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**DOKĄD SIĘGAJĄ GRANICE ZACHODU?  
Rosyjsko-polskie konflikty strategiczne  
1990–2010**

**HOW FAR DO THE BORDERS  
OF THE WEST EXTEND?  
Russian/Polish strategic conflicts  
in the period 1990-2010**

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# **HOW FAR DO THE BORDERS OF THE WEST EXTEND?**

## **Russian/Polish strategic conflicts in the period 1990-2010**

Twenty years ago, Poland was the biggest satellite of the global Soviet empire, of which Russia was the core. Today, Poland is Russia's largest EU neighbour, and Russia is Poland's largest non-EU neighbour. The former border between the People's Republic of Poland and the USSR has transformed from an intra-bloc 'line of demarcation' into a section of the most important dividing line in Europe. From the perspective of Brussels and Warsaw, this line runs between the West and the region regarded as its neighbourhood (containing potential EU members); from Moscow's perspective it separates Russia – along with *its* sphere of influence – from the West. The history of the border symbolically illustrates the relations between Poland and Russia over the last twenty years: it is not simply a story of two countries, but a story entangled in much broader problems of pan-European significance.

This text summarises the first two decades of the relations between independent Poland and the Russian Federation. It presents them mainly through the lens of problematic questions because the most important areas of the two countries' mutual relations have been composed of contentious issues. With a longer time perspective, it may be possible to answer questions which have been posed repeatedly since the early 1990s and which have often been answered rashly and stereotypically: What is the essence of Polish/Russian problems? Do they stem from historically conditioned phobias and prejudices, or from genuine contradictions between the two parties' interests? And finally, are we 'treading water' by engaging in these difficult relations, or is this process bringing a new quality into the relationship?

Before looking at these questions, it is worth setting the context by making three key points, which are very often overlooked in debates about the Polish-Russian problems, but which should be borne in mind in order to understand the dynamics and essence of the interactions between Moscow and Warsaw.

**Firstly**, the problems of today should not obscure the fact that – when seen from a historical perspective – the last two decades can almost be regarded as a ‘golden age’ of Polish-Russian relations. This is the first time in several centuries that a sovereign Poland and Russia have been able to develop mutual relations without resorting to force; moreover, they have established a bilateral legal basis and (albeit not without difficulty) put into practice its provisions on “the inviolability of borders, territorial integrity, non-interference with internal affairs and the nations’ right to self-determination”<sup>1</sup>. Clearly, this situation stems from many factors, and not just decisions taken by Poland or Russia alone. Nevertheless, the situation which we currently perceive as difficult and highly unsatisfactory in fact marks a breakthrough, and demonstrates the immense progress that has been made in Moscow’s policy towards Warsaw and vice versa.

**Secondly**, Polish-Russian relations should not be reduced to the purely intergovernmental level. The undeniably difficult relations at the official level have had little impact on co-operation between businesses and social organisations, or on research and cultural exchange. Even if the scope of this co-operation did shrink in the initial period immediately following the break-up of the Soviet empire, this arose mainly from the new social and economic conditions, and not as a result of problems between Warsaw and Moscow.

<sup>1</sup> ‘Poland-Russia. ‘Treaty on friendship and neighbourly relations signed on 22 May 1992 by Presidents Lech Wałęsa and Boris Yeltsin’, in *Polska–Rosja. Traktat o przyjaznej i dobrosąsiedzkiej współpracy oraz inne dokumenty*, PISM, Warsaw 1992, pp. 9-26.

**Thirdly**, relations between Poland and Russia are asymmetric. This refers not only to the obvious and oft-mentioned asymmetry of capabilities, but also to the different levels of sensitivity that each state shows when classifying issues as difficult situations or conflicts in international relations. For Poland, relations with Moscow are among the most conflict-ridden. For Moscow, which has been involved in numerous economic and political wars as well as military conflicts in recent years, its problems with Poland are just one of many issues, and certainly not the most dramatic one. This asymmetry has weighed heavily on mutual relations because it has caused the two sides to perceive the same facts differently: what appears as a deep crisis from the perspective of Warsaw is taken as political business-as-usual in Moscow. As a result, the two sides have displayed different levels of determination towards solving the problems.

## The four problems

In October 1990, the foreign ministers of Poland and the Russian FSSR met in Moscow and adopted the *Declaration on friendship and neighbourly relations*. This document, which was signed before the Soviet Union had even broken up, marks the symbolic start of new, post-Soviet relations between Poland and Russia. Since that time, there have been moments when those mutual relations have been quite cordial; however, the atmosphere between the two countries has more frequently been chilly and tense. Top-level visits have been cancelled or cut short on several occasions; no Russian president visited Poland for nine years consecutively (1993–2002); Moscow has imposed economic sanctions on Poland, and a number of harsh diplomatic and political exchanges as well as mutually critical press debates have taken place.

The problems underlying those tensions have always been part of the same four threads: **(1)** the dismantling of Russian dominance in Poland and Warsaw's policy towards the EU and NATO; **(2)** the policies pursued by the two states in relation to the Eastern European countries, **(3)** energy relations, and **(4)** the interpretation of the two nations' common history. From the perspective of the last two decades, it appears that these four long-term processes have constituted the key – and at the same time the most difficult – areas of mutual relations. Differences on those four issues have affected other aspects of relations between Moscow and Warsaw, as a result of which apparently insignificant events have on some occasions risen to the level of serious conflicts. The present paper focuses on these four processes. A number of other occurrences and bilateral issues, which have attracted much attention in their time, have been deliberately omitted as being either secondary to the four fundamental questions, or incidental and of no consequence for Polish-Russian relations in the long term.

## I. The first problem – the dispute about the sovereignty of Poland

After 1989, the strategic objective of Poland's foreign policy, as acknowledged by most Polish decision makers, was to put an end to any signs of the Soviet, and subsequently Russian dominance in Poland, and to prevent any new forms of dependence from emerging. The intention was not to act to the detriment of the Russian Federation; this effort was rather perceived as a *sine qua non* of the existence of an independent Polish state. This was the premise voiced very clearly in the opening address of Poland's first non-communist prime minister, Tadeusz Mazowiecki: "We have opened a new chapter in Polish-Russian relations. They are no longer guided by ideology and shaped by the Communist party (...), they are now normal relations between states and their governments pursuing the good of their nations and their national interests (...). Our point of reference in our mutual relations is the independence of the Polish state"<sup>2</sup>.

It very quickly transpired that this independence would inevitably require the freedom to choose allies, because in Poland's geopolitical situation, neutrality would in fact lead to continued dependence. This is why only membership in the Euro-Atlantic structures came to signify full military, political and economic sovereignty for Poland, as it created conditions for the modernisation of the state and enabled a successful transformation of the system of government.

