


The Baltic Pipe Gas Pipeline in the Concept of Ensuring Poland's Energy Security in the Political Thought of the Democratic Left Alliance and the Polish People's Party

Gazociąg Baltic Pipe w koncepcjach zapewnienia bezpieczeństwa energetycznego Polski w myśli politycznej Sojuszu Lewicy Demokratycznej oraz Polskiego Stronnictwa Ludowego

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Abstract: Poland's dependence on natural gas supplies from the Russian Federation has been negatively assessed by Polish political groups. Politicians of many parties have been raising the legitimacy of building a diversified import structure for this raw material, and an important energy concept considered over the years has been cooperation with Norway. The aim of this article is to analyze the political thought of the Democratic Left Alliance and the Polish People's Party in relation to the construction of the Baltic Pipe gas pipeline. The main research paradigm used in the text was the analysis of testimonies and traces of political thought. Addressing the topic was important because of the lack of studies reporting original research on the position of political parties in the context of building this pipeline.

Keywords: political thought, Baltic Pipe, energy security, political parties

Streszczenie: Uzależnienie Polski od dostaw gazu ziemnego z Federacji Rosyjskiej było negatywnie oceniane przez polskie ugrupowania polityczne. Politycy wielu partii podnosili zasadność budowy zróżnicowanej struktury importu tego surowca, a ważną, rozważaną przez lata koncepcją energetyczną była współpraca z Norwegią. Celem artykułu jest analiza myśli politycznej Sojuszu Lewicy Demokratycznej oraz Polskiego Stronnictwa Ludowego w odniesieniu do budowy gazociągu Baltic Pipe. Główny paradygmat badawczy, zastosowany w tekście, stanowi analiza świadectw i śladów myśli politycznej. Podjęcie badanego tematu było istotne z uwagi na brak opracowań, w których można znaleźć efekty autorskich studiów dotyczących stanowiska partii politycznych w kontekście budowy tego gazociągu.

Słowa kluczowe: myśl polityczna, Baltic Pipe, bezpieczeństwo energetyczne, partie polityczne

An important aspect of Poland's energy policy has been the diversification of supplies of energy resources. The creation of a diversified structure of natural gas imports has become the main element of both the concept and practice of many political groupings. The problem of ensuring alternative, in relation to the Russian Federation, directions of supply of energy raw materials has also fundamentally determined the shape and character of Poland's foreign policy. A key role in these programmes was played by Poland's energy cooperation with Norway, and thus the Baltic Pipe project.¹

The construction of the Polish-Norwegian gas pipeline has been an important element in the political debate in Poland, and the positions of many parties have differed on the approach to the construction of this type of infrastructure. One of the key aspects raised by the supporters of the project was the real diversification of sources and directions of natural gas supply. For opponents of the concept, however, it was the price of natural gas that was important, as it could affect the rate of economic growth and competitiveness of businesses in Poland.

The aim of the paper is to analyse the political thought of the Democratic Left Alliance (SLD)² and the Polish People's Party (PSL) with respect to the construction of the Baltic Pipe pipeline and to identify potential consequences of the views expressed and decisions taken. The study analysed first of all the statements of politicians of the two parties in the context of the investigated issue, as the issue of the construction of the Baltic Pipe pipeline is not present in the political pronouncements of the two parties. The basic assumption was that in the conceptions of the Democratic Left Alliance and the Polish People's Party the implementation of this type of investment was not justified politically and economically. In this context, it was not a project supported by the parties. At the same time, the construction of the Polish-Norwegian gas pipeline would not lead to the increase of Poland's energy security through diversification of natural gas supply

¹ Baltic Pipe is an investment designed to diversify natural gas supplies to Poland by building infrastructure in the Baltic Sea, the North Sea and in Denmark and Poland to connect natural gas deposits in Norway with customers in Denmark and Poland.

