

CASE STUDY

Diplomacy at the Highest Level. The Case of Polish Presidents

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Abstract

The aim of this article is to analyse the dynamics and intensity of diplomacy at the highest level in the practice of Poland's foreign policy after 1989. From the perspective of international law, high-level diplomacy is understood as a form of special diplomatic mission. A defining characteristic of such a mission is the status of the individual leading it. Diplomatic studies, meanwhile, employ the concept of *summit diplomacy*. For the purposes of this article, the term *diplomacy at the highest level* will be used, as it integrates both the international legal perspective and the approach of diplomatic studies.

In the article the relationship between a state's stage of development and the intensity of its presidents' international activity is examined. The following research questions are posed:

- (1) What was the intensity of international activity by Polish presidents?
- (2) What were the factors influencing the international activity of individual Polish presidents?

The theoretical framework of this article is interdisciplinary, combining international legal approaches, diplomatic studies, and political science perspectives. The adopted research strategy allows for the use of both quantitative methods (quantitative data analysis) and qualitative methods (comparative method and case study). The paper concludes that the most active period of the presidency after 1989 was characterized by significant events, such as accession to the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation and the European Union, which undoubtedly required increased efforts on the international stage. Additionally, three main types of factors influencing the international activity of Polish presidents after 1989 can be identified: *internal factors* – relating to the President's position within the constitutional system; *international factors* – connected to the state of the global environment; *subjective factors* – such as the President's knowledge and understanding of international affairs.

Keywords

diplomacy at the highest level, summit diplomacy, Polish presidents

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Introduction

In contemporary times, diplomacy conducted at the highest level by heads of state or government has gained increasing significance. Issues of national importance are now more frequently addressed through direct meetings or conversations between presidents and prime ministers¹. This form of contact is not a new phenomenon. Meetings between sovereigns to discuss matters of mutual concern predate the development of permanent diplomatic structures. However, both in that era and in subsequent periods, such encounters were rare and organised solely on an ad hoc basis².

From the perspective of international law, high-level diplomacy is understood as a form of special diplomatic mission. A defining characteristic of such a mission is the status of the individual leading it. When high-ranking politicians head a special mission, they assume a dual legal status. On the one hand, they act as architects of a state's foreign policy and are responsible for making political decisions; on the other, they become the executors of those decisions through diplomatic engagement³.

Diplomatic studies, meanwhile, employ the concept of *summit diplomacy*. Numerous definitions of diplomatic summits exist in the literature, but two elements are common to all: (1) the participation of heads of state, heads of government, or high-ranking international officials; and (2) personal, direct contact and dialogue⁴.

For the purposes of this article, the term *diplomacy at the highest level* will be used, as it integrates both the international legal perspective and the approach of diplomatic studies. In the context of bilateral relations, this refers to special missions led by heads of state, while in multilateral relations, it corresponds to summit diplomacy. It is assumed that a diplomatic summit involves a meeting attended by at least three senior representatives of states.

¹ Erik Goldstein, "The Politics of the State Visit," in *Diplomacy*, vol. 2, ed. Christer Jönsson, and Richard Langhorne (SAGE New York, 2004), 362–371.

² On the origins and early stages of summit meetings, see: Erik Goldstein, "The Origins of Summit Diplomacy," in *Diplomacy at the Highest Level. The Evolution of International Summitry*, ed. David H. Dunn (Palgrave Macmillan, 1996), 23–34.

³ For a broader discussion, see also: Beata Surmacz, "Kto jest dziś dyplomata?", in *Nowe oblicza dyplomacji*, ed. Beata Surmacz (UMCS Lublin, 2013), 26.

⁴ Some authors include communication through digital platforms as a form of direct contact. See: August Danielson and Elsa Hedling, "Visual Diplomacy in Virtual Summitry: Status Signalling during the Coronavirus Crisis," *Review of International Studies* 48, no. 2 (2022): 243–261, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210521000607>.

The aim of this article is to analyse the dynamics and intensity of diplomacy at the highest level in the practice of Poland's foreign policy after 1989. Due to space constraints, the analysis focuses on missions led by Polish presidents and covers a period of over 35 years — from the election of Wojciech Jaruzelski as President of Poland to the end of President Andrzej Duda's second term. The following research questions are posed: (1) What was the intensity of international activity by Polish presidents? (2) What were the factors influencing the international activity of individual Polish presidents?

According to Z. J. Pietraś, states tend to make particularly frequent use of special missions during two periods: (1) during the “childhood” stage, immediately after gaining independence or following rapid internal transformations; and (2) during the stage of political, economic, and military “maturity”, when forms of permanent diplomacy are insufficient to meet the need and desire for broad international engagement⁵.

