

# THE POSSIBILITY OF RECONCILIATION IN POLISH-RUSSIAN RELATIONS

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## *Abstract*

The article provides an overview of public debates on Polish-Russian reconciliation after the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Katyn crime. It is argued that, in practice, at the core of the issue is the development of a certain *modus vivendi* which could make it possible to move beyond historical disputes and begin a pragmatic normalisation of bilateral relations. The author states that Poland is making significant reassessments of its policy towards Russia. However, getting rid of the historical trauma does not have to mean that mutual relations will become less problematic instantaneously. As the author argues, the process of reconciliation in Polish-Russian relations requires a systematic dialogue and normalisation. The main features of this dialogue are flexibility of thinking and awareness of a common goal. The dialogue fosters the development of situational partnership and informational ties. These in turn translate into normalisation of mutual relations. Normalisation implies a levelling of mutual relations, or bringing them back to the state commonly called normality. Therefore, the issue is centred on the introduction of transparent rules of the game, unification of criteria for the assessment of the interests of the parties, and stabilisation of contacts, making them routine and as frequent as mutually acceptable. The author argues that the reconciliation process requires at least three complementary undertakings: 1) accommodation and mutual restraint; 2) rapprochement on the level of societies; 3) development of a community of interests and values.

## **1. Psychological and geopolitical determinants**

In the context of the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Katyn crime, the notion of Polish-Russian reconciliation has appeared, somewhat prematurely, in the public debate. The Smolensk disaster has accelerated the process of rhetorical fine-tuning of the goal on both sides. In practice, it has more to do with the development of a certain *modus vivendi* which could make it possible to move beyond historical disputes and begin a pragmatic normalisation of bilateral

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relations<sup>1</sup>. The essence of the process would be the establishment by the states and nations of principles of living together (cooperation and coexistence) - close to each other, yet differing significantly, with diverse preferences and systems of values, but at the same time allowing for a peaceful resolution of fundamental disputes.

The Katyn crime, due to its circumstances, premeditation and involvement of the Stalinist authorities, is counted among the most atrocious war crimes. However, it is not a one-of-a-kind, unique crime, either in the World War II period, or ever since. Its special character consists of a sustained and intensive influence on Polish policy and relations with Russia, which is a phenomenon difficult to understand in the West. There, such war disasters have long been forgotten and reconciliation achieved. In Poland, all the political forces see the Katyn crime as an inexhaustible source of inspiration to build the identity of a victim and a never relieved suffering<sup>2</sup>.

The topic of Katyn as a Stalinist mass murder concealed for decades puts the complexity of historical Polish-Russian relations in focus. Russia and its citizens have never passed through a phase of such historical reassessments that would allow them to look at the sins of the past from the perspective of their own political responsibility. Russia has lacked politicians and moral authorities who could make a heroic and clear-cut assessment of the past, pointing, above all, to the communist crimes perpetrated on their own people. Then it would be easier to recognise the crimes of the Stalinist regime against the Polish people.

The Russian collective identity supplants Katyn also because there were such monstrous repressions in the Stalinist period in the USSR that in comparison to them the Katyn crime is perceived as a relatively insignificant episode. A crucial mistake here – in the view of sociologist Lev Gudkov – is a failure to take the Polish perspective into consideration, or a refusal to acknowledge the huge importance of Katyn for Polish national identity<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> L. Mażewski, *Polsko-rosyjski modus vivendi*, "Arcana" 2010, nr 4, p. 57 and further.

<sup>2</sup> R.J. Hunter, *Katyn: Old Issues Threaten Polish-Russian Economic and Political Relations*, "European Journal of Social Sciences" 2010, nr 2, p. 288-297.

<sup>3</sup> *Polska przestała interesować Rosjan. Rozmowa z Lwem Gudkowem*, "Europa. Magazyn Idei Newsweeka", April 2010, nr 4 (289)/2010.

### **1.1. Psychological determinants**

The mutual relations between Poland and Russia are still conditioned by a certain aberration in the perception of the latter. Poles clearly overrate Russia. They do it often – aside from other determinants – because of their irrational fear. It has become the main factor determining the definition of Poland's security. In the case of Poles, the sources of fear undoubtedly lie in the geopolitical position; but they also extend to history and psychology. It appears that the essence of the phenomenon of fear is well-conveyed by a description from Paul Tillich, a German-born American theologian, who defined it as a “painful feeling of being unable to deal with a threat to a specific situation”<sup>4</sup>.

Experts on security issues perceive one type of relationship between the reality and psychology which translates into security and is adequate to Poland's situation. It is a state of obsession, when a relatively minor threat is perceived as big. As a result, it produces alarmist tones in security policy<sup>5</sup>. The example of political elites (as it is hard to say whether the society as a whole) makes it clear that security is a consequence of the perception of threats coming from the external environment, but through the prism of their emotional reception. Some negatively evaluated phenomena have the character of challenges rather than threats. They express events or processes that have occurred or could occur in the future and are marked by a lack of clarity regarding their content, including likely effects. Their proper assessment makes it possible to interpret them as either opportunities or threats. It seems that, in the case of Polish decision makers, the distinction between these categories is missing. Threats from Russia are demonised, including the military one, which was supposed to be demonstrated by the 2008 Georgian War<sup>6</sup>.

In the sphere of psychological and emotional determinants, complexes attesting to Polish feelings of inferiority, even a peculiar provincialism, come to the fore. Fomenting them has become a speciality of various political groups and mass media. That is not to say that the complex of Russia is held by the whole of Poland. Watching the growing interest in scientific cooperation and

<sup>4</sup> Quoted from: F. Ryszka, *Nauka o polityce. Rozważania metodologiczne*, Warszawa 1984, p. 112.

<sup>5</sup> R. Zięba, *Pozimnowojenny paradygmat bezpieczeństwa międzynarodowego*, in: R. Zięba (ed.), *Bezpieczeństwo międzynarodowe po zimnej wojnie*, Wydawnictwa Akademickie i Profesjonalne, Warszawa 2008, p. 15-39.

<sup>6</sup> C. Ochmann, *Geopolityka a Europa Wschodnia*, “Nowa Europa Wschodnia” 2009, nr 5, p. 22.

student exchange with Russia, it can be said that through establishing contacts, the young generation of Poles is getting increasingly attracted to Russia and Russians. Young Poles neither hold any particular grudges against young Russians, nor demonstrate any special complexes – be they of estrangement or superiority. And this is the most important change that is occurring at the social level, which augurs well for the future of mutual relations.

