

Poland and North Korea in the 1980's – from Partnership to Stagnancy

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Previous decades

Poland recognized the Democratic People's Republic of Korea on October 9, 1948. It was a natural consequence of belonging of both states to the Communist Bloc led by the Soviet Union. On the other hand, Poland did not accept the existence of the Republic of Korea and for decades agreed with North Korean claims saying that Koreans in the South were occupied by the US Army and ruled by "American puppets". This point of view has been revised in the 1980' and finally on November 1, 1989 Poland established diplomatic relations with South Korea.

In my paper I am going to describe Polish-North Korean relations in the 1980's. Up till today, scholars have not paid enough attention to this issue¹. First of all I am going to draw a short historical background of the subject. In previous decades Communist Poland supported North Korea on many fields. After the outbreak of the Korean War, propaganda in Poland consequently presented North Korean version of events. Accusations towards the Americans and South Koreans of invading the North and using biological weapon were common in the media. What is more, sometimes Americans were even compared to Nazi-German war criminals. An anti-American attitude could be noticed not only in the state-run media but also in literature – novels and poems, sometimes written by outstanding Polish authors like Wisława Szymborska and Tadeusz Różewicz². During the war, alike several other Communist countries, Poland gave material aid to DPRK and agreed to give shelter to 1200 North Korean orphans who came to Poland in two stages: in November 1951 and in July 1953³.

¹ See short analytics of chosen 3 documents related to the 1980': S. Szyc, *Stosunki polsko-północnokoreańskie w latach 80-tych XX wieku w świetle wybranych dokumentów*, „Komunizm: system-ludzie-dokumentacja”, vol. 3, 2014, pp. 221–237.

² Choi Sung Eun, *Koreańska wojna domowa w polskich socrealistycznych utworach literackich*, [in] „Korea w oczach Polaków”, ed. J. Włodarski, K. Zeidler, M. Burdelski, Gdańsk 2013, pp. 545–551.

³ There is several articles in Polish related to problem of North Korean orphans in Poland. See for example: S. Szyc, *Północnokoreańskie dzieci oraz młodzież w Państwowym Ośrodku Wychowawczym w Plakowicach na Dolnym Śląsku w latach 1953–1959* [in] *Rodzina: powołanie, zadania, zagrożenia*, ed. Ks. J. Zimny, Stalowa Wola 2014, pp. 1045–1054; Ł. Sołtysik, *Dzieci i młodzież północnokoreańska w Polsce w latach 1953–1954 w świetle wybranych dokumentów*, „Rocznik Jeleniogórski” 2009, vol. 41, pp. 195–210.

In the first years after signing of the armistice Polish-North Korean relations were still close and warm. Poland together with Czechoslovakia was chosen by North Korea and Peoples Republic of China to become a member of the Neutral Nations Supervisory Commission and Neutral Nations Repatriation Commission. Nevertheless, both countries were not neutral and represented interests of North Korea and China. Moreover, the Polish delegation used NNSC as a cover institution for activities of its intelligence and collected data concerning the US military in South Korea and in the Far East⁴. The Neutral Nations Inspection Teams, which as supervisory bodies had access to 5 crucial South Korean ports until June 1956, were especially useful for this kind of activity⁵. It is worth mentioning that from 1951 until 1955 Polish military intelligence was fully subordinated to the Soviet Union and headed by high rank Soviet officers⁶.

Poland also took part, together with other Communist states, in post-war reconstruction of North Korea. Poland fully equipped hospital in Huichon, obliged itself to build steam engine and carriage workshop in Pyongyang and a rolling-stock workshop in Wonsan. What is more, Poland decided to implement mechanization of three coal mines and, last but not least, Polish urbanists developed the plan of the city and two housing projects⁷.

Visit of Kim Il Sung from 2–6 July 1956 confirmed good mutual relations. It was a part of his 50-day journey to Communist countries in order to receive more help needed to implement Five-Year Plan aimed to grow the economy. In April 1957, Polish delegation led by Prime-minister Józef Cyrankiewicz revisited North Korea. One and half year later, in October 1959, delegation led by head of the State Council Aleksander Zawadzki went to DPRK. Despite the positive atmosphere of the visit, first symptoms of distrust towards Poland were visible. In his report Polish ambassador to North Korea Józef Dryglas stressed that absence of Kim Il Sung during each public meeting with the delegation was meaningful⁸.

Indeed, since late 50's Polish-North Korean relationships became colder. It was connected with events inside the Soviet Union after Joseph Stalin's death and

⁴ See an example of the data collected by the intelligence officers under cover of the NNSC: AIPN, 2602/2904, [Notatka dla tow. Kotowskiego], 10 XII 1953 r.

⁵ After withdrawal of the Inspection Teams from South Korea and then from North Korea, the role of the NNSC dramatically decreased. Since that time it only observed situation in the Demilitarized Zone and received reports about violations of the armistice, but had no tools to respond effectively. Poles were forced to leave North Korea in 1995 and since that time representatives of the NNSC have no access to DPRK. See more on the NNSC: Ch. Birchmaier, M. Burdelski, E. Jendraszczak, *50-lecie Komisji Nadzorzej Państw Neutralnych w Korei*, Warsaw 2003.

⁶ S. Cenckiewicz, *Długie ramię Moskwy. Wywiad wojskowy Polski Ludowej 1943–1991*, Poznan 2011, pp. 86-87.

⁷ AMSZ, zesp. 12, w. 41, t. 994, *Stosunki polsko-koreańskie*, p. 8–11.

