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## **Necessary Neighbors**

*Poland and Ukraine Must Stabilize Their Strained Partnership*

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Since the beginning of Russia's full-scale invasion in 2022, Polish-Ukrainian relations have moved from a phase of exceptional solidarity to one of mounting tension and deepening structural strain. What initially seemed to be a long-term strategic partnership grounded in shared security interests has evolved into a more fragmented and fragile, at times almost hostile, relationship. This shift, visible across political, economic, and social dimensions, risks undermining not only bilateral cooperation but also the broader foundations of regional stability at a moment of ongoing war, strategic uncertainty in Europe, and a potentially antagonistic transatlantic relationship.

If Poland and Ukraine fail to adopt a more realistic, constructive, and mutually attentive approach to the partnership, their cooperation will weaken in ways that directly affect military logistics, EU cohesion, regional resilience, and resistance to hybrid threats. Understanding how the relationship has changed, and what deeper dynamics are driving this, is essential for assessing the risks ahead and identifying pathways to improve the relationship.

## **Soured Relations: From Solidarity to Strain**

Most of the disputes currently shaping Polish-Ukrainian dynamics predate 2022 and were manageable in peacetime through routine diplomacy, gradual compromise, or political compartmentalization. Now, the context has shifted. Against the background of a prolonged, high-intensity war, pressures are heightened, making tensions sharper. Familiar frictions have become more consequential in a way that can corrode wartime unity. Issues that were not considered urgent now generate immediate strategic costs, calling for timely management.

The initial phase of the war in 2022 only temporarily suspended long-standing irritants in bilateral relations. Existential fear, a shared threat perception, and widespread social empathy pushed structural tensions—economic competition, historical memory disputes, and political divergences—to the margins. However, as the war entered its protracted phase in 2023, these issues resurfaced with greater intensity. Rather than arising from any specific misstep by either Poland or Ukraine, the change was the product of broader systemic and contextual pressures.

### *Social Fatigue and the Politics of Cohabitation*

Since February 2022, Poland has experienced one of the fastest demographic shifts in its modern history, hosting nearly 1 million refugees from Ukraine (representing about 2.5% of the Polish population) under temporary protection. Before the war, the country had already hosted around 1.3-1.5 million Ukrainian migrant workers and long-term residents, yet the recent refugee influx has made the demographic impact far more perceptible.

While integration has been largely successful—with around 69% of working-age Ukrainian refugees employed and over 200,000 Ukrainian children enrolled in Polish schools—the scale of cohabitation has generated competition for public services, cultural misunderstandings, and rising local frustration.

Over time, right-wing Polish political actors began to exploit social concerns about Ukrainian refugees and migrants, transforming local frustrations into national debates. During the 2025 Polish presidential campaign, figures associated with the far-right Konfederacja (Confederation) party—including its presidential candidate, Sławomir Mentzen—emphasized issues around immigration, social support, and national identity, framing them in terms that resonated with segments of the electorate experiencing migration fatigue and economic insecurity. Mentzen's platform combined broader anti-migration rhetoric with increasingly direct criticism of Ukrainian refugees and Poland's support for Ukraine.

At the same time, figures aligned with the Law and Justice (PiS)-supported camp, most notably President Karol Nawrocki, framed debates over refugee support in terms of social policy and national priorities. Nawrocki's decision

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in August 2025 to veto a bill extending social benefits for Ukrainian refugees unless they were tied to employment fueled national discussion about welfare, social cohesion, and migration policy. The issue of social assistance for Ukrainians thus became a politically charged topic in Poland.

An early 2025 report from Poland's state-owned National Development Bank (BGK) concluded that Ukrainians pay more in taxes and social contributions than the value of benefits they receive from the state. However, this data has done little to alleviate anxieties at the local level.

The demographic shift is accompanied by noticeable changes in neighborhoods, workplaces, schools, and public spaces, from Ukrainian-language signage and community organizations to increased bilingual schooling and cultural practices. These changes have generated social unease, creating fertile ground for political polarization.

Public attitudes illustrate the depth of the challenge. By early 2025, positive sentiment among Poles toward Ukrainians had fallen to its lowest level in years, while negative views surpassed positive ones for the first time since 2018. This change reflects complex differences and longstanding unresolved tensions that were masked—but not eliminated—by the shared urgency of the war's early months.