The complex of Russia is part of the so-called Polish complex, which Poles have grappled with for ages<sup>7</sup>. It is a question of the geopolitical position at the junction of East and West, of the defense of national and religious identity. The complex has its sources stretching as far back as the Jagiellonian era. It comes from the geopolitical rivalry of two great empires of the time – Poland and Russia. Rzeczpospolita (Commonwealth) lost that rivalry, particularly from the end of the Great Northern War (1700-1721) onwards, falling into dependence from Russia. Then the complex started growing and was aggravated by the partitions and the successive, failed insurgent uprisings in the 19th century. The 20th century brought about a long series of tragic experiences – the war against the Bolsheviks, the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact, the Katyn crime and the extermination of Polish population from Poland's territories seized by the USSR in 1939, the Soviet Army's failure to act in the light of the Warsaw Uprising, and finally, the 40-year-long domination and subjugation which completed the sources of animosities and grievances. At the level of societies, however, quite a bit of mutual, well-wishing interest, even sympathy, has remained<sup>8</sup>. The popularity of Polish culture in the USSR was a phenomenon that merely cannot be erased or subjected to any corrective revision stemming from present-day ideological assumptions. Poles and Russians share Slavic

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<sup>7</sup> As a result of the division between Rome and Byzantium, a line of religious and cultural division emerged that has been recognised as the most enduring civilisational border of the European continent. "Poland found itself in a western-eastern location; as Sławomir Mrożek describes it ironically: to the east from the West and to the west from the East. However, it mostly sought – through the thoughts of its intellectuals and popular representation – to tip the scales in favour of the »West« and dissociate itself from the »East«". M. Janion, *Niesamowita Słowiańszczyzna. Fantazmaty literatury*, Wydawnictwo Literackie, Kraków 2006, p. 11.

<sup>8</sup> "Some in the Polish elite speak Russian, value Russian culture, but fear the Muscovite state and its imperialism. Representatives of the Russian intelligentsia admire Polish art and desire for freedom – but they complain about their hubris". J. Voswinkel, *Zwei Vettern brauchen einen Therapeuten*, "Die Zeit" from 7 April 2011.

origins, likings and converging characters (for example, attachment to tradition, hospitality, sensitivity and emotionality, sentimentality, following instincts, pride and honour). Our historical connotations are similar, though the historical memory is different; our desires for peace, love, and the good are similar, though the reasons are different; the cultural and civilisational bonds are similar, though different religions prevail<sup>9</sup>.

Poland and Poles now face a historical opportunity to endure reorientation and become embedded in Western structures. Getting rid of anti-Russian phobias will certainly take quite some time, but there is no other way than a return to normality - if not close cooperation, then at least sympathetic indifference.

## **1.2. Geopolitical determinants**

The past 20 years have been full of political transformations – first and foremost, Polish foreign policy has undergone a reorientation from an imposed subordination to a full integration within Western structures. But regardless of the deep geopolitical changes, Russia has not lost its significance in Polish foreign policy. It remains in a sustained system of complex geopolitical dependencies<sup>10</sup>. For this reason, any decision maker must have courage, intuition, but also draw on relevant knowledge to cope with challenges. In fact, it is not geopolitics, but rather the balance of power (or more precisely, its asymmetry and imbalance) that determines Poland's relations with the two biggest neighbours to the east and west – Russia and Germany<sup>11</sup>. Russian neo-imperialism and German ambitions to politically, economically and culturally influence the

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<sup>9</sup> See. M. Dobroczyński (ed.), *Polacy i Rosjanie. Czynniki zbliżenia*, Centrum Badań Wschodnich UW-Wydawnictwo Adam Marszałek, Warszawa-Toruń 1998; A. de Lazari, T. Rongińska (ed.), *Polacy i Rosjanie. Przewyciężanie uprzedzeń*, Ibidem, Łódź 2006.

<sup>10</sup> T. Orłowski, *Geopolityka polska*, in: C. Jean, *Geopolityka*, Wrocław 2003, p. 361-390.

<sup>11</sup> Lech Wałęsa once used a funny metaphor, comparing himself and Yeltsin to two drivers approaching from the opposite directions on an unfamiliar road at night, without any road markings. The difference between them, however, was in the class of the vehicles – Wałęsa was driving a small Fiat while Yeltsin – a powerful truck. The metaphor encapsulates the essential problem that lies at the foundation of all the Polish complexes about Russia – it is a problem of scale, or, to put it more precisely, the balance of power. J.A. Gorska, *Dealing with a Juggernaut. Analyzing Poland's Policy towards Russia, 1989-2009*, Rowman, Lanham 2010, p. XIX.

affairs of Central and Eastern Europe lead to Poland's decreasing importance as an independent participant in international processes, and in the longer term – to the role of a protégé of one of the sides. Of course, it is possible to wage ideological disputes about the possibility of choice in the policy towards the two most powerful neighbours, for example, through the prism of the EU policy or the American “security umbrella”. It turns out, however, that without Germany's acquiescence, it is impossible to pursue any reasonable policy within the European Union; while without taking Russia's interests into account, it is difficult to achieve anything in either the East or West<sup>12</sup>.

It is likely for these reasons that Rzeczpospolita's foreign policy has adopted assumptions (in fact, it is difficult to trace their origins) whereby foreign policy is perceived as inherently competitive and confrontational. Following this approach, it is advisable to demonstrate distrust and hostility towards the closest neighbours to the west and east, while friends should be “sought far away”, preferably across the “great water”. The traditional obsessions over the two stronger neighbours – Germany and Russia – come, first of all, from the real disparity of power, but also from the elites' disbelief that the policy of these powers can ever stop threatening the existence of the Polish state. In this sense, we are still dealing with geopolitical determinism resulting from Poland's location between Germany and Russia<sup>13</sup>.

Poland has made an ambitious attempt to break free from the geopolitical constraints, which has not, however, brought disengagement from the pressure of the neighbourly factor. According to a well-known statement, it is closer from Warsaw to both Berlin and Moscow than from Moscow to Berlin. It follows that Poland's relations with Russia and Germany could and should be better than the mutual relations between the latter two countries. A specific Germany-Poland-Russia triangle could emerge, whereby Poland and Germany

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<sup>12</sup> The asymmetrical balance of power will obviously always play to the disadvantage of Poland's position against Russia. This is why Poland is unable to neutralise or weaken Russia's position. No cordon of countries from Georgia through Ukraine to the Baltic republics is able to restrict Russia's activity in the post-Soviet space. Efforts to build energy corridors that would help some European countries lessen their dependence on Russian supplies of energy resources have also ended in failure. Poland is unable to weaken the traditional sentiments of Paris, Rome, or Berlin towards Moscow.

