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Special Issue:

Identities, Nations and Politics after Communism

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by

Roger E. Kanet  
University of Miami

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## **National Identity and National Interest in Polish Eastern Policy, 1989–2004**

*Krzysztof Fedorowicz*

The processes of democratic social and political changes in Poland that have gained momentum since 1989 have radically altered the foundations and the goals of Polish foreign policy. In addition to re-establishing Polish interests as the basis for foreign policy, they have also started the process of establishing a new element of Polish diplomacy, namely its eastern policy. In these altered political conditions it was the right time to ask the question of how to establish new relationships in the East, how to normalize relations with the USSR and, finally, what stance should be adopted towards the increasing independence claims of individual Soviet republics. The process of establishing a democratic Poland was concurrent with the reconstruction, and later, with the fall of the USSR. In addition, the convoluted history of Polish–Ukrainian and Polish–Lithuanian relationships from the very beginning hindered the attempt of Polish diplomacy to establish new contacts with its eastern partners.

Until the middle of 1990 Polish eastern policy assumed that the USSR would exist in perpetuity. The Union's position as a superpower was clearly acknowledged and any independence movements within the empire were treated with reserve. Contacts with neighbouring republics were limited and modest, without defining specific prospects for cooperation.<sup>1</sup> Initially for the Polish authorities it was more beneficial to have the USSR as a neighbour, rather than to have individual sovereign republics. It was believed that the results of the potential fall of the USSR would have negative consequences for Poland.<sup>2</sup> Polish policy towards the USSR at that time in essential issues paralleled the policy of the US and the West European states, for which Mikhail Gorbachev was the only partner worthy of support. Therefore, Polish Foreign Minister Krzysztof Skubiszewski was often criticized at home for his extreme prudence in contacts with the USSR and the newly established republics.<sup>3</sup>

As late as the middle of 1990 the programme of an active Polish eastern policy in relations with the USSR and eastern neighbours was established. The programme was referred to as a "two-track" policy, based on the principles of maintaining reformed relations with the USSR and, simultaneously, establishing and developing relations with the Union republics. It was assumed that the role of individual republics

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within the USSR would increase. This meant for the future a readiness to acknowledge the republics' right to autonomy and self-determination, as well as a promise to establish secure diplomatic relations.<sup>4</sup> The implementation of the principle was not easy, since such a policy was not totally approved either in the republics or in Moscow, and in Poland opinions varied. The cause of independent republics was supported mostly by "Solidarity" MPs and senators, while the policy of the government and President Lech Wałęsa was more prudent.<sup>5</sup>

The "two-track" approach was in essence an answer to the independence declarations of the Baltic republics (Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia), which found themselves in open conflict with Moscow, as well as to the independence aspirations of other Soviet republics, which were becoming increasingly visible. Officially, Poland responded cautiously to such movements and independent actions, trying to avoid any unnecessary irritation of the USSR. However, most politicians already treated the republics as independent states. Therefore, after some period, the target of Polish diplomacy was to gradually establish such bilateral relations with the Union republics, which are normally binding between fully independent and sovereign countries.<sup>6</sup>

Intensive contacts with eastern neighbours began in the second half of 1990, after sovereignty was declared by Russia (in June 1990), as well as Ukraine and Belarus (in July 1990). The Polish authorities handed over to those republics drafts of political declarations on good-neighbourly relations that were supposed to be signed in the near future.

The first element of the "two-track" policy that was implemented and which manifested the readiness of Polish diplomacy to establish a dialogue at state level was a visit paid on 12–15 October 1990 by Polish Foreign Minister Krzysztof Skubiszewski to Kiev, Minsk and Moscow. During this visit two documents were signed—the Polish–Russian "Declaration of friendship and good-neighbourly cooperation between the Republic of Poland and the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic" and the "Declaration on the principles and major directions of Polish–Ukrainian relations' development."

At that time Russia was the real driving force behind the transformations taking place in the USSR; it was the only republic in which a group of politicians could develop as an alternative to the Kremlin. It was led by Boris Yeltsin, whose popularity in Russia was greater than that of Mikhail Gorbachev. Although Boris Yeltsin did not meet with the Polish Foreign Minister, apparently the declaration was finally signed thanks to him. In the signed document both parties underlined the fact that they did not have any territorial claims against each other, nor would they have such claims in the future. The existing border was accepted as unalterable then and in the future. It was also decided to commence work to establish legal grounds for the development of bilateral business cooperation and to start diplomatic and consular relations as soon as possible.<sup>7</sup> During the visit to Moscow Minister Krzysztof Skubiszewski also held discussions with the government of the USSR. As a result it was agreed to commence negotiations to withdraw the Soviet army from Poland.

