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POLISH-RUSSIAN / RUSSIAN - POLISH RAPPROCHEMENT: A Long-awaited Decisive Move

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1.- Polish-Russian Rapprochement

By *Agnieszka Nowak*

The Russian initiative of a joint commemoration by the Russian and Polish prime ministers of the 70th anniversary of the Katyń massacre on the 7th of April 2010 was a significant step forward in the Polish-Russian historical reconciliation process and a sign of the recent rapprochement between the two countries. It followed a period of less confrontational rhetoric on both sides, driven by a desire for a pragmatic approach to cooperation on practical issues. Three days after the official commemoration of Katyń, the Polish presidential plane crashed in Smoleńsk near Katyń on its way to a second commemoration of the massacre, killing all on board. Those who died included the Polish president and several other high-ranking politicians, severely testing the still fragile ties between Poland and Russia. Poles shocked by a tragedy unprecedented in their modern history were touched by the solidarity gestures and cooperation of the Russian government following the catastrophe. During the early presidential election campaign triggered by the death of President Lech Kaczyński, the anti-Russian rhetoric present in previous elections was absent and the significance of the thaw in Polish-Russian relations was broadly discussed in Poland and abroad. The victory of Bronisław Komorowski, a candidate of the governing Civic Platform party, also seemed to confirm that a majority of Poles had chosen stability in internal affairs as well as continuation of the open and pragmatic policies towards their neighbours, most notably Russia.

While the high profile visit of president Medvedev in Poland this December further validates a new willingness to cooperate through constructive dialogue, Polish-Russian relations remain complex and disagreements between Moscow and Warsaw are apparent at many levels. In addition to unresolved historical issues, there are also strategic conflicts related to energy, security and the future of Poland's Eastern neighbourhood that will most probably continue to cause frictions in the years to come. Many of these issues do not involve Russia and Poland alone but also concern Russia's relations with multilateral actors such as the EU and NATO. External factors may thus influence the current rapprochement.

Two decades of thorny Polish-Russian relations

In order to understand the dynamics of Polish-Russian relations over the last twenty years, one needs to keep in mind the context in which they have occurred, as well as some key characteristics that are often ignored in the general debate.

First, from a historical perspective, the last two decades have been exceptionally harmonious - although politically quite tense - when compared to the previous conflict-ridden centuries. Despite some initial difficulties, relatively quickly after the fall of the Iron Curtain the two countries established a bilateral basis for their new relations. Presidents Lech Wałęsa and Boris Yeltsin signed the *Treaty on friendship and neighbourly relations* in May 1992. Since then, the provisions such as 'the

inviolability of borders, territorial integrity, non-interference with internal affairs and the nations' right to self-determination' have been legally binding for the two parties.

Secondly, although a legal basis had been established, the relations between Moscow and Warsaw remained limited and totally dependent on the political conjuncture in both countries. The lack of institutionalized forms of cooperation and often-cancelled top-level meetings is well illustrated by the fact that after the visit of Boris Yeltsin in Warsaw in 1993, no Russian President visited Poland for another nine years (V. Putin visited Poland in 2002 and D. Medvedev for the first time in 2010). Still, the difficult relations existing at the official level only partly affected co-operation in areas such as business, trade, research, civil society and cultural exchange. New social and economic conditions have also made co-operation difficult. Due to the transformations in Poland and Russia, co-operation in different fields, and especially in trade and business, required new regulations. Indeed, when Poland joined the EU in 2004, the forms of co-operation between the two countries required significant adjustments.

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Third, Polish-Russian relations are asymmetric. The asymmetry does not concern only the economic size and capabilities of the two states, but more importantly their perceptions of their relationship and what is perceived to be problematic issues. What appears to be a political crisis from the perspective of Warsaw may be considered business as usual in Moscow. This asymmetry has weighed heavily on mutual relations since the two sides have had different levels of determination to solve problems.

The essence of Polish-Russian disagreement over the last two decades is well expressed by Katarzyna Pełczyńska Nałęcz (2010); '*at the deepest level, this is a dispute about how far do the Western world's borders extend, and about the Russian Federation's sphere of influence.*¹ This dispute affects historically defined identities and economic assets as well as the political spheres in both countries. It is also worth remembering that after the fall of the communist regime in Poland, the dispute

initially mostly concerned the relations between the two states, in the sense of ending Soviet dominance, fighting for the full sovereignty of Poland and preventing any new forms of dependence from emerging. Later on, after Polish emancipation and after the country joined first NATO in 1999 and then the EU in 2004, some of the contentious issues in Polish-Russian relations have out of necessity also involved Russia's relations with other Western actors.

Against this 'background' disagreement, Nałęcz (2010) distinguishes four specific strategic conflicts: (i) the dispute over the sovereignty of Poland, (ii) contradictory visions of the neighbourhood, (iii) energy geopolitics and (iv) the interpretation of the two nations' common history. However, she underlines that the disagreements between Poland and Russia should not necessarily be viewed as unproductive disputes, they should rather be understood as a difficult process, which has nevertheless moved relations between the two countries forward.² In order to understand the significance of the current rapprochement it is necessary to first briefly explain the background of these particular disputes.

