

The domination of confrontational thinking

Poland's Eastern policy has long been determined by the fundamental question about the imperative of a durable accord with Russia. It is an echo of the now distant thought of Roman Dmowski¹, but also a question about the existential interests of the Polish state in modern realities. The post-1989 Poland never made a diagnosis that would point to the unequivocal priorities for its policy towards Russia. It has always been a policy determined by either a "double-track", the progress of transformation, or affiliations with the West. The basis for pro-Ukrainian or pro-Georgian preferences has never been specified, assuming the righteousness of such choices due to their anti-Russian overtones rather intuitively. Poland has not developed a coherent Eastern policy, even though there were real premises for it. It is unclear whether Krzysztof Skubiszewski, the first Foreign Minister of the Third Polish Republic (Poland after 1989), lacked determination in this regard, or didn't have the support of the political base. The Democratic Union/Liberty Union (Unia Demokratyczna/Unia Wolności) itself proved inconsistent in this matter, there was a lack of persistence and sacrifice of various authorities, which similarly to West Germany advocated for normalization².

The 1990s were marked by captivation with freedom which did not require a creative effort to maintain the country's position in the new realities. It was a truly unique period in history, as circumstances themselves forced some actions – affiliations with the West, opening to the world. Many things seemed like a "godsend", did not require any effort or special courage. Against this background, the basis for Poland's Eastern policy lacked coherent conceptualization based on the articulation of national interest. Questions about our own identity and the identity of parties with which Poland wanted to conduct a rational policy, bringing some benefits to everyone, were sidestepped. It was naively assumed that the post-Soviet states would move onto the democracy track en masse, even though there were clearly no grounds for such transitions. (Half-hearted attempts to transplant the models of liberal democracy to Russia or even Belarus in the early 1990s inevitably led to relapses of authoritarianism). In the absence of ideas, there was a tendency to overstate the influence of the thought of Parisian "Kultura"³, in particular of Jerzy Giedroyc and Juliusz Mieroszewski. Certainly, they were visionaries, but they had no real influence on Poland's Eastern policy – for that from the beginning was shaped by a *fait accompli*, primarily the consequences of the disintegration of the Soviet empire. That's why, Adam Bromke maintained, the Eastern policy, based partly on the so-called double-track, became a peculiar "sure-fire hit"⁴. Biting back after years of dependency and humiliation while succumbing to prejudices and grievances, the Polish political elites, along with media centers, created a Russophobic atmosphere in the Polish society, thanks to which all the conceptual shortcomings and practical setbacks could be explained. Russophobia is a result of ignorance, lack of good will and manipulation. For it would take only a bit more civil courage and intellectual effort to acquire and re-evaluate the knowledge about Russians. The Russian side was not without blame either. The tradition of imperial loftiness and the arrogance of Russian elites fed anti-Polish sentiments. Poland began to be assigned the role of a limitrophe state seeking to isolate Russia in the international arena⁵. As a result, both sides became hostages of negative attitudes, phobias and grudges. Since things have gone very far in terms of airing mutual grievances and ramping up tensions, it is extremely difficult to reverse the existing trend⁶.

At the same time, profound historical complexes resurfaced, with a return to the tradition of martyrdom and heroism. A significant role in this respect was played by the demonization of the so-called historical policy, based on the emotional valuation of past grievances and events, particularly the Katyń atrocity. What needs to be added to the mentioned determinants is the ideologization of the Eastern policy in the form of a peculiar missionaryism and Prometheism, founded on the conviction of the superiority of the democratic West over the undemocratic East. The Polish political elites, followed by a large part of the media and public opinion, came to believe that Poland joined the ranks of mature democracies and its mission was to bring democratic values to the East. This way, political interests, inspired by the interests of Western countries, and not their own diagnosis, determined the specific actions of the Polish government. All this lacked in-depth reflection and understanding of what is significant and important in the long run for our own interests. The intellectual misery of think tanks was also brought to light. The ease in using political slogans, the lack of courage in debunking myths and criticizing flawed political decisions, the "collectivization" of thinking, opportunism and conformism – ordering everyone to think "patriotically", have essentially led to a deficit of alternative thinking.

