



Agnieszka SAWICZ 

Adam Mickiewicz University, Faculty of History, Poznań, Poland

Strategic Partnership in the Shadow of History

Strategiczne partnerstwo w cieniu historii

• Abstract •

The article analyzes selected problems in the implementation of the Polish-Ukrainian strategic partnership assumptions. The aspects of bilateral relations that undoubtedly made it difficult to engage in a constructive dialogue in the 21st century were outlined. It was also pointed out that the implementation of foreign policy assumptions in both countries is often the result of historical politics and a mythologized image of a neighboring country. In addition, putting the historical discourse over political, economic and social took part in the events. Kwaśniewski recalled then “the bravery and merits of those soldiers problems may result in lowering the standards of democracy, and the expectation from the other side to accept a specific vision of the past may indicate that politicians are focused on domestic politics at the expense of the country’s position on the international arena.

Keywords: nationalism; historical policy; strategic partnership; Poland; Ukraine

• Abstrakt •

W artykule poddano analizie wybrane problemy w realizacji założeń strategicznego partnerstwa polsko-ukraińskiego. Nakreślono te aspekty relacji dwustronnych, które niewątpliwie utrudniały podjęcie konstruktywnego dialogu w XXI wieku. Wskazano przy tym, że realizacja założeń polityki zagranicznej w obu państwach często jest wypadkową polityki historycznej i zmitologizowanego wizerunku sąsiedniego kraju. Ponadto przedłożenie dyskursu historycznego nad problemy polityczne, ekonomiczne i społeczne może skutkować obniżeniem standardów demokracji, a oczekiwanie od drugiej strony akceptacji dla określonej wizji przeszłości może wskazywać, że politycy skupieni są na polityce wewnętrznej kosztem pozycji kraju na arenie międzynarodowej.

Słowa kluczowe: nacjonalizm; polityka historyczna; strategiczne partnerstwo; Polska; Ukraina

The article attempts to outline and analyse selected problems of the Polish-Ukrainian strategic partnership implementation. While putting forward research hypotheses, the possible reasons for the disagreement in the interpretation of shared history were indicated, including an increase in nationalist sentiment and populist tendencies in social and political life, and the subordination of foreign policy to the domestic one. The role of churches and clergy in bringing understanding between the two countries was also emphasized.

The study presents an outline of the strategic partnership and its role in relations between Warsaw and Kiev. The different perceptions of nationalism and patriotism on both sides of the border and the influence of historical politics and bilateral relations were analysed, considering interpretation differences. The considerations were made on the possibility of developing a symbolic and actual reconciliation of Poles and Ukrainians in the longer term. While looking for answers to presented questions, the methods of critical analysis and comparative analysis were used.

The analysis of archives, legal acts, the results of public opinion polls and journalistic publications showed the importance of historical policy in building a rational foreign policy, but it also showed the discrepancy between the implementation of the assumptions and the politicians' focus on achieving short-term political benefits, aimed at strengthening the position in internal politics. Suggestions for actions were also presented that could positively influence the development of eastern policy concept by Poland and the increase in its importance on the international arena.

What Is a Strategic Partnership

The foundations for the future partnership between Poland and Ukraine were laid in 1993 when the *Treaty on good neighborhood, friendly relations and cooperation* was signed. It expressed the conviction that “the positive elements of the extensive history of Polish-Ukrainian relations will foster the expansion of cooperation between fraternal nations” (*Treaty between...*, Dz.U. [Journal of Laws] 1993 No. 125 item 573). Four years later, presidents Leonid Kravchuk and Aleksander Kwaśniewski emphasized that they “appreciate the importance of the strategic partnership of both countries” by signing in Kiev on May 21, 1997 *A Joint Statement on the understanding and reconciliation of both nations*. Its preamble indicated the intention to build bilateral relations based on “truth and justice” and “deep and sincere understanding and reconciliation” (*A Joint Statement...*, 1997). It was

a symbolic milestone in the history of building bilateral relations, but probably no one at that time would have imagined that reconciliation would prove to be such a long process.

