

France/Georges Mink: Neither Poland nor France will give way in the way they see values

"The meeting of Presidents Andrzej Duda and Emmanuel Macron was an opportunity to reduce tension in relations between the two countries, which allows for the development of new fields of understanding. However, neither Poland nor France will give way in the way of seeing values – says Prof. Georges Mink, an expert on Polish-French relations, head of the .B. Geremek Chair at the College of Europe in Natolin.

"The technical revisit of President Andrzej Duda turned into a working visit with talks about the rule of law and the crisis in Poland-EU relations, investments and security. Poland received President Macron very nicely a year and a half ago in Warsaw and Krakow, and President Macron received President Duda very nicely, the expert comments.

"Two positions, i.e. the French position on the rule of law in Poland and the Polish position on the sovereignty of the state on the reform of the judiciary or the superiority of the constitution over European law, remain unchanged after the meeting," said the head of the .B Geremek Chair at the College of Europe.

"The presidents locked themselves in the Elysée Palace and frankly discussed, which does not mean that this sincerity has surfaced in the external communications, because despite raising difficult topics, it is not about inciting public opinion with them," Mink says.

"Polish-French relations will continue and will be friendly. There will be dialogue, and it is in the interest of both sides not to block it; the economic development and well-being of the populations of both countries," Mink said.

When asked about the support given to Poland by the presidential candidates in next year's elections in France regarding the verdict of the Constitutional Tribunal, the PAP interlocutor stated that: "Each of the politicians submits to the assessment of his words and deeds during the elections."

"Poland may appear in next year's presidential elections in France because of Poland's orientation towards the French extreme right. For the French side, i.e. about 80 percent. of the political class, not the population, this is absolutely incomprehensible."

"Looking at Poland, we see the alliance of the extreme right concluded in the EP between Le Pen, PiS, Vox or Orban, who has a similar position both on the

CJEU-Constitutional Tribunal conflict or on the vision of Europe to create a Europe of nations or homelands. This is a reservoir of future conflicts" - the expert believes.

"The purchasing element of Polish in France (nuclear, energy, weapons) is an element of politics and can be a bargaining chip: something for something. However, there are boundaries that are difficult to cross, because there is a threat of being accused of cynicism" - believes Mink.

According to the advisor to the French side, France is interested in investing in Poland in relations with Poland, because Poland has the strength to be a huge market."

"A subtle game is, for example, to work out a compromise on nuclear investments, mainly in small nuclear reactors, where France could compete with the Americans," Mink said, adding that "France could become a more interesting partner for Poland if the U.S. supports Germany and the NordStream2 gas pipeline too much."

"Certainly, a lot of room for cooperation lies in the economy, which also gives Polish companies a chance, although France has been very protectionist since de Gaulle, but it will be even more so if Poland remains with the alliance with Le Pen, which has economically extravagant ideas that do not correspond to the policy of Poland just like the fact that Le Pen is pro-Russian," Mink stressed.

"Marine le Pen does not fit in with what Poland is geopolitically. The meeting between Prime Minister Morawiecki and Le Pen irritated the cabinets, although the French government has not officially spoken about it. She is not a partner for the Polish government, let's look at the history of her party" - the expert believes.

Asked about the far-right leader's chances of winning next year's election, Mink said he didn't know if Le Pen would win, but "we are dealing with a lot of social frustration over the state of the French economy, which is not in a bad situation, but factors such as rising energy prices, covid and restrictions are causing a high degree of discontent. Macron, however, has the backing of France's large and medium-sized industry and is pursuing a smart health policy. But we can't predict how the campaign will ultimately turn out."

Asked about the frequent criticism of Poland by the French Secretary of State for European Affairs Clement Beaune, Mink noted that: "In the Elysée Palace, politics is made on the basis of pragmatism related to the balance of power in

the EU and the interests of France, and Minister Beaune, criticizing Poland, says what is on his heart."

"I am not surprised by the critical comments on the part of both countries, whether Beaune on 'LGBT-free zones in Poland' or Jaroslaw Kaczynski on 'Sharia' in the suburbs of cities in France.' In life, it is already the case that some criticize each other, and leaders have their own opinions about countries in the EU, we live in a world where there is freedom of expression. The point is not to break off relations, but to express an opinion in the name of freedom of expression," Mink said.

Asked about France's reaction to President Duda's declaration on the participation of Polish in the Takuba action in Africa, the expert stated that "all acts of military assistance are useful. France has many military problems in Africa. There is a lot of pressure from Russia, which brutally goes to Africa, just like China. Americans practice isolationism."

"In this geopolitical system, alliances that would guard the sovereignty and democracy of African countries are advisable and France cares about it. The declaration Polish support for Operation Takuba's operations in Africa has been well received, even if it is only a declaration for the time being, but Poland has shown that it participates in alliances, sacrifices its troops and is operationally capable of doing so," Mink added.

"Poland is a symbolically important country for the French because of its history and economic ties. The French have always accepted Polish refugees according to the Geneva Convention as politically persecuted," the expert concluded.

Prof. Georges Mink is head of the B. Geremek Chair at the College of Europe (Natolin-Warsaw) and director emeritus of research at the CNRS (Institute of Political Social Sciences) and chairman of ICCEES (International Council for Central and Eastern European Studies). He occasionally advises the French side; he was a member of President Emmanuel Macron's delegation during his visit to Poland in 2020.