The dispute over the sovereignty of Poland was a consequence of Poland's determination to put an end to Russian dominance and establish normal relations between the two states. This was formally accepted by the Russian Federation by the signing of the Treaty in 1992. However, it quickly became clear that independence gave Poland the right to choose its allies and that it may do so without consulting Moscow. The Polish view was that through membership in NATO its military, political and economic sovereignty would be guaranteed. Poland's aspirations to independence and its rapprochement with the West were often perceived in Moscow as diminishing Russia's influence in Europe and strengthening the Western camp. Acting on this perception, Russia made attempts to restrain Poland's political autonomy and impede its integration with Western structures. This discrepancy has been the cause of the most serious frictions between Poland and Russia, which have recurred at greater or lesser intensity throughout the last two decades. Although the process of Poland's integration with the EU was less problematic than its membership of NATO, it also caused some controversies, e.g. the Russian public's freedom of movement between Kaliningrad and mainland Russia. Perhaps surprisingly, Poland's membership in the EU has proved to be much more consequential for the overall shape of Russia's relations with Poland and the West than has Poland's accession to NATO. Poland's membership in the EU has had a significant impact on the EU's strategy in a number of areas, including energy and Eastern neighbourhood policies, as well as economic policies (e.g. *the meat crisis* in 2005-06.)

1. K. Pełczyńska-Nałęcz, *How far do the borders of the West extend? Russian/Polish strategic conflicts in the period 1990-2010*, Centre for Eastern Studies, 2010, pp. 39-71 (this paper is based on a chapter from the study *White Spots Black Spots. Difficult Issues in Polish-Russian Relations (1918- 2008)*, Eds. Adam D. Rotfeld, Torkunow Anatolij W., Polish Institute of International Affairs, 2010).

2. Op.cit p. 69

The *question of Eastern Europe* has never been officially identified as an important area in relations between Russia and Poland. In reality, both sides were aware of their conflicting interests in this sphere. In Poland, the assumption was that the countries such as Lithuania, Belarus, Ukraine and later Georgia should be sovereign and follow the same path of systemic transformation that Poland had chosen, namely to develop into democratic market economies, and aim to integrate with the Euro-Atlantic structures. From a Russian point of view, the character of the political and economic systems developed by the countries in question was of secondary importance. The key objective was to preserve political, economic and military ties between the Eastern European states and Russia. Disagreements between Poland and Russia over Eastern Europe have surfaced with varying levels of intensity over the last two decades. However, due to the asymmetry of Poland's and Russia's capabilities, Warsaw quickly realized that it would be unable to support democratisation of the Eastern European countries and their rapprochement with the Euro-Atlantic structures without involving also Western states in this process. An opportunity for such involvement presented itself when Poland joined NATO and the EU. Poland's activities related to the first 'Eastern Dimension' project, the internal crisis in Ukraine and the Georgian conflict were perceived by Moscow as anti-Russian and aimed at creating a Polish sphere of influence. Poland, however continued to participate in the development of the EU's policies towards Eastern Europe and actively promoted the Eastern Partnership.

Due to their location and infrastructure conditions, Poland and Russia have considerable potential for mutually beneficial energy co-operation. However, **energy geopolitics** has generated a lot controversy since the early 1990s. Warsaw has mainly been concerned about the excessive dependence of Poland's energy sector on Russia. (Russia provides 90 and 95 per cent respectively of Poland's natural gas and oil imports.) The Polish concern has been that Russia may use its virtual monopoly in these areas to exert political influence and that Russia has attempted to secure its monopoly by trying to gain maximum control over the energy infrastructure, especially gas pipelines. Over the last six years these disputes have largely moved from the bilateral onto the European level.

The disagreements about history extend beyond the sphere of bilateral relations. It has been part of each country's wider efforts to define its international positions. The perceptions of the significance of this dispute have been quite different in Poland as compared to in Russia. For Poland, the historical controversies with Russia has been important in their own right, in particular as another area of emancipation from the dominance of the former empire. This may be the reason Poland has a particularly emotional attitude towards the question of clarifying and publicising facts concerning Soviet acts of violence against the Polish state and

nation, as knowledge of these facts had been suppressed while Poland was under Soviet dominance. For many Polish politicians, these conflicts make normalisation of the relations with Russia difficult. However, it is also true that historical issues have been used for domestic political reasons much more often in Poland than in Russia. For Russia, historical disagreements with Poland have been just a small element of a wider process whereby the Russian Federation has been defining its new, post-Soviet, identity through its past history.

Signs of rapprochement

The current more favourable atmosphere in Polish-Russian relations is to some extent due to external factors, which have temporarily neutralized some 'confrontational' subjects. For instance, as a consequence of the Russian-Georgian conflict in August 2008, NATO put on hold its offer of membership to Georgia, thus neutralizing one contentious issue. Similarly, internal political changes in Ukraine last year brought the pro-Russian Yanucovich to power, thus in practice shelving Ukraine's ambition to become a member of NATO. Poland strongly support the EU's Eastern Neigh-

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bourhood Policy and Russia has been invited to join some multilateral projects under a new *Friends of Eastern Partnership* initiative, which should help to settle down its opposition to the EU's policy. Some hard security issues, such as the US anti-missile shield planned to be install in Poland and Czech Republic, have also been removed from the agenda by the Obama Administration's decision to change the project. Moreover, the members of NATO and the EU have shown a willingness to discuss within the OSCE's *Corfu Process* Medvedev's proposal concerning *New European Security Architecture*. Meanwhile, the EU is trying to find a new formula for building up its strategic partnership with Russia through discussions on Russia's modernisation proposal.