This article aims to determine whether the thesis also holds true in relation to diplomacy at the highest level conducted by heads of state. Accordingly, the relationship between a state's stage of development and the intensity of its presidents' international activity is examined. In simplified terms, the “childhood” phase is understood to encompass the presidencies of Wojciech Jaruzelski and Lech Wałęsa (1989–1995)⁶. This period was marked by major political and economic transformation in Poland, substantial changes in the international environment, and a redefinition of foreign policy objectives. These included the withdrawal from the Warsaw Pact and the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (COMECON), as well as the clear prioritisation of Euro-Atlantic integration. The “maturity” phase is understood to refer to the period following 2004, when Poland became firmly anchored in NATO and the European Union. The years 1995–2004 are thus regarded as a phase of “adolescence”, characterised by the adaptation of state structures and actions to international requirements.

The theoretical framework of this article is interdisciplinary, combining international legal approaches, diplomatic studies, and political science perspectives. The adopted research strategy allows for the use of both quantitative methods (quantitative data analysis) and qualitative methods (comparative method and case study). It should also be emphasised that the aim of this study is not to evaluate the effectiveness of this form of international contact in the practice of Polish diplomacy after 1989 – that is, to compare the costs with the political or economic outcomes achieved. The effectiveness of such missions is undoubtedly a highly important issue that deserves a separate and in-depth analysis.

Diplomacy at the highest level

The growing intensity of diplomacy at the highest level is conditioned by numerous factors. First and foremost, attention should be drawn to the remarkable development of

⁵ Ziemowit J. Pietraś, *Dyplomatyczna misja specjalna jako instytucja prawa międzynarodowego*, (UMCS Lublin, 1978), 15.

⁶ As Roman Kuźniar noticed, the year 1989 is in some respects comparable to 1918, when Poland regained independence after 123 years. See: Roman Kuźniar, Krzysztof Szczepanik, “Wprowadzenie”, in “Polityka zagraniczna RP 1989-2002”, ed. Roman Kuźniar, Krzysztof Szczepanik (ASKON Warszawa, 2002), 15.

transportation technologies, which allow leaders to travel quickly, as well as telecommunications technologies, which in turn facilitate the logistics of organising such meetings. Other contributing factors include: globalisation processes – particularly in the economic sphere; the increasing number of states, many of which, especially smaller ones, lack a sufficient diplomatic network; the rising number of international organisations that make use of diplomatic summits; regional integration processes; the expanding scope of diplomatic activities⁷; the centralisation of decision-making in foreign policy matters⁸; and the gradual unification of diplomatic styles and standards.

It is also possible to identify more subjective factors. As Jan Melissen notes, “political leaders love foreign policy,” and most of them “believe in the effectiveness of direct contact with their counterparts.” For many, diplomacy at the highest level has become “an addictive drug”⁹. The intensification of such diplomacy is also, in a sense, a response to the illusory public expectation that key issues in international politics are under the control of national leaders – while those very leaders wish to be perceived as decision-makers of historical importance.

Diplomacy at the highest level has certain advantages: building personal relationships, trust, and sometimes even sympathy or friendship; overcoming bureaucratic impasses; and enabling the immediate implementation of decisions¹⁰. It also undoubtedly carries tremendous symbolic and image-building potential¹¹. Frequent direct contact between political leaders also allows for mutual learning – of behavioural patterns, values, and norms recognised in the international community, as well as principles of political correctness. It fosters convergence in strategic cultures and a form of cultural consolidation among strategic elites¹².

However, this type of diplomacy also has its drawbacks: an excessive focus on propaganda¹³; a lack of sufficient substantive or diplomatic qualifications among top-level politicians which may lead to poor decisions; hasty decisions made for media impact;

⁷ Carl Death, “Summit Theatre: Exemplary Governmentality and Environmental Diplomacy in Johannesburg and Copenhagen,” *Environmental Politics* 20 (1) (2011): 1-19. DOI: 10.1080/09644016.2011.538161.

⁸ It should be emphasized that heads of state or government are the highest representatives of the state and, under international law, do not require special authorization to express the will of the state or to conclude international agreements.

⁹ Jan Melissen, *Summit Diplomacy Coming of Age*, (Netherlands Institute of International Relations ‘Clingendael’, 2003), 1-2.

¹⁰ See: Elmer Plischke, “Summit Diplomacy: Diplomat in Chief” in *Modern Diplomacy: The Art and the Artisans*, ed. Elmer Plischke (American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research Washington, 1979), 169-187; Charles. H. Fairbanks Jr., *The Allure of Summits*, (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1988).

