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POLAND AND BROADER MIDDLE EAST. RELATIONS, INITIATIVES AND PROSPECTS FOR ACTION¹

Relations between Poland and BMENA countries

Poland's relations with the BMENA region have evolved over the last decade or so: they were relatively intensive before 1989, which was followed by a break caused by refocusing the state's efforts on political and economic transformation and pursuit of its international aspirations, whereas since late 1990s there has been a growing interest in co-operation with BMENA countries.²

Poland's bilateral relations with Arab countries date back to the 1950s. The limited significance of the region was and still is a stable element of Poland's foreign policy towards this part of the world. Even in the period of the most active interest in mutual contacts, i.e. in the 1970s and 1980s, the scale of co-operation was unimpressive. Nonetheless, until this day there persist memories and experiences gained from involvement in large investment projects carried out, among others, by Polish companies, including construction of manufacturing and cement plants, as well as investments in basic infrastructure in Arab countries. Other co-operation areas included research work, especially in archaeology, where mutual activities had been very intensive until 1989; later the relations loosened.

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² See: H. Obeidat, *Stosunki Polski z Egiptem i Irakiem w latach 1955-1989* (doctoral thesis), Jagiellonian University, Kraków 2000.

Since the 1989 breakthrough there have been three tendencies in the approach of subsequent Polish governments towards co-operation with North African and Middle Eastern states: renewal of old diplomatic contacts and establishment of new ties and institutionalization of co-operation; strengthening of economic relations leading to trade exchange; involvement in actions aimed at development of democracy and respect for human rights.

Although, as it was said earlier, BMENA countries are not a priority in Polish foreign policy, in recent years there have been some changes and the importance of the region for Poland has been growing.

Poland's accession to the European Union was of primary importance for it's the State's policy towards BMENA. This was determined by two main reasons. First, obtaining the status of a EU member state had been a major objective of Polish foreign policy since the beginning of 1990s. Most actions carried out by the government had been subordinated to the attainment of this objective. As a result of completion of the preparations and the accession itself a long-standing priority vanished giving way to new challenges. Second, by entering the EU, Poland overnight became a party to a number of initiatives carried out by the EU and addressed to North African and Middle Eastern states.³ To recapitulate, for Poland its EU membership means not only the need to get involved in some forms of bilateral and multilateral co-operation established earlier, but also a new dimension of the entire Polish foreign policy, namely, that of global aspirations of the Union which can be achieved only through co-operation and involvement of all Member States.⁴

Another factor behind the changes is Poland's involvement in the stabilization of Iraq. According to Polish authorities, it was the first time for Poland as a democratic state to act on such a scale against violation of human rights during Saddam Hussein's regime. In this way our country demonstrated its capacity to carry out stabilization mission in co-operation with a large group of states, but also decided to incur expenses (material and human).⁵ As a result of its involvement in Iraq, Poland became even more dedicated to maintaining order and stabilization in the entire Middle East as these two factors have major impact on global security.

Poland is in the course of building – even if not always in a conscious manner – a new identity resulting from an unavoidable change in perception of international environment and Poland's place in the global system.⁶ For decades a major factor shaping international relations had been the Cold War division between East and West which differed not only in terms of economic advancement but also – and above all – of ideology. The process of democratic change in the whole Central and

³ Cf. K. Skubiszewski, *Kilka uwag o polityce zagranicznej Polski jako członka Unii Europejskiej*, [in:] *Rzecz o przyszłości Europy*, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, European Union Department, Warszawa 2005, p. 50.

⁴ Cf. *Informacja rządu na temat polskiej polityki zagranicznej w 2003 roku (przedstawiona przez ministra spraw zagranicznych na posiedzeniu Sejmu w dniu 22 stycznia 2003 roku)*, www.msz.gov.pl/Wystapienie.Mi.nistra,1644.html.

⁵ See on this subject: *Bilans dotychczasowego udziału polski w misji stabilizacyjnej w Iraku*, Information Centre, Ministry of National Defence, Warszawa [2005].

