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## **United States policy on the Oder-Neisse question in the 1960s as viewed by Zbigniew Brzezinski**

This article examines the views of Zbigniew Brzezinski (1928–2017) on United States policy in the matter of Poland's western border. The time-frame is limited to the 1960s, the decade preceding the Polish–West German border treaty of 1970. The reason for this is Brzezinski's exceptional level of journalistic and political activity in this period in relation to the question of the Oder–Neisse Line, which was accompanied by revived interest from the administrations of presidents John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson in issues concerning Central and Eastern Europe (Tyszkiewicz 2015: 185–211, 233–238). The correlation between American policy in Europe and Brzezinski's activities is also demonstrated by the latter's involvement in the work of the Policy Planning Council in the State Department in the years 1966–1968, shortly after Johnson's announcement of a policy of “bridge building” with the communist countries of Central and Eastern Europe (Mania 1996: 53). The end date of the period under consideration corresponds to a decline in interest in the border question – on the part of both American diplomacy and Brzezinski himself – following the Polish–West German treaty, which was concluded against the backdrop of US–Soviet *détente* and West Germany's parallel *Ostpolitik* (Jarząbek 2011: 252).

The author intends to show to what degree Brzezinski's position on the need for formal US recognition of the Oder–Neisse border corresponded with his vision of a breaking down of the Cold War division of Europe through a weakening of Soviet influence in Poland and resolution of the problem of disputed national borders. What is noteworthy is not only the American political scientist's influence on US policy in our part of Europe, being oriented towards deepening the divisions within the communist bloc, but also his wider view of the border problem in the context of Polish–German relations, Polish–Soviet relations, nationalism, and communist ideology. This study is thus not intend-

ed as a comprehensive analysis of US policy in the matter of Poland's western border, such as has already been presented in works on American foreign policy and the history of international relations. What deserves highlighting, however, is Brzezinski's proposal for the Oder–Neisse question to be resolved by the United States as an act serving to stabilise the whole of Europe, anticipating a decline in the importance of borders and the emergence of an interdependence of interests between the US, West Germany, Poland, and the USSR. It may be asked to what degree this supranational point of view on the Polish–German border question might have served to increase interest in Poland among Washington political circles, and to what degree it corresponded only to the administration's universalist view of contemporary European issues.

The materials left by Brzezinski and by US diplomatic sources shed light on the significance of the question of Poland's western border in the American vision of the European political order. The scope of the present research thus goes beyond the previously analysed diplomatic aspects of the Polish western border question, to include Brzezinski's internationalist ideas in relation to the political order in Europe. This work is therefore based primarily on Brzezinski's publications and archive material concerning the Oder–Neisse question, supplemented by documents from the State Department and other government institutions, found in the US federal archives.

In the Cold War era, Zbigniew Brzezinski's view that Washington should issue official confirmation of the permanence of the Polish–German border on the Oder and Neisse was divergent with respect to the official US policy since 1945, which was to avoid giving *de jure* recognition to the border as established in Potsdam (Allen 2003: 245–246). At the same time his position on the status of the Polish–German border corresponded to the viewpoint in American diplomacy that had favoured, since the Potsdam conference, the formation of strong economic links between the former German lands, including Silesian industry, and Western Europe (*Notatka delegacji polskiej...* 1945).<sup>1</sup> This was confirmed by a statement by Secretary of State George Marshall at a conference held in Moscow in 1947 to discuss the Polish–German borders, which regardless of their shape “do not create a continuing political problem and are not barriers to the accustomed and healthful flow of trade and commerce and human intercourse” (Marshall 1947). It is notable that the Americans attached less weight to the precise position of the border than to the establishment of

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<sup>1</sup> This subject was addressed in Potsdam by, among others, the US ambassador in Moscow, Averell Harriman, who spoke of the need for exports of coal from Silesia “for the needs of other countries”.

a “kind of a frontier” that would serve “Europe as a whole”. Brzezinski’s views on the question of the Oder–Neisse Line thus did not represent political revisionism with respect to the original US position, which was aimed at the permanent neutralisation of Central European border disputes. The change proposed by Brzezinski was to put an end to the temporary status of the Polish–German border in international law; this was to serve to increase political and economic interdependence between East and West.

In Brzezinski’s view, the question of the Oder–Neisse border was a significant element of the United States’ influence on the communist bloc as a whole, because it affected not only its relations with the West, but also the internal stability of the communist system. Hence, his position was greatly influenced by the changes that took place in Poland after 1956. He believed that they weakened the “communist orthodoxy” in favour of a reformist current, close to Western social democratic thinking (Brzezinski, Griffith 1961). By the same token, Poland and other communist bloc countries in Central and Eastern Europe had adopted a more diversified political face, opening an opportunity for the United States to create a neutral belt of countries that would no longer be subject to total Soviet control, although they would maintain friendly relations with the USSR (*ibidem*). In Brzezinski’s view it was the Polish western border question that conditioned these sociopolitical transformations in Poland, affecting in turn that country’s multifaceted relations with the West (*ibidem*). For this reason, from 1961 onwards Brzezinski expressed his belief that the United States’ failure to recognise the line of Poland’s western border above all undermined Washington’s credibility in Central and Eastern Europe.<sup>2</sup>