<sup>13</sup> More: S. Bieleń, *Polska między Niemcami a Rosją – determinizm czy pluralizm geopolityczny?*, in: S. Bieleń (ed.), *Polityka zagraniczna Polski po wstąpieniu do NATO i do Unii Europejskiej. Problemy tożsamości i adaptacji*, Difin, Warszawa 2010, p. 268-287.

would counterbalance Russia's influence and play an important role in shaping the EU's policy towards the East. However, this has not happened. It is not clear to what extent the human factor is to blame, nor to what extent is it a consequence of certain objective determinants. For Germans clearly seek to include Russia in the European security system, or at least to make it so dependent on Europe's economy that any destabilisation of the Old Continent would not pay off for Russia<sup>14</sup>. Russians, meanwhile, are looking to the West in pursuit of resources to modernise their state, and in this endeavour, Germans are perceived as an excellent partner<sup>15</sup>. But every German-Russian rapprochement causes atavistic fear on the Polish side. Aside from the dread, Poles should therefore proceed as quickly as possible to an analysis of the changing system of "geopolitical games" and look for rational safeguards. Geopolitical thinking, particularly when dealing with a "middle-sized" country like Poland, requires realism, taking into account the international balance of power, and "vital" interests of powers<sup>16</sup>.

Considering the overall record of Poland in the past two decades, one may notice a lack of a mature and coherent vision of foreign policy. It appears that it reacts to current events without reflection or conceptualisation. Calls for the reinterpretation of the "Jagiellonian tradition" have nothing to do with realism. True realism means "taking into account the realities"<sup>17</sup>, the balance of power, rather than constant harking back to the mythical concept of *prometheism* (the formation of an alliance of smaller states in the east against Russia) which has always ended in failure<sup>18</sup>. Any alliances covering

<sup>14</sup> R. Götz, *Germany and Russia – Strategic Partners?*, "Geopolitical Affairs" 2007, nr 4.

<sup>15</sup> *Jak Rosja chce wrócić z peryferii do centrum globalizacji. Rozmowa z rosyjskim politologiem Dmitrijem Treninem*, "Europa. Miesięcznik Idei" 2011, nr 6, p. 40-44.

<sup>16</sup> See: S. Bieleń, *Geopolityczne myślenie o ładzie międzynarodowym*, "Przegląd Geopolityczny" 2009, t. 1, p. 27-28.

<sup>17</sup> The view on Poland's policy towards the post-Soviet area is still dominated by a heroic-romantic vision of history, all the concepts and assessments are effects of political idealism, not realism. "Realism is a recognition of the limits of what can be achieved. It's not what your goals are, but what can you realistically do. The idealist starts from the other end – What do we want to be? What do we want to achieve? – and may neglect how feasible it is to try to get there and whether, in trying to get there, you do things which destroy your ability to get there and sacrifice the very ideals you were pursuing". Z. Brzeziński, B. Scowcroft, *Ameryka i świat. Rozmowy o globalnym przebudzeniu politycznym*, Łódź 2009, p. 264.

<sup>18</sup> Despite that, commentaries are not short of nostalgia for such a way of looking at the post-Soviet reality. See F. Memches, *Prometeusz wśród trumien*, "Rzeczpospolita" from 16-17 April 2011.

small states in the post-Soviet space do not have a chance for success due to Russia's strategic advantage. No issue in the CIS area can be solved without Russia's participation. In any case, Poland has to coexist with Russia, regardless of what Russia is like. During the coexistence – instructs Zbigniew Brzeziński – it is necessary to stay protected and create conditions for a greater geopolitical stability at the same time, because Poland benefits from this stability<sup>19</sup>. It is high time to understand this truth and make it the basis for new political quests.

It is beyond doubt that Poland still remains in the sphere of dependencies on Russia. Facts show that in the energy field, Russia supplies Poland with 100 percent of its gas imports and more than half of the gas it consumes, and also ca. 95% of the oil it consumes. The dependencies are a consequence of the ties from the Comecon period. Moreover, they affect the other Central and Eastern European countries, too; even Nordic Finland obtains 100 percent of its gas from Russia. Despite the strategy of reducing the dependence on Russia adopted many years ago, little success has been achieved in this regard. Instead of independencies, it is only the frustration of successive governing parties in Poland that is growing<sup>20</sup>. Therefore, it is time to do some sort of calculation – either to effectively seek alternative energy supplies, or to come to terms with the existing situation and cease “rhetorical wars” with the country which is the only source of Poland's energy resources supply. Otherwise, Poland will be stuck in some odd schizophrenia<sup>21</sup>.

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<sup>19</sup> *Niemcy są ważniejsze dla USA niż Polska. Rozmowa ze Zbigniewem Brzezińskim*, “Wprost” from 27 September 2009.

<sup>20</sup> Polish minds are certainly not reassured by the views of the likes of Aleksandr Dugin, one of the main theoreticians of Russian imperialism. In his opinion, a strong determinism can be seen in the Eurasian area, which involves a clash of two geographical-civilisational elements – the Euro-Atlantic West and the Eurasianic Russia. In his opinion, “Russia will always seek to move its influence zone in the Western direction, just as the West will be moving it in the Eastern direction. The nations living between Russia and the West will always be located in a transitional zone, a frontier zone, a zone of competition and conflict of the two civilisations: the Western – Atlantic one, and the Eastern – Eurasianic one. The entry of Russian forces into Poland in the Stalin era or in the Catherine II era, just like the occupation of Moscow by Polish-Lithuanian troops in the XVII century, are just links in the same chain of history”. *Polski na razie nie odzyskamy. Rozmowa z Aleksandrem Duginem*, “Europa. Magazyn Idei Newsweeka”, 2009, nr 1 (282), September 2009.

<sup>21</sup> S. Bieleń, *Deficyt realizmu w polskiej polityce zagranicznej*, “Stosunki Międzynarodowe-International Relations” 2008, t. 38, nr 3-4, p. 9-29.



Juliusz Mieroszewski, one of the most outstanding publicists of the Parisian "Kultura", once remarked that it is difficult to imagine a situation in which Poland could dictate its terms to Russia. He stressed that the impotence of Polish policy towards Russia is caused by an inclination to sacrifice real slogans and programs "on the altar of legitimate yet unreal slogans". Such inclination stems from a typical Polish dislike for compromise policy. The word "settlement" has a negative character in the Polish dictionary. Poles are unwilling to compromise, and since they do not have an ability to force Russia into a compromise, they renounce any reasonable policy towards it<sup>22</sup>.