In the Polish–Ukrainian declaration, on the other hand, the countries declared their intention to strengthen good-neighbourly relations between them as sovereign states and to maintain and develop cooperation, which would be beneficial for both parties and also correspond to their national interests. The document stressed the inalienable right of both states to determine freely their internal and external political status.

Poland and Ukraine announced that they did not hold any territorial claims against each other, nor would they hold any such claims in the future; and they treated the border existing between them as unalterable then and in the future.<sup>8</sup> It was also agreed to establish consular relations and it was announced that consultations concerning the establishment of full diplomatic relations were to be arranged in the near future. The parties also made an obligation to consistently secure and respect the rights of the national minorities—the Poles in Ukraine and the Ukrainians in Poland, as well as to improve their situation. Keeping in mind the ethnic and cultural affinity, both parties decided to grant extensive support to Polish–Ukrainian contacts.

It is worth stressing that the declaration refers to history and underlines the ethnic and cultural links between the Polish and Ukrainian nations. The document showed that Ukraine was not in fact exclusively Russia-oriented, but, as was the case with Poland, it identified itself with Central Europe. From the Ukrainian point of view, the signed declaration was basically the first document that legitimized Polish and Ukrainian relations at the level of two independent states of Central and Eastern Europe. The Ukrainian opposition gained the confirmation of Polish support for the establishment of an independent Ukrainian state. However, friendly relations between Ukraine and Poland gave hope to the Ukrainian opposition that, when the independent Ukrainian state was established, other neighbours (e.g. Hungary) would respond positively to the political transformations across their borders.

Unfortunately, an attempt to sign a similar document with the government of Belarus, which was hostile to the new political situation in Poland as well as to the intention to establish closer bilateral cooperation without the mediation of the USSR, ended in failure. During talks in Minsk the Belarusian party did not agree to the proposal to refer to the 1945 Polish–Soviet agreement concerning the national border, since Belarus claimed that it had not been a party to that agreement. Moreover, Belarus made a statement that a part of the Bialystok region (located in the territory of Poland) was ethnically Belarusian. No official territorial claims were made, although it was made clear that such a problem might occur in the future. The "two-track" policy also did not work in relations with Lithuania, since Poland treated this country differently from other republics. Lithuania expected Polish support in its conflict with the USSR; however, Polish diplomacy did not want to acknowledge the independence of Lithuania directly. Polish politics towards Vilnius was then related to the issue of increasing conflict related to the Polish minority in Lithuania, which had opposed any attempt to regain independence by the Lithuanian government.<sup>9</sup>

During 1991–1992 Poland's eastern policy involved establishing official contacts, as well as the implementation of the "two-track" approach. The most important element was the fact that Poland was the first state in the world to acknowledge the independence of Ukraine on 2 January 1992 and established full diplomatic relations on 8 January 1992. It was a very good beginning for new Polish–Ukrainian relations, thanks to which Poland gained a privileged position in its relations with the fledgling Ukrainian state.<sup>10</sup> At the same time Poland also acknowledged the independence of Belarus and Russia. The year 1992 was the beginning of a new era in diplomatic relations with its eastern neighbours. Poland signed inter-state treaties on good-neighbourly relations and friendly cooperation with Ukraine, Belarus and Russia, thus in a formal way regulating its diplomatic relations with these new states. The treaty with Lithuania was not signed until 1994. Polish diplomacy concentrated then on establishing legal and formal foundations in inter-state relations, developing political dialogue and searching for opportunities for economic cooperation. An attempt was also made to support the processes of political change initiated in those countries.

In the opinion of numerous analysts, Polish eastern policy during 1989–1992 was one of the factors that in a certain way contributed to the fall of the USSR and the establishment of good-neighbourly relations with former Soviet republics. The paradigmatic regulation of relations between Poland and Ukraine was particularly important. Poland, as the largest and strategically the most important state in Central Europe, initially occupied a special place in the plans of Ukraine. Warsaw was perceived as a regional co-leader, and presented as a model of democratic political and market transformations that could play the role of a political connection between Ukraine and the West. The idea of a "Polish–Ukrainian axis," proposed by Ukrainian Deputy Foreign Minister Boris Tarasiuk, was in the form of an announcement inviting Poland into a strategic political and military alliance.<sup>11</sup>

