



**THE LAST CENTURY IN  
TURKISH-POLISH RELATIONS  
(1923-2023)**

*International Conference*

**19 OCTOBER 2023, THURSDAY**



**WARSAW**

**UL. RAKOWIECKA 19, 02-517 WARSAW  
TURKISH EMBASSY IN WARSAW**



**UNIWERSYTET  
WARSZAWSKI**



**TURKISH  
AIRLINES**



**STATE  
ARCHIVES**  
THE NATIONAL DIGITAL ARCHIVES

**TURKIYE CUMHURİYETİ  
DIŞİŞLERİ BAKANLIĞI  
AVRUPA BİRLİĞİ BAKANLIĞI**



**REPUBLIC OF TURKEY  
MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS  
DIRECTORATE FOR EU AFFAIRS**

# THE LAST CENTURY IN TURKISH-POLISH RELATIONS (1923-2023)

## INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

October 19, 2023  
Turkish Embassy in Warsaw

### HONORARY PRESIDENTS

**H.E. Rauf Alp Denktaş**  
Ambassador-Designate of the Republic of Türkiye in Poland

**Prof. Dr. Osman Bülent Zülfikar**  
Rector of the Istanbul University

**Prof. Dr. Alojzy Z. Nowak**  
Rector of the University of Warsaw

### SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE

**Prof. Dr. Hacer Topaktaş Üstüner** - Istanbul University  
**Prof. Dr. Emre Erşen** - Marmara University  
**Prof. Dr. Adam Szymański** - University of Warsaw  
**Assoc. Prof. Danuta Chmielowska** - University of Warsaw

### ORGANIZING COMMITTEE

**Çağdaş Bilgin**  
Deputy Head of Mission and First Counsellor of the Republic of Türkiye in Poland  
**Prof. Dr. Hacer Topaktaş Üstüner**  
Istanbul University

### SECRETARY OF CONFERENCE

**Mehmet Türkay** - Embassy of the Republic of Türkiye in Poland  
**Remzi Can Uğur** - Istanbul University

### ORGANIZING INSTITUTIONS

Embassy of the Republic of Türkiye in Poland  
Istanbul University  
University of Warsaw

### PROGRAMME

**09.30-10.00:** Registration  
**10.00-10.30:** Opening Speeches  
**10.30-10.45:** Exhibition Opening

*Historical Photos on Turkish-Polish Relations in The Last Century*

**10.45-11.00:** Coffee Break

**11.00-12.30**

**SESSION I: A NEW BEGINNING IN TURKISH-POLISH RELATIONS**

**Chair: Sevtap Kadioğlu**

**Danuta Chmielowska**

*Re-establishment of Turkish-Polish relations in Lausanne*

**Piotr Nykiel**

*The Inventory of the Galician Martyrdoms of the Ottoman XV Corps for the Years 1916-1917 made by the Polish State in 1921*

**Paulina Dominik**

*On a secret mission to Ankara: Seyfeddin Thadée Gasztowtt (1881 – 1936) and Polish-Turkish relations during the Turkish War of Independence*

**Hacer Topaktaş Üstüner**

*Some Remarks on the first permanent Turkish Embassy in Poland: İbrahim Tali Bey and his Warsaw mission (1924-1926)*

**12.30-14.00**

**Lunch Break**

**14.00-15.15**

**SESSION II: TURKISH-POLISH RELATIONS IN THE COLD WAR AND POST-COLD WAR**

**Chair: Adam Balcer**

**Karolina Wanda Olszowska**

*Turkish-Polish relations during the Cold War*

**Emre Erşen**

*Türkiye and Poland after the Cold War: Political, Economic and Cultural Relations*

**Özgün Eler Bayır**

*Analysing Positions of Türkiye and Poland in Transatlantic Security Relations and NATO in Post-Cold War Era*

**15.15-15.30**

**Coffee Break**

**15.30-16.45**

**SESSION III: PERCEPTIONS IN TURKISH-POLISH RELATIONS**

**Chair: Ayşegül Komsuoğlu Çıtırıtıoğlu**

**Adam Szymański**

*Polish Public Opinion on Türkiye - Selected Social and Political Issues*

**Şener Aktürk**

*Poland in Ottoman and Turkish Grand Strategy: "Natural Allies" over the Centuries?*

