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BETWEEN PYONGYANG AND SEOUL – A ROCKY ROAD TO ESTABLISHING DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS BETWEEN POLAND AND THE REPUBLIC OF KOREA

For several decades, communist Poland and the Republic of Korea did not maintain diplomatic relations with each other. This was a result of the Cold War realities in which Poland was a Soviet satellite and South Korea was an American ally. Another consequence of geopolitical conditions of the time was the establishment of diplomatic relations between Poland and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea on 16 October 1948, just over a month after the DPRK was proclaimed.

Communist Poland's support for North Korea during the Korean War continued after the war ended with Poland taking part in rebuilding the country from destruction. Like other Eastern Bloc countries, Poland supplied various materials and goods, including clothes, shoes, medicines and food. Also, Poland took care of 1,200 North Korean orphans and founded a Red Cross hospital in the city of Huichon.¹ Furthermore, during the truce negotiations which ended military operations in Korea, Poland along with Czechoslovakia was elected by the communist side to be members of the Neutral Nations Supervisory Commission² and the Neutral Nations Repatriation Commission.³

¹ S. Szyg, "The relations between Poland and North Korea between 1948 and 1961", *Progress. Journal of Young Researchers* 2017, vol. 2, pp. 124–130.

² The goal of the NNSC was to monitor the situation in both North and South Korea, report violations of the truce and to ensure that neither party armed itself above the limits set in the treaty. Currently, the best work describing the role of the NNSC is by G. Jonsson, *Peace-keeping in the Korean Peninsula: The Role of Commissions* (Seoul, 2009). In turn, a number of articles and anniversary publications on Poland's involvement in the work of the Commission were created [see for example P. Benken, "Uwagi na temat najnowszych prac dotyczących aktywności Misji Polskiej w Komisji Nadzorczej Państw Neutralnych w Korei w latach 1953–1989 oraz możliwości ich uzupełnienia na podstawie nowych źródeł", *Studia z Dziejów Polskiej Historiografii Wojskowej* 2013, vol. 14, pp. 133–143; M. Hańderk, "PRL na straży pokoju w Korei", *Biuletyn Instytutu Pamięci Narodowej* 2018, no. 10, pp. 136–147; *Role of the NNSC in shaping the security architecture at the Korean Peninsula after signing of the Armistice Agreement* (Seoul: Embassy of the Republic of Poland, 2013)].

³ Due to the fact that over 20 thousand prisoners of war (mainly from Chinese and North Korean troops) refused to return home, explanations and interviews were to be carried out under the truce agreement, during

During the Korean War and thereafter, communist Poland consistently repeated the main messages of North Korean propaganda. Thus, according to the official version, American aggression on the DPRK was the reason for the outbreak of the war in Korea. Furthermore, Kim Il Sung was presented as the sole leader of the entire nation, while his political opponents from the South were portrayed as American puppets and leaders of regimes oppressing ordinary Koreans. Apart from a few crises in bilateral relations, caused, however, by broader processes taking place in the communist camp, such as the condemnation of Stalinism by Nikita Khrushchev and subsequent political thaws in some countries,⁴ Polish-North Korean relations for most of the Cold War were good or decent at worst. At that time the Polish People's Republic (*Polska Republika Ludowa*, PRL) did not recognise South Korea's existence for decades and, until the early 1970s paid little attention to its politics.

A NEW ROK POLICY TOWARDS COMMUNIST COUNTRIES

In Park Chung Hee era (1961–1979), South Korea entered a path of rapid economic development, leading to it becoming one of the “Asian tigers” and as such needed more and more new markets for their products. That was one of the reasons why South Korean leaders began to turn their eyes towards European communist countries, including Poland. A revision of the Trade Act of 1967 on 31 December 1970 was a symbolic opening to economic connections with the Eastern Bloc, which were until then forbidden.⁵ Over time, South Korea's rivalry with North Korea for strengthening its position in the international arena had also become an argument in favour of establishing links with some communist states.

Moreover, in the late 1960s and the early 1970s external environment changed in way which was dangerous for South Korean security. Implementation of the Nixon Doctrine, the reduction of the number of American troops in the ROK and the US-China rapprochement pushed the Park Chung Hee regime to modify its foreign policy. Park decided to replace solid anti-communism with openness to dialogue with selected communist countries, including North Korea. On 15 August 1970 president Park proclaimed the “Declaration for Formulating Peaceful Unification”. Next year, he announced his intention to improve relations with the communist countries in the two press conferences held in January and August. Secret negotiations with North Korea resulted in the “Joint Declaration of South and North” of 4 July

which representatives of the truce signatory states were to try to convince the soldiers to change their minds. The action was conducted under the supervision of the NNRC, ensuring the security of the interrogated soldiers and compliance with the procedures by the parties involved (*The Korean War Armistice Agreement, Annex, Terms of Reference for Neutral Nations Repatriation Commission*, Panmunjom, 27 VII 1953).

⁴ M. Hańderek, “Hard Times – Poland and North Korea in the first half of the 1960s” [in:] *Korean Peninsula – Traditions, Culture, Historical Perspectives*, ed. Kim So Young (Sofia, 2019), pp. 117–126.

⁵ Kim Bogook, “The Diplomatic Relationship between Hungary and South Korea: 1948–1982” [in:] *Korea and Eastern Europe. Exploring the Past*, ed. A. Fedotoff, Kim So Young (Sofia, 2017), p. 23, fn. no. 22.

1972 which presented three key principles to achieve Korean unification. However, further talks did not lead both sides to compromise and one year later Korean states returned to confrontation.⁶ Despite distrust towards the DPRK, the ROK continued its efforts to improve relations with Eastern European communist countries.

The Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs (*Ministerstwo Spraw Zagranicznych*, MSZ) closely watched the new politics of South Korea and, at the turn of 1971 and 1972, they noted several statements from representatives of the ROK authorities. The first statement was published by the ROK's Ministry of Foreign Affairs in which they declared their continuing efforts to establish relations with "non-hostile socialist countries". Another one was the ROK's Ministry of Communications announcing a planned launch of telecommunication services in 1972, "first with Yugoslavia, Poland, Czechoslovakia and Cuba". Following that, the ROK's Minister of Justice declared that in 1972 his ministry would introduce easier access for representatives of "non-hostile communist countries"⁷ to come to South Korea. With regard to Poland, these were just propaganda statements that could, at best, confuse its authorities, but did not relate to any real achievements in building mutual contacts.

In considering the efforts undertaken by South Korea in building diplomatic ties with Poland, the authorities of the Polish People's Republic had, by the early 1970s, identified several ways of encouraging the establishment of relations with the Republic of Korea. One of the most frequently used measures were attempts to get in touch with the Polish diplomatic corps in third countries. For example, in the summer of 1974, the Polish ambassador in Tokyo received an invitation to participate in a reception organised by the Embassy of the Republic of Korea as part of Independence Day celebration. In this and other cases, there was no reaction to such initiatives.⁸

In South Vietnam, on the other hand, South Korean diplomats sought to establish contacts with Polish and Hungarian representatives in the International Commission of Control and Supervision. At a reception organised in early November 1973 by the Japanese embassy in Saigon, the Counsellor of the Embassy of the Republic of Korea constantly followed around Polish and Hungarian ICCS representatives until he finally managed to talk to the Hungarian representative. The Hungarian embassy in Warsaw informed the Polish side about the details. A South Korean diplomat allegedly informed the Hungarian interlocutor that South Korea was ready to establish contacts with the Soviet Union and other socialist countries. As evidence of goodwill in this regard, he alluded to the recent visit of South Korean journalists to Poland and, allegedly, they returned with positive impressions. He also stated that similar visits to other socialist countries could be helpful in the process of rapprochement. When asked by the

⁶ Cha Jung Mia, "Analysis of the Implementation of South Korea's Nordpolitik in 1970s–1990s. Focusing on the Interaction between Environment and Foreign Policy Decision-Making", *Korea Observer* 2020, vol. 51, no. 1, pp. 78–79; B. Schaefer, "Overconfidence Shattered: North Korean Unification Policy, 1971–1975", *North Korea International Documentation Project*, Working Paper 2, XII 2010, pp. 7–23.

⁷ Archiwum Ministerstwa Spraw Zagranicznych (Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, hereinafter: AMSZ) Asia-Pacific, 29/87, vol. 2, no. 22-1-79, Urgent memo on the activation of the South Korean regime towards some socialist countries, Warsaw, 6 III 1972.

⁸ *Ibidem*, Ambassador of the Polish People's Republic in Tokyo, Zbigniew Regulski to Department II of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Tokyo, 25 IX 1974.