⁸ AMSZ, zesp. 12, w. 41,teczka 994, Notatka informacyjna z pobytu w KRLD tow. Aleksandra Zawadzkiego i delegacji rządowej PRL, Phenian, 30 X 1959 r., k. 41–43.

its repercussions for the Communist Bloc. On one hand, when Nikita Khrushchev pointed out Stalin's crimes and critique of the cult of individual it resulted in political thaw in several Communist countries, including Poland. On the other hand, a few prominent Communist politicians as Mao Zedong and Kim Il Sung perceived Khrushchev's attitude as a potential threat to their positions. In the aftermath these events, the Sino-Soviet split began and soon the Communist camp was divided. North Korea supported China, while Poland stayed loyal to the Soviet Union⁹.

In the Era of the Sino-Soviet split and the birth of the Juche ideology, in the 1960's and 1970's, relations between Poland and DPRK were stagnant. According to the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs the period 1963–1966 was the worst period time in mutual relations¹⁰. Until the late 1970's the Polish embassy in Pyongyang regularly informed about constant stagnancy¹¹. At the same time Polish members of the NNSC reported signs of lack of trust from the North Koreans who perceived the Poles as representatives of Soviet interests¹².

Polish documents from that period show that leaders of the state did not pay attention to the DPRK and sometimes even ignored its initiatives. In 1972 North Korea invited First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Polish United Worker's Party Edward Gierek to visit DPRK. In the following years DPRK asked several times about his plans and in October 1977 its ambassador on a behalf of Kim Il Sung repeated the invitation¹³. The much awaited visit of the Polish leader was a very important issue for North Koreans and they underlined their expectations even after visits of 1977 when two prominent figures: the Minister of National Defense general Wojciech Jaruzelski and the Minister of Foreign Affairs Emil Wojtaszek travelled to North Korea¹⁴. In spite of North Korean efforts, Gierek did not come, and until 1986 Poland did not send any delegation with the First Secretary of the ruling party.

There were also other issues that somehow disappointed North Koreans. They complained that the First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Polish United Worker's Party has never received the ambassador of the DPRK. Such information was provided in report of the Polish ambassador Jerzy Pękala, who in February

⁹ See more on Polish-North Korean relations until 1961: S. Szyk, *The relations between Poland and North Korea in 1948–1961*, "Progress. Journal of Young Researchers", vol. 2, 2017, pp. 123–136.

¹⁰ AMSZ, D. II, 27/90, w. 4, Notatka nt. stosunków polsko-koreańskich, Warszawa, 15 X 1985.

¹¹ AMSZ, D. II 11/79, w. 4, Ambasada PRL w Phenianie. Raport okresowy za m – c czerwiec 1976 r.

¹² AMSZ, D. II, 8/77, w. 5, Sprawozdanie z działalności Szefa Misji Polskiej do KNPN w Korei za okres od 21. 09. 1971 do 31. 10. 1972 r., Warszawa, 30 XI 1972.

¹³ AMSZ, D. II, 29/87, w. 2, Wydział Zagraniczny KC PZPR. Notatka, Warszawa, 19 X 1977.

¹⁴ AMSZ, D. II, 38/86, w. 4, Jerzy Pękala. Sprawozdanie z pobytu na placówce dyplomatycznej w Koreańskiej Republice Ludowo-Demokratycznej od dnia 2 VII 1978 do 14 XI 1981,

1981 summed up his three and a half year service in Pyongyang. He added that at the same time North Korean politicians stressed that Kim Il Sung has met each of the Polish ambassadors to North Korea¹⁵.

From a position of a Soviet-dependent state Polish diplomats pointed out in many documents numerous North Korean moves that made DPRK a trustworthy partner not only for Poland but also for other Communist states subordinated to Moscow. Crucial arguments were listed in document written by the deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Ernest Kucza just before Kim Il Sung's second trip to Poland. Kucza mentioned a specific North Korean way of strengthening socialism like the cult of personality and the Juche ideology, a foreign policy focused mainly on the state's own particular goals, a neutral attitude towards the Chinese attack on Vietnam in 1979 and in general a negative stance on Vietnam¹⁶. It is worth noting that under Soviet pressure Poland, Czechoslovakia and the German Democratic Republic postponed visits of North Korean Minister of Defense planned for autumn 1978. The main reason was the Soviet disappointment in close DPRK-Chinese relations¹⁷.

The turning point

A new North Korean policy towards European Communist countries created opportunities to intensify contacts and cooperation. From the Polish point of view also the North Korean reaction to the introduction of Martial Law in Poland (December 13, 1981) was a significant factor. One week after implementation of the Martial Law, Kim Il Sung met with the Polish ambassador to North Korea, Leon Tomaszewski and expressed his standpoint. Kim claimed that the implementation of a state of emergency in a socialist country affected the working class and the nation, and meant that the ruling party had conducted a wrong economic and educational policy. After he had said that, he added that because of the counterrevolution, supported by the US propaganda, the implementation of the Martial Law was necessary. The following day, North Korea decided to give symbolic support through donation of 3 metric tons of wheat¹⁸.

In spring 1984 Kim Il Sung made his second trip to European Communist countries. Officially North Korea declared that its purpose was to intensify contacts with those states, strengthen "brotherhood" and unite with them in "fight against war and imperialism". European diplomats saw different reasons. First of all, Kim's peregrination took place several months after the Rangoon bombing, so it was seen as a way of escaping international isolation. Secondly, North Korea needed

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ AMSZ, D. II, 29/87, w. 2, Pilna notatka, 3 V 1984.

¹⁷ AMSZ, D. II, 25/92, w. 4, Pilna notatka, 12 IX 1978; Ibid., Szyfrogram nr 8280, Warszawa, 25 IX 1978 r.

¹⁸ AMSZ, D. II, 43/86, w. 2, Szyfrogram ambasadora Leona Tomaszewskiego, Phenian 2 I 1982.

economic aid because of its economic weakness and an impressive development of South Korea. What is more, probably DPRK wanted to build up its position in order to balance China's influence when it seemed that the "Middle State" may become an important player in the discussion concerning the unification and future of the Korean Peninsula¹⁹.