However, Poland's aspirations to independence and its ensuing 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, which in turn met with objections in Warsaw and raised concerns about a possible rebirth of the Kremlin's imperial aspirations. This discrepancy has

<sup>2</sup> The Polish prime minister Tadeusz Mazowiecki's address to the Parliament, 12 September 1989, *Trybuna Ludu*, 19 January 1990.



been the cause of the most serious frictions between Russia and Poland, which have recurred at greater or lesser intensity throughout the last two decades.

In 1989, Prime Minister Mazowiecki obtained a pledge that Russian troops would be withdrawn from Poland by 1991. However, the pledge was soon forgotten, as members of the conservative post-Soviet *nomenklatura* gained influence in the Kremlin. No progress in the negotiations concerning the pullout of troops was reported for many months. A breakthrough came after the August putsch in Moscow. In October 1991, a treaty on the withdrawal of troops was initialled, and 1993 set as the final deadline for the withdrawal of all Soviet troops from Poland. However, the property issues remained unresolved. A proposed solution was to create companies with mixed capital that would take over the property left by the Northern Group of Forces. The military employed in these companies would be allowed to reside on the territory of Poland. Initially, the Polish side agreed to include provisions concerning such companies into the treaty. However, this solution met very strong criticism from large parts of the Polish political elite; it was seen as undermining Poland's sovereignty and preserving bridgeheads for Russian political and military presence on Polish territory. Consequently, during President Lech Wałęsa's visit to Moscow shortly before the agreement was signed on 22 May 1992, the Polish side asked for the provisions to be removed.

The new Polish-Russian treaty on bilateral relations was also signed during the visit by President Wałęsa to Russia. Work on the document had started back in 1991. At that time, the parties disagreed about the Soviet-proposed clause to limit Poland's ability to enter military alliances and other pacts without Moscow's consent. However, the Russian Federation no longer made any 'anti-alliance' demands. Article 1 of the treaty stated that "the Parties shall develop their relations in the spirit of friendship, neighbourly partnership and equality"<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>3</sup> 'Treaty on friendship and neighbourly relations signed on 22 May 1992 by Presidents Lech Wałęsa and Boris Yeltsin', *op.cit.*

## 1. Membership in NATO and military co-operation with the United States

However, the practical implementation of the treaty's provisions proved problematic. A debate about Poland's accession to NATO was already underway at the time the treaty was signed. Signs of Moscow's disapproval of this process started to surface with the creation of the Russian Federation, and were voiced mainly in military circles. Those statements gained in intensity in 1993 when the rapprochement between the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland on the one hand, and the North Atlantic Alliance on the other, became increasingly apparent. In the face of such attitudes from Russian politicians, the Polish-Russian declaration to the effect that "in the long term, such a decision by sovereign Poland (i.e. accession to NATO) would not be contradictory to the interests of other states, including Russia"<sup>4</sup>, made during President Boris Yeltsin's visit to Warsaw in August 1993, was welcomed all the more enthusiastically in Poland. However, the declaration was not followed by any change in Russia's policy; four weeks later, the Russian president sent a confidential letter to Western leaders, highlighting the threats involved in the Central European countries' integration with NATO. Russia argued that NATO enlargement would isolate Russia and adversely affect its relations with the West, and that good relations between NATO and Russia were much more important for European security than the Alliance's good relations with the Central European countries<sup>5</sup>.

Similar arguments were also raised in press debates in Russia. It was pointed out that NATO enlargement would reinstate bloc politics and push Russia towards authoritarianism. However, some analysts admitted that Russia's internal instability and unpredictability could be the factor prompting Poland to take such a step. Others maintained that the behaviour of the Polish authorities was inappropriate because Warsaw was facing no threats from either east or west<sup>6</sup>.

<sup>4</sup> Joint declaration by Poland and Russia, in *Zbiór Dokumentów*, No 3, PISM, Warsaw 1993.

<sup>5</sup> The letter was published in A. Rotfeld, 'Europe: Towards a new regional security regime', SIPRI Yearbook 1994.

<sup>6</sup> Pushkov, *Moskovskie Novosti*, 10 October 1993; Arbatov, *Segodnya*, 16 October 1993.

This attitude was reflected in the strategic documents Russia published. Both the *Foreign policy concept* published by the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs in January 1993, and the new military doctrine adopted in November 1993, included provisions on the “historical interests of Russia” in the region and on the preservation of the region’s “friendly neutrality”. The containment of NATO’s enlargement was not limited to the question of maintaining influence in Central Europe, but was part of Russia’s wider strategy aimed at establishing a new security architecture in Europe, which would enable Russia to decide jointly on political and military issues while at the same time restraining the US military presence in Europe.

This was the Russian position as presented by the Russian foreign minister Andrei Kozyrev in Krakow in February 1994. He called for NATO’s role to be limited, and for the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe to be transformed into a leading institution in charge of coordinating security issues in Europe. To the Czechs, Slovaks, Hungarians and Poles, Kozyrev offered “cross-guarantees” of security from the Russian Federation and the biggest Western states. The proposal was perceived in Poland as signifying Russia’s refusal to accept Poland’s political emancipation. The Polish authorities tried to persuade Moscow not to view NATO enlargement as a threat but, on the contrary, as an opportunity for rapprochement with the Alliance.

In July 1997, the NATO summit in Madrid decided to admit three new member states including Poland. It should be noted that the decision was preceded by a number of political measures designed to ‘mitigate’ the cost of this decision for Moscow. From Poland’s point of view, the crucial measure was the signature in May 1997 of the *Founding Act on Mutual Relations, Cooperation and Security* between Russia and NATO, which included *inter alia* a political commitment to the non-deployment of major armed forces on the territories of the new member states (which continues to be respected to this day)<sup>7</sup>. At that moment, the question of NATO enlargement ceased to receive such intense criticism from Russia.

<sup>7</sup> The text is available at [www.nato.int/pfp/nato-rus.htm#texts](http://www.nato.int/pfp/nato-rus.htm#texts)