Hungarians whether South Korean journalists had actually visited the PRL, the Polish side replied that in July 1973 two South Korean journalists applied for entry visas to Poland, but they were both refused.⁹

The false statement of a South Korean diplomat regarding the alleged entry of journalists into Poland was not the only situation in which the ROK envoys put Poles in an awkward position. Another, rather embarrassing situation for the Polish embassy occurred in Helsinki, when a South Korean trade representative appeared in July 1973 without an invitation at a reception for the PRL's state celebration organised by the Polish embassy. In order not to cause a scandal, Polish diplomats decided not to usher him out but they did inform the Finnish authorities about the incident and explained the matter to North Korean diplomats.¹⁰

Another method used by South Korea to search for contacts within Poland was sending scientists, artists and athletes to the PRL to participate in international events taking place on Polish territory. Some of those who managed to enter Poland, attempted to make unofficial contacts aimed at establishing talks between the authorities of both countries. One such attempt was made by professor Lee Duk Ho, who was working at Yonsei University Medical School. In October 1973, he participated in a few week-long pediatric course organised (under the auspices of UNICEF) by the Mother and Child Institute in Warsaw. Using this opportunity Lee, having been mandated by the South Korean authorities, proposed during the conversation with Włodzimierz Pawlik (the Secretary General of the Polish UNICEF Committee) the establishment of contacts between the governments of both countries. The Polish side reacted by sending a request from the MSZ to the Ministry of Internal Affairs to persuade Lee Duk Ho to leave the territory of the PRL.¹¹

Yet another technique to encourage Polish authorities to open up to dialogue with Seoul was to involve third countries in this matter. In the autumn of 1972, Sweden and Switzerland presented a concept by which they would establish diplomatic relations with North Korea, and Poland and Czechoslovakia – with South Korea. The plan was based on the participation of all four countries in the NNSC. Both Poland and Czechoslovakia, however, refused to establish diplomatic relations with Seoul. At the same time, they expressed their support for Sweden and Switzerland setting up diplomatic relations with North Korea.¹²

In 1974 South Korea decided to capitalise on Australia's efforts to establish diplomatic relations with North Korea. The Republic of Korea, in return for not opposing Australia's plans, expected assistance in establishing economic relations with Poland, Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia. Consequently, the Australian ambassador in Warsaw in a casual conversation at the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs probed such a possibility. In reply,

⁹ *Ibidem*, Memo for Deputy Minister, Comrade J. Czaplą, Warsaw, 14 XI 1973.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, 7/77, vol. 3, no. 0-242-1-73, Cable No. 10252, Helsinki, 26 VII 1973.

¹¹ *Ibidem*, 8/77, vol. 5, no. 30-2-73, Director of Department II of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to the Head of Passports and Personal IDs Office of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, 20 X 1973.

¹² *Ibidem*, 24/76, vol. 3, no. 0-2413-4-72, Aide Memoire (translation from Czech), 1972, p. 4.

he heard that Poland had nothing against the establishment of diplomatic relations between Australia and North Korea, but at the same time, establishing contacts between Poland and the Republic of Korea was not possible.¹³

With the passing of time, more and more measures were taken by South Korea to establish contacts with Poland. Similar attempts were made by other countries not recognized by the PRL, such as Taiwan and South Vietnam. Because of this, at the beginning of September 1974, the then Minister of Foreign Affairs, Stefan Olszowski sent an urgent memo to the heads of all ministries and emphasised that the PRL invariably held a position of non-recognition and isolation of those countries on the international arena. The appeal was also a reminder to be vigilant to any possible further steps undertaken by the aforementioned group of countries and to report them to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.¹⁴

While efforts made by South Korea continued, in April 1976, Romuald Spasowski, the then director of the 2nd Department in the MSZ responsible for contacts with the Far East, prepared an urgent memo for state authorities with recommendations to counteract South Korean policies. First of all, he clearly emphasised that one should not respond to any initiatives of the Republic of Korea aiming at establishing official or unofficial contacts with Poland. Secondly, he noted that Poland should avoid organising international events that would give ROK an opportunity to send its representatives. Finally, Spasowski demanded that every attempt to establish contacts with Poland by South Koreans be reported to the 2nd Department in the MSZ. At the end of his memo, the author gave a reminder that without exception PRL diplomatic posts were not allowed to issue visas to citizens of the Republic of Korea.¹⁵

It is worth noting here that since the 1970s, representatives of South Korea were allowed to enter Poland only if the event taking place in its territory was organised by an international body, which included delegates of the Republic of Korea. In such cases, Poland was obliged by the statute of that organisation to accept the ROK's representatives. Nevertheless, at every such opportunity, the citizens of the ROK encountered as many difficulties as possible and various restrictions were applied to clearly show that Poland did not recognise the existence of the Republic of Korea. The ROK representatives' stays in PRL were not made official, and so national flags and emblems were not displayed. For example, for the Congress of the Pharmaceutical Union in 1977, only the members of its authorities were granted visas but the official ROK government delegate's visa was refused.¹⁶

¹³ *Ibidem*, 29/87, vol. 2, no. 22-1-79, Memo on the next initiative of South Korea establishing relations with socialist countries, 1974.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*, no. 22-1-74, Urgent memo on counteracting attempts to establish contacts with Poland by Southern regimes. Korea, Saigon, Taiwan, South Africa and Rhodesia, Warsaw, 6 IX 1974, pp. 2-4.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*, no. 22-1-73, Urgent memo regarding abstaining from contact with representatives of the Republic of Korea, Warsaw, 30 IV 1976.

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, no. 22-1-79, R. Fijałkowski to the Department of USSR relations in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Warsaw, 8 VII 1977.

NORTH KOREA CONTROLLING POLAND

One of the main factors in Poland refusing to accept any South Korean initiatives was North Korea's constant appeals to adopt such an attitude. The DPRK measures were directed not only to Poland, but to all friendly communist states that may have become an object of interest for South Korean diplomacy. Even before South Korea announced the revision of the Trade Act at the end of 1970, North Korea warned its European partners that the ROK leadership would seek to establish relations with communist countries, especially in the field of culture, education and sport. Therefore, at the beginning of 1969, the North Korean Ministry of Foreign Affairs discussed this with the ambassadors of European communist states. On 25 January 1969, the Polish ambassador, Józef Drygłaś was talked at for over an hour at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the DPRK and, just like representatives of other countries, he was asked that the PRL not issue entry visas to any of the ROK's citizens. In addition, DPRK officials appealed to their interlocutors that their countries would consistently recognise Kim Il Sung as the only legitimate leader of all Koreans. They also expressed dissatisfaction that some publications from friendly countries presented the demarcation line between North and South as a state border, whereas it should have been treated as a temporary one only.¹⁷

Another concern for North Korea was the fact that, in the 1970s, Polish NNSC members were increasingly receiving invitations to visit South Korea as part of their work. The invitations were usually sent by senior American officers from the Military Armistice Commission, which directly supervised the work of the NNSC. Representatives of the North Korean authorities asked Poles to stop those travels. They expressed their understanding for the necessity of participating in meetings and consultations with American MAC members, they indicated however that these could only take place in the Demilitarised Zone. Sometimes Poles were instructed in a patronising tone and remarked that during a party in the South they drank vodka and might have said something inappropriate while drinking.¹⁸ Being aware of the North Koreans's oversensitivity, Polish delegates to the NNSC did not inform them about trips to Seoul at least several times in the early 1970s alone, maintaining that they were only going to the American Advanced Camp base located in the southern part of the Demilitarised Zone.¹⁹ On the other hand, over the years, the number of Poles' visits to the capital of South Korea increased. In 1987 alone, Polish delegates to the NNSC visited Seoul as many as 20 times.²⁰

In the 1970s and 1980s, the North Korean embassy in Poland monitored the efforts of South Korean citizens seeking access to Poland. In many such attempts, the embassy put

¹⁷ Archiwum Instytutu Pamięci Narodowej (hereinafter: AIPN), 2602/8420, Memorandum of the conversation between the ambassador of PRL, Drygłaś and the director of the First Deputy of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the DPRK, 1 II 1969, pp. 66–67 (pdf file).

¹⁸ AMSZ, Asia-Pacific, 7/77, vol. 3, no. 0-13-1-73, Cable No. 7064, Pyongyang, 25 V 1973, p. 9.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, Cable No. 3241, Pyongyang, 24 III 1972, p. 2.