Brzezinski’s expression of such views appears to have coincided, not accidentally, with the start of the Kennedy administration, whose policy was oriented towards creating divisions in the communist bloc (Tyszkiewicz 2011: 18–21). Henry Kissinger, who in 1961 was a consultant for the National Security Council, then expressed the belief that only the recognition of the Oder–Neisse, rather than the Elbe, as the continent’s dividing line would provide a chance for the stabilisation of Central Europe, which was “highly desired” by the US (Kissinger 1961). For the same reason, Brzezinski regarded formal American confirmation of the position of the Polish–German border as a path to Poland’s loosening of its political dependence on the Soviet Union. In accordance with

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<sup>2</sup> At the 1945 Potsdam conference, the United States, Britain and the USSR placed the formerly German lands east of the Oder and Neisse under “Polish administration”, stipulating that the final shape of the border would be confirmed only at a future peace conference with Germany.

the policy of “flexible response”, the United States aimed in this way to achieve a deconcentration of power in the communist countries through support for manifestations of their national sovereignty (Gaddis 2007: 290–291). Settlement of the border issue in Poland’s favour, with the goal of extending Polish “internal autonomy”, might thus lead to the opening up of the whole Eastern bloc to economic and political links with the West (Brzezinski 1961; Brzezinski, Griffith 1961). Brzezinski’s belief that the Oder and Neisse should be seen as the actual line of the “Iron Curtain” dividing Europe, taking the place of the German question that had thus far held centre stage, therefore corresponded to the Kennedy administration’s vision as outlined above.

The political weight of Brzezinski’s position is confirmed by the fact that in February 1961, as a lecturer at Columbia University, he attended a meeting in Washington with Adam Schaff, considered the chief ideologist of the Polish communist party (PZPR), who had come to the US in the role of “special emissary” of the First Secretary of the PZPR Central Committee, Władysław Gomułka (Tyszkiewicz 2011: 20–22, 73–74). State Department materials show that the Oder–Neisse question was one of the main topics of discussion between American diplomats and Schaff, who, citing Gomułka’s “firm position”, promised the friendliness of Poland (towards the US) within the eastern bloc in exchange for American recognition of the border (*Discussion...* 1961). It is known from Schaff’s report that he learnt of the views of a group of American diplomats and academics on the matter of Poland’s western border (Schaff 1961), and that among them it was Brzezinski who expressed himself most eloquently, indicating that it was only the circumstances of the Berlin crisis that prevented the US government from giving its support to the present Polish–German border, since “it was not possible to brutally spurn the Germans in the present world conflict”.

Brzezinski’s assertion that the United States’ support for West German policy was merely “simulated” undoubtedly made an impression on Schaff, who interpreted it as “*de facto* recognition of the [Polish western] border by the United States” (ibidem). Polish expectations in this matter were strengthened by a pre-election assurance supposedly given to the Polish UN delegation by Kennedy’s associates in 1960 that, in case of his victory, the new president would recognize the Polish–German border as final (*Review...* 1961). It should be added, however, that Foy D. Kohler, assistant to the Secretary of State, dampened the hopes of the Polish party leadership when in April 1961 he confirmed to Schaff only the recognition of the “Polish administration in the Western Lands”. In excluding the possibility of any practical change to the border, he added that the United States could not take formal steps in that matter, since it

would mean accepting the division of Germany. Schaff expressed understanding for the American position, which he explained in his report as a US bargaining chip “in the future settlement of matters of central Europe” (Schaff 1961). American intentions were indeed described in that same conversation by Kohler, who expressed a hope for an understanding between Poland and the Federal Republic of Germany in place of the “communist proposal” providing for a peace treaty with the two German states (*Discussion...* 1961). He suspected that behind Polish efforts to obtain American recognition of the Oder-Neisse line was a desire to achieve international legalisation of the division of Germany.

Paradoxically, it was the construction of the Berlin Wall in 1961 that allowed the Kennedy administration to divest itself of its obligations to West Germany in the matter of reunification, and at the same time stabilised the position of the GDR on the western side of the Oder-Neisse border (Allen 2003: 241–242). However, this process was not accompanied by any undertakings by the United States towards Poland or Germany with regard to the border. During the period of tension over Berlin, Kohler warned ambassador Edward Droźniak of the dangers posed to Poland by Khrushchev’s policy, since legalisation of the division of Germany through US recognition of Poland’s western border would be a “threat to peace” in the whole of Europe (*Berlin and Germany* 1961). After the 1961 Berlin crisis, American diplomacy created conditions that forced West Germany (but not the US itself) to recognise the territorial status quo in Central Europe, while encouraging Poland to enter into dialogue with Bonn in the face of the danger of an understanding between the Soviets and the two German states. Only these circumstances, related to the German question, can explain the sense of Brzezinski’s engagement in solving the problem of the Oder-Neisse Line.

