjskiej', *Infos*, No. 19 (15 September 2001).

¹⁰ G. Ciechanowski, *Żołnierze polscy w misjach i operacjach pokojowych poza granicami kraju w latach 1953-1989*, Toruń 2009, p. 178.

¹¹ T.G. Karis, 'South African Liberation: The Communist Factor', *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 65, No. 2 (1986/1987), p. 271.

¹² B. Ludwikowski, *Namibia. Pomysłowiec wypełniona misja pokojowa ONZ przy znacznym udziale Polaków*, Warszawa 2009, pp. 23-24.

II. POLISH–AFRICAN RELATIONS AFTER 1989

After 1989 the importance of Polish political and economic interest in Africa was steadily declining. The Polish strategic interests immediately after 1989 were twofold: Tadeusz Mazowiecki's government wanted most of all to obtain guarantees that the Oder-Neisse line would not be challenged by the reunifying Germany, and simultaneously a number of measures were taken in order to ensure independence in the creation and conduct of the foreign policy. The second aim was mainly realized by joining and initiating a number of multilateral projects (The Visegrád Group, The Central European Initiative and "the Weimar Triangle" are the most prominent examples of Polish diplomatic engagement in the early 1990s). The first period of post-communism was marked with 'multivariate uncertainty'. On the one hand, there were many doubts about the foreign policy of reunifying Germany¹³, on the other hand, the collapsing Soviet Union and the deconstruction of the Eastern Block made the international position of Poland even more uncertain, but it also created a historical chance for the creation of a truly independent foreign and trade policy.

It can be argued that post-communist countries in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) can be categorized as "peculiar" post-colonial states¹⁴ that not only had to re-define foreign policy priorities but also their international identity and parallelly deal with multiple internal challenges of political and economic transformation. However, the "dilemma of simultaneity"¹⁵, after the fall of communism, existed in CEE only to a certain extent. Among the political elites there was awareness that multiple internal and external challenges co-existed, but there was also a clear hierarchy of priorities, remembering that the political geography of the CEE has been changed three times during the 20th century. The only common feature regarding the situation in Poland and in certain African postcolonial states is the obsession with a possible future domination of a former "colonial power". Both Central and Eastern European states in the 1990s and African states, after they regained independence, were very sensitive about their own sovereignty, and a certain political decision might be rationalized by the constant fear of the revisionist policies of the powers that used to

¹³ In 1989 the issue of the Polish-German border was to some extent uncertain. In West Germany the Landmannschaft was a politically influential lobby, and Chancellor Kohl did not want to lose that part of CDU/CSU electorate. K. Malinowski, *Polityka Republiki Federalnej Niemiec wobec Polski w latach 1982-1991*, Poznań 1997 (*Studium Niemcoznawcze Instytutu Zachodniego*, 74).

¹⁴ V. Kelertas (ed.), *Baltic Postcolonialism*, Amsterdam–New York 2006 (*On the Boundary of Two Worlds*, 6). Poland has been described as postcolonial state by Ewa M. Thompson. This issue was even considered by Polish daily newspapers. M. Nowicka, 'Rzeczpospolita postkolonialna', *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 24 August 2007.

¹⁵ According to the 'dilemma of simultaneity' concept, the post-communist states in Central Europe had to address a myriad of problems at the same time. L.R. Johnson writes about the necessity of the development of independent nation states, capitalist market economies, and democracy simultaneously. L.R. Johnson, *Central Europe. Enemies, Neighbors, Friends*, New York 1996, p. 287.

