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POLITICS OF HISTORY OF THE THIRD POLISH REPUBLIC: **reORIENTATION (1989–2007)**

Abstract

This article summarises the concepts behind the direction of Polish politics towards Ukraine, Lithuania, Belarus and Russia in placing Poland's new international relations in Central and Eastern Europe due to its historical ties with the countries of the region. A significant verbal role was played by the reception in Polish politics of the doctrine of Mieroszewski and Giedroyc—the so-called ULB (Ukraine–Lithuania–Belarus). It assumed the establishment of special relations with these countries, and, at the same time, waiving claims to territories lost by Poland after 1939. The application of this idea was conditioned by the internal political dynamics of Ukraine, Belarus, Russia, and Lithuania, and their mutual relations that determined the effectiveness of this doctrine. A key role in shaping Poland's policy towards these countries was played by an “historical factor”—the exchange of mutual declarations concerning the past; this sometimes included the transmission of documentation—for instance the Katyn massacre evidence documents were transferred to Poland in 1990 by the Russian authorities. These actions served as tools of political rapprochement, and they sometimes resulted in opening the way to re-examine previous historical interpretations (especially in Polish–Lithuanian and Polish–Ukrainian relations). The question of investigating the crimes of the

USSR against Poles, including above all the Katyn massacre (1940), played an important role in the rapprochement in Polish–Russian relations in the early period of President Yeltsin’s rule. One of the repercussions of implementing this concept and its conciliatory priorities in Polish foreign policy and in its internal formal discourse was the suppression of some recently recreated areas of collective memory and currents of historical discourse; this especially concerned Polish–Ukrainian relations, in the context of, among others, the massacre in Volhynia in 1942–1943. Another result was transferring possible settlements to the responsibility of the state and the Polish community—a particular example of which was a resolution of the Polish Senate concerning Operation “Vistula” (*Akcja “Wisła”* in 1947) that was adopted in 1990.

Keywords: Russia, USSR, Communism, Russian ideology, politics of history, imperialism

In the Polish politics of history, or, more precisely, in its eastern dimension, 1989 did not bring a sudden change. It turned out to be a stage on the path of change leading from the politics of history of the Polish People’s Republic to a new approach, which became stable along with the political structures of the Third Polish Republic.

It was not only the transformation of the political system in Poland that affected this process but also, and perhaps even to a greater extent, the changes behind our eastern border that dramatically accelerated in 1989–1993. From the pluralisation of Russian politics and declarations of sovereignty announced by Lithuania (May 18, 1989), Latvia (in July 1989) and already in November 1988 by Estonia, through to the unsuccessful attempt to restore the Soviet system in August 1991 and the final collapse of the USSR in December of the same year, and the consolidation of a new formula of power in Russia after Boris Yeltsin’s dissolution of the Supreme Soviet in October 1993. Beyond Poland’s eastern border, four new neighbours appeared at the site of the Soviet monolith: Ukraine, Belarus, Lithuania, and the Russian Federation. The bogey of a renewal of the empire in a new form but referring to the historical ones—Soviet or Russian, is still present. These changes and fears have created a new context in which Poland’s related politics of history could fit in. These changes and their influence on Polish Eastern policy in 1989–1993 are introduced in the seminal works of Włodzimierz Marciniak and Joanna Strzelczyk (Marciniak 2001; Strzelczyk 2002).

The second, but no less important context, was marked by a general geopolitical reorientation: from the East (Soviet, Russian) to the West (European, Euro-Atlantic). It was not only a reorientation of Poland but also of most of the Eastern and Central European countries, which were under the direct or indirect control of the USSR until the end of the 1980s. A backward turn from the East, a focus on the West, a race to the West towards its structures and the standards it imposes; a race in which other countries of the region could be not only companions but also competitors. Who is more “Western,” who has stronger “European” traditions, where are the “bad,” “Eastern” remnants or burdens located, and how to get rid of them? These are questions that were continually recurring in this peculiar race.