The period 1993–1995 was a time of temporary stagnation in Polish eastern policy and a weakening in the dynamics of Polish–Ukrainian and Polish–Russian contacts, as a result of changes in the Polish political arena—the creation of a coalition of a left-wing party and a peasant party after the 1993 parliamentary elections—as well as the attempts to make adjustments in Polish foreign policy towards its eastern neighbours. There were those who recommended that Polish diplomacy should withdraw from its active role in the East. There was also a belief that Poland should stop supporting the new states (Ukraine, Belarus, and Lithuania), accept the existence of the Russian sphere of influence, and maintain good relations with "any possible Russia." Attempts made in 1989–1993 to find a partner in the East within the democratic opposition were harshly criticized. The opposition was seen to be a marginal phenomenon in the realities of the former Soviet republics; they either did not gain power at all or lost it quickly. Critics pointed to the insufficient level of cooperation with Russia, in particular. With respect to security issues, the proposal was to work out a new collective security system based on the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE).<sup>12</sup>

At that time in the monthly magazine *Dziś* [Today], which had a strong impact on left-wing circles, the idea of the so called "third road" was frequently discussed. In practice it meant a proposal to depart from the pro-Western approach and to switch to the more active eastern policy, with particular focus on Russia. Journalists from *Dziś* believed that relations with Russia are of fundamental importance for Poland. Poland would be able to maintain complete sovereignty by concurrently cultivating closer relations with the West and at least partially coordinating its economic and military policy with Russia.<sup>13</sup>

The fuzzy political situation in the post-Soviet area hindered the definition of a long-term political strategy and facilitated the creation of various myths, among which the most dangerous was the one of the Russian market (or the eastern market in general) as a superb opportunity for the Polish economy.<sup>14</sup> Some of the representatives of the coalition in power believed that the development of economic relations with the East was an opportunity for economic development and, first of all, it was supposed to be a way of strengthening the sectors which could not cope with the transformation processes (agriculture and heavy industry). Predominant opinions demanded the re-establishment of cooperation with the post-Soviet partners, mainly the Russians. An adjustment of certain sectors of the Polish economy to Russian standards by halting their structural transformations was considered. There was a common belief concerning the un-adopted opportunities related to Polish–Russian relations.

Moreover, at the turn of 1993/1994 the dispute concerning the leadership in Polish foreign policy became evident. The branches of executive power that were responsible for its performance found themselves influenced by various political environments. In a short time, differences in the evaluation of economic, political and social policy in the post-Soviet area became evident. There were also signals concerning different strategies for pursuing Polish national interests and platforms for cooperation with the eastern neighbours. Such a situation had a considerably negative impact on the form of the later dialogue with Russia, Ukraine and Belarus.<sup>15</sup>

The unresolved historical problems between Poland, Ukraine and Russia were also becoming increasingly visible. The Polish policy of openness towards Ukraine in 1991–1993 did not tie in with the social atmosphere concerning Polish–Ukrainian relations. The efforts undertaken by the government and political forces to normalize relations were not, unfortunately, reflected in societal feelings, which were still influenced by the negative stereotype of Ukraine from the time of World War II. The attempts to politicize the problem of national minorities and the intention to treat it as a bargaining chip in relations with Ukraine and Lithuania were also a negative characteristic of Polish eastern policy at that time.

#### Tensions in Polish–Russian Relations in the Mid-1990s

There were also discrepancies in Polish–Russian relations with respect to foreign policy and European security. Since Poland gained full sovereignty, relations with

Russia have remained one of the most crucial elements of Polish foreign policy. The integration of Poland with the democratic European institutions and the establishment of good neighbourly relations in the region, particularly with its Eastern partners, remained among the priorities of the Polish state. This stance was related to the problem of the Russian attitude towards Poland, as well as to the whole of Central and Eastern Europe. Years after the fall of the communist system there remained in Russian foreign policy the view that Central and Eastern Europe should, to some degree, remain outside the boundaries of Western Europe and at the same time the politics and economy of the area should be aligned with Russia. Therefore, the process of establishing Polish–Russian relations was difficult and frequently tense.

From the beginning, Polish–Russian relations were asymmetric. While Russia remained Poland's most important partner in the East (often at the expense of the new eastern neighbours, i.e. Lithuania and Ukraine), Poland practically ceased to exist in Russian foreign policy. Between 1991 and 1993 Russia did not have any clearly defined strategy towards Central and Eastern Europe, including Poland. There were two dominating tendencies: one was to place the region in second or even third place (after relations with the former Soviet republics and Western countries) in Russian foreign policy; the other was governed by the confused syndrome of resentment and repentance. The characteristic feature of Russian foreign policy between 1991 and 1993 towards the region was Russia's consistency in rejecting the importance of Central and Eastern Europe and the reluctance to achieve mutual understanding. Only in a few cases was the region the subject of discussion in Russian foreign policy. It was only acknowledged that Poland, Bulgaria and possibly Slovakia could be the states with the greatest importance for Russia in the region, because of their geographical locations.