Irrespective of the weight of the problems raised during Schaff’s visit to Washington, it is hard to find any significant consequences of his conversation with Brzezinski, other than a Polish-American academic conference, held in Jabłonna near Warsaw in May 1962, devoted to European international security, East-West relations, and the German question (Zyzak 2016: 128). Still little is known about the events and consequences of that meeting.<sup>3</sup> However, Polish official and press reaction to Brzezinski’s political ideas was usually critical or polemic. In official reports, even then, Brzezinski

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<sup>3</sup> Besides Brzezinski, the American side was represented by the political scientists and economists William Griffith and John Montias. The group of Polish experts included, among others, Oskar Lange, Józef Szczepański, Manfred Lachs, Hilary Minc, and Mieczysław Rakowski.

was accused of having links with American intelligence and the New York financial elites (Vaïsse 2013: 3–26). Indeed, these were not groundless suspicions.<sup>4</sup> Consequently, American promises to Poland of scientific and cultural exchange were described by Ryszard Strzelecki of the PZPR Central Committee's politburo, at the party congress in June 1964, as dangerous attempts to “soften up” the communist countries (Nowak-Jeziorański, Brzezinski 2014: 71). In turn, in the February 1967 edition of the Central Committee's monthly *Nowe Drogi*, Roman Werfel accused Brzezinski of attempting to restore the capitalist system in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe and to propagate the American lifestyle (Werfel 1967: 99–111). On the other hand, Brzezinski's ideas were fully supported by Jan Nowak-Jeziorański, head of the Polish section of Radio Free Europe, who had conferred with Brzezinski on Polish political matters since the late 1950s. In a letter of April 1965, Nowak-Jeziorański accepted Brzezinski's thinking as the “only realistic formula corresponding to Polish national interests in the present political conditions” (Nowak-Jeziorański, Brzezinski 2014: 111).

A key political initiative of the United States that was aligned with Brzezinski's increasing activity in relation to Poland's western border was the programme of “bridge building” officially announced by President Lyndon B. Johnson in May 1964 (Tyszkiewicz 2015: 233–238). The goal, closely linked to the previous one of bringing about the fragmentation of the communist bloc, was to create conditions in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe for a greater national independence from the USSR, to increase the costs of Soviet control, to open up those countries to political, social, economic and cultural contacts with the West, and to cause their internal liberalisation (Thomassen 2017: 263–273). It is telling that in relation to Poland, American intelligence suggested to Johnson that he make an informal declaration “affirming the permanency of Poland's Oder–Neisse frontier”, thus “implicitly raising the question of Poland's eastern frontier”, and so complicating Soviet policy (*Bridges...* 1964). It should be added that the American initiative, aimed at extending the political and economic self-determination of the Soviet-dominated nations, was in no way intended to split them from the communist bloc, but to satisfy their need for security by normalising the relations of those countries between

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<sup>4</sup> Brzezinski began his academic and political career in the US with study at prestigious Ivy League universities, which in time enabled him to join the elite New York-based Council on Foreign Relations. In the 1970s, together with David Rockefeller, chairman of Chase Manhattan Bank, Brzezinski founded the Trilateral Commission, which supported processes of “growing interdependence” between the United States, Western Europe and Japan.

East and West. A factor that favoured improvement in the sphere of Polish–American relations was the 1965 appointment as US ambassador in Warsaw of John Gronouski, an official of Polish descent, who enjoyed the trust of the Polish diplomatic service (Tyszkiewicz 2015: 254–257).

In the judgement of Secretary of State Dean Rusk, there existed favourable circumstances for reconciliatory actions towards the Soviet-dominated states, because the political leadership in Poland was aware that the new Polish–Soviet treaty of April 1965 did not guarantee the inviolability of any of Poland's borders (Rusk 1965). A feeling of insecurity in Warsaw might also have been aroused by the USSR–GDR treaty of June 1964, which gave an assurance of the permanence of the East German borders “without stating their exact position”. In this context, Gomułka responded to Johnson's proposal with an appeal to the president, transmitted in a conversation with Averell Harriman, for an official announcement “that our borders on the Oder and Neisse established in Potsdam are final” (*Protokół...* 1965). However, the Americans assessed the border question from an internationalist perspective, foreseeing the possibility of its settlement only “in the course of the removal of barriers in Europe”. The final aim of US policy towards Central and Eastern Europe was to be the dismantling of the Iron Curtain, which would mean the practical ending of the Cold War division of Europe, along with a decline in the importance of national borders.

It was only in the atmosphere of Johnson's “bridge building” that Brzezinski could become fully engaged in resolving the Oder–Neisse border question, as a general European problem that had an impact on the global position and credibility of the United States. He set out his position on this matter most extensively in his work *Europa bez podziału* (“Europe without division”), published not coincidentally in 1965, in which he evaluated the Oder–Neisse problem through the lens of the division of Europe, making it an issue in East–West relations, and not merely in Polish–German relations (Brzezinski 1966c: 159–162). In view of this European political significance of the Oder–Neisse line, an improvement of relations between Poland and West Germany would be only a first step on the road to ending the division of the whole continent, which was seen as the source of the Cold War (*ibidem*: 111–113). On the other hand, his proposal to end the political and economic division of Europe unquestionably assigned Germany a distinguished position in the process of East–West dialogue. A new “sense of purpose” in West German politics, consistent with the interests of the United States, was expected to build the trust of Poland, since it lessened the likelihood of a separate German–Soviet agreement, which would pose a danger both to the US and to Poland (Brzezinski 1966b).