²⁰ *Ibidem*, 24/92, vol. 8, no. 023-1-88, Theses for conversation with the DPRK ambassador regarding the Polish Mission in the NNSC, November 1988.

pressure on the Polish authorities not to let any of the ROK's citizens into Poland. Sometimes this only regarded niche events like the World Aeromodelling Championship in 1980,²¹ in other cases, there were more prestigious events such as the International Chopin Piano Competition. In the spring of 1985, the North Korean ambassador in Warsaw attempted to convince the Deputy Foreign Minister, Jan Majewski that Poland should not agree to let the South Korean pianists participate in the competition. The ambassador argued that this is an event organised by the PRL and not by an international body. Majewski's reply was that it is not Poland that organises the competition, but the International Chopin Society based in Switzerland, and the condition of hosting the competition is admission of all interested parties, regardless of the country of origin.²² But this was not the end of North Korean diplomats' attempts to disregard South Korea at the competition. Already, during the competition, in October 1985, under pressure from the DPRK embassy, the organisers removed the flags of South Korea from the National Philharmonic in Warsaw and from its front. Prior to this, the flags were placed among flags of other countries that sent their representatives to the competition.²³

Pressure to remove flags, as well as the previously mentioned remarks regarding books and publications presenting the demarcation line as a state border, indicated that North Korea had tried to counteract even symbolic gestures that could merely imply the recognition of two Korean states by the PRL. In this respect, the DPRK embassy watched particularly closely at how the Polish media commented on Korean issues. In May 1985, the First Secretary of the Korean Embassy intervened in the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs and protested against the Polish press calling Chun Doo Hwan the President and he reminded them that the only president of Korea was Comrade Kim Il Sung.²⁴

It is worth noting that North Korea continued its attempts to influence the narrative presented in the Polish media even after the democratisation of Poland began, and after Tadeusz Mazowiecki became the first non-communist Prime Minister in the post-war period. At the end of December 1989, Mieczysław Dedo, the Polish Ambassador at the time was summoned to the North Korean Ministry of Foreign Affairs where he was harshly criticised for the broadcast of a documentary about the Korean War on Polish television. The film called "Mysterious War" portrayed North Korea as an aggressor who invaded the Republic of Korea in 1950. The representative of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the DPRK stated that the film was libellous and falsified history, and he offered that the DPRK authorities provide Polish television with materials showing the truth about the Korean War. Ambassador Dedo concluded in his cable that the North Korean authorities failed to understand that censorship was no longer in effect in Poland.²⁵

²¹ *Ibidem*, 28/85, vol. 5, no. 11-6-80, Memo from the conversation with the First Secretary of the Embassy of the DPRK, Warsaw, 14 V 1980.

²² *Ibidem*, 25/88, vol. 6, no. 22-8-85, Record of the conversation between the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, Comrade J. Majewski, and the Ambassador of the DPRK, O Man Sok, Warsaw, 28 V 1985.

²³ *Ibidem*, Memo from a conversation with the councilor of the DPRK Embassy, Li Man Sik, Warsaw, 19 X 1985.

²⁴ *Ibidem*, W. Klaczyński, Information memo, 16 V 1985.

²⁵ *Ibidem*, 3/94, vol. 3, no. 0-22-1-89, Cable No. 0-3949 / IV, Pyongyang, 27 XII 1989, p. 1.

In the 1980s, South Korean athletes more frequently attempted visits to Poland which created quite a few problems from North Korea's point of view. This was also the case with occasional endeavours of Polish athletes and coaches to travel to South Korea. The North Korean authorities and the DPRK's diplomatic mission in Poland also tried to block all possible contacts in this regard. In the summer of 1980, following the intervention of the DPRK ambassador, Polish MSZ decided to delay issuing entry visas for South Korean athletes and thus prevented their participation in the World Academic Judo Championships in Wrocław.²⁶ The same year, following prompts from the North Korean Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the embassy in Warsaw, the Polish authorities prevented the two-time Olympic gold medalist in weightlifting, and the coach at that time, Waldemar Baszanowski, from going on a monthly contract to Seoul.²⁷ During the 1980s there were many more incidents of similar interventions and pressure exerted by North Korean authorities.

THE PROBLEM OF THE OLYMPICS IN SEOUL

After 30 September 1981 when the International Olympic Committee chose Seoul as a host for the 1988 Summer Olympics, the issue of the Olympic Games became one of the main concerns North Korea was to face in the next few years and their stance in this matter was inconsistent. Initially, North Korea unanimously tried to discredit Seoul's candidacy and put pressure on many countries to boycott the games. North Korea also rejected third country suggestions to organise the Olympics in both Korean states. However, in mid-1985, there was a turn in Pyongyang's policy and the authorities in the DPRK began to seek co-organisation of the games. To this end, a group of representatives from North Korea, South Korea and the IOC held four rounds of negotiations in Lausanne between October 1985 and June 1987. These negotiations, however, were unsuccessful and North Korea did not become a co-host of the Games.

Shortly before and during the negotiations in Lausanne, North Korea sought the greatest support possible in the international arena to co-host the Games. This however, was varying and the requests from the DPRK were a choice between the best option of conducting half the Olympic competition in the North and the less ambitious vision of hosting only few more prestigious sports contests.²⁸

With regard to Poland, as with other communist states, North Korea in 1984 and the first half of 1985 pressed for the boycott of the Seoul Olympics via several channels. The most active figure in this regards was O Man Sok, the DPRK ambassador in Poland at the time. At the end of December 1984, in a conversation with Jan Majewski, the

²⁶ *Ibidem*, 28/85, vol. 5, no. 53-3-80, R. Fijałkowski to Comrade T. Mulicki, Director of the Consular Department, Warsaw, 20 VIII 1980.

²⁷ *Ibidem*, no. 220-2-80, Memo from the conversation with the 3rd Secretary of the Embassy of the DPRK, Warsaw, XI 1980.

²⁸ Detailed backstage conversations were described by Sergey Radchenko (S. Radchenko, *Sport and Politics on the Korean Peninsula: North Korea and the 1988 Seoul Olympics*, North Korea International Documentation Project, E-DOSSIER 3, December 2011, pp. 3-10).

Director of 2nd Department in Polish MSZ, O Man Sok explicitly warned that if any country took part in the Olympic Games in Seoul or even supported the Games hosted by South Korea, would be treated as an opponent of the DPRK advocating against the unification of Korea. The North Korean diplomat also demanded that Poland supported the DPRK's position on the Olympics and that the Polish press publish articles against hosting it in Seoul. Majewski replied briefly that Poland as a member of the Warsaw Pact would take a stance agreed by the Pact.²⁹ Just a few days after, the DPRK ambassador presented their position in a conversation with Marian Renke, the President of the Polish Olympic Committee.³⁰ In the following months, the ambassador continued his attempts and paid visits to the Polish MSZ, the parliament of the PRL, the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party (*Komitet Centralny Polskiej Zjednoczonej Partii Robotniczej*, KC PZPR) and several other institutions to put pressure on Polish decision makers.³¹

Not only the North Korean ambassador but also representatives of highly ranked delegations from North Korea put pressure on the top members of Polish authorities. In the second half of April 1985, DPRK's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Kim Yong Nam visited Poland for several days, and met with Wojciech Jaruzelski, First Secretary of the KC PZPR, Henryk Jabłoński, the Chairman of the State Council, and the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Stefan Olszowski. Kim Yong Nam described the Olympic Games planned in Seoul as a non-sporting political event aimed at strengthening the position of the South Korean regime. To further reinforce calls of other socialist states to boycott the event, he emphasised that North and South Korea had held talks to put up a joint representation for the Los Angeles Olympic Games, but ultimately North Korea decided to boycott them in solidarity with the socialist countries. Poland responded that they first consult the partners of the Eastern Bloc regarding participation in the Games and that the press statements about Poland's participation in the Olympics should not be treated as binding.³²

In mid-1985, the North Korean authorities changed their tactics regarding the Olympic Games problem. They began to seek to co-organise the Olympics and tried to convince as many foreign partners as possible to support that idea. To this end, they sent letters to a number of leaders of friendly countries. On 19 June 1985 Poland also received a letter addressed to Józef Czyrek, the member of the Politburo and the Secretary of KC PZPR. The letter urged Poland to support the idea of organising the Olympic Games in both parts of Korea and to grant North Korea the opportunity to host half the competitions. The

²⁹ AMSZ, Asia-Pacific, 25/88, vol. 6, no. 22-8-85, Information memo from the conversation with Ambassador of the DPRK, O Man Sok conducted 22 December at his request, Warsaw, 24 XII 1984.

³⁰ *Ibidem*, 30/87, vol. 5, no. 240-4-84, Memo from the conversation with the Ambassador of the DPRK, O Man Sok on 28 XII 1984 at his request, Warsaw, 29 XII 1984.

³¹ M. Hańderek, "Poland and North Korea in the 1980's – from Partnership to Stagnancy" [in:] *Korean Society Today*, ed. A. Fedotoff, So Young Kim (Sofia, 2018), p. 34.

³² AMSZ, Asia-Pacific, 25/88, vol. 6, no. 220-1-85, Urgent memo about the visit of a member of the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the PPK, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of the DPRK, Kim Yong Nam in Poland, 23–29 April, Warsaw, 30 IV 1985.

letter also expressed an opinion that if an agreement could not be reached, the socialist states should boycott the 1988 games.³³

At the beginning of October 1985, a memorandum was prepared and approved by the Politburo of the KC PZPR, presenting the stance of the highest authorities of PRL to the problem of the next Olympics. The memorandum clearly stated that Poland from the very beginning had a negative attitude to choosing Seoul as the Games host city and stressed that the Korean Peninsula as a region was in a particularly tense political situation at the time.

Polish authorities also criticised the representatives of the North Korean authorities, who were accused of “[...] urging, at every opportunity, socialist countries to oppose Seoul’s candidacy and boycott the Olympic Games in that city. However, they [the North Koreans] were not vocal enough about it in the forum of the international Olympic movement”. As evidence of this, the North Korean representative at the IOC was recalled not to have protested against awarding Seoul hosting the Olympic Games at the IOC session in Lausanne in December 1984.