Looking at the relations between Poland and Russia in terms of the balance of power, we face huge asymmetry. Poland is unable to counterbalance Russia in the post-Soviet sphere. Not even the European Union as a whole is able to do so. For Russia not only operates in a space it knows well, which is culturally and geopolitically close to it, it is itself a major reference point for many post-Soviet states (as a guarantor of security, a source of commodity supplies, a receptive market, a place to earn a living etc.). Russia does not always constitute – as it appears from Warsaw's perspective – a threat to the countries situated in its immediate vicinity. Also, Russia's significant pro-integration potential in the so-called near abroad is yet to be fully recognized⁷. Promethean thinking in this context is of a unilateral, wishful nature, detached from reality and doomed to failure.

Without Russia's consent, no actions in the post-Soviet space can succeed. The development Caspian and Central Asian deposits of energy resources against Russia's will has proven impossible. The idea of the so-called Intermarium⁸ similarly has no chance at becoming a reality in the foreseeable perspective. It is also worth looking at the difficulties with the development of the Eastern Partnership in this context⁹.

So far, there has been no critical reflection over the chances for normalization of relations with Russia. No politician on the Polish side has dared to call Russia an important neighbor, with "strategic" interests binding it to Poland. On the other hand, the term "strategic partnership" has been lavished on Ukraine, without acknowledging the ambivalent attitude of the Ukrainians themselves. It is also difficult to fathom what binds Poland with Georgia or Azerbaijan, other than resentment towards Russia. Russia is too important a participant in the international game to be sidelined, marginalized or ignored. Cooperation with Russia can't be indefinitely made conditional on the advances of democratization processes, because it will not change overnight and immediately – as its critics would like it – adhere to Western standards. More generally, Poland's Eastern policy constitutes a blend of coincidences, flawed and idealistic visions, mere wishful thinking and incompetence of political elites. It could be added, as a form of excuse that Poland is dealing with a particularly complex matter, deeply embedded in history, geopolitics, culture and tradition. It requires a critical sense of observation and objective analysis, as well as courage in making decisions. Sadly, the elites governing the III RP have failed a test of these conditions.

Poland is among the countries historically affected by immense threats, hence it is highly sensitive to its sources. Polish politicians easily admitted that they live in a world of competing powers, with Russia naturally, not to say objectively, coming to the fore. The rival, by definition, is dangerous, so it's a natural thing that due to its geographical location Russia meets all the conditions of a potent source of threats. "Countries bordering a dangerous opponent usually don't need to exaggerate this danger, primarily because it exists just next door, and they are in the direct firing range. In such cases, the society usually recognizes the threat and fears its immediate neighbour"¹⁰. Perhaps that's the reason why governments in Poland find it relatively easy to spend more and more billions of zlotys on armaments (PLN 140 billion, or ca. EUR 34 billion, is scheduled to be spent in the coming 10 years)¹¹.

The Polish side views Russia through the prism of reconstruction of power, which is called by various names: neoimperialism or a return to great power roles. The rulers and the media particularly demonize V. Putin, seeing him as the source of all evil. There is no place for polemics on the assessments of the Russian leader. Knowing the Russians, it should be assumed, however, that any political leader in place of Putin would pursue the same objectives. Differences could only be seen in means. Great power thinking is attributed to any authority in Russia. It does not depend on individual preferences of members of Russian authorities, but rather on geostrategic location, which means not only a remarkable territorial extent, but also bordering many countries which are not always friendly. Bearing in mind the long-lived Realpolitik traditions of European powers, it can be confidently said that many Western politicians would behave similarly in the place of the Russians.

The Polish perception of Russia suits the scenarios drawn up across the ocean, according to which Poland is supposed to be a "bolt" rather than a catalyst for rapprochement, to act as a "warrior of the new Cold War" rather than an advocate of rapprochement between the Eastern and Western worlds¹². For what else if not "bolting" Russia is served by a permanent base for U.S. troops on Polish territory? The problem lies not in objective determinants, but in the fear and anti-Russian obsessions of Polish political elites. Expressing constant fears over a renewed dependency on Russia, they uncritically acquiesce to U.S. geostrategic visions related to the encirclement and fragmentation of Russia. In this way, Poland becomes, on its own request, a hostage to foreign strategic concepts.