Brzezinski's vision thus corresponded well with the *Ostpolitik* initiated by West Germany in 1966 (Jarząbek 2010: 318). In spite of the non-aggression declaration that West Germany then proposed to Poland, the government in Bonn continued to refuse final recognition of the decisions of the Potsdam conference, remaining faithful to the goal of a German state within the 1937 borders. The Johnson administration, in turn, was mistrustful of manifestations of independence in West German foreign policy (Costigliola 1994: 173–179). Nevertheless, the State Department offered sympathetic support to Bonn's initiative, because along with the exchange of letters between representatives of churches in Poland and Germany, it not only opened the way to "eventual reconciliation between the two peoples", but also served to "reduce East–West tensions" and to "isolate the GDR" (*FRG–Eastern European Relations* 1966). For this reason, Brzezinski assigned to West Germany's eastern policy the task of taking the "nationalist" argument out of the PZPR's hands through official acceptance of the "existing Polish borders" (Brzezinski 1966b).

Brzezinski was aware that Polish fears of German revisionism were not just a creation of communist propaganda, but arose from the painful historical experiences of the Polish nation. Here he saw the need to provide Poland with a feeling of security, because Poland could not exist as a nation on wheels, with ever-changing territory and borders (Brzezinski, Griffith 1961). However, Brzezinski perceived the obstacle on the road to normalisation of Polish–German relations not so much in the conditions of the Cold War as in historically grounded national prejudices, particularly on the Polish side. This enabled the Polish communist authorities to take political advantage of the fear of "German revisionism" that was rooted in the Poles' historical consciousness. For this reason, while appreciating the desired Europeanisation of West Germany, Brzezinski also bemoaned the persistent Polish mistrust of Germany, visible in the moods of "Polish settlers" (sic) in Lower Silesia and Pomerania (Brzezinski, Griffith 1961). In Brzezinski's political thinking, then, nationalism was one of the main obstacles on the way to breaking down political and economic borders in Europe. In his view, a state appealing to nationalist values was an anachronism that offered no prospects for development, whether in the West or in Central and Eastern Europe (Brzezinski 1966c: 19–24). The peculiar "national communism" found in Poland made it possible, in his opinion, for control within the communist party to be retained by headstrong types with anti-German and anti-Western tendencies. He foresaw that only the overcoming of these nationalistic fears by the Polish political class and the whole of society would open the way to "a different



kind of Europe”, free of conflicts over “narrow national advantages at the expense of others” (Owen 1966).

The problem was that Brzezinski’s idea of building a Europe free of political and economic borders was addressed not to Poland, but above all to Germany and to the Soviet Union. In his view, the “most important and decisive” objective of US policy in the matter of the Polish western border was not the security and sovereignty of Poland, but the breaking down of the Cold War division of Germany and Europe through support for the process of “Europeanisation of Russia” (Brzezinski 1966c: 164–166). On the other hand, it can be assumed that Brzezinski’s universalist view of Poland and the Polish–German border question may have drawn the attention of the highest decision-makers in the US to the issue of Poland’s independence, as a factor having an impact on the European and global order. The attractiveness of Brzezinski’s perspective to the administration was indeed confirmed in his work at the State Department.

In October 1966 Brzezinski undertook an important journey to Poland, now as a member of the State Department’s Policy Planning Council under the Johnson administration (Zyzak 2016: 130). He was accompanied by Henry Owen, chairman of that council, whose report is one of the most interesting sources of knowledge about the position of Brzezinski, and of American political circles more broadly, on the question of the Polish–German border, Polish national consciousness, and Poland’s international situation (Owen 1966). It can be assumed that the observations contained in Owen’s report concerning questions of territory, borders and ideology reflected Brzezinski’s views and were compiled under his direction. However, the report devotes most attention to issues of national psychology, which was behind the Poles’ perception of the importance of territory and borders. In this context, on the one hand, Owen justified the Polish “obsession” with security between Germany and Russia, resulting from the difficult historical experiences of Poles “living in a house that has collapsed about them” (*ibidem*). It seemed obvious to him that this “stubborn and heroic people” feared a “fifth partition” in case of a war between the countries of NATO and the Warsaw Pact. This also gave Brzezinski grounds to show understanding towards Polish proposals for arms limitations or the establishment of a European security organisation (Brzezinski 1966c: 108–109). However, he saw chances for an easing of tension between East and West not so much in the full independence of the Soviet-dominated nations, but rather in the maintenance of the two military blocks in Europe, which created the best conditions for dialogue between the communist countries and the United States (Zyzak 2016: 131). Building the absolute sovereignty of a nation state based on an anti-Soviet attitude, in Brzezinski’s view, would risk releasing a “ti-

ger of nationalism”<sup>5</sup> that would generate new divisions and borders in Europe rather than remove them (Brzezinski 1966c: 54).

Brzezinski’s critical attitude to the concept of a nation state led him to evaluate the Polish position on the Oder–Neisse question in terms of an “abstraction based on emotions” which roused the masses to a collective and irrational cult of territory, borders and state (Brzezinski 1970: 33). On this basis he further believed that for the nations of Central and Eastern Europe, divided by unnatural borders, Marxist ideology was up to a certain time a “creative stage in the maturing of a universal vision of man”. He did not even conceal his regret over the failure of “communist internationalism” in Central and Eastern Europe, because “the period of Russian domination in no way led to a reduction of traditional conflicts”, and the foundation of Comecon (the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance) occurred “too late” (Brzezinski 1966c: 29–34). Also in Poland, the old “communist internationalism” had been supplanted by “conservative bureaucrats” in the PZPR, appealing to “state nationalism as the principal emotional bond with the masses” (Brzezinski 1970: 38). Thus, he linked Gomułka’s rhetoric over the security of the Polish–German border to the “basically parochial and conservative” character of the Polish “backwater” party leadership, which he saw as being in the “early stages of post-peasant political awakening” leading to the development of a form of “national communism” (Brzezinski 1967; Brzezinski 1966c: 170–171).