control them¹⁶. The deconstruction of a bipolar world created a vacuum in both Central Europe and Sub-Saharan Africa. This notion may be correlated with Marc Ferro's observation that former Soviet republics lying on the southern perimeter '*are back in a pre-, not a post-colonial situation, with the Russian once again acting as arbiters in disputes breaking out on their borders*'¹⁷. Ferro's remark was only partly adequate to Poland; nevertheless, until 1993 due to the presence of Soviet/Russian troops on the Polish territory, Moscow had the strongest possible instrument of political influence on Warsaw. The very focus on the withdrawal of Soviet soldiers was another key aspect of Polish foreign policy in the 1990¹⁸, which resulted in the further reduction of Polish involvement in Africa. The declining position of Africa in Polish foreign policy between 1989 and 1993 is best illustrated by the first wave of closures of Polish diplomatic missions. In 1989 the Polish Office of Commercial Affairs in Zambia was liquidated. In 1992 Polish Embassy in Addis Ababa operations were suspended for the subsequent 11 years. In the same year the Polish Office of Commercial Affairs in Khartoum was closed. Finally, in September 1993 the Polish Embassy in Accra ended its activities¹⁹. At the same time, the beginning of the 1990s brought sharp economic decline in Sub-Saharan Africa²⁰, what did not encourage Polish investors to conduct activities in this region. Simultaneously, the newly introduced capitalist system in Poland (often called *wild capitalism*) meant that the new opportunities were open in Poland, and what is more, the one of the key principles of the economic transformation (the so-called *Balcerowicz shock therapy* or the *Sachs-Lipton Plan*²¹) was the substantial reduction of the government's unnecessary investments, and engagement in Sub-Saharan Africa was considered as such.

The process of the withdrawal of Soviet military equipment and forces was finished in September 1993, and this moment can be perceived as a symbolic point of transition to a new phase in Polish foreign policy²². After 1993 Polish foreign policy focused on accession to the European Union (EU) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, and these two strategic objectives dominated Polish foreign policy for the next decade.

¹⁶ A good example of an a rational (this behavior gives the impression of irrationality, however, it is perfectly rational in certain cultural, ideological, historical or religious contexts) behavior is the Polish government's decision to host a US *anti-missile* defense system on Polish territory and the Warsaw' military support to the USA-led military interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq.

¹⁷ M. Ferro, *Colonization. A Global History*, London 1997, p. 334.

¹⁸ In 1991 there were over 56,000 Soviet soldiers in Poland.

¹⁹ K. Szczepanik, A. Herman-Lukasik, B. Janicka (eds.), *Stosunki dyplomatyczne Polski. Informator*, Vol. 4: *Afryka i Bliski Wschód*, Warszawa 2010 (*Biblioteka Polskiej Dyplomacji*).

²⁰ E. Miguel, 'Africa Unleashed. Explaining the Secret of a Belated Boom', *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 90, No. 6 (2011).

²¹ J. Sachs, *Poland's First Economic Reform Plan of July 1989*, 13 April 2015, at <<http://jeffsachs.org/2015/04/polands-first-economic-reform-plan-of-july-1989/>>.

²² 1993 was also the year of Parliamentary elections. The post-communist parties (Democratic Left Alliance and Polish Peasants' Party) won the elections, and Poland, became the first country in Central Europe, where the former communists returned to power. Nevertheless, the new government has prioritized Poland's integration with NATO and the European Union.

Among all major political parties, there was consensus that the pro-Western aspirations of Poland are a peculiar kind of “public good” and the activities of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was not subject to the criticism of the opposition, which in turn effected in the Polish foreign policy a permanent defining merely in the Euro-Atlantic context. The narration of the “returning to Europe” became a new mantra of the political class.

After the completion of the strategic political objectives (membership in the EU and NATO) a visible vacuum appeared in terms of the aims of Polish foreign policy, what was correlated with the lack of vision of how and in which direction to redefine the role of Poland in the international environment. After 2004, Poland tried to establish itself as an architect of the Eastern neighborhood Policy in the European Union and an advocate for democratic reforms, especially in Georgia, Belarus, Moldova, and Ukraine. The Polish attitude towards African states after the eastward enlargement of the European Union was diplomatically summarized by the Egyptian State Information Service:

*The demise of the Soviet Union and Poland's accession to the European Union was a turning point towards enhancing cooperation with Poland in particular fields such as tourism, though it dwindled in other fields such as trade, educational and scientific cooperation. This was due to the change in priorities on both sides, in addition to the new rules and regulations binding Poland to its new sphere of interests*²³.