After Mieroszewski and Giedroyc, no genuine political thought on joint settlement with Russia has been developed, while various foreign ideas are easily adopted as ours. This is largely an effect of a lack of genuine social discourse on Eastern issues. Truly independent voices struggle to be heard. Intellectuals such as Andrzej Walicki or Bronisław Łagowski are unable to reach the wider audience. They are largely dominated by doctrinaires and ideologues of the "new faith", subservient to their political principals. There are no centers initiating an independent, professional discussion that would contribute to gaining critical distance from established truths which harm the Polish cause.

Turning their backs on Russia, Poles have quit learning the language, culture, economy and way of life which made them a credible guide to the dangerous and mysterious East. The competence of think tanks dealing with Russia leaves much to be desired in terms of substance. Their studies have been overrun by opportunists and supporters of political correctness. They don't see a scope for action in a peaceful space in the East. They lose the initiative if things are stable and well. They look forward to crises, against the background of which they can show initiative. Although it sounds absurd, this is the dominant way of thinking. The head of the Center for Eastern Studies, Olaf Osica, expressed it this way: "Poland has to wait for a crisis situation. The East is an area of permanent crisis and it can reach such proportions that a scope for action, a room to play will be created". In other

words, a Polish analyst believes that “worse is better”¹³. One gets the impression that Polish decision makers are constantly guided by intuitive knowledge in Russian affairs, because there is simply no demand for analytical knowledge. The Center for Polish-Russian Dialogue and Understanding brings disappointments instead of hopes and fails to guarantee any change in the current approach to Russia.

The PiS (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość – Law and Justice) governments believed confrontation was most fruitful, while the PO (Platforma Obywatelska – Civic Platform) government practically has no policy, although its spin is that it is a thought-out, realistic and mature policy, pursued deliberately and carefully against its predecessors. It’s really hard to point out where the place for thoughtful concepts and moves is here¹⁴. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MSZ) circles hardly generate anything original, apart from bombastic announcements or declarations. Cliches such as: “I see Poland in the group holding power in Europe”, “nothing about Poland without Poland”, or “it wouldn’t be good if we fell back to the role of a European bulwark” – these are some wisdoms from a press interview with Minister Radosław Sikorski¹⁵. Dilettantism and epigonism pour out of all Polish diagnoses. The ahistorical approach to “eternal enemies”, irrational betting on “overseas” allies continues to resonate. There are no coherent criteria in the overview and self-assessment of the international situation. This is reflected, for example, in a one-sided view of the issues of hegemony and imperialisms.

The fact that Poland is in an alliance with the United States does not exempt decision makers from thinking in terms of their own interests. A significant intellectual limitation pertains to the illusory conviction that “special” relations with a country, particularly a power, ensure a complete understanding of a given party’s interests by the stronger partner and equal treatment. It is the so-called stronger ally trap¹⁶. Unfortunately, there is no guarantee the other side will not use its advantage to push through its interests. The weaker side can obviously appeal, if it musters enough courage and determination, for greater concessions from its mighty ally, but it risks being accused of disloyalty and unreliability. This fear of such a judgment paralyzes decision makers who consider “falling out of the protector’s favor” to be the greatest danger, primarily to themselves. This example can refer to Polish-U.S. relations after 1989. No Polish ruling party has been able to define the price of unconditional support for America. Polish politicians, regardless of their ideological provenience, have become hostages to the conviction that any opposition to the United States would mean a return to pro-Russian affiliations. Such a mental climate has been created (both in the political salons and in the media) that Poland in fact has no elbowroom in negotiations with Americans. First of all, the ruling parties in Poland have not shaken off the inferiority complex towards the U.S. and don’t understand the necessity to use pragmatic, not ideological, arguments. The issue of lifting the visa requirement for Polish citizens travelling to the U.S. symbolizes a profound asymmetry in the treatment of Poland by its American ally. Marcin Zaborowski, Director of the Polish Institute of International Affairs, is therefore right when he writes that “a solid account of profits and losses resulting from acting as, have no illusions, an unequal partner” is necessary to remedy Polish-U.S. relations¹⁷.