¹¹ Minseon Ku, “Summit Diplomacy as Theatre of Sovereignty Contestation,” *The Hague Journal of Diplomacy*, 17 (4), (2022): 628-642, DOI: 10.1163/1871191x-bja10131

¹² Wojciech Lamentowicz, “Dyplomacja bezpośrednia jako pasmo spotkań przywódców na szczycie,” in *Nowe oblicza dyplomacji*, ed. Beata Surmacz (UMCS Lublin, 2013), 153.

¹³ Benjamin S. Day, Alister Wedderburn, “Wrestlemania! Summit Diplomacy and Foreign Policy Performance after Trump”, *International Studies Quarterly*, 66 (2), (2022): 10, <https://doi.org/10.1093/isq/sqac019>.

or decisions taken under the influence of mood or emotion¹⁴. These meetings are often informal or semi-official, when politicians arrive not on official state visits but on private invitations – so-called ‘no-tie diplomacy’. It is widely believed that discussions held in a more relaxed atmosphere, free from the rigid rules of diplomatic protocol, enable better mutual understanding and the discussion of issues important to the states involved.

The 1969 Convention on Special Missions (the New York Convention – NYC) defines a special mission as “a temporary mission, representing the State, which is sent by one State to another State with the consent of the latter for the purpose of dealing with it on specific questions or of performing in relation to it a specific task”¹⁵. A temporary mission headed by the highest-ranking state officials constitutes, in legal terms, a diplomatic special mission.

Special missions in bilateral relations can be classified according to several criteria¹⁶: (1) the rank of the mission; (2) the scope of parties involved in the contact; and (3) the subject matter of the mission. According to the criterion of the mission leader’s rank, the following categories can be distinguished: (1) political missions – high-level missions headed by a head of state, head of government, minister of foreign affairs, or another prominent figure of the sending state; (2) diplomatic missions – led by individuals who hold permanent diplomatic status and appropriate credentials; and (3) paradiplomatic missions – often specialised and technical in nature, led by experts in a given field who do not hold diplomatic status. Using the criterion of the scope of parties involved, the following types can be identified: (1) typical missions – sent from one state to another; (2) circular missions – sent by one state to several receiving states (generally dispatched to geographically distant countries or when the same function is to be carried out in multiple states); and (3) joint missions – carried out as a joint body of several sending states to a receiving state. From the perspective of the subject matter or function of the mission, the following categories can be distinguished: (1) negotiation missions – where the main goal is to conduct negotiations; these are most commonly used when there are no diplomatic relations or permanent diplomatic missions, in cases of negotiation deadlock (especially when a new impetus is needed, high-level missions may prove useful), or when specialised knowledge is required that resident diplomats lack; (2) military missions – military delegations, missions on occupied territories, those supervising ceasefires, ship commanders, advisory missions, or the presence of military forces on foreign territory under agreements; (3) observation missions – to attend conferences, study missions, fact-finding missions, election observers, conciliation or mediation missions; (4) courier missions – aimed at delivering important political messages to the highest officials of the receiving state; and (5) ceremonial

¹⁴ Geoff R. Berridge, *Diplomacy: Theory and Practice*, (Basingstoke New York, 2010), 164–167. On the advantages and disadvantages of summit diplomacy, see also: David H. Dunn, *The Lure of Summitry: International Dialogue at the Highest Level*, (Leicester Diplomatic Studies Programme, 1996).

¹⁵ Article 1 of the 1969 Convention on Special Missions Adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations on 8 December 1969, Dz.U. 1985, No. 48, item 245.

¹⁶ Pietraś, *Dyplomatyczna misja specjalna*, 120–153.

missions – sent to attend coronations, weddings, funerals¹⁷, presidential inaugurations, or anniversary celebrations. According to the subject matter criterion, it is generally accepted that high-level special missions led by heads of state or prime ministers rarely, if ever, serve as observation, military, or courier missions. Most such missions can be classified as negotiation missions, and some as ceremonial missions. According to the rank of the high-level mission, the following categories are distinguished: (1) state visits; (2) official visits; (3) working visits; (4) unofficial visits; and (5) private visits – the latter do not meet the definitional requirements of a special mission, as their purpose is not connected with the official function held. These visits differ primarily in their degree of ceremoniality and protocol. State and official visits generally carry symbolic significance and reflect the state of bilateral relations. Working visits are intended to address or resolve specific issues requiring swift decision-making; their goal is not to externally demonstrate the state of mutual relations, and protocol requirements are kept to a reasonable minimum. Unofficial visits, meanwhile, are made at the invitation of non-governmental organisers¹⁸.

