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## **POLAND AND THE GROWING IMPORTANCE OF THE GLOBAL SOUTH COUNTRIES**

### **Introduction**

The global economy and international order have undergone tremendous changes in the 21st century. Following Fukuyama's „end of history” and the hyperglobalisation of the 1990s, the Western world was shaken by numerous crises – the bursting of the „dotcom” bubble, the American war on terror following the attack on the World Trade Center, and the global financial crisis gradually undermined the rest of the world’s faith in the supremacy of the Western economic and social model. In response to the weakening of the Western world, there was an intensification of cooperation among countries expressing dissatisfaction with the existing model of the global economy, which was clearly demonstrated by the creation of the BRICS format by the governments of Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa in 2009. Since then, despite many differences in their policies, these countries have become the voice of the Global South, seeking to limit Western dominance over the global economy and to take into account the needs of developing countries.

The countries of the Global South, on the other hand, face numerous problems, three of which seem to be particularly important. The first is related to the negative effects of climate change, which will be most strongly felt by developing countries. The second issue is related to growing geopolitical tensions, which disrupt the flow of goods, services and capital, which in turn limits the development opportunities of countries in the Global South. Finally, the third aspect relates to digitalisation and technological progress, requiring capital investments that exceed the capacity of most developing countries, contributing to further growth in development inequalities, economic backwardness and social unrest.

The problems plaguing the Global South coincide with its growing importance in the global economy. In the context of Asian countries, this is primarily related to their unprecedented economic development. Africa, although unfortunately still unable to overcome its barriers and development challenges, will experience extremely dynamic population growth. In relation to Latin American countries, it is worth mentioning the rich deposits of strategic raw materials found in the countries of this region. All of this makes establishing diplomatic, economic and cultural relations with the countries of the Global South an increasingly important issue.

In addition to these issues, recent years have also seen dynamic economic development in Poland, whose growing economic and political potential necessitates it taking a more active role on the international stage. Thus far, Polish foreign policy has largely focused on European and transatlantic issues, ignoring trends related to the Global South.

In light of the above observations, the main aim of this article is to discuss the potential for intensification of Polish relations with the countries of the Global South. This is done by highlighting similarities, converging interests and factors that distinguish Poland positively from Western countries. To this end, research methods such as literature analysis, stylised facts (Boland 2008), as well as conceptual and interpretivist reasoning (Carson et al. 2001) were used. The main sources used include scientific literature, secondary statistical data but also press and think-tank reports, due to the relatively low coverage of the discussed issues in economic literature.

The text is divided into three parts. The first deals with the aforementioned challenges from the perspective of the Global South. The second part concerns the growing importance of developing countries, highlighting the most important trends for each region and their main implications. The third part discusses selected factors conducive to the intensification of Poland's economic and cultural relations with the countries of the Global South, with particular emphasis on development and security initiatives, arguing for the possibility of building Polish soft power on the international stage by acting as a „spokesperson for the European Union” among developing countries.

### **Selected issues facing countries in the Global South**

In recent years, Western scientific and media discourse has increasingly reflected a conviction that fundamental changes are taking place in the functioning of the international order. The withdrawal of the

United States from its role as global hegemon (Kimmage 2025), the resurgence of rivalry between superpowers (O'Neil 2025) and the relative weakening of democratic systems around the world are undermining the existing order based on international cooperation, the liberalisation of the movement of goods, capital and people, and the democratisation of societies. In this context, there is also frequent mention of the countries of the Global South, which are allegedly turning away from cooperation with the Western world, tempted in particular by specific development proposals offered by Beijing (Miliband 2023). This process began after the global financial crisis of 2007-2009 (Holmes & Krastev 2020) and accelerated during the first term of US President Donald Trump from 2016 to 2020 (Eyal 2021), the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine, as a result of which developing countries began to more boldly postulate their aspirations for increased multilateralism in international relations.

This is linked to the intensification of numerous processes, challenges and problems throughout the 21st century, which are redefining the existing debate on globalisation. In the context of developing countries, climate change, geopolitical tensions and digitalisation are particularly important. These countries have limited capacity to counteract the negative effects of these trends, which contributes to their further economic backwardness, growing development inequalities and social tensions (Hązła 2025a).