⁶ See: *Euro-Mediterranean Co-operation: Enlarging and Widening the Perspective*, ed. A. Jacobs, ZEI Discussion Paper C131 2004.

Eastern Europe along with economic modernization followed by the accession of a number of countries to NATO and the EU made Poland change its ways of perceiving the world. Old divisions vanished and were replaced by new ones (mainly along the North/South axis) and Poland became a member of an exclusive club of the rich North. What is more, wealth in the first place implies obligations, which means that we are no longer recipients of aid but we have become its donors. Naturally, aid offered is both material (financial) and non-material (know-how), though the latter is in a way easier to implement than the former. This change, however, takes time, and therefore there still prevails a belief (N.B.: communicated in explicit terms in the Strategy of the Republic of Poland towards non-European Countries⁷) that support should be granted to those regions which guarantee media effect and certain economic benefits.

The growing importance of widely understood Middle East in Polish foreign policy is confirmed in both declarations and concrete actions. Referring to the former, subsequent policy statements delivered by Poland's successive foreign ministers are worth mentioning. Although in 2002 Minister Włodzimierz Cimoszewicz admitted that "in recent years Poland's relations with non-European countries experienced a slowdown" and pointed to our country's "selective activity (...) in Africa and the Middle East"⁸, he announced that Polish foreign policy would "increasingly pay attention to strategic importance of non-European regions"⁹ and co-operate with them. Subsequent policy statements stressed that Poland was becoming a participant in the process of globalization (as an EU member state) and should contribute more to development aid enabling modernization and socio-economic development of non-European regions, become involved in actions aimed at maintaining peace and security there (Iraq being just an example) and support initiatives leading to democratization of individual states. All these should be carried out primarily within European structures. In reference to the above, Poland has to intensify its economic, political and cultural activity in non-European regions. The Middle East is a number one priority region due, among others, to numerous historical and current ties between Poland and countries of that region. In his policy statement delivered in 2005 Minister Adam Daniel Rotfeld pointed to the fourth most important priority in Polish foreign policy, namely, efforts aimed at stabilization and modernization of Iraq (supported by growing involvement of private companies).¹⁰

From Poland's perspective the growing importance of non-European regions is further confirmed by adoption by the Polish government of two significant strategies: Strategy for Poland's Development Co-operation (October 2003) and Strategy

⁷ Cf. *Strategia RP w odniesieniu do pozaeuropejskich krajów rozwijających się*, Warszawa, XI 2004, www.msz.gov.pl/files/docs/Strategia_kraje_roz.pdf, p. 14.

⁸ *Informacja Ministra Spraw Zagranicznych RP Włodzimierza Cimoszewicza o podstawowych kierunkach polityki zagranicznej (przedstawiona na 16. posiedzeniu Sejmu w dniu 14 marca 2002 roku)*, www.msz.gov.pl/Wystapienie.Ministra.1648.html.

⁹ *Ibidem*.

¹⁰ Cf. *Informacja Rządu na temat polskiej polityki zagranicznej przedstawiona na posiedzeniu Sejmu 21 stycznia 2005 roku przez ministra spraw zagranicznych RP prof. Adama Daniela Rotfelda*, [www.msz.gov.pl/Wystapienie.Ministra.\(tekst\).1160.html](http://www.msz.gov.pl/Wystapienie.Ministra.(tekst).1160.html).

of the Republic of Poland towards non-European Developing Countries (November 2004). They are important instruments in increasing Poland's involvement in actions carried out in the Middle East as well. The former document focuses on Polish development aid. It points to the fact that priority is assigned to selected developing countries which maintain relations with Poland at a significant level, and implement political transformation processes, i.e. mainly the countries of Eastern and South-Eastern Europe, as well as developing countries and those undergoing transformation whose residents include large groups of ethnic Poles (another category comprises humanitarian and *ad hoc* aid granted e.g. in the case of conflict and crisis prevention).¹¹ These states, although not ranked at the top of the list, may include BMENA countries, which is reflected in aid action plans and practice discussed later in this presentation. The latter of the strategies is a comprehensive document setting aims, objectives and instruments of co-operation with developing countries and detailed aspects of co-operation with individual regions.¹²