**Jakub Wódka**

*Threat perception of Poland and Türkiye. Convergences and divergences*

**16.45-17.15**

**Closing Speeches**

## CONFERENCE PARTICIPANTS

**Prof. Dr. Şener Aktürk**

Koç University - Türkiye

**MA Adam Balcer**

College of Eastern Europe - Poland

**Assoc. Prof. Danuta Chmielowska**

University of Warsaw - Poland

**Dr. Paulina Dominik**

European University Institute - Italy

**Prof. Dr. Özgün Erler Bayır**

Istanbul University - Türkiye

**Prof. Dr. Emre Erşen**

Marmara University - Türkiye

**Prof. Dr. Sevtap Kadioğlu**

Istanbul University - Türkiye

**Prof. Dr. Ayşegül Komsuoğlu Çıtıptıoğlu**

Istanbul University - Türkiye

**Assoc. Prof. Piotr Nykiel**

Jagiellonian University – Poland

**Dr. Karolina Wanda Olszowska**

Jagiellonian University - Poland

**Prof. Dr. Adam Szymański**

University of Warsaw - Poland

**Prof. Dr. Hacer Topaktaş Üstüner**

Istanbul University - Türkiye

**Res. Asst. Remzi Can Uğur**

Istanbul University - Türkiye

**Assoc. Prof. Jakub Wódka**

Polish Academy of Science - Poland



# ABSTRACTS

# POLAND IN OTTOMAN AND TURKISH GRAND STRATEGY: “NATURAL ALLIES” OVER THE CENTURIES?

Prof. Dr. Şener Aktürk  
*Koç University*

## **Abstract**

In previous works (Aktürk 2020), I described Poland as a natural ally of Türkiye. The appearance of a stable and consistent Polish-Turkish alliance through the centuries poses an intriguing puzzle for strategic studies and international relations scholarship more generally. Given the assumption that national interests, geopolitical balance, and international norms often change in radically different directions, it is a puzzle as to how and why Polish-Turkish alliance could be sustained over the centuries with only a few bouts of conflict. I also critically note and briefly examine the most notable episodes of conflict that pitted the Polish-Lithuanian and Ottoman-Turkish actors against each other, such as the Siege and the Battle of Vienna. I argue that the broad contours of political geography for both Poland and Türkiye, including the actors that threatened their survival, remained strikingly similar over the centuries. Most importantly, Russia remained the archenemy of the Ottoman Empire, post-Ottoman Türkiye, Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, and interwar Poland, at least until the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1992 and has resurged as a major threat since 2008 (Five Day War) and especially since 2014 (Russia's occupation and annexation of Crimea). However, both Poland and Türkiye have also been threatened and even occupied by Western actors (e.g., Germany and the Habsburgs for Poland; British and French Empires for the Ottomans and Türkiye), thus making them natural allies militarily threatened by both Russia and the Western powers throughout the centuries. As a corollary of these political geographic and structural conditions, there are striking chronological parallels in the rise, the fall, and the revival of Polish-Lithuanian and Ottoman-Turkish polities from the 15<sup>th</sup> to the 21<sup>st</sup> centuries.

Citation: Aktürk, Şener. 2020. "Turkey's Grand Strategy as the Third Power: A Realist Proposal." *Perceptions*, Vol.25, No.2, pp.152-177.

# RE-ESTABLISHMENT OF TURKISH-POLISH RELATIONS IN LAUSANNE

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Danuta Chmielowska  
*University of Warsaw*

## Abstract

The decisions of Versailles Conference (1919) caused the collapse of the Ottoman Empire (Sevres 1920). The victory of the Turks in the Greco-Turkish War (1919-1922) resulted in the convening of the international Conference in Lausanne (November 22, 1922-July 24, 1923), which was radically different from the Paris Peace Conference, where the winners decided everything only among themselves. The Treaty of Sèvres became obsolete and the former vanquished state acted as the victor. Convened on the initiative of France, Great Britain and Italy there was no unity among the Western powers and this fact was skillfully used by the Turkish delegation headed by General İsmet İnönü. The first in Lausanne was the bilateral Turkish-Greek agreement on population exchange (1922).

Poland was not invited to Lausanne, although it tried to do so through diplomatic channels. This was especially important to the Marshal Józef Piłsudski, who hoped for the implementation of his plans with Turkey, e.g. economic and military. In view of the above situation, on the recommendation of the Polish leader, in June 1923, the Polish delegation went to Switzerland with Dr. Jan Modzelewski as the head, to hold bilateral negotiations with İsmet İnönü. They ended successfully and on July 23, 1923, bilateral agreements with the new Türkiye. Great success of Polish negotiators who returned to the country with: Friendship Agreement, Settlement and Trade Agreement.