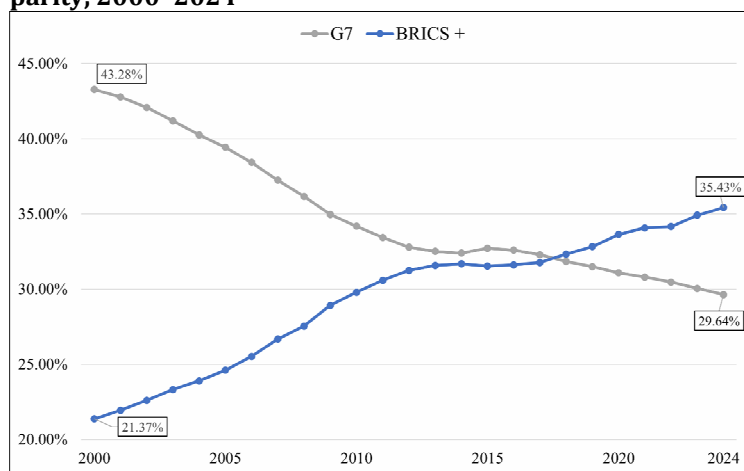
The issue of climate change is often the subject of heated debate in developed countries, which is due to the still relatively low intensity of its consequences in the northern hemisphere. Since the end of the 19th century, the average annual temperature on Earth has risen by about 1-1.5 degrees Celsius, and in Europe this has so far been associated with a several-fold increase in the number of days per year considered „hot” (with temperatures exceeding 30°C) and an increase in the frequency of extreme weather conditions. However, for countries in the Global South, climate warming will mean very severe processes, sometimes threatening their very existence. If no action is taken to combat climate change, by around 2070 up to one third of the world's population will experience temperatures comparable to those currently found in the Sahara, making almost all of sub-Saharan Africa, Brazil, India and the Middle East uninhabitable.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Apocalyptic visions propagated by, among others, the IPCC are increasingly being questioned and are not confirmed by research conducted by centers independent of

Another issue is the growing geopolitical tensions that disrupt the flow of goods and capital, limiting the development opportunities of countries in the Global South. Since the global financial crisis of 2007-2009, there has been increased criticism of the Western liberal socio-economic model, which became the main argument for the creation of the BRICS format in 2009 by the governments of Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa (Sawicka 2011). Despite their often divergent goals, the growing geopolitical ambitions of the BRICS<sup>2</sup> countries have also coincided with a powerful shift in the structure of global GDP (Fig. 1). At the beginning of the 21st century, the share of the G7 countries in global GDP according to purchasing power parity was more than twice that of the BRICS Plus countries. In 2018, however, the BRICS Plus countries overtook the G7, and since then the gap has continued to widen in their favour.

**Fig. 1: Share of G7 and BRICS Plus countries in global GDP by purchasing power parity, 2000–2024**



Source: Own elaboration based on Statista (<https://www.statista.com/statistics/1412425/gdp-ppp-share-world-gdp-g7-brics/2025>) (17.12.2025)

institutions advocating the need to reduce CO<sub>2</sub> emissions and develop solar and wind energy. Natural climate fluctuations have both positive and negative effects, and according to Nobel Prize winner William Nordhaus, even a rise in temperature of 2°C will not have catastrophic consequences (W. Nordhaus, *Projections and Uncertainties About Climate Change in an Era of Minimal Climate Policies*, American Economic Journal: Economic Policy, vol. 10, no. 3, 2018, pp. 333-360; see also: W. Wilczyński, *Rola fizyków we współczesnej wojnie informacyjnej*, Przegląd Geopolityczny, 50, 2024, pp. 157-174) [editor's note].

<sup>2</sup> In 2024–2025, the format expanded to include Egypt, Ethiopia, Indonesia, Iran and the United Arab Emirates, leading to the organisation being unofficially renamed „BRICS Plus”.