Kim Il Sung's travel to Europe improved North Korean relations with the Soviet Union and other Communist states. One year after his visit, Polish diplomats in the Soviet Union were informed by specialists from the Far East Department of the USSR Foreign Ministry that Soviet-North Korean bilateral relations reached a new level²⁰.

When it comes to Poland the visit, which took place in 27–29th of May 1984, also was a turning point²¹. Right after the departure of the delegation, the deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs evaluated all the meetings with North Koreans and notified that they fulfilled basic expectations. He underlined that Poland provided detailed information about the internal situation in the country and described the main interests of its foreign policy. Regarding international affairs, the Polish side stressed the value of collaboration with other Communist states, especially the significance of close relations with the Soviet Union. The Korean delegation limited its concern to three issues. They discussed DPRK's achievements concerning the reinforcement of socialism, their view on the international aspects of the Korean issue and the cooperation with Poland, particularly in the field of economy.

In the matter of economy Koreans repeated their proposal made during previous negotiations of an intensification of Polish involvement in North Korean coal mine industry. Furthermore, they presented a new request which was an idea of establishing a factory of MI-2 helicopters by Polish engineers. DPRK hoped for a factory that could produce 100 helicopters a year. When it comes to Poland requests, the main one was to import more North Korean mineral resources as magnesite, lead and zinc. At the same time Poles emphasized that in order to increase trade exchange it is essential to fulfill contracts on time and deliver high quality products. In past North Korea failed to meet obligations to Poland many times.

General Wojciech Jaruzelski and Kim Il Sung decided that details of further economic cooperation should be discussed by special committee²² during a scheduled meeting in Pyongyang. Poland also agreed to a not scheduled visit of

¹⁹ AMSZ, D. II, 29/87, w. 2, Pilna notatka, 3 V 1984.

²⁰ AMSZ, D. II, 25/88, w. 6, Notatka z rozmowy tow. Burskiego, Szustera i Kramarza z wicedyrektorem I Dalekowschodniego Departamentu MID Morozowem nt. sytuacji na Półwyspie Koreańskim, Moskwa, 3 IV 1985.

²¹ See more details about the visit: S. Szyg, "*Wieczna braterska przyjaźń*". *Oficjalna wizyta Kim Il Sunga w Polskiej Rzeczypospolitej Ludowej w maju 1984 roku*, „Komunizm: system-ludzie-dokumentacja”, vol. 2, 2013, pp. 109–121.

²² The Committee was set up on October 4, 1972 and had sessions alternately in Pyongyang and Warsaw.

Korean experts in factories of helicopters and factories producing coal mining equipment²³.

A Polish delegation for economic talks visited Pyongyang from 8–13 July, 1984. Together with their North Korean partners they conferred about future plan and the Polish side confirmed that it was ready to: build a factory of helicopters, help in exploration of coal basin in Anju and provide machinery necessary for the construction of a rail freight wagon's factory. However, there were still preliminary talks and no contracts were signed.

It is worth noting that unexpectedly on the last day of their trip the Polish delegation was received by Kim Il Sung. He informed his interlocutors that he treated their visit as a positive result of his journey to Poland and that he appreciated that fact that the Poles came as the first delegation after his trip to Europe. He declared that he perceived this fact as a sign of friendship. Moreover, Kim asked to give his regards to general Jaruzelski and called him "brother and closest friend"²⁴.

Friendship and intensive cooperation

Despite ambitious plans in the following years economic cooperation was the weakest aspect of bilateral contacts. Year by year Polish ambassadors stressed this fact in their reports. The helicopters factory became a symbolic example of non-realized ideas. Even after signing the contract North Korea was not able to cover costs of its establishment. On the other hand, in spite of several problems, trade exchange increased significantly. Poland became DPRK's third trade partner among 10 Communist states after USSR and China. At the same time North Korea rose as Poland's second biggest partner in Asia, after China²⁵. What is more, the trade agreement signed for years 1986–1990 assumed that trade between both countries would grow 97% when compared with 1981–1985²⁶.

Definitely political contacts were the real core of the mutual relations. Visible sign of its development was increasing number of exchanged delegations and its level. Beside a few exceptions, in previous decades North Korea and Poland

²³ AMSZ, D. II, 30/87, w. 5, Pilna notatka z wizyty delegacji partyjno-państwowej KRLD, pod przewodnictwem Sekretarza Generalnego KC Partii Pracy Korei, prezydenta Kim Ir Sena, 27–29 maja 1984 r., Warszawa, 29 V 1984 r.; AMSZ, D. II, 25/88, w. 6, Notatka nt. stosunków polsko-koreańskich, Warszawa, 11 IV 1985 r.

²⁴ AMSZ, D. II, 30/87, w. 5, Informacja w sprawie ważniejszych ustaleń podjętych na VIII posiedzeniu Komisji Konsultatywnej do Spraw Gospodarczych i Naukowo-Technicznych między Rządem PRL a Rządem KRLD, Phenian, 8–13 lipiec 1984 r.; *Ibidem*, Notatka informacyjna dla Towarzysza gen. armii Wojciecha Jaruzelskiego Prezesa Rady Ministrów, Warszawa, 18 VII 1984 r.

²⁵ AMSZ, D. II, 22/89, w. 6, Propozycje do plany pracy ambasady PRL w Phenianie na 1987 rok, Phenian, 22 X 1986 r.