A decade after Poland's accession to NATO, it is possible to say that the arguments of both sides have proved to be only partly justified. The enlargement has altered the geopolitical situation in Europe, but it has not radically changed either NATO's policy on Russia or Russia's internal situation and foreign strategy. While it is true that the new members are more distrustful of Russia, the enlargement has led neither to a souring of relations (as Russia had predicted), nor to a long-term rapprochement between the Alliance and Moscow (as Poland had argued it would). The crises of the last decade have been caused primarily by the divergence between the two sides' strategic objectives (e.g. with regard to the Balkans or Georgia). However, the Kremlin's predictions have come true on one point: the new member states, and especially Poland and later the Baltic states, have turned out to be devoted champions of NATO's integration with Ukraine and Georgia, which is completely unacceptable to Russia. In recent years, US plans to deploy elements of the missile shield in Poland have been causing contention. Throughout the Polish/US negotiations (2006–2008), Russia was firmly opposed to the plans and argued that the shield was in effect an anti-Russian undertaking. Moscow threatened to retaliate by aiming missiles at the shield elements located in Central Europe and deploying new-generation short-range missiles in the Kaliningrad oblast. Russia's criticism was addressed not so much to the United States as to Poland and the Czech Republic (on whose territories the radar stations forming part of the system was to be deployed). Poland emphasised that the shield was a defensive project, the objective of which was to ensure protection against a possible attack from Iran. This was evidenced by the technical parameters of the installation, which could not have provided effective protection from a missile arsenal as powerful as the one held by Russia. Poland also emphasised its sovereign right to conclude bilateral agreements with the United States. It pointed out that Russia's objections were indicative of its specific treatment of Central Europe, including Poland, as no criticism had been expressed about the deployment of missile shields in Denmark or the United Kingdom. In essence, the conflict did not concern the installations themselves, but was rather a continuation of the strategic dispute about the scope of the US military presence in Poland and Central Europe, and the Central Eu-

ropean countries' right to full sovereignty with regard to hard security. Russia opposed the permanent deployment of any US forces in the region. The Polish government, on the other hand, believed that such a presence would provide an additional security guarantee; i.e. that in the event of a threat, the USA would be more willing to engage in Poland if that would in fact mean the defence of its 'own forces' on Polish territory.

## 2. Integration with the European Union

The process of Poland's integration with the European Union was much less problematic, although it too gave rise to some controversies. Initially, the Russians perceived EU enlargement as posing no threat to Russian interests, in contrast to the enlargement of NATO. This perception was due to the notion, dating back to Soviet times, that spheres of influence are defined mainly in terms of military presence. However, as Poland's rapprochement with the EU progressed, Moscow started to publicly raise the issue of the likely adverse consequences for Russia arising from this. The manner in which the demands were presented and the harshness of the rhetoric suggested that, apart from mitigating the unfavourable consequences of the enlargement, Russia was also making a political statement<sup>8</sup>. Its aim was to show that despite EU enlargement, the Russian Federation would not be reduced to a peripheral country but, on the contrary, the Community would have to respect the interests of Moscow as an important actor on the continent.

The problem of Kaliningrad turned out to be one of the most important points of contention. As a result of the EU's enlargement, the Russian enclave would be completely surrounded by EU member states. Even before the accession of Poland and the Baltic states, the Russian side started to make harsh references concerning the damaging implications of this on ties between Kaliningrad and mainland Russia (specifically, the Russian public's freedom of movement between the two areas). This caused seri-

<sup>8</sup> For more information, see Marek Menkiszak, 'Russia vs. the European Union: a "strategic partnership" crisis', Centre for Eastern Studies, Warsaw, January 2006.

ous friction, especially between Lithuania and Poland on the one hand, and Moscow on the other. Lithuania firmly refused to implement any solutions which would impede its accession to the Schengen zone in the future, and Poland criticised the Russian idea of an extra-territorial corridor running through its territory. Warsaw also maintained that the transit route did not run through its territory, and would not run through it in the future, due to infrastructural reasons. The European Commission acted as a mediator and a conciliatory force in the dispute. As a result, a compromise was reached (implemented in June 2003), under which it was decided that transit would take place solely via Lithuania based on free and easily accessible permits (the so-called Facilitated Transit Document).

The second contentious issue raised concerned the economic consequences of EU enlargement for Russia. Under the Partnership and Co-operation Agreement (PCA) governing the EU's economic relations with Russia, the new member states were to be automatically covered by that agreement upon their accession to the Community. However, the process proved to be rather problematic. Several months before the 2004 enlargement, Russia started to demand the signature of a statement that would regulate certain co-operation issues which Moscow deemed sensitive. After lengthy negotiations, in April 2004 the parties signed a protocol to the PCA and a statement<sup>9</sup>. The EU accepted most of Russia's economic demands but rejected the proposal to soften or retreat from certain EU standards (such as sanitary requirements) applicable to goods imported from Russia.

Paradoxically, Poland's membership in the European Union has proved to be much more consequential for the overall shape of Russia's relations with Poland and the West than has Warsaw's accession to NATO. Poland's membership in the EU has not brought about any breakthrough in the Community's policy towards Russia, but has had a significant impact on the EU's strategy in a number of areas, including the energy and eastern

<sup>9</sup> The agreement finally came into force only after ratification by the State Duma in November 2004.

neighbourhood policies (to be discussed in greater detail further in the text), as well as economic policy.

As for the principles of the EU's economic co-operation with Russia, Warsaw has taken an active stance in connection with what became known as the meat crisis. In November 2005, Russia imposed an embargo on Polish agricultural and animal products, claiming – as its justification for the move – that there had been instances of certificate forging for such products. Poland's economic losses were small (the Polish ministry of economy estimated them at around US\$300 million a year). However, Warsaw was convinced that the embargo had been largely politically-motivated, and that its aims included undermining the EU's single trade policy and dividing EU member states into two categories – the 'better' ones with good relations with Russia, and the 'worse' ones whose relations with Russia were tense. In this situation, Poland's main policy goal was to obtain the support of the European Commission, i.e. the institution formally in charge of trade policy issues, and of the other member states, in order to clearly manifest European solidarity. On 13 November 2006, Poland vetoed the European Commission's mandate to start talks with Russia concerning a new agreement laying down the legal framework of EU-Russia relations. This forced the EU member states to take note of the embargo problem and undertake concrete measures towards Moscow.

The EU initially adopted a dual strategy of persuading Poland to withdraw its veto and Russia to lift its embargo. It was only after Russia toughened its stance that the EU started to display more solidarity<sup>10</sup>, most visibly during the Russia-EU summit in Samara in May 2007. On that occasion, the German chancellor Angela Merkel, who was representing the EU presidency, said that the meat crisis was not a bilateral issue but concerned the entire Union.

<sup>10</sup> In order to gain a stronger bargaining position, Russia suggested it might extend its ban on meat imports to the entire European Union, on the pretext that conditions for Romania and Bulgaria's accession to the EU had not been consulted with Russia. In another attempt at dividing the Union, Moscow declared that only states that signed bilateral agreements with Russia to guarantee the safety of their products would be allowed to export meat to Russia after 1 January 2007. Russia offered to sign such agreements with Germany, Italy, France, Denmark and Ireland.

The meat embargo was finally lifted between December 2007 and November 2008 (on different dates for different products), i.e. only after political groups that declared readiness to improve relations with Russia came to power in Poland in the aftermath of the parliamentary elections. At that time, Poland also withdrew its veto against the start of negotiations concerning the new Russia-EU agreement.