In this context, it is hardly surprising that the common reaction of Western societies has been to resort to protectionist and sometimes nationalist rhetoric. The subsequent revision of numerous American commitments and cooperation formats, the trade war with China, the COVID-19 pandemic, have contributed to a permanent shift in the neoliberal paradigm which has shaped the global economy over the last decades, as a result of which both American and Chinese policy makers have become determined to reduce the economic interdependence of the two countries that has been built up over previous decades. All this contributes to the regionalisation of the global economy and, unfortunately, to the phenomenon of growing ideological polarisation between emerging regions. Increasingly, the flow of goods and capital is dependent on political sympathies, significantly limiting the development opportunities for countries in the Global South. In the face of geopolitical tensions, it is therefore increasingly difficult for small and medium-sized countries to avoid the consequences of geopolitical rivalry between superpowers – in particular between the United States and China, which are building a network of dependencies in formal, political and economic terms that is strikingly reminiscent of the Cold War „spheres of influence” (Hązła 2025b).

Finally, digital transformation is also an important issue. Progressive digitisation offers growing opportunities to develop technological solutions that can significantly influence the shaping of production structures, employment, international cooperation and the entire process of globalisation. Solutions such as AI, work automation, telemigration, 3D printing, the Internet of Things and quantum technologies can improve the quality of life of societies through many channels, including both government programmes and private initiatives (Manyika et al. 2017; Baldwin 2020). However, also in this case, the countries of the Global South are doomed to unequal competition (Lewicki 2024). This is primarily due to the economies of scale achieved by key data storage and processing centres, the vast majority of which are located in Europe, North America and East Asia. At the beginning of 2025, there were approximately 11,800 data centres worldwide, of which 5,400 (46%) were operated by the United States, 2,500 (21%) by the European Union and Canada, 1,500 (13%) by developed countries in East Asia and Oceania, while only 2,200 (19%) by the rest of the world.

This means that most data flows take place exclusively between developed countries, almost completely bypassing the Global South.<sup>3</sup>

### **The growing importance of the Global South**

The problems affecting the Global South coincide with its growing importance in the global economy, the latter proven by authors such as Sułek & Szymala (2024); Ostasz & Surowiec (2025). Traditionally, three key regions are mentioned: Asia and Oceania, Africa, and Latin America. Due to the limited scope of this article, each region is discussed with a focus on one key idea related to the most important trend affecting its position on the international stage. In the case of Asian countries, this is their unprecedented economic development and its consequences for the structure of global trade, production and consumption. For Africa, on the other hand, the focus is primarily on dynamic population growth and the associated challenges, but also opportunities. For Latin America, the key factor is access to vast reserves of raw materials necessary to carry out the energy transition.

As a result of increased outsourcing of production following the end of the Cold War, Asian countries became industrial subcontractors for developed Western countries. Although China welcomed most of the capital flowing in from the West, it was not alone – South Korea, India, Indonesia and Thailand also played an important role. Between 1990 and 2022, their share in global industrial production increased from 5% to 29%, and their share in global GDP from 5% to 25% (Hązła & Mińska-Struzik 2023). Although in recent years there have been increasing opinions and forecasts that China's economic growth will slow down significantly due to structural problems in its economy, countries such as India, Indonesia, Vietnam, the Philippines and Bangladesh still face the prospect of dynamic development. This is one of the reasons why Asian countries are expected to account for over 50% of global GDP by 2050 (PWC 2017). The consequence of growing GDP is also the growing wealth of Asian countries and, consequently, a further shift in the structure of global consumption. In 2015, Asian consumers accounted for 36% of global middle-class spending, but by the middle of the century their share could reach as much as 57% (Kharas 2017). One of the most striking manifestations of this trend is the share of Chinese consumers in