²⁶ AMSZ, D. II, 22/89, w. 6, Informacja o stosunkach gospodarczych Polski z Koreańską Republiką Ludowo-Demokratyczną (stan z dnia 15 sierpnia 1986), Warszawa, 18 VIII 1986 r.

exchanged mainly low-level delegations. After second Kim Il Sung trip to Poland also a frequency of high-level meetings increased. For instance, from 23–29 April, 1985, a member of the Politburo of the Worker's Party of Korea, Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Kim Yong-nam paid an official visit to Warsaw. He gave Kim Il Sung's letter to general Jaruzelski and renewed an invitation to him to visit DPRK. Kim also met with the head of the State Council Henryk Jabłoński and invited him to North Korea. One of the main purposes of his visit was to introduce a North Korean proposal of signing a Friendship and Cooperation Agreement. Kim presented a draft of the agreement and expressed North Korean wish to sign a final version during Jaruzelski's visit to North Korea. Furthermore, Kim participated in consultations with Polish diplomats led by Foreign Minister, Stefan Olszowski. The meeting resulted in enacting a two-year cooperation agreement between both ministries and a decision on the establishment of Polish-North Korean Friendship associations no later than to the end of 1985²⁷.

Wojciech Jaruzelski decided that his trip to North Korea would take place in early autumn 1986. Due to his plans, Polish specialists were obliged to prepare a final draft of the Friendship and Cooperation Agreement with their North Korean partners. Before they accomplished this task, they had carefully studied similar agreements between North Korea and other countries. In December 1985 Ministry of Foreign Affairs provided an analysis examining cases of agreements signed by North Korea with USSR, China, Romania, Libya, Ethiopia, GDR, Bulgaria and Cuba²⁸.

In the middle of 1986 the North Korean ambassador to Poland presented an additional DPRK's proposal concerning Jaruzelski's visit. The suggestion was to enact a long-term agreement for economic and scientific cooperation terminating in 2000. Poland rejected that idea because of not fulfilling its economic obligations by the DPRK and announced that short-term agreements would be more suitable²⁹.

A Polish delegation led by Wojciech Jaruzelski visited North Korea from 24–28 September 1986. Among dozens of members there was also an informal second person in a ruling regime the Minister of Interior general Czesław Kiszczak. He was accompanied by trusted collaborators: chief of the Security Service gen. Władysław Ciasłoń, head of the Citizen's Militia gen. Józef Beim, director of counterintelligence service col. Janusz Sereda and chief of Kiszczak's cabinet colonel Czesław Żmuda. Representatives of the Ministry of Interior were invited to North Korea by DPRK's Minister of Public Security general Pek Hak Rim and

²⁷ AMSZ, D. II, 25/88, w. 6, Stefan Olszowski. Pilna notatka o wizycie członka Biura Politycznego KC PPK, wicepremiera i ministra Spraw Zagranicznych KRLD, Kim Jon Nama w Polsce, 23–29 kwietnia 1985, Warszawa, IV 1985.

²⁸ AMSZ, D. II, 22/89, w. 6, Notatka dot. charakterystyki Układów o Przyjaźni i Współpracy zawartych przez Koreańską Republikę Ludowo-Demokratyczną, Warszawa, 4 XII 1985 r.

²⁹ AMSZ, D. II, 22/89, w. 6, Notatka o rozmowie z Ambasadorem KRL-D – Towarzyszem O Man Sok, Warszawa, 20 VI 1986.

part of their schedule was different from Jaruzelski's program³⁰. The North Korean Minister of Public Security had sent 3 invitations to Kiszczak which proves that he treated him as a very important person³¹. I will provide more information about the cooperation between both ministries in the further part of this paper.

Except for ritual exchanges of courtesies, general Jaruzelski presented to Kim Il Sung goals of his trip to China that was scheduled for right after his visit to North Korea. He stressed that Poland wished to develop cooperation with PRC because conflicts inside the Eastern Bloc had negatively affected the Communist camp and had strengthened its enemies. Jaruzelski also expressed his wish of improving Sino-Soviet relations³². On the last day of the visit, Jaruzelski and Kim Il Sung signed an agreement which finally was named the Declaration of Friendship and Cooperation. What is more, representatives of Ministries of Foreign Affairs enacted the treaty on the provision of legal assistance in civil, family and criminal cases³³.

The visit was another step forward on the way to closer and more intensive relations. From 1986–1987 Poland sent about 280 delegates to DPRK. Sometimes these were political missions but there were also visits of artists, scholars and social activists. Such a number of delegation meant a radical change in comparison with the past years, even with early 1980's. For example, in January 1981 the Counselor of North Korean Embassy in Poland presented the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs a list of 6 Polish delegations which DPRK was planning to receive in 1981.

When it comes to above mentioned 280 delegations from 1986–1987, it is worth to point out at least several of them. Among them was a delegation of the Polish Military with the Deputy Minister of National Defence and Chief of General Staff gen. Józef Użycki as well as delegation led by the Deputy Marshal of the lower chamber of the Parliament, Mieczysław Rakowski. Also the Minister of Foreign Affairs Marian Orzechowski came to Pyongyang. What is more, North Korea was visited by: representatives of the Polish-North Korean Friendship Association, professors from the Polish Academy of Sciences, a delegation of – subordinated to authorities – All-Poland Alliance of Trade Unions with its chief, Alfred Miodowicz. Additionally, during 2 years „Orbis” travel agency arranged

³⁰ AIPN, 1585/1969, Protokół z pobytu delegacji Ministerstwa Spraw Wewnętrznych PRL w Koreańskiej Republice Ludowo-Demokratycznej, Warszawa, 10 X 1986 r., p. 7.

³¹ AIPN, 1585/1969, Notatka dot. wizyty Min. Spr. Wewn. PRL tow. gen. bron. Cz. Kiszczaka w KRLD w 1986 r., Warszawa, VI 1986, pp. 52–53.