Another factor that indicates that Africa has not been considered as a potential direction of an increased Polish diplomatic and economic activity is the number of official visits in the region. Only four out of twelve Polish Ministers of Foreign Affairs who served after 1989 visited Sub-Saharan Africa. SSA was visited by Krzysztof Skubiszewski in 1993 (he visited Republic of South Africa and Kenya), Władysław Bartoszewski in 1995 (he visited Republic of South Africa and Namibia) and Włodzimierz Cimoszewicz in 2004 (he visited Nigeria, Angola, Kenya and Namibia) and Radosław Sikorski in 2009 (he visited Kenya and Rwanda)²⁴. However, none of the African tours of Polish Ministers of Foreign Affairs resulted in significant business contracts or agreements on strategic cooperation.

A relatively low interest of the Polish political elite in the development of bilateral relations with African states was rhetorically rationalized by the claim that after the eastward enlargement of the EU, the European Union would represent the Polish interest in terms of relations with Africa by its already established diplomatic channels. However, as there is no clear Polish African policy, there is no European either, as argued by Daniela Sicurelli:

*EU is far from becoming a unitary player in Africa. Lacking a clear strategy and coherent normative framework, the EU should be considered a multi-level actor, where national and supranational institutions have different interests and push forward contrasting views of what role Europe should play in Africa*²⁵.

²³ Egypt State Information Service, *Egypt and Poland*, at <<http://www.sis.gov.eg/En/Templates/Articles/tmpArticles.aspx?CatID=150#VOOqyZU5DY8>>, 7 September 2015.

²⁴ K. Szczepanik, A. Herman-Łukasik, B. Janicka (eds.), *Stosunki dyplomatyczne Polski...*

²⁵ D. Sicurelli, *The European Union's Africa Policies. Norms, Interests and Impact*, Farnham 2010.

It is extremely difficult to carry out a foreign policy towards Africa by the EU institutions, if bilateral and multilateral priorities for this very region are not clearly defined. Poland does not have a separate strategy towards Africa. Political and economic priorities towards Africa are listed in the Polish Strategy Towards non-European Developing States (Pol. *Strategia RP w odniesieniu do pozaeuropejskich krajów rozwijających się*). The document was published in 2004²⁶ (sic!) and is based on data from 2002-2003. The analysis of the *Strategy* indicates that Poland not only perceives Sub-Saharan Africa as a homogenous region, but, moreover, it identifies the continent almost in terms of Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. In the *Strategy's* introduction to the part devoted to Africa one can read that:

*For many decades Africa has been a symbol of a continent mired in chronic poverty and one that was unable to develop mechanisms for efficient governance. In Africa there is a concentration of the majority of serious conflict situations, which in conjunction with natural disasters create extremely strong migratory pressure, especially in the direction of Europe which is nearest geographically*²⁷.

The lack of a long-term vision and well-defined aims towards Africa was mirrored in limited engagement into Euro-African relations on the EU level. During the first three EU-Africa Summits Poland was not represented neither by the President nor by the Prime Minister. Only in 2014, during the 4th EU-Africa Summit in Brussels the Polish delegation was headed by Prime Minister Donald Tusk, what was commented as "*the evidence of the growing importance of Africa in Polish foreign policy*"²⁸.

The decreasing level of Polish-African relations was demonstrated again in 2008 by Minister Radosław Sikorski's decision about the closure of additional four Polish embassies in SSA. In December 2008 Polish embassies in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Senegal, Tanzania and Zimbabwe ended their activities. The government used two-track argumentation to rationalize its decision: economical calculation²⁹ and the changes in Polish priorities. Minister Sikorski stated that the cost of embassy operations *must be in some reasonable proportions in relation to trade with this country*³⁰. The government adopted the criterion by which the costs of embassy operations should not

²⁶ Ministerstwo Spraw Zagranicznych RP, *Strategia RP w odniesieniu do pozaeuropejskich krajów rozwijających się*, Warszawa 2014, at <<http://www.msz.gov.pl/resource/aaf21c98-4082-45c9-996c-a6f6c6a40a7b:JCR>>, 7 September 2015.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 40.

²⁸ Ministerstwo Spraw Zagranicznych RP, *IV Szczyt Unia Europejska-Afryka*, at <http://www.msz.gov.pl/pl/aktualnosci/wiadomosci/iv_szczyt_unia_europejska___afryka?printMode=true>, 7 September 2015.