‘Strategic partnership’ is an undefined and largely discretionary term. It rather expresses the will of partner countries to develop their relations in a specific way, instead of having legal consequences. So far, the scope of the strategic partnership has not been defined, and the features of international cooperation that would qualify it have not been indicated. In practical terms, it involves setting common goals to both countries, outlining the ways and methods of their implementation, and creating the structures to serve this purpose. The linguistic aspect already assumes the equality characteristic to international relations, where the countries are not subordinate to each other. It should be emphasized that it is impossible to discuss equality of entities in terms of the system, economic, military, and social potential. Equality remains in the ability to negotiate a mutual position and achieve goals that are important and common to both strategic partners. At the same time, each of these countries is primarily concerned with securing the best position on the international arena, which may bring potential difficulties in finding compromises.

Undoubtedly, this partnership goes beyond the traditional understanding of bilateral relations, especially in a broader, international context. Contacts resulting from belonging to international organizations are worth mentioning, under the condition that this is not always symmetrical membership. This is the case of the Polish-Ukrainian relations, where Ukraine does not belong to NATO and the European Union, while Poland has been a member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization since March 12, 1999, and the EU since May 1, 2004. This fact has an impact on Warsaw and Kiev relations, they should be seen in a broader, tripartite context, especially after 2004. Joining the EU and the Schengen area had a direct impact on relations with Ukraine, including the trade, visa policy, border traffic regulations. At the same time, Poland intended to lobby “among like-minded countries” for the Euro-integration of Ukraine (AMSZ).

Krzysztof Bałon, while asking “What is a strategic partnership?”, quotes Edyta Posel-Częścik, that not only the equality of strategic partners plays an important role in shaping such partnership, but also “it may precede the overcoming of historical prejudices” (Bałon, 2001, p. 412). Nevertheless, in the case of the Polish-Ukrainian relations, it is difficult to indicate if there is such a process, especially since nationalist tendencies have become increasingly visible in Poland in recent years, which in confrontation with Ukrainian historical policy makes it impossible to reach an agreement.

Perception from the Ukrainian Side

The development of mutual relations is affected by anti-Ukrainian events, such as the destruction of the Taras Shevchenko monument in Biały Bór on October 30, 2006, or the incidents in Bartoszyce in the Province of Warmia and Mazury, where schools with the Ukrainian language were set on fire, as reported by the Embassy of Ukraine in Poland (AMSZ2006). The exhibition “Eastern Borderlands Drowning in Polish Blood”, under the supervision of Jan Młotkowski, shown in Poznań, Sieradz, Łódź, Bełchatów and Kraków, was considered by the Ukrainians as an expression of an unfavorable attitude. Ambassador Ihor Charczenko described it as a “shameful event” (AMSZ2005a), and representatives of Kiev city organizations and five parties and associations in a letter addressed to the Embassy of the Republic of Poland in Kiev accused the organizers of the exhibition of “mixing the facts”, provoking hysteria around the events in Volhynia in 1943, humiliation of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army soldiers, Ukrainophobia and “fuelling national hostility between our countries”. The concept of showing the audience “pathological cruelty”, outraging viewers, was considered the provocation of chauvinists, intended to worsen good-neighborly relations between Poland and Ukraine and consolidate the image of the Ukrainian as an enemy (AMSZ2005b). Polish diplomats in their response clearly indicated that such undertakings “are not organized upon the initiative and with the support of the authorities of our country and a large part of our society, which has been supporting Ukraine for many years”, and that historians from both countries should research the history (AMSZ2005c)¹.

An equally sensitive issue was the conference “Genocide and Deportation of the Polish Population in the Eastern Borderlands of the Republic of Poland in 1939–1947”, scheduled for June 4, 2005 in Przemyśl. The intention of the organizers was to commemorate the murdered people, pointing that those responsible for the genocide were not the Ukrainians, but “fascist, criminal Ukrainian organizations” (AMSZ2005d). However, Ambassador Charczenko recognized that the conference changed its meaning, because it was organized at a time when the Intergovernmental Protocol on the Commemoration of Ukrainian Sites in Poland and Polish Sites in Ukraine was signed and when the agreements were reached on Polish military burials at the Lychakiv Cemetery in Lviv. In a letter addressed to Waldemar Dąbrowski, the Minister of Culture, Ambassador Charczenko mentioned that

¹ There was a demonstration in this matter in front of the Consulate General in Lutsk, organized by nearly 20 people, members of the “Svoboda” Union, the Volyn Sich of the Zaporizhian Army and “Spilnej Diji”.

there were current problems in Przemyśl affecting the Ukrainian minority, the military cemetery in Pikulice or Pawłokoma, and the authorities, having the intention to distract the attention from these problems, organized “provocative ceremonies” that could cause a wave of opposition in Ukraine (AMSZ2005d).