The memorandum further referred to a change in tactics by the DPRK and the position expressed in the letter to Czyrek. The leadership of the PRL was sceptical about North Korea’s chances in the negotiations starting soon in Lausanne. They also pointed out the negative attitude of the IOC and the organising committee of the Seoul Games who relied fully on the validity of the IOC decision of 1981 and its final confirmation in 1984. Regarding the boycott proposed by North Korea – in case the co-organisation negotiations ended in a debacle – the authorities of the PRL conducted extensive consultations with other countries of the communist bloc and all agreed that a common position should be developed in this respect. After analysing all the statements made by representatives of various socialist countries to date, the decision-makers of the PRL were clear that most of those countries were against boycotting the games again. Such action would not only mean athletes losing their motivation for training, but also political losses for countries deciding to boycott. And although finding common ground by the bloc of pro-Soviet countries seemed to be crucial, the message was explicit – unless there is a clear signal from the USSR not to partake in the Olympics, Polish athletes should attend.³⁴

Although the above-mentioned memorandum did not state it distinctly, the PRL authorities could be almost certain that regardless of the outcome of the talks in Lausanne, the Soviet Union would send their representation to the 1988 Olympic Games. In June 1985, the USSR Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mikhail Kapitsa informed the Polish ambassador in Moscow, Stanisław Kociołek that in August 1985, a Soviet delegation would visit Pyongyang to express support for the idea of co-organising the Olympic Games by both Korean states. However, the delegation was also to imply to the Koreans that even if the negotiations ended in fiasco, the USSR national team would take part in the games anyway.³⁵

³³ *Ibidem*, no. 56-1-85, Letter to Comrade Józef Czyrek, Member of the Politburo, Secretary of the Central Committee of PZPR, Pyongyang, 19 VI 1985.

³⁴ *Ibidem*, Memo on problems related to the 1988 Olympic Games, Warsaw, 12 X 1985.

³⁵ *Ibidem*, Pro Memoria, September 1985.

Although Moscow was the most important reference point for the Polish authorities, the attitude of other Eastern Bloc countries also influenced Poland's approach to the issue of participation in the Games in Seoul. Some of those countries sent unambiguous signals that they would not even consider the boycott. At the beginning of August 1985, Marian Renke talked to the General Secretary of the Hungarian Olympic Committee, Pál Schmitt, who stated that the Hungarian authorities negatively viewed the socialist camp's decision to boycott the Olympic games in Los Angeles in 1984. Such a decision had apparently caused collateral damage in many areas and therefore one should not allow such a scenario to be repeated with the Seoul Olympics. Consequently, the Hungarian authorities decided to participate in the event.³⁶

While North Korea encouraged Eastern Bloc countries to boycott the games in Seoul, South Korean authorities tried to prevent this from happening. So, the representatives of the Republic of Korea sent proposals to Poland and other communist countries that indirectly put pressure on countries' authorities to send their athletes to Seoul. Y-Song Kim, the Secretary of the Embassy of the Republic of Korea in West Germany did exactly that when he arrived at the Polish embassy at the end of August 1984 in order to obtain visas for South Korean table tennis players going to Gdansk for international competitions. Taking this opportunity, he suggested that Poland take part in the construction of Olympic facilities in Seoul, with an aim and desire to tie Poland closer to the venture and indirectly apply pressure to send Polish athletes to the Games.³⁷ However, Poland did not pursue this matter further and expressed no interest in participating in the construction of Olympic infrastructure.

Despite the fiasco in negotiations regarding the co-organisation of the Olympics by both Koreas, Poland, along with other USSR's satellite countries, decided to participate in the 1988 Olympics. North Korea's calls to boycott the Seoul Games proved unsuccessful. The arrival of Polish athletes and officials to the Olympic Games in South Korea became a good opportunity to establish closer contacts with the South Korean authorities and business circles. At the time, Poland's attitude towards the South Korean proposal to develop economic contacts had significantly changed compared to that of a few years earlier.

THE ECONOMY ABOVE ALL

Over the 1980s, modernising the Polish economy and pulling the country out of economic stagnation became an increasingly pressing problem for the authorities of communist Poland. Although most of the 1970s' was spent implementing the plan which was meant to lead to accelerated economic development (mainly based on foreign funds), one could already notice crisis symptoms by the end of the decade.³⁸ At its height were mass strikes, the emergence of Solidarity and a brutal response from General Wojciech

³⁶ *Ibidem*, no. 22-8-85, Information memo from the meeting on 8 VIII 1985 with Pál Schmitt, vice-chairman of the Hungarian Committee of Physical Culture and Sport, Warsaw, 9 VIII 1985.

³⁷ *Ibidem*, 30/87, vol. 5, no. 53-3-84, Memo, Cologne, 29 VIII 1984.

³⁸ D.T. Grala, *Reformy ekonomiczne w Polsce (1982–1989)* (Warsaw, 2005), pp. 27–34.

Jaruzelski's regime, which decided to enforce martial law on 13 December 1981. On the one hand, the introduction of Martial Law led to the pacification of the opposition but on the other, solutions to improving the economic condition of the state were very difficult to implement. In addition, American economic sanctions became a considerable problem for the PRL.

The difficult economic and political situation of the PRL turned into a good opportunity for decision-makers in South Korea who invariably strived to develop economic contacts with Poland and other Eastern Bloc countries. Less than half a year after Martial Law was enforced, Koreans attempted to attract Poland's attention to favourable loans. Mitchell P. Kobelinski³⁹ and Donald J. Mucha,⁴⁰ two American businessmen with Polish roots, known to the Polish elite of the PRL, were used for this purpose. Kobelinski played a leading role in this respect and he officially appeared as the president of the Kore International Trade & Investment Company, with offices in Chicago, Poland and South Korea. Kobelinski stated that his business partner, Jeung Kwak, after consulting with government circles in Seoul, proposed on their behalf, to grant Poland a loan of 100 million dollars over the next two years, with a repayment within five years.⁴¹

The purpose of the loan was to purchase South Korean products. The Polish side was aware that this was not only a one-off operation but also an element of long-term tactics aimed at encouraging the PRL to initiate trade relations with the Republic of Korea and break North Korea's monopoly on contacts with Poland. Despite this, a decision was made to engage in dialogue while taking precautions to keep North Korea oblivious to the whole matter. To this end, it was assumed that the loan could be granted to a Polish bank by a South Korean bank in cooperation with a company in a third country.⁴² To learn the specifics of the offer, Andrzej Treumann, director of the American branch of Bank Handlowy w Warszawie S.A. arranged to meet on 12 July 1982 with three representatives of Export Import Bank of Korea, as well as with Kobelinski, Mucha and Kwak.⁴³

To the PRL authorities' surprise, before the end of that month Treumann asked the American authorities for asylum. He was then investigated by the CIA and the FBI. Based on leaks from these investigations, on 22 October 1982, The New York Times published on the front page that Treumann on top of his professional duties at the

³⁹ Mitchel P. Kobelinski was connected with the banking and financial sector for many years. He held several positions, such as the administrator of the United States Small Business Administration in years 1973–1976, a member of the President's Economic Policy Board in 1976–1977. He was also the founder and head of Kore International Trade and Investment Company from 1978–1983 [*Who's Who in Polish America*, ed. B. Wierzbiański (New York, 1996)].

⁴⁰ Mucha represented the Unitrex Company, which was founded in the mid-1970s and was meant to deal with the trade of electric and electronic components between Poland and the USA, Canada and Mexico. Unitrex Company, United States Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation, Chicago, 15 V 1975, https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/SCHMIDT,%20LAJOS_0018.pdf, Accessed 8 XI 2019.

⁴¹ AMSZ, Asia-Pacific, 43/86, vol. 2, no. 0-23-1-82, Letter from Mitchell P. Kobeliński to Zdzisław Ludwiczak, 19 V 1982.

⁴² *Ibidem*, Mulicki to the Minister comrade T. Olechowski, Warsaw, 25 V 1982.

⁴³ *Ibidem*, Memorandum from an interview instructed by Commercial Counsel, Minister A. Wójcik, New York, 13 VII 1982.

bank, also collaborated with the PRL's intelligence.⁴⁴ It seems that because of Treumann's defection⁴⁵ who knew the backroom details of this transaction, the deal was off the table. In any case, no documents have been found to prove that the loan was granted to Poland at that time.

