

**INSTITUTE OF  
PUBLIC AFFAIRS**

# PEOPLE – HISTORY – POLITICS

## RUSSIAN PERCEPTIONS OF POLAND AND GERMANY

KEY CONCLUSIONS





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## KEY CONCLUSIONS



- ▶ **The image of Poland and Poles in Russia is neutral or relatively positive.** Negative opinions are expressed by a minority of Russians. At the same time, the image of Germany and Germans is much better.
- ▶ **While the Russians harbor established opinions about Germany, many of them do not have any such opinions about Poland.** On average, around one third of the respondents have chosen the answer “hard to say” while responding to the Polish part of the questionnaire. As regards the questions on Germany, such responses were relatively infrequent.
- ▶ **The Russians’ knowledge about Poland comes mainly from school and textbooks (53%),** followed by TV programs on Poland (39%) and press articles (26%).
- ▶ **The majority of the Russians’ associations with Poland are generalizations about the country and the Polish society (32%). A relatively smaller percentage of Russians’ associations with Poland concern politics (14%) or history (9%),** followed by the economy (9%) and culture (5%). Most of these associations are positive.
- ▶ **Germany and the Germans are mainly associated with history (36%).** This is followed by the country and its society (29%) and politics (3%). As in the case of Poland, **the majority of the Russians’ associations with Germany are positive.**
- ▶ **The majority of Russians (more than half of the respondents) neither like nor dislike the Poles (51%).** Moreover, the number of respondents who declare that they like the Poles (36%) – is nearly three times larger than the group of respondents expressing dislike (13%).
- ▶ The most commonly mentioned specific Russian association with Poland is **the airplane crash in Smolensk in 2010 (8,8%),** while the main association with Germany is the **attack of the Third Reich on the Soviet Union (18,5%).**
- ▶ **The Russians expressed much more fondness for the Germans than for the Poles.** More than half of the respondents (55%) cited a positive

attitude towards the Germans, one third neither like nor dislike them (37%). Only 8% Russians claimed that they dislike the Germans.

- ▶ **Most Russians are able to accept the Poles in different social roles** – first of all as tourists visiting their country (89%), followed by neighbours (66%), colleagues at work (64%), close friends (61%), permanent Russian residents (56%). Nearly half of the respondents would not oppose having Polish in-laws (49%) nor Poles receiving Russian citizenship (47%). Having a Polish boss is the least popular option, but even here more Russians would accept than oppose such a situation.
- ▶ **The Russians' acceptance of the Germans is higher than in the case of the Polish people.** A large majority would not oppose the Germans visiting Russia as tourists and would accept a German as their neighbour or as co-worker. Slightly fewer Russians would accept a German friend (71%). Two-thirds of the Russians (67%) are open towards Germans living in Russia and more than a half of them (59%) would accept German in-laws, granting the Germans the Russian citizenship (58%) or working for a German boss (57%).
- ▶ **The Russians have better opinions about Poland and Germany than about their own country.** Their views of Germany are exceptionally positive – 92% of the respondents believe that the German state takes care of its citizens, 85% claim that the German economy is developing well, 63% are of the opinion that the German media can freely criticize the government, while half of them agree that the German administration is free from corruption.
- ▶ **A significant number of Russians (between 30% and nearly 50%) have found it difficult to answer such questions concerning the state of Polish democracy and economy.** Among the respondents who have given their answers, as much as 67% agreed that Poland takes care of its citizens and nearly half believed that the Polish economy is developing well (46%).
- ▶ **The Russians do not have a consistent opinion on freedom in the Polish media** – 43% of those having an opinion believe they are free, while 46% think they are only partly free.
- ▶ Likewise, **the Russian view on the level of corruption in Poland is ambiguous.** Nearly half of the respondents (47%) declined to answer, while among those Russians who have an opinion, there are more

Russians who think that the Polish administration is rather corrupt than those who disagree with such a statement.