The main peace treaty with Türkiye and additional treaties, the most important of which was the Straits Convention, were signed in Lausanne on July 24, 1923. It gave Türkiye unlimited sovereignty over Anatolia and East Thrace, with the exception of demilitarization provisions in the straits area and along the Turkish-Greek border and Turkish-Bulgarian (demilitarization also applied to Greece and Bulgaria on their side of the border. Capitulations were definitively abolished, that is, all economic privileges for foreigners from the times when they were granted by the sultans from Suleiman the Magnificent onwards. Türkiye assumed part of the debt of the Ottoman Empire, according to the reduced territory.

In my presentation, I will discuss, among others, the above-mentioned agreements signed by both parties and present the ongoing negotiations between the Polish and Turkish delegations.

# SEYFEDDIN THADÉE GASZTOWTT AND POLISH-TURKISH RELATIONS DURING THE TURKISH WAR OF INDEPENDENCE

Dr. Paulina D. Dominik

*Max Weber Postdoctoral Fellow European University Institute*

## **Abstract**

This paper focuses on the efforts of the political leadership of the Second Polish Republic that aimed to establish relations with the Turkish national government in Ankara under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal and that dated back to final months of 1920. To examine the motivations of the Polish leaders behind development of contacts with new political body in the Anatolian heartland in parallel to maintaining friendly relations with the Ottoman government in Istanbul, it sheds light on the secret mission of the First Secretary of the Polish Delegation to the Sublime Porte, Seyfeddin Thadée Gasztowtt (1881 – 1936), which took place in the spring of 1921. Gasztowtt had come to prominence in the Ottoman public sphere following the 1908 Young Turk Revolution when between 1908 and 1914 he was actively involved in advocating for Poland's independence on the Bosphorus among the key members of the Committee of Union and Progress and as such acted as a spokesman for the new political regime in Istanbul. This paper reconstructs Gasztowtt's mission which was the first success of Polish diplomacy in establishing relations with the government in Ankara. It discusses its importance from the point of view of the geopolitical projects of General Józef Piłsudski and his circle, and evaluates its long-term consequences as far as the conclusion of the Polish-Turkish Friendship Treaty in Lausanne on 23 July 1923 is concerned.



# ANALYZING POSITIONS OF TÜRKİYE AND POLAND IN TRANSATLANTIC SECURITY RELATIONS AND NATO IN POST- COLD WAR ERA

Prof. Dr. Özgün Erler Bayır  
*Istanbul University*

## Abstract

It is both interesting and insightful to analyze together and/or comparatively the positions of two countries, Poland and Türkiye, in the context of post-Cold War foreign policy, security priorities and Transatlantic relations. Türkiye has extensive experience in the Western security architectures in the 20th century. As we left behind the 70th anniversary of Türkiye's NATO membership, one of the most fundamental elements of continuity in Turkish foreign policy since the founding of the Republic is turning face to the West. The other two foreign policy components, on the other hand, are undoubtedly commitment to the Lausanne status and security concerns regarding the neighbors. In fact, these three continuity components of Turkish foreign policy are interconnected and interact with each other at the simultaneous time. As for Poland, although it has a shorter history and background in this context, it has been rapidly and successfully integrated into the political, economic and security structures of the West after 1989. Poland's experience of being in the Eastern Bloc during the Cold War spans about half of the 20th century. The post-Cold War legacy and infrastructure that Poland inherited had to be transformed, and this was accomplished in a successful way.

When we analyze the issue from the perspective of transatlantic security relations and NATO, there is undoubtedly a difference of history and background when the two countries are compared to each other. However, we have now left behind a period of three decades since the end of the Cold War and an assessment of this 30-years period is also crucial for a better understanding of the relations between the two countries. Within transatlantic security relations, it is important to underline the fact that both countries have special strategic relations with the USA. What are the convergences and divergences in the post-Cold War positions of these two countries, which have different backgrounds and histories within the entire Transatlantic security architecture and specifically with NATO? What could be the main reasons for this divergence? Can this phenomenon be explained, for instance, by the general directions of foreign policy or by security priorities? Or can it be evaluated as the conjuncture according to the relations with the main actors in transatlantic security? Is it possible to make a categorization in this regard? While seeking answers to these questions, the study will also attempt to provide a general framework for the position and role of the two countries in post-Cold War transatlantic security.