Russians also view Poland through the prism of historical burdens, attributing to it imperialist impulses. Reminiscences of the past centuries returned in the context of Poland's support for the systemic transition in Ukraine referred to as the "Orange Revolution". A return in any form to the "Jagiellonian idea" evokes bad associations with Polish imperialism (paternalism and protectionism) in the East that Poles themselves either do not notice or do not want to notice. In Mieroszewski's view, any return to imperialist impulses, whether Polish or Russian, will cause threats to the stability of the whole continent in the Central and Eastern Europe area<sup>23</sup>. That is why Lech Mażewski is right when he calls for a definitive withdrawal from the East, understood as an inheritance from the Great Duchy of Lithuania<sup>24</sup>.

Poland's geopolitical location is quite firm; nothing can be done about the fact that it is situated at the East-West frontier. Defying the facts, representatives of Polish ruling elites seemed to believe they had found a place among the most important Western players. What was missing was, first and foremost, a reliable diagnosis of the national interest in the changing geopolitical conditions. The old German-Russian determinism was supplemented by new challenges and circumstances, related to Poland's membership in Western integration structures. Thus, Poland's geopolitical position did not change,

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<sup>22</sup> R. Habielski, *Gra możliwości. O pisarstwie Juliusza Mieroszewskiego*, in: A. Friszke (ed.), *Mysł polityczna na wygnaniu. Publicyści i politycy polskiej emigracji powojennej*, Warszawa 1995, p. 139-162.

<sup>23</sup> J. Mieroszewski, *Finał klasycznej Europy*, (Wybór, opracowanie i wstęp: R. Habielski), Lublin 1997, p. 355.

<sup>24</sup> "Shouldn't it perhaps be clearly recognised that the days of the Polish-Lithuanian empire are gone forever and Poland's interest in the areas of the former Great Duchy of Lithuania is only to protect Polish national minority, monuments of national culture, cemeteries and to maintain good relations with all our Eastern neighbours?" L. Mażewski, *Polsko-rosyjski modus vivendi....*, s. 59.

only its structure did<sup>25</sup>. It seems utterly strange that the key role of Germany and Russia in Europe is currently being discovered in Polish foreign policy with such astonishment and undisguised reluctance. Yet these circumstances have existed for a long time, Polish elites did not want to or could not properly describe and understand them. In the 1990s, Polish foreign policy succumbed to the euphoria that, after the demise of bloc dependencies, Poland embarked on the road to the Western world, released from the geopolitical dependencies from the East. When the importance of geopolitical challenges from the post-Soviet space was mentioned, Polish politicians almost suspected it to be a “bolshevik plot”<sup>26</sup>. All the supporters of Jerzy Giedroyc’s ULB concept<sup>27</sup> naively followed this direction, forgetting that the “main powerbroker” in the East is, after all, Russia, and great powers reckon with it, even when it was temporarily affected by the syndrome of “the troubles”.

Russia’s European engagement has a fundamental importance for Polish geopolitics. Although it is a country strongly allied with Western countries, it nonetheless remains on the sidelines of Europe’s great integrational changes. The obstacles to mutual rapprochement or convergence are primarily structural contradictions and the system of values. The European model is based on moving away from the traditional attributes of the nation state, desovereignisation and elimination of territorial barriers. Russia, on the other hand, insists on the preservation of strong sovereignty, its own authority in the security area and economic self-sufficiency.

## 2. The myth about Eastern policy

In political circles and part of the public opinion in Poland, a myth of an extraordinarily active, and, what is worse, effective Eastern policy is sustained. Poles (though it is not known precisely who exactly) are attributed a special

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<sup>25</sup> K. Szczerski, *Polska geopolityka europejska*, “Arcana” 2009, nr 5 (89), p. 23; see: P. Bajda, *Geopolityczne znaczenie Europy Środkowej – zaniedbane sąsiedztwo*, in: J. Kloczkowski (ed.), *Geopolityka i zasady...*, p. 161-173.

<sup>26</sup> The ascertainment stems from the author’s personal experiences when he took part in the debates on Polish Eastern policy involving prominent politicians and commentators.

<sup>27</sup> Juliusz Mieroszewski’s famous abbreviation, referring to Ukraine, Lithuania and Belarus. J. Mieroszewski, op. cit., p. 352-361.

insight into Russian, or more broadly, post-Soviet issues, while in reality this turns out to be a misconception<sup>28</sup>. Polish expertise is paltry and useless in political settlements. Even if some studies emerge, they are always in line with the current mandatory political interpretation. There is a strange phenomenon of the “uniformisation” of attitudes, writing to suit the prevalent political line. Studies do not serve inspirational or predictive functions. Countries like Germany or France, and also the Anglo-Saxon countries, display a much bigger institutional and material commitment to studies of Eastern issues. They can also pursue a distanced and rationalised policy devoid of reminiscences and unnecessary emotions.

Poland faces a phenomenon of ignorance on Russian topics, coupled with an odd arrogance. Aleksander Hercen once said, in reference to Poles, that they do not know Russia “with premeditation”. Of course, every generalisation carries a risk of simplification. There is a considerable group of people in Poland who understand Russia, not least due to their personal experiences or professional interests. But they are outnumbered by those Poles who do not understand Russia at all, or do not want to understand it. After 1989, instead of meticulously watching and thoroughly analysing Russia and the changes underway there, many people started to reheat old prejudices and dwell on historical grievances. This helped them to redefine their national identity. Anti-Russian stereotypes returned in the perception of the eastern neighbour, which by no means made it easier to understand what was really happening there. After all, Russians were also undergoing their own great systemic transformation. Russia, however, was shedding communism in a way different from that of Poland. It did not dissociate itself from it as radically as Poles did. First and foremost, Russia has never broken formal ties with the previous, Soviet state structure. For this reason, the question about the relationship between the communist heritage and the new in Russian statehood has not lost its relevance. The Soviet inheritance still determines the identity of present-day Russia and its citizens. Russia has serious problems with ridding history of lies after the havoc wreaked by the brutal Soviet propaganda and censorship. Russians experimented with communism for 70 years, thus the damage incurred

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<sup>28</sup> “Russia and Poland are like old friends who haven’t seen each other for many years, but are still convinced that they know each other perfectly”. A. Malgin, *Rossija-Polsza: unikalnyj szans otbrosit’ emocij*, “Niezawisimaja gazeta”, 8 February 2008.

is great. Besides, while there was some hope in Poland for a return of that “mythical”, once already practiced democracy, there were no historical democratic models in Russia. Russia had a brush with some parliamentary experience for only a few months from February to October 1917. Thus, generally there were no institutions or customs that would make it possible to quickly create any form of democratic political culture. Russia’s transformation, therefore, proceeded haltingly, meanderingly and did not bring the effects in the systemic overhaul that the world had been expecting. It was related to many problems of geopolitical, legal-constitutional, economic, ethno-national, military, cultural, religious, and even civilisational nature. Unfortunately, Poles did not try to understand it; instead, they scorned Russians’ sacrifices and readiness for self-denial. They were carrying out their own systemic transformation with a conviction that it was necessary to pull away from the dangerous East as fast as possible. What had only recently linked them to the Russian culture, similarities of characters, historical experiences was hastily pushed out of memory. Poland wanted to join the exclusive “club of the safe and rich”, that is, the Western structures, as quickly as it could.