In the field of political practice (including politics of history), these two contexts converged to one central point: a critical distance from recent Soviet domination. However, this distance was expressed in different countries in many different ways and with various effects. In 1989, not only Poland, but the Baltic states, which were struggling to separate themselves from the Soviet empire, set an example of a spectacular and very effective use of politics of history (social, not yet national) for this very purpose. A human chain, also called the Chain of Freedom, marked the 50th anniversary

Memorial plaque of the Baltic Way, a peaceful political demonstration in August 1989. Two million people joined hands to form a human chain across three Baltic states (Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia). Vilnius, Lithuania. July 13, 2017.

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Memorial plaque of the Baltic Way, a peaceful political demonstration in August 1989. Two million people joined hands to form a human chain across three Baltic states (Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia). Riga, Latvia. January 14, 2018.
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of the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact. Approximately two million people—almost one-third of the total population of the three republics—joined their hands in a six-hundred-kilometer line from Vilnius through Riga to Tallinn. This action helped the world recall the fate of the three small Baltic nations that were victims of Stalin’s and Hitler’s bandit collusion. Poland did nothing at that time to remind anyone that it was its primary victim. It already had its first non-communist prime minister. On 24 August, the day after the great anti-Soviet protests of the Baltic States and the day of his official approval by the *Sejm* (the larger house of the Polish parliament), Tadeusz Mazowiecki uttered his memorable words: “We must draw a thick line in the sand and separate ourselves from the past.” Although they referred, of course, to the domestic context, they were actually reflected in the passivity (or at least great caution) with which the Polish authorities referred to the possibility of conducting a more assertive politics of history in the following months;

presenting the truth about the Polish historical experiences with Soviet totalitarianism on the international stage. In his *exposé*, the new Prime Minister had only one thing to say concerning purely political matters related to the USSR: “We also understand the significance of the obligations resulting from the Warsaw Pact. To all its members, I declare that the government I will form will respect this Pact.” (*Wystąpienie premiera, Rzeczpospolita*, August 25, 1989).

It was then out of the question to bother Poland’s allies with historical memories, although for domestic use it was already possible to write legally about the essence of the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact or the Soviet “knife in the back” of September 17, 1939 (read more in, among others: “Pakt. w 50 rocznicę”, *Gazeta Wyborcza*, August 23, 1989; “17 września 1939. Nóż w plecy”, *Gazeta Wyborcza*, September 15–17, 1989). In *Trybuna Ludu*, one of the largest newspapers in communist Poland and the then organ of power represented by General Jaruzelski, an original attempt to interpret both revealed historical events was made by Prof. Włodzimierz T. Kowalski. He proved that, on the one hand, the fate of Poland was the responsibility of Minister Beck, who “disregarded” the information about the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact, and, on the other hand—of western allies who did not warn Poland about the content of the secret protocol, although they were aware of it, (see Włodzimierz T. Kowalski, “Na drodze do 17 września 1939 r.”, *Trybuna Ludu*, September 15, 1989).

The promoter of a different, bolder approach to these issues was the then Chairperson of the Solidarity movement (*Solidarność*), Lech Wałęsa. An example of this attitude was his presence in December 1989 at the funeral of Andrei Sakharov in Moscow (Wałęsa met with Boris Yeltsin on that occasion), and, to an even greater extent, the content of his conversation with the USSR’s Ambassador to Poland, Vladimir Brovikov, on January 18, 1990 that was made public. Wałęsa, for the first time spoke directly about the necessity of removing Soviet troops from Poland and also demanded an explanation of a number of historical issues. First of all, that the Russians finally disclose the burial places of the Polish officers murdered in 1940 (it should be noted that at that moment the only known place was Katyn). Secondly, they reveal the background of such events as the Soviet aggression against

Poland in 1939 or the trial of sixteen leaders of the Polish Underground State. Finally that they give compensation for the harm done to Polish citizens living in the areas seized by the USSR after September 17, 1939; see *Rzeczpospolita* and *Gazeta Wyborcza* of January 19, 1990, also cf. (Strzelczyk 2002, pp. 65–67). This declaration of Polish interests, if one may say so, could be treated as an element of Lech Wałęsa's preparation for the political game in Poland itself. However, it was not transformed in the following months into any coherently implemented historical political agenda and especially one that would convince foreign recipients not only in the USSR, but also in the West—a particularly important reference point for all Polish policy after 1989.