In line with Brzezinski’s beliefs, Owen also stated that, contrary to this “conservative orthodoxy”, the Poles’ future ought to lie in the idea of a “European community” in which “wars for national territorial gain have become as unlikely as wars between feudal lords were after the decline of feudalism” (Owen 1966). For this reason, Poland’s perception of territorial issues and the western border question as elements of national identity, based on historical arguments, seemed to Brzezinski to be a highly undesirable relic of the past. As regards the award to Poland of the former German lands of Silesia and Pomerania after 1945, he understood it – characteristically for American political thinking – as compensation for the eastern Polish lands that had been lost to the Soviets (Brzezinski, Griffith 1961). From the perspective of the interests of the “whole of Europe”, the territories of the Polish–German and Polish–Soviet borderlands served, in his view, as a bargaining counter, where the past, tradition, and considerations of nationality were only an obstacle to supranational cooperation. What ultimately mattered was that Poland “without breaking

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<sup>5</sup> He cited the example of Romania, where a weakening of Soviet control had brought not political and economic liberalisation, but a “technocratic–nationalist–communist” dictatorship.

from the Soviet Union, could pull it along with her in evolutionary processes” in the political and economic spheres (Brzezinski 1966c: 165).

Understanding of this new variant of internationalism in Poland now made it necessary to overcome Polish concerns over political borders, along with fear of Germany, and to eliminate “antisemitism”<sup>6</sup> (Brzezinski 1970: 48). In this last case, Owen attached importance to the revision of Polish attitudes to the experiences of the Second World War, in line with the assumption that in the face of the extermination of the Jews “no one of us is innocent”. Here he meant to provoke reflection in Poland over the “moral weakness of man”, which would reduce aversion and suspicion towards the Germans, seen as the only nation responsible for the aggression and war crimes. Only such a conversion of the consciousness of ordinary Poles, in his view, would make it possible to extinguish Polish “national prejudices” in the name of European cooperation.

A telling fact was that the summary report to the State Department on Brzezinski and Owen’s trip to Poland contained no critical remarks on the nature of the communist regime in the Polish People’s Republic or its dependence on Moscow. There was also no assessment of the attitudes of Polish society towards the authorities, particularly in the context of the heightened conflict between state and Church in 1966 (Brzezinski 1966c: 29). The reason for this omission may have been a conversation that took place in Warsaw between Brzezinski and the philosopher Leszek Kołakowski (Nowak-Jeziorański 2005: 544), who echoed his anti-nationalist vision, together with the view that ideological and religious belief systems in Poland were becoming exhausted. In this discussion, Kołakowski apparently shared his concern over the state of moral vacuum in Poland, which in turn opened the way to a national ideology represented by a generation of “nationalist technocrats” (Owen 1966). To prevent this, Brzezinski believed, Poland now needed a new (after Marxism) universalist philosophy, recognising the relativity of moral principles, nationality, borders and territory, which would undermine “irrational beliefs and [...] institutions asserting a monopoly on the truth” (Brzezinski 1970: 37–38). He thus awaited a socially and materially more attractive alternative to the exhausted Soviet Marxism.

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<sup>6</sup> Brzezinski’s cited example of political antisemitism in Poland was the presence of a “partisan” fraction in the PZPR that produced “nationalist” and “antisemitic” slogans, addressed to public opinion and also directed against left-wing intellectuals. He claimed that this group had an ideological link to the pre-war National Democracy movement and to “neofascist activists”, not distinguishing the pre-war national right wing from political activists in communist Poland with a National Democracy pedigree.

It was not without reason that Brzezinski ascribed decisive importance for this “internationalist” transformation in Polish consciousness to the United States, rather than to the already compromised Soviet state. Washington’s recognition of the Polish western border as demarcated in Potsdam would weaken the influence in Poland of ideological and political elites representing “national communism”, in favour of managerial and bureaucratic elites (Brzezinski 1966b). Only then might the Polish communist authorities recognise their own interest in forging closer links with the West, which would protect Poland against possible German territorial claims. Brzezinski claimed that this process would “have a Europeanizing impact on the Communist elites”, enabling them to enter into cooperation with the European Economic Community and the United States, while maintaining links with Moscow through the Warsaw Pact (Brzezinski 1967). He further assumed that a joint settlement of the status of the border by the US, Germany, Poland and the USSR would cause the emergence of a “European-minded technical and economic elite” whose political culture would somehow “naturally” evolve in a “more liberal” direction (*ibidem*).

This peculiar socioeconomic determinism, assuming certain political consequences of Poland’s opening up to relations with the West, led Brzezinski to treat the Oder–Neisse border as a supranational European problem of a political, social and economic nature, which might revolutionise East–West relations. He thus believed that the United States’ official recognition of Poland’s western border would gradually make that border permeable to people and trade, thus raising Poles’ social aspirations and forcing the country’s authorities to take a “more flexible attitude” in the direction of “political tolerance” (Brzezinski 1966c: 199–202; Brzezinski 1967). He hoped that in this way a “European consciousness” could be instilled in the “minds of the communist top flight”, which – thanks to joint economic and scientific projects with American participation – would turn into an “Eastern European cadre of European technocrats” (Brzezinski 1966c: 161, 198). This process was to begin with the United States’ support for a regional confederation of countries in Central and Eastern Europe on the model of the European Economic Community, with the task of breaking down borders and the national divisions present in the region. American involvement was thus to be decisive for such regional cooperation, since the United States had “no [territorial] claims east of the Elbe”, in contrast to Germany and the USSR.