²⁹ J. Borkowski, *Odpowiedź sekretarza stanu w Ministerstwie Spraw Zagranicznych – z upoważnienia ministra – na interpelację nr 3432 w sprawie deklaracji dotyczącej zamykania placówek dyplomatycznych Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej*, at <<http://orka2.sejm.gov.pl/IZ6.nsf/main/6BE66B41>>, 7 September 2015.

³⁰ Ministerstwo Spraw Zagranicznych RP, *Minister Radosław Sikorski odpowiada na pytania posłów dotyczące polityki zagranicznej*, 21 March 2013, at <http://www.msz.gov.pl/pl/aktualnosci/wiadomosci/minister_radoslaw_sikorski_odpowiada_na_pytania_poslow_dotyczace_polityki_zagranicznej>, 7 September 2015.

be higher than 1% of the trade with the country where the embassy is situated. Additionally while speaking about the Embassy in Harare, Sikorski acknowledged that the priorities of Polish foreign policy have changed, and the Polish diplomatic mission in Zimbabwe was *of key importance* during the anti-apartheid campaign, but *currently he does not see any economic perspectives in Zimbabwe*³¹.

Bishop Wiktor Skworc, the chairman of the Episcopal Commission on the mission, Poles living in the countries where embassies were closed, and Polish academics protested against the closure of the embassies. It is striking that Poland started the reduction of its diplomatic presence in Africa when other states decided to increase it³². Additionally, one must remember that it is relatively easy to close an embassy, but the restoration process can be very challenging, especially in the states where the knowledge of local conditions is crucial for the development of business relations. In 2014, Poland had embassies in: Angola, Ethiopia, Kenya, Nigeria and the Republic of South Africa. Angola, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Nigeria and RSA have diplomatic missions in Poland³³.

From 2013, Poland has become more active in terms of revitalization of relations with Africa, and the symbolic sign of changes is the governmental programme "Go Africa", which aims at the increase of Polish export to five African countries: Algeria, Nigeria, Kenya, Angola, Mozambique and Republic of South Africa. In the same year Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk made the first official visits to Sub-Saharan Africa (he visited Zambia, Republic of South Africa and Nigeria). There were also economic missions organized by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Polish entrepreneurs accompanied by the vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs visited Nigeria, Angola, Congo and Ethiopia in 2013, and Ghana and Senegal next year. In 2014, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs announced that the Polish embassy in Senegal will be restored, a year before the Senegalese government declared that it would open an embassy in Warsaw, what occurred on 8th January 2015³⁴. However, the most important changes took place at the level of rhetoric used by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The narration of the "continent mired in chronic poverty" was replaced by the "continent of great opportunities" for Polish export products. Nevertheless, it is too early to say whether we are dealing with a new trend in Polish foreign policy towards Africa. Besides general statements that Africa is a continent of the future, there is a visible lack of strategic thinking in terms of Polish–

³¹ Ibid.

³² India already has 26 embassies in Africa, and China 49. Brazil has expanded its engagement with Africa, doubling its diplomatic presence from 17 to 37 embassies over the last few years. Turkey is catching up, with 28 embassies, and even the ostracized Iran has embassies in 20 African countries. Some European states (such as Sweden and the United Kingdom) are taking into consideration the development of micro-posts with one or two diplomats in Sub-Saharan states.

³³ Ministerstwo Spraw Zagranicznych RP, *Wydarzenia Polska-Afryka*, at <http://www.ms.gov.pl/pl/polityka_zagraniczna/inne_kontynenty/afryka/>, 7 September 2015.

³⁴ Ministerstwo Spraw Zagranicznych RP, *Akredytacja nowego Ambasadora Republiki Senegalu, pana Khaly Adama Ndour*, 8 January 2015, at <http://www.ms.gov.pl/pl/polityka_zagraniczna/inne_kontynenty/afryka/akredytacja_nowego_ambasadora_republiki_senegalu_pana_khaly_adama_ndour>, 7 September 2015.

Sub-Saharan relations. Actions of various ministries are not coordinated and the strategic policy document on relations with Africa has not been updated. Poland also lacks a coherent branding strategy.