### *Economic Disputes and the Limits of Solidarity*

Economic tensions, particularly in the agricultural sector, emerged as one of the most visible sources of conflict. After 2022, Ukraine sought to expand access to European and Polish markets to maintain export flows disrupted by the war, including grains, sunflower oil, and other key agricultural products. Polish farmers, however, faced sudden competition from these tariff-free imports, which depressed local prices and threatened the profitability of domestic production.

By spring 2023, farmers' organizations began organizing protests that intensified in late 2023 and early 2024 into large-scale demonstrations and border blockages. These actions disrupted trade flows and became a major domestic political issue in Poland.

In response, the Polish government introduced unilateral restrictions on imports of certain Ukrainian agricultural products and pressed for EU-level solutions. Although the European Commission initially sought to manage the issue through transit monitoring and compensation mechanisms, Poland maintained its own bans. The dispute gradually de-escalated in mid-2024 through a combination of negotiated transit controls, alternative export routes, and revised EU trade arrangements. In 2025, while acute border protests had largely subsided, Poland continued to support limits on select Ukrainian agricultural imports. This reflected unresolved structural concerns rather than a fully settled compromise.

From the Ukrainian perspective, the grain dispute was above all a challenge to maintenance of the crucial export channels needed to sustain Ukraine's wartime economy. Kyiv emphasized that access to European markets, including Poland's, was essential to farmers' livelihoods and to the broader stability of an agricultural sector disrupted by the war. Ukrainian officials expressed frustration with Poland's protectionist measures, arguing that such actions risked undermining broader European solidarity.

These disagreements were not inherently political, but reflected the differing national priorities of the two countries. Over time, however, as the issue became politicized, it amplified mutual frustrations and signaled a shift from the initial wartime solidarity toward a more transactional, interest-driven phase of the relationship.

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### *Historical Memory: A Persistent, Politicized Fault Line*

Disputes over historical grievances surrounding the 1943–1945 Volhynia tragedy, in which Ukrainian nationalists massacred some 40,000 to 100,000 Polish civilians and Polish underground forces retaliated with the massacre of several thousand Ukrainians, have never been resolved in a manner acceptable to both sides. The continuing weight of this issue in Polish social discourse is reflected in the fact that one of Nawrocki's early actions in August 2025 was to appoint a special ambassador for “historical diplomacy” to focus on WW II-related issues.

During the early phase of the ongoing war in Ukraine, however, both Polish and Ukrainian societies consciously downplayed these issues. Only after the conflict shifted from an acute emergency to a protracted, resource-intensive struggle from late 2023 onward did contested historical memory reemerge as a potent political tool for rallying electoral support in Poland.

A further factor was the gradual normalization of Ukraine as a political actor rather than solely as a victim of aggression. As Ukraine became more deeply embedded in EU accession discussions and regional policy debates, expectations of Kyiv shifted. Issues previously considered untimely or inappropriate during an acute crisis—including historical reckoning and regulatory disputes—were reframed as legitimate components of a more “normal” bilateral relationship. Polish political figures including Deputy Prime Minister and Defense Minister Władysław Kosiniak-Kamysz publicly stated that unresolved (in the sense of taking responsibility) historical questions such as the Volhynia tragedy should be addressed as part of Ukraine’s European integration process.

For Poland, unresolved historical issues remain a moral and political priority. For Ukraine, accusations tied to wartime narratives risk appearing disproportionate or politically motivated, if not as a form of implicit blackmail. Kyiv has reacted to Polish emphasis on the Volhynia tragedy with a mix of diplomatic caution and calls for structured dialogue, rather than unilateral political moves. On June 5, 2025, Ukraine’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs criticized the Polish Sejm’s (lower house of the parliament) decision to designate July 11 as a day commemorating victims of “genocide” by Ukrainian nationalists, calling it “inconsistent with the spirit of good-neighborly relations”.

Kyiv has engaged in practical cooperation, including allowing joint exhumations and reburials of Volhynia victims to resume in 2025. Both sides hailed this as a step forward in mutual reconciliation, yet these gestures were overshadowed by polarized rhetoric and the frequent instrumentalization of history in Polish domestic politics.

### *Political Imbalances and Misaligned Expectations*

Political cultures diverge as well. Poland’s post-1989 political system developed in a context that limited the entry of wealthy business figures into politics, fostering a relatively institutionalized and predictable governance structure. Ukraine’s political landscape, by contrast, has been shaped by the long-term entanglement of economic power and political authority, where oligarchs leverage wealth and personal networks to influence political appointments, legislative outcomes, and regulatory decisions. Despite substantial reforms since 2014 and intensified anti-corruption measures during wartime, decision-making in Ukraine remains more personalized and less institutionally anchored—which, from the Polish perspective, translates into lower predictability and higher political risk in bilateral cooperation.