³² AMSZ, D. II, 22/89, w. 6, Tezy do rozmów w „cztery oczy” z tow. Kim Ir Senem, Warszawa, 6 IX 1986 r.

³³ AMSZ, D. II, 22/89, w. 6, Program organizacyjny partyjno-państwowej wizyty przyjaźni w Koreańskiej Republice Ludowo-Demokratycznej I Sekretarza KC PZPR Przewodniczącego Rady Państwa PRL Generała Armii Towarzysza Wojciecha Jaruzelskiego 24-28 września 1986 roku.

16 trips do DPRK. And furthermore, both countries agreed to receive chosen officials with their families on holiday. As a result of that deal, five members of the Politburo of the Polish United Worker's Party together with their families spent their leisure time in Pyongyang.

At the same time North Korea sent numerous delegations to Poland and among them many consisting of high-rank officials. Visits of Vice-President and member of the Politburo Ri Jong-ok as well as that of the Korean People's Army's Chief of the General Staff, O Kuk-ryol may be some illustrative examples. Naturally, there were also low-rank trips like those with North Korean journalists or youths and pioneers³⁴.

The second half of the 1980's was a time of close cooperation between security apparatus of both countries. Since July 1983, regular exchange of delegations began. During first meetings Polish side shared its experience of struggles against democratic opposition. Koreans must have been impressed because they were especially interested in the equipment used by the Civil Militia in Poland. Upon their request Poles gave them several devices used by the Civil Militia as a „gift”. In May 1985 representatives of Polish Ministry of the Interior and North Korean Ministry of Public Security signed an agreement for a 4-year education of several North Korans in the Polish Main School of Fire Service.

The above mentioned visit of the Polish Minister of the Interior, Czesław Kiszczak during Wojciech Jaruzelski's official trip in September 1986 was a very significant event that helped to bolster bilateral ties between security institutions of Poland and North Korea. In July 1987 the Ministry led by Kiszczak signed an agreement for cooperation with the Ministry of State Security and in February 1989 with the Ministry of Public Security of North Korea. The first agreement focused on sharing political, military and economic information about common enemies and cooperation on the counterintelligence field as well as struggle against international terrorism. The second one established experience-sharing in regard to fighting with criminal activities, money counterfeiting and drug-addictions³⁵.

In spite of very good political relations and close cooperation on security field in the second half of the 1980's, there were permanent problems in the matter of economy. After some time it occurred again that North Korea was not able to fulfill part of its commitments on time. When in May 1988 Kim Yong-nam traveled to Poland, the Minister of Foreign Affairs Marian Orzechowski expressed his disappointment about delivering only 4 thousand out of the expected 32 thousand

³⁴ AMSZ, D. II, 38/86, w. 4, Notatka informacyjna w sprawie wymiany osobowej polsko-koreańskiej w 1981 r., Warszawa, 23 I 1981; AMSZ, D. II, 24/92, w. 8, Ocena realizacji ustaleń z wizyt na najwyższym szczeblu, 22 I 1988 r.

³⁵ P. Gasztold, *Korean Peninsula in the Documents of the Polish Communist Security Services*, [in] “Korea and Eastern Europe. Exploring the Past” ed. A. Fedotoff, S. Y. Kim, Sofia 2017, p. 141.

tons of magnesite according to a contract for 1988. From Orzechowski's point of view Polish-North Korean economic relations decreased anew³⁶.

Olympic Games and the XIII World Youth Festival

One of the most important issues discussed by Poles and North Koreans many times in the 1980's was the case of 1988 Summer Olympics in Seoul. In 1981 the International Olympics Committee chose Seoul as a host city of the Summer Olympic in 1988. Despite the opposition of Communist countries, including Poland, IOC confirmed its decision in December 1984. In the meantime, North Korea refused the idea of becoming a co-host of the Olympics although such a plan was put forward for consideration by Fidel Castro. Instead of following Castro's proposal, DPRK preferred a strategy of persuading Communist states to boycott the Olympics.

In spite of North Korean efforts, Poland made a preliminary decision to participate in the Olympic Games in Seoul very soon that is in March 1985. However North Koreans did not give up and continued their attempts to encourage Poland to revise its attitude. During numerous meetings, DPRK's ambassador tried to persuade Polish officials to change their mind and boycott the Olympics. In order to reach his goal, he visited the Parliament, the Central Committee of the United Worker's Party, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and several other institutions³⁷.

In late December 1984 ambassador O Man Sok expressed a strong statement on behalf of the North Korean regime. He announced that every country taking part in Seoul's Olympics or supporting Seoul as a hosting city, would be perceived as DPRK's enemy and such a position would be treated as an attack on North Korea³⁸.

Not only the ambassador but also other North Korean figures exerted pressure on Poland. During his visit to Poland in April 1985 Minister of Foreign Affairs Kim Yong-nam tried to persuade general Jaruzelski to share North Korean stance. He claimed that Communist countries should not attend the Olympics because it would be no sport but a political event useful for "American imperialism". Besides, he underlined that in case of the Los Angeles Olympics DPRK had showed solidarity with other Communist states and had not participated in the Olympics. In spite of the decision made a month before, Poland preferred to postpone announcing it

³⁶ AMSZ, D. II, 24/92, w. 8, Pilna notatka o wizycie oficjalnej w Polsce członka BP KC PPK, wicepremiera Rady Administracyjnej, ministra SZ KRLD Kim Jon Nam'a (5-7 maja 1988 r.), Warszawa, 12 V 1988 r.

³⁷ AMSZ, D. II, 22/89, w. 6, Problemy Igrzysk Olimpijskich w 1986 roku (notatka informacyjna), Warszawa, 26 VIII 1986 r.