Megalomania and a certain primitivism of thinking are evidenced by the fact that any deterioration in U.S.-Russian relations is seen in Warsaw as a new opportunity for Poland’s return to the geopolitical game involving the largest powers. The thesis of rightwing politicians says: if Russia is aggressive, that’s only better for Poland, because then the U.S. has to return to its active roles in the region again¹⁸, except for the fact that Poland is treated more like an object than a subject. A columnist for “Rzeczpospolita” calls the coolness between the U.S. and Russia a new opportunity for Poland¹⁹. He fails to add that the function of an anti-Russian “first line of defense” assigned to Poland across the ocean means being conferred the strategic weight of a “frontline state”, and this inevitably entails various costs. Nobody asks whether Polish citizens are ready to take on such a function. In this context, it is worth noting the “rocket tempting of Poland” to include it in the construction of the MEADS (Medium Extended Air Defense System) anti-missile system, which Americans themselves don’t want, while Germans and Italians are skeptical towards it²⁰. The deficit of thinking in terms of own sovereignty leads to self-satellization and servility, to building new psychological and political barriers. This is accompanied by disregard for Russia’s international position, for example by underestimating its veto in the U.N. Security Council (“Russia with its niet in the UN Security Council remains useless”) or downplaying the importance of nuclear potential (“further reduction of nuclear arsenals” is no longer a strict condition for global security).

Obstacles on the way to normalization

Once it was difficult to imagine French-German cooperation. The phenomenon of the 1963 Elysee Treaty lay in the fact that thanks to the courage of two outstanding politicians and statesmen – Charles de Gaulle and Konrad Adenauer – two countries fighting each other for centuries pledged mutual cooperation in all the key areas, from foreign and security policy to youth exchange. The regularity of the French-German dialogue has become an example for others, although obviously there was no shortage of various obstacles and difficulties along the way. Compared to French-German cooperation, it is worth considering what conditions would have to be met for Poland and Russia to be ripe for such a historic act. Certainly, political will is needed on both sides to

systematically remove mutual resentments and prejudices. But the most important obstacle in the objective sense is the asymmetry of power and axiological incompatibility.

Russia pursues an imperial policy, advancing its interests in various fields – from Ukraine to energy security. The negative consequences of the Russian-German partnership, opening the Russian space to German investments in return for access to natural resources are not without significance for Poland. All this constitutes the source of real threats to the interests of Poland, which is anxious to win over Ukraine, or become independent from Russian energy sources. Add to this the conviction that “anti-Polishness is genetically inherent in Russian policy, because Moscow is ready to maintain good relations with weaker partners only on its own terms”²¹. Therefore, the problem of Poland’s Eastern policy is to define its own room for maneuvering, identify both opportunities and limitations of independent action. It appears that Polish political elites don’t believe they can achieve anything on their own in relations with the more powerful Russia. They don’t believe in any partnership with it, and this in effect means Poland is unable to be a real player in relations with Russia. It can only rely on the EU or US-EU policy, and this, as we know, does not always correspond to the Polish point of view.

Despite its Western affiliations, Poland has not developed self-confidence and a full sense of security. It remains a “border area”, a country which returns to its past and threats from stronger neighbors²². Poland is a peripheral culture, and the ruling elites do little to reinvent themselves towards other nations and states, without the complexes and burdens of the past. The problem lies in the fact that there is no definition of an international role as a function of real capabilities, understood as resources, but also abilities to take certain actions²³. In the past two decades, Poland’s convergence with higher, meaning Western, cultures has become a goal in itself. Aspiring to higher positions is certainly not reprehensible, it is worse when it becomes a morbid obsession of constant comparisons and proving how we are top of the class among the Central and Eastern European countries in executing ideas originating from Washington or Brussels. The impotence in defining the national interest and using the attributes of regained sovereignty in such a way as to defend our rights not only towards opponents, but also, and perhaps above all, towards allies is also of relevance²⁴.