In the following months and years, South Korea kept up their efforts, and the economic difficulties of the PRL encouraged its decision-makers to be pragmatic and to set aside any ideological prejudice. Therefore, the rule was adopted that if attractive offers appeared, Poland would undertake economic cooperation with South Korean companies, but only on the territories of capitalist states and without the participation of PRL's official trade institutions. An example of such camouflaged activity was the export of Polish machine tools to South Korea by a Polish-Japanese company. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs assessed that in this difficult era, exporting Polish machines and selling them to South Korea was fully justified. At the beginning of February 1984, the annual revenue from their sales to the Republic of Korea was estimated to amount to two million dollars. To hide the whole deal, Poland first transported machine tools to Japan, where they were adequately masked and then sent to South Korea.⁴⁶

In the 1980s there were more similar contracts made with South Korea – secret and hidden from North Korea's eyes. According to data from the South Korean press in which the Office of Commercial Council in Tokyo referred to in its memorandum, the Republic of Korea in 1986 exported goods to Poland worth 12.7 million dollars. As part of trade with European socialist countries with which South Korea did not have diplomatic relations, this placed Poland in third place. The German Democratic Republic was the leading importer in this group, with purchases amounting to 90.1 million dollars followed by the Soviet Union, which in 1986 purchased goods worth 64.8 million dollars.⁴⁷

NEW GEOPOLITICAL REALITIES AND A BREAKTHROUGH

In the 1980s, South Korea strived even more to establish economic and political relations with communist countries than in the previous decade. In the second half of the decade such policy began to be called *nordpolitik*. On the one hand, the goal was

⁴⁴ H. Blum, "A Key Polish Banker Defects; Linked to Spying For Warsaw", *The New York Times* 22 X 1982, 1. Indeed, since 1978 Treumann cooperated with civilian intelligence of communist Poland (Department I of the Ministry of Internal Affairs) [AIPN, 01917/104, Memorandum regarding defection of former representative of Bank Handlowy in New York Andrzej Treumann, Warsaw, 13 VIII 1982, pp. 11–12 (pdf file)]. As a result of defection he was sentenced in absentia to 25 years imprisonment by the Court of the Warsaw Military District on 6 XII 1983 (*ibidem*, 2901/1, General information (reconstructed) file of the "C" Bureau of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, Mkr-2).

⁴⁵ Treumann's decision to break ties with the Polish People's Republic and stay in the West was not an isolated case during Martial Law. The most known cases of Polish government officials who did not return to the PRL were the Ambassador to the USA, Romuald Spasowski and the Ambassador to Japan, Zdzisław Rurarz.

⁴⁶ AMSZ, Asia-Pacific, 29/87, vol. 2, no. 0-23-1-84, Majewski to Tomaszewski, Warsaw, 1 II 1984, p. 4; *ibidem*, Cable. Department II to Chabasiński in Tokyo, Warsaw, 29 XI 1984, p. 2.

⁴⁷ Archiwum Akt Nowych [The Archive of Modern Records] (hereinafter: AAN), Central Committee of the PZPR, Foreign Department, LXXVI-819, Trade exchange between Poland and South Korea and Taiwan, III 1988.

to increase the significance of the Republic of Korea in the world, and on the other, to isolate the North Korean regime in the international arena.⁴⁸ ROK's president Roh Tae Woo (1988–1993) believed that the besieged North Korean regime would be more eager to reunite the peninsula on South Korean terms. According to his vision, unification would be a second stage of *nordpolitik* and final one would be extending South Korea's living and cultural sphere to the Yanbian and Yeonhae regions.⁴⁹ Up to today, only the first phase of his plan has been fulfilled.

In the 1980s, from South Korea's point of view, recognition by the Soviet Union would be the most significant for increasing the country's prestige, but the smaller communist countries were still constant objects of its interest. Due to internal conditions and its obligations towards North Korea, the Soviet Union was not a leader in the Eastern Bloc in developing relations with Seoul.⁵⁰ At the same time, the USSR did not oppose their European satellite countries making closer contacts with South Korea. The fact that Moscow slowly but surely was opening up to relations with Seoul only strengthened other bloc countries in their strategy of rapprochement with the ROK. The statement made by Mikhail Gorbachev in Krasnoyarsk on 16 September 1988 was one of the main arguments for the countries of the Eastern Bloc in favour of continuing rapprochement with South Korea as well as a propaganda tool for the ROK authorities. On this day, the Soviet leader publicly announced for the first time that his country is open to developing economic contacts with the Republic of Korea.⁵¹

In mid-September 1987, the leaders of the PRL decided to revise their current attitude towards South Korea. They clearly stated that South Korea was a potentially attractive economic partner and that other Eastern Bloc countries were also opening up to trade with the ROK. Thus, Poland did not jump ahead of the pack but followed a certain already set path. With this in mind, Poland followed the guidelines set out by the state authorities whereby working contacts and cooperation at an economic and commercial level were allowed and in some economically justified cases, direct contacts of Polish enterprises with Korean ones were also permitted. Additionally, visa regulations were liberalised, ships of the Polish Ocean Lines (*Polskie Linie Oceaniczne*) were granted permission to call at the port of Busan and Polish ships could also be repaired at South Korean shipyards. A decision was also made to create a branch of the Polish-Japanese company "Agropol" in Seoul, which began operating in February 1988.⁵²

The abovementioned decision was made to help intensify trade with South Korea in the long term. In the following months, however, it turned out that a formal decision to open up to economic contacts with South Korea was not enough for a significant breakthrough in this regard. In July 1988, the Minister of Foreign Economic Cooperation

⁴⁸ S. Radchenko, *Unwanted Visionaries. The Soviet Failure in Asia at the End of the Cold War* (New York, 2014), p. 206.

⁴⁹ Cha Jung Mia, "Analysis of the Implementation of South Korea's Nordpolitik in 1970s–1990s", pp. 87–88.

⁵⁰ S. Radchenko, *Unwanted Visionaries*, pp. 222, 228–229.

⁵¹ *Ibidem*, p. 222.

⁵² AMSZ, Asia-Pacific, 24/92, vol. 8, no. 22-2-88, Memo on Poland's relations with South Korea, Warsaw, 8 XI 1988.

Władysław Gwiazda reported to the state leadership that the current commercial contacts were connected primarily to machinery, electronics and chemical industries, but were rather episodic. Gwiazda saw the potential for significant development and initiation of wider industrial cooperation. In his opinion, acquiring mutual knowledge about market specifics was necessary for intensification of bilateral trade links. Therefore, in spring 1988 when the Korea Trade-Investment Promotion Agency (KOTRA) proposed opening its agency in Poland and also the Polish Chamber of Foreign Trade branch in Seoul, Gwiazda considered these ideas as fully justified. He recommended Tadeusz Żyłkowski, the head of Polish Chamber of Foreign Trade to begin negotiations in that matter.⁵³

Meanwhile, in accordance with the earlier decision, Poland sent their sports representation to the Olympic Games in Seoul, which took place between 17 September and 2 October 1988. This was a good opportunity to establish contacts and conduct informal talks with representatives of the South Korean political and business elite. During the games, Andrzej Majkowski, the Deputy Director of the 2nd Department in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, held several important meetings. He had the opportunity to talk to the Director-General for Economic Affairs of the ROK's Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) and the Director of the Department of Eastern European Countries of the ROK MOFA as well as with the President of the KOTRA, Lee Sun Ki and finally, with the presidents of three leading South Korean companies.

Representatives of the South Korean Ministry of Foreign Affairs implied explicitly to Majkowski that they would like both countries to establish diplomatic relations in the long run. In return, they promised to grant favourable loans, encourage Korean companies to invest in Poland and to assist in exporting products manufactured in Poland by these companies to third markets. Probably, to make the right impression and achieve the desired effect, South Korean officials made promises towards Poland in the broader context – a dialogue and development of economic and political contacts with China, the Soviet Union and its European satellites. They referred to the important speech by Gorbachev in Krasnoyarsk, where he declared openness to economic contacts with the Republic of Korea. They also recalled Hungary's case, where the future loans and economic cooperation were inseparably connected with establishing diplomatic relations. Having realised that without this link, the contribution of South Korea to the Polish economy may be smaller than expected, the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, Jan Majewski concluded to the state authorities to consider the exchange of permanent diplomatic missions equipped with consular and diplomatic powers. Polish delegates did not want to inform North Korea about these meetings with the ROK's officials so they requested that Seoul did not inform the media about political talks held during the Games.⁵⁴

The Olympic Games in Seoul ended on 2 October 1988. A day later, the KOTRA delegation began a five-day visit to Poland. During the talks, both sides confirmed their

⁵³ *Ibidem*, no. 20-1-88, Urgent memo on economic relations with South Korea, Warsaw, 20 VII 1988.

⁵⁴ *Ibidem*, Information memo regarding talks of representatives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in South Korea (during the Seoul Olympics), Warsaw, 6 X 1988. Over decade later Andrzej Majkowski recalled his visit to South Korea during the Seoul Olympics and further negotiations in a short article (A. Majkowski, "Geneza nawiązania stosunków dyplomatycznych między Polską a Republiką Korei", *Azja-Pacyfik* 2000, no. 3, p. 133).

willingness to open their offices in the partner country.⁵⁵ Tadeusz Żyłkowski went to Seoul at the end of November 1988 to sign the earlier agreed cooperation agreement between the KOTRA and the Polish Chamber of Foreign Trade. Furthermore, his task was to talk about South Korea possibly granting loans to Poland in the future. Żyłkowski and the president of KOTRA Lee Sun Ki signed the agreement on 25 November 1988. Moreover, within those few days Żyłkowski held many talks with representatives of the South Korean Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Trade and Industry as well as heads or top representatives of large companies, including Samsung, Daewoo, Hyundai, Ssang-yong and Lucky Gold Star. During all these talks, he reassured potential partners that the Polish government led by Mieczysław Rakowski had already set the goal of speeding up economic reforms aimed at decentralising and developing a market economy and opening up to business contacts with other foreign countries.