These differences are reflected in comparative governance indicators. In Transparency International’s 2024 Corruption Perceptions Index, Poland scored 53 out of 100, ranking 53rd globally, while Ukraine scored 35, ranking 105th. A similar gap appears in media oversight and accountability. In the 2024-2025 World Press Freedom Index by Reporters Without Borders, Poland ranked 47th, whereas Ukraine ranked 61st-62nd, despite notable wartime improvements.

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The practical effect of these asymmetries is visible in daily bilateral coordination. Routine administrative or procedural decisions in Kyiv—such as approvals for joint projects, bureaucratic timelines, or technical framing of initiatives—can be interpreted in Warsaw as careless, symbolic, or politically motivated. Meanwhile, in Ukraine, there is often an assumption that Poland is a familiar, friendly, and straightforward partner—reducing the perceived need for specialized knowledge about Polish politics, sensitivities, or institutional logic. This gap contributes to miscommunication and misunderstandings.

As a result, Polish policymakers increasingly feel that their efforts toward partnership are undervalued, while Ukrainian officials, focused on the war and immediate operational priorities, sometimes view Polish reactions as unexpectedly sharp or politically driven. This misalignment of expectations magnifies tensions even when neither side intends it.

Aware of the pressures generated by wartime dynamics and divergent priorities, the two governments, along with civil society actors, have developed new frameworks and initiatives to coordinate activities across political, cultural, and humanitarian spheres. Nevertheless, significant gaps in institutional capacity and formal coordination persist.

## **Institutional Gaps and the Fragmentation of Bilateral Coordination**

Despite the proliferation of councils, working groups, and joint initiatives, the existing institutional architecture has struggled to produce fully coherent and predictable coordination between Poland and Ukraine. Many mechanisms operate on an ad hoc or advisory basis, leaving critical areas such as crisis response, historical dialogue, and cross-border initiatives only partially managed. As a result, their full potential is constrained. The mechanisms are also usually reactive rather than guided by a long-term, structured approach, leaving them vulnerable to misunderstanding or disruption.

In this context, to strengthen and better coordinate Poland's engagement with Ukraine, Prime Minister Donald Tusk in April 2024 established the Council for Cooperation with Ukraine. The council is headed by Special Envoy Paweł Kowal, who is also chair of the Sejm's Foreign Affairs Committee. It reports directly to the prime minister and includes members from academia, business, government, and local authorities. The council operates through five thematic working groups covering diplomatic, local government, humanitarian, economic, and regional cooperation.

The council was established primarily to coordinate Poland's engagement in Ukraine's reconstruction and postwar recovery, rather than as a direct response to political or social tensions in Polish-Ukrainian relations, although its advisory remit also encompasses broader bilateral cooperation and strategic planning. Its mandate remains advisory and subordinate to the prime minister. Without permanent expert units or crisis-response mechanisms, its capacity to manage sensitive or urgent disputes is limited.

This reflects the council's intentionally consultative design—operational crisis management in Poland remains the responsibility of formal ministries and agencies such as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of National Defense, consistent with the typical separation between advisory councils and executive crisis units. Despite these limitations, the council has broadened dialogue, coordinated reconstruction and cross-sector initiatives, and strengthened regional and international partnerships.

On the Ukrainian side, cooperation with Poland runs through multiple ministries, parliamentary groups, and expert networks. These mechanisms function effectively within their domains but do not constitute an integrated framework.

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Ukrainian institutions are actively attempting to strengthen cooperation in specific areas, particularly historical dialogue. The Ukrainian Institute of National Remembrance has recently been granted formal status as a central executive body—a change that expands its institutional capacity and increases its budget—paving the way for deeper cooperation with its Polish counterpart. In addition, preparations are underway for a major Ukrainian-Polish historical conference scheduled for May 2026, which will focus on fostering professional dialogue on sensitive historical issues.

It is also important to note that the two countries have developed active educational and cultural cooperation, including university partnerships, youth exchange programs, and school-level initiatives. Universities such as Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań have expanded cooperation with Ukrainian counterparts through summer schools, structured academic mobility, and bilateral agreements with multiple Ukrainian institutions. The Polish-Ukrainian Council for Youth Exchange supports secondary-school projects, seminars, and joint activities that foster cross-cultural understanding. In 2023 alone, it funded 53 projects involving over 1,700 participants.