Poland is not looking for any *modus vivendi* in relations with Russia that would facilitate the search for pragmatic forms of coexistence and cooperation. Toeing the Western line, it has rather uncritically adopted the principle of conditionality, applied particularly by the European Union towards many countries, imposing the requirement of holding free elections and respecting human rights, which aims to stimulate and stabilize democratic transformations and expand influence²⁵. In relations with Russia, the development of “common spaces” that were supposed to bring it closer to Western standards were agreed upon. In practice, it was confirmed that reaching into the axiological realm gives impetus for the ideologization of mutual relations, i.e. putting values first, above interests. In such situations, each party tries to impose its point of view on the other. This breeds a natural conflict over values, principles or dogmas, with no chances for resolution. Russia is the last country which would readily adopt foreign values as its own. It has its own traditions and cultural codes that do not allow for easy compromises with Western values. The insistence of the European Union, and also the United States, on their values as the basis for relations with Russia does not provide an opportunity to build a lasting compromise between them in the foreseeable future²⁶.

The Polish-Russian political discourse remains far from settling the historical accounts. While some topics have been muted, it does not mean moving towards a normalization of relations. An attempt at rapprochement between the Orthodox and Roman Catholic churches has also failed to bring the expected results²⁷. Why this occurred could be a topic of long deliberations. It appears the Polish public opinion, including decision makers and church leaders, is not yet prepared for such an act of emotional transformation which requires some kind of “dementi of what you were before”²⁸. It is rather the motif of intransigence than reconciliation that is deeply embedded in the Polish political awareness, hence parties show no desire for mutual forgiveness or forgetting. It is worth remembering that an attitude based on intransigence is a permanent psychological mutilation.

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One paradox is the perception of the conflict with Russia in terms of military possibilism²⁹. Since Russia pursues its policy with the use of force in the Caucasus or in Ukraine, why wouldn’t it use it in the broader European zone? This question betrays a complete lack of understanding of the policy Russia conducts. Simple analogies are useless here if deeper determinants and differences between post-Soviet area and Central Europe are taken into account. The Polish media devote a lot of attention to the Russian army, the Center for Eastern Studies alarmingly reports that defense expenditures in Russia are six times higher than in Poland. Such an atmosphere facilitates lobbying for increased military spending, which in the case of Poland is ten times higher than spending on science. It would be useful to think twice, what provides greater security to Poland? In a confrontation with stronger neighbors, no Polish army will manage on its own, even if it can hold out longer than a month.

The bellisation involves trade relations in particular. The public opinion has already become accustomed to constant food “wars” between Poland and Russia, which is reflected in the radicalization of media coverage about the other side. You can even see the emergence of a journalist specialization based on constant incitement, attributing bad intentions or blaming the other side for all failures. Even in literature, aspiring to a scientific status, you can find phrases unambiguous in their meaning: “In addition to breaching the agreements on the construction of the second leg of the Yamal gas pipeline, a clearly hostile Nord Stream gas pipeline project was put forward, seriously threatening Polish economic, political interests, and to some extent even sovereignty”³⁰. With such stylistics, opinions on Poland’s position, omissions, inconsistency or simply inefficiency are sidelined. Poland’s policy once again appears to be a victim of aggressive designs of the Russian power.

Europeanization policy as a condition for normalization with Russia

Europeanization is the placement of one’s own interests and political practice within integration structures and levels. Europeanization processes are expressed in three dimensions: from the EU’s influence on member states, from member states’ influence on EU policies, processes and institutions, and horizontally – between member states. Each of these cases refers to Poland’s participation in the creation of the EU’s Eastern policy. The effects of Europeanization can be seen in many fields. First and foremost, as a result of membership in Western structures, Poland’s geopolitical situation is, for the first time in the modern era, not a source of danger, but rather allows it to act within broader alliances and constellations, secured by mutual guarantees. Poland’s involvement in the common energy policy on the basis of solidarity and unity undoubtedly confirms that Europeanization is underway³¹.