Domestically, the coalition government in power since 2007 and led by Civic Platform's leader Donald Tusk, has been trying hard to improve Poland's relations with Russia. The previous Law and Justice governments (2005-07) took a strong anti-Russian stance both on historical and current issues. Jarosław Kaczyński - the leader of Law and Justice party and his twin brother - President Lech Kaczyński conducted a very assertive policy towards both Russia and Germany, despite Angela Merkel's efforts to conciliate Poland. After the 2007 parliamentary elections, Tusk's government reversed these and other Law and Justice policies. For these efforts, the prime minister was personally praised '*for steering his country away from nationalism*' and recently re-

ceived the prestigious Charlemagne Prize awarded annually in Aachen for promoting European understanding. To secure EU support in the disputes with Russia, Civil Platform needed to show Western Europe that they were not the typecast Polish Russophobes. Despite opposition from President Kaczyński during the co-habitation period, Tusk worked hard towards building a better relationship with Moscow, including with Vladimir Putin personally. Trying to ease the burden of history seemed like a good place to start. Therefore, in 2008 the two sides reactivated an expert joint **Group for Difficult Issues**, a consultative body that works towards common understanding of historical issues. The Group was first established in 2002 when Vladimir Putin visited Poland, but during 2004-08 its activities were suspended due to 'chilly relations'. The Group is co-chaired by Prof. Adam Daniel Rotfeld and Prof. Anatolij Torkunow, and is composed of about 30 distinguished historians and experts on Polish-Russian relations. Katarzyna Pełczyńska-Nałęcz, who was invited to join the group in 2008, has characterized the composition of the group and discussions undertaken by this forum as highly professional. She points out two main achievements of the Group. One of them is a joint Polish-Russian study called *'White Spots Black Spots'*

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in which Polish and Russian authors analyze in parallel selected issues in bilateral relations between 1918-2008. The idea of the study was, she says: *'that since we cannot agree on some issues and write about them together we should at least start by presenting our positions in one study allowing the broader public to understand the differences in our point of view.'*³ The study was translated into Polish and Russian and published this November.

A second initiative of the Group was the establishment of **Polish-Russian Dialogue and Reconciliation Centers** based in Moscow and Warsaw. According to an agreement between Polish and Russian Prime Ministers reached in April 2010 the Centers should be created and act under the auspices of the Ministries of Culture. They will become a first institutionalized form of co-operation with an aim of inspiring and supporting scientific research and dialogue about the two nations history, culture and heritage. During the recent visit of president Medvedev in Poland an agreement was signed by the respective Ministers of Culture, stating that the Centers should start its activities in January 2011 with an initial budget of 1 million Euros for each headquarter.

Apart from the Polish-Russian Group for Difficult Issues, another two initiatives were reactivated in 2008 by the Ministers of Foreign Affairs, Radosław Sikorski and Sergey Lavrov, after 4 years of inactivity. One is the **Polish-Russian Civil Dialogue Forum** and the second is the **Polish-Russian Business Council**. The Civil Dialogue Forum has despite its name nothing to do with civil society forums. Rather, it brings together a select group of Polish and Russian intellectuals, representatives of culture, science, media and politics to discuss twice a year in an informal setting various aspects of Polish-Russian relations. Krzysztof Zanussi, a distinguished Polish film director and co-president of the Forum believes that this setting works very well since *'it allows us to maintain some informal contacts that are very limited and therefore needed'*. He explains that: *'We would like to establish some personal contacts with the entourage of President Medvedev and premier Vladimir Putin in order to be able to call someone and discuss when the need arises'*. In contrast to the discussions concerning the past conducted by the Group for Difficult Issues, the discussions within the Civil Dialogue Forum are more forward looking: *'how we see our countries in the future, what are our prospective goals and how we perceive the developments of our civilization, culture and politics. It is a type of multi-layered dialogue allowing us*

*to better understand differences in our perceptions of reality.'*⁴

The latest meeting of the forum took place in Warsaw in December with the participation of presidents Komorowski and Medvedev.

Two other governmental initiatives undertaken in 2008

aimed at improving the economic relations between the two countries. The reactivation of the **Polish-Russian Governmental Commission for Economic Co-operation** as well as the **Polish-Russian Business Council** can contribute significantly to the development of business and trade relations. Despite political up and downs, the trade between Poland and Russia has been growing over the last ten years. According to this year's data from the Polish Ministry of Economy, Russia is Poland's third largest source of imports and the seventh largest destination for Polish exports. Poland is also an important trading partner for Russia, being respectively the fourth and fifth largest import and export partner of Russia among all EU countries. Poland imports mainly commodities like oil, gas and wood as well as chemical and metal products. Cooperation in energy, transport and borders' infrastructure, tourism and inter-regional contacts is regulated by governmental agreements. However, other sectors important for Polish small and medium size businesses investing in Russia are insufficiently regulated, despite the fact that a process to do so has been active since 1993. Initiatives like the Polish-Russian Business Council and the Governmental Commission thus has an important role to play. On the Polish side, the activities related to the Business Council are coordinated since 2002 by a Polish business association called the Eastern Club. Henryk Cuga, the secretary of the Council explains, that