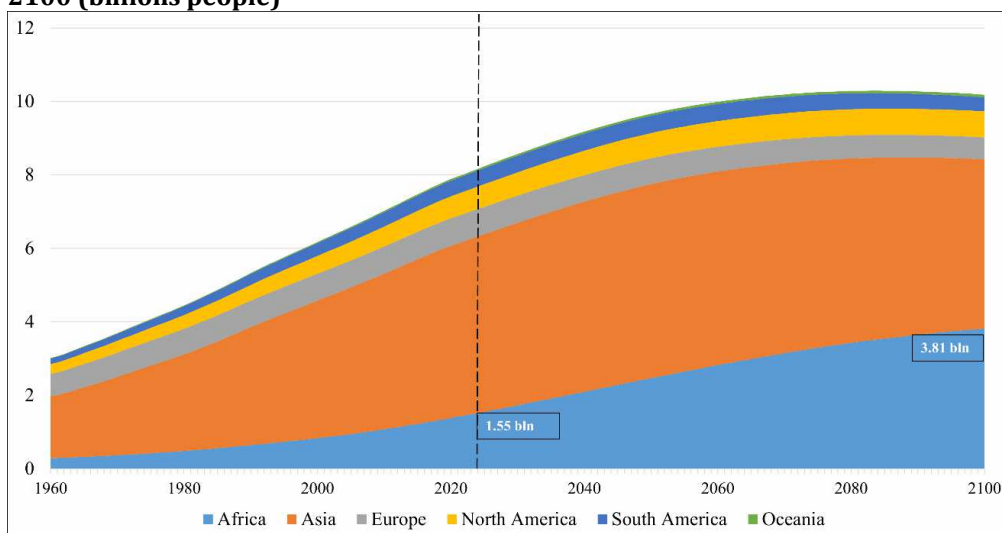
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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.visualcapitalist.com/ranked-the-top-25-countries-with-the-most-data-centers/>; <https://unctad.org/news/digitally-deliverable-services-boom-risks-leaving-least-developed-countries-behind> (9.12.2025)

global spending on luxury goods, which rose from 1% to 33% between 2000 and 2020, and may reach as much as 40% by 2030 (Fan et al. 2024).

In the context of Africa, demographic issues remain the most important. In 2025, Africa was home to approximately 1.5 billion people, accounting for 18% of the total global population of approximately 8.2 billion. However, it is predicted that by the end of the century, the human population will reach as many as 10.2 billion, with Africa accounting for most of this increase, with a population of up to 3.8 billion, or 38% of humanity (Fig. 2).<sup>4</sup> Africa's demographic growth trend will coincide with an intensification of factors conducive to emigration from the continent, including climate change, urbanisation, differences in wealth and development levels, and growing diasporas, which will contribute to increasing migratory pressure towards Europe (Lindenberg 2019).

**Figure 2: Population of world regions in 1960–2025 and projections for 2025–2100 (billions people)**



Source: Own elaboration based on <https://ourworldindata.org/region-population-2100>.

However, as a result of its growing population, Africa is also currently the youngest continent in the world – the median age among Africans is only around 18, compared to 31 in Asia, 35 in North America and 42 in Europe.<sup>5</sup> Thanks to its young, entrepreneurial and resourceful

<sup>4</sup> <https://ourworldindata.org/region-population-2100> (19.12.2025)

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.visualcapitalist.com/mapped-the-median-age-of-every-continent/> (19.12.2025)

population, Africa is seeing a growing number of initiatives, start-ups and businesses adapted to regional conditions. These include sectors such as renewable energy (particularly photovoltaics), the development of blockchain and Internet of Things technologies, 3D printing, biotechnology and fintech, attracting increasing amounts of capital – in 2023, more than USD 2.5 billion was invested in African start-ups, mainly in Kenya (USD 800 million), Egypt (USD 640 million), South Africa (USD 600 million) and Nigeria (USD 400 million).<sup>6</sup>

Latin America's key role in the global economy will, in turn, be linked to the substantial deposits of critical raw materials found in the region's countries. In its latest act on critical raw materials from 2024, the European Union identified a list of 34 raw materials for which demand is expected to grow exponentially in the coming decades. Latin America has deposits of 25 of these raw materials, including 94.1% of the world's niobium reserves, 56.7% of lithium, 36.3% of copper, 27.5% of natural graphite and 24.3% of fluorite.

In this context, it is also worth mentioning the conclusion of negotiations on a free trade agreement between the European Union and Mercosur in December 2024. This will make it easier for European entities to establish capital cooperation with Latin American partners, enabling them to co-create value chains related to the processing of critical raw materials (Znojek 2023).