In these endeavours, it was not without significance to show the West that Poland’s determination in its desire to protect itself from Russia resulted from a potential threat of the revival of Russian imperialism, with all its negative consequences<sup>29</sup>. Overall, Poland had achieved its intended objectives, although it was difficult to instantly grasp all the aspects of the historical accomplishments. The consistently pro-Western stance impressed on Western European governments the idea how strong Polish fears of Russia were. At the same time, it damaged Poland’s image, projecting it as a country guided by an incomprehensible Russophobia. Another cost of that success was a decline in the importance of Polish assets in the Russian market. The interest in Poland decreased and Western companies and products took over the place of Polish companies and goods. Besides that, Poles lost contact with Russian reality. The credit for it largely goes to the media which show Russia through the prism of constant crises and disasters, which effectively discourages Poland from any contacts with its neighbour.

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<sup>29</sup> See. S. Bieleń, *Postimperializm-neoimperializm-transimperializm: próba oceny rosyjskiej polityki zagranicznej*, in: S. Bieleń, A. Skrzypek (ed.), *Rosja. Refleksje o transformacji*, Oficyna Wydawnicza ASPRA-JR, Warszawa 2010, p. 235-265.

After the break-up of the USSR, a situation emerged where, for the first time in centuries, Russia stopped dictating to the other Central European countries how those should behave. Poland's and other regional countries' entry into the Western structures became possible thanks to Moscow's definitive loss of dominance in its traditional sphere of influence. Another positive effect of the deep geopolitical changes was a "pluralisation" of the East. Apart from Russia, other countries emerged there and it was possible to build new alliances with them. Poland was particularly "over the moon" about Ukraine's freedom, although the effects of the so-called strategic partnership have mostly been wasted - and Poles were by no means the only ones to blame.

### **3. A time of difficult reassessments**

Poland is making significant reassessments of its policy towards Russia. It took two decades for political elites on both sides (not without significance was the "new" atmosphere after the Smolensk disaster) to become ripe for a "reset" in mutual relations. While there is no shortage of concerns in Poland as to whether Moscow's opening to Warsaw is possibly but another tactical ploy designed to bypass Poland's obstruction to building good relations with the European Union as a whole, much indicates that there is more and more goodwill for reconciliation and burying historical divisions.

Getting rid of the historical trauma does not have to mean that mutual relations will at once become less problematic. As Andrzej Drawicz used to say, Poland and Russia are condemned to having chilly relations, who knows if not for long decades, or even centuries<sup>30</sup>. For example, how many years did it take to forget that the Swedes were invaders? Bearing in mind the contradictions of interests, it needs to be assumed that the state of conflict in mutual relations will be, so to say, their natural feature. In many political circles of the Polish right a conviction (scepticism) persists that "Russia ruled by Vladimir Putin's strong hand does not need reconciliation with Poland"<sup>31</sup>. It is advocated that,

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<sup>30</sup> A. Drawicz, *Przewartościowanie Rosji w polityce III Rzeczypospolitej*, in: S. Bieleń (ed.), *Patrząc na Wschód. Z problematyki polityki wschodniej III RP*, Centrum Badań Wschodnich UW, Warszawa 1997, p. 57.

<sup>31</sup> A "Rzeczpospolita" columnist supports the popular assessment of Russia's neighbourly policy: "Putin's

as the stronger partner and historical adversary, Russia has “more on its conscience” and should therefore be the first to reach out for reconciliation with Poland, show more goodwill, not least on such issues as explaining the causes of the Smolensk disaster<sup>32</sup>. One might also have an impression that Polish right-wing politicians care more about sustaining constant tensions in Poland’s relations with Russia. Then they can show more initiative, reacting to short-term challenges or threats. Yet calm and stability require arduous work whose effects do not have to be so spectacular at all. Besides, reconciliation closes the door to various troublemakers who see Russia as an object of constant criticism. A columnist for “Rzeczpospolita” makes the following confession with no inhibitions: “The deeper we wade into Polish-Russian reconciliation, the harder it will be for us to criticise the Kremlin when such a need arises”<sup>33</sup>. The distrust on the Polish side stems, first of all, from the actual asymmetry, but also from the failure on the part of Kremlin politicians to perceive and treat Poland equally. Rather, they are suspected of treating Poland instrumentally, of “sham” gestures as they advance Russia’s own interests in the European Union and in relations with the U.S.<sup>34</sup>

Regardless of all the mistrust from the Polish side, it is true that the better Polish-Russian relations will be, the less embarrassment will be caused by Polish Russophobia in the European Union. The better Poland’s relations with Russia will be, the greater the impact of Polish policy on the EU’s Eastern policy. It may sound paradoxical, but, thanks to the improved relations with Russia, it will be easier to obtain support for Ukraine’s entry into the European Union<sup>35</sup>. Solving its problems with Russia on its own, Poland will neither burden the general EU agenda, nor put many Western European countries in an awkward situation. Poland should join the stance in the EU, which sees Russia as an inherent element of the European community. Instead of a confrontational

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Russia recognises only two categories of neighbours: those it fears and shows respect to because of their military power (China, Turkey) or affluence (Norway, Finland). And those it treats with disrespect, even disdain”. M. Magierowski, *Polityka dwóch fortepianów*, “Rzeczpospolita Plus Minus” from 26-27 March 2011.

<sup>32</sup> W. Marciniak, *Dwie tendencje w polityce polskiej wobec Rosji*, “Arcana” 2010, nr 4, p. 66-71.

<sup>33</sup> M. Magierowski, op. cit.

<sup>34</sup> See. P. Kowal, *Miękki realizm*, “Nowa Europa Wschodnia” 2011, nr 2, p. 22-29.

<sup>35</sup> C. Ochmann, op. cit., p. 22.

policy of “containing” Russia, a common EU effort should be made to entangle the Russian “bear” with many durable interdependencies, at the same time extending the EU’s impact on other countries – Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia, and Belarus. This will make it possible to limit Russia’s influence in their territories in the long term and will include them in the system of European norms and institutions, which will consequently foster their prospective integration.