3. Interview with K. Pełczyńska-Nałęcz, Centre for Eastern Studies, Warsaw, 12th of July 2010

4. Interview with Krzysztof Zanussi, Film Studio TOR, Warsaw, 8th of July 2010

'the main goal of the Club is to represent Polish companies by submitting the problematic issues concerning investments and other issues to the Governmental Commission. Many issues like customs, taxes, investment protection need to be regulated, notably since Poland joined the EU in 2004. The political instability is very bad for business since it blocks the working of the Commission completely and therefore all the areas of co-operation that need to be regulated remain very vulnerable'.⁵ The Governmental Commission co-presided since 2008 by Polish Minister of Infrastructure Cezary Grabarczyk and Russian Minister of Transport Igor Lewityn, is responsible for overlooking the Polish Russian economic cooperation and analyse regulation of its main sectors, as well as for identification of particular problems of the Polish investors in Russia and Russian in Poland and finding the ways of solving them. Ryszard Konwerski, president of the Polish Business Club established in 1993, and president of the SMEs sector within the Polish Russian Business Council has a lot of experience in cooperating with Russian business partners. In his opinion, the Russian market is in general very unstable and 'honest' business cooperation is difficult. However, he underlines his very positive experience in business co-operation with the Moscow Oblast and its Governor Boris Gromov who was awarded a Polish Business Oscar in 2002.⁶

Polish-Russian non-governmental cooperation, despite the two countries' geographical and historical proximity, has been almost non-existent. The

first **Polish-Russian Non-governmental Forum** organized in 2009 may yet help to build closer ties between the two nations. The Forum was held under the initiative of *Zagranica Group*, whose members together with the *Moscow Centre for the Development of Democracy and Human Rights* organised a meeting of representatives of some 90 NGOs from the two countries in Jachranka, near Warsaw. The aim of the meeting was to create a forum for dialogue between Polish and Russian NGOs, in order to rationalise and professionalise their future cooperation. The two-day forum allowed participants to establish contacts with each other and gain a better understanding of local conditions under which the NGOs function – both in Russia and Poland. Wojciech Tworkowski, the director of *Zagranica Group* underlines that in spite of this effort, the co-operations has so far been rather difficult, due to insufficient mechanisms for financing joint projects, as well as some differences between the two sides about the areas in which they could co-operate.

Reconciliation between Poland's Roman Catholic and Russia's Orthodox Churches

The idea of involving Russia's Orthodox Church and Poland's Roman Catholic Church in the dialogue between the two nations initially came from the Polish-Russian Group for Difficult Issues. The two churches are influential in their respective countries and if willing to co-operate, they could po-

tentially help to overcome a painful shared past and contribute to reconciliation. The Russian Orthodox Church has also, and unlike any other official Russian institution, openly condemned Stalinism and its crimes. The reason for this was the fact that many orthodox clergymen and worshippers were themselves victims of the communist repressions. Proselytism remains a delicate issue though, as the Russian Orthodox Church accuses the Roman Catholic Church of creating dioceses in Russia and missions activities in Belarus and Ukraine aimed at converting Orthodox Christians to Catholicism.

The idea of initiating a dialogue between the churches became more relevant when Russia's newly elected Patriarch Kirill assigned a high priority to improve inter-faith dialogue in 2009. The first orthodox clergy visit in Poland took place in September 2009. It was a low ranking delegation and its aim was to make some reconnaissance of the Polish intentions. At a second meeting of more senior clergy in February 2010, the two churches agreed to draw up a joint document that will express their Christian vision of how the two Slavic neighbors can/could come together. Then on June 25th Archbishop Hilarion Alfeyev - head of the Russian Orthodox Church's external relations department - visited

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Warsaw and further discussed the content of the common document. He believes that the churches should steer clear of politics in their document, which he said would probably take up to a year to complete. "Our aim is to call for mutual forgiveness and reconciliation so the errors of the past are not repeated in the future. Our aim is to seek those things common to us both such as Christian history," he said. Stanislaw Budzik, general secretary of the Polish Bishops' Conference commented after the meeting that: "The idea is to look at the history of our nations from our Churches' point of view. During the history we experienced glorious moments but also very painful ones. As Christians we should reflect on the history of our nations and call for mutual love and cooperation." If the two churches manage to come out with a common message to its followers this could be a very powerful element and a historic moment in the reconciliation process.

Emotional rapprochement after Smolensk tragedy

The noticeable thaw in Polish-Russian relations did not start in Katyń on April the 7th. Rather, Moscow's 'change in tone' regarding historical issues was gradually articulated by Vladimir Putin. First, in September 2009 Putin accepted Donald Tusk's invitation to attend the 70th anniversary of the Polish defence of Westerplatte in the first days of the WWII and on that occasion gave a broadly conciliatory speech. Then, he took an unprecedented decision to host

5. Interview with Henryk Cuga, Klub Wschodni, Warsaw, 8th of July 2010

6. Interview with Ryszard Konwerski, Polish Business Club, Warsaw, 12th of July 2010

7. Russian Orthodox and Polish Catholic churches eye major reconciliation, Reuters, June 25th 2010.

a joint commemoration of the Katyń massacre and spoke quite openly about what had happened in 1940 and about Stalinist totalitarianism. This was a significant step forward in the reconciliation process, perhaps made possible due to a combination of various factors. Some of these were domestic, and some were related to bilateral efforts made over the last two years to establish a more stable and pragmatic relations. Other factors have been external, helping neutralizing some bilateral disputes like those related to security or neighborhood policies.

Following the air disaster in Smolensk, Putin and Medvedev's reactions were even more forthcoming. The most significant gesture was the airing of the Andrzej Wajda's feature film 'Katyń', concerning the massacre, on the day following the crash. The movie aired on prime time on the Russian national TV network Rossiya, contributed to an exceptional outburst of warm sentiment between the Polish and Russians. A couple of days after the catastrophe, in an interview broadcast on Russian television, Medvedev stated clearly what Poles had felt was missing from Putin's speech at Katyn: *"It is obvious the shooting of the Polish officers was ordered by Stalin and the USSR leadership of the time,"* he said. All these factors together, combined with Putin's personal commitment to the crash investigation, and the sensitivity displayed in dealing with families of the perished, as well as Medvedev's participation at the state funeral in Cracow – have fostered an entirely new atmosphere of solidarity between Poles and Russians, both among the two peoples and between their politicians. This has given the impression that the rapprochement may be longer lasting.