Therefore the Polish political relations with Sub-Saharan Africa after 1989 can be divided into four phases. During the first phase, 1989-1993, Poland was focused on securing and strengthening its independence. During this period four Polish African diplomatic missions were closed, but Poland established official relations with the Republic of South Africa. In the second phase, 1993-2004, Poland's foreign policy was dominated by accession negotiations with the NATO and the European Union. After the eastward enlargement the third phase of seeking a new role in the international environment had started. Poland had no vision of how to conduct (if at all) a policy towards Sub-Saharan Africa, and it was claimed that it was conducted through the EU institutions. This period was also marked by further closures of four Polish diplomatic missions in Sub-Saharan Africa in 2008. Since 2013, one can observe a slow process of increased interest of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Polish business in Africa. The pursuit of new markets was to some extent forced and sustained by Russia's foreign policy and the embargo on the Polish products³⁵.

III. POLISH-SUB-SAHARAN ECONOMIC RELATIONS AFTER 1989

As it was mentioned above, during the first years of the Polish economic transformation, there were no incentives to invest in SSA, and Poland began to restructure its foreign trade patterns moving away from the exchange with Russia in favor of Western Europe (mainly Germany). The first large Polish company that decided to enter Africa was a copper mining giant-KGHM Polish Copper, and the investment was a failure.

In 1996 KGHM decided to expand its operations into Sub-Saharan Africa as a part of the company's resource seeking strategy. KGHM was trying to be involved in the privatization process of the Zambian copper mines. However, the company did so without any success. Finally around 40 million USD were invested in the Kimpe ore deposit in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Due to the "high political risk", the investment was cancelled in 2006. In 2009, the KGHM applied for voluntary liquidation of its subsidiary KGHM Cong. Officially the KGHM claimed that it did not have the technology to extract copper from the Kimpe ore. Unofficially, it is said that the Congolese authorities have questioned the KGHM's concession on copper mining³⁶ and the members of the KGHM Congo board were evacuated to Poland due to "safety reasons". The absence of the Polish Embassy in Kinshasa did not facilitate the relations between KGHM and the Congolese authorities.

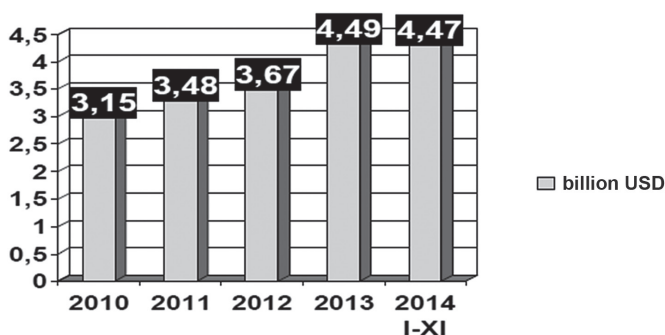
³⁵ In response to the annexation of the Crimea Peninsula by Russia, the European Union imposed economic sanctions on the Russian Federation in July 2014, in response Russia imposed an embargo on selected EU products.

³⁶ Interview with a source close to the KGHM Management Board.

Renewed interest in Africa among Polish entrepreneurs started in 2013 and it was partly forced by the uncertain situation in the Eastern European markets and a narrative, well-established at that time, which presented SSA as the “new economic frontier”³⁷.

Despite the government’s declarative interest in the Polish economic expansion in SSA, Poland’s trade with Africa is less than 1% of the total Polish trade (in the 1970s Polish–African trade was rated at 1.5%). However, since 2010 there has been a steady increase in the volume of trade. In 2007 Polish trade with Africa was 3 billion USD, 3 years latter it was 3.15 billion USD. The sharpest trade growth was noted between 2012 and 2013, when the total Polish trade with Africa reached almost 4.5 billion USD.

Figure 1. Polish total trade with Africa



According to the estimates of the Polish Information and Foreign Investment Agency and the Go Africa Program, Africa’s share in Polish trade should reach 3% in 2018³⁸. However, as of today, trade flows mainly consist of trade with the North African countries and the Republic of South Africa. Trade exchange with Algeria, Morocco, Egypt, Tunisia and RSA constitutes two thirds of the trade value between Poland and Africa.