The term *summit*, referring to a meeting between heads of state or heads of government, was introduced into international and diplomatic discourse by Winston Churchill in the 1950s¹⁹. In Churchill's understanding, *summits* referred to meetings between leaders of two great powers – situations in which rivals, or even antagonists, met to discuss matters of high politics. As the number of such meetings increased and their purposes diversified, the term *diplomatic summits* came to encompass a broader range of high-level meetings. In this article, *diplomatic summits* are defined as official meetings involving at least several heads of state or heads of government. Classic bilateral or trilateral summit diplomacy, practised in the 20th century, now rarely holds global significance, garners international attention, or receives broad media coverage. Moreover, the most pressing problems of the modern world tend to require multilateral rather than bilateral solutions.

Geoffrey Berridge identifies three categories of summits: (1) serial summits – held at regular, predetermined intervals; (2) *ad hoc* summits – convened to address specific issues; and (3) consultative summits – serving primarily as forums for the exchange of views²⁰. For the purposes of this analysis, the following classification of summits is adopted: (1) regular summits held within the framework of international organisations, sometimes as sessions of their organs; (2) heads-of-state summits forming independent political-economic forums—

¹⁷ Nowadays, so-called “working funerals” have become widespread, during which leaders participate not only in the funeral ceremony but also engage in numerous meetings and talks — for example, the meeting between Presidents Trump and Zelensky during the funeral of Pope Francis. See: Geoff R. Berridge, “Funeral Summits,” in *Diplomacy at the Highest Level: The Evolution of International Summitry*, ed. David H. Dunn, (Houndmills: Macmillan Press, 1996), 106–117; Idem, “Diplomacy After Death: The Rise of the Working Funeral,” in *Diplomacy*, vol. 3, ed. Christer Jönsson and Richard Langhorne (Sage New York, 2004), 170–184.

¹⁸ See: Tomasz Orłowski, *Protokół dyplomatyczny. Ceremoniał i etykieta*, (PISM Warszawa, 2005), 221–229; Idem, *Praktyka dyplomatyczna*, (PISM Warszawa, 2023), 191–198.

¹⁹ Melissen, *Summit Diplomacy Coming of Age*, 1.

²⁰ Geoff R. Berridge, *Diplomacy: Theory and Practice*, (Basingstoke–New York, 2005), 167–174.

held either regularly or on an ad hoc basis; and (3) international conferences organised by international organisations or non-governmental actors, focusing on specific issues in international relations²¹.

The case of Polish Presidents (1989–2025)

According to the Constitution, the President of the Republic of Poland is the representative of the state in external relations, meaning that they embody the state on the international stage, particularly in contact with other states and international organisations. The President represents Poland not only when required to do so by domestic or international law, but also when customary diplomatic practices call for it. In representing Poland internationally and shaping foreign policy, the President cooperates with the Council of Ministers. Special missions led by the head of state play an important role in the formulation of foreign policy.

In bilateral relations, presidential special missions were classified according to the criterion of subject scope. Accordingly, typical, circular, and joint missions were distinguished. In multilateral relations, the following categories were identified: (1) summits held within the framework of international organisations, sometimes as meetings of their bodies—such as the UN, the Warsaw Pact (WP), NATO, the EU (prior to 1992, the European Communities – EC), the CSCE–OSCE, and the Council of Europe (CoE); (2) presidential summits within the Visegrad Group, CEFTA, the Central European Initiative, the Council of the Baltic Sea States, the Three Seas Initiative, the Arraiolos Group, and other summits organised by states (e.g., meetings of Central European presidents, Baltic state presidents, GUAM, etc.); and (3) participation in conferences organised by non-state actors (e.g., the World Economic Forum in Davos).

In the second classification, relating to bilateral relations, the rank of the mission was adopted as the main criterion. As a result, official, working, and unofficial missions were identified. Additionally, ceremonial missions were included in the classification—these are usually official missions, but with a clearly defined purpose, namely participation in ceremonial events (religious, historical, political, or funerary).

President Jaruzelski's international activity (Table 1) was very limited due to his complex political situation. His first foreign visit, to the GDR, was ceremonial in nature and related to the celebrations marking the 40th anniversary of the founding of the GDR. In addition, as president, Jaruzelski paid visits to Switzerland, France, Spain, and the USSR. His visit to the Soviet Union in April 1990 was of particular significance, during which the Soviet authorities officially acknowledged the responsibility of Stalinist officials for the murder of Polish officers in Katyn in 1940. President Jaruzelski laid a wreath at Katyn on the symbolic grave commemorating their deaths (Table 2 and Table 3).

During his five-year term, President Lech Wałęsa carried out 46 special missions in bilateral relations, the vast majority of which were official or ceremonial visits. He participated in relatively few summits (14) in multilateral relations. Notably, the president's

²¹ For more on the classification and role of summit diplomacy, see: Beata Surmacz, *Ewolucja współczesnej dyplomacji: aktorzy, struktury funkcje*, (UMCS Lublin, 2015), 286.

Table 1. Wojciech Jaruzelski (19.07.1989– 22.12.1990).