From the perspective of the last twenty years, the disagreements between Poland and Russia concerning the strategic issues described above need be viewed as part of a difficult process of normalisation of the bilateral relations. This process has slowly moved the two countries forward. Some of the major conflicts, like the dispute about Poland's sovereignty and its integration with NATO and the EU, can now be considered as resolved. The disagreement about the two nations' common history needs to be separated from internal politics, and there is a real prospect of it being solved through this reconciliation process.

The remaining disagreements concerning security, energy and the future of the Eastern neighbourhood automatically also involve Russia's relations with NATO and the EU. Poland has an important role to play within these communities and the strategic decisions made by Poland within these structures will to some extent continue to influence bilateral relations with Russia. Although a 'change in tone' in Polish-Russian relations has been observed recently, remaining unresolved issues can still undo the recent rapprochement. Perhaps the most optimistic aspect of the current thaw in Polish-Russian relations is that new forums (e.g. contacts between Russian Orthodox Church and Polish Catholic Church) and some new institutionalised forms of cooperation (Polish-Russian Dialogue and Reconciliation Centres) have been established. These initiatives give hope for a more stable co-operation as they build a deeper structure that might not be affected by political fluctuations.

2.- Russian- Polish Rapprochement

By Irina Kobrinskaya

The Smolensk tragedy in April 2010 signified an opening of the next stage in Russian-Polish relations. The sincere sympathy shown by both ordinary Russians and their leaders deeply surprised Polish society, which overall distrusts both Russia and its politicians; and which made Poles believe that Russia is able to demonstrate feelings of humanity and support.

None the less, several significant steps towards improving Russian-Polish relations were also taken much earlier than the expression of cordial compassion and sympathy in the days of Smolensk tragedy, which at the time were breaking news on TV and which were covered on the first pages of the newspapers.

The first of these occurred in January 2005, when the then President V.Putin commemorated the victims of the Holocaust in Auschwitz, on the occasion of the 60th anniversary of the liberation of the concentration camp by the Soviet army.

Since the beginning of 2008 both Presidents Putin and Medvedev have met several times with the Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk. It was then that Tusk formulated a new paradigm of Russian-Polish relationships. He said, firstly, that both countries have had enough and are 'sick and tired' of the 'atmosphere of cold'. *'Coming in from the cold'*, setting a regular dialogue, including on most difficult problems – can be defined as first principle of the new paradigm. During the same period in his interview, Tusk formulated another principle of the new approach towards relations with Russia: *to deal with Russia, to keep dialogue with Russia 'as it is'*.

At the end of 2007 Foreign ministers Lavrov and Sikorski agreed to re-start⁸ the work of the Polish-Russian Commission on difficult problems (including Katyn), which first met in June 2008. By spring 2010, it had mostly accomplished its designated task and this time, the results of investigation have almost satisfied the Polish side's expectations.

On September 1 2009, Putin came to attend the commemoration events on Westerplatte in Gdansk, which was commonly admitted as being a brave step by the Russian leadership. Furthermore, Putin's article published in Gazeta Wyborcza on 31 August 2009 openly condemned both Stalin's crime in Katyn and the Ribbentrop-Molotov pact of 1939.

Other critical events in the lead-up to this improvement in Russo-Polish relations include:

8. The first commission of Russian and Polish historians was organized on the request of the then Polish leader General W. Jaruzelski, who explained its necessity to Mikhail Gorbachev as a consequence of pressure from Polish public opinion. As a result, on 13 April 1990, during the visit of Jaruzelski to Moscow, the TASS agency published the declaration on the Katyn tragedy, in which the Soviet side admitted guilt for the execution of Polish prisoners and qualified this murder as one of the Stalinist crimes. The decision on the new commission was taken in 2002, but it started its work only in 2008, co-chaired by A. Torkunov and A.D. Rotfeld.

- Russia's introduction of restrictions on Polish meat imports in 2006, while in return, Poland hampered EU-Russia negotiations on the new strategic partnership;
- Poland's active opposition to the construction of the Northern Stream gas pipeline;
- Warsaw's strong support for US plans to deploy elements of the US Ballistic Missile Defense (BMD) system in Poland and Czech Republic, which caused harsh criticism in Moscow. Finally, in July 2009 Central-European political leaders signed a letter of appeal to the US Administration to keep to a 'firm' line in its relations with Moscow; not to neglect Central Europe in American foreign policy; and deploy the BMD elements there. The decision to cancel the initial plans came from Washington in 2009 on a day which could not have been worse for Poland – 17 September - and was perceived there almost as a betrayal by a strategic partner. This chronology has not only symbolic but high political significance for the analysis of Russian-Polish relations.
- In 2007 the EU started the "Eastern Partnership" project for six post-Soviet states, initiated by Poland (and supported by Sweden), but strongly criticized by Russia as a next attempt to intervene into the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) affairs and to draw these countries into the European ambit.