Figure 2. Poland’s trade with five major African partners

Country	Trade value (millions USD)
Republic of South Africa	915,90
Algeria	700,69
Morocco	665,78
Egypt	380,70
Tunisia	291,66

Source: Go Africa, http://www.goafrica.gov.pl/files/?id_plik=122

³⁷ D. Kopiński, A. Polus, W. Tycholiz, *Europe...*

³⁸ Polska Agencja Informacji i Inwestycji Zagranicznych, *Polska potrzebna Afryce, Afryka Polsce*, 9 October 2014, at <http://www.paiz.gov.pl/20141009/polska_potrzebna_afryce_afryka_polsce#>, 7 September 2015; Go Africa, *Program Go Africa, Polska, Warszawa*, 29 stycznia 2015, at <http://www.goafrica.gov.pl/files/?id_plik=122>, 7 September 2015.

Although in 2014 there was an increase of over 47% and 44% in the trade between Poland and Nigeria and Zambia respectively, this data should be considered rather in terms of a low base effect than a steady trend. After RSA is removed from the picture, the trade ratio between Poland and SSA is just 1.5 billion USD.

As for the main Polish companies that have entered Sub-Saharan markets in recent years these are: Grupa Azoty (the company bought a 55% share in the African Investment Group and phosphorite mining license in Senegal for almost 29 million USD), Asseco (Asseco is providing IT solutions for the energy sector in Ethiopia. In 2014 this company signed a 10 million USD contract with the Ethiopian Information Network Security Agency), Ursus (the company supplies 3.000 tractors to Ethiopia), Izodom 2000 (the company signed a contract for building house elements factory in Zambia and construction of 20 pilot houses on the outskirts of Lusaka), Krezus (a mining company which holds three exploration licenses in Guinea), Lubawa (company is selling protective and special use materials/clothing in Nigeria, Ghana and Zambia) and Kulczyk Investment (KI). KI has shares in various mining projects in Sub-Saharan Africa. Among others, KI has a 40% share in Neconde Energy Limited, which in 2011 acquired a 45% stake in the OML 42 production license in the Niger Delta from Shell³⁹. In 2014, the QKR Corporation (funded by KI and Qatar Investment Authority) acquired the Navachab Gold Mine in Namibia⁴⁰. KI has also a 3% stake in the SAB Miller breweries (SAB Miller owes 38 breweries in SSA).

In March 2014, the Council of Polish Investors in Africa (CPIA) was created⁴¹. The Council is an informal *platform for exchanging ideas and experiences for even better Polish-Euro-African cooperation. The task of the Council is to break ground for other Polish and European companies wishing to appear on the African continent*. In the study conducted by the Polish Center for African Studies for CEED Institute⁴² among the companies that belong to the CPIA, major Polish investors in Africa were asked about their perception of Africa and challenges facing by their companies. On the bases of CPIA members' answers, six general groups of challenges for doing business in SSA can be distinguished:

- infrastructural problems such as: a weak internet connection, traffic, shortages of energy;
- corruption;
- unclear legal and technical regulations;
- competition with Asian companies;

³⁹ Kulczyk Investments, at <<http://kulczykinvestments.com/project/86>>, 7 September 2015. Naconde, at <<http://www.neconde.com.ng/index.php>>, 7 September 2015.

⁴⁰ QKR Corporation, at <<http://www.qkrcorp.com/>>, 7 September 2015.

⁴¹ The Council was initiated by Jan Kulczyk and the founder members of the Council were Presidents of the Management Boards of: Polpharma, Grupa Azoty Zakłady Chemiczne Police, Krezus, Asseco Poland, Ursus and Lubawa.

⁴² This study was part of the research work on the report on African consumer market. D. Kopiński, A. Polus, W. Tycholiz, *Unpacking the African Consumer. Spending Patterns and Investment Opportunities*, Warsaw 2015.

- security concerns;
- limited number of potential employees (in Poland) willing to work in SSA.

Based on the survey, it may be concluded that Polish companies want to internationalize their operations in SSA. The “mental Rubicon” has been crossed, and Sub-Saharan Africa is perceived as a region of business opportunities; many respondents compared the current situation in SSA to Poland in the 1990s.

African investments in Poland originate almost exclusively from the Republic of South Africa. In 2004, Pepkor investment holding created a retail chain – PEPCO. Currently PEPCO has over 500 shops in Poland. In 2009 SAB Miller bought from Kompania Piwowarska a leading Polish brewery, and Framondi invested in a pulp and paper mill in Świecie. Naspers acquired the leading Polish web portals (allegro.pl, tabllica.pl, nasza-klasa.pl). According to the Polish Ministry of Economy, over 3,000 jobs were created in Poland due to the investments from RSA⁴³.