Year	Bilateral			Multilateral			Total
	Typical missions	Circular missions	Joint missions	International organisations summits	Presidential summits	Conferences	
1989	1			1 (WP)			2
1990	4					1 (Davos)	5
Total	5			1		1	7
	5			2			7

Source: <https://www.wojciech-jaruzelski.pl/czas-zmian/> [dostęp: 10.04.2025]; *Kalendarium ważniejszych wydarzeń związanych z polityką zagraniczną RP w okresie sprawowania przez Krzysztofa Skubiszewskiego funkcji ministra spraw zagranicznych 12 września 1989 – 25 października 1993*, http://www.pism.pl/files/?id_plik=7114 [accessed on: 10/03/2020].

Table 2. Lech Wałęsa (22.12.1990–22.12.1995).

Year	Bilateral			Multilateral			Total
	Typical missions	Circular missions ²²	Joint missions	International organisations summits	Presidential summits	Conferences	
1991	8	1 (2)	-	3 (EC, WP, NATO)	1	-	13
1992	5	-	-	2 (CoE, CSCE)	1	-	8
1993	10	-	-	-	-	-	10
1994	12	2 (4)		1 (CSCE)	2		17
1995	7	1 (5)	-	-	1	3	12
Total	42	4 (11)	-	6	5	3	60
	46			14			

activity within international organisations was limited – for example, no mission to the United Nations was recorded during his term. However, President Wałęsa did take part in the historic final session of the Warsaw Pact, during which the organisation was officially dissolved (Table 4 and Table 5).

During his two terms in office, President Aleksander Kwaśniewski conducted 193 missions in bilateral relations and participated in 93 multilateral meetings. He took part in 44 presidential summits and represented the state on 33 occasions at international organisations — including fifteen at NATO, seven at the European Union, and five at the Council of Europe.

In bilateral relations, most missions were typical in nature, but it is worth noting the sixteen circular missions during which the president visited 40 countries, as well as 34 joint

²² In brackets, the number of countries visited.

Table 3. Bilateral missions according to the rank of the missions.

Year	Ceremonial	Official	Working	Unofficial	Total
1991	1	6	-	2	9
1992	1	4	-	-	5
1993	5	4	-	1	10
1994	2	10	-	2	14
1995	1	6	-	1	8
Total	10	30	-	6	46

Elaboration of tables based on: *Annals of Polish Foreign Policy* for the years 1991-1996, Lech Wałęsa Library, <http://www.bibliotekalw.pl/28,0> [accessed on: 12/03/2014].

Table 4. Aleksander Kwaśniewski (23.12.1995–23.12.2005).

Year	Bilateral			Multilateral			Total
	Typical missions	Circular missions	Joint missions	International or organisations summits	Presidential summits	Conferences	
1996	12	2 (3)	-	3 (OSCE, UN, NATO)	2	2	21
1997	16	2(4)	-	2 (NATO, CoE)	5	2	27
1998	19	-	-	2 (EU, NATO)	5	4	30
1999	16	2 (6)	1	3 (2xNATO, OSCE)	9	4	35
2000	16	-	-	4 (EU, CoE, NATO, UN)	3	2	25
2001	15	1 (2)	1	7 (2xEU; 4xNATO; CoE)	6	2	32
2002	11	5 (14)	-	2 (NATO)	6	1	25
2003	22	-	-	3 (2xEU; CoE)	4	-	29
2004	21	2 (7)	2	2 (NATO; EU)	2	-	29
2005	25	2 (4)		4 (2xNATO; UN; CoE)	3	-	34
Total	173	16 (40)	4	32	44	17	286
	193			93			

missions. For example, in 1999, he and the President of Lithuania made a joint visit to Macedonia and visited the Polish–Lithuanian Peacekeeping Battalion in Kosovo; in 2001, he carried out a similar mission to Kosovo with the President of Ukraine; and in 2004, at the request of the Ukrainian president, he twice participated in a joint mediation mission in Kyiv alongside Lithuanian President Valdas Adamkus. President Kwaśniewski's bilateral missions were not limited to ceremonial and official visits — nearly half were working or

Table 5. Bilateral missions according to the rank of the missions.