## II. The second problem – contradictory visions of neighbourhood

Unlike the process of Poland's political and military emancipation, and the rapprochement with NATO and the European Union that it entailed, the question of Eastern Europe has never been officially identified as an important area in relations between Russia and Poland. In reality, however, both sides were aware of their conflicting interests in this sphere. The tension resulting from this 'latent' conflict has been affecting bilateral relations, triggering clashes of an evidently secondary nature. At the core of the disagreement lay the conflicting visions of the Eastern European order. The future of this region has proved to be of fundamental significance for both Russia and Poland.

Warsaw's interests focused mainly on Lithuania, as well as Ukraine and Belarus, and later Georgia. Lithuania, however, ceased to be regarded as part of the 'neighbourhood area' when it joined the Euro-Atlantic structures. In Poland, the assumption was that the countries in question should be sovereign (i.e. free of Russian, Polish or any other dominance) and follow the same path of systemic transformation that Poland had chosen, namely, to develop democracy and a market economy, and to aim at integration within the Euro-Atlantic structures.

This vision was the implementation of a concept of fundamental importance for Polish political thought, which had been formulated long before the fall of communism by two distinguished émigré journalists, Jerzy Giedroyc and Juliusz Mieroszewski. This concept stated that the situation in the Eastern European countries (which the authors referred to as ULB, an acronym standing for Ukraine, Lithuania and Belarus) was of crucial importance for Russia's policy towards Poland. Moscow's control over those countries would pave the way to the subjugation of Poland, whereas their sovereignty would contribute to Poland's independence<sup>11</sup>.

<sup>11</sup> 'Rosyjski 'kompleks polski' i obszar ULB' ('Russia's 'Polish complex' and the ULB area'), *Kultura* 1974, No 9.

From Russia's 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 that were as strong as possible; the underlying assumption was that the relationship should not be that of partners, but should be based on Russian dominance. This entailed firm objections to those countries' integration with NATO and (albeit to a lesser extent) with the European Union. Russia viewed the emancipation of the CIS members as a threat to its security, and a factor that would push Moscow to the periphery of Europe.

This way of looking at the post-Soviet states, including those in Eastern Europe, was reflected in the policy document entitled *Russia's strategy towards the CIS members*, which was approved by presidential decree on 14 September 1995. Section 1 of the document, which describes the objectives and undertakings of Russia's policy towards the area, does not even mention 'democracy' or 'market economy'. Instead, it emphasises that Russia strives for the political and economic integration of the Commonwealth of Independent States, and that this process should be guided by the principle of safeguarding the interest of the Russian Federation and "strengthening Russia's role as the main force shaping the new order of inter-state relations in the post-Soviet area"<sup>12</sup>.

Disagreements concerning Eastern Europe have surfaced with varying levels of intensity over the last two decades. However, the asymmetry of Poland's and Russia's capabilities and instruments for implementing policy has been evident from the very start of this period. The key actors were the countries concerned and the Russian Federation. Poland, on the other hand, played a secondary role, apart from in a couple of specific situations. Warsaw thus realised very quickly that it would be unable to support the democratisation of the Central European countries and their rapprochement with the Euro-Atlantic structures without involving the Western states in the process. An opportunity for such involvement pre-

<sup>12</sup> 'Strategicheskii kurs Rosii s gosudarstvami – uchastnikami Sodruzhestva Nezavisimyykh Gosudarstv', [www.mid.ru](http://www.mid.ru)

sented itself when Poland joined NATO and the European Union. Motivated by Poland's awareness of its own limitations, this strategy of seeking allies was interpreted, wrongly, by some Russian journalists and elite members as having been inspired, or even 'ordered', by Western powers.

Tension related to policies towards Eastern Europe had already become apparent in 1990. At that time, Poland adopted a 'dual' strategy, aimed at developing dialogue with the Soviet republics while at the same time maintaining the best possible relations with the Kremlin. The practical implementation of this concept created dilemmas for the Polish authorities as to which relations should be prioritised. The decisions taken often amounted to messy compromises. Poland postponed the diplomatic recognition of Lithuania (it was only the twenty-sixth country to recognise the state), as Warsaw was concerned about possible complications in its relations with Moscow. In the case of Ukraine, the Polish authorities adopted a different stance, and were the first to recognise the Ukrainian state, even before the Białowieża meeting of December 1991 in which the Soviet Union was dissolved.

In the first years following the break-up of the Soviet Union, Polish-Russian tensions concerning Eastern Europe were not readily apparent. Russia was seeking to preserve its dominance in the region. The Russian foreign policy concept and the new military doctrine of 1993 contained provisions about "the special responsibility of Russia in the so-called 'near abroad'". In Poland, such signals gave rise to concerns, voiced for instance by the then foreign minister Andrzej Olechowski: "We are obviously concerned about statements concerning Russia's 'special interests' or 'special role' in Ukraine. Such utterances are not conducive to the stability of Europe. We deeply disapprove of them, and believe that in the long run, the independence of Ukraine will also contribute to the development of democracy and the economy in Russia"<sup>13</sup>. The international atmosphere, however, was not favourable for Poland's policy. Most Western states did

<sup>13</sup> Andrzej Olechowski's statement in the Senate Foreign Affairs Commission in 1994, in *Zbiór Dokumentów* 1994, No 1, PISM, Warsaw, pp. 42–54.

not perceive the Eastern European countries as important actors in Europe. The dominant approach could be summarised as “Russia above all and Russia only”, an attitude which in fact put President Yeltsin in the position of the main guarantor of stability in the post-Soviet area.

Friction between Poland and Russia was exacerbated in the early 2000s when Poland, freshly admitted to NATO, became a devoted champion of Lithuania’s accession to the Alliance (Lithuania joined NATO in 2004), which stood in stark contrast to Moscow’s vision.

The breakthrough came in 2004. Poland had just finalised its integration process of many years and joined the European Union; Russia, which had been politically strengthened by the presidential election which ended in spectacular success for Vladimir Putin, was stepping up efforts to re-inforce its influence over the CIS. In this setting, a very serious social and political crisis took place in Ukraine: the opposition (and its candidate Viktor Yushchenko) accused the then-president of Ukraine Leonid Kuchma, and the candidate he was promoting, Viktor Yanukovich, of ballot rigging. In addition, there were many indications that the candidate of the ruling camp was also being backed by Moscow (the Russian media and politicians had supported Yanukovich). Hundreds of thousands of people took to the streets throughout Ukraine (and elsewhere) in protest against the government’s abuse and illegal actions during the election.