Poland currently needs to catalogue its problems in relations with Russia, to establish the means and methods for solving them, and, finally, to define priorities which would allow Poland to build a middle-term strategy. With hindsight, it is clear how certain problems in mutual relations, clashes over the “historical policy”, the Baltic gas pipeline, or imperial threats were exaggerated. It is now apparent how insignificant the historical disputes turned out to be against the background of diversification ventures facing Poland, related to reducing dependence on Russian oil and natural gas. The question needs to be asked whether these ventures could be more successful if Polish policy towards Russia was more conciliatory than when it is more critical. In Poland, very few are interested in such dilemmas<sup>36</sup>.

There are no “easy” matters in Poland’s relations with Russia. All the issues have a complex character, partly due to the psychological determinants mentioned above. A shift from the issues of history to the present and future is the basic message for a change in mutual relations. Poland must strive to overcome the “policy of fear of Russia” as its continuation has become ineffective. It must also depart from the “victim syndrome”, because it makes it a burdensome partner in international relations, both in the West and in the East<sup>37</sup>.

Relying on sentiments and dwelling on history is a strategic error of Polish policy and diplomacy. All the countries across the region, as well as Polish partners in the European Union, support the intensification of European and transatlantic ties, through which the level and quality of cooperation with Russia can be raised. Meanwhile, irrespective of their political provenience, the ruling elites in Poland insist on the traditional, dichotomous understanding

<sup>36</sup> For an interesting example of deliberations, see: J.J. Wiatr, *Polska-Rosja: interes narodowy czy pamięć historyczna?* “Myśl Socjaldemokratyczna” 2010, nr 4, p. 7-23.

<sup>37</sup> *Polska-Rosja: jak zdefiniować interes narodowy? Debata klubu ekspertów “Rzeczpospolitej”, “Rzeczpospolita Plus Minus”* from 12-13 February 2011.

of the balance of power – “who is with whom and against whom”. Russia is perceived as a straightforward continuation of the Soviet Empire, the existential enemy of timeless character. Along with the emotions caused by the 2008 “Caucasus War”, a demand for an aggressive, hostile, “rogue” and imperial Russia, which is a source of Polish self-identification, was revealed.

Poland first became ripe for the historic reconciliation with Germany. The conditions to start the same processes with the neighbours to the East, Ukraine and Russia in particular, emerged in the 1990s. These processes are conditioning each other, which constitutes a practical and cognitive challenge. By the way, it is noteworthy that Poland lacks an objectivised view on Ukraine or Belarus, as well as the other countries included in the Eastern Partnership. In light of the failure of the “strategic partnership” with Ukraine, and also of an increase in nationalist sentiments in Ukraine which are quite often anti-Polish, both the naivety of Polish political authorities and also the bias of Ukrainophile scientific studies are as clear as daylight<sup>38</sup>. Polish anti-Russianism has led to a rather simplistic idea of an alliance with Ukraine, which was supposed to help counter Russia’s great power and imperial aspirations<sup>39</sup>. This was to be served by support for Ukrainian nationalism, which has a sinister historical face, but can also be dangerous in its present-day consequences. Meanwhile, after the political changes in Kiev, it has turned out that Russia has still more possibilities

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<sup>38</sup> One can get an impression that the so-called historical policy is an unsystematised, chaotic reaction of different political actors to various events and provocations related to the interpretation of history by neighbours or other nations. An example confirming this diagnosis is a total lack of reaction from Polish government officials as well as mass media to the “Banderisation” of Ukraine, which represents impotence in the face of the propagation of ideologies praising fascism, antisemitism and anti-Polishness, symbolised by the cult of Stepan Bandera. Poland has no idea of how to solve the problems stemming from the shared, painful history with Ukrainians.

<sup>39</sup> In the 1990s, it was taken for granted, without any particular debate in political and intellectual circles, that supporting Ukraine should be Poland’s priority. There was no justification whatsoever as to what reasons argued for such a political choice. Nobody made a diagnosis of interests, showing preferences in terms of profits and losses in the short term perspective. It was assumed unquestionably that any stance with anti-Russian content had to necessarily be beneficial for Poland. The assumption turns out to be erroneous. Just like eliminating Russia from all European projects, including the Eastern Partnership, betrays the flawed thinking on the perspectives of European integration. For Russia, in spite of all its negative traits, is the European Union’s most important partner in the Eastern direction and as yet nobody has denied such a view. Why do then all the Polish initiatives overlook Russia as if there was no place for it in Europe? See M.F. Goldman, *Polish Policy toward Ukraine: The Impact on Polish-Russian Relations in 2008-2009*, “The Polish Review” 2009, vol. LIV, nr 4, p. 451-476.



to use Ukraine against Poland than Poland against Russia. Attempts to win over Kiev are thus the essence of the Ukrainian problem in Polish-Russian relations. Ukraine is faced with a false choice: with the West, or with Russia. Yet this is an ambivalent country by virtue of its geopolitics, history, ethnicity and culture. For this reason, it can derive benefits from its cooperation both with Russia and with the European Union<sup>40</sup>. At the moment, pro-Western forces in Ukraine are on the defensive, while Russian influence is growing. It is so not only because of internal political strife, but also due to the country's economic structure.

As for Belarus, in the context of assessments of various tyrannies in Arab countries during the ongoing wave of revolutionary changes, it turns out that the Belarusian dictatorship does not pose such problems, as the official propaganda has it. Therefore, the possibilities for establishing normal contacts with the Belarusian regime are different than it has appeared in recent years. Quite simply, one needs to recognise the *status quo* as a starting point for the improvement of the relations rather than strive at all costs for a change of the conditions existing there and make any improvement of the relations contingent on it. Also noteworthy is the sovereign policy of Aleksander Lukashenko, who has been deftly manoeuvring between Russia and the West for many years and cannot be seen only as a Moscow's puppet. It is therefore reasonable to apply the same logic as in the dialogue with Russia: to talk with Belarus as it is. Experience teaches that more can be achieved on the path of evolutionary changes than through radical pressure. Besides, it is worth to reconsider the policy towards Poles in the East – whether Poland cares about their integration within those societies, or fomenting various separatist tendencies with their participation.

The other countries involved in the Eastern Partnership, such as Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Moldova, still do not have achievements in the field of democratisation and economic reforms. Rather, they are hybrid creations in terms of their political system, if not overtly authoritarian, as the case of Azerbaijan proves. There are virtually no differences between Azerbaijan and Belarus. So why are different yardsticks applied to both dictatorships? The Eastern Partnership program, promoting human rights and democratic political

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<sup>40</sup> See. M. Riabczuk, *Dwie Ukrainy*, Kolegium Europy Wschodniej, Wrocław 2004; D. Gibas-Krzak, *Ukraina między Rosją a Polską*, Wydawnictwo Adam Marszałek, Toruń 2004.

culture, among other things, has therefore serious problems with credibility. Then there is the geopolitical factor related to the position of Russia. Its determination in defense of its causes in Transcaucasia has proven that it is capable of restoring its imperial influence and the West is not able to oppose it. Poland is all the more unable to create any effective counterbalance alone.