³⁸ AMSZ, D. II, 25/88, w. 6, Notatka informacyjna z rozmowy z ambasadorem KRL-D, O Man Sok przeprowadzonej 22 bm. na jego prośbę, Warszawa, 24 XII 1984 r.

to North Korea. Instead of that Kim Yong-nam was informed that Poland would debate about the issue with other European Communist states³⁹.

Indeed, in following months Poland exchanged views about Seoul Olympics with its European partners, which resulted in a conclusion that a boycott of the Olympics would be a mistake. For instance, in August 1985 general secretary of the Hungarian Olympic Committee Pál Schmitt stated that the boycott of the Los Angeles Olympics had negative consequences and that Communist countries should not do the same in regard to the upcoming Olympics. Moreover, Schmitt informed the Poles that Hungarian officials were irritated by constant North Korea's appeals⁴⁰.

Probably the failure of initial North Korean strategy was one of factors that caused a verification of its attitude. In summer 1985 Deputy Prime Minister of DPRK sent a letter to heads of Communist states and declared that North Korea was ready to co-host the Olympics⁴¹. Poland supported that idea. However, several meetings of representatives of both Korean states did not give positive results. Effect could not have been different due to North Korean maximalist demands concerning the number of sport events that DPRK wanted to host. Other Communist states interpreted DPRK's attitude as considered tactics which goal was to force South Korea to reject North Korean stance. DPRK's elites were aware that its economy was too weak and there was lack of time to prepare the country for co-hosting the Olympics. Nevertheless, the regime preferred to push South Korea to refuse cooperation than admit DPRK's failure⁴².

When North Korea realized it was impossible to prevent the Olympic Games in Seoul, a decision was made to respond in a different way. In February 1987, the International Preparation Committee for the World Youth and Student Festival agreed to hold the 13th World Youth Festival in Pyongyang in 1-8 July 1989. Soon after this decision North Korea sent delegations to Communist countries in Eastern Europe to ask for support, credits and buy technology. According to Bernd Schaefer's findings, East Germany seemed to be the most important partner in that regard⁴³. Nevertheless, North Koreans asked for help also other countries, among them Poland.

³⁹ AMSZ, D. II, 25/88, w. 6, Stefan Olszowski. Pilna notatka o wizycie członka Biura Politycznego KC PPK, wicepremiera i ministra Spraw Zagranicznych KRLD, Kim Jon Nama w Polsce, 23–29 kwietnia 1985, Warszawa, IV 1985.

⁴⁰ AMSZ, D. II, 25/88, w. 6, Notatka informacyjna ze spotkania 8 sierpnia br. Z wiceprzewodniczącym Węgierskiego Komitetu Kultury Fizycznej i Sportu tow. Palem Schmittem, Warszawa, 9 VIII 1985 r.

⁴¹ AMSZ, D. II, 22/89, w. 6, Problemy Igrzysk Olimpijskich w 1986 roku (notatka informacyjna), Warszawa, 26 VIII 1986 r.

⁴² AMSZ, D. II, 24/92, w. 8, Pilna notatka dot. udziału Polski w XXIV Igrzyskach Olimpijskich 1988 r. w Seulu – w dniach 17 września – 2 października 1988 r., Warszawa, 17 II 1988 r.

⁴³ B. Schaefer, *North Korea and the East German Stasi, 1987–1989* <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/blog-post/north-korea-and-the-east-german-stasi-1987-1989> (read: 10 II 2018).

In January 1989, a delegation of Polish security apparatus together with representatives of state security organs from North Korea, USSR, East Germany, Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria and Cuba took part in a meeting in Pyongyang where they discussed ways of maintaining security during the Festival. After the consultation Poles received a long list of sophisticated equipment that North Korea wanted to buy in 1989–1990 and a shorter list of equipment that they wished to receive for free or borrow in order to use them during the Festival. The second list presented devices produced in West Germany: 5 explosives detectors, 2 detectors of improvised explosive devices and mines and 2 X-ray detectors⁴⁴. Moreover, in June 1989 two North Korean special agents came to Warsaw in order to supervise the vetting of foreign students attending the Festival⁴⁵. Not only security institutions were asked for help. DPRK also wanted Poland to educate (and cover the costs of this education) 15 young Koreans in the field of interpreting. They wanted 10 of them to become Russian-Korean interpreters and 5 French-Korean interpreters⁴⁶.

The Festival was a large scale event with 13 thousand participants from 173 countries. Almost everything went according to DPRK's plan which meant that the "Great Leader", the Juche ideology as well as one and only South Korean student who attended the Festival, were in the center of attention. On the other hand, North Korea successfully blocked any discussion about troubling issues like violence of human rights and did not let Amnesty International attend the event⁴⁷.

After the end of the Festival, North Korea described it as a great success. At the same time the Polish Embassy in Pyongyang presented it differently. An opinion sent to Warsaw was based on their own observations and on an exchange of thoughts with foreign diplomats serving in DPRK. The author of the report written in early August 1989 predicted that the Festival would be an accelerator of mental changes in the North Korean society⁴⁸. Today we know that the event did not start political reforms. But what we can say for sure, that huge expenses connected with preparations to the Festival resulted in a widespread impoverishment of ordinary North Koreans⁴⁹.

⁴⁴ AIPN, 1585/1569, Pismo płk. Czesława Żmudy do Ambasadora PRL w Phenianie Mieczysława Dedo, Warszawa, 30 V 1988 r., k. 194–195.

⁴⁵ P. Gasztold, *Korean Peninsula in...*, p. 153.

⁴⁶ AMSZ, D. II, 4/94, w. 2, Notatka informacyjna. Węzłowe problemy Światowego Festiwalu Młodzieży i Studentów w Phenianie w 1989 r., Phenian, 17 IX 1987 r.