It must be acknowledged that Brzezinski’s position, questioning the meaningfulness of Polish–German border controversies, appeared justified in an era of global confrontation between nuclear powers, when Central European ter-

ritorial disputes took on international significance (Kennan 1973: 244–255). The potential benefits to Poland arising out of Brzezinski's vision might nevertheless be disputed. His proposals concerning American recognition for the permanence of the Oder–Neisse border had little to do with the principle of respecting Poland's right to “national self-determination” and autonomy from the USSR. It would also appear that he expected gradual democratisation in Poland, carried out by the hand of the communist class with Western support, and also with the approval of the Soviet authorities. He thus wished for a “peaceful transformation” of the communist states leading to their establishing economic and political ties with Europe as a whole, where borders would become permeable to people, trade, and ideas, thereby losing their political importance (Brzezinski, Griffith 1961).

Most important, however, was the fact that Brzezinski's proposal concerning the Polish–German border aligned with the American policy of bridge building and with the Johnson administration's new initiatives towards the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, which might potentially be of benefit to Poland. A speech given by the US president to the National Conference of Editorial Writers in New York in October 1966 contained a mention of the need to “remove territorial and border disputes as a source of friction in Europe” (Johnson 1966). This applied in particular to the Polish–German border and to the partition of Germany, which was an “unnatural line” dividing Europe like a “wound” that “now cuts East from West”. It should be noted that the president linked the need to “respect the integrity of a nation's boundary lines” with the simultaneous ending of all national territorial disputes through the liberalisation of trade and cultural exchange between the West and the countries of the communist bloc. Johnson's speech, which was clearly influenced by Brzezinski's views, thus launched an American vision of Europe as a space free of ideological or trade barriers (Brzezinski 1966a), and at the same time open to economic and political penetration by the United States. The latter thus expected that “inviolable” borders would “cease to be an important issue” in international relations, and would moreover weaken the significance of the German problem, namely the division on the Elbe.

A matter of no small importance in Johnson's “European speech” was the priority given to the reaching of understanding between the West and the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, in place of a demand for the unification of Germany (Schwartz 2003: 134). As a result, the US embassy in Warsaw noted Gomułka's favourable impression caused by the speech (*Reactions...* 1966). Although Brzezinski himself called the GDR an “artificial creation”, he conceded that the existence of the East German state gave Poland a feeling of

security that enabled the formation of closer links with the West (Brzezinski 1966c: 166–167). Therefore, in his German unification plans presented to the State Department in November 1967, Brzezinski expected the preliminary recognition of the inviolability of the Oder–Neisse border by both German states, which would be “especially important in overcoming Polish and Czechoslovak fears of any move towards closer all-German ties” (Brzezinski 1967). Certainly, he believed that the East German “security buffer” would lose its usefulness to Poland with the confirmation of the country’s western border, but US recognition of that border would mean respecting not only the legality of the GDR, but also the Soviet system of control over the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. In return for the unification of Germany, he proposed that the West should give the Soviets guarantees that the territory of the former GDR would not be incorporated into NATO structures, and that Soviet troops or UN forces would remain there (Brzezinski 1966c: 180–181). We should add that the head of the State Department’s Bureau of Intelligence, Thomas L. Hughes, drew attention to the then ongoing Polish–Soviet discussions concerning a new system of European security encompassing the East German state (Hughes 1967). At the same time, Polish diplomats in Washington, in discussions with State Department representatives, dismissively avoided the Oder–Neisse question while placing emphasis on recognition of the GDR (*Comments...* 1967; Jarzabek 2011: 79–82).

Discussions of collective security in Europe went hand in hand with Brzezinski’s proposal to establish an undefined “cooperative community” encompassing the United States, Western Europe, and “some communist states” (Brzezinski 1966b; Brzezinski 1970: 113–114). Because he was concerned about the possible rebirth of a “Balkanised” Europe of nation states, he suggested including the USSR in the policy of bridge building between the West and the communist bloc, to prevent the “fragmentation of both Eastern and Western systems of alliance” (Brzezinski 1966b). In this system, the Warsaw Pact would remain an active “symbol of political interdependence” among the countries of the region, giving Moscow a “guarantee of minimal political loyalty” on the part of Poland and other member countries (Brzezinski 1967). Poland would receive in return “guarantees” of the security of all of its borders and its territorial integrity, from the Soviets, the Americans and the British. Brzezinski imagined in this way the realisation of his idea of a “stronger unification of all of us in order to make further waging of wars impossible” (Brzezinski 1966c: 204). In return for the promise of lasting peace, however, the nations of Central and Eastern Europe would have to sacrifice the goal of regaining full political sovereignty. The idea of the “Europeanization of Russia” would bring Poland to

the role of a “transmission belt to the Soviet Union for Western ideas and influence” (Brzezinski 1966b). US recognition of the Polish–German border would thus not only lead to political “evolution in the communist camp”,<sup>7</sup> but would also secure “Soviet, Polish and Czech national interests” in Europe.