Additional levels of co-operation. Development aid and scientific co-operation

Beside very limited financing of development projects and scientific co-operation, Poland does not use soft power tools in relations with Sub-Saharan states. This situation is rooted in the above-mentioned lack of political strategy towards SSA.

Poland is among the last OECD countries in terms of the ratio of development aid to the gross national income. African countries are not among the priority states for Polish development aid and Polish bilateral development aid for eight Sub-Saharan countries in 2012⁴⁴ was only 5 073 000 PLN⁴⁵ (1 600 000 USD). Despite the adoption of the Act on Development Aid in 2012, there was no co-ordination of actions between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Economy and the Ministry of Finances. Above and beyond the issue of increase in funding, the dilemma of Polish development aid (but also a rationalization of its non-coordinated character) is whether to engage in bilateral programs or to support multilateral aid agencies (especially the European Commission). Moreover, the issue of the complementarity of the Polish aid with the aid programs carried by other countries and/or international agencies is not under discussion.

Despite the fact that strengthening the links between European and African universities is among the main objectives of Joint Africa-EU Strategy, the level of scientific cooperation between the Polish and African universities is far below the potential. The scientific co-operation is relatively best developed between Polish and South African academia. In December 2014 the Polish National Centre for Research and Development and the National Research Foundation of the Republic of South Africa

⁴³ Ministerstwo Energii RP, at <<http://www.mg.gov.pl/node/20322#>>, 7 September 2015.

⁴⁴ Small grants were donated to: Burundi, Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, Somalia, South Sudan, Tanzania and Uganda.

⁴⁵ Ministerstwo Spraw Zagranicznych RP. Departament Współpracy Rozwojowej, *Polska współpraca na rzecz rozwoju. Raport roczny 2012*, Warszawa 2013, p. 49.

signed the Memorandum of Understanding. As a result, in 2015 Centre for Research and Development provided 2,400,000 PLN for joint Polish-South African research initiatives⁴⁶.

The most important field of collaboration is the Polish engagement in the Southern Africa Large Telescope (SALT) project –the largest telescope in the southern hemisphere⁴⁷. Poland's financial contribution was 11% of the costs of building, and Polish astronomers have at their disposal 11% of the telescope's operating time. Another project is the involvement of Gdynia Maritime University, Navimor, and Remontowa Shipyard in the establishment of the Namibe Fishery Academy in Angola, which is the biggest Polish development project in Sub-Saharan Africa⁴⁸.

Unused assets

There are at least two types of assets that can be relatively quickly utilized to promote Poland in Africa. The first are "human resources". The most valuable group for Polish business promotion consists of the Africans who studied in Poland. According to the estimates of the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs since the 1960s more than 4,000 Africans graduated from Polish universities⁴⁹. Many graduates of Polish universities form the current elite of the African states⁵⁰ and they can be the first contact points for Polish entrepreneurs. Another "natural" source of information about local conditions are Polish missionaries. In 2014, over 840 Polish missionaries worked in Africa⁵¹; most of them were in Cameroon, Zambia and Tanzania. Moreover, the Polish diaspora in the Republic of South Africa is estimated to be over 12 000 people.

The second type of assets functions at the level of rhetoric. As it was mentioned before, Poland might be presented as a specific postcolonial state, a state that never had any colonies in Africa. The experience of political transformation is shared by Poland and many African states. Polish government can also "use history" to emphasize that Africans several times helped the Poles, especially during World War II when

⁴⁶ Narodowe Centrum Badań i Rozwoju, *Konkurs na wspólne polsko-południowoafrykańskie projekty badawcze*, 8 May 2015, at <<http://www.ncbir.pl/programy-miedzynarodowe/wspolpraca-dwustronna/republika-poludniowej-afryki/aktualnosci/art,3346,konkurs-na-wspolne-polsko-poludniowoafrykanskie-projekty-badawcze.html>>, 15 February 2015.

⁴⁷ Southern African Large Telescope, at <<http://www.salt.ac.za/>>, 7 September 2015.