The Strategy towards Developing non-European Countries says, among others, that one of Polish policy priorities should consist in expanding the **body of laws and treaties**, as agreements are major co-operation instruments. This intention, at least towards BMENA countries, is justified since there are several co-operation areas which require institutional support. Particularly worth noting in this context are agreements on facilitating employment abroad and/or providing legal assistance. Poland has signed with most of the region's states agreements on supporting and protecting investment and avoiding double taxation, as well as agreements on cultural and research and development co-operation.¹³ Both strategies and agreements form a solid base for developing bi- and multilateral relations.

Co-operation in science and academic education is the only area in which **bi-lateral co-operation** between Poland and the region's states has flourished for years. Every year students and doctoral students from BMENA countries come to Poland to continue their education. This co-operation also enables Polish researchers to participate in traineeship programmes in the Arab world. Trade exchange, on the other hand, is developing more dynamically and has reached the USD 1 million threshold. Increase in Polish exports to most of BMENA countries is worth noting, although the potential still remains to be fully explored.

Poland engages in **multilateral relations** mostly as a member state of the European Union. As such it participates in initiatives carried out within the frame-

¹¹ Cf. *Strategia polskiej współpracy na rzecz rozwoju. Przyjęta przez Radę Ministrów w dniu 21 października 2003 r.*, www.ms.gov.pl/files/docs/STRATEGIA.doc, p. 6.

¹² In the "Near and Middle East region" which includes Iran, Saudi Arabia, UAE and Kuwait as priority states, and Iraq – as a significant state, the principal objective in political and security sphere is stabilization and assistance in modernization of Iraq, supporting efforts leading to solution of Israeli-Palestinian conflict, while important objectives include sustaining dialogue with regional Arab partners and Iran, seeking understanding and support from Gulf Council states and other countries of the Arab Peninsula in the context of our involvement in Iraq, maintaining direct relations with them at significant level established in 2003. In the area of economy Poland strives to achieve a status of a reliable partner to countries of the region, renew investment activity and increase the volume of trade. In the case of "Africa" it should be noted that favourable co-operation prospects relate mainly to North African states: Egypt, Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia are considered priority states, while Libya is considered a significant state. Cf. *Strategia RP w odniesieniu do pozaeuropejskich krajów rozwijających się...*, pp. 32-47.

¹³ See: *Internetowa baza traktatowa*, www.ms.gov.pl/apps/apps/?portlet=bpt/linki.

work of Euro-Mediterranean partnership and European Neighbourhood Policy; it is also very much interested in strengthening relations with the Gulf Co-operation Council. Poland's relations with BMENA countries are also determined by its obligations towards international organizations. Currently Poland is an active participant in NATO's Mediterranean dialogue, which is particularly visible in the cases of Algeria and Libya. It offers specialist staff training and assistance in modernization of post-Soviet military equipment. In this context Algeria is an important partner as it is perceived as the main US ally in North Africa in combating terror and has been associated with the EU since April 2002. Moreover, it strives to apply NATO standards in the area of organization, training and professionalization of armed forces. Algeria is an active participant in Partnership for Peace and Mediterranean dialogue, and an organizer of military exercises and manoeuvres.

At the moment Poland strives to reconstruct those relations with BMENA countries which cooled down or loosened after 1989. Closer economic co-operation especially with countries grouped in the Gulf Co-operation Council is currently of crucial importance. The aim of such co-operation is above all to increase the volume of mutual trade. Importance of the Persian Gulf region also results from Poland's pursuit of additional sources of energy, as e.g. natural gas imported from Qatar.

Poland maintains major commercial relations with BMENA countries, resulting from our involvement in Iraq but also from EU and NATO membership. Nonetheless, the mission in Iraq has complicated our policy towards these states which is currently carried out in a highly sensitive manner in order to avoid destabilization in the region.