The chairwoman of the Society of Enthusiasts of Lviv and the South-Eastern Borderlands in Kozuchów, Urszula Płachcińska, considered such a statement as “an unprecedented interference in the internal affairs of Poland and Poles” (AMSZ2005e). Finally, the actions of local authorities resulted in moving “the most controversial aspects of the ceremony” “to the basement of one of the churches” to reduce the publicity. No legal grounds were found then to cancel the event. President Lech Kaczyński resigned from his patronage, “trying to calm emotions”. The emotions were extreme, also among the clergy – Archbishop Jan Martyniak, when opening the Przemyśl social welfare centre, spoke of the conference “with indignation”, but Cardinal Lubomyr Husar referred to it “calmly”. Director of the Social Policy Department of the Voivodeship Office in Przemyśl, Marek Łagowski, was convinced that this case “should not significantly worsen the bilateral relations”, although these words implied that such deterioration could have been expected to some extent (AMSZ2005f).

Such regional events perfectly illustrated the scale of the problems in bilateral relations, which were officially considered very good at the presidential level. *A Joint Statement of the President of the Republic of Poland and the President of Ukraine on the 60th anniversary of Operation “Vistula”*, issued during Viktor Yushchenko visit to Poland on April 27, 2007, emphasized the importance of strategic partnership. Yushchenko and Kaczyński stated that “over the recent years Poles and Ukrainians have made an enormous progress in the reconciliation efforts and in the search for a joint assessment of the difficult and painful past”, and “[t]he celebrations of the Volyn Tragedy in Pavlivka in Ukraine and the martyrdom of Ukrainians in Pawłokoma in Poland were the milestones of this process”. The Operation “Vistula” was described as an “example of injustice”. It was reminded that already in 1990, the Senate of the Republic of Poland condemned these actions of the communist government (AMSZ2005g; *Wizyta...*, 2007).

It should be mentioned, however, that on February 17, 2015, the Patriotic Union of Borderland and Veterans’ Organizations sent a letter to the Speaker of the Senate, Bogdan Borusewicz, where they demanded “the abolition of the disgraceful *Resolution of the Senate of the Republic of Poland of August 3, 1990 on the Operation «Vistula»*”. The Union appealed that “the High Senate do justice to Polish soldiers and representatives of public authorities who, fighting against the criminal gangs of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army and taking the necessary preventive

measures, defending the Polish borders and the security of Polish citizens” (*Uchylić uchwałę...*, 2015). There was even a petition on the Internet, signed by 634 people by the end of June 2020, and by three more people by April 23, 2021. Then there was an increase in interest in this matter and another 67 signatures were added within three months (*Uchylić haniebną dla Polski...*, n.d.). Even if we consider that it shows little support for such initiatives, it is also proof that the moods in Poland are far from supporting the concept of a Polish-Ukrainian understanding.

On the other hand, voices were raised on the Dnieper against the *Resolution of the Senate of the Republic of Poland of 7 July 2016 on paying tribute to the victims of genocide committed by Ukrainian nationalists on citizens of the Second Polish Republic in 1939–1945* (M.P. 2016 item 638) and the adoption by the Sejm of the Republic of Poland on July 22, 2016 of the *Resolution on paying tribute to the victims of genocide committed by Ukrainian nationalists on the citizens of the Second Republic of Poland in 1943–1945* (M.P. 2016 item 726). They were considered a unilateral review of the joint political assessment of the Polish-Ukrainian conflict during World War II by Polish parliamentarians, and by quoting the previous Polish resolutions of a similar nature, it was emphasized that they were a deliberate misrepresentation of the historical truth. Ukrainian politicians, political and social activists signed an appeal to the authorities and citizens to resume constructive Ukrainian-Polish dialogue, the signatories included Leonid Kravchuk, Levko Lukyanenko, Dmytro Pavlychko, Ivan Drach (*Sejm Polshchi...*, 2016; *Zvernennia...*, 2016).