For Poland, it was of paramount importance to ensure that the Ukrainian election met international standards. The assumption was that any other scenario, especially the use of armed force to resolve the crisis, would undermine Ukraine’s sovereignty and pave the way for Russian dominance, while at the same time impeding, if not altogether preventing, Kyiv’s cooperation with the European Union, NATO and the Western states. This conviction was the motivation behind the involvement of Polish politicians, and especially the then president Aleksander Kwasniewski, in resolving the internal crisis in Ukraine. The Polish activities greatly contributed to the organisation of the three round table meetings in Ukraine, which produced the final compromise and made the repeat of the second round of voting possible. In all this, the Polish government strove to act as a representative of the Union, making a (successful) effort to en-

sure that the mediation mission was a Community undertaking, and not simply a national enterprise (the mission included Javier Solana, the EU High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy). In Russia, Poland's activities were perceived as anti-Russian and aimed at creating a Polish sphere of influence. The media spelt out accusations that the Polish involvement in fact amounted to supporting the pro-Polish candidate, Viktor Yushchenko. As Sergei Markov, a Russian political scientist involved in Yanukovich's campaign, framed it, "Operation Yushchenko" was part of Poland's plan to establish itself as the leading state in Central and Eastern Europe"<sup>14</sup>. Markov also emphasised that the objective of the Poland-endorsed pro-western option in Ukraine was to isolate Russia and strengthen Poland, because the USA had decided that Ukraine should join NATO under Poland's protection<sup>15</sup>. Gleb Pavlovsky, another political scientist with close links to the Kremlin, who was working for Yanukovich at that time, also voiced harsh criticism of the 'Kwasniewski doctrine' which allegedly aimed at "the containment of Moscow's political influence".

The conflict did not directly manifest itself at the diplomatic level. During the Polish foreign minister's visit to Moscow on 17 December, before the rerun of the second round of voting, the foreign ministers of Poland and Russia jointly stated that the Ukrainian nation should elect its president independently and without any external interference.

The essence of the dispute was nevertheless revealed by the surprisingly sincere statement by the Polish president Aleksander Kwasniewski, who stated, "For any great power [implicitly meaning the USA], Russia without Ukraine is better than Russia with Ukraine". This provoked an equally direct response from President Putin who interpreted Kwasniewski's declaration as reflecting an ambition to restrain Russia's ability to develop contacts with its neighbours, or even to isolate Moscow<sup>16</sup>.

<sup>14</sup> Interfax, 25.11.2004.

<sup>15</sup> Interfax, 17.12.2007.

<sup>16</sup> Quoted from Adam Eberhardt, 'Stosunki Polski z Rosją, Rocznik Polskiej Polityki Zagranicznej 2006', PISM, Warsaw 2006.

The fact that the atmosphere of mutual relations soured as a result of the controversies surrounding the Orange Revolution bore on a series of apparently insignificant events that occurred in the course of the following year, and had no connection with the Ukrainian crisis. Those 'secondary' crises culminated in the incident of 31 July 2005, in which three teenage children of Russian diplomats were beaten and robbed by hooligans in Warsaw. Even though the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued a diplomatic note expressing regret, Moscow took the incident to have been a deliberate anti-Russian action rather than a random act of hooliganism. An anti-Polish campaign broke out in the Russian media. Within the week (5–10 August), three Poles were beaten in the streets of Moscow, including two embassy staff members and one journalist. It is worth noting that around the same time, the son of the Polish ambassador was beaten while travelling in Siberia (in an evident act of hooliganism without any political undertones). In order to avoid worsening relations further, the Polish ambassador deliberately hushed up the case<sup>17</sup>. In the following years, Poland, now a member of the European Union, sought to participate actively in the development of the Community's policy towards Eastern Europe. These efforts appear to have become increasingly effective as the Polish side has gathered more and more experience in the maze of internal EU diplomacy. All the Polish initiatives, including support for the opposition in Belarus during and after the 2006 presidential election, the unimplemented 'Eastern Dimension' concept proposed by Poland back in 1998, and the more successfully promoted Eastern Partnership initiative, have been perceived by Russia as running counter to its interests and designed to reduce its influence in Eastern Europe. It should nevertheless be noted that despite the evident difference of views, the Russian and Polish statements concerning the Eastern Partnership have been much more moderate than in the previous periods. Poland has been emphasising that this new initiative is politically neutral, and is focused on the modernisation of the so-called Eastern neighbourhood countries.

<sup>17</sup> Michał Komar, 'Świat według Mellera', Rosner & Wspólnicy, Warsaw 2008.

The question of Eastern Europe's relations with NATO generates much more controversy than does EU policy on Eastern Europe. Warsaw has officially backed the accession of the Baltic States, and subsequently (albeit less unequivocally) expressed support for membership for Ukraine and Georgia. Moscow, on the other hand, perceives the possible membership of Georgia and Ukraine as an absolutely unacceptable 'crossing of the red line'. Russia's attitude towards Poland's policy is well illustrated by a statement from the Russian foreign minister Igor Ivanov in a 2001 press conference held in Moscow following talks with minister Władysław Bartoszewski. Asked about the role that Poland could play in the enlargement of the North Atlantic Alliance, Ivanov said, "Poland may play a positive role in building stability and security in Europe if it speaks against further enlargements"<sup>18</sup>.

In Warsaw, Russia's position has been criticised as reflecting Moscow's refusal to acknowledge the full sovereignty of Ukraine and Georgia. The prevalent opinion among Polish journalists and experts is that Moscow has been so determined to defend its standpoint that it has even been prepared to resort to the use of force. The Russian-provoked armed conflict in Georgia in August 2008, which demonstrated Moscow's ability to defend its interests, and at the same time exposed the weakness of the West as a guarantor of stability in post-Soviet countries aspiring to join the Alliance, may serve as evidence of this.

<sup>18</sup> www.mid.ru

### III. The third problem – energy geopolitics

Due to their geopolitical location and infrastructural conditions, Poland and Russia have considerable potential for mutually beneficial energy co-operation. It could even be said that they have no choice but to co-operate<sup>19</sup>. However, this sphere of mutual relations has generated massive controversies since the early 1990s.

The level of tension and the relative significance of particular issues has varied considerably in recent years, reflecting the evolution of Russia's strategy on the one hand, and the fluctuating priorities of successive Polish governments on the other. Some points of contention, however, have remained fairly constant. Warsaw has mainly been concerned about the excessive dependence of Poland's energy sector on Russia. The general belief has been that it might facilitate monopolistic practices, leading to solutions that would be unfavourable to Warsaw; and also that it could become an instrument of pressure in other areas outside economic relations. Russia has been interested in maintaining a monopoly on supplies and gaining maximum control over the energy infrastructure, especially transit gas pipelines.

It should be noted that Polish-Russian energy relations and the related disputes have only partially taken place at a strictly bilateral level. Over the past five years they have largely moved onto the European level and become part of Russia's manoeuvres with respect to the EU, as well as Poland's strategy as a member of the European Union.