### **Opportunities for Poland to intensify relations with the Global South countries**

According to data from the International Monetary Fund, at the end of 2025 Poland became the 20th largest economy in the world, exceeding the USD 1 trillion GDP barrier (*World Economic...*, 2025). Poland's growing economic potential and the exhaustion of the current model based on catching up with Western technology necessitate greater interest in the country's active participation on the international stage (Bagiński 2024). At the same time, Poland is characterised by a number of factors conducive to its increased integration with the countries of the Global South, including (Piątkowski 2023; Stefan 2023; Hązła 2024):

- 1) The history of Poland's economic success after the political transformation, which is an attractive inspiration for policy makers in developing countries,

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<sup>6</sup> <https://growthafrica.com/african-startup-funding-landscape-analysis/> (19.12.2025)

- 2) Experiences related to living in the shadow of aggressive powers, manifested through occupation during the partitions or forced integration with the Soviet bloc,
- 3) The lack of a colonial history, which allows for a better understanding of the countries of the Global South, still struggling with the infamous legacy of colonialism,
- 4) Belief in anti-imperialism, legalism and the conviction of the sovereignty and equality of states,
- 5) The need to develop a new development model, taking into account the diminishing benefits of technological catch-up and the risk of falling into the so-called „middle-income trap”,
- 6) An ethos of entrepreneurship and hard work that can inspire developing economies,
- 7) The legacy of prominent figures, such as Fryderyk Chopin, who is popular in Asia, Maria Skłodowska-Curie, who can inspire the emancipation of women in Africa, Pope John Paul II, who is still important in Latin America and for the growing number of Christians in sub-Saharan Africa, or Robert Lewandowski, a role model for many young people in Latin American countries.

They constitute a „package” that strongly credibilises Poland among the countries of the Global South as an authentic partner that does not perceive them as „pawns in a bigger game” and, at the same time, has no great power ambitions. What is more, these factors are perfectly in line with the agenda of developing countries on the international stage. This is because they promote the so-called ‘third generation of human rights’, which includes issues such as the right to development, the right to security, the right to share in the heritage of humanity, and the right to peace, which is a prerequisite for socio-economic development (Beall 2022). All this necessitates an interest in the issues of developing countries in the activities of Polish diplomacy, whose efforts have so far focused primarily on European and transatlantic affairs (Dębski 2024).<sup>7</sup>

In this context, it can be argued that Poland's „offer” to the countries of the Global South should primarily concern development initiatives, as well as selected initiatives in the field of broadly understood security.<sup>8</sup> In order to develop a detailed strategy, it would be

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<sup>7</sup> [https://klubjagiellonski.pl/2025/10/23/polska-powinna-walczyz-o-globalne-poludnie-tonasz-interes-i-odpowiedzialnosc/\(19.12.2025\)](https://klubjagiellonski.pl/2025/10/23/polska-powinna-walczyz-o-globalne-poludnie-tonasz-interes-i-odpowiedzialnosc/(19.12.2025))

<sup>8</sup> <https://forsal.pl/biznes/aktualnosc/wideo/9612874,globalne-poludnie-szansa-na-nowe-kierunki-rozwoju-dla-polski.html> (24.12.2025)

necessary to analyse Poland's historical, current and potential economic, cultural and political relations with individual countries of the Global South, which is also an interesting direction for further research.<sup>9</sup>

In relations with East Asian and South-East Asian countries, it will therefore be worthwhile to focus on issues related to the intensification of trade and capital exchange, but also cultural exchange, which results from the dynamic economic development of the region and its growing potential. This refers to activities such as:

- 1) Participation in EU negotiations on free trade agreements with Indonesia, India, Thailand, the Philippines and Malaysia to prevent them from being dominated by traditional European export economies,
- 2) Concluding bilateral agreements on trade in selected product groups, enabling investment in sectors related to digitalisation, green technologies, infrastructure and food processing,
- 3) Expanding the network of Polish Institutes in Asia and striving to increase the recognition of the Polish national brand, which is a valuable resource in Asian countries focused on close business relations.

With regard to Africa, initiatives aimed at improving the functioning of state institutions and supporting human capital development may prove crucial, such as:

- 4) Invitations for the most talented Africans to participate in leadership schools, study at universities or take part in a new college dedicated to the education of the African elite, drawing on existing experience from the 1970s,
- 5) Support for African women through training, educational programmes, or by sharing inspiring memories, stories and experiences,
- 6) Careful and controlled opening up to immigration of skilled and qualified workers and entrepreneurs, which will enable the exchange of ideas, increase economic innovation and potentially help mitigate the effects of the demographic gap in the labour market.