Not Everything Is Clear

Over the years, there has also been a growing controversy over the perception of nationalist groups. At the same time, in Poland, the conviction that the Ukraine looked unilaterally and uniformly at the OUN-UPA [Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists – Ukrainian Insurgent Army] and the events in Volhynia was strengthening. Already in 1993, in a note prepared according to an analysis of selected titles of the West Ukrainian press (Lviv, Lutsk, Ivano-Frankivsk, and Tarnopol) and according to historical publications published in 1991–1993, it was noted that the concept of the history of Ukraine assumed the continuity of settlement within its current borders. Poland was mentioned in publications mainly in the context of the incorporation of Volhynia and Kiev region, the Cossack wars, and the division of the “Cossack state” between the Republic of Poland and Russia, and in the context of denationalization, not stopped during the period of Partitions, because Poles were “the ruling group in the Austrian partition” and in the “occupa-

tion” of western Ukraine after 1918. Attempts were made to “dissect” the “purely Ukrainian” elements, the will of Polish domination over Ukrainian lands was emphasized. Many “inconvenient” issues were omitted in the analyzed works, such as the political activity of Ukrainian parliamentary groups in the Second Polish Republic, the involvement of Ukrainians on the German side during World War II, the “extermination of the Polish civilian population” or the repatriation of the Polish population from the USSR, which deprived the historical context of such events like the Operation “Vistula”. The Ukrainian Insurgent Army, viewed negatively by Poles, was described as the strongest anti-German guerrilla formation, protecting “the civilian population against the activities of Soviet and Polish bands”. Yet, a phenomenon known as the “complex of history deception” was noticed. It involved reversing completely the assessment of historical events made during the Soviet era, which meant that “any information referred to by Soviet historians was automatically considered as evidence that it was exactly the other way round”. The attitude towards the nationalist movement was an example here, viewed extremely negatively in the USSR. It was assumed that before Ukraine becomes a stable country, it was necessary to create a history in that country that would stimulate the processes of national rebirth. The “victim syndrome” was also important, as Ukraine was portrayed in journalism as “the subject of the evil attempts of its neighbors” and the history of neighboring countries was interpreted accordingly. Articles criticizing nationalists or, more broadly, presenting views different from the discussed were rarely published (AMSZ1993).

Such an attitude towards nationalist activists was also noted in the following years, and the “speeches of local elites in Western Ukraine” and statements glorifying the OUN and UPA and their leaders were observed with concern. In this context, in 2009, Jarosław Bratkiewicz, Director of the Eastern Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in a letter addressed to Krzysztof Rómmel, Director of the International Affairs Office of the Chancellery of the Sejm, mentioned that while not denying the right of any nation to its own historical memory, it is necessary to objectify and rationalize it, and to fight for Ukraine’s independence cannot be an excuse for “mass murder and other repression”. Therefore, the purpose of the resolution of the Sejm of July 15, 2009 was to commemorate the victims of the Volhynian events, and not to harm the relations between Poland and Ukraine, which was continuously perceived as a strategic partner. As early as in 2003, Presidents Aleksander Kwaśniewski and Leonid Kuchma expressed their condemnation of violence against the civilian population in a joint statement on reconciliation on the 60th anniversary of the tragic events in Volhynia, during the opening of the Cemetery of the Defenders of Lviv in 2005, ceremonies in Pavlivka in 2003, Pavlokoma

in 2006, or commemoration of the victims in Huta Peniatska in 2009. Bratkiewicz wrote that „[o]nly third parties benefit from Polish-Ukrainian animosities”, which is why it was considered necessary to deepen social dialogue on historical subjects, or to create a forum for exchange of ideas under the patronage of the governments of both countries, because the gestures of reconciliation at the highest levels “do not always reach the social consciousness”. It was necessary to prevent “the future of our nations becoming a hostage to different and completely contradictory interpretations of history” (AMSZ2009; *Uroczystości...*, 2003).