# TÜRKİYE AND POLAND AFTER THE COLD WAR: POLITICAL, ECONOMIC AND CULTURAL RELATIONS

Prof. Dr. Emre Erşen  
*Marmara University*

## **Abstract**

The official relations between Türkiye and Poland have continuously developed since the collapse of the Soviet Union. In addition to their remarkable economic performance in the post-Cold War period, the two countries play a crucial strategic role for peace and stability in East Europe. They also contribute to the European security architecture as two important NATO member states. Polish support to Türkiye's membership process in the EU is another significant factor that draws the two countries closer to each other. On the other hand, the ongoing war between Russia and Ukraine have also contributed to the strategic rapprochement between Ankara and Warsaw in the last few years, since they both openly support Ukraine's territorial integrity against Russia. The goal of this paper is to shed light on the development of the political, economic and cultural relations between Türkiye and Poland in the post-Cold War period. To this end, the paper will focus on a number of key developments in these three spheres that have provided significant momentum to the emergence of a strategic relationship between the two countries.

# THE INVENTORY OF THE GALICIAN MARTYRDOMS OF THE OTTOMAN XV CORPS FOR THE YEARS 1916-1917 MADE BY THE POLISH STATE IN 1921

Assoc. Prof. Piotr Nykiel  
*Jagiellonian University*

## Abstract

Already in the late autumn of 1920, the Polish diplomatic mission in Constantinople took the first steps to determine the burial places and identity of soldiers of Polish nationality who died on the territory of the Ottoman Empire. As a gesture of goodwill, the Polish side then handed over to the Turkish authorities the death certificates and inheritance documents of Ottoman soldiers who died on the Polish soil, which – as emphasized by the then Undersecretary of State of the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Raşid Bey – unspeakably moved both the Ottoman government and the families of the dead. The conduct of the Polish side was read as a testimony to the delicacy of the feelings of the Polish Government. Probably in the wake of this and in parallel to the analogous activities carried out in Türkiye (the details of which, unfortunately, we do not know), in 1921, on the order of the Section of Non-Catholic Faiths and Care of War Graves of the Ministry of Military Affairs, an inventory of the graves of Turkish soldiers, killed or dead between 1914 and 1918 on the territory which later on became Polish, was completed. The lists drawn up by the local Departments of the Office of Care of War Graves included, with a few exceptions, necessarily only soldiers of the Ottoman XV Corps, which in the years 1916-1917 fought on the East Galician Front. On today's territory of Poland there were 19 officers and soldiers, all with established personalities, buried in Kraków, Wadowice, Dziedzice, Cieszyn, Rzeszów, Przemyśl and Poznań. In the case of the current areas of western Ukraine, a total of 971 identified burials and 166 nameless burials located in 13 cemeteries were added to the list. For reasons difficult to determine, the lists drawn up in 1921 did not include as many as 12 cemeteries, the establishment of which in the years 1916-1917 was confirmed by Turkish sources. Among the omitted necropolises there were, among others, cemeteries in Łopuszna and Hucisko, preserved to this day (although in a dramatically changed form), or the cemetery in Podwysokie, which certainly still existed in 1921. These documents sometimes contained obvious inaccuracies, testifying to the ignorance of the officials who drafted them. For example, 11 burials of Russian soldiers of the Muslim faith in Strzałkowo in the Kalisz district were mistakenly identified as Turkish. In turn, those fallen from the Ottoman 20th Division buried in Borszczów were considered Austro-Hungarian soldiers. Despite significant shortcomings, the documentation prepared in 1921 by the Section of Non-Catholic Faiths and Care of War Graves of the Ministry of Military Affairs is, on the one hand, a unique source for historical research, and on the other hand, a confirmation of mutual respect for the fallen soldiers, which Poland and Türkiye have shown towards each other in an extremely difficult period, in which both countries were still fighting a military and political struggle of deterrence, defence, and maintaining an open-door policy.

# TURKISH-POLISH RELATIONS DURING THE COLD WAR

Dr. Karolina Wanda Olszowska  
*Jagiellonian University*

## **Abstract**

During World War II, Poles were employed in various branches of Turkish industry. They had the greatest merit for the development of aviation, but after the war, they were quickly replaced by American engineers. Polish Ambassador Michał Sokolnicki was an important figure in Turkish-Polish relations. It was thanks to him that it was possible to evacuate some interned Poles from Romania to Turkey.

The situation became complicated after the government of Türkiye recognized the government of Lublin while withdrawing recognition of the government in exile in London. The first months after the end of the war were a period of rivalry between representatives

Turkish-Polish relations became even more complicated when Türkiye, after joining NATO, clearly found itself in the Western sphere of influence. The paper will be aimed at presenting how Turkish-Polish relations were developed in the period 1945-1952 and what they were based on.