To recapitulate, Poland currently strives to maintain its position in the Arab world and to strengthen it gradually especially in the area of trade. Democratization of the region is equally important although we realize that it requires caution due to cultural differences.

Polish initiatives in the BMENA region

Poland is proud of its involvement in a number of activities carried out in areas covered by international initiatives addressed to BMENA countries. These included both governmental and non-governmental initiatives.

Governmental initiatives

In Poland's current foreign policy towards BMENA states priority is assigned to Iraq. Poland's main objective consists in taking part in the stabilization of that country, as this is the necessary condition for contributing to its democratization.¹⁴ During his visit to Iraq in December 2005 Prime Minister Kazimierz Marcinkiewicz an-

¹⁴ These actions are also determined by Poland's efforts to ensure the repayment of USD 780 million debt incurred by previous Iraqi governments back in 1980s.

nounced a plan for reconstruction of relations with that country, which, as it is hoped, will be implemented shortly. Since 2003 Poland has assisted the Iraqi armed and security forces in training and modernisation after the collapse of Saddam Hussein's regime. A number of specialist courses, addressed e.g. to the newly created police forces, was conducted, not only within Iraq, but in Poland as well.

As part of academic exchange Polish universities train physicians, engineers and other specialists who often perform important functions in the Arab world in their later careers. In exchange, Arab countries offer educational programmes to Polish academics specializing in Arab studies. Poland is in fact able to continue to offer educational pathways to specialists from BMENA countries also at the level of doctoral studies. Palestinian Authority can serve as a good example here: in 2004 Poland hosted 52 Palestinian nationals who attended university studies, doctoral programmes, post-graduate medical traineeships and medical consultant study programmes.¹⁵ Polish-Arab academic and research co-operation is particularly close and evident in the field of archaeology. Polish archaeological missions are actively working in Egypt, Sudan, Syria and Lebanon.

In 2005 the Polish government presented projects dealing with elimination of depots of weapons of mass destruction (chemical weapons) situated among others in Libya, to be implemented in the coming years. Poland's assistance also consists in transforming munitions factories producing chemical weapons into civil industrial plants. The state has also offered the construction of concentrated nitrogen acid plant and specialist training for Libyan engineers.¹⁶

Apart from Iraq, Poland has not excluded the possibilities of close military co-operation with certain BMENA states, as e.g. with Libya or Algeria. Poland offers basic and advanced training courses, also provided locally, mutual exercises within strategic dialogs, exchange of information on the role of armed forces in society, as well as assistance, support and development aid and the creation of twinning or joint units.

Multilateral initiatives include activities carried out by the Polish-Arab Chamber of Commerce which has representatives in a number of Arab countries. The aim of its activities is to facilitate commercial relations between Polish companies and their Arab partners.

As part of multilateral initiatives some Polish universities independently established co-operation with numerous Arab academic and research institutions. This co-operation is conducted according to expectations and capacities of the given institution outside governmental control, most often in the form of projects. The following Polish academic institutions maintain such forms of close co-operation: Warsaw University, Wrocław University, Łódź University, the Universities of Technology in

¹⁵ Data: *Polska współpraca na rzecz rozwoju – raport roczny 2004*, www.msz.gov.pl/files/docs/pomocpr2.pdf, p. 35.

¹⁶ Information source: Ministry of National Defence, International Cooperation Department. It must be noted that Poland's military have been active in BMENA states since the 1960s with the UN peacekeeping missions. Currently Poland maintains large troops contingencies within UNIFIL-2 (Lebanon) and UNDOF (Syria and Israel), as well as in Afghanistan within ISAF and finally in Iraq. In this text, however, Poland's participation in UN peacekeeping in the region and aid activities in BMENA are separated.

Gdańsk, Wrocław and Rzeszów, and the Agricultural University in Kraków. This is aimed at exchange of scientific information and staff, and at joint research.