In the bilateral dimension, the terms of supplying natural gas to Poland and the closely linked question concerning the construction of a new transit gas pipeline via Poland have been generating most controversy. In the early 1990s, it became a priority for Poland to agree on new rules for the supply of gas to Poland. In the final years of the Soviet Union's

<sup>19</sup> For Poland, Russia is the main provider of both natural gas and oil (in 2008, Gazprom or companies it controls supplied 92% of Poland's total gas imports and 55% of gas consumption; 95% of Poland's oil imports and 91% of domestic oil consumption originated from Russia).



existence, the so-called Yamburg agreement (concluded in 1987, and designed to run until 1996) was in force. Under that agreement, Poland committed itself to carrying out a number of construction and renovation projects in the USSR in return for receiving gas supplies. The supplies issue was soon linked with the construction of a new pipeline to connect the Yamal fields with customers in Belarus, Poland and Germany. After lengthy negotiations, an agreement to build a system of gas pipelines for the transit of Russian gas via Polish territory and gas supplies to Poland was concluded during Boris Yeltsin's visit to Poland on 25 August 1993. The agreement envisaged the construction of two pipeline branches with a total capacity of around 62 billion m<sup>3</sup>. In September 1993, the Ministry of Industry and Trade approved the status of the EuRoPol Gaz company, which was tasked with the construction and operation of the Polish section of the Yamal gas pipeline. Contrary to the provisions of the agreement, under which shares in the undertaking were to be divided between Gazprom and Polskie Górnictwo Naftowe i Gazownictwo (PGNiG) in equal proportions, 4% of the shares were taken by Gas-Trading, a company with mixed Polish and Russian, private and state-owned capital. In 1995, the prime ministers of Poland and Russia signed an annex to the 1993 agreement concerning organisational arrangements to ensure the implementation of the agreement, and in September 1996, the CEOs of PGNiG and Gazprom finally concluded a 25-year deal for the supplies of 250 billion m<sup>3</sup>, which was worth US\$21 billion according to the Russian side. The agreement concerning the construction of the gas pipeline has only partially been implemented, as only the first branch has been built. It was completed in 1999, and reached its full capacity of 32.3 billion m<sup>3</sup> in 2005.

From its inception, the Yamal agreement has been a source of controversy, not only in Poland, but also between Warsaw and Moscow. The controversy concerned the ownership of EuRoPol Gaz, which in practice allowed Gazprom to take over control of that company as the Russian monopoly was informally co-operating with the private shareholder of Gas-Trading, thus gaining *de facto* control of the company, and consequently of the entire EuRoPol Gaz. Such an arrangement was regarded in Poland as being contradictory to Poland's interest. The assumption was that the

Polish side should control the Yamal gas pipeline and the entire strategic gas transmission infrastructure. Charges were even brought against the Polish officials who had authorised the EuRoPol Gaz's ownership structure described above, but the case was dropped because the decision to award 4% of shares to Gaz-Trading was found to have been legal. Paradoxically, the question of the Yamal gas pipeline's ownership was raised again on the initiative of the Russians during PM Putin's visit to Poland in 2009. This time, it was the Russian head of government who was calling for the controversial company to be ousted from EuRoPol Gaz. The reason was probably that co-operation with Gaz-Trading was no longer profitable for Gazprom at this stage, and ousting the private owner would enable the Russian monopoly to slightly increase its shareholding in EuRoPol Gaz.

The second controversy involving the Yamal project concerned the wider problem of diversifying gas supplies to Poland. In 1993, an internal debate began in Poland about whether the Yamal agreement would ensure Poland's energy security by safeguarding long-term supplies and balancing Poland's dependence on energy resource supplies from Russia with Russia's dependence on transit via Polish territory, or whether it would seal Gazprom's monopoly and hinder any diversification initiatives for many years. This dilemma was one of the main challenges of Warsaw's energy policy towards Moscow. The strategy of successive Polish governments was inconsistent and full of about-turns. In 2001, when the post-Solidarity AWS/UW coalition was in power, a preliminary agreement was signed with Norway to import 5 billion m<sup>3</sup> of gas a year from 2012. The following government, dominated by post-communist groups, decided not to implement that agreement. Supplies from Norway were prioritised again under the right-wing government of Law and Justice, only to become of secondary importance for the next centre-right PO/PSL cabinet. This government, which is currently in power, has sought to extend the Yamal agreement to 2037 and to increase the annual volume of supplies provided for in that deal by 20-30%. Meanwhile, Russia's stance on the issue has remained clear; the Russian Federation is interested in maintaining a monopoly and limiting alternative supplies to the Polish market.

The diversification issue is related to another challenge – the mounting problems concerning the security of gas supplies to Poland. These problems are mainly connected with the repeated reductions in the volume of gas transmitted from Russia, caused by Russia's conflicts with the transit states – Ukraine and Belarus. Another factor undermining the Polish side's confidence in Russia as a gas supplier is the fact that Gazprom has used its position as a monopoly to force PGNiG to co-operate with a less-than-reliable intermediary, RosUkrEnergo. Purporting to be an independent supplier of gas under short-term contracts (around 2.5 billion m<sup>3</sup> a year), the company made the extension of PGNiG's deal conditional on a modification of the terms of the Yamal contract in favour of Gazprom in 2006, and in early 2009 discontinued supplies altogether, failing to honour the contract that was in force until 1 January 2010.

Since its accession to the EU, Poland has also been engaged in the wider debate on the European Union's energy policy. This process has coincided with more active approach from Moscow towards the European Union. For example, Russia has stepped up measures aimed at gaining access in member states to the end consumer, and has started to promote new gas pipeline projects running partly through EU territory. As a result, many proposals presented by Warsaw on EU energy policy have in fact been reactions to the policies of Moscow, and most of them run counter to the interests of Gazprom.

Poland's main objectives in the EU have been:

- to protect the liberalising EU energy market from investments by the Russian gas monopoly which, due to its combined production and transport potential, could gain an advantage over the other players and pose a threat both to the functioning of the developing market, and to the energy security of individual countries;
- to obtain the European Union's support for infrastructural projects conducive to the diversification of gas and oil supplies to Central and Eastern Europe, that is, projects which would offer EU market access to energy resource suppliers other than Russia. The main project promoted by Poland in this context has been the Odessa-Brody-Gdansk oil pipeline, which was intended to supply Caspian oil (mainly from Azerbaijan) to

Ukraine and Poland, and possibly to other countries in Central Europe (Germany, Slovakia, Lithuania);

■ to stop any undertakings that would deepen the European Union's dependence on supplies from the Russian Federation, and to halt Russian investments in the EU energy sector;

■ to call for Russia's reliance on the transit countries, including non-EU countries such as Ukraine and Belarus, to be maintained.

The last two objectives are the basis of Warsaw's objections to the Moscow-promoted project of the northern gas pipeline from Russia to Germany under the Baltic Sea. From Moscow's point of view, the investment would enable Russia to avoid troublesome transit – especially *via* Ukraine or Belarus, but also Poland – and make it possible to supply the key customer –Germany directly. From Warsaw's point of view, the new transport route would undermine the position of the transit countries in their relations with Russia, and limit the ability of the entire Union, including Poland, to seek any natural gas suppliers alternative to Gazprom.