An important factor contributing to the differences between the states was the differing perception of their respective "civilizing" backgrounds (historical, cultural and religious), which later became the fundamental reason for the contradictions between Poland and Russia, namely the differences in understanding and approaching the question of European security.

The increasing discrepancies between Poland and Russia in relation to their approaches to foreign policy and European security, as well as the significant asymmetry in mutual relations, were caused mainly by political, psychological and historical factors. Even the expectations of both parties turned out to be asymmetrical. Polish political elites expected that the new Russia had rejected the communist doctrine and the totalitarian regime and should immediately become a democratic country, open to the values of Western civilization and, most importantly, it should become Poland-friendly. They expected that Russian democrats would acknowledge that Poland is also an important partner for Russia and that the Polish experience in freeing itself from communism, both politically and economically, could serve as an example. However, the conviction of equal rights and the priority of Poland in Russian foreign policy had a negative impact on mutual relations.

For the Polish government of that time the major problem was the need to clarify the circumstances related to the so-called "white spots" in Russian–Polish history (particularly the Katyn massacre).<sup>16</sup> The expectation of the Polish political elite concerning the reconciliation of both nations through the final revelation of the "white spots" from the past was not realized. The principal obstacle was the approach to history, which was perceived differently in Russia and in Poland.<sup>17</sup> This is why Katyn soon became the subject of misunderstanding and reciprocal accusations. Members of the Russian political class almost unanimously rejected the Polish proposal for reconciliation. In their opinion there were no grounds for forgiveness on either side, since no wrong was done by either party—according to the Russian side, it was the NKVD (People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs) and Stalin who were responsible for Katyn, not Russia. The persistent requests from the Polish side to explain the issue of Katyn were received negatively in Russia. A common opinion was that the actual motivation for such actions was the will to maintain an anti-Russian mood in Polish society.<sup>18</sup>

The issue of the role of the Red Army in the liberation and later subordination of Poland turned out to be even more difficult. The spectacular dismantling of Red Army monuments in Poland was seen in Russia as an act of contempt and disrespect for the sacrifice of Soviet soldiers who died on Polish soil. Another disputable issue was the withdrawal of the Soviet army from Poland. Poland wanted the USSR army to leave the territory of Poland as soon as possible; on the other hand the Soviet authorities delayed the final withdrawal of their army from Poland for a considerable period of time (the last Red Army troops were withdrawn from Poland in 1993). At the end of 1992, when domestic problems and relations with the West were the priorities in Russian foreign policy, the claims and demands of Poland contributed to establishing a negative approach by Russia towards Poland, as well as the whole region of Central and Eastern Europe.<sup>19</sup>

The primary Polish objective of joining NATO and the EU, clearly expressed since 1992, became a new element in Polish eastern policy. In the circumstances it became clear that a serious conflict of strategic interests had occurred between Poland and Russia. But in the middle of 1993 it seemed that Poland's aspirations to join NATO and the EU were being received positively by the leaders of Russia.

The most important event in the Polish–Russian relationship of the period was the visit of Russian President Boris Yeltsin to Poland in August 1993. The visit raised hopes in Poland. President Yeltsin confirmed that the last Russian soldiers would leave the territory of Poland on 17 September 1993,<sup>20</sup> earlier than had been previously agreed. There was also considerable progress in discussions concerning economic cooperation. Moreover, the president of Russia handed over to Lech Wałęsa a set of secret documents from the Russian archives concerning the cooperation between the KPZR (Communist Party of the Soviet Union) and PZPR (Polish United Workers' Party) in fighting the democratic opposition. The flower-laying ceremony at the monument to the Katyn victims was also a symbolic gesture by Yeltsin.

However, the highlight of the visit was the joint declaration signed by both presidents, where the Russian side confirmed that Poland's joining NATO would not be contradictory to the interests of the Russian Federation.<sup>21</sup> It seemed that after the visit and the signing, Polish–Russian relations would normalize and, despite really difficult challenges, the countries would manage to overcome all serious differences and establish a solid foundation for a new partnership. The problems which remained unresolved were identified, and more and more often the parties showed their intention to secure a reasonable compromise.<sup>22</sup>