Finally, in the context of Latin America, initiatives supporting infrastructure expansion and the development of the sector related to the extraction, processing and use of critical raw materials could be a good idea, including:

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<sup>9</sup> <https://www.money.pl/gospodarka/jakie-sa-polskie-priorytety-na-globalnym-poludniu-relacja-z-krynica-forum-2024-7073099673025440a.html> (19.12.2025)

- 7) Exploiting the opportunities offered by the negotiated agreement between the EU and Mercosur, in particular in terms of access to public procurement markets and supporting the process of constructive privatisation and reform of state-owned enterprises, drawing on Poland's experience of transformation,
- 8) Intensifying trade in products and cooperation on projects related to the mining, agricultural, medical, IT and green technology sectors,
- 9) It might also be worth considering expanding KGHM's activities to the lithium market, taking advantage of the support offered by the EU's Global Gateway initiative.

In addition, in the context of security cooperation with countries of the Global South, particular attention should be paid to issues such as investment in energy and digital transformation, countering disinformation, radicalisation and terrorism, supporting regional integration within international organisations and their cooperation with the European Union and NATO, and strengthening the resilience of societies and state institutions, which helps to protect against many of the challenges of the modern global economy described above. These are also issues that have already been addressed in the seven pillars of security proposed during the Polish Presidency of the Council of the EU.<sup>10</sup>

Despite the opportunities outlined above, the intensification of cooperation between Poland and the countries of the Global South may encounter several significant barriers. First, limited institutional capacity and diplomatic infrastructure constitute a structural constraint. Polish foreign policy apparatus remains heavily focused on European and transatlantic affairs, while diplomatic presence, development instruments, and trade promotion mechanisms in many regions of Africa, Latin America and Southeast Asia remain comparatively underdeveloped (Dębski 2024). Second, asymmetries in economic scale and financial instruments may reduce Poland's competitiveness vis-à-vis larger actors. In contrast to China's Belt and Road Initiative, the United States' development finance architecture, or even the EU's Global Gateway framework, Poland lacks autonomous large-scale financing tools capable of underwriting major infrastructure or industrial projects. This risks positioning Poland as a secondary or subcontracting actor rather than a strategic partner (Miliband 2023). Third, geopolitical polarisation and

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<https://polish-presidency.consilium.europa.eu/pl/program/priorytety-prezydencji//24.12.2025>

bloc competition create a structurally constrained environment for middle powers. As noted earlier, intensifying rivalry between the US and China as well as consolidation of BRICS+ format reduce the maneuvering space for smaller states. In this context countries of the Global South increasingly pursue hedging strategies rather than alignment. Poland's strong anchoring in NATO and the EU, while a source of credibility, may simultaneously limit its perceived autonomy in the eyes of partners seeking diversification rather than alignment with Western geopolitical agendas. Fourth, normative and perception gaps may undermine trust. Although Poland does not possess a colonial legacy, it remains institutionally embedded in the European Union, which is sometimes perceived in parts of the Global South as protectionist, regulatory-heavy, and selectively normative. Finally, structural instability in parts of the Global South, including fragile institutions, conflict risks, regulatory unpredictability and corruption, may discourage Polish private sector engagement. Polish firms, which are still in the process of international expansion, may avoid higher risk profiles of developing economies, thereby limiting economic deepening beyond declarative diplomacy.

Taken together, these factors suggest that successful engagement requires not only identifying converging interests, but also building institutional capacity, ensuring policy coherence within the EU framework, developing tailored financial instruments, and adopting a long-term strategic approach resilient to geopolitical volatility.

## **Conclusions**

In view of the growing importance of the countries of the Global South, Poland's increasing need to take a more active role on the international stage, and numerous factors conducive to cooperation, intensifying relations with developing countries seems to be a good direction for Polish foreign policy in the coming years. For Poland, this would mean the opportunity to diversify its portfolio of economic partners who would accept Polish capital and undertake joint development, cultural and broadly understood security initiatives, enabling the modification of the current development model. For the countries of the Global South, this would in turn be an opportunity to strengthen cooperation with both Poland and the European Union as a whole. Negotiated free trade agreements, increased trade, capital, cultural and scientific exchange, and cooperation in innovative sectors could accelerate the technological advancement of developing economies. Finally, for the European Union itself, this would open up the

possibility of diversified access to critical raw materials necessary to carry out the energy transition and become independent of Russian fossil fuels. It is also an opportunity to mitigate the effects of ageing populations through smart migration policies that harness the potential of the most talented Africans, Latin Americans and Asians.

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