² The paper does not analyse the political thought of the New Left party, which was formed after the merger of two political parties (SLD, Wiosna). The group's programme indicates the need to make Poland independent from natural gas supplies through the development of renewable energy sources (RES). The issue of building the Baltic Pipe gas pipeline is not mentioned in the programme declarations of this party (Nowa Lewica 2019).

sources and directions.³ The main research paradigm used in the text is the analysis of testimonies and traces of political thought. Taking up the examined topic was important due to the lack of studies in which one can find the results of author's studies concerning the position of political parties in the context of the construction of the Baltic Pipe gas pipeline.

1. Unwanted project of the Democratic Left Alliance

One of the most frequently taken up issues by political parties in Poland was the Polish-Norwegian energy cooperation involving, on the one hand, the construction of a pipeline connecting Poland with Norwegian energy deposits (Baltic Pipe) and, on the other hand, a contract for natural gas supplies. Such a project was pursued by the government of the Solidarity Electoral Action, but the government of Leszek Miller, prime minister of Poland in 2001–2004, abandoned the investment. Among other things, the opinions expressed emphasized the lack of economic justification for the construction of the pipeline.

SLD politicians did not verbally question the need for diversification of raw material imports from “various directions” (*Wypowiedź Wiesława Kaczmarka 17.12.2001*), but they paid great attention to the economic aspect of pipeline construction. They were aware of the assumptions of the construction of the Polish-Norwegian gas pipeline; nevertheless, they took the view that providing access to the European network, as part of the process of diversifying sources and directions of natural gas supplies, could also be done on the basis of other, competing projects. Andrzej Szarawarski, Secretary of State in the Ministry of Economy in the government of L. Miller, believed that the same role as the “Norwegian project” could also be played by the “Danish pipeline on the Rødvig-Niechorze route, as it will also [...] connect [Poland – M.P.] with the North Sea, possibly via [...] the route [...] from Emden via Berlin to Szczecin, where the section between Szczecin and Berlin would have to be built” (*Wypowiedź Andrzeja Szarawarskiego 26.04.2002*).

³ The analysis of political projects to ensure the energy security of the state is an issue that is the subject of research on the political thought of political parties (Paszkowski 2015: 99–109).

A key aspect of the Polish-Norwegian agreement on the construction of the pipeline became the issue of financing the investment. According to the conducted negotiations, the investor was obliged to cover the full cost of the pipeline construction. The security for Norwegian enterprises, and thus a guarantee for the execution of the investment, was the off-take of natural gas in accordance with trade agreements concluded between the companies (*Wypowiedź Jacka Piechoty* 25.01.2002). As argued by A. Szarawarski, "we [Poland - M.P.] would only be concerned with the terminal in Niechorze, which will be built by PGNiG S.A." (*Wypowiedź Andrzeja Szarawarskiego* 26.04.2002). The analysis of the sources of political thought indicates that the politicians of the Democratic Left Alliance were aware of the conditions of the agreement, however, they evaluated negatively the possibility of diversification of natural gas supplies within the construction of the pipeline connecting Poland with the sources of energy resources from Norway. They took the position that financially it was a "very expensive solution" (*Wypowiedź Małgorzaty Ostrowskiej* 7.07.2005). Małgorzata Ostrowska, Secretary of State in the Ministry of Economy and Labour in Marek Belka's government, believed that "this project [involving the construction of the Norwegian pipeline - M.P.] was not financially feasible, therefore [...] in order to pay it off with fees, it would be necessary to pass a very large amount of gas through this Norwegian line, and there were no receivers" (*Wypowiedź Małgorzaty Ostrowskiej* 7.07.2005). Wiesław Kaczmarek, Minister of State Treasury, was of a similar opinion, arguing that "dozens of factors decide whether a contract from an economic point of view is reasonable and safe" (*Wypowiedź Wiesława Kaczmarka* 17.12.2001). A consequence of this position was the conviction that the most important factor determining the import of natural gas should be the price of the commodity offered to domestic consumers.