The improvement or 'warming-up' of bilateral relations is thus under regular pressure and is repeatedly severely tested. It causes the resistance of the nationalist conservative forces mostly in Poland, but, reactively, also in Russia. The most telling examples are the publications of former Prime Minister Kaczyński blaming Polish leadership

for treason of national interests, whilst accusing Russia of a plot to liquidate the Polish elite in Smolensk. In return, Russia responded with eye-opening revelations on the Katyn massacre which caused accusations against Poland in the ill-treatment and killing of Russian prisoners in 1920.

Despite this rhetoric, both Moscow and Warsaw have passed the 'Zakaev's test' in September 2010 with a 'satisfactory' mark. However, even more difficult and just as significant is the test of negotiations on gas, where both sides have to deal with a third very important partner – the European Commission. In fact, the results of these negotiations may have far-reaching implications for the whole European energy security system. The fact that neither Warsaw nor Moscow are giving these issues a high public profile can thus be interpreted as sign of a pragmatic, non-politicized, results-oriented approach.

Notwithstanding, all these developments bear witness to the unstable nature of Russian-Polish bilateral relations. A mere arithmetical balance (in Lenin's terminology) would be not "one step forward – two steps back", but rather "two steps forward – one step back" with a positive final sum. Is this indeed the case?

The Puzzle for Scholars

The case of the recent Russian-Polish rapprochement presents an interesting problematic for analysts and scholars, for three main reasons:

First, it is an outstanding example of the changes which have occurred in the world over the last 20 years – and of continuing change. Is the current rapprochement a logical "delayed result" of the events of 1989, the year of the "round table" in Poland which gave a start to the peaceful "velvet revolutions" in Central Eastern Europe, the year of German unification, the year which world known Polish publicist and one of Solidarity heroes Adam Michnik called '*annus mirabilis*'? Or is the normalization of bilateral relations 'in spite' of the experience of the 1990s and the early years of the 21st century?

Second, it presents a fascinating exercise in forecasting. It is possible to build scenarios foreseeing the changes in world affairs. Nevertheless, it is more difficult and even more important to foresee the domestic developments in both countries, depending on a complex combination of national, party, personal, economic-financial interests and ambitions, and above all, frequently on the 'personality factor', as we see in both Russia and in Poland.

Much in the future development of Russian-Polish relations will depend on whether Poland continues its activities within the same paradigm as in the past, trying to build on the alienation from Russia and the Soviet world, or will it re-align with the new Euro-integration and globalization trends

Third, it is a challenging case for a study on the motivation of recent dynamics in Russian-Polish relations. On the one hand, recent progress is internationally-based, with the impact of Russian-Polish relationship on world politics often being compared to previous German-French rapprochement. In this scenario, the success, stagnation or failure of these developments has a spill-over effect into both the European and Euro-Atlantic spaces. On the other hand, recent rapprochement has its specific roots in domestic political and historical bilateral contexts.

What makes this analysis and research such a difficult task, is the fact that those who write about Russian-Polish relations are often too much personally involved in the issues themselves. At the same time, at least in Poland, there already are some young and knowledgeable scholars (or groups of scholars, like "*Nowa Europa Wschodnia*" journal and *Collegium Europaeum* in Wrocław) with a qualitatively new – European, or rather EU – approach to the problems of Eastern Europe and Russia. When considering all writings on this topic, it is therefore necessary to differentiate between objective, national vision and interests and parochial approaches – again on both sides, for both Russia and Poland.

It is also important to take into consideration an additional factor: particular perceptions on the part of both countries and their relations with third countries, first and foremost in Europe, because the public relations aspect of bilateral Russian-Polish developments has a significant feedback effect. Here, two points should be mentioned from the outset.

First, obviously Russia's position in this respect – for historical, as well as actual political and economic reasons – is hundreds of miles behind that of Poland. And in order to improve its image, Russia's efforts have to be twice as hard as those of Poland. Still, as pragmatic moods, or 'realpolitik' take an upper hand in world politics, public perceptions and – to a greater extent – assessments of politicians, are becoming much more flexible. For example, Poland has dramatically spoiled its image in Europe, when brothers Kaczyński headed the country in many cases against European integration mainstream. Second, these perceptions are considerably historically biased and mostly appeal to the past and to old memories. In October 2010, in the very center of Milan, near its cathedral, along the whole length of a small street can be seen huge photos of the Polish Solidarity movement of the late 1980s. One of them shows the crowd with a slogan "we

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don't want brother's (meaning Soviet) support". In the other, General Jaruzelski announces the imposition of martial law in 1981. For at least three decades in Europe and for even longer in the United States, Poland has received invaluable support and help from a very influential actor – Poland. This Polish lobby in the USA has been among key driving forces behind NATO's expansion in the 1990s. Much in the future development of Russian-Polish relations will depend on whether Poland continues its activities within the same paradigm as in the past, trying to build on the alienation from Russia and the Soviet world, or will it re-align with the new Euro-integration and globalization trends – which would be a real break-through?

It is well known that Russian communities abroad are either scattered and fragmented or, as former dissidents do, tend to condemn the country. Whilst undoubtedly useful, most recent attempts to make up for the deficit of trust abroad and improve its image, first and foremost in and through Russian-speaking circles or via people of Russian origin, in particular through "Russian mir" Fund, though useful, cannot be compared in scale and effectiveness to Poland. Bearing in mind this background of mistrust and division, we will now attempt to answer the two main interconnected questions: (i)

why this rapprochement became possible; and (ii) whether it is irreversible. In other words, is Russian-Polish rapprochement doomed for success or will it turn into a missed window of opportunity?

Why has the current Russian-Polish rapprochement become possible?