⁴⁸ Ministerstwo Spraw Zagranicznych RP, *Akademia Rybołówstwa w Angoli – największy polski projekt rozwojowy w Afryce Subsaharyjskiej*, 28 August 2013, at <http://www.msz.gov.pl/pl/aktualnosci/wiadomosci/akademia_rybolowstwa_w_angoli_najwiekszy_polski_projekt_rozwojowy_w_afryce_subsaharyjskiej>, 7 September 2015.

⁴⁹ Ministerstwo Spraw Zagranicznych RP, *Współpraca naukowo-techniczna oraz w dziedzinie edukacji*, at <http://www.msz.gov.pl/pl/polityka_zagraniczna/inne_kontynenty/afryka/wspolpr_nauka_educja/>.

⁵⁰ Among graduates from Polish Universities there are, among others: the President of Mali and the Chairperson of the African Union Commission Alpha Oumar Konaré and the Tanzanian Minister of State for the Planning Nassoro Malocho.

⁵¹ Dzieło Pomocy Ad Genets, at <<http://www.adgentes.misje.pl/misjonarze-279>>, 7 September 2015.

Władysław Anders army was evacuated from the Soviet Union, it should also be remembered that South African pilots flew supplies to the Warsaw uprising in 1944, and they suffered serious losses⁵².

IV. FINAL REFLECTION

Africa has never been prioritized in Poland's foreign policy. However, during the communist period Polish involvement on the continent, although politically motivated, was much larger than after 1989. It might be argued that four subsequent phases of Poland's relations towards Africa were marked by the closures of Polish diplomatic and trade missions on the continent.

An analysis of the Polish political discourse on Sub-Saharan Africa indicates that there is a visible lack of a long-term vision and well-defined aims towards this region. Along this line, it may be argued that this is a general feature of the Polish foreign policy towards non-European countries after the eastward enlargement of the EU, when Poland achieved its basic goal in the international environment and failed to redefine its role and priorities.

The lack of a political strategy towards Sub-Saharan Africa was mirrored in Poland's literal lack of involvement in the Africa-EU Strategic Partnership. Despite the intensification of relations in 2014, Polish-African contacts are random and unsystematic, since the economic and political relations are not institutionalized. There is no official (at the intergovernmental level) forum of co-operation between Poland and any Sub-Saharan state, not even at the level of ministers or experts, and the channels of communication existing within the frameworks of the EU are not used effectively by Poland, what is rooted in the lack of clearly defined priorities for this region. From 2013 this gap is to some extent being filled by business and official meetings that are held during European Economic Congresses in Katowice under the name of "Africa-Central Europe Economic Cooperation Forum" and various activities organized by the African Institute in Łódź. The activities aimed at the intensification of trade between Poland and selected Sub-Saharan countries were also undertaken by the Polish Members of Parliament who were born and raised in Nigeria and Zambia – John Abraham Godson (who also is the President of the African Institute in Łódź) and Killion Munyama.

Poland's trade with Africa is less than 1% of the total Polish trade, ironically it might be said that this number is within the limits of statistical error. However, a steady nominal increase in Polish-African trade relations has been observed since 2010. Despite multiple challenges, the "mental Rubicon" has been crossed by the Polish entrepreneurs, and Sub-Saharan Africa is perceived as a region of business opportunities; a market which is difficult, but at least worth considering. However, one cannot yet speak about a flagship Polish investment in SSA, which would attract the attention of the public and cause a snowball effect. It might be argued that due to the increased interest

⁵² R. Sikorski, 'Solidarity with the ANC?', *National Review*, Vol. 42, No. 4 (1990), p. 27.

the of the emerging powers (mainly BRICS countries) in SSA, it is already too late for Poland to start economic engagement in SSA. Additionally, due to the falling prices of raw materials in 2015, the “Africa rising” narration is called into question by both international financing institutions and academics⁵³, what might have a daunting effect on Africa’s perception by Polish entrepreneurs in the short and medium term.

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⁵³ I. Taylor, ‘Dependency Redux: Why Africa Is Not Rising’, *Review of African Political Economy*, Vol. 43, No. 147 (2015), pp. 1-18, at <<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03056244.2015.1084911>>.

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