Korean interlocutors expressed satisfaction with the trade contacts developing between the two countries and, as during the prior talks with Majkowski, they saw a broader context in developing relations with communist countries. They informed Żyłkowski that the South Korean government was creating a special fund to finance trade with Eastern Europe, which in 1988 amounted to 230 million USD, and by 1990 would increase to 500 million USD. They declared that the loan interest rate of this fund would be set at only 4 per cent. Representatives of government departments made it quite clear that they treated Żyłkowski's visit as a breakthrough, but they would not like this relationship be limited to trade only. One of the directors in the Korean MOFA Min Hyung Ki directly asked Żyłkowski to forward a proposal to Warsaw to establish unofficial relations and arrange a meeting of delegates from both Ministries of Foreign Affairs, either in Seoul or in Warsaw.

An interesting element of the report of the President of the Polish Chamber of Foreign Trade is the information on the economic contacts of Central and Eastern European states with the government and South Korean businesses. This proves in many ways that the policy of those countries towards the Republic of Korea was a reference point for decision-makers in Poland. Moreover, the wording used by Żyłkowski indicates that, in the late 1980s, Poland did not want to stay behind and even competed with Eastern Bloc partners for Korean loans and potential investments. It was rightly assumed that the ROK's funds for investment in the region were limited and prompt action was required to ensure Poland received as much funding as possible before it was directed elsewhere. The president of the Polish Chamber of Foreign Trade concluded in his report: "The signing of the agreement between the Polish Chamber of Foreign Trade and KOTRA levelled out possible opportunities for economic cooperation of South Korea when compared with the USSR and Bulgaria and even gives Poland a certain advantage, for a short period of time, over the CSRS and GDR".⁵⁶ Żyłkowski and his co-workers kept themselves up to speed and, reporting from South Korea to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Żyłkowski

⁵⁵ AMSZ, Asia-Pacific, 24/92, vol. 8, no. 22-2-88, Memo on Poland's relations with South Korea, Warsaw, 8 XI 1988.

⁵⁶ *Ibidem*, no. 23-4-88, Report on stay in South Korea on 24-28 XI 1988.

also announced that on 30 November KOTRA signed a cooperation agreement with the Bulgarian Chamber of Commerce and Industry and another one with the Soviet Union on 2 December.⁵⁷

Based on Żyłkowski's findings and conclusions, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Foreign Economic Cooperation, at the end of December 1988, recommended that the state leaders took further steps in preparing the ground for deeper cooperation with South Korea. These were accepted and its intention was to primarily improve the development of trade, as this was Poland's main interest. Ministries' reps also suggested that depending on the further development of contacts and possible future benefits, the authorities should also consider implementing the "Hungarian option".⁵⁸

In September 1988, the Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs informed diplomats from the Eastern Bloc states that in the near future Hungary would establish diplomatic relations with the Republic of Korea, justifying this step with openness and realism of their foreign policy.⁵⁹ North Korea reacted harshly to it, calling Hungary's actions "a betrayal for a few miserable pieces of silver, interfering with the internal affairs of the Korean nation, questioning the status of the DPRK as the only legitimate Korean state, a betrayal against the unification of the Peninsula, and favouring its division on two Korean states".⁶⁰ In early November 1988, Kim Pyong Il, a son of Kim Il Sung, departed suddenly on a specially arranged plane from Budapest. He had been the DPRK's ambassador for only a few weeks prior to leaving.⁶¹ After Hungary and the Republic of Korea finally established their diplomatic relations on 1 February 1989,⁶² North Korea demanded that Hungary brought their diplomatic representation down to the rank of chargé d'affaires, which really meant the Hungarian ambassador leaving North Korea.⁶³

Meanwhile in Poland, following acceptance of the proposals of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Foreign Economic Cooperation based on Żyłkowski's report, a coordinating team for contacts with South Korea was established and met for the first time on 30 January 1989. The team comprised of representatives of the Foreign Department of KC PZPR, the MSZ, the Ministry of Foreign Economic Cooperation and the Polish Chamber of Foreign Trade. Their work and arrangements were to be strictly confidential. The members of this group urged to set up the Polish branch of Chamber of Foreign Trade office in Seoul as soon as possible, so that its management could, by June

⁵⁷ *Ibidem*, Tadeusz Żyłkowski to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Tadeusz Olechowski, Warsaw, 7 XII 1988.

⁵⁸ *Ibidem*, Urgent memo on the outcomes of the visit of the President of Polish Chamber of Foreign Trade, Tadeusz Żyłkowski in South Korea (24–28 XI 1988), Warsaw, 13 XII 1988.

⁵⁹ *Ibidem*, 25/92, vol. 4, no. 0-2413-1-88, Cable No. 3843 / III / 2452, Budapest, 13 IX 1988, p. 2.

⁶⁰ *Ibidem*, no. 0-2413-5-88, Cable No. 4229 / III / 2524, Pyongyang, 20 IX 1988, p. 17

⁶¹ *Ibidem*, Cable No. 2276 / IV / 3042, Pyongyang, 11 XI 1988, p. 9.

⁶² According to recently declassified South Korean diplomatic documents, Hungarian negotiators asked to execute half of pledged 250 million USD bank loans as a precondition to the forging of diplomatic relations. In December 1988, eight banks in ROK signed loan contracts with Hungary's central bank (Ahn Sung Mi, "S. Korea provided \$125m in loans to Hungary in 1989 for diplomatic relations", *The Korea Herald*, 31 III 2020, <http://www.koreaherald.com/view.php?ud=20200331000895>, Accessed 3 VII 2020).

⁶³ AMSZ, Asia-Pacific 3/94, vol. 3, no. 0-2413-1-89, Cable No. 1803 / I / 266, Warsaw, 3 II 1989, p. 50.

1989 at the latest, find out exactly what loans South Korea could grant to Poland, learn about their investment plans and conditions of selling selected technologies to PRL.⁶⁴

At the beginning of February 1989, Lee In Suk, the director of the KOTRA office in Hamburg, visited Warsaw. He was also authorised by the South Korean government to conduct negotiations with Poland. Lee In Suk held talks with representatives of the MSZ and the Ministry of Foreign Economic Cooperation, who initially declared their readiness to talk about establishing diplomatic relations between the two countries and they also presented the economic and financial expectations of the Polish authorities. Lee declared that in a short time he would advise on who would come to Warsaw for secret negotiations regarding diplomatic relations and loans for Poland.⁶⁵ Before these talks took place, KOTRA had already set up its office in Warsaw in April 1989 and the Polish Chamber of Foreign Trade had established its branch in Seoul.⁶⁶

At the turn of May and June 1989, South Korean Deputy Foreign Minister Hong Soon Young travelled to Warsaw for secret talks. He promised that if diplomatic relations between the two countries were established, the Republic of Korea would grant government loans to Poland amounting to 400 million dollars. He also gave assurances that the official financial engagements of the South Korean government in Poland would encourage private companies to invest in Poland. At the same time, the Korean diplomat rejected the intermediate solution, which was establishing consular relations only, suggested by Polish negotiators.⁶⁷

Having read the arrangements made during the negotiations, Prime Minister Mieczysław Rakowski informed the MSZ that he “deemed it appropriate to establish diplomatic relations with the Republic of Korea to secure Poland’s economic interest”. At the same time, he accepted to apply further actions leading to achieving this very goal.⁶⁸ Before further negotiations with the South Koreans, at the end of July 1989, the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs made sure that Moscow did not raise any objections to these plans.⁶⁹

The last round of talks on conditions of establishing diplomatic relations between Poland and the Republic of Korea were held between 18 and 20 September, 1989 in Seoul. Poland was represented by Andrzej Majkowski, the Deputy Director of 2nd Department in the MSZ, Paweł Zawistowski, the Deputy Director of 2nd Department in the Ministry of Foreign Economic Cooperation, and Jacek Czabański, the adviser to the Minister of Finance. Their task was to negotiate the most favourable conditions for loans and South Korean investments in Poland in exchange for which Poland was to agree

⁶⁴ AAN, KC PZPR, Foreign Department, LXXVII-48, Record of the meeting of the Coordinating Team for contacts with South Korea on 30 I 1989, Warsaw, 31 I 1989.

⁶⁵ AMSZ, Asia-Pacific, 3/94, vol. 3, no. 0-22-1-89, To Comrade Prime Minister, M.F. Rakowski, Warsaw, 6 II 1989, p. 5.

⁶⁶ A. Majkowski, “Geneza nawiązania stosunków dyplomatycznych między Polską a Republiką Korei”, p. 133.

⁶⁷ AMSZ, Asia-Pacific, 3/94, vol. 3, no. 0-22-1-89, Urgent memo regarding the establishment of diplomatic relations with the Republic of Korea, Warsaw, 5 VII 1989, pp. 13–14.

⁶⁸ *Ibidem*, Secretary of the Prime Minister, Edmund Pawlak to Jan Majewski, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, Warsaw, 12 VII 1989, p. 12.