Year	Ceremonial	Official	Working	Unofficial	Total
1996	1	8	4	1	14
1997	1	8	6	3	18
1998	4	6	5	4	19
1999	3	9	2	5	19
2000	2	7	4	3	16
2001	3	3	7	4	17
2002	1	8	7	-	16
2003	5	8	8	1	22
2004	5	10	8	2	25
2005	7	9	11	-	27
Total	32	76	62	22	193

Source: *Roczniki Polskiej Polityki Zagranicznej* for the years 1996–2006; <http://www.prezydent.pl/archiwum/archiwum-aktualnosci> [Accessed 25/03/2014]; *Działalność międzynarodowa Prezydenta RP Aleksandra Kwaśniewskiego w latach 1996–2005*, Fundacja Aleksandra Kwaśniewskiego AMICUS EUROPÆ, <http://fae.pl/raport-nt.-dzialalnosc-miedzynarodowej-prezydenta-rp-aleksandra-kwasniewskiego-w-latach-1996-2005.pdf> [accessed 15/03/2014]. *Kalendarium prezydentury Aleksandra Kwaśniewskiego (lata 1995–2005)*, <https://wiadomosci.wp.pl/kalendarium-prezydentury-aleksandra-kwasniewskiego-lata-1995-2005-6037511030874753a> [accessed 16/04/2014].

unofficial visits, which may indicate his active involvement in current foreign policy and a genuine influence on its direction. The highest intensity of bilateral missions occurred during the final three years of his second term (2003–2005), while multilateral missions peaked between 1999 and 2001.

Throughout both terms, the President most frequently visited Germany (34 times), Ukraine (17 times), and Lithuania (13 times). He held two meetings with Russian President Boris Yeltsin and met President Vladimir Putin on 11 occasions, including six times in Russia and twice in Poland. He was also received in audience 10 times by Popes John Paul II and Benedict XVI at the Vatican (Table 6 and Table 7).

During his incomplete term in office, President Lech Kaczyński conducted 78 missions in bilateral relations and participated in 46 multilateral meetings. His peak international activity occurred between 2007 and 2009. In bilateral relations, nearly half of his missions were working or unofficial visits. President Kaczyński carried out six circular missions during which he visited 14 countries, and one joint mission — in 2008, together with the presidents of Ukraine, Lithuania, Estonia, and the Prime Minister of Latvia, he travelled to Georgia on a solidarity mission in response to Russian aggression.

In multilateral relations, he represented the state 24 times in international organisations. The vast majority — 15 missions — were to attend European Council meetings and EU summits, but he also participated annually in the UN General Assembly sessions. The President took part in 19 presidential summits: in addition to summits of Central and Eastern European

Table 6. Lech Kaczyński (23.12.2005–10.04.2010).

Year	Bilateral			Multilateral			Total
	Typical missions	Circular missions	Joint missions	International organisations summits	Presidential summits	Conferences	
2006	15	2 (4)	-	4 (2xEU; NATO; UN)	5	1	27
2007	22	1 (2)	-	7 (5xEU; NATO, UN)	4	1	35
2008	18	2 (5)	1	6 (4xEU; NATO; UN)	8	1	36
2009	11	1 (3)		7 (4xEU; NATO; UN; ILO)	1	-	20
2010 (do 10.04)	5	-	-	-	1	-	6
Total	71	6 (14)	1	24	19	3	124
	78			46			

Table 7. Bilateral missions according to the rank of the missions.

Year	Ceremonial	Official	Working	Unofficial	Total
2006	2	8	4	3	17
2007	2	8	8	5	23
2008	5	5	8	3	21
2009	4	4	4	-	12
2010	3	1	1	-	5
Total	16	26	25	11	78

Source: *Roczniki Polskiej Polityki Zagranicznej* for years 2006–2011; <https://www.prezydent.pl/kancelaria/archiwum/archiwum-lecha-kaczynskiego/cztery-lata-prezydentury/prezydentura-w-liczbach> [accessed 25/04/2025].

states, the Baltic states, and the Visegrád Group, he also participated in GUAM summits; however, during his term, there was only one meeting of the Weimar Triangle leaders.

President Kaczyński conducted the highest number of special missions to Lithuania — 16 visits. He visited Ukraine and Belgium nine times, Czechia and Germany eight times, Georgia seven times, and the United States six times (Table 8 and Table 9).

President Bronisław Komorowski carried out a total of 70 missions in bilateral relations and participated in 31 meetings in multilateral relations. The bilateral missions were primarily official and ceremonial in nature, with only 13 classified as working visits. This indicates, in contrast to his two predecessors, a relatively limited involvement of the president in the conduct of day-to-day foreign policy. A noteworthy aspect is the relatively high number of circular missions: 11 missions during which the president visited 24 countries.

Table 8. Bronisław Komorowski (06.08.2010–06.08.2015).

Year	Bilateral			Multilateral			Total
	Typical missions	Circular missions	Joint missions	International organisations summits	Presidential summits	Conferences	
2010 (od.08)	5	2 (4)	-	3 (2xNATO; EU)	2	1	13
2011	12	2 (5)	-	3 (2xEU; UN)	3	1	21
2012	10	1 (2)	1	3 (NATO; UN; EU)	1	2	18
2013	10	4 (9)	-	2 (UN, EU)	1	-	17
2014	9	2 (4)	3	2 (UN, NATO)	4	-	20
2015 (do 08. 2015)	7	-	2	-	-	3	12
Total	53	11 (24)	6	13	11	7	101
	70	31			101		

Table 9. Bilateral missions according to the rank of the missions.