Against this background, the challenge is even bigger for Polish-Russian reconciliation, which should rest on cooperative thinking, a necessity to create an accommodating strategy allowing for a reassessment of the negative ideological past in favour of a positive and pragmatic cooperation now and in the future. Reconciliation needs, on both sides, empathy, reciprocity and partnership, equal dialogue, rapprochement over values as common criteria for the assessment of the interests of both sides. It is a task for years to come, out of reach in the short term.

Reconciliation processes require both countries to build regular personal and institutional ties. This should be followed by a new narrative of mutual attitudes<sup>41</sup> and a consolidation of organisational or logistical efforts. The support of social elements for official mechanisms is a precondition for success. Poland's multifaceted approach to reconciliation and normalisation with Russia should not be limited solely to the activity of the government and the president, but should also include broad sections of society, culture makers, scientists, journalists, youth, social organisations and local governments. Taking on the idea of reconciliation by the Russian Orthodox Church and the Polish Catholic Church is a positive step. What needs to be appreciated is the fact that, once again, the impulse for reconciliation between the neighbours has come from church circles, even though a letter of the episcopates of both countries, which would be modelled on the 1965 gesture of forgiveness from Polish and German bishops, has not been written yet. The very rhetoric dealing with the reconciliation process is typical of theology, not politics<sup>42</sup>.

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<sup>41</sup> In Polish-Russian relations, debates over the past have taken a quasi-diplomatic formula – the Commission on Difficult Issues. Confronting different views on historical events in debates among historians certainly makes it possible to build a climate for higher trust and cooperation. See A.D. Rotfeld, A.W. Torkunow (ed.), *Białe plamy, czarne plamy. Sprawy trudne w polsko-rosyjskich stosunkach 1918-2008*, PISM, Warszawa 2010.

<sup>42</sup> N. Wade, J. Kidwell, *Understanding Forgiveness in the Lives of Religious People: The Role of Sacred and Secular Elements*, 3rd Global Conference “Forgiveness. Probing the Boundaries”, 15-17 July 2010, <http://www.inter-disciplinary.net/wp-content/uploads/2010/06/wadepaper.pdf> (3.04.2011).

An important role can be played by public opinion, including the mass media, which depict Russia through the prism of its permanent crisis and constant worries, as if the country and its citizens did not have their own achievements or positive sides. A dangerous feature of Polish attitudes towards Russia is that all media campaigns are transferred to the interstate and intergovernmental level. This could be most clearly seen during the ceremonies marking the anniversaries of the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact and the outbreak of World War II. In response to the provocations from the Kremlin-controlled Russian media, the Polish media pressed for a political reaction from Polish government officials. Therefore, what is needed is an appropriate reaction on the information and propaganda level, without constantly inflaming political relations. Instead, Polish diplomacy could focus on the popularisation of a positive attitude towards Russia. There is a need for pre-emptive activities against the media, for more steps of informative and educational, rather than explanatory, significance; it is foreign policy decision makers who should display more originality, rather than have their originality influenced by the media.

A fight over visions of history requires preparation of a proper set of instruments and a programme of action. Polish opinion makers have yet to prepare a comprehensive vision of the history of the 20th century that could be popularised in the international environment. Polish attitudes are primarily of reactive character, full of indignation and astonishment that someone presents a vision of history different from their own<sup>43</sup>. Provocative materials in the Russian media should be looked at more broadly. For there is no shortage of programs and research findings in Russia which are polemic and worthy of discussion; however, they should not be condemned or discredited. The discourse is currently not so much about facts and truth, but about visions of historical events. The winner in the discourse will be the stronger party, the one that wins over the international opinion. That is why an initiative should

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<sup>43</sup> Polish foreign policy taps into historical argumentation in proving its case to its neighbours. Yet each of them has its own version of history and makes its own assessments of the developments and processes which have been subjects of a common experience. Only historians can succeed in bringing interpretations of the same references any closer. A moral judgment of other countries and societies, based on historical experiences, cannot be the foundation of a country's foreign policy. It would be a trap leading to the stigmatisation of history and escalation of perpetual resentments and grievances. Meanwhile, the interpretation of history changes, as does the historical memory when successive generations pass away. Many issues are forgotten and pushed out from memory, while others become mythologised.

be put forward in Poland, for example, in the IPN (the Institute of National Memory), by issuing - in international languages - a White Book of the 20th century events which Poland participated in.

#### **4. The conditions for dialogue and normalisation**

The process of reconciliation in Polish-Russian relations requires systematic dialogue and normalisation. Dialogue is an existing or postulated state characterised by a certain atmosphere and perspectives, a situation based on partnership in overcoming contradictions. The essence of dialogue is to explore opportunities for agreement, to seek ways that are conducive to bringing the stances closer, to work out solutions based on compromise that would be acceptable for both sides and bringing some benefits to both of them. Citing John Paul II, it can be remarked that dialogue is an ability to talk in such a way that the other can hear and understand, and an ability to listen in such a way as to understand the other. Dialogue is not about detailed solutions (these are a subject of painstaking negotiations), but about bridging gaps, creating foundations, setting directions, agreeing principles. The most important condition for dialogue is kindness.

I am kind, which means that I wish well for the partner in dialogue, even though he represents a different opinion and believes mine is wrong. I treat him kindly, which means that I accord him confidence, I believe he doesn't intend to deceive or ridicule me, I believe that he has something significant to say, which I don't have to take as mine at all, but I should get to know it and consider it. Kindness in itself is enough to breed tolerance understood as putting up with distinctions which can be vexing for me at times. If I settle among Muslims, I will rage that the singing from the minaret wakes me up at strange times. If I can be kind, I will respect their way of praising God<sup>44</sup>.

The features of dialogue are flexibility of thinking and awareness of a common goal. Dialogue fosters the development of situational, partnership and informational ties. These in turn translate into normalisation of mutual relations. Normalisation implies either levelling of mutual relations, or bringing

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<sup>44</sup> J. Surdykowski, *Tolerancja*, "Rzeczpospolita Plus Minus" from 12-13 March 2005.

them back to the state commonly called normality. Therefore, it is about the introduction of transparent rules of the game, unification of the criteria for the assessment of the interests of parties, stabilisation of contacts, making them routine and as frequent as mutually acceptable. Normalisation results in psychological reassurance. Former adversaries become partners<sup>45</sup>.