Governmental agreements also promote art residencies, cultural heritage preservation, and language support for Ukrainian students in Poland. Compared with highly institutionalized partnerships such as that between France and Germany, which benefit from long-standing resources and structures such as the Deutsch-Französisches Jugendwerk, Polish-Ukrainian exchanges are newer and more project-based. They are, however, rapidly expanding in scope and scale.

Despite these advances, the broader framework of bilateral coordination remains fragmented and asymmetrical, leaving the two capitals exposed to misunderstandings that could make coherent, long-term collaboration more difficult.

## Civil Society: A Strength Under Strain

Civil society has long provided the connective tissue of Polish-Ukrainian relations. Cross-border NGOs, local activists, and diaspora groups sustained cooperation even when political ties were weak. After 2022, they became essential to humanitarian support, integration, and disinformation resistance.

Programs such as the Polish-American Freedom Foundation’s “Support for Ukraine” initiative funded civil society projects providing humanitarian aid, legal and psychological services, language courses, and counter-disinformation efforts for both refugees in Poland and communities in Ukraine. Grassroots volunteer networks and local associations rapidly provided shelter, food, and integration support at Polish border crossings and cities, coordinated by Polish NGO Forum Razem; Ukrainian diaspora and civil society groups such as Euromaidan-Warszawa organized charity campaigns, humanitarian collections, transport, and liaison with international agencies; and Polish-linked foundations such as Solidarity Fund PL provided expertise and advisory support in Ukraine, including training and study visits for local government officials and assistance with sectoral reforms in areas including social services and education.

Yet today, the capacity of civil society to sustain its crucial role is under increasing pressure. Ukrainian organizations in Poland operate with limited funding and rely heavily on volunteers, while Polish NGOs, despite long experience, face not only financial constraints but also growing structural and political challenges. According to the Civic Space Report 2025, Poland remains classified as a country with a “narrowed civic space”, where negative public narratives and legal-institutional uncertainty continue to constrain open civil society engagement and meaningful participation in decision-making. Dialogue with authorities often remains superficial in practice. As the report notes, civil society organizations are frequently treated as “decorations” on the decision-making process, without real influence.

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Another major complicating factor is that Russian disinformation campaigns constantly and aggressively target NGOs in Poland, specifically aiming to discredit both Ukrainians and the organizations that support them. The sheer scale and intensity of these campaigns makes it extremely difficult for civil society to counter them.

These factors severely constrain civil society's engagement on socially sensitive issues and limit its capacity to counter polarizing narratives. As a result, even well-established organizations face significant challenges in sustaining their role in Polish-Ukrainian cooperation. Civil society remains a critical asset, but without sustained funding and integration into broader institutional frameworks, it cannot compensate for the existing gaps.

## Strategic Consequences: What Is at Risk?

The current dynamics of the Polish-Ukrainian relations involve tangible risks for both countries and for Europe's security architecture.

### *Operational Vulnerabilities in Wartime*

Most of the Western military aid, equipment, and humanitarian assistance destined for Ukraine flows through Polish logistical hubs (with Poland's foreign minister noting that up to 95% of aid transits through sites such as Jasionka). Political tensions, administrative delays, or public pressure could complicate logistical flows at a time when reliability is essential for Ukraine's defense. For instance, the aforementioned border blockades by Polish farmers in late 2023 held up critical volunteer-supplied equipment such as drones and night-vision systems for weeks.

### *Erosion of NATO and EU Cohesion*

Poland plays a central role in maintaining EU unity on sanctions, mobilizing support for Ukraine's EU accession, and reinforcing NATO's eastern flank. Strained relations with Kyiv could slow decision-making, weaken coalitions, and provide openings for states skeptical of sustained support for Ukraine.

While disagreements on specific bilateral issues have created friction, they have not so far disrupted major EU or NATO mechanisms. Sanctions remain in place, and military and financial assistance continues to flow. However, as noted above, Polish leaders have already linked Ukraine's EU accession to resolving the Volhynia historical dispute, and Nawrocki has publicly opposed Ukrainian NATO membership, signaling that support for Ukraine may be increasingly conditional on bilateral issues.