In the context of development co-operation, priority states include Afghanistan and Iraq, and – since 2005 – the Palestinian Authority. In 2004 (in other words, in the first year following the adoption of the Strategy for Poland's Development Co-operation) initiatives targeted at Afghanistan and Iraq included an invitation to tender addressed to NGOs and aimed at selecting organizations which could carry out projects according to objectives defined by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In the case of Afghanistan priorities included: reconstruction and strengthening of medical and educational infrastructure and technical assistance in political and economic reconstruction (including reconstruction of state administration structures and creation of local government system). In the case of Iraq, on the other hand, the priorities were as follows: water supply, provision of hospital equipment, technical assistance for managers in creating state administration structures and for entrepreneurs in building and reinforcing market economy. Humanitarian aid granted in 2004 to Darfur (Sudan) and Iran should also be mentioned. In the case of Afghanistan the plan for 2005 was to spend PLN 750,000 (PLN 250,000 in 2004) for implementation of projects in the following areas (apart from the ones mentioned above): support for development of agriculture and rural areas, reintegration of former soldiers with the society, and training of police officers. Similarly, Iraq was to receive funding in the amount of PLN 750,000 (PLN 600,000 in 2004) for projects related to the following issues (apart from those discussed earlier): training of lawyers, police officers and prison guards, assistance in adjusting the existing infrastructure to the needs of the disabled. The amount of PLN 350,000 was earmarked for the Palestinian Authority for funding shelter, providing potable water and sanitary facilities, and expanding administration structures.¹⁷

Non-governmental initiatives¹⁸

Activities of Polish NGOs carried out in BMENA countries were focused above all on offering development aid to Iraq, Sudan and Afghanistan. Caritas Polska, Polish Medical Mission and Polish Humanitarian Organization (PAH) played the part of the most active aid providers.

Caritas Polska was a medical aid provider to Afghanistan, Sudan and Iraq, where a clinic was opened in Al-Hillah, consulting rooms at orphanages and clinics in Al-Hurr near Karbala and Al-Kut, which serve a 30-thousand community.

¹⁷ In 2005 other priority states were to receive more funding: Georgia – PLN 1.5 million, Moldova – PLN 1 million, Vietnam – PLN 1 million. Angola was to receive PLN 500,000. Moreover, BMENA countries were not meant to be the recipients of aid targeted at countries which are in the period of transformation (PLN 7,975,000). Data: *Informacja nt. pomocy rozwojowej udzielonej przez Polskę w 2004 r.*, 1 VII 2005, www.msz.gov.pl/Pomoc.rozwojowa.udzielona.przez.Polske.w.2004.r..1772.html; *Polska współpraca na rzecz rozwoju – raport roczny 2004...*, pp. 29-31; *Ramowy plan działań pomocowych MSZ na rok 2005*, www.msz.gov.pl/Pomoc.rozwojowa.udzielona.przez.Polske.w.2004.r..1772.html.

¹⁸ Data on this part: *Activity of Polish NGO's Abroad*, CD version, "Grupa Zagranica", IX 2005.

The Polish Medical Mission was active in Afghanistan, where it ran a project to restore infrastructure and medical assistance in Mazar-i Sharif. The first team was dispatched to Afghanistan in December 2002. Thanks to the co-operation with the UNHCR and the Polish government, the team was able to establish the clinics in Quetta, Chaman, Nushki and Kandahar, which serve 80 women and infants daily. The Polish Medical Mission provided these clinics with medical equipment and supplies. Furthermore, four ambulances funded by the Mission were delivered to the Mazar-i Sharif rescue service.

The Polish Humanitarian Organization (PAH) has maintained an office in Kabul since 2002. Between 2003 and 2005 it participated in reconstruction of the Agricultural College. Furthermore, it also participated in several projects in Iraq aimed at restoration of schools in the provinces of Babil and Wasit. Altogether 16 schools, 7 youth centers and 3 sports centers were refurbished and equipped. Moreover, 6 water intakes were fixed and 8 further schools were built. A number of children were granted holidays at Al-Hillah. Between November 2003 and March 2004 the Organization participated in refitting the water purification station in the Babil area. Unfortunately, Polish personnel had to leave for Poland in May 2004 because of the deteriorating security in Iraq. The Organization, however, remained active in Sudan.