⁴⁷ AMSZ, D. II, 3/94, w. 3, Szyfrogram Nr 0-389/III, Phenian, 10 VII 1989 r.

⁴⁸ AMSZ, D. II, 3/94, w. 3, Szyfrogram Nr 0-1576/III, Phenian, 4 VIII 1989 r.

⁴⁹ AMSZ, D. II, 4/94, w. 2, Warunki życia ludności Koreańskiej Republiki Ludowo-Demokratycznej (z rozmów z radcami i I sekretarzami ambasad Bułgarii, Czechosłowacji, Egiptu, Jugosławii, Palestyny, Węgier i ZSRR, Phanian, X 1989).

The problem of South Korea

Another significant issue affecting Polish-North Korean relations in the 1980's, was the South Korean policy towards European Communist countries. Its shape had genesis in events that had happened in the previous decade. In the early 1970's both Koreas started a dialogue about unification but the reasons that pushed them to that step were completely different. On one hand, North Korean strategy of 1966–1969, based on escalation of conflict with the South, failed. In the aftermath of the so called “Second Korean War” no revolution broke out in South Korea but an absolutely opposite situation occurred. The ruling regime of Park Chung-hee became more popular among society and his anticommunist politics gained more supporters.

On the other hand President Park Chung-hee perceived the Nixon Doctrine and his politics towards China as dangerous for South Korean security. Element of *detente* that mostly influenced South Korea was a decision taken in July, 1970. According to it the USA reduced its military forces on the Korean Peninsula from 62 thousand to 20 thousand.

In such circumstances South Korea started a dialogue with the DPRK which in following years resulted in many negotiations and plans for unification submitted by both sides⁵⁰. At the same time South Korean authorities, which believed that political power follows economic power, started looking for new markets for South Korean export. Communist countries in Europe seemed to be promising markets. On December 31, 1970 South Korea revised the Trade Act of 1967 which initially had prohibited trade with the socialist zone. After the revision of the Act, the trade became allowed⁵¹.

The Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs carefully monitored South Korean efforts to establish links with Poland. First of them were noticed in early 1970's. South Koreans tried to build ties in several different ways. First of all, their diplomats initiated contacts with Polish diplomats in countries where both states had their embassies, such as USA and Belgium. Secondly, South Korean citizens were sent to join international events as conferences and sport tournaments in Poland. And last but not least, South Korea mailed to Polish libraries and research institutions propaganda materials⁵².

Regardless of their character, Polish authorities perceived all this moves as a planned strategy to encourage Poland to establish relationships with South Korea.

⁵⁰ G. Strnad, *Korea. Polityka Południa wobec Północy w latach 1948–2008. Zmiana i kontynuacja*, Poznań 2014, pp. 188-204.

⁵¹ Bogook Kim, *The Diplomatic Relationship between Hungary and South Korea: 1948–1982*, [in] “Korea and Eastern Europe. Exploring the Past”, Sofia 2017, p. 23.

⁵² AMSZ, D. II, 29/87, w. 2, Zestawienie znanych Departamentowi II faktów dot. kontaktów Korei Płd. Z Polską oraz incydentów z dyplomatami KRLD w Warszawie, Warszawa, 24 V 1976 r.

In the 1970' Poland was definitely against that idea and tried to block or at least limit contacts of Poles and South Koreans. The only case when Polish officials agreed to such contacts were important international events.

North Korea constantly observed South Korean efforts to build links with Poland and its citizens. Every time the North Korean embassy learned that someone from South Korea planned to visit Poland, its diplomats met with Polish officials and tried to convince them to not let South Koreans enter Poland. They did it in any case: in regard to scientific conferences, sport tournaments, even The International Chopin Piano Competition⁵³. Moreover, DPRK's embassy regularly requested Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs to prevent trips of Polish citizens to South Korea. Furthermore, there were cases when the North Korean embassy expressed disappointment with the way Polish press wrote about South Korea. In result, in 1980 the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs recommended using the term "so called" in reference to South Korean authorities and specific posts they hold, for instance, the so called Prime Minister of South Korea⁵⁴.

The Polish attitude towards South Korea changed in the middle of the 1980's. Poland alike other European Communist countries started to perceive South Korea as a potential trade partner and investor. From the Polish point of view it was especially important because of the economic crisis and implementation of American economic sanctions in response to the Martial Law. In September 1987 Poland decided to modify its position on contacts with South Korea. Since that time cooperation in the field of economic, trade, science, culture and sport was allowed. What is more, Poland implemented a more liberal visa policy in regard to contacts with South Korea and let Polish ships enter the Pusan harbor as well as allowed for repairing of Polish ships in South Korean shipyards. Another meaningful step was the opening of a branch office of the Polish-Japanese "Agropol" company in Seoul⁵⁵.

After that Poland considered building closer links and conducted unofficial negotiations with South Korean politicians and businessmen. In this matter the Polish participation in the Seoul Olympics appeared to be a useful tool. During the Olympics Deputy Director of the Second Department of the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Andrzej Majkowski and the head of the Polish Olympic Committee, Aleksander Kwaśniewski held talks with representatives of the South Korean Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Korean Trade Promotion Agency. It was another step for better mutual understanding and discussing future plans. Several

⁵³ AMSZ, D. II, 25/88, w. 6, Zapis rozmowy wiceministra SZ tow. J. Majewskiego z Ambasadorem KRLD O Man Sok, Warszawa, 28 V 1985 r.

⁵⁴ AMSZ, D. II, 28/85, w. 5, Notatka z rozmowy z ambasadorem KRLD tow. O Un Gwonem, przeprowadzonej z jego inicjatywy 26 lutego 1980, Warszawa 29 II 1980 r.