Unfortunately, Brzezinski did not explain what the basis would be for the proposed Central European community of interests of Poland, Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Union, given that, in the opinion of Polish diplomats in Washington, Prague’s pro-Western course was opening the way to West German penetration in that country, generating a political threat to Poland and the USSR (*Luncheon...* 1968). Also unconvincing was his suggested “Europeanisation” of Poland, which assumed a compromise with Moscow and securing of the positions of the communist elites of government. It came down, in fact, to some kind of control exercised by the Western powers and the USSR over the nations of Central and Eastern Europe, with “Europeanised” communist circles acting as intermediaries (Brzezinski 1970: 71–72). The plan also did not take into account the significant economic disproportions and differences of interests between Eastern and Western Europe (*ibidem* 77–96). Finally, the State Department viewed with concern the decline of Poland’s interest in the Oder–Neisse question, along with the increasing pressure from Polish diplomats for the recognition of East Germany. From the US perspective, such a policy on Warsaw’s part carried a threat to Poland’s security in a situation where East Germany might someday make claims to the lands beyond the Oder and Neisse (*Conversation...* 1968). It should be noted that foreign minister Stefan Jędrzychowski, speaking to the US Secretary of State, cited the unregulated status of the borders in Central Europe as a justification for Poland’s participation in the invasion of Czechoslovakia (*The Secretary’s...* 1969).

It was following the aggression of Warsaw Pact troops against Czechoslovakia in 1968 that Zbigniew Brzezinski left the State Department, although he would return to top-level politics as National Security Advisor in the Carter administration (Brzezinski 1986). In spite of this, further developments in relation to Poland’s western border confirmed Brzezinski’s predictions insofar as, following the treaty of December 1970 between Poland and West Germany, the Oder–Neisse problem ceased to be an element of the international Cold War

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<sup>7</sup> He contrasted “national” communism with “pluralist communism”, which was claimed to be capable of democratisation, on the model of Czechoslovakia under Alexander Dubček. In contrast to the “positive” example of Czechoslovakia, in Poland he perceived a danger of the development in the 1970s and 1980s of dictatorial forms of “social fascism” based on nationalist dogmas and military control.

dispute concerning the German question (Tyszkiewicz 2014: 121–137). In the view of US diplomacy, it was Poland's western border, rather than the Elbe, that represented the line of division of Europe.

Nevertheless, in spite of American support for the Polish–West German treaty, note should be taken of the United States' reluctance to give formal recognition to the Polish–German border, expressed in the desire to maintain the “responsibility of the four powers for Germany as a whole” (CES... 1970). On the one hand, in the period of détente in relations with the Soviet Union, the State Department favoured not opening up the question of the border in the future, but on the other hand, considered only the adoption by the four powers of a so-called Königsberg formula, presaging support for the position of the border at a future peace conference. A similar view was expressed by Henry Kissinger, National Security Advisor in the administration of President Richard M. Nixon, referring with unconcealed reserve to the *Ostpolitik* pursued by Chancellor Willy Brandt (Kissinger 1979: 409–412, 529–534). He viewed West Germany's eastern policy as merely a “new form of classic German nationalism” that would lead to German–Soviet rapprochement and “forever seal Germany's division”. He noted that the Bonn government had first of all, in August 1970, concluded an agreement with the Soviet Union, in which the post-war territorial order in Europe had been recognised without the participation of the Western powers (Hanhimäki 2013: 62–68). The United States, on the other hand, linked the German problem to the status of Berlin, which was occupied by the four powers, a situation that entailed the joint responsibility of the US for “Germany as a whole” (*Current Issues...* 1970). It may thus be concluded that it was the signing of the Polish–West German treaty under the conditions of West Germany's *Ostpolitik* that forced the US administration to keep its distance in the matter of the legality of the Oder–Neisse Line. It should be added that Polish diplomats did not accept this American interpretation, seeing in it an attempt to extend the rights of the powers up to Poland's western border (Jarząbek 2011: 245–252).

Brzezinski's contribution to regulating the question of the Polish–German border, which had an impact on the development of Poland's relations with the West and its later political and constitutional evolution, nevertheless appears to be indisputable. His thinking, oriented towards ending the division of Europe through American dialogue with Poland and other communist states of Central and Eastern Europe, corresponded to the policy of bridge building and was an inspiration for President Johnson's “European speech” of 1966. Naturally, it is difficult to make a full assessment of Brzezinski's influence on American diplomacy over the Oder–Neisse question, because his proposals were normally in harmony with the direction that US policy was taking.



In spite of significant differences in diplomatic methods, the policy of détente, pursued by Kissinger from 1969 onwards, remained consistent with Brzezinski's ideas in terms of the general assumptions that East–West tensions could be reduced by resolving European territorial questions (Hanhimäki 2013: 71–74). The bridge building policy that Brzezinski supported, followed by US–Soviet détente, and finally the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe were based on the assumption that recognition of the territorial status quo would be given in exchange for the opening up of the communist bloc to Western political and economic influences (Kieninger 2017: 281–284). There also occurred a noticeable shift of American interest from Germany to the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, which contributed to the gradual disintegration of the communist system. It was Brzezinski who persuaded the US administration that the breaking down of the Iron Curtain in Europe ought to begin with democratisation in Poland and Czechoslovakia, and not with the unification of Germany.