The outline of the agenda of such politics began to reveal itself elsewhere, in a different context than the “anti-Soviet” one. At the same time, its target and subject became the block of three new eastern neighbours of Poland: Lithuania, Belarus, and Ukraine. New in the sense of their newly gained political independence (that in the years 1989–1991 was still in the process of gaining), but, at the same time, “old” by their historical connection with the geopolitical and civilisational area of the former Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth. The Polish authorities, as part of the so-called dual-track approach implemented by Krzysztof Skubiszewski, Minister of Foreign Affairs, tried to combine the above-mentioned “caution” towards the still existing Soviet centre with support for the ambitions of the ULB countries (Ukraine, Lithuania, and Belarus). This acronym was popularised by the Parisian *Kultura* a leading Polish–émigré literary–political magazine, and, the publications of Juliusz Mieroszewski in which he was writing about the idea of harmony with Poland's closest eastern neighbours at the cost of resigning from the reacquisition of the eastern borderlands lost in 1939. It was this agenda that gradually became a leading, so to speak, slogan, to which almost all the governments in Poland after 1989 referred to in the Eastern policy, as well as in any related politics of history. However, the tone and presentation of this politics were enacted differently.

What—after years of silence forced by the Communist censorship—needs to be revived in the first place? Traditions of the Polish–Lithuanian Union as an extraordinary political and



civilisational experiment? Traditions of “strategic partnership” and brotherhood of arms (from the Battle of Orsha in 1514, at the very beginning, to the Kościuszko Uprising in 1794 and the November Uprising in 1830–1831) in the struggle against the geopolitical rival from Moscow? Or rather, beating our breasts, the history of territorial dispute and political conflict, which intensified during the Second Polish Republic and was symbolised by the action of General Lucjan Żeligowski in Vilna and mistakes in the policy towards Slavic minorities in the Second Polish Republic? Alternatively, in relation to Ukraine, traditions of military cooperation: from Petro Konashevych-Sahaidachny to Symon Petliura, or of military confrontation and slaughter—from the Cossack uprisings of the 17th century to what happened in Volyhnia in 1943? Also, what will be the place in the new vision of history (and politics of history) for Vilnius or Lviv, the historical centres of Polish culture and identity that have been cut off from Poland and incorporated

National Museum of Lithuania with a monument to King Mindaugas and Gediminas Tower. Vilnius, Lithuania.
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into the area of Lithuania or Ukraine (both of which are today regaining their sovereignty)? In historical relations should we refer to the principle of reciprocity? (This also applies to contemporary relations, in which at stake are the location and rights of the Polish population—separated from their motherland after 1939—in the territory of today’s Ukraine, Belarus, and Lithuania). Or perhaps should we concentrate on our own mistakes, needs, as well as the sensibilities of the other side in the name of the strategic agreement between Poland and the ULB, the latter of which is considered to be of paramount importance? Such questions appear for example when taking into consideration, for instance, the fate of the Cemetery of the Defenders of Lviv (destroyed in 1971), or the commemoration of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA) fighters killed on Polish territory. It was also addressed when deciding on the approach to “remembering” Operation “Vistula” that was directed by the Polish communist authorities against the civilian Ukrainian population.

To put it simply, it is possible that the historical relations with the ULB nations were presented from the standpoint of the optimistic Warsaw school of history, which emphasised the positive elements of Polish civilisation and cultural works as well as elements of cooperation, while attributing its destruction primarily to an external factor—the expansion of Russian imperialism. They could also be presented from the standpoint of the pessimistic Cracow school, according to which Polish political errors—from the Middle Ages to Operation “Vistula”—have negatively burdened the relationship with the ULB area, and the improvement in these relations could not be based on history, but rather on some “new beginning” with a critical look into one’s past.