However, from that moment Russia began emphasizing that the extension of NATO would undermine the existing geopolitical situation in Europe. It was then that the alarming tendency in Russian foreign policy with respect to the whole of Central and Eastern Europe began. Opinions were bandied about concerning Russia's "historical" or "special interests" in the region. The warning voices foreshadowing Russian opposition and changes in Russia's foreign policy began when the chances of Poland joining NATO were becoming increasingly more likely. Andrei Kozyrev, Russian Foreign Minister, referred to the countries of Central and Eastern Europe as false allies of the former Soviet Union. In 1993, when the debates prior to the NATO summit of 1994 started in the West, Russian protests against the cooperation of Central and Eastern European countries with NATO also began. Additional evidence of Russian opposition came with the de facto withdrawal of the statement made by Boris Yeltsin, in Poland in August 1993, concerning the absence of Russia's objection to Poland joining NATO.<sup>23</sup> Almost a month later, in September 1993, President Yeltsin addressed the leaders of the US, Great Britain, France and Germany with a letter, in which he firmly expressed his objection to the countries of Central and Eastern Europe joining NATO. The Russian side also submitted a proposal that Russia and NATO could present joint security guarantees for Central and Eastern Europe. Within a short time representatives of the Russian government also started a campaign of re-interpreting Russia's consent to Poland joining NATO. Russian Defence Minister General Pavel Grachov stated that the idea of the former Warsaw Pact countries joining NATO would not be a good move for all parties. Moreover, Foreign Affairs Minister Andrei Kozyrev, along with Russian diplomats, began a concerted campaign aimed at stopping the process of NATO extension to Central and Eastern Europe countries, particularly Poland.<sup>24</sup> It became clear that a serious conflict of strategic interests had begun between Poland and Russia.

From 1993 the policy of objection and opposition began to dominate Russia's attitude towards Poland. It hindered initiatives and political actions in relations with the West that would lead to Poland's integration with the Euro-Atlantic system. This was done using arguments concerning the responsibility of Russia as a superpower. At all costs, Russia tried to prevent NATO's eastward extension by presenting Poland as an explicitly anti-Russian country.<sup>25</sup> On the other hand, Poland gave assurances that the accession of Central European states to NATO was not aimed against Russia and Ukraine.

The process of Poland's integration into the EU and NATO started to be viewed in Moscow as contrary to the Russian *raison d'état* and, therefore, it was resisted as clearly anti-Russian. The most efficient tactic was to counteract the speedy integration of Poland into NATO by creating and promoting an image of Poland as an anti-Russian country. Russian politicians wanted to create the impression that, in principle, Poles have a hostile attitude to Russia. Minor incidents were publicized disproportionately by the media, presenting an atmosphere of serious frictions. The purpose was to convince the NATO states that by accepting Poland they would accept a country in permanent conflict with Russia. Specific events and incidents were used for that purpose; they caused a crisis in diplomatic relations in 1994–1996, as well as a wave of mutual accusations.<sup>26</sup>

The characteristic feature for Moscow was also the conviction that Poland should be the first to take any action to improve bilateral relations by introducing adjustments in its foreign policy, since Poland was responsible for their poor condition. The Russian side did not take into consideration the arguments proposing the need to introduce a new strategy towards Poland, as well as towards the whole of Central and Eastern Europe. On the other hand, the Polish side was not able to handle the impasse and was limited only to repeating invitations and declarations of goodwill. As a result, in 1994–1996, among the Russian elites and in the media, irritation and suspicions towards Poland, as well as the old negative stereotypes, were revived; a serious crisis occurred in bilateral relations.<sup>27</sup>

#### Improved Relations between Poland and Some Eastern Neighbours, 1996–1997

Positive changes in Polish eastern policy, particularly in Polish–Ukrainian and Polish–Lithuanian relations, took place in 1996. In 1996–1997 there was a considerable increase in political cooperation and contacts between the leaders of Poland and Ukraine (Presidents Aleksander Kwasniewski and Leonid Kuchma), which was referred to as the renaissance of Ukraine in Polish eastern policy. The considerably convergent visions of Europe and the acknowledgement of common tasks in the future comprised an important premise in the development of these contacts. Polish political elites showed a growing interest in Ukraine, which resulted from its increasing importance in the European political arena, and Ukraine appreciated the importance of cooperation with Poland—a neutral and friendly neighbour. In 1996 both presidents signed the "Declaration on strategic partnership," which included a clause stating that the existence of an independent Ukraine is a factor conducive to the consolidation of Poland's independence, just as the existence of an independent Poland is conducive to the consolidation of Ukraine's independence. Additionally, an agreement was signed concerning no-visa travel, and thus Poland became the first country in Central Europe where Ukrainians could travel without visas. A year later a Polish–Ukrainian "Declaration on understanding and reconciliation" was

signed, where mutual references were made to the painful and often tragic history of both nations. Since then, Poland has tried, with varying success, to be an advocate in bringing Ukraine closer to European structures, and Ukraine has referred to Polish aspirations to join NATO with increasing understanding.<sup>28</sup>

There was also a revival of cooperation with Lithuania. After signing a treaty on friendly relations and on regulating the matters of national minorities in 1994, Poland started to be seen as one of Lithuania's major political and economic partners.<sup>29</sup> From that moment both states jointly followed the path to NATO and the EU.