SLD politicians, while raising the potential legitimacy of building a pipeline from Norway and ensuring natural gas supplies to Poland, formulated two general arguments. Firstly, they pointed to a higher price of natural gas imported from Norway in comparison with supplies from the Russian Federation (Knap 24.05.2001: 1, 4; *Miller: kontrakt norweski był niewykonalny* 3.01.2006; Rychlewski 4.01.2006: 2), secondly, they raised the issue of economic profitability of the construction of the pipeline, which in confrontation with other investments, among others the Bernau-Szczecin gas pipeline, was a more expensive project. As W. Kaczmarek argued, "this is [...] one of the factors that make Norwegian gas [...] inevitably more expensive than

the gas we obtain from other sources of supply, due to the investment program" (*Wypowiedź Wiesława Kaczmarka* 17.12.2001). The consequence of such a stance was the view, dominant among the politicians of the Democratic Left Alliance, that the investment should be suspended. Kazimierz Zarzycki, a Democratic Left Alliance MP, claimed that it was necessary to "review this contract [Norwegian – M.P.], which has not yet been consummated, and which is to cost so much" (*Wypowiedź Kazimierza Zarzyckiego* 25.01.2002).

In SLD's political concepts, the talks with Norway were inseparably linked to the ongoing 2001–2003 Polish-Russian negotiations covering natural gas supplies to Poland. According to the Alliance, the rationale for the investment was conditioned on the need to make the necessary analyses in the area of natural gas absorption, "in the context of [...] the Yamal contract, which is an existing, signed contract" (*Wypowiedź Marka Kosowskiego* 25.01.2002). Generally, members of this group were of the opinion that the problem of natural gas supplies from the Russian Federation to Poland should be regulated first and only then the issue of cooperation with Norway (Łakoma, Maciejewski 7.03.2002: B2). They believed that too much of the contracted raw material could negatively influence the financial situation of PGNiG S.A. Leszek Miller argued that undertaking additional import obligations in the situation of natural gas supplies from the Russian Federation, which significantly exceeded the needs of the Polish economy, would be a sign of the government's irresponsibility (Barański 23.02.2004: 3; Ożadowicz 8.01.2009: 3; Szelestowska 6.06.2002: 3; *Wypowiedź Leszka Millera* 26.03.2003). Failure to renegotiate the agreement threatened to make payments for unclaimed natural gas (Knap 13.02.2003: 2; Wójcik 13–14.04.2002: 5; *Wypowiedź Leszka Millera* 13.06.2003). The left-wing government's concentration of efforts on regulating the import of energy resources from the Russian Federation resulted in the marginalisation of the role and significance of the Polish-Norwegian agreement. The limited interest of SLD members in the problem of natural gas supplies to Poland was evidenced by L. Miller's statement back in 2001, in which he stated that at the moment of the Alliance's winning the parliamentary elections, the gas contract with Norway for natural gas supplies to Poland, concluded by Jerzy Buzek's government, would be thoroughly verified (Majewski, Reszka 12.12.2001: A3).

In addition, SLD politicians have argued that the Norwegian side has not fully complied with its obligations as part of the investment ([AŁ] 21–22.02.2004: A1, B1; Michałek 28–29.11.2009: 2; Miller 12.01.2009: 4–5;

Wypowiedź Jacka Piechoty 19.02.2004). According to the agreement, companies from Denmark, Sweden and potential buyers from the Central European region were also involved in the investment to a varying extent. Thus, Poland was not the only participant in the international project, and consequently also a consumer of natural gas from Norway. Within the framework of conducted negotiations, Poland declared the possibility of receiving about 5 billion m³ of natural gas annually, while the Norwegian side was obliged, in cooperation with Poland, to find additional recipients at the level of about 3 billion m³ of natural gas (*Odpowiedź* 17.10.2002; Rychlewski 10.01.2006: 3; *Wypowiedź Jacka Piechoty* 19.02.2004). The consequence of such an assessment of the contract by SLD politicians was the position that it was the Norwegians who failed to fulfil their obligations. As argued by L. Miller, “the Norwegian side makes the possibility of [...] implementing [the project – M.P.] dependent on finding additional gas recipients outside our country,” and – continuing – “so far it has not found any, which leads to the only logical conclusion, that if it does not, this project is simply unprofitable” (*Wypowiedź Leszka Millera* 26.09.2002). A similar point of view was presented by Tadeusz Iwiński, SLD MP, who believed that “the Norwegian project did not come to fruition, because the Swedes, who were supposed to be a component, did not make an adequate offer for a certain minimum, which required trilateral action” (*Wypowiedź Tadeusza Iwińskiego* 7.07.2005).