# POLISH PUBLIC OPINION ON TÜRKİYE- SELECTED SOCIAL AND POLITICAL ISSUES

Prof. Dr. Adam Szymański  
*University of Warsaw*

## **Abstract**

The perception of Türkiye by societies of the EU member states is an important factor affecting not only bilateral relations but also the Turkish EU accession process. Being experienced in participating in projects aimed at the presentation of true image of Türkiye among the European societies, the author would like to have a closer look in his paper at the perception of the Turkish state and society by the Polish public opinion. The data collected within the discourse analysis of the Polish media and in surveys conducted by opinion poll companies as well as by the author of the paper himself are used to answer the question of how Poles see selected important political and social issues related to Türkiye and if there have been some changes in this regard in successive years. In the analytical part of the paper, the author tries to explain key factors shaping the Polish public opinion on Türkiye and generating change of attitudes.

# SOME REMARKS ON THE FIRST PERMANENT TURKISH EMBASSY IN POLAND: İBRAHİM TALİ BEY AND HIS WARSAW MISSION (1924-1926)

Prof. Dr. Hacer Topaktaş Üstüner  
*Istanbul University*

## Abstract

After the signing of the Turkish-Polish Friendship Treaty in Lausanne in 1923, Türkiye and Poland started to take the necessary steps to improve their mutual relations. Accordingly, in 1924, both states opened their first permanent embassies in Warsaw and Ankara. Roman Knoll was assigned to Ankara, and İbrahim Tali Bey (Öngören, 1875-1952) to Warsaw. Before that, neither the Ottoman Empire nor Poland had permanent embassies in Warsaw and Istanbul.

İbrahim Tali Bey is one of the prominent figures of the Turkish national struggle (1919-1922) and was one of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's colleagues in the establishment of the Republic of Türkiye. In 1919, he set out for Samsun with Atatürk and took part in the organization of the struggles. He is also a military doctor and has served as a deputy and inspector for many years.

İbrahim Tali Bey's Warsaw mission is important as it represents the resumption of Turkish-Polish relations in the 20th century. The Warsaw embassy of İbrahim Tali Bey, who has served in Warsaw for more than two years, has not been the subject of studies until now. At this point, the paper focuses on the Warsaw embassy of İbrahim Tali Bey and examines the benefits of his embassy on bilateral relations. At the same time, the paper seeks answers to the following questions in the light of the available sources: Why was İbrahim Tali Bey appointed to the post of Warsaw embassy, what issues did he deal with during his mission as the first envoy, how did he represent Türkiye, how was his relationship with the Polish authorities? Thus, certain aspects of İbrahim Tali Bey's Warsaw embassy will be analysed in this paper. The main sources of the paper consist of materials from the archives of Türkiye and Poland and related literature.

# THREAT PERCEPTION OF POLAND AND TURKEY. CONVERGENCES AND DIVERGENCES

Assoc. Prof. Jakub Wódka  
*Polish Academy of Science*

## **Abstract**

The paper seeks to explore how Poland and Turkey, in the face of growing geopolitical instability, assess the main challenges arising from their respective neighborhoods. Despite Poland's consistent view of Russia as a perennial source of concern, the war Moscow has waged against Ukraine since February 24, 2022, marked a transformative moment in shaping and solidifying Poland's threat perception. This conflict is seen as a determining factor that has forged Poland's strategic calculus. It has also played a pivotal role in defining the measures Warsaw has undertaken to manage security threats in its Eastern neighborhood. These actions have significantly impacted not only its national policies, such as a major increase in defence spending, but also its engagement and priorities in international organizations, including NATO—where there is a heightened focus on deterrence, defence, and maintaining an open-door policy.

On the other hand, Turkey has pursued a more balanced policy concerning Russia, adopting what some refer to as cooperative rivalry or conflictual connivance. Positioned at the crossroads of two major geopolitical regions—the Eastern/Black Sea neighborhood and the Southern neighborhood—Turkey's threat perception is nuanced and extends beyond viewing Russia as the sole challenge. It perceives its Southern neighborhood as a consistent source of instability and considers terrorism a significant threat. This perception is guided by the overarching goal of fostering strategic autonomy and becoming an independent player on the global stage. As in the case of Poland, Turkey's threat perception has not only substantially impacted its domestic policies, but also its stance in international forums. For instance, this is evident in its position on the potential accession of Sweden and Finland to NATO, as well as the emphasis on the Alliance's three core tasks.

Hence, the paper aims to illuminate the similarities and differences in how Poland and Turkey navigate the current geopolitical instabilities through the lens of their respective threat perceptions.