The process of reconciliation encourages a fresh look at the issue of identity. It requires at least three complementary undertakings: 1) accommodation and mutual restraint; 2) rapprochement on the level of societies; 3) development of a community of interests and values.

Ad 1) The strategy of reconciliation requires sacrifices. First and foremost, mutual grievances and claims need to be abandoned, or at least set aside for later (even for next generations). The trick is to restrain oneself in the articulation of one's points in order not to provoke unnecessary tensions and aggravate mistrust. It is about presenting one's positions confidently and assertively, but not arrogantly and aggressively. Mutual restraints lead to displays of a willingness for cooperation, facilitate concessions, and indicate a readiness for disinterested and altruistic steps. They soften the tone of reasoning. Countries stop arguing and bargaining under the cloud of suspicions, they start thinking in "win-win" categories. The question that arises on the Polish side is about Russians' readiness to accept such a strategy towards Poland. There is, however, another question regarding the Poles themselves. Is it possible to restore a uniform and coherent policy towards Russia against the background of the existing rifts in the Polish political scene? Many signs indicate that such a scenario is unfeasible in the foreseeable future.

Ad 2) After the systemic transformation, the mental and cultural transformation is still lagging behind. If barriers in mutual perceptions on the level of societies are not overcome quickly, we will all become hostages to new distrusts and prejudices. That is why Polish-Russian relations need to return to working contacts in various fields without trumpeting them, as this provokes professional Russophobes to accuse the government of high treason. It is necessary to reach out to Russian elites through a launch of a network of intellectual and business links. It is necessary to start rational lobbying in Russia and to build a "Polish

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<sup>45</sup> Ch.A. Kupchan, *How Enemies Become Friends. The Sources of Stable Peace*, Princeton University Press, Princeton and Oxford 2010, p. 389 and further.

party” appealing to cultural actors as well as professionals engaged in the media and politics. It is not known, for example, why we could not make a gesture of gratitude to Yeltsin for his contribution to exposing the Katyn truth. Up to now, no opinion-making community in Poland has come to appreciate Mikhail Gorbachev. His 80th birthday anniversary could provide food for thought for many an observer in Poland. It is time to give credit to other Russians, for example literary men and Russian cinema makers, to make a half-step forward and surprise both Polish and Russian opinion.

Ad 3) An important condition for reconciliation is a focus on interests, not solely values. Both countries have to find a compromise between interests and values. So far, Poland’s insistence on values and Russia’s insistence on interests have not created a window for dialogue and understanding<sup>46</sup>. Pragmatism without values has turned into cynicism, while values unbacked by real politics have turned out to be lip service. Rationalising mutual references, it is worth to consider not what divides us, not even what binds us, but rather what makes us different. After such a diagnosis of differences it may be worth to take a risk and look for close, similar, tangent, if not shared, elements. Without a solid diagnosis of interests, it will be impossible to build any positive future.

Russia and Poland are divided by an axiological gulf, different views on history, freedom traditions and the systems in place. In recent years, Polish decision makers have come to believe in a peculiar “missionary call” on Russia, making cooperation with it contingent on progress in democratisation processes. There has been quite a lot of naivety in repeating American slogans about building democracy in the East or expansion of Western values. Many commentators from Central and Eastern Europe have allowed themselves to be seduced, if not infatuated, by the perspective of building a Western-fashioned order. The civilisational and cultural distinctiveness of many parts of the globe has been forgotten, and the ideological and worldview pluralism,

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<sup>46</sup> “The language of interests plays an important role in contentious issues. Just because they don’t touch upon the country’s core values or identity, it is easier to find common ground through discussions on interests than if negotiations on values were to be attempted. When a problem becomes defined in terms of good and evil, there is no room for negotiations or compromise. Compromises based on adaptation of interests will essentially be temporary, because interests can change or be redefined, but they can also be a useful stage on the way to a more enduring agreement”. R. Cooper, *Pęknięcie granic. Porządek i chaos w XXI wieku*, Media Rodzina, Poznań 2005, p. 142.

which is the foundation of the planet's heterogeneity, has been ignored. Disregard for the reasons of others in favour of the reasons of the strongest power has betrayed not only arrogance, but also ignorance about the development processes in the world, which has dangerous consequences. Yet it does not take a great deal of imagination to understand that Russia is not able to change overnight and will not adhere to Western standards – as Poles expect – at once. Leaving aside the ideological principles, it is high time to understand that, if our policy is founded only on values, we will be forced to reject everyone who does not share these values. The trick is to understand that interests and values permeate each other and this interdependence needs to be skilfully examined in practice.

Without taking Russia's values and interests into account, therefore, there is no way any effective policy towards it can be pursued. A *sine qua non* condition is respect for Russian identity, even when it greatly diverges from our sense of Europeanism or Westernism. Thus, it was a mistake to bet on a Westernising mission, export of Western-style democracy and promotion of Western institutions without care for their acceptance by the country's society. Respect for otherness, worldview pluralisms, and civilisational choices is a foundation for sound relations with any country. The essence of intercultural dialogue is not moving closer to one cultural canon, political model, or system of values; rather, it is about finding in diversity things that bind and respecting what is different.

Poland cannot ignore Russia in the Eastern Europe region. Any initiatives designed to pull more Eastern European countries into the Western system have to take into account the role of this country as a constructive partner, rather than sideline it and thus contribute to the deepening of the post-imperial frustration. The West has long understood it, so it is time Warsaw started a review of the Eastern policy in this respect. Dialogue with Russia is not evidence of weakness. The only thing necessary is to have a concept and know the terms on which the dialogue is to be conducted.

Reconciliation should take advantage of the EU's support and solidarity in defining interdependencies based on stable rules of the game, transparency, and consensus. First and foremost, it is about bringing Russia into the European community while respecting the same rules of the game. The condition for the success of such strategy is, above all, the unity of EU member states in

their approach to Russia<sup>47</sup>. Poland will then take advantage of the “synergy” effect and will not be treated as a “disfunctional” country in pursuit of the EU’s policy towards Russia. There will always be various disagreements between Poland and Russia, but the most important thing should be to understand the interdependencies of both countries, their security, economies and cultures, including in the EU context.

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<sup>47</sup> Meanwhile, the main problem of Western European countries is a lack of a unanimous, strong voice that wouldn’t allow Russia to build separate relationships and agreements with particular countries. A model example of this weakness was the Georgian-Russian conflict in 2008, during which the European Union couldn’t adopt a common position. European elites do not know how to talk, or maybe they do not want to talk with Russia about difficult issues. A desire for short-term gain often prevails over a long-term vision.