Poland's greater openness to political and economic relations with the West after 1970 could not therefore have resulted exclusively from West Germany's *Ostpolitik*. A decisive factor for the transformation of Central and Eastern Europe was the change in the traditional understanding of security based on territory and defence potential, which was replaced by a security connected with universal human rights and the free movement of people, trade and ideas (Morgan 2018: 159–168). The transformation that Brzezinski foresaw in the mid-1960s was achieved primarily through the involvement of the United States in European politics. However, it was Brzezinski who succeeded in articulating especially clearly the need for an opening of “national” doors to international cooperation, closer economic ties, the free flow of ideas, and political liberalisation. In subsequent years this progressive transnational order, based on the flow of people and goods, appeared to permeate unstoppably above national and ideological borders (Aron 2009: 144–147).

American geopolitical interests, as manifested in Brzezinski's views, led him to question the Polish national and historical vision concerning relations with Germany and the western border. It was economic determinism, he believed, that made the disappearance of borders inevitable in the course of the integration of Central and Eastern European countries with the West. For this reason, even Jan Nowak-Jeziorański, in a letter of 1965, compared Brzezinski's theses to Leninist dogmas (Nowak-Jeziorański, Brzezinski 2014: 112). The resolution of the question of Poland's western border, in Brzezinski's eyes, served not so much the total elimination of Soviet influence from Poland, as the establishment of a “useful” political and economic dependence of the countries

of Central and Eastern Europe on the “whole of Europe”. His involvement thus led to a certain loosening of Soviet domination over Poland, creating conditions for greater international interdependence and American interest in the Central and Eastern European region. This position was favourable to Poland to the extent that it prevented an understanding, directed against Polish interests, between Germany and the USSR. On the other hand, it was these very two countries that were the main addressees of American policy on the Oder–Neisse question, which reduced Poland to the role of a “transmission belt” between East and West. Hence the liberation of Poland from Soviet domination was to be at the same time the realisation of the “end of history” utopia in a multinational “universal state” free of territorial borders, a vision that exerted a certain influence on post-war American political thinking (Drury 1994: 41–45). Brzezinski’s view of the issue of the Polish–German border thus corresponded to the universalist perspective on European territorial issues that was adopted by the US political and economic elites. The question remains open to what degree his conception was in line with Poland’s authentic *raison d’état* and national interest.

In conclusion, it should be noted that the United States did not officially recognise Poland’s western border until the “two plus four” conference in 1990, when by doing so it opened the door to German reunification and the final dismantling of the Iron Curtain (Allen 2003: 287–289). Raymond Aron seems to have been correct in his remark that the refusal by the US to recognise the division of Europe for so many years helped maintain that division, but that as soon as the West “solemnly acknowledged” the territorial division outlined at Yalta and Potsdam, the Cold War status quo was immediately upset (Aron 2007: 269–270). The United States’ involvement in European international security policy meant that the main elements of that policy came to be people, societies, their political consciousness and an increasingly supranational economy, instead of borders and territory. In arguing for US recognition of the “controversial” border on the Oder and Neisse, Brzezinski understood the watershed significance of that transformation not only for Poland, but above all for “Europe as a whole”. His internationalist perspective appeared at the time to be the only formula capable of arousing the interest of American political decision-makers in the international status of Poland. For this reason, Brzezinski’s legacy in relation to the question of Poland’s western border may serve as an interesting contribution to reflection on transatlantic relations and the position of Poland in Europe, including in the period after 1989.

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#### ABSTRACT

*This article presents the political ideas of Zbigniew Brzezinski as they relate to his position on United States policy over the question of Poland's western border in the 1960s. The main goal is to show to what extent Brzezinski's advocacy of formal US recognition of the Oder–Neisse border was linked to his aim of overcoming the Cold War division of Europe and the problem of national borders. Brzezinski's position on the border issue is also examined in relation to his views on Polish–German and Polish–Soviet relations, as well as Polish nationalism and communist ideology. Accordingly, the question of the Oder–Neisse Line is addressed here with reference to Brzezinski's comments on US policies towards West Germany, the Soviet Union, and Europe as a whole. The main sources are Brzezinski's political commentaries, publications and archival material from the 1960s concerning Poland's western border. However*

*this study extends beyond the purely diplomatic history of the Polish border question, examining the relationship between Brzezinski's views on the Oder–Neisse Line and his internationalist concept of European political and economic relations.*

*It is demonstrated that Brzezinski's support for formal US recognition of the Oder–Neisse border in the 1960s developed within the framework of American political, geopolitical and economic designs for Germany, the Soviet Union and Europe as a whole, against the background of the Cold War. Although his arguments regarding Poland's western border contributed to a desirable increase in US political interest in Poland and Central and Eastern Europe, Brzezinski favoured a kind of European interdependence of states and the "Europeanisation" of Poland, rather than the restitution of its full sovereignty based on anti-Soviet nationalism. This distinctive universalist vision of Central and Eastern Europe, coupled with socio-economic determinism, appears to have profoundly affected Brzezinski's position on the Polish border question, which was based on the assumption that both the Cold War division of Europe and national borders would eventually diminish in political significance as a result of Western recognition.*