Rapprochement is a deliberate mutual political action by two equal countries. The deliberate nature of the process presupposes good political will, which can appear only in cases when stable political leadership is supported by a significant part of political-economic-business establishment and through an interactive 'on-line' dialogue with the society (ie, the social contract in action). Apart from good will, deliberation means realization by both sides (though possibly for different reasons or motives), of the necessity for the normalization of relations. This necessity – a recognized need (again in Lenin's terminology) – in turn, to a significant extent, arises out of the international context, which may either be conducive to bilateral détente, or may impede it.

None of these prerequisites existed – and could not exist – before middle of the first decade of the 21st century.

The key problem of the relations between new post-Soviet Russia and new post-socialist Poland for the last two decades was a lack of strategic vision of the development of their relationships on all levels. Hence, there was no policy of consequent rapprochement.

In fact, on the contrary, both sides saw these relations as a by-product of their 'grand strategies'. For Poland, this meant integration into the western world through NATO and EU membership. For Russia, it meant the search for a new niche as a regional power in the post-Soviet space and being seen as an influential, first-rate, actor in the changing world order.

It is no wonder that Russian and Polish policy at the bilateral level was inconsequential, reactive, constantly nourished by mutual distrust and deep-rooted social-psychological prejudices and biased. Both countries have mutual suspicions – and not without grounds – which impede one another from realizing their *grand strategies*.

On the Polish side, its political elite overestimated the ability of Moscow to prevent and to hamper the movement of Poland into NATO and the EU. Thus, on the one hand, Poland has used up all its internal and external resources: first and foremost, the Polish lobbies in the West (predominantly in the United States) in pushing through the decision on NATO enlargement. On the other hand, the basic instrument of the Polish NATO-enlargement campaign in the 1990s was presenting Russia in the West as a state with imperial ambitions; and as a direct (military) and indirect threat (energy, civili-

zation, illegal migration, political instability especially at the start of 1990s) to Poland and its national interests.

On the Russian side, politicians underestimated first the Polish zeal and ability to integrate into these structures; and, secondly, the potential of Warsaw to build new relations with the CIS countries. In many cases, Russian officials neglected Poland as a part of negotiations and preferred to talk to Western partners (in Europe or the US) directly. Such a format in Warsaw (which is in general hyper-sensitive to Rapallo style decision-making)⁹ caused both irritation and further counter-steps which turned to be effective in neutralizing efforts by Moscow.

Such approaches acquired a self-replicating momentum of their own, and led – rather often – to undesirable results. Thus, openly anti-Russian course taken during Kaczyński brothers' rule led the country practically to political self-isolation within both the EU and NATO and to the weakening of positions in Ukraine. Meanwhile, the introduction of politically-motivated restrictions in trade and economic relations with Poland, on the part of Russia, have seriously damaged the image of Moscow as a politically predictable and economically-reliable partner of the West.

The mass-media have popularized and even cultivated these mood swings in public opinion, in which – in particular in Russia after the break-up of Com-econ and the Warsaw pact, and then of the USSR itself – have dominated mutual indifference. The public contacts between the two countries have substantially reduced and both Poles and Russians re-oriented their interest looking to Western Europe.

Any Russian steps in the CIS, and even more in Central Eastern Europe were interpreted as being motivated by imperial ambitions. Meanwhile, Russia saw in Polish initiatives the intention to undermine Russia's relations with its neighbors in the CIS, Europe and the United States.

This situation started to change in the early years of the first decade of the 21st century.

Poland has fully implemented the goals of its grand strategy in terms of membership of the EU and of NATO. Nevertheless, acquiring EU and NATO membership did not solve all the problems with the country's new identity. Attempts to re-build or to build anew a *national state identity* - (a task which was put aside in the 1990s and was not in tune with adaptation to these institutions' norms and rules) - caused

irritation among 'old' EU states, in particular in the period of the Iraqi war, when for the first time after the second world war, transatlantic ties have seen a visible split. Poland has made an open bet on the United States - not NATO - as a security guaranty. In the meantime, Russia has used this split to re-establish and strengthen its own bilateral relations with European 'big players', mostly Germany, France and Italy.

Building a new national state identity in general did not correspond to postmodern nature of the EU. Neither in the new situation could this task be fully realized on the traditional stance of reaction and counter-reaction to Russia.

By 2005-2007 Poland faced a dual problem: to re-invent the adequate narrative in relations with its partners in the European Union; and to find a new paradigm in its relations with Russia. These tasks could not be separated from one another, in a situation where the United States, after two decades of indisputable leadership, hinted at a changing format for their role in the changing, globalizing, world order.

Neither could public opinion in Poland be satisfied by the cultivation of contradictions with Russia, against a back-

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ground of evident problems in its relations with new (long-desired) allies and partners. Though still actively used in the mass-media, the anti-Russian theme is losing its attractiveness – though with the notable exceptions of cases like the war in the Caucasus, or conflicts over gas.

The energy theme is also perceived and interpreted publicly in different terms, as compared to the past. Poland, though enthusiastic about shale gas deposits in the country, is now more realistic in its approach to cooperation with Russia. As the Energy Charter is recognized as ineffective by all sides, the current format of negotiations – between Russia and Poland and the European Union – corresponds more to the demands of the near- and at least mid-term future, which needs predictable stable and mutually profitable relations between producers, consumers and transit lines of hydrocarbons in Europe.