- ▶ **The Russians are highly critical about the state of Russia.** Nearly half of the respondents (46%) believe that the state does not care about the welfare of the citizens. The Russians also perceive corruption as a problem – more than four out of five (83%) claim that Russian officials are corrupt. More than a third (39%) disagree with the opinion that the Russian economy is developing well, while about a quarter (26%) remain optimistic about their country's economic prospects.
- ▶ **In spite of the generally negative assessment of the state of Russia, the respondents are relatively positive as regards the freedom of the Russian media.** As many as two-fifths (42%) claim the media in Russia are free to criticize the government. One third (32%) think they are only partly free, while one-fourth (26%) believe there is no media freedom in Russia. Possibly, the respondents take into account not only the traditional media (television and radio), but also the so-called new media – the Internet - where there is no censorship and criticism of the government is widespread.
- ▶ One fifth of the respondents declare that **the information that a certain product has been made in Poland would encourage them to buy it.** More than half of them (61%) feel neither encouraged nor discouraged.
- ▶ The Russians think that **Poland neither supports nor impedes Russia's relations with the European Union, the United States or Ukraine and other countries from the Commonwealth of Independent States.** The opinion that Poland impedes Russia in its relations with these partners was expressed relatively infrequently. The Russians, however, perceive the Germans as much more supportive than the Poles.
- ▶ **Most Russians believe that neither Poland (52%) nor Germany pose or will pose in the future a threat towards Russia.**
- ▶ As many as 81% of the respondents see **Germany as playing an important role in Europe. In the case of Poland, the opinions are divided**, with just 28% of the respondents agreeing that Poland plays an important role in Europe, two in five (38%) giving a neutral answer, and one third rejecting such a claim.

- ▶ **The respondents perceive Russia's role in Europe as less important than Germany's, but more important than Poland's.** More than half (40%) are convinced of Russia's importance in Europe, while 25% disagree.
- ▶ The respondents who see Poland or Germany as supportive of Russia's building ties with the EU, the US or the CIS countries, also see these countries as having a relatively greater role in Europe.
- ▶ **Russia's relations with Germany are perceived as much better than relations with Poland.** 66% of the respondents claim that German-Russian relations are good. At the same time most Russians (63%) see the relations between Russia and Poland as neither good nor bad, while 21% perceive them to be positive.
- ▶ **Assessing the changes in Polish-Russian relations in the last three years, more than half of the respondents (54%) do not see any changes,** while nearly one third of the respondents (31%) claim the relations have worsened.
- ▶ Nearly half of Russians (42%) think **the Smolensk catastrophe has damaged Polish-Russian relations,** while one third (33%) do not see any influence of the accident on the bilateral relations.
- ▶ **Nearly half of the respondents believe there were events in the Polish-Russian history for which Poland should bear guilt towards Russia.** At the same time, only one in four Russians (24%) believes that Russia has reasons to feel guilt vis-à-vis Poland, while 44% say that Russia bears no guilt.
- ▶ **The list of Russian complaints regarding Poland has remained fairly constant over the years.** Accordingly, the Poles can be blamed for accusing Russian authorities for the Smolensk air disaster (30%), lack of gratitude for Poland's liberation by the Red Army (22%), Poland's political support of Georgia during the Russian-Georgian conflict in 2008 (20%), joining NATO (19%), hosting the Chechen Information Centres (19%) as well as lobbying for alternatives to Russian gas and oil supplies to Europe (15%).
- ▶ Most Russians (58%) declare that **Polish-Russian relations should focus on the present rather than on the past.**
- ▶ Almost half of the respondents (45%) think that **improving Russian-Polish relations depends on** regular meetings of politicians and a joint discussion of the issues important for both countries. A third of the

Russians point to the need for more intensive cultural and scientific cooperation between the two countries. One in four Russians think it would help if the Poles acknowledge the role of the Red Army in the liberation of Poland in 1945 (25%). Finally, just 7% of the respondents see more Russian investments in Poland and Polish investments in Russia as a way forward for improving of the relations between the two countries.