Year	Ceremonial	Official	Working	Unofficial	Total
2010	2	3	2	-	7
2011	6	4	4	-	14
2012	3	6	2	1	12
2013	5	6	3	-	14
2014	10	3	1	-	14
2015	4	4	1	-	9
Total	30	26	13	1	70

Source: <https://www.prezydent.pl/kancelaria/archiwum/archiwum-bronislawa-komorowskiego/aktualnosci/wizyty-zagraniczne> [accessed 30/06/2025].

In multilateral relations, President Komorowski took part in 31 meetings, including 13 within the framework of international organisations (five times in the EU, four times each in NATO and the UN). He visited both Ukraine and Germany 11 times and carried out missions to Slovakia and Italy seven times each (Table 10 and Table 11).

President Andrzej Duda, during his two terms in office, carried out 154 missions in bilateral relations and participated in 91 meetings in multilateral relations. The bilateral missions were primarily official and ceremonial, but since 2022 there has been a significant increase in working visits, which was related to the president's heightened activity concerning the war and support for Ukraine, as well as security issues. Noteworthy is the high

Table 10. Andrzej Duda (06.2015–06.2025).

Year	Bilateral			Multilateral			Total
	Typical missions	Circular missions	Joint missions	International organisations summits	Presidential summits	Conferences	
2015 (od 08)	8	-	-	1 (UN)	3	-	12
2016	18	1 (2)		4 (2xNATO, UN, CoE)	3	1	27
2017	12	1 (2)	-	2 (NATO, UN)	2	2	19
2018	13	2 (5)	-	4 (NATO; 3xUN)	3	2	24
2019	12	-	-	3 (2xNATO, UN)	5	1	21
2020	4	1 (2)		-	1	1	7
2021	11	1 (2)	-	3 (2xNATO; UN)	5	1	21
2022	13	3 (8)	3	5 (2xNATO; 3xUN)	5	2	31
2023	15	1 (2)	2	6 (2xNATO; 3xUN; CoE)	5	3	32
2024	13	1 (3)	3	5 (2xNATO; 3xUN)	5	2	29
2025 (do 06.08)	13	2 (5)	1	4 (2xNATO; 2xUN)	2	1	23
	132	13 (31)	9	36	39	16	
	154			91			245

Table 11. Bilateral missions according to the rank of the missions.

Year	Ceremonial	Official	Working	Unofficial	Total
2015	-	6	2	-	8
2016	6	10	1	2	19
2017	1	10	1	1	13
2018	8	4	1	2	15
2019	1	7	2	2	12
2020	-	1	4		5
2021	4	8	-	-	12
2022	2	2	15	-	19
2023	6	4	6	2	18

Table 11 *Continued*

Year	Ceremonial	Official	Working	Unofficial	Total
2024	6	7	4	-	17
2025	4	7	4	1	16
Total	38	66	40	9	154

Elaboration of tables based on: <https://www.prezydent.pl/aktualnosci/wizyty-zagraniczne> [accessed 15/07/2025].

proportion of multilateral meetings, especially those related to participation in presidential summits and international conferences.

The president regularly took part in summits of the Three Seas Initiative, the Bucharest Nine, the Visegrád Group (V4), Arraiolos Group meetings, as well as the World Economic Forum in Davos and the Munich Security Conference. He most frequently visited the United States (19 visits), Ukraine (15), Lithuania and Italy (13 each), Slovakia (12), and Germany (11).

Conclusions

To determine answers to the research questions, a comparison of the activities of individuals holding the highest office in the state is essential. By applying the International activity coefficient, it becomes evident that the intensity of diplomacy at the highest level conducted by Polish presidents has varied significantly (Table 12).

Table 12. Comparison of the International Activities of Polish Presidents: Participation in Diplomacy at the Highest Level since 1989.

	Bilateral				Multilateral			Total	IAC
	Ceremonial	Official	Working	Unofficial	International organisation summits	Presidential summits	Conferences		
Wojciech Jaruzelski	2	3	-	-	1	-	1	7	0.4
Lech Wałęsa	10	30	-	6	6	5	3	60	1
Aleksander Kwaśniewski	32	76	62	22	32	44	17	286	2.7
Lech Kaczyński	16	26	25	11	24	19	3	124	2.4
Bronisław Komorowski	30	26	13	1	13	11	7	101	1.6
Andrzej Duda	38	66	40	9	36	39	16	245	2
Total	128	227	140	49	112	118	47		
	544				277			821	

IAC – International activity coefficient – calculated by dividing the number of special missions by the number of months in office.