Undoubtedly, the latter view was closer to the approach of Prime Minister Tadeusz Mazowiecki and the political camp he represented. This camp, until the end of the first decade of the Third Polish Republic, remained one of the leading architects of Polish politics, and certainly of the “politics of memory” read more in (Nowak 2004, pp. 379–391; Prizel 1998, pp. 79–104).

The quick and unequivocal declaration of the Polish authorities concerning their new eastern neighbours established that Poland would not make any territorial claims

against them. It was a positive step in establishing political relations with Ukraine, Belarus, and Lithuania, which were not burdened with fundamental disputes. What perhaps is less noticeable, however, was its impact on the significance of the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact, which established the existing borders. In the Polish “politics of remembrance,” it played a marginal role—in contrast to, as it has already been said, its significance to the politics of history of the Baltic States. Since supporting the ULB countries with historical arguments for the agreement was considered a priority, this historical silence was also a kind of underlining of this policy—at least in the official, public speeches of the authorities. The main basis of the protest of the authorities of the Polish Underground State (*Polskie Państwo Podziemne*, PPP) and the Government of the Republic of Poland in exile (*Rząd Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej na uchodźstwie*) against the partition treaty of August 23, 1939 was the fact that it entailed the annexation of half of the territory of the Republic of Poland. The acceptance of the idea developed in exile in the circle of Jerzy Giedroyc and, at the same time, the acceptance of the pan-European consensus on the inviolability of borders meant there was an opportunity for a real “new deal” in relations with Poland’s eastern neighbours, but at a certain price. This price was measurable not only in the territory that Poland had already voluntarily renounced this time but also in the interpretation of the past. Less was said about the so-called “fourth partition” of Poland since it turned out that its beneficiaries were not the Soviet empire, but its neighbouring ULB countries, which finally regained their historical independence. Moreover, the territorial arrangement delineated in this way turned out to be, in a sense, an act of historical justice towards them—a justice that was violated not only by the Soviet (Russian) rule but also by the earlier Polish rules in the territories “united” after September 17, 1939.

This caused that, apart from the role of a victim, Poland was gradually beginning to play a different, more ambiguous role in interpreting its historical relations with the ULB countries. (The position of a victim was still touching individual Poles affected by Soviet terror and deportations who were then distinguished from other nationalities—as victims of this persecution on the territory of the Second Polish Republic

under Soviet occupation.) This new role was, to some extent, the role of the punished wrongdoer, or, perhaps, of the entity ready to confess their historical guilt, accept punishment (territorial losses) and seek other ways of redress. It was not the only discourse in the Polish politics of history of this region after 1989, but it was undoubtedly the best match for other aspects of this policy—Poland's relations with Jews or Germans.

This attitude has already been expressed in the resolution of the Senate of the Republic of Poland (99% of which are representatives of the new, non-communist power elite) of August 3, 1990. The resolution was to condemn Operation "Vistula" (a deportation of the Ukrainian minority as well as Lemkos people to the north-western areas of Poland in 1947). It emphasised that the responsibility for the mass resettlement of the Ukrainian population lay with the "communist authorities." However, by the very fact that Operation "Vistula" was placed in the context of Polish-Ukrainian relations and the historical account of the injustice that had arisen between the two nations, and not in the context of the communist crimes affecting both nations, the Polish Senate assumed the responsibility of Poland for the operation of the Bolesław Bierut's regime. Operation "Vistula" was, by this action, accepted by the independent Polish state as one of their historical misdeeds towards Ukrainians—see (*Uchwała Senatu RP potępiająca akcję "Wisła" in Czech 1993, pp. 130–131*).