Among the lesser known Polish aid organization is the African Missions Association, which was active in Morocco and several sub-Saharan states. Its personnel provided training and basic education, particularly in the field of agriculture. They also promoted dialog with Islam and traditional African cults.

Moreover, a number of Polish NGOs (Lech Wałęsa Institute and the Association 'School for Leaders') came up with training projects for social workers from Arab countries such as Iraq or Palestine, aimed at building civil society structures and supporting democratic change.

Yet another type of activities carried out by NGOs is the exchange of experience in restructuring and economic modernization of the country by organizing conferences and preparing expert reports. Initiatives implemented by the Centre for Social and Economic Research (CASE) for the benefit of Iraq are a good example.¹⁹

To recapitulate, Poland is beginning to play an active role in the BMENA region. Development of co-operation is hindered by certain obstacles – most notably an unfriendly approach of some Polish organizations and limited material (small number of diplomatic posts) and financial capabilities of Poland. Too many Polish organizations are simply afraid of dealing with the BMENA states because of the high risk of such involvement caused by political or economic instability, or ultimately lack of understanding of different cultures. The main constraint in Poland's humanitarian activities in BMENA is the lack of dedicated government agency, which promotes development and provides aid to developing countries. However, it is probable that the number of Poland's initiatives in the BMENA region will be growing in the next years.

¹⁹ Cf. e.g.: B. Kamiński, *Economic Regime for Iraq: the Foreign Trade Perspective*, "Studies and Analyses" (Centre for Social and Economic Research – CASE), 2003, No. 259, Warszawa.

Prospects for action. Example of co-operation within V-4 and with Turkey

Poland's contribution to BMENA

In the coming years Poland may offer its contribution to bi- and multilateral initiatives aiming at stabilization, democratization and modernization of BMENA countries, above all those pursued within *Forum for the Future*.²⁰ Despite limitations mentioned earlier, this is possible thanks to Poland's reliable experts' base comprising engineers, medical staff, teachers and academics, operating archaeological stations, training and research institutions and organizations promoting co-operation between entrepreneurs and local authorities (such as the Mixed Committee in Iran), historical experience in relations with BMENA countries, functioning of a Muslim community in Poland, respect and tolerance for foreign cultures, religions and systems of values, rooted in tradition, previously discussed active culture, research contacts and participation of many graduates of Polish universities in the state apparatus of the region's countries.

Poland is keen on supporting political and economic reforms in BMENA countries. Nonetheless, it is of the opinion that gradual democratization should be accompanied by respect for cultural and historical differences present in the region. Reforms must not be imposed by foreign partners; instead they should be prepared by domestic decision makers in the country in question. Considering this, Poland could participate in initiatives carried out among others by *Forum for the Future* in order to support BMENA states by providing them with appropriate human resources, infrastructure and funds necessary to implement these reforms.

Possible areas of Poland's involvement are roughly defined in the Strategy for Poland's development co-operation. In the case of both political initiatives – chiefly democratization and building administration structures at national and local level (within *Forum for the Future* these include: *Democracy Assistance Dialogue*, DAD and *Civil Society Dialogue*) and educational and economic projects (which relate to the remaining other activities areas within the *Forum*), with its experience in political transformation and political and economic reforms Poland could share its expertise in these matters with BMENA states (Algeria and Egypt are among the countries which clearly expect this type of assistance from Poland²¹). Another initiative worth joining is the *Fund for the Future*, a fund which supports small and medium enterprises; and is based on an American fund addressed to Central and Eastern Europe.²² Poland's role could consist in raising the level of knowledge, skills and qualifications

²⁰ See on the Forum: *Broader Middle East and North Africa Initiative Makes Progress*, Fact Sheet, Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs, Washington DC, 19 VII 2005, www.state.gov/p/nea/rls/49781.htm.