If political disagreements or public fatigue escalate, Poland might be less willing to push for ambitious EU and NATO measures, and Kyiv could grow frustrated with perceived delays or obstacles. This could, over time, lead to conditional or fragmented support, opening space for Moscow to exploit divisions, slow the EU's decision-making, or weaken NATO's cohesion along its eastern flank.

### Opportunities for Russian Hybrid Interference

Tensions between Poland and Ukraine create fertile ground for Russian disinformation, manipulation of historical narratives, cyberattacks, and sabotage. Historical memory, refugee fatigue, and economic anxieties have already been exploited through external disinformation campaigns.

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Ahead of Poland's 2025 presidential elections, Russian-aligned networks amplified false claims suggesting Ukraine intended to annex Volhynia, aiming to polarize Polish public opinion and undermine bilateral trust. Coordinated social media campaigns spread allegations that Ukrainian refugees were responsible for rising crime or for plotting attacks, fueling anti-Ukrainian sentiment.

Meanwhile, Russian media have consistently portrayed Poland as an overbearing supporter of Ukraine, seeking to sow doubt about Poland's policies and weaken public consensus. Long-standing campaigns such as "Doppelgänger" have targeted Polish audiences with posts criticizing Ukraine, questioning support for Ukrainian refugees, and manipulating economic anxieties.

### *The Risk of Strategic Drift*

Current trajectories are settling the partnership into a pattern of reactive, transactional, and increasingly fragile cooperation. If these dynamics continue, they will undermine long-term planning, reduce the two countries' ability to anticipate and prevent disruptions, and make decision-making more vulnerable to sudden shocks.

Over time, this trend could lead to institutional inertia—creating a situation in which both governments respond primarily to short-term pressures instead of implementing proactive policies—and erode confidence among allies and regional partners that rely on predictable Polish-Ukrainian coordination. It could also weaken the resilience of joint initiatives, from reconstruction projects to cross-border civil society programs, making them more susceptible to inefficiency, politicization, or failure. Without a structured approach, the relationship risks drifting into a state in which crises define strategy rather than strategy preventing crises.

## **Recommendations for Strengthening Polish–Ukrainian Cooperation**

Addressing the current pressures on Polish–Ukrainian relations requires a combination of institutional innovation, civil society engagement, and, most importantly, structured and depoliticized dialogue between the two countries. Regional and multilateral actors—including the EU, NATO, and neighboring states—can provide complementary support through funding, policy expertise, mediation, and best-practice frameworks. Such a multi-layered approach is essential to reducing misperceptions, increasing predictability, and building long-term trust.

The following measures are particularly important.

### **Develop a Ukrainian Expertise Platform on Poland**

While many Polish policymakers and analysts follow Ukrainian affairs closely, there are comparatively few Ukrainian experts on Poland embedded in Kyiv's policymaking orbit. Outside of diplomatic channels, Poland is often perceived in Ukraine as familiar and self-explanatory, an assumption that can lead to misjudgments and missed opportunities for cooperation.

To address this gap, Kyiv should consider establishing a dedicated platform—ideally anchored in a state-funded think tank—that cultivates expertise on Poland, facilitates structured Polish-Ukrainian dialogue, and ensures regular exchanges between analysts, officials, and civil society actors. State support is important here, as it would provide stable, long-term funding, formal access to decision-makers, and the authority to coordinate across government agencies. Given the sensitive nature of Polish-Ukrainian relations, a government-backed platform

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would also signal official commitment and legitimacy.

Such a mechanism would help normalize expectations on both sides, reduce misperceptions, and provide Ukrainian decision-makers with a more nuanced understanding of Polish political, social, and historical sensitivities.

## Foster Cooperation Through Joint Education and Professional Exchanges

Poland and Ukraine should jointly implement measures to strengthen knowledge of each other across society and government, drawing on successful approaches used in other countries. This could include university programs and academic chairs in Polish and Ukrainian studies covering language, history, political science, and EU affairs, modeled on Franco-German academic partnerships such as the Deutsch-Französisches Institut and the Franco-German University, which support structured student mobility, joint degrees, and collaborative research.

Early cross-cultural understanding can be promoted through school and youth exchanges, drawing inspiration from Franco-British lycée programs, which combine joint classroom projects, structured school visits, and bilateral scholarships to foster long-term personal and academic ties between students from the two countries.