The sense of a specific historical pedagogy, which was connected with such an approach, was perfectly articulated by one of its main initiators, Jacek Kuroń, the first Chairman of the Commission of National Minorities and Ethnic Groups (*Komisja Mniejszości Narodowych i Grup Etnicznych*) in the Contract Sejm of 1989:

In Poland, there was no feeling of guilt towards Ukrainians—what existed and still exists, however, is a profound conviction that Poles are martyrs of the world. [...] it is not the real history that matters, but the history present in human consciousness. [...] As a society, we are not yet mature enough to examine our conscience because we are burdened with the martyr complex. What is more, it is an honorary title, so it does not allow for any exceptions as, for example, the recognition Poland was also

a perpetrator. Because of the Polish martyr complex, it appears that Poland is always the sufferer (Kuroń 2010, pp. 653–656).

For this important part of the Polish political scene, represented by Jacek Kuroń, and the largest daily newspaper *Gazeta Wyborcza* with its (also historical) journalism, the fight against this Polish martyr complex was not only an expression of concern for implementing the great project of a Polish agreement with Ukrainians, Lithuanians, and Belarusians. It was also an important element in bringing Poland closer to the imagined European, western standards of “a new, critical consciousness.” This historically oriented policy was addressed not only to Poland’s eastern neighbours but also, or perhaps above all, to Polish society *per se*—its “complexes,” its “consciousness,” and the place of its community history. In this double perspective, it was necessary to accentuate Polish historical guilt with the slogan “we ask for forgiveness,” rather than, as in the preceding imagination and memory of Poles, the memory of their own harm (including, perhaps in the first place, that of being exiled from part of their own country in the former borderlands of the Republic of Poland). This reformulated memory that would allow Poles to make the generous offer: “we forgive.”

This attitude prevailed in the actions of Polish diplomacy towards our eastern neighbours in the 1990s, although not without opposition from other political forces represented in parliament, such as the Christian National Union (ZChN) and a part of the political *milieu* of the Democratic Left Alliance (SLD)—still ready to cooperate with Moscow at the expense of the countries separating Poland from Russia. There is a synthetic summary of this problem in (Snyder 2003, pp. 232–276). The most important expressions of this attitude were relatively quickly concluded treaties on good neighbourliness and friendship: May 18, 1992 with Ukraine, June 23, 1992 with Belarus and finally April 26, 1994 with Lithuania (Poland–Ukraine Treaty 1993; Poland–Belarus Treaty 1993; Poland–Lithuania Treaty 1995).

Unfortunately, the place of Belarus in Polish politics of history has remained marginal. In this context, there were too few “sharp” memories (whether negative or positive) on which the “critical” debate could focus. Nor was it deemed

necessary to refer more broadly to the past in the 1992 Treaty or in the intergovernmental agreement on scientific and cultural cooperation (November 1995), which, in a sense, complements the former. There were only general references to “common history” and “centuries-old traditions of cultural cooperation between Poland and Belarus.”

The politics of historical understanding could be built thanks to the very lively and positive memory of the First Republic heritage destroyed by the Russian partitions among the independence-oriented part of the Belarusian elite. However, it has not yet been used. In the years 1992–1993, this was due to the obvious mistakes of Polish diplomacy in this area, which treated the young Belarusian state very patronisingly. After 1994, a decisive role was played by a fundamental change of geopolitical and historical orientation (one might say) of Belarus after the election of Aleksander Lukashenko as president, who was no longer interested in a partnership with Poland, see, for example (Kossobudzki 1994, pp. 19–21).

The conclusion of the treaty with Belarus, signalling the will of the Polish authorities to recognise the established borders unconditionally, served to convince the Lithuanian side, which was particularly distrustful in this respect. The Vilnius issue determined the axis of the dispute: Lithuanians demanded that the Polish side condemn the action of General Żeligowski of 1920 and the resulting “Polish occupation of Vilnius.” Some Polish politicians, in turn, called for the situation of the Polish minority in the Vilnius region, which the Lithuanian authorities wanted to treat as a “relic” of the mentioned occupation and deny the right to restitution of property to this group of citizens, as well as to Polish social organisations operating in this area until 1939. Eventually, the text of the treaty did not include a formula condemning the action of Żeligowski and, more broadly, the Second Polish Republic. Both sides expressed “regret at the conflicts between the two countries after the end of World War I.” At the same time, reaching deeper into the divergent memory of the First Republic (considered by Lithuanian nationalists as the time of enslavement by Polish influences), both parties recognized “the complexity of the history of our nations and the centuries-old close relationship of Poles and Lithuanians”

and “considered the possibility of a different understanding of their common history by both nations”.