Changing the global order with increasing uncertainties, new risks and threats has demanded more realistic, more pragmatic – and at the same time, a more visionary strategic approach, including towards relations with Russia. Though Polish economic indexes during the most difficult period of financial-economic crisis were much better than those in neighboring countries of the CEE, this crisis has demonstrated a very high degree of European economic interdependence.

9. (RAPALLO – The Treaty of Rapallo was signed in 1922 between Soviet Russia, at that time in complete diplomatic isolation, and Germany. The treaty is considered as a break-through of Soviet Russia in international relations at that time. Figuratively "Rapallo" means – 1. Russian-German rapprochement, 2. The style (though not that much Soviet, but classical British) of policy-making as "divide and rule" etc.

The clear fiasco of the Kaczyński brothers stance on international affairs – as exemplified by the deterioration of relations with Germany, lower credibility in the European Union – also demonstrated an acute necessity for changes in foreign policy strategy for Poland.

The shift in Polish approach to Russia is closely linked to the positioning of the country within the European Union. In this regard, the differences between the proponents of normalization of relations with Russia and opponents to this course are mostly very clear. The first set, who are made up of those currently in power (Prime Minister Tusk and President Komorowski of the Civil Platform party) believe that a rapprochement in relations with Russia corresponds to all-European trade-economic, political and security interests. They justify their stance by the recent significant improvement of relations with Germany and France and the strengthening of the Polish position in European institutions. Opponents of this view (mostly supporters of Kaczyński (PiS) and representatives of nationalist conservative forces) stick to the hard line in relations with Russia,

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using as their main argument that only this policy line will strengthen Polish credentials in the European Union. The debates on this topic of the early autumn 2010 in the Polish media clearly evidence this divide in vision among the different sets of politicians.

Two other important factors made the Polish approach towards relations with Russia more realistic and pragmatic. The first is a new and – with high probability – long-term stance of the United States. A significant element in this is a US-Russian “reset” in relations. The United States – which appears ready for a partial sharing of global responsibilities – is looking for reliable partners in a new world order, where the new centers of power will strengthen and the challenges (if not threats) to the Euro-Atlantic community will increase. Thus, dialogue with Russia in the security sphere becomes an indispensable element of the new security architecture in the Euro-Atlantic region. This new structure is foreseen as inclusive by all parties, independently of the fate of Russian initiative on the European Security Treaty. It is difficult to imagine a situation in which Central Europe will again become a pivotal priority of the US foreign policy. Thus, the

fundamental principles on which Polish policy of 1990s was based, are becoming obsolete and need revision.

An additional factor are the changes occurring in Ukraine. For several years, Poland has played a role of advocate of Eastern European states (former soviet republics) and has had a strong influence on the elaboration of the EU's Eastern policy. Still the Eastern Partnership, which has been criticized by many in the European Union, has been – as the majority admit – a fiasco: firstly, due to the financial-economic crisis, which deprived 6 Eastern European countries (members of the project) of any real stimulus, i.e. EU membership – thus presenting neither a short-term nor a long-term future; secondly, due to the political changes in Ukraine. Thus the Eastern Partnership has turned into an initiative without subject and without object¹⁰.

During the first decade of the 2000's Russians have become at least skeptical, and indeed almost indifferent, to political life, since the political situation in the country is fairly stable. Russians have to a great extent overcome the humili-

ation of 1990s, less the collapse of the socialist system in Central Europe, but more the break-up of the Soviet Union. Young Russians – at least in big cities – are western, Europe-oriented and indifferent to the deep historical and recent contradictions between Poland and Russia. Indeed, Poland is perceived as a country firmly rooted in the European Union. Finally in 2010, relations with Poland started to be perceived as at least instrumental in building strategic relations with the EU.

Though Russia's grand strategy has been crumbly, it was also – at least partially – implemented. Russia has obviously added in power, and level of life has increased. Russia evidently has turned back to the group of influential first-rate actors on the global stage, though this is perhaps less due to national success, than to external factors: changes in the global world order; the rise of new non-traditional threats; the United States' overstretching itself in Iraq and Afghanistan; the political weakness of the European Union, and so on. In this regard, Russia's main asset nowadays is that the key and most acute problems of international security cannot be solved without cooperation with Russia.

However, this situation hardly satisfies the Russian ruling elite, which realizes that without deep-rooted and speedy modernization, the country's infrastructure will further dete-

10. In February 2010 a new president, Viktor Yanukovich, was elected in Ukraine. Contrary to his predecessor, along with partnership with the EU, V. Yanukovich supports normalization and strengthening of relations with Russia.

riorate and lose its international ratings. Last summer's fires were like alarm bells. Thus the current situation – when Russia is in need – the Russian leadership seems to perceive in it a window of opportunity to modernize the country through cooperation with the West, first and foremost the European Union.

Pragmatism, declared as a driving force of Russian foreign policy, can hardly be defined as a 'grand strategy', in particular for a country like Russia. Nevertheless, political practices prove that a pragmatic approach to relations with foreign partners and efforts to use foreign policy instruments for the modernization of the country are becoming Russia's strategy for the foreseeable future. Indeed, it is beginning to be admitted also that this strategy has no alternative in terms of a strategy for national survival - which, after all, makes it 'a grand strategy'.

By 2010, Russian-Polish relations have therefore acquired a more balanced character – these are the relations of two equals, feeling safe and secure, aware of their historical phobias and able to overcome them. Thus the current *rapprochement* is a deliberate mutual political action of two equal countries. There are no obvious internal domestic or external international reasons why this development – of course with deviations – should be interrupted.