No major improvement was recorded in Polish-Russian relations during this period, despite the intensification of political contacts, and the increasingly buoyant development in business contacts. It was only in 1996, in relationship to the presidential elections in Poland, that a group of Russian politicians enthusiastically welcomed the victory of Aleksander Kwaśniewski, hoping that the pro-NATO option of Polish policy would weaken considerably. In Moscow it was expected that Polish foreign policy would change favourably towards Russia as a result of the change of government after the elections. What is of particular importance, however, is that in Moscow it was finally admitted that the previous policy towards Central and Eastern Europe, and particularly towards Poland, was wrong.<sup>30</sup>

In 1996-1998 some changes were introduced in Russia's policy towards Central and Eastern Europe. The reasons for the adjustments were the dynamic processes taking place in Europe. Unofficially, Russia began a series of bilateral consultations with the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, which were motivated by a need to separate the problem of establishing bilateral relations from the issue of NATO extension. The new phenomenon in Russian policy towards Poland and the whole region was the increase in the importance of Russia's foreign economic interests in Central and Eastern Europe. At that time Poland received a number of proposals from the Russian side for business cooperation in the areas of energy and armaments, as well as in the banking sector. Apart from signing an agreement on the free trade zone, it was proposed to create joint enterprises and networks of commercial, financial and credit institutions. It was also planned to create preferential conditions for Russian power industry companies and financial institutions to operate in the Polish market.<sup>31</sup> If Poland had accepted such proposals for business cooperation it would have lost control over the process of transforming the power industry market and the banking/financial sector. In fact, it would have meant negating the opportunity of EU membership. It would also have contributed to the increased risk of Polish market penetration by Russian economic structures, which would remain beyond the control and standards of the market economy. Therefore, Poland rejected such a model of cooperation proposed by the Russian side.<sup>32</sup>

Despite all this, to a large extent Poland remained dependent on the deliveries of strategic raw materials (gas and crude oil) from Russia. In September 1996, in Warsaw, a contract with the Russian corporation "Gazprom" was signed for gas provision for a period of 25 years. It meant that Russia's participation in gas imports to

Poland would not be less than 80%. In a short period of time Central and Eastern Europe became the second (after Germany) strategic territory for gas sales to the European market. The two largest Russian corporations, "Gazprom" and "Lukoil," were becoming increasingly effective instruments of Russian foreign policy, which was evidence that it was gradually becoming less related to ideology and increasingly dependent on economic factors.<sup>33</sup>

The dynamic development of economic contacts did not translate into a visible improvement in political relations. The continual obstacle for their improvement was Russia's objection to the extension of NATO eastwards. Under such conditions the target of Polish policy towards Russia was to maintain friendly relations at an official level, which would serve to resolve the then current bilateral problems. After Poland's accession to NATO in 1999 and with the progress of integration with the EU, Russia started raising the issue of the possible negative effects of Poland's accession to the EU in relationship to bilateral business relations.<sup>34</sup>

Moreover, Russia also demanded positive solutions concerning transit traffic to the Kaliningrad Region via the territories of Poland and Lithuania after their accession to the EU. In 1995, responding to the announcement of Poland's acceptance into NATO, the Russians warned that they would locate nuclear weapons in the Kaliningrad Region.<sup>35</sup> Similar threats occurred a few years later, when the chances of Lithuania joining NATO and the EU became highly probable. The Russians also demanded consent from the Polish government for the construction of a special ex-territorial transport corridor across the territory of Poland to connect Kaliningrad with Belarus, which would allow for the unrestricted travel of Russian citizens to and from Kaliningrad. Also, the EU leaders were startled when during the summit of the EU and Russia in Moscow in May 2002, President Putin categorically stated that the unrestricted travel from the Kaliningrad Region to other regions in Russia was so important that the future of EU-Russia relations depended on its resolution (according to Moscow's proposal).<sup>36</sup> Moscow also demanded that after the EU expansion the inhabitants of the Kaliningrad Region should be able to travel freely, without visas and passports, across the territories of Lithuania and Poland, to other regions of Russia and Belarus. The opinion of Brussels was, however, very clear: each citizen of a third country entering the territory of an EU member state must have a valid travel document (passport) and a valid visa.<sup>37</sup>