To sum up, the SLD’s position on the construction of the Polish-Norwegian gas pipeline was unequivocal and resulted from a different approach to the issue of energy security. Alliance politicians claimed that the key element was not the source of supply, but the price of imported natural gas which would enable economic development. In these circumstances, the key partner was the Russian Federation. In addition, the financial aspect of building the gas pipeline and finding customers for part of the imported raw material was raised, and problems in this context provided justification for abandoning the investment.

2. An unnecessary investment in the opinion of the Polish People’s Party

The construction of a gas pipeline to enable natural gas supplies from Norway to Poland was an important element of the political debate, and the representatives of the Polish People’s Party (PSL) also presented their

views on ensuring energy security. The formulated concepts were important enough, as in 2007–2015, the PSL held an important function in the parliamentary system in Poland (coalition party) and its representatives were responsible for shaping the energy policy. However, its members' views on cooperation with Norway were dominated by a sceptical approach, and the party's position on the construction of the Baltic Pipe gas pipeline was argued primarily on economic rather than political grounds.

Analysis of the sources of the political thought of PSL entitles one to conclude that Ludowcy, similarly to politicians of the Alliance, treated the issue of diversification of natural gas supply sources, including the import of this raw material from Norway to Poland, in a comparable way. In their opinion, the project was unnecessary and unjustified. Waldemar Pawlak, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Economy in 2007–2012, emphasised that since 2010 virtual and then physical reverse was functioning on the Yamal pipeline and therefore Poland had "the possibility to import gas from the western direction" (Sawicki 17.01.2022: A18). The costs of building the Baltic Pipe pipeline would, in his opinion, be borne by consumers, which would not be beneficial for the Polish economy. A similar opinion was expressed by Stefan Krajewski, a PSL politician, who believed that "if we want to become independent from Russian gas supplies, then, through Baltic Pipe, we will become dependent on supplies from other countries" (Polskie Radio 2022). Essentially, such views stemmed from the belief that Poland's own raw material resources were the key to ensuring energy security. Józef Zych, a PSL MP, claimed that concluding an agreement with Norway while importing natural gas from the Russian Federation, which "exceeds our needs" (*Wypowiedź Józefa Zycha* 20.07.2000), would limit the possibilities of exploiting domestic deposits. Considering the lack of political decisions on cooperation with Norway 2007–2015, the sceptical opinions of the People's Party regarding Polish-Norwegian cooperation confirm the thesis that the PSL opposed the import of natural gas to Poland from the northern direction.

A characteristic feature of PSL political thought was the view that ensuring Poland's energy security required the expansion of the import infrastructure. Ludowcy believed that this was an effective way to diversify natural gas supplies to Poland. This is how the construction of the Bernau-Szczecin gas interconnection was justified by W. Pawlak, who claimed that "the more interconnections, the better for the whole system" (*Wypowiedź Waldemara Pawlaka* 9.01.2009). PSL politicians have repeatedly pointed

to the need for the development of gas infrastructure (*Wypowiedź Joanny Strzelec-Łobodzińskiej* 19.11.2009; *Wypowiedź Waldemara Pawlaka* 31.08.2011). In their opinion, natural gas storage facilities and interconnectors could ensure a fast supply of the raw material to the domestic market in crisis situations (*Wypowiedź Joanny Strzelec-Łobodzińskiej* 18.12.2008). As argued by W. Pawlak, the construction of interconnectors is “an element which is strongly represented by Poland in the European policy” (*Wypowiedź Waldemara Pawlaka* 2.12.2009).

PSL politicians believed that the expansion of cross-border gas connections could be treated as an element connecting the Polish gas system with the European system. Such solutions, in the opinion of W. Pawlak, were of a technical rather than political nature, as they facilitated the possibility for companies, which imported natural gas to Poland, to purchase the raw material from different directions and from other suppliers. Analysis of the political thought of PSL indicates that the party, within the framework of its political activities aimed at diversification of sources and directions of natural gas supplies to Poland, advocated only increased domestic production of natural gas and construction of interconnectors. Importantly, the Baltic Pipe gas pipeline was to be of a similar nature. As a result, PSL politicians perversely pointed to the need to develop the infrastructure, but not to the construction of the Polish-Norwegian gas pipeline. Thus, the issue of cooperation with Norway was considered to a minor extent.