It is a common belief that Poland is able to bring specific values into the process of Europeanization of Eastern European countries. There is talk in this context about Poland’s “normative” strength, which is derived from its historical identity and attachment to values. What is forgotten, however, is that in the East, which remembers the times of the I Commonwealth (in Ukraine, Belarus, but also Lithuania), reminiscences related to Polish civilizational and cultural expansion and Polish imperialism are still vivid³². It may be just a “beggar’s imperialism” these days, but Polish aspirations still ring the wrong bells. In this light, whether Poland will be able to take advantage of the European Union’s mechanisms and values to redefine this imageremains an open question. All the more so that instead of an approach based on searching for compromise formulas, there are calls to create a front for a common policy against the Russian threat inside Europe³³. The problem is the Polish narrative substantially differs from the narratives of other European countries. Therefore, who could join the creation of such a “front” to contain Russia? Germany, France and Great Britain are realistic. It blocks compromise and conciliatory stances. It prevents or hinders contacts with a former enemy and weighs down on the atmosphere of contacts with allies.

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Normalization in Polish-Russian relations implies the equalization of mutual relations or bringing them back to a state deemed normal. It is therefore about the introduction of predictable rules of the game, harmonization of the criteria for the assessment of interests of the parties, stabilization of contacts, giving them routine forms and mutually acceptable frequency. Normalization results in psychological and emotional calming. Former adversaries become partners³⁴. For these conditions to be met, the following must take place: accommodation and mutual restraint; rapprochement at the society level; the development of a community of interests³⁵.

Normalization requires sacrifices. First of all, it is necessary to abandon mutual grievances and claims, or at least set them aside for later (even for next generations). The trick is to restrain yourself in the articulation of your points in order not to provoke unnecessary tensions and aggravate mistrust. It is about presenting your positions confidently, assertively, but not arrogantly and aggressively. Mutual restraints lead to expressions of the will to cooperate, facilitate concessions, and indicate a readiness for selfless and altruistic steps. They soften the tone of reasoning. The countries stop arguing and bargaining under the cloud of suspicions, they start thinking in "win-win" terms. The question that arises on the Polish side is about the Russians' readiness to accept such a strategy towards Poland. There is, however, another question regarding the Poles themselves. Is it possible to restore a uniform and coherent policy towards Russia against the background of the existing rifts in the Polish political scene? Many signs indicate that such a scenario is unfeasible in the foreseeable future.

After the systemic transformation, the mental and cultural transformation is still lagging behind³⁶. If the barriers in mutual perceptions at the society level are not overcome quickly, we will all become hostages to new distrusts and prejudices. This is why Polish-Russian relations need to return to working contacts in various fields without trumpeting them, as this provokes professional Russophobes to accuse the government of high treason. It is necessary to reach out to Russian elites using a network of intellectual and business links, start rational lobbying in Russia, build a "Polish party", through gestures towards the people of science, culture, media, and also the government. Among present-day Russian politicians, Poles don't see anyone to conduct a systematic dialogue with and seek far-sighted solutions. It is time, however, to recognize Russians as they are, have no illusions that some "idealized" democrats will come to power after the Putin team. Even when it happens one day, Poles may feel disappointed again, because they will also be... Russians.

An important condition for reconciliation is to focus on interests, not just values. Both countries have to find a compromise between interests and values. So far, Poland's insistence on values and Russia's insistence on interests have not created a window for dialogue and understanding³⁷. Rationalizing mutual references, it is worth considering not what divides us, not even what binds us, but rather what makes us different. After such a diagnosis of differences, it may be worth taking a risk and look for a close, similar, tangent, if not shared, elements. Without a solid diagnosis of interests, it will be impossible to build any positive future. A sine qua non condition for an effective policy is respect for Russian identity, even when it greatly diverges from our sense of Europeanism

or Westernism. It is a mistake to bet on a Westernising mission, export of Western-style democracy and promotion of Western institutions without care for their acceptance by the country's society. Respect for otherness, worldview pluralisms, and civilizational choices is a foundation for sound relations with any country. The essence of intercultural dialogue is not moving closer to one cultural canon, political model, or system of values. It is rather about finding things in diversity that bind and respecting what is different.