In the Polish Parliament, however, the initiative to support the Polish minority in Lithuania in the fight for its rights (including the right to a Polish university in Vilnius) was also blocked by politicians such as Jacek Kuroń and Aleksander Kwaśniewski (Chajewski 1996, pp. 94–111). In the presence of Poles in the former territory of *Kresy Wschodnie*, cut off after September 17, 1939, the dominant trend in Polish politics after 1989 identified this as a dangerous problem rather than a historical commitment. It was the spectre of Polish nationalism and imperialism that should finally be dispelled by remembering the wrongs and losses of nations—its victims, and a discrete easing of the memory of Polish victims.

The reason for a confrontation between this politics of history and the desire to commemorate Polish victims—real, mass, and relatively recent (of the World War II period) was the relationship with Ukraine. The first two presidents of the Third Polish Republic made a relatively small contribution to this debate. Wojciech Jaruzelski, first President of the Third Polish Republic, as a veteran of Operation “Vistula”, was not particularly suitable to be a patron of the change of the politics of memory towards Ukraine, while Lech Wałęsa was more active in the field of Poland’s historic settlements with the USSR (which will be described in this article) than in relation to Ukraine.

Among presidents, it was Aleksander Kwaśniewski who was relatively most involved in promoting a new historical discourse in Polish–Ukrainian relations during his two terms of office. Presenting himself as—during the communist era—faithful but quiet of the Parisian *Kultura* and a continuator of Jerzy Giedroyc’s ideas, Kwaśniewski made references to history a permanent instrument for searching for Polish–Ukrainian consensus—on terms similar to those defined by Jacek Kuroń, but taking into account to a slightly higher extent the historical sensitivity (or, if you like, prejudices) of the Polish side.

The expression of this policy was the “Joint Statement of the Presidents of the Republic of Poland and Ukraine on Understanding and Reconciliation” (*Wspólne oświadczenie Prezydentów RP i Ukrainy o porozumieniu i pojednaniu*) announced in May 1997 during Kwaśniewski’s visit to Kyiv

(Joint Statement 1997). The declaration expressed the common will to “overcome the complicated heritage of Polish–Ukrainian fates” and also highlighted the presence in this heritage of “many moving examples of sincere friendship, mutual help, and cooperation,” as well as “brotherhood of arms, mutual cultural influences, enriching both nations.” It also directly condemned the “manifestations of the anti-Ukrainian policy of the Polish authorities in the 1920s and 1930s”. It opposed them only to “the persecution of the Polish population in Soviet Ukraine” (i.e., the repressions of the Stalinist state, which, after all, did not affect the Ukrainians to a lesser extent), while silently omitting the terrorist activity of Ukrainian nationalists in the Second Polish Republic. The declaration expressed the memory of “the blood of Poles shed in Volhynia in the years 1942–1943” (but without mentioning who shed the blood) and juxtaposed it with the “dramatic card,” which was Operation “Vistula”. By paying homage to the innocent victims of both nations and condemning the perpetrators of their suffering, the declaration of the presidents was the first attempt at such a high level to reach the slightest consensus on the 20th-century history of Polish–Ukrainian relations (Joint Statement 1997).