Yet, even for Ukrainians it is not easy to have a single view of the history of the OUN-UPA, especially after the years of Soviet supremacy, when nationalists were considered traitors. After 1991, it had to be agreed, as those people fought the Soviet Union, if they were really the enemies of the homeland, or rather heroes. The latter option began to have more and more supporters over time, which does not mean that they were in the majority. In 2017, only 41% of Ukrainians believed that it was right to grant OUN-UPA members the status of fighters for Ukraine’s independence in the 20th century. 27% were against the idea, 26% did not have an opinion on this matter (*Pidtrymka...*, 2017). It was a decrease by nearly 16.7% compared to the results of the 2008 research, when 57.7% of the respondents fully or partially supported granting the Ukrainian Insurgent Army the status of participants in the fights for national independence and thus having the resulting benefits. The percentage of opponents of such a decision also decreased from 46.1%, while the number of people who did not have an opinion on this matter increased significantly (18% in 2008) (*Use menshe...*, 2008).

At the same time, many emotions were caused by the adoption of the so-called decommunization laws concerning the policy of national remembrance, signed by President Petro Poroshenko on May 15, 2015. This decision was criticized by the Ukrainian scientific community and human rights defenders, among others, for assuming responsibility for the imprecise propagation of communist or Nazi ideology or for “falsifying history” and “public demonstration of contempt” for the defenders of Ukraine’s independence, including members of the OUN-UPA (Chervonenko, 2015; *Zakon Ukrainy Pro dostup...*; *Zakon Ukrainy Pro pravovyi...*; *Zakon Ukrainy Pro uvichnennia...*; *Zakon Ukrainy Pro zasudzhennia...*).

The politicization of the historical debate resulted in the ineffective attempts to find a common point of view on the scale of two countries and within each of them. The development of dialogue may enable the effective implementation of a historical policy that can play an important role in the consolidation of societies. It is true that the annexation of Crimea and Russian aggression in the east of the country contributed to some reevaluation and increased anti-Russian senti-

ment among Ukrainians, but the acceptance of a common interpretation of the past would additionally minimize the likelihood of intensifying internal conflicts (*Ukrainci rizko...*, 2015)².

If Kiev consistently strives to tighten cooperation with the Western Europe countries, declaring the will of Euro-integration that seems utopian today, but not impossible in an undefined future, adopting a vision of the past acceptable by the countries of the European Union will pose an additional problem. Meanwhile, the ongoing disputes over history and memory have a direct impact not only on Ukraine's relations with other countries but may also slow down democratic processes. The presentation of the historical discourse and the polarization of the world where heroes and enemies are referred to in the first place over economic and social problems and over the strengthening of domestic and foreign policy may result in lowering the democratic standards. There is such a situation in Poland now. The country fell to the category of incomplete democracies in the Freedom House ranking (*Poland*, 2020), it was also ranked 57th out of 167 countries assessed in the Democracy Index 2019 of the „The Economist” (*Democracy Index 2019*, 2019). Although it improved its position and climbed to the 50th place after a year (*Democracy Index 2020*, 2021), it was assessed that Poland is “the most autocratizing country in the world” according to the report “Autocratization Turns Viral” of 2021 (*Autocratization...*, 2021, p. 7). Although such assessments take into account the level of civil liberties, government activity at the national level, self-governance, independence of the judiciary system, election process, media independence, functioning of civil society or political culture, it is undoubtedly a change of emphasis from cooperation to building a reality where there is no place for other views that contributed to such a low assessment of Poland.

Need for Reconciliation

The adoption of the concept “we apologize and ask for forgiveness” still does not work for Polish-Ukrainian relations, as Oleksandr Zinchenko reminds. Although politicians, social activists and representatives of churches had already come out

² From September 2013 to February 2015, the percentage of Ukrainians declaring a positive attitude towards Russia decreased from 88% to 34%. The biggest decrease was recorded in the western oblasts, from 75% to 15%, and in the east of the country the positive attitude fell from 96% to 55%. At the same time, in Russia in March 2015, a positive attitude towards Ukraine was declared by 28% of respondents, “very good” was declared by only 3% of Russians, “very bad” by 21%, and “bad” by 34% of respondents.

with such an initiative, the discussions did not stop, but even intensified (Zinchenko, 2015). Reconciliation, which so far has been limited to a narrow group of politicians, clergy, scientists, has not transferred in the views of Poles and Ukrainians. It has not impacted a revision of historical policy or attitude towards a neighboring country. It was a declaration without a practical dimension, and its promoters were even suspected of procrastination or attempts to relativize history.