⁵⁵ AMSZ., D. II, 24/92, w. 8, Notatka dot. stosunków Polski z Koreą Południową, Warszawa, 8 XI 1988 r.

months after the Olympics, the Polish Chamber of Foreign Trade set up its office in Seoul and KOTRA opened its office in Warsaw⁵⁶.

The next round of secret negotiations took place in Warsaw and concerned establishing of diplomatic relations between both countries. In the decisive round of talks South Korea was represented by deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, Hong Soon Yung who promised a 400 million dollars credit for 5 years. After that declaration the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs recommended establishing diplomatic relations with South Korea to the Polish authorities⁵⁷. When Prime Minister Zbigniew Messner studied that opinion, he approved the recommendation and wrote that recognition of South Korea would be useful for preserving economic interests of Poland⁵⁸. Finally both countries established diplomatic relations on November 1, 1989.

North Korea made last-minute efforts to stop Poland from recognizing the South. To demonstrate disappointment with Polish plans, DPRK withdrew its ambassador only two years after the beginning of his service in Poland⁵⁹. After this move Polish diplomats in Pyongyang started to consider other possible North Korean steps. Only 10 days before the recognition of South Korea, the Polish embassy sent an opinion based on conversations with foreign diplomats to Warsaw. They forecasted three possible ways of North Korea's behavior. According to this, the most radical politicians may have advised Kim Il Sung to attack Polish diplomats in Seoul or the South Korean in Warsaw. Fortunately, that scenario was not implemented⁶⁰.

Another step made 10 days before the recognition of South Korea was a direct request of Kim Il Sung to Wojciech Jaruzelski. Via Polish ambassador the "Great Leader" asked Poland to change its intention or at least postpone for half a year official announcement concerning establishment of relations with South Korea⁶¹. His efforts were also pointless.

A few weeks after the recognition of South Korea, DPRK forced all its students, PhD students and interns to leave Poland. The North Korean Embassy received such an order on December 5, 1989 and on December 14 a group of 103 young Koreans left Poland by a chartered plane without the majority of their belongings. Officially North Korea claimed that the reason was a threat of kidnapping them by South Korea⁶².

⁵⁶ A. Majkowski, *Geneza nawiązania stosunków dyplomatycznych między Polską a Republiką Korei*, „Azja-Pacyfik” 2000, vol. 3, p. 133.

⁵⁷ AMSZ, D. II, 3/94, w. 3, Pilna notatka dot. nawiązania stosunków dyplomatycznych z Republiką Korei, Warszawa, 12 VII 1989 r.

⁵⁸ AMSZ, D. II, 3/94, w. 3, Sekretarz Urzędu Rady Ministrów do Wiceministra Spraw Zagranicznych Jana Majewskiego, 12 VII 1989 r.

⁵⁹ AMSZ, D. II, 3/94, w. 3, Szyfrogram Nr 03334/III, Phenian, 12 IX 1989 r.

⁶⁰ AMSZ, D. II, 3/94, w. 3, Szyfrogram Nr 0-1000/IV, Phenian, 23 X 1989 r.

⁶¹ AMSZ, D. II, 3/94, w. 3, Szyfrogram Nr 0-1001/IV, Phenian, 23 X 1989 r.

⁶² AMSZ, D. II, 6/96, w. 3, Pilna notatka dot. decyzji władz KRLD o odwołaniu z Polski wszystkich studentów, stażystów i doktorantów, Warszawa, 6 XII 1989 r.; *Ibidem*, Informacja dot. wystąpienia Ambasady KRLD w sprawie odbioru i odesłania książek i przedmiotów osobistych pozostawionych w Polsce przez ich studentów i stażystów, Warszawa, 7 II 1990 r.

Despite the above mentioned moves, Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs considered North Korean reaction as calm, especially in comparison to the previous reaction on the recognition of South Korea by Hungary⁶³. It was probably a result of several reasons. Before anything else, Poland was not the first state of the Eastern Block that established relationships with Republic of Korea. What is more, Polish communists did their best to ease the situation. A telling example may be an unprecedented meeting of the withdrawn North Korean ambassador with President Wojciech Jaruzelski⁶⁴. And last but not least, DPRK's uncertainty and a lack of understanding of deep political changes in the Eastern Block was also a significant factor. Several days after the establishment of Polish-South Korean relations the Polish embassy in Pyongyang informed Warsaw that North Korean officials in their conversations with Romanian, Albanian and Cuban diplomats expressed an opinion that Poland stopped to be a Communist country only for short period of time. They believed that after the 11th Congress of United Workers Party Polish communists would regain their strength and defeat "agents of imperialism". What is more, they supposed that „creeping revolutions” in Hungary and GDR would face the same fate⁶⁵. After some time North Korea realized the real nature of East European revolutions. That is why the relationships with democratic Poland worsen and mutual distrust arose.

Conclusion

The decade of the 1980's was one of the most turbulent period in bilateral relations of Poland and North Korea. After dozens of years of stagnancy Kim Il Sung's visit of 1984 became a turning point. Since that time both countries strengthened ties and intensified contacts on many fields. Nevertheless, fruitful cooperation between both countries was stopped by the end of the Cold War and the transition of Poland. The recognition of South Korea was a symbolic change in Polish foreign policy towards Eastern Asia. In the aftermath, in following years South Korea became one of the biggest investors in Poland and at the same time there were not many fields of cooperation with DPRK.

⁶³ North Korea not only withdrew its ambassador from Hungary but also expelled Hungarian envoy.

⁶⁴ AMSZ, D. II, 3/94, w. 3, Szyfrogram Nr 9083, Warszawa, 28 X 1989 r.

⁶⁵ AMSZ, D. II, 3/94, w. 3, Szyfrogram Nr 0-2163/IV, Phenian, 17 XI 1989 r.