In addition to the specific issues just discussed, psychological issues remained a considerable hindrance to Polish-Russian relations. Part of Russian society and its politicians, because a lack of historical knowledge, as well as attitudes shaped by its past totalitarian system, simply did not understand why Polish citizens voted for integration with the EU.<sup>38</sup> In Russia, Poland's accession to NATO and the EU was perceived as a potential threat. The situation did not change after the visit of President Putin to Poland in May 2002. It started a series of intensive Polish-Russian contacts at various levels and contributed to a temporary improvement in the political climate. However, in the long term it did not bring the breakthrough in mutual relations

expected by both states. Its only measurable political effect was an open exchange of ideas concerning crucial matters of interest to both states.<sup>39</sup>

Polish political cooperation with Belarus did not have a partnership dimension as it did with Ukraine. In 1996 there was a considerable deterioration in bilateral relations. This was due largely to the internal political situation in Belarus, particularly the authoritarian style of power of President Aleksander Lukashenko. The continual violation of human rights and OSCE (Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe) standards in Belarus, persecution of the opposition and the independent mass media caused a long-lasting (until now) isolation of this state in the international arena and contributed to a lowering of the importance of Polish–Belarus bilateral contacts. Therefore, Poland decided to maintain official political contacts on a lower level, and at the same time to develop contacts at lower and working levels.<sup>40</sup>

It should be stressed, however, that the Polish policy of isolation towards Belarus is less rigorous than the policies adopted by most EU states, where there is a dominating belief in the need to isolate the Belarusian authorities totally. It is not in the interests of the Polish authorities to isolate the Minsk regime totally not least because of the large Polish minority living in Belarus, as well as the fact that Belarus is Poland's immediate neighbour.<sup>41</sup>

The increase in Poland's integration with the EU was also related to the unavoidable prospect of introducing a visa requirement for the citizens of Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, as well as other post-Soviet states. For a number of years this was in actuality the only and principal problem in Polish eastern policy. Poland tried to minimize the negative consequences of the visa requirement introduction and delayed the timing of its introduction as long as possible. Among the EU accessing states, Poland was the last country to introduce visas for its eastern neighbours, at the end of 2003. The Polish–Ukrainian solution seems to be a paradigm in this case. The parties agreed that Polish citizens would be able to travel to Ukraine without visas, and Ukrainian citizens would receive Polish visas free of charge. Also Moldova and Georgia agreed to the same solution.

After Poland's accession to the EU in May 2004, the earlier concerns about the aggravation of contacts with eastern neighbours did not materialize. There was a sudden increase in the business turnover of Poland with its eastern partners, and the introduction of the visa requirement, although it limited individual traffic, did not cause any major problems during border crossing and did not transform the eastern border of the EU into another "iron curtain." Since then Polish eastern policy has become part of the eastern policy of the EU. However, a major problem is still the lack of a uniform and coordinated EU eastern policy. This was clearly illustrated during the "orange revolution" in Ukraine at the end of 2004. The Polish authorities and Poland's citizens then showed explicit support for the democratic forces of Victor Yushchenko in his struggle with the electoral fraud of Leonid Kuchma's party. Poland's president, Aleksander Kwaśniewski, along with Lithuania's president proposed mediation at a "round table." This prevented the use of force and contributed to the peaceful resolution of the dispute.<sup>42</sup>

While Poland and the Baltic States would like to limit the possibilities of Russian imperialism through a common EU eastern policy as well as the democratization of Ukraine and Belarus, France and Germany perceive Russia as a factor for the regional stabilization of the area to the east of the EU. Therefore, in the immediate future the most important task for EU authorities will be to define a uniform foreign policy, including a policy towards the EU's eastern neighbours. The earlier experience of new EU member states (Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia), which border the eastern neighbours of the EU, may turn out to be invaluable in this task.<sup>43</sup> Polish backing for democratic changes in Ukraine during the "orange revolution" led, on the one hand, to a considerable improvement in the already existing good relations between Poland and Ukraine, but on the other it aggravated Poland's already poor relations with Russia and Belarus. Currently, Russia and its president want to punish Poland for its involvement in the victory of democracy and Victor Yushchenko in Ukraine. Russia's humiliation and ignoring of Poland in the international arena have additionally influenced the determination of the Polish authorities to support the independent and pro-Western political forces in the East.<sup>44</sup>

For Poland, Russia was and remains very important. The pivotal theme of all Polish eastern policy is Russia and the potential threat of Russian neo-imperialism. Polish actions and strategies towards Ukraine and Belarus are motivated not only by a concern with human rights and democracy but also with a will to counteract potential Russian political and economic expansion in Central and Eastern Europe. As can be seen by twentieth-century history, such expansion is treated seriously in Poland. Therefore, a natural barrier against the Russian *reconquista* will be the independent, democratic post-Soviet states—which are viewed as Poland's natural allies.