²¹ Cf. I. Nafie, *Lessons in Transformation*, "Al-Ahram Weekly On-line", 31 V–6 VI 2001, Issue No. 536, www.weekly.ahram.org.eg/2001/536/op1.htm; also: *Strategia RP w odniesieniu do pozaeuropejskich krajów rozwijających się...*, pp. 42–43.

²² See: D. Shelby, *Forum for the Future Promotes Democracy, Job Creation*, www.usinfo.state.gov/mena/Archive/2005/Nov/12-179438.html.

of various groups of residents of BMENA states. This could be done by training administration and local government officials, managers and entrepreneurs, medical staff, police officers, lawyers, technicians in maritime industry, etc. Poland could also offer expert assistance, especially in the area of building civil society, good governance, crisis management, respect for human rights, building independent media and information society, technical assistance, preparing economic analyses and expert reports. Furthermore, Poland could prepare and carry out investment projects in individual countries, e.g. by implementing consulting services and transfer of the know-how. It is also able to train students and doctoral students in order to ensure transfer of knowledge to BMENA countries and support educational reforms there. Material support in the form of supplies of equipment to schools, hospitals, etc. as well as financial aid – if available – is also foreseen. Equally important is assistance in protection of cultural heritage (the role of Polish archaeological stations).

During the Fifth Euro-Mediterranean Speakers Conference, which took place in November 2005, the Speaker of the Senate, Bogdan Borusewicz, discussed prospects for reinforcing Poland's presence in the region as part of EU activities: "Poland supports cross-cultural and cross-religious dialogue within the Barcelona Process. Apart from research and cultural contacts we will focus on joining activities aimed at protection and development of democracy and respect for human rights. Of equal importance are projects designed to facilitate the process of socio-political reforms and implementation of efficient governance strategies. We are willing to share our experience with our Mediterranean partners also in the area of professional and socio-political development of women, reinforcement of civil society structures, combating corruption and promotion of independent journalism. Improvement of co-operation in these areas will enable the Mediterranean region as a whole to regain its role of a pioneer of cultural development which long ago initiated the European civilization. Let us remember that interaction between Europe and the remaining part of the region is beneficial to both sides; it enriches our experience, makes us more aware of the roots of our tradition and even today, although we keep hearing of tiredness and decline of European civilization, it may channel new energy and give impetus to our development".²³

Our NATO membership brought about new opportunities. Poland's current military co-operation is particularly intensive with Iraq and Algeria, which is a result of our involvement in the first, and comprehensive co-operation programme carried out with the latter country, among others, within NATO's Mediterranean Partnership. Poland is also able to use its experience in restructuring and modernizing the armed forces. Moreover, Polish government presented several projects aiming at elimination of weapons of mass destruction kept in arsenals in a number of Arab countries and offered assistance in transforming munitions factories into civil industrial plants. Similar proposals are submitted on a regular basis. For instance, the gov-

²³ Website of the Polish Senate: www.senat.gov.pl.

ernment expects Libya to respond positively to the offer of transforming the capacities and output of some munitions factories into civil industrial production.²⁴

Possible co-operation with V4 states and Turkey

Poland's development aid strategy confirms that Central and Eastern European states can collaborate closely, also as EU members, in carrying out joint aid projects in third countries.²⁵ This is also the case with the Vyšehrad Group countries. A brief analysis of these countries' actions and plans focused solely on development aid reveals that within both regional co-operation and EU level activities there may be areas of joint participation in initiatives targeted at BMENA.²⁶ In their development aid strategy all four Vyšehrad Group countries prioritized most of the elements which had been mentioned as potential Polish contribution. All of them have certain experience in political transformation and are willing to share their expertise with third countries. Doing so, they intend to support political reforms aimed at democratization and creation of administration structures at national and local level and economic reforms (privatization, etc.). In the former case Poland might, for instance, join Hungary (and Turkey) and become involved in activities carried out by the *Foundation for the Future*, an organization which supports the creation of civil society.²⁷ Furthermore, all V4 states show interest in activities such as assistance in expanding the infrastructure, transfer of knowledge and support for education, research and health care through training, consultancy and expert assistance. Thus, it seems that co-operation within the *Forum for the Future*, focused on the above mentioned areas, is possible especially in the case of DAD, *Civil Society Dialogue*, promotion of education and counteracting illiteracy.