On the Polish side, the calls are still heard for Ukrainians to apologize to Poland for bloody moments in their common history, although the representatives of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, operating in Ukraine, and the Polish Episcopal Conference, signed a declaration of forgiveness and reconciliation between Poles and Ukrainians on October 8 and 17, 1987 in Rome. John Paul II, a supporter of understanding between both nations, initiated the meetings of the delegations chaired by Cardinal Józef Glemp and Archbishop Myroslav Lubachivsky. During the pilgrimage to Ukraine on June 23–27, 2001, the Pope also spoke in Lviv about forgiveness and the purification of historical memory, then “everyone will be ready to value higher what unites than what divides, to build a future based on mutual respect, on fraternal community, fraternal cooperation and genuine solidarity”. Cardinal Lubomyr Husar, in turn, mentioned the “dark and spiritually tragic” moments in history in the 20th century, when “some sons and daughters of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church did evil, unfortunately consciously and voluntarily, to their fellows from their own nation and other nations”, and asked for forgiveness “of God, Creator and Father of all of us, and of those whom we, sons and daughters of this Church, have wronged in any way”. On his behalf and on behalf of the believers, he forgave “those who hurt us in any way” (*Polsko-ukraińskie pojednanie...*, 2017). After the papal visit, a commission for cooperation of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church Synod of Bishops and the Polish Bishops’ Conference was established, the first meeting was held on May 8 and 9, 2003 in Lublin. “A pastoral ‘wound healing’ program was adopted, with an emphasis on priest formation and work with young people”, which seemed to be the right thing to do, as future bilateral relations would depend on the younger generation (*Komunikat...*, 2003).

On May 2, 2003, a letter from Ukrainian Greek Catholic bishops was sent to “neighboring brothers in Christ, Ukrainians and Poles”, calling for reconciliation, and on May 30, 2004, Cardinal Husar together with Cardinal Glemp prayed for the same intention. On August 7–8, 2004, nearly 200,000 people participated in the “Pilgrimage of Love and Reconciliation” to the Mother of God Sanctuary in Zarvanytsia, and on August 26 of the same year, Ukrainians and Poles prayed together at Jasna Góra for consent between the nations. Less than a year later, on June 19, 2005, the *Letter of the Greek Catholic bishops of Ukraine and the Roman Catholic*

bishops of Poland on the occasion of the act of mutual forgiveness and reconciliation was published, signed by Archbishop Józef Michalik and Cardinal Lubomyr Husar, calling, “Let us rise above political views and historical past, above our church rites, even above our nationality – Ukrainian and Polish” (*Komunikat...*, 2015; Stepan, 2015). Cardinal Husar emphasized that when he started talks about signing the document eight years ago, he did not expect that they would be finalized in such a short time. He considered this act to be a kind of “anticipation of reality”, making it possible to build foundations for mutual understanding (AMSZ2005).

There were some opinions that such gestures were possible because after many years of disputes, the deputies of the Lviv City Council agreed to open the Cemetery of the Defenders of Lviv, but these opinions were rare (Kryk, 2005). The voice of the bishop of the Lutsk diocese of the Roman Catholic Church in Ukraine, Bishop Markijan Trofimiak, did not have a wider response neither. The bishop expressed doubts about not being invited to participate in such a significant act of the Roman Catholic hierarchy from Ukraine (AMSZ2005i).

It should be remembered here that the ceremonies at the Cemetery of the Defenders of Lviv and at the Memorial of the Soldiers of the Ukrainian Galician Army were held on June 24, 2005. Presidents Aleksander Kwaśniewski and Viktor Yushchenko who, under the leadership of Symon Petliura, alongside Józef Piłsudski, fought together with Polish troops for the Homeland”, which was a rare example of evoking cooperation and brotherhood of both nations (*Udział...*, 2005). Yet, it soon turned out that the gestures of politicians and clergy would remain important but empty, without understanding the events and historical processes by the societies of both countries.