⁶⁹ *Ibidem*, Urgent memo regarding the establishment of diplomatic relations with the Republic of Korea, Warsaw, 24 VIII 1989, p. 17.

to establishing full diplomatic relations. Finally, the Republic of Korea committed itself to grant loans to Poland amounting to 450 million dollars for a duration of five years.⁷⁰

The formal establishment of diplomatic relations between Poland and the Republic of Korea took place in Seoul on 1 November 1989. The protocol was signed by Korean Foreign Minister, Choi Ho Joong and Polish Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, Jan Majewski. Simultaneously, the following agreements were signed: on the promotion and mutual protection of investments, a commercial agreement, and an agreement on loan guarantees and loans for the aforementioned amount. Moreover, the Polish delegation was received by the President of the Republic of Korea, Roh Tae Woo.⁷¹ At that point, Poland became the second country, after Hungary, of the Cold War Eastern Bloc to establish diplomatic relations with Seoul.

The final stage of negotiations and finalising the entire process with the establishment of diplomatic relations took place in a new political reality. As of 24 August 1989, Tadeusz Mazowiecki became the first non-communist prime minister since the end of World War II. Krzysztof Skubiszewski, not associated with any political group, became the Minister of Foreign Affairs.⁷² The new government was pragmatic about relations with South Korea and counted on the benefits of prospective loans and investments which was reflected in Skubiszewski's parliamentary expose, delivered on 26 April 1990.⁷³

NORTH KOREA AND THE POLISH-SOUTH KOREAN RAPPROCHEMENT

The North Korean authorities anxiously watched intensifying contacts between South Korea and the communist states in Europe. The DPRK, which once had a monopoly in this respect, tried very hard to maintain the status quo. With each passing day, however, it became more and more difficult, and after Hungary's decision to establish diplomatic relations with South Korea, it was even harder for the DPRK to reverse this unfavourable trend.

The deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs, Jan Majewski was the one to inform the North Korean ambassador in Poland about the plans of opening trade agencies in Warsaw and Seoul. This message was passed on to the ambassador during the talks on 21 October 1988.⁷⁴ North Korea, however, did not give up and exerted further strong pressure on

⁷⁰ *Ibidem*, Instruction for a group of experts going to Seoul to conduct negotiations on establishing diplomatic relations with South Korea, Warsaw, 1 IX 1989, p. 1–2; *ibidem*, Andrzej Majkowski to Z. Dembowski, the Director of the Human Resources and Training Department in the MSZ, Warsaw, 6 IX 1989; *ibidem*, 7/96, vol. 4, no. 242-1-91, Memo on the relations between the Republic of Poland and the Republic of Korea, Warsaw, 8 IV 1991.

⁷¹ A. Majkowski, "Geneza nawiązania stosunków dyplomatycznych między Polską a Republiką Korei", pp. 133–134

⁷² A. Dudek, *Historia Polityczna Polski 1989–2005* (Cracow, 2007), pp. 55–58.

⁷³ Sejm expose of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Poland, Krzysztof Skubiszewski, Warsaw, 26 IV 1990, https://www.cvce.eu/content/publication/2006/3/28/6a0b3b70-0545-43ce-be95-59e1c0cd825c/publicable_en.pdf, Accessed 10 XI 2019.

⁷⁴ AMSZ, Asia-Pacific, 24/92, vol. 8, no. 22-2-88, Memo on Poland's relations with South Korea, Warsaw, 8 XI 1988.

Poland to abandon their plans. In order to persuade Poland to revise their plans, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of the DPRK, Li In Giu stayed in Warsaw between 17 and 21 November 1988. His mission turned out to be ineffective and a few days later the President of the Polish Chamber of Foreign Trade signed an agreement of exchanging commercial offices with KOTRA in Seoul. Upon hearing this, the DPRK embassy asked for their charge d'affaires to be received in the Polish MSZ. In an over an hour long conversation in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs with Stanisław Stawiarski, the Director of the 2nd Department, the DPRK diplomat firmly stated that North Korea could not accept the announced exchange of trade offices between Poland and South Korea. Also, the Korean charge d'affaires appealed again to the Polish authorities to revise their plans and to block any interpersonal contacts between South Korea and Poland. The conversation could not have had the intended effect as it was up against the decisions already taken at the very top of the PRL's government. Parallel to these attempts, the DPRK embassy in Poland made similar efforts at the Ministry of Foreign Economic Cooperation. These, too, were unsuccessful.⁷⁵

Over the next few months throughout 1989, North Korean officials in Pyongyang and DPRK diplomats in Warsaw on many occasions made strenuous efforts to dissuade Poland from considering deepening cooperation with South Korea, and in particular establishing diplomatic relations with the ROK. Numerous sources indicate that Kim Il Sung and his advisors particularly hoped that they would be able to put pressure on Wojciech Jaruzelski. The then-First Secretary of the KC PZPR visited North Korea twice, first in 1977 as the Minister of National Defence, and then in 1986 as the head of state. The latter was a response to Kim Il Sung's visit in 1984. So both communist leaders had enough time to get to know each other and Kim Il Sung tried to appeal to and make use of those encounters.

It seems that appealing directly to Jaruzelski was a good choice. Jaruzelski was very sceptical about the South Korean offer to Hungary. On 10 October 1988, during a meeting of the Secretary of KC PZPR, he expressed his opinion that it was hard to believe that the ROK could grant Hungary 600 million USD loans and other financial support. What is more, he doubted the Americans would allow the ROK to help Poland in its economic recovery from the crisis. And last but not least, Jaruzelski was very sensitive about relations with the DPRK. He did not want to weaken Polish-North Korean ties and underlined that the Hungarians had made a mistake by not consulting their politics towards the ROK with the DPRK.⁷⁶

North Korean officials and diplomats on various occasions began to request that Wojciech Jaruzelski would pay at least one day visit to North Korea during his planned visit to China at the end of 1989. According to North Korean officials, the fulfilment of this request "would dispel hostile speculations about the alleged, soon to be established diplomatic relations

⁷⁵ *Ibidem*, no. 23-4-88, Memo from the conversation with chargé d'affaires of the DPRK, Li Man Sik on 30 XI 1988, Warsaw, 2 XII 1988.

⁷⁶ AAN, KC PZPR, VII/92, Minutes No. 48. Meeting of the Secretary of Central Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party, Warsaw, 10 X 1988, pp. 29-34. I am grateful to Dr. Tomasz Kozłowski for sharing with me this file collection.

between the PRL and the discredited, puppet-like Roh Tae Woo regime⁷⁷. Polish diplomats did not make any promises in this respect and continued to delay revealing to the DPRK the actual intentions and goals of the Polish authorities with South Korea.

Poland was ready for a possible downturn of relations with Pyongyang as the economic reckoning proved to be the most important consideration. With a prospective 400 million USD in loans, as well as promises of South Korean investments and an increase in trade, the possible cut in trade with the DPRK, worth 100 million rubles per year,⁷⁸ was not considered as particularly threatening. Also, it was assumed that the main commodity imported from the DPRK, that was magnesite, could be imported in larger quantities from Yugoslavia and Brazil. Furthermore, at the end of August 1989, the Ministry of Foreign Economic Cooperation reported that despite the establishment of diplomatic relations between Hungary and the Republic of Korea, Hungary's trade exchange with North Korea did not experience any perturbations.⁷⁹ Thus, North Korea did not really have any effective arguments to persuade Polish decision makers to change their course of action.

When all key issues regarding the breakthrough in relations with the Republic of Korea were agreed upon, the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, Jan Majewski informed the DPRK ambassador on 17 October 1989 about the intended establishment of diplomatic relations between Poland and the Republic of Korea. The memorandum stated that the economic considerations dictated taking such steps, and that President Wojciech Jaruzelski wished that the decision did not change Poland's attitude towards the DPRK. Poland also committed to maintaining friendly bilateral relations and developing comprehensive cooperation, and constantly supporting the unification of Korea.⁸⁰

In response to this, on 21 October 1989 the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of North Korea expressed regret to the Polish ambassador in the DPRK, Mieczysław Dedo at Poland's intentions. He also stated that Poland's arrangements contributed to the division of the Korean Peninsula and categorically urged the Polish government to withdraw these plans.⁸¹ A day later, on 22 October 1989 the Director General in the office of the President asked ambassador Dedo to forward Wojciech Jaruzelski "a personal, heartfelt plea from Kim Il Sung" to withdraw from the decision to establish diplomatic relations with South Korea. If that were not possible, Kim Il Sung insisted on delaying public announcement in this matter by at least six months.⁸²

The Polish authorities did not intend to reveal their plans, but they tried to neutralise possible retaliation from North Korea as much as possible. When it turned out that the ambassador Pak San Am, who had been in Poland for only two years, would be removed from his position and replaced by a new diplomat, the authorities of the PRL decided to

⁷⁷ AMSZ, Asia-Pacific, 3/94, vol. 3, no. 22-1-98, Cable No. 1324 / II / 927, Pyongyang, 24 IV 1989, p. 38.

⁷⁸ In 1989, the average exchange rate of 1 ruble was 1.52 dollars [J. Kaliński, "Rubel transferowy" [in:] *Systemy walutowe współczesnego świata*, ed. J. Łazor, W. Morawski (Warsaw, 2018), p. 158].

⁷⁹ AMSZ, Asia-Pacific, 3/94, vol. 3, no. 0-22-1-89, Annex to memo 0-9 / D. II / 89, Warsaw, 24 VIII 1989, pp. 18–20.

