



By: TA | AP Insight

Defending Europe's eastern flank at the center of the Germany and Poland defence deal



Germany and Poland signed a new defense agreement on Wednesday, putting aside their complicated past to strengthen **European military cooperation** amid heightened tensions with Russia and growing uncertainty over **U.S. engagement in Europe**.

Relations between the two neighbors in recent years have become more pragmatic in the wake of Russia's full-scale war on Ukraine in 2022 and the coming to power of a liberal government in Poland in 2023.

"We are not forgetting the past," Polish Defense Minister Władysław Kosiniak-Kamysz said in Warsaw during a press conference with his German counterpart, Boris Pistorius. "But the politics of the future, development and security are our obligation."

As the U.S. weighs a **partial drawdown** of its military presence in Europe, Poland is keen to ensure that major European allies take a greater role in defending the continent's eastern flank.

Germany seeks partners as it moves to **revitalize its military**, the Bundeswehr, after decades of neglect, with ambitions to build the strongest conventional army on NATO's European side — an effort that will make it a central pillar of European defense in the years ahead.

Poland's importance as a logistics hub for Ukraine, alongside its **growing economy** and heavy **defense investment**, has made it a compelling partner for Germany and other core European countries.

"Poland started building a strong army much earlier than other countries in Western Europe," Cezary Tomczyk, the Polish deputy defense minister, told The Associated Press. "So we are ahead when it comes to capabilities."

"We definitely don't accept that any agreements about this part of Europe are made without Poland," he said.

"We Germans need a strong Poland as an equal

partner," German Chancellor Friedrich Merz said in Berlin after meeting with liberal Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk in December. "This is in our fundamental interest."

Germany has a key role in securing Europe's eastern borders

The defense agreement is to include plans for protecting the Baltic Sea region and details about cooperation on military mobility and infrastructure, cyber defense and new technologies.

The two countries are irreversibly tied by NATO's defense plans, which give Germany a key role in the defense of the Baltic region, together with Poland and other countries in the central and eastern European region, said Justyna Gotkowska, deputy director of the Warsaw-based think tank Center for Eastern Studies.

Germany is largely responsible for the defense of the Baltic states and without cooperation with Poland, that will not happen - Justyna Gotkowska

"Germany is largely responsible for the defense of the Baltic states and without cooperation with Poland, that will not happen," Gotkowska said.

The Baltic countries are often referred to as the most likely target for Russia if it were to attack NATO territory in the future.

Tomczyk, the deputy defense minister, said German soldiers, among others, would help further develop Poland's **Eastern Shield**, a system of enhanced fortifications the country has been building on its borders with Belarus and Russia since 2024.

Historical wounds still cause

problems

The agreement is expected to reaffirm the mutual defense obligations set out in NATO and European Union treaties, to which both countries are parties.

However, unlike bilateral treaties each has signed with France and the United Kingdom in recent years, the Polish-German agreement is inter-ministerial, focused on the practical aspects of military cooperation and does not include political mutual defense declarations that the bilateral treaties do.

When asked in June by Polish Radio Trojka why Poland is not signing a similar treaty with Germany, Polish Foreign Minister Radosław Sikorski said that President Karol Nawrocki, who came to power with the support of the national-conservative Law and Justice party, would never agree to that.

“Hell would break loose here” if a German-Polish treaty was signed, Sikorski said.

When Law and Justice was in power, the government demanded \$1.3 trillion in reparations from Germany because of its World War II occupation of Poland — a demand Berlin has rejected.

The topic is likely to resurface ahead of next year's general election, and Tusk will seek to avoid appearing soft or serving Berlin's interests.

Tusk himself has demanded that Germany move faster to compensate surviving victims of the occupation.

On Tuesday, Polish far-right leader Robert Bąkiewicz and several companions from a movement opposing immigration were briefly detained in Berlin after attempting to stage a demonstration in front of a monument to Polish victims of World War II, holding a large cross.

Poland is not core Europe just

yet

Despite Poland's rising importance in Europe's security architecture, Germany has preferred to make major decisions on Ukraine or Iran with only France and the U.K, leaving Warsaw aside.

On June 7, leaders of the three Western European countries hosted Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy in London to discuss the role they might play in potential peace negotiations with Russia.



Poland's role and significance within Europe and NATO have grown

Tusk said at a news conference in Warsaw after the London meeting that he told Merz Poland should be part of the discussion about the future of Ukraine and the region. “Any arrangements made without our participation will not be respected or binding for us,” Tusk said.

Rolf Nickel, a former German ambassador to Poland and vice president of the German Council on Foreign Relations, said Poland's role and significance within Europe and NATO have grown.

“So Poland must be taken more seriously today and, above all, must be respected more than we have seen in the past,” Nickel said.

Gotkowska, from the Center for Eastern Studies, said that Germany needs to recognize that its economy has stagnated while Poland's economy and military strength have risen.

“The balance of power has changed in Europe in recent years,” Gotkowska said.