## **IV. The fourth problem – history as a political instrument**

The dispute about history has undoubtedly been one of those aspects of mutual relations which clearly extend beyond the sphere of bilateral relations. On the one hand, it has been part of each country's wider efforts to define its international position, and on the other, has been deeply entangled in internal affairs. However, the significance of this dispute (in the international and domestic spheres) has been completely different for Poland and 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. Over the last ten years, this identity has increasingly come to be built around Russia's great power aspirations, referring to the achievements of the Soviet Union. This is why the Russian authorities have been rejecting those elements of the past which undermine the image of the Soviet Union as a constructive global power. The Kremlin has usually considered disagreements about historical issues to be harmless; such conflict situations have often provided the Russian ruling elite with a convenient instrument to mobilise the public around a new 'Great Russian' idea of statehood.

For Poland, the historical controversies with Russia have been important in their own right, in particular as another area of emancipation from the dominance of the former empire. This has been the reason for the particularly emotional attitude towards the question of clarifying and publicising facts concerning Soviet acts of violence against the Polish state and nation, which have had to remain silenced or minimised for years. For most Polish politicians, these conflicts are a problem, a solution to which would be highly desirable. However, it is also true that the conflict has been the object of internal political bargaining within Poland much more often than in Russia.

The controversies that arose during the negotiations concerning the Polish/Russian treaty in 1992 can be regarded as the symbolic beginning of the historical problems. Warsaw wanted the document to include statements on Stalinist crimes and on indemnities for Polish nationals who had been victims of the regime. The Russian authorities firmly refused. In subsequent years, the Polish side has regularly called for the issue to be resolved through an interstate agreement, but without any results. Over time, the intensity of Warsaw's efforts lessened, even though the question of indemnities still formally figures in the list of unresolved bilateral issues. The Russian authorities have consistently claimed that these matters are covered by Russia's domestic legislation under which Polish nationals, too, may claim compensation. However, obtaining an indemnity in this way would be impossible in most cases, as the repression victims have not received any verdicts from the courts, and are therefore ineligible to claim any compensation.

The other legal issue in bilateral relations, and one of much greater significance for the Polish side, concerns the final clarification of the Katyn case. In the early 1990s, the Russian authorities made a number of gestures in this direction. In 1990, the Soviet president Mikhail Gorbachev handed President Wojciech Jaruzelski some documents from NKVD files concerning the Polish prisoners and covering the years 1939–1940. In 1992, Boris Yeltsin declassified files demonstrating the responsibility of the highest Soviet authorities for the Katyn crime and handed them over to the Polish side. A year later, he placed a wreath under the Katyn cross in the Warsaw Powązki cemetery, the first Russian leader to do so. However, contrary to what is widely believed in Poland, no official apology was presented on that occasion. According to eyewitnesses<sup>20</sup>, the Russian president whispered, "*Prostite, yesli smozhete*" ("Forgive, if you can") when laying the wreath.

The work of exhumation was conducted around the same time, and the military cemeteries in Kharkiv, Katyn and Mednoye were established by the end of the decade and opened in 2000. Serious disagreements oc-

<sup>20</sup> For example, see Stanisław Ciosek in an interview for *Nowa Trybuna Opolska* in 2009.

curred only in 2004, when the Military Prosecutor's Office of the Russian Federation decided to close the Katyn investigation opened back in 1990. Contrary to Poland's expectations, the crime was not recognised as genocide, and 116 out of the 183 volumes of files were classified. Moscow also refused to rehabilitate the victims of the Katyn murder, claiming that this was not possible because they had not been convicted under a court verdict. Poland has repeatedly raised these issues, especially the question of the declassification of files, but they remain unresolved.

The disagreements described here have been closely connected with a much wider debate about symbols and national prestige, which concerns the origins, outbreak and consequences of World War II. This debate has been catalysed mainly by successive anniversaries and preparations to commemorate them.

The first major clashes related to anniversary celebrations took place in 1994 and 1995. Lech Wałęsa did not go to Moscow to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the victory over fascism (Poland was represented there by the PM Józef Oleksy), and Boris Yeltsin was absent from Katyn during the commemoration of the 55th anniversary of the massacre. Among other matters, the disagreements concerned the interpretation of the significance of the end of the war. According to Lech Wałęsa, it marked the beginning of a new occupation in Eastern Europe, but this interpretation offended Russia. The Russians also claimed that the Poles were diminishing the historical role of both the Soviet soldiers and the Polish soldiers who fought side by side with them.

A particular souring of 'anniversary relations' occurred in 2004–2005, in connection with the sixtieth anniversary of the Warsaw Uprising, the 65<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Katyn murder, and the outbreak of World War II, all celebrated in Warsaw, as well as the sixtieth anniversary of the victory over fascism, celebrated in Moscow. It started with a very heated and emotional exchange in the media. After much hesitation, President Aleksander Kwasniewski finally decided to take part in the Moscow celebrations. However, the behaviour of the Russian officials in connection with his visit was interpreted in Poland as a deliberate blow to Warsaw's prestige; for instance, President Putin made no mention of the contribu-

tion Polish forces made to the victory. As Poland could not present its position in Moscow, the Polish foreign minister Adam Rotfeld communicated it to the international community in his address at a special meeting of the UN General Assembly convened to commemorate the anniversary of the victory<sup>21</sup>.

Poland and Russia subscribe to different interpretations of the role of the Soviet Union in starting the war. The Polish side emphasises the joint responsibility of the Soviet Union and highlights its co-operation with Nazi Germany (through the Ribbentrop–Molotov pact, for example), while Russia deeply resents the equating of Soviet totalitarianism with that of the Nazis. The two sides also differ about the Yalta conference: the Poles underline its significance as the symbol of the final division of Europe into spheres of influence, whereas the Russians claims that this is a misinterpretation of the outcome of the conference, which “reasserted the desire to make Poland strong, free, independent and democratic” (the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs has even released a special statement concerning the issue<sup>22</sup>).