There will always be various disagreements between Poland and Russia, but the most important thing should be to understand the interdependencies of both countries, their security, economies and cultures, also in the EU context. As Andrzej Drawicz³⁸ used to say, Poland and Russia are condemned to having chilly relations, who knows if not for long decades, or even centuries³⁹. For example, how many years did it take to forget that the Swedes were invaders? Bearing in mind the contradictions of interests, it needs to be assumed that the state of conflict in mutual relations will be, so to say, their natural feature. In many political circles of the Polish right, a conviction persists that Russia ruled by Vladimir Putin's "strong hand" does not need reconciliation with Poland⁴⁰. There are calls for Russia, as the stronger partner and historical adversary, with "more on its conscience", to be the first to reach out for reconciliation with Poland, show more goodwill, for example on issues such as explaining the causes of the Smolensk disaster 2010. The distrust on the Polish side stems, first of all, from the actual asymmetry, but also from the failure on the part of Kremlin politicians to perceive and treat Poland equally. They are suspected of treating Poland instrumentally, of "sham" gestures as they advance Russia's own interests in the European Union and in relations with the U.S.⁴¹

Regardless of all the mistrust from the Polish side, it is true that the better Poland's relations with Russia, the greater the impact of Poland's policy on the EU's Eastern policy will be. It may sound paradoxical, but thanks to improved relations with Russia it will be easier to obtain support for Ukraine's entry into the European Union⁴². Solving its problems with Russia on its own, Poland will neither burden the general EU agenda, nor put many Western European countries in an awkward situation. Poland should join the stance in the EU which sees Russia as an inherent element of the European community. Instead of a confrontational policy of "containing" Russia, a common EU effort should be made to entangle the Russian "bear" with many durable interdependencies, at the same time extending the EU's reach into other countries – Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia, and Belarus. This will make it possible to limit Russia's influence in their area in the long term and integrate them into the system of European norms and institutions, which will consequently foster their prospective integration.

Poland currently needs to catalogue its problems in relations with Russia, to establish the means and methods for solving them, and, finally, to define the priorities that would allow Poland to build a middle-term strategy. With hindsight, it is clear how certain problems in mutual relations, clash over the "historical policy", or the Baltic gas pipeline, were exaggerated. The question needs to be asked whether these ventures could be more successful if Poland's policy towards Russia was more conciliatory than when it is more critical. In Poland, very few people are interested in such dilemmas.

There are no "easy" matters in Poland's relations with Russia. All the issues are of a complex nature, partly due to the psychological determinants. A shift from the issues of history to the present and future is the basic message for a change in mutual relations. Polish-Russian reconciliation should be based on cooperative thinking, a necessity to create an accommodating strategy allowing for a reassessment of the negative ideological past in favor of positive and pragmatic cooperation now and in the future. What is needed, on both sides, is reciprocity and partnership, equal dialogue, rapprochement over the interests of both sides. This is a task for years to come, out of reach in the short term.

The dramatic events in Ukraine and the Russian intervention in Crimea in 2014 have shown once again, after the 2008 Georgian war, how strong the demand for a hostile and aggressive Russia is. A wave of hysterical comments has swept across the nation, making it anything but easier for the man in the street to understand the essence of the ongoing situation. First and foremost, both the media and politicians are using extremely emotional, negative evaluative rhetoric, as a result of the groupthink syndrome, focusing attention on "Moscow's aggression", in isolation from the context and prior events. Rational reasoning struggles to reach the public, while common sense and restraint in response are at a premium. First of all, a sense of realism and keeping a distance from the events in Ukraine are necessary both at the official and media level.

Meanwhile, the Polish political life has been dominated by war rhetoric against Russia. Such rhetoric best serves Russophobic propaganda, but does not bring any positive political effects in the long run. Poland can afford to assess the situation with calm and restraint. Anti-Russian emotions are a bad advisor to effective diplomacy. Apart from this, the crisis will end some day, because such is the nature of crises, Poland will remain Russia's neighbor and needs to think about its interests with it, not only about someone else's affair, because this is what the Ukrainian affair, whichever way you look at it, is for us. More realism, less moralism would come in handy. And not for the first time in history. First of all, you need to know the cost of your own national interest, rather than engage in saber-rattling for public acclaim and the personal satisfaction of politicians.