⁸⁰ *Ibidem*, no. 22-1-98, Cable No. 8748, Warsaw, 14 X 1989, p. 15.

⁸¹ *Ibidem*, Cable No. 0-969 / IV, Warsaw, 21 X 1989, p. 13.

⁸² *Ibidem*, no. 0-22-1-89, Cable No. 0-1001 / IV, Pyongyang, 23 X 1989, p. 11.

accept the suggestion of the Korean-Polish Friendship Society operating in the DPRK and to award him with the Order of Merit of the PRL. The ceremony took place in the office of Jan Majewski, the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs on 16 October 1989.⁸³

Another gesture and a signal to North Korea from Polish leaders of their willingness to maintain good relations with Pyongyang was a send off by the President of the PRL, Wojciech Jaruzelski for the departing ambassador, which took place on 27 October 1989. The Polish press only reported about the ambassador meeting with the First Secretary of the KC PZPR, Mieczysław Rakowski, because, as a rule, the President did not receive departing ambassadors and they did not want to set a precedent for this event. The DPRK ambassador told Jaruzelski about Kim Il Sung wishing to meet him, on which the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, Jan Majewski assured the diplomat that efforts would be made to organise it. Just five days after this conversation, on 1 November 1989, came an announcement about the establishment of diplomatic relations between Poland and the Republic of Korea.⁸⁴ Two weeks later, on 15 November 1989, the chargé d'affaires of the Republic of Korea arrived in Warsaw to start organising the diplomatic representation for their country.⁸⁵

Withdrawing the ambassador from Poland who had been on the post for only two years was not the only response of the DPRK to the unacceptable steps of the Polish authorities. Another one was the sudden recall of one hundred and three North Korean students and interns who were residing in Poland at the time. On 6 December the North Korean chargé d'affaires informed the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs that the rationale behind this decision was the fear of them being abducted to South Korea.⁸⁶ He added that those students would undergo several weeks of ideological training in North Korea, after which they could continue their studies.⁸⁷ It is not known if they were allowed to continue their studies, but it is certain that they did not return to Poland.

SUMMARY

The establishment of diplomatic relations between Poland and the Republic of Korea was the result of many years of efforts made, above all, by South Korea. These efforts could have gone on for a long time without success, if it had not been for several important factors in the 1980s. First of all, the difficult economic situation of the PRL forced Polish authorities to look for possibilities in acquiring loans, investors and investments in modern technologies. Rapidly developing South Korea was an attractive partner in that respect. Another extremely important issue was the Soviet Union's geopolitical

⁸³ *Ibidem*, no. 0-10-1-89, Cable No. 0-3958 / III, Pyongyang, 23 IX 1989, p. 6; *ibidem*, Cable No. 0-633 / IV, Pyongyang, 14 X 1989, p. 3.

⁸⁴ *Ibidem*, Cable No. 9083, Warsaw, 28 X 1989, p. 1.

⁸⁵ *Ibidem*, no. 0-22-1-89, Cable No. 9606, Warsaw, 17 XI 1989, p. 5.

⁸⁶ Another reason behind the decision about students withdrawal was probably a fear that some students would defect to the West. After opening of the borders between East and West Germany on 9 XI 1989 it would be easier than before.

⁸⁷ AMSZ, Asia-Pacific, 3/94, vol. 3, no. 0-54-1-89, Ciphertext No. 10008, Warsaw, 6 XII 1989, p. 1.

reorientation under Mikhail Gorbachev's leadership and attempts to engage more with Asia to achieve its political and economic goals. The first significant signal of changes was participation of the USSR and its satellite states in the Olympic Games in Seoul. This matter, as well as development of economic contacts, and later the establishment of diplomatic relations with the Republic of Korea, were loyally consulted by the PRL's authorities with Moscow to make sure that it did not veto any of the above.

Over time, the USSR had to focus primarily on their economic recovery, and in this respect South Korea – just as in the Polish case – was seen as a potential investor and source of loans. The authorities of the Republic of Korea, however, have consistently stressed that major economic projects and injection of funds could only be implemented once diplomatic relations were established. In the case of the Soviet Union – unlike Hungary or Poland – negotiations in this matter were more complicated. The Soviet leadership was more concerned with the opinion of the DPRK, their ally on the Korean Peninsula. Also, normalisation of relations with Seoul was opposed by some prominent politicians and some of the military elite.⁸⁸ Protracted negotiations meant that economic aid from Seoul could not be of effective help in resuscitating the collapsing Soviet economy.⁸⁹

The establishment of diplomatic relations with the Republic of Korea had a very negative impact on Poland's relations with North Korea. However, this was not the only reason for worsening relations between Warsaw and Pyongyang. For the totalitarian DPRK, the democratisation of Poland was primarily the reason that led to it losing Poland as a reliable partner. Relations between Poland and North Korea after 1989 are the subject for separate studies. Similarly, more in-depth research is needed on the impact of South Korean investments in the Polish economy, so much awaited by the declining elite of the PRL and initiated in 1993 by the Daewoo investment in the FSO (Warsaw Car Factory). The fact is, however, that over the years South Korea has become an important political and economic partner of Poland in East Asia, and the value of mutual trade in 2018 was 5,432.7 million dollars.⁹⁰ In contrast, trade between Poland and North Korea remains minimal, and political relations are limited to occasional contacts of delegations on a low- and mid-level.

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⁸⁸ S. Radchenko, *Unwanted Visionaries*, pp. 222, 228–229.

⁸⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 247.

⁹⁰ *Republic of Korea*, Trade and International Cooperation Department at the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy (compiled study), V 2019, pp. 2–4.

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Between Pyongyang and Seoul – a Rocky Road to Establishing Diplomatic Relations between Poland and the Republic of Korea

The paper presents South Korean efforts to establish economic and political relations with Communist Poland which resulted in establishment of diplomatic relations on 1 November, 1989. In the 1970s the Republic of Korea (ROK) decided to initiate contacts with selected Communist states in order to find new export markets and to get wider international recognition. It was a part of competition with Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) for legitimacy. For many years Communist Poland ignored South Korean initiatives and continued to maintain diplomatic relations with North Korea. Polish approach to South Korea has changed in the 1980s when Communist Poland faced a serious economic crisis and the ROK's economy grew rapidly. The remarkable economic development of South Korea convinced the USSR and its satellites to perceive the ROK as a potential source of credits and investments. Taking into account internal problems and new Soviet policy towards South Korea, the authorities of Communist Poland decided to start trade with the ROK. However, South Korea's representatives declared that the ROK would give credits and invest in Poland only after establishing full diplomatic relations. Prime Minister Mieczysław Rakowski gave a green light to do so, but the final step was made when the government was led by Tadeusz Mazowiecki. Thus, Poland became the second state from the collapsing Eastern Bloc to establish diplomatic relations with the ROK.

KEYWORDS

Polish-South Korean relations, Republic of Korea, North Korea, diplomacy, *Nordpolitik*

Między Pjongjangiem a Seulem. Wyboista droga do nawiązania stosunków dyplomatycznych między Polską a Republiką Korei

Tekst przedstawia, w jaki sposób od lat siedemdziesiątych XX w. Republika Korei zabiegała o nawiązanie relacji gospodarczych i politycznych z Polską Ludową, co ostatecznie zostało sfinalizowane nawiązaniem stosunków dyplomatycznych 1 listopada 1989 r. Korea Południowa w latach siedemdziesiątych zdecydowała się zainicjować kontakty z częścią państw komunistycznych, by zdobyć nowe rynki dla swojego eksportu, a także

pozyskać kolejnych partnerów na arenie międzynarodowej. To drugie było elementem rywalizacji z Koreańską Republiką Ludowo-Demokratyczną o uznanie w świecie. PRL przez szereg lat negatywnie odnosiła się do południowokoreańskich starań i konsekwentnie traktowała KRL-D jako jedyne państwo koreańskie. Sytuacja zmieniła się w latach osiemdziesiątych, gdy Polska Ludowa musiała się mierzyć z coraz większym kryzysem gospodarczym, a Korea Południowa niezmiennie notowała znaczący wzrost gospodarczy. Szybki rozwój Republiki Korei spowodował, że kraje bloku sowieckiego – ze Związkiem Radzieckim na czele – w drugiej połowie lat osiemdziesiątych zaczęły postrzegać ją jako potencjalne źródło kredytów i inwestycji. Biorąc pod uwagę sytuację wewnętrzną oraz nastawienie ZSRR do Korei Południowej, władze PRL otworzyły się na kontakty handlowe z tym państwem. Republika Korei uzależniła jednak obiecane kredyty i inwestycje od nawiązania pełnych stosunków dyplomatycznych. Pozytywną decyzję w tej sprawie podjął rząd Mieczysława Rakowskiego, jednakże finalizacja sprawy nastąpiła już po sformułowaniu gabinetu przez Tadeusza Mazowieckiego. Tym samym Polska stała się – drugim po Węgrzech – państwem rozpadającego się bloku wschodniego, które nawiązało stosunki dyplomatyczne z Republiką Korei.

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE

stosunki PRL-Korea Południowa, Republika Korei, Korea Północna, dyplomacja, *Nordpolitik*

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