A special year for Polish-Ukrainian relations was 2013, the time of the celebration of the 70th anniversary of the murder in Volhynia. On Forgiveness Sunday, March 17, 2013, the Synod of Bishops of the Kiev-Halych Major Archeparchy of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church addressed a message “to the believers and all people of good will”, where the view of the clergy regarding the events in Volhynia was presented. It resulted from “not only the desire to commemorate innocent victims and express solidarity with their families, but also from the fear that the politically conditioned manipulation of the circumstances of this tragedy and the fierce intransigence of individuals or communities could ignite the faded fire of hostility between nations”. It was admitted that historians still have the task of explaining this tragedy and establishing the names of the victims, stressing that nothing justifies killing or even the smallest harm. According to the authors of the message, the Polish and Ukrainian nations will always have “a different collective memory of these events. The differences will concern the assessment of their his-

torical context and the names that will be used to define them”, but it does not relieve anyone from the awareness of guilt and the need to express regret. And since we have no influence on the past, in the opinion of the bishops it was important to take care of the present and the future and continue the work on reconciliation (*Oreǳzie...*, 2013).

It seems that the believers did not listen carefully to these words. *A Joint Declaration of the Catholic Church in Poland and the Ukrainian-Greek Catholic Church on the 70th anniversary of the tragedy in Volhynia*, signed on June 28, 2013 by Archbishop Sviatoslav Shevchuk and Archbishop Józef Michalik, and the renewal of Husar’s apology by Shevchuk did not change much (*Pidpysano...*, 2013). Similar voices were raised by clergy of Christian communities gathered in the Council of Churches operating in Volhynia, including the Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate and the Church of the Kiev Patriarchate, Greek Catholics, Protestants and the bishop of the Roman Catholic Church in Volhynia, Stanislav Shyrokoradiuk. They called for reconciliation, but also for drawing conclusions from the events in Volhynia (Wojciechowski, 2013), but some Polish circles did not hear this appeal. Tomasz Terlikowski considered the clergy’s letter “simply false. The message of the Volhynia Council of Churches on the 70th anniversary of the Volhynia tragedy is an attempt to build Christian forgiveness on a lie. That’s why it can’t succeed”, he said. He referred to the words about the “bloody confrontation between Ukrainians and Poles in Volhynia”, thus indicating a certain symmetry in the responsibility for past crimes. It can be noted that this was a subjective interpretation and undoubtedly not everyone understood the call of the hierarchs in this way, but it perfectly reflects the tense relations associated with Polish-Ukrainian history (*Ostre słowa...*, 2013).

On December 5, 2017, during a meeting in Lviv Polytechnic National University, Shevchuk, the head of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, reminded again that reconciliation between the two nations is needed. He noted that politicians are continuing their disputes and diplomats use “increasingly aggressive rhetoric”. Declaring reluctance to confrontation should be followed by real actions. The archbishop still noticed discrepancies, part of the “tragic tendency” visible in Europe today, scratching wounds and emphasizing what divides rather than what connects (*Proshchaiemo...*, 2017). It was symbolic that he mentioned it thirty years after the reconciliation in Rome, as if nothing or too little had been done for the Polish-Ukrainian reconciliation in three decades.

Conclusion

Today it seems that the concept summed up in the words “we apologize and ask for forgiveness” is not only ineffective, but also worn out. The apologies remain declarations that are left unnoticed by those who need to clearly define who was the culprit and who was the victim during World War II. Being considered a victim is somehow convenient, as it gives the right to claims, and at the same time relieves the aggrieved party of any blame. Yet, it is impossible to imagine building a rational foreign policy and bilateral relations with Ukraine only under the condition that the Ukrainians recognize the Polish interpretation of history. The assumption by Kiev that the OUN and the UPA are criminal organizations seems unlikely, while in Poland voices are being raised demanding that Polish politicians force such a declaration on Ukraine. Ukraine, as an independent subject of international law, is implementing its own historical policy, optimal, according to its understanding, and it is difficult to expect its change under the pressure of foreign governments.

In this situation, it can be considered how much both sides care about the implementation of the strategic partnership vision, and how much politicians are focused on building their electorate and strengthening their position in domestic politics, at the expense of foreign policy and the country’s position on the international arena. An attempt to outline the causes of the bloody events of the first half of the 20th century and to understand them would undoubtedly be much more beneficial today than considering their effects, which are well known to us and last until today.