The seventieth anniversary of the outbreak of World War II, celebrated in Poland, has also inspired heightened emotions on both sides. The Russian PM Vladimir Putin attended the ceremony; in his statement, and in an article published shortly before by *Gazeta Wyborcza*, he condemned the Ribbentrop-Molotov pact, but at the same time he noted that it had been preceded by the “treaty with Hitler, which undid any hopes for a joint front against Hitler”, signed by France and Great Britain in Munich<sup>23</sup>. He also expressed sympathy for Polish sensitivity about the Katyn case. However, the moderate message formulated by Putin in Poland was accompanied in Russia by a number of very strong official and media statements in the spirit of Soviet historiography. It could be argued that these messages were at least tolerated, if not inspired, by the authorities – the fact that the most potent materials included two documentary films

<sup>21</sup> The full text of the statement is available at <http://www.msz.gov.pl>

<sup>22</sup> [http://www.mid.ru/brp\\_4.nsf/sps/314872473059B3E2C3256FA60050BAC4](http://www.mid.ru/brp_4.nsf/sps/314872473059B3E2C3256FA60050BAC4)

<sup>23</sup> [http://wyborcza.pl/1,75477,6983945,List\\_Putina\\_do\\_Polakow\\_\\_\\_pelna\\_wersja.html](http://wyborcza.pl/1,75477,6983945,List_Putina_do_Polakow___pelna_wersja.html)



broadcast by state-owned television may serve as evidence of this<sup>24</sup>. The documentaries alleged that the Ribbentrop-Molotov pact was a necessary measure to protect the Soviet Union against a German attack. They presented Poland as collaborating with Hitler in the 1930s, with a view to attacking the USSR.

It should be noted that neither Russia's official position nor the message of the Russian media in the run-up to the seventieth anniversary of the outbreak of World War II were focused exclusively on Poland. They were part of a broader effort to promote a certain concept of the origin of World War II, which the Russian authorities have been endorsing for the last several years. According to this concept, responsibility for the outbreak of the war rests with other countries apart from Germany, including France, Great Britain and Poland, which struck compromises or collaborated with Hitler, thus contributing to the strengthening of Germany on the one hand, and a marginalisation of the anti-fascist Soviet Union on the other. In this interpretation, the Soviet Union was obliged to start talks with Hitler as a preventative measure.

<sup>24</sup> On 20 August, the state-owned Rossiya television (RTR) broadcast a documentary entitled 'The Secrets of the Confidential Protocols', and on 31 August, the international channel of the Russian public television, ORT International, broadcast a documentary 'Could Stalin have stopped Hitler?'

## Two decades of difficult relations

The experience of the last twenty years leads to some interesting conclusions, which seem to undermine some of the established ways of thinking about Polish-Russian relations.

1. First of all, the frequently repeated view that the Polish-Russian conflicts stem mainly from genetic Russophobia on the Polish side, or irrational prejudice on the Russian side, appears to be unfounded. The underlying causes of the Polish-Russian problems are real and concern strategic issues. At the deepest level, this is a dispute about how far the Western world's borders extend, and about the Russian Federation's sphere of influence. The disagreement affects many levels. It pertains to historically defined identities, economic assets and the political sphere. Obviously, it does not involve Poland and Russia alone. Moreover, Poland is certainly not the most important actor in this regard, although due to the historical context and its geographic location it is one of the countries that lies closest to the 'line of contact', and is therefore particularly entangled in the disagreement.

2. Secondly, facts do not bear out the opinion that all the fundamental problems between Poland and Russia remain unresolved. On the contrary, the most important contentious issue of recent years, the question of Poland's emancipation and its integration with the Euro-Atlantic community, can in fact be considered resolved. This demonstrates that Polish-Russian friction should not be viewed as unproductive disagreements, but rather as a difficult process which nevertheless takes the two countries forward.

3. The manner in which the dispute about Poland's sovereignty was resolved demonstrates that solving strategic problems does not require the two sides' foreign policy priorities to be brought closer together. When the question of Poland's Euro-Atlantic integration was being decided, Russia stepped up its 'great power' rhetoric. However, after Poland's accession to NATO and the EU – that is, when the situation had become fully clear – both sides adjusted their positions to the new realities with-

in a couple of years. It could be argued that tension subsided when the 'zone of uncertainty' shrank. Moscow came to accept Warsaw's political emancipation, and Poland gradually softened its stance towards its eastern neighbour, while also meeting the expectations of its western partners who were more disposed to conciliation.

4. The same pattern has been observed in connection with the other, still unresolved, dispute concerning the contradictory visions of the future of Eastern Europe. In previous years, the problem gained intensity whenever uncertainty arose as to which direction the Eastern European countries would take, such as during the Orange Revolution, or when NATO was deciding whether to award Membership Action Plans to Georgia and Ukraine. This observation has interesting implications for the future of the dispute. Assuming that neither Russia nor Poland, and more broadly the European Union, are likely to redefine their interests, it can be predicted that uncertainty (the two-vector strategies pursued by the countries concerned, the ambiguous strategies of the EU and NATO) will only add fuel to the dispute. Decisive policies, on the other hand, may heat up the conflict at the breakthrough point, but in the longer term may bring about a solution.

5. The dynamics of Polish-Russian relations in the last two decades have shown that the relations between Warsaw and Moscow do not have to be in permanent crisis. The political climate has improved on several occasions since 1990. However, the periods of better relations were usually not occasioned by real changes, but rather by redefined tactics, as a result of which the problems were both perceived and presented less intensely. This observation shows that political decisions to approach the mutual disagreements in a less confrontational manner (both in Poland and in Russia) may improve the atmosphere. However, it is also true that these periods of rapprochement have always been followed by new breakdowns. It appears that such fluctuations should also be expected in the next few years, for it would be an illusion to believe that serious dis-

putes can truly be solved just by changing the form. And disagreements about the future of Eastern Europe, as well as the interpretations of history and energy security, certainly continue to be serious disputes.

**6.** Contrary to expectations, it was not only Poland's membership in NATO (about which the fiercest battles have been fought), but also its accession to the European Union that has had a crucial impact on Polish-Russian relations. This refers not only to the frequently underlined developmental changes which have increased the distance between Poland and Russia in terms of legal, political, social and economic systems, but also the much less frequently noted linkages between Poland's policy within the Union and relations between Warsaw and Moscow. By becoming a EU member, Poland has gained additional capabilities to build up relations with the Russian Federation, with Brussels as Poland's go-between and supporter. Paradoxically, Poland's integration with the EU has also expanded the range of instruments available to Russia, which the Polish side had not predicted. The quality of relations with Russia has become a factor that could either buttress or undermine the reliability of Warsaw and its representatives on the EU's internal scene. The experience of the last five years shows that this co-dependence may generate two kinds of effects. On one hand, it may stimulate the two states' determination to maintain good relations by restraining their confrontational rhetoric (in order to avoid being labelled as irrationally Russophobic in the case of Warsaw, and in order to prevent Poland from taking 'anti-Russian' actions within the EU, in the case of Moscow). On the other hand, it may trigger an escalation of the conflict if it becomes used instrumentally: by Russia to discredit Poland in the European Union in order to create divisions within the Community, or by Poland to unite the EU in opposition against Russia.

*Katarzyna Pełczyńska-Nałęcz*

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■ **Komentarze OSW** – w tej serii publikujemy analizy o najistotniejszych wydarzeniach z obszaru naszego zainteresowania w pogłębionej formie (wersja angielska: **OSW Commentary**)

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