Turkey is particularly active as far as these areas are concerned, which makes V4's co-operation with Turkey within the *Forum* possible. It should be noted here that Turkey is DAD's Government Sponsor responsible for the issue of women's rights and participation of women in public life.²⁸ As said earlier, Poland is interested in granting help in promoting professional careers of women and improving their socio-political involvement in public life in Mediterranean states. Joint actions of V4 and Turkey targeted at BMENA might be focused on a certain group of this region's states. Support for Afghanistan is a priority in initiatives carried out by all Vyšehrad Group countries. Most of them also prioritize help for the Palestinian Authority and Iraq, where for some time Turkey was active as well. Apart from its participation in

²⁴ Cf. *Charakterystyka kontaktów wojskowych z krajami Północnej Afryki*, Ministry of National Defence, International Cooperation Department, Warszawa 2006.

²⁵ Cf. *Strategia polskiej współpracy na rzecz rozwoju...*

²⁶ *Ibidem*. See also: V. Benč, *Rozvojová pomoc a spolupráca – výzvy a perspektívy*, SFPA, Prešov 2005, www.sfpa.sk/publ/Rozvojova_pomoc.pdf; *Rozvojová spolupráce a humanitární pomoc*, www.mzv.cz/wwwol/mzv/dcfault.asp?ido=329&amb=1&idj=1&ikony=False; *Hungarian Policy For International Development Cooperation (IDC)*, www.mfa.gov.hu/kum/en/bal/foreign_policy/international_development/ide.htm.

²⁷ See: D. Shelby, *Forum for the Future Promotes Democracy, Job Creation...*

²⁸ See: *Report on the Initiatives Undertaken in the Framework of Democracy Assistance Dialogue 2005*, www.fco.gov.uk/Files/kfile/Bahrain%20-%20DAD%20Report%202005.pdf.

ISAF, Turkey trains soldiers and police officers in Afghanistan, and carries out reconstruction projects in areas such as education, agriculture and the building sector. In the Palestinian Authority it supports the construction of infrastructure and educational and health care institutions. It also helps in conducting economic reforms, among others, through the Ankara Forum and the Turkish Agency for Co-operation and Development, by supporting the reform of public finances and development of tourism and agriculture. Moreover, it trains police forces and funds grants for students. In Iraq Turkey grants humanitarian aid and initiates activities aimed at stabilization of the state. It also supports political changes, among others, by organizing seminars and meetings for Iraqi political parties to discuss problems of democratic institutions, procedures of adopting legal acts and organizing elections, economic reconstruction of the country by supporting the "Neighbourhood Forum", i.e. consultancy between representatives of Iraq and its neighbours.²⁹ The V4 states could cooperate with Turkey in carrying out initiatives in all these areas which, let us remember, are comprised by the *Forum*.

Turkey and Poland, as well as other Vyšehrad Group countries strive for stabilization of BMENA states. Hence, their collaboration within the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative (ICI), which operates within NATO, seems to be possible. This Initiative is targeted at BMENA and aims, among others, at counteracting terrorism, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and smuggling of drugs, arms and humans, disaster prevention, training, participation in NATO exercises, consultancy in defence and civil-military relations.³⁰

²⁹ Cf. *Die türkische Außenpolitik (Synopsis)*, www.tcberlinbe.de/de/aussepolitik/synopsis.htm.

³⁰ See: N. de Santis, *Otwieranie się na region Śródziemnomorski i szerzej rozumiany Bliski Wschód*, "NATO Przegląd", Autumn 2004, www.nato.int/docu/review/2004/issue3/polish/art4_pr.html.