## NOTES

1. Damrosz, "Na wschod od granic Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej."
2. Skubiszewski, "Nowe sojusze, system bezpieczeństwa w Europie Środkowo-Wschodniej."
3. Najder, "Polska polityka zagraniczna 1989–1993."
4. Pawlak (1993/94), "Polityka traktatowa polski."
5. Nowakowski, "Polska polityka wschodnia w 1991 roku."
6. Nowakowski, "Polska pomiędzy Wschodem a Zachodem."
7. "Deklaracja o przyjazni i dobrosąsiedzkiej współpracy."
8. "Deklaracja o zasadach i podstawowych kierunkach."; Burant, "Problematyka wschodnia"; idem, "Ukraina i Polska."
9. Nowakowski, "Polska polityka wschodnia w 1991 roku."
10. Kaminski and Kozakiewicz, *Stosunki polsko-ukraińskie*.
11. Tolstow, "Ukraina geopolityczna."
12. Iwinski, "Osiem słabosci polskiej polityki zagranicznej."
13. Kossakowski, "Polska–Rosja–Ukraina."
14. Nowakowski, "Polityka wschodnia—kilka spraw oczywistych."

15. Calka, "Polska polityka wschodnia w 1994 roku."
16. During World War II, in Katyn near Smolensk, Soviet divisions of the NKVD murdered approximately 15,000 Polish POWs. Until 1991, the Soviet government had claimed that the POWs were killed by the German army. Finally, in 1991, the Russian government officially admitted that the Polish POWs were in fact murdered by Soviet soldiers.
17. Kobrinskaja, *Długi koniec zimnej wojny*; Magdziak-Miszewska, *Polska i Rosja*.
18. Michutina, "Tak była li osibka?"; idem, "Tak skolko ze sovetskich voennoplennych pogiblo v Polsce v 1919–1921 gg?"; Ivanov, "Za dolgo do Katyni"; Liebieidieva, "Katynski dzial wodny."
19. "Koncepcja wnieszej polityki Rossijskoj Fiederacji"; Kobrinskaja, "Nowe spojrzienie na stosunki rosyjsko-polskie."
20. September 17 is a symbolic date in Poland, since on 17 September 1939 Poland was attacked by the USSR.
21. Strzelczyk, "Lech, Borys i NATO."
22. Olechowski, "Pragniemy ocieplenia stosunkow z Rosja"; Kloczowski, "Koalicja SLD-PSL wobec Rosji"; "Głowne elementy"; "Polska polityka."
23. "Dzialalnosc prezydenta Lecha Walesy"; "Urząd Prezydenta RP."
24. "Polska i Rosja"; Nowakowski, "Polityka wschodnia—kilka spraw oczywistych."
25. Bartkiewicz, "Stosunki z Rosja, Ukraina i Bialorusia."
26. Miller, "Obraz Polski i Polakow w Rosji od roku 1989."
27. Magdziak-Miszewska, "Stosunki z Rosja."
28. Fedorowicz, *Ukraina w polskiej polityce wschodniej w latach 1989–1999*.
29. Koleccka, "Stosunki z panstwami baltyckimi."
30. Pawlowa-Silwanskaja, "Ewolucja polityki Rosji wobec Polski w latach 1991–1996."
31. "Memorandum o wolnym handlu"; *Gazeta bankowa*, 27 October 1996, 12–13.
32. Calka, "Polska polityka wschodnia w latach 1989–1997."
33. *Finansovye Izvestia*, no. 93, 1 October 1996, 6; "Miedzy potrzeba a uzaleznieniem"; Piotrowski, "Stosunki dwustronne Polski."
34. Michalski, "Stosunki z Rosja"; Najder, "Pozornie lepiej, naprawde gorzej."
35. "Obwod Kaliningradzki"; Pelczynska-Nalecz, "Siedem mitow na temat Kaliningradu."
36. Ksiazek, "Stosunki dwustronne Polski"; Piotrowski, "Obwod kaliningradzki."
37. Kureczab-Redlich, "Z Rosji do Rosji."
38. Michalski, "Stosunki z Rosja."
39. Ksiazek, "Stosunki dwustronne Polski," 302–05.
40. Piotrowski, "Stosunki dwustronne Polski," 237–39.
41. Ksiazek, "Stosunki dwustronne Polski," 318–23.
42. Kwasniewski, "Misja kijowska."
43. Cimoszewicz, "The Eastern Dimension of the EU"; idem, "Polityka zagraniczna Polski—aktualne wyzwania."
44. Podolski, "Rosyjscy chuligani polityczni."

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