Diplomatic and professional rotations for civil servants and analysts would provide firsthand experience of policymaking, governance, and social norms in the partner country. Practical expertise in trade, security coordination, and EU-related decision-making could be reinforced through joint workshops, scenario exercises, and policy simulations. Cooperation between think tanks and civil society networks in the two countries would complement these initiatives, providing additional analytical perspectives and strengthening long-term expert networks.

## Create a Common Platform for Historical Dialogue

Historical memory remains a sensitive and politically salient issue for both countries. While Poland's Council for Cooperation with Ukraine plays an important role, relying solely on this body risks overburdening it and narrowing the space for broader engagement. There is a clear need for a dedicated, institutionalized platform linking the two Institutes of National Remembrance directly. This structure should operate on a stable, long-term basis, independent of individual initiatives or political cycles, to coordinate educational programs, memorial projects, and scholarly exchanges. Such a mechanism would depoliticize historical dialogue, reduce the risk of instrumentalization, and strengthen mutual understanding.

Examples of structured historical dialogue already exist in Central Europe. For example, the Joint German-Polish Textbook Commission, established in 1972, has for decades brought together historians and educators from both countries to review curricula, produce jointly authored history textbooks, and organize conferences that deepen mutual understanding of contentious historical topics. It culminated in a four-volume history series used in both countries that presents German-Polish history from shared perspectives, illustrating how sustained institutional dialogue can reshape public historical narratives. Similarly, the German-Czech Textbook Commission, formally established in 2002, has facilitated annual bilateral meetings, joint analysis of school materials, and collaborative discussions on sensitive aspects of modern German-Czech history—showing how structured, recurring engagement can bridge divergent historical memories.

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## Strengthen Civil Society Integration and Support

Civil society remains one of the most resilient pillars of Polish–Ukrainian cooperation, but its impact is limited by fragmented support and funding constraints. Long-term, structured support should target cross-border NGOs providing humanitarian aid, Ukrainian diaspora associations in Poland, Polish foundations active in Ukraine, and local community organizations involved in integration, education, and cultural projects. These actors play concrete roles such as coordinating refugee support, running language and vocational training, organizing cultural and youth exchanges, providing legal and psychological assistance, and countering disinformation.

To maximize effectiveness, these groups should be systematically connected to decision-making processes at relevant ministries, regional institutions, and intergovernmental working groups through formal advisory roles or liaison offices. This would enable them to act as bridges between communities, provide early warning of social tensions, counter populist narratives, and foster social resilience. Strengthened networks would ensure that civil society contributions complement state efforts, reduce duplication, and enhance the overall stability and sustainability of bilateral cooperation.

## Enhance Institutional Coordination and Crisis Response

The advisory nature of existing coordination bodies, coupled with fragmented Ukrainian structures, leaves the relationship vulnerable to miscommunication and reactive decision-making. The two governments should strengthen institutional coordination by establishing permanent expert units, joint working groups, and clear procedures for crisis response. Symmetric, well-resourced platforms would increase predictability, improve information flow, and allow for rapid intervention when tensions arise.

## Conclusion

The Polish-Ukrainian relationship has historically been complex and occasionally tense. The exceptional surge of solidarity in 2022 represented a temporary high point, but in many ways, relations have since reverted to their “normal” pattern of friction and transactional engagement. What makes this pattern particularly concerning today is the context. With a war ongoing in Europe and the United States signaling a more selective approach to its commitments, Warsaw and Kyiv cannot afford the usual level of mistrust, misalignment, or institutional fragility without creating strategic risks for themselves and for European security.

Poland and Ukraine remain bound by geography, shared defense imperatives, and the broader architecture of the regional stability. These foundations are durable but not self-sustaining. The current moment is fragile: Rising societal fatigue, revived historical disputes, economic tensions, political asymmetries, and institutional gaps give rise to a set of reinforcing pressures. Left unaddressed, they could erode not only bilateral goodwill but also the strategic resilience of the region, since weakening ties could signal fragmentation to other partners, complicate coordination on sanctions and defense policy, and reduce Europe’s capacity to project stability in the face of external pressures.

The challenge lies not in the existence of disagreements but in the absence of a structured, realistic, and mutually attentive framework for managing them. A sustainable partnership will require stronger institutions, deeper social resilience, consistent political communication, and a depoliticized approach to sensitive historical issues.

The window for stabilizing and strengthening the relationship remains open, but it is narrowing. What Poland and

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Ukraine do now will determine whether their partnership becomes a cornerstone of European security or a fault line vulnerable to internal pressures and external manipulation.