President Kwaśniewski explained the intentions of this act, at least on the Polish side, the day after the signing of the declaration during his visit to Zhytomyr. In his speech he recalled the centuries-old presence of Polish culture and history in the area of today’s Ukraine—the names of Kraszewski, Paderewski, Rzewuski, and Moniuszko could be given as examples in this region of Ukraine. At the same time, he called for an end to haggling over suffering and, once again, made a juxtaposition, rejected by the Polish historical consciousness, of the mass massacres of Volhynia against the Polish population and the deportation of the Ukrainian population as part of Operation “Vistula”. He called for the rejection of negative stereotypes that were cultivated in the era of the Polish People’s Republic, e.g., the film *Ogniomistrz Kaleń* (The Firemaster Kaleń) by Ewa and Czesław Petelski (1961), showing the soldiers of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army only as inhuman murderers (*rizun*). Furthermore, he referred to the persistent work of the textbook committee of historians trying to overcome these stereotypes, at least in school education (*Wystąpienie podczas*

spotkania z mieszkańcami Żytomierza na Ukrainie, May 22, 1997, Kwaśniewski 1999). For further discussion on the changes to Polish textbooks see, among others (Glimos-Nadgórska 2005, pp. 243–256; Fic 2005, pp. 295–306).

A problematic question came back with particular force in Polish–Ukrainian relations in connection with the reconstruction of the Cemetery of the Defenders of Lviv. How to reconcile the historical memory of the Polish presence on lands that no longer belong to Poland, the requirement to pay homage to the heroism of those who died in the struggle for their Polishness with the idea of building the best possible relations and strategic partnership with the state that not only took over these lands, but also “inherits” the historical memory of the other side of these battles? The cemetery, commemorating the heroism of the Polish defenders of Lviv from 1918–1919 and 1920, and, in the Second Polish Republic, symbolises the memory of all those who died in the struggle for the borders of the regained statehood after the century of partition, was for Ukraine a symbol of the war on Lviv lost to the Poles, or, more broadly the war on Ukrainian independence after 1918. The reconstruction of the cemetery after its devastation in the Soviet period, inaugurated in 1989, was stuck in 1995 in the face of protests by the local Ukrainian authorities in Lviv.

President Kwaśniewski’s politics of history had to face this problem. Attempts to find a compromise formula for the presence of Polish memory in Ukrainian state territory (connected with the voices of Ukrainians who demanded graves and monuments of their soldiers from the war of 1918–1919, including the soldiers of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army, in the territory of Poland) became the subject of political negotiations at the highest level, and a test for politics of history of both countries based on persuasion towards their own societies. This test was, so to speak, passed successfully. However, only in June 2005, when the Cemetery of the Defenders of Lviv was officially reopened, the sharp divisions that had accompanied the discussions on its reconstruction, were calmed down (“Cmentarz Orłąt otwarty”, *Rzeczpospolita*, June 25, 2005).

The relatively ‘soft’ position of Poland in the historical debate with Ukraine at that time has unfortunately provoked the other side to make “strong,” sometimes even extravagant



Polish Military Cemetery (*Cmentarz Orłąt*) in the Lychakiv Cemetery (after restoration). Lviv, Ukraine. December 4, 2019.
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and disturbing statements. An example is President Kuchma's public statement (in September 2004, on the occasion of the 60th anniversary of the so-called exchange of population between Poland and Ukraine) that "the south-eastern areas of today's Poland are indigenous Ukrainian lands" (Kościński 2004). Such speeches, probably conscious, were not controlled by Polish "official factors" in order not to spoil the "historical dialogue." What is more, a more assertive Polish position in relations with its neighbours would have been contrary to the overall vision of the "education of remembrance" of Poles themselves, which President Kwaśniewski conducted following the assumptions recalled above in the quotes of Jacek Kuroń.

The confirmation of these assumptions in the practice of politics of history was the celebration of the 60th anniversary of the mass crime committed by Ukrainian nationalists against the Polish population in Volhynia—the most tragic "memorial site" for Poles in their mutual relations with Ukraine. It took place in the presence of Presidents Kwaśniewski and Kuczma in Pavlivka, where sixty years earlier the Ukrainian Insurgent Army had murdered the entire local Polish population. The celebrations were conducted in a way that relieved Ukraine of responsibility for the crime and made Poles only one group of its victims. They were placed on an equal position with the Jews and Ukrainians—and even as accomplices of the perpetrators. As President Kuczma put it in his speech