Altogether, Polish presidents since 1989 have participated in 821 meetings at the highest level. The vast majority of these were missions carried out in bilateral relations, were typical in nature, and took the form of official visits. Between 1989 and 2025, the presidents conducted 20 joint missions (four by President Kwaśniewski, one by President Kaczyński, six by President Komorowski, and nine by President Duda), as well as 50 circular missions. These included combined visits to Italy and the Holy See, as well as visits to geographically distant countries. The most frequently visited countries were Germany, Ukraine, and Lithuania. In multilateral relations, presidential summits slightly outnumbered other forms of participation.

The most internationally active president was Aleksander Kwaśniewski. During his presidency, Poland experienced significant events such as accession to the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation and the European Union, which undoubtedly required increased efforts on the international stage. Special relations with the United States and Poland's involvement in the military coalition against Iraq in 2003 also demanded personal engagement from the head of state. Notable, too, was the president's involvement in relations with Poland's neighbours, particularly Ukraine, which became a focus of his special attention. Equally important were Kwaśniewski's personal traits and aptitudes—his ease in establishing relationships and his direct communication skills.

However, Lech Kaczyński was not far behind in terms of international activity. His high level of engagement, particularly within international organisations, is noteworthy. The President participated annually in NATO and UN summits and remained active within the organs of the EU, which at times led to tensions with the Prime Minister and the Council of Ministers. Comparatively, although with slightly less intensity, Andrzej Duda's international activity followed a similar pattern. His involvement in international affairs – especially in the context of international organisations and regional meetings (such as the Three Seas Initiative and the Visegrád Group) – placed his multilateral engagement on a level comparable to that of President Kwaśniewski.

In contrast, President Lech Wałęsa's international activity was relatively limited. However, it is essential not to overlook the global geopolitical context of his presidency – particularly in Europe. At the time, the Soviet Union, the Warsaw Pact, and the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (COMECON) still existed. Nearly one million soldiers and personnel of the Red Army were stationed across Central and Eastern Europe, with over 100,000 of them in Poland. It is also worth noting that President Wałęsa signed treaties of friendship with all of Poland's neighbouring countries.

According to constitutional provisions, the President cooperates with the government in conducting foreign policy²³. Nonetheless, each President has operated with relative independence in certain domains – chiefly in Eastern policy. For President Kwaśniewski, relations with Ukraine were of particular importance. His excellent rapport with then-President Leonid Kuchma enabled him to play a significant role during the Orange Revolution. For President

²³ Anna Umińska-Woroniecka, „Zadania i kompetencje organów władzy wykonawczej w sferze polityki zagranicznej po uchwaleniu konstytucji 1997 roku – między rywalizacją a współpracą”, *E-politikon*, 19 (2016): 25–49.

Kaczyński, the key focus was Georgia, as well as cooperation within Central Europe, supported by his close relationship with President Saakashvili. President Duda has shown particular interest in Central Europe, notably through the presidential Three Seas Initiative, along with exceptionally strong ties to the Trump administration.

Three main types of factors influencing the international activity of Polish presidents after 1989 can be identified:

- (1) *Internal factors* – relating to the President’s position within the constitutional system (foreign policy is led by the government) and the actual relationship between the President, the Prime Minister, and the Foreign Minister (whether they represent the same political camp or are in a cohabitation arrangement).
- (2) *International factors* – connected to the state of the global environment. Presidential activity tends to increase during times of crisis, tension, or threat, especially in the country’s immediate neighbourhood.
- (3) *Subjective factors* – such as the President’s knowledge and understanding of international affairs, authority on such matters both domestically and internationally, interpersonal skills, and even foreign language proficiency.

The diplomatic activity of the head of state is undoubtedly one of the key indicators of a state’s engagement in international relations. However, the thesis put forward by Z.J. Pietraś in the introduction was not confirmed by the actual practice of diplomacy at the highest level by Polish Presidents after 1989. If we were to simplify and assume that the first years following the 1989 transformation represented a period of “childhood”, and that post-2004 Poland entered a phase of “maturity”, then the most intensive use of high-level special missions in Polish diplomacy occurred during the period of “adolescence” — as Poland worked towards stabilisation within European and Euro-Atlantic structures. For this reason, President Kwaśniewski’s term was marked by a significant increase in international activity. His international engagement index remains the highest — both in comparison to Presidents serving during the country’s “childhood” and those during its “adulthood”.

Ethics and consent

Ethical approval and consent were not required.

Data availability

The data for this article consists of bibliographic references, which are included in the References section. We agree to make freely available all of the data and materials supporting the results or analyses in your paper, under an open licence permitting reuse.