Indeed, many PSL politicians emphasised the lack of justification for the construction of the Baltic Pipe gas pipeline, but at the same time, there was a group of Ludowcy who presented a different approach. Such a view was formulated by Adam Jarubas, a PSL MEP, who argued that “Poland needs to reduce its energy dependence on Russia, which uses the supply of raw materials as a tool to pressure Europe” (Aleksowska 2022). He stressed that only a diverse base of contractors and suppliers would put Poland in a favourable negotiating position with the Russian Federation. In this context, he pointed out that “Poland should have different options and sources of energy, because then it can also negotiate better prices for the supply of these raw materials, also from Russia itself” (Aleksowska 2022). Thus, he did not deny the need to import natural gas from the East, but to create conditions that would put Poland in a convenient negotiating position.

Generalizing, it should be said that Poland’s heavy dependence on natural gas supplies from the Russian Federation did not pose a significant threat to the PSL, although the programme emphasized that Poland

“must not be dependent on the whims and blackmail of the governments of other countries” (Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe 2019: 24). The People’s Party emphasised, in the context of the plans related to the construction of the Baltic Pipe gas pipeline, that regardless of the source of the raw material, Poland would still be vulnerable to pressure from potential suppliers. Therefore they demonstrated the need for both further cooperation with the Russian Federation and taking steps to develop the domestic raw material base. At the same time, the politicians of the PSL presented their views that the rationale for the direction of natural gas supplies should be decided by the economic aspect, and not the political one. However, this type of situation meant that in the case of the contract with the Russian Federation the topic of supplies was politicised anyway due to the necessity to conclude an intergovernmental agreement regulating the import of natural gas. This type of approach was dominant in the views of the PSL, but among the politicians of this group, there were also those who articulated opinions pointing to the necessity of reducing the dependence on the dominant supplier of energy resources to Poland.

Concluding remarks

Geographical and raw material determinants influenced the subject scope of the Polish-Norwegian cooperation, which included natural gas supplies to Poland. The analysed political parties differently assessed the possibility of cooperation with countries that are producers of energy resources. Such political concepts influenced the character and scale of cooperation with Norway in the scope of construction of a gas pipeline connecting natural gas deposits in that country with customers in Poland. The idea of creating this type of infrastructure has a long history and the first attempts to build the gas pipeline took place already during the rule of Solidarity Electoral Action (1997–2001). In the following years, this kind of concept was denied or supported by various political circles, while the position of the Democratic Left Alliance and the Polish People’s Party (PSL) was unambiguous in this matter.

The research conducted allows for a conclusion that the politicians of the Democratic Left Alliance and the Polish People’s Party did not treat Norway, i.e. a significant producer of energy resources in Europe, as

an important partner which would enable the diversification of natural gas import sources and directions. Among the members of these groupings, there was no conviction about the need to make Poland independent from imports of strategic raw materials from the Russian Federation. For both political parties, energy cooperation with Norway was unnecessary.

The issue of natural gas supplies to Poland was one of the major topics of the political debate. In the opinion of SLD and PSL, the dominant factor conditioning the natural gas import was the final price of the raw material. Such an assumption, due to the existing infrastructure, favoured natural gas supplies from the Russian Federation. Consequently, cooperation with Norway did not play a significant role in the political concepts of these groupings. Additionally, it should be pointed out that the left-wing government, while in power in Poland 2001–2005, undertook actions aimed at diversification of natural gas supply sources to a limited extent. In this context, the Democratic Left Alliance politicians abandoned the possibility to import this raw material also from Norway, thus making it difficult to return to the concept of constructing the Baltic Pipe gas pipeline for many years. Also, PSL politicians, playing an important role in the process of governing in Poland and forming the PO-PSL coalition government 2007–2015, did not take active steps towards the implementation of the investment.

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