According to the Polish-Ukrainian Dialogue Group, the partnership between Poland and Ukraine should be based on social relations, subordinated to “solidarity against common threat of Russian aggression policy”, it should exclude Polish paternalism and Ukrainian messianism, and be “future-oriented; its goal is historical reconciliation, not confrontation”. While building bilateral relations, Ukraine’s integration with the EU should still be considered (*Priorytetowe Partnerstwo...*, 2017, p. 3). Meanwhile, negative elements invariably prevail over positive ones in the Polish-Ukrainian dialogue. Few Poles remember about the involvement of politicians and non-governmental organizations in Ukrainian reforms, the building of civil society, rapprochement with NATO and the EU, but also about the role their nation played in the democratic processes in Ukraine, including during the Orange Revolution (Hurska, 2008), joint organization of 2012 European Football Championship, not to mention such a “distant past” as the alliance concluded by Józef Piłsudski and Symon Petliura. Even if Polish support for the independence of Ukraine was partial and late, it is noted in Ukraine that Poland “was the only

state that was interested in an independent Ukraine and provided military aid in 1920” (Borymskyi, 2020), and with certain reservations, there are mostly positive views of those events as a joint fight against Moscow and evidence of the possibility of cooperation between the two nations (Verstiuk, 2020; Kraliuk, 2016; *Ukraina i Polshcha...*, n.d.; Voitsekhovskiy & Kupriyanovich, 2015). It is true that Maksym Miroshnychenko states, quoting the colonel-general of the Ukrainian People’s Republic Mykhailo Omelianovych-Pavlenko, that “the Polish-Ukrainian agreement was not the work of two nations, but the personal work of their leaders”, nevertheless such statements still give hope that there will be politicians in Poland and Ukraine ready again to come to an understanding beyond divisions, and then to convince the nations to their arguments (Miroshnychenko, 2020). Even though such a thought seems to be very distant today, it is not impossible to fulfill.

It currently seems that Poland not only has no concept of eastern policy but is also not interested in creating it. Relations with neighboring countries are correct, but their intensification will probably not strengthen Poland’s position on the international arena, which means there may not be a specific motivation for change. The Eastern Partnership project initiated by Poland had its 10th anniversary in 2019 in the shadow of criticisms. It was mentioned that “the achievements of the Eastern Partnership are underestimated, and its potential is overestimated” (Słojewska, 2019), and Michał Lebduska believed that it was currently waiting for a relaunch, being “a kind of Cinderella” of the European Union, which is not too interested in it as the EU focuses on solving its own problems (Lebduska, 2019).

In view of the diminishing importance of Eastern Europe in the policy of the European Union, the importance of Poland is diminishing parallelly. First, because it is no longer attractive as a state that can be a mediator in building relations with this area, it is not successful in this field, but it is also increasingly shifting to the East, towards countries where rule of law, media freedom and democracy are questioned. The fall to the 62nd place in the ranking of press freedom in 2020 according to Reporters Without Borders was caused by the “attempts to control the justice system”, impacting “freedom of expression in independent media” and it is not a good prognosis for Poland for the future (*2020 World Press Freedom Index*, 2020).

Thus, it is difficult to judge to what extent domestic policy matters will dominate the actions of the Polish government in the coming years, and to what extent it will return to implementing an effective foreign policy. Arranging relations with Ukraine will undoubtedly require a declaration on the condition of bilateral relations, but also changes in real activities, considering the significant impact on the shape of the European Union, but also of Russia. The war in eastern Ukraine is now forcing Ukrainian politicians to defend the status quo in historical policy and

it will be difficult to expect compliance with the Polish vision of the past. Therefore, it is necessary to consider the possibility of an agreement beyond divisions, which is especially important in the presence of external threats.

Outlining common short-term and long-term goals, while emphasizing the positive sides of cooperation, and the past, will be a challenge for the rulers. The year 2020 brought an opportunity to refer to the anniversary of the 1920 war and to recall the glorious moments of the joint struggle of Ukrainian and Polish soldiers. This year could have become the starting point for a discussion based on a new perspective, not focusing on division between Poles and Ukrainians, but instead on what the connection was in the past and may be today, not focusing on multi-layered international cooperation, including NATO and the Union European, but focusing on regional cooperation. Activation of the Consultative Committee of Presidents, the Polish-Ukrainian Intergovernmental Commission for Economic Cooperation, the Interparliamentary Assembly of Ukraine, Lithuania and Poland, among others, the activities of partner forums or scientific exchange, and extensive programs aimed at overcoming negative stereotypes and creating a positive image of a neighboring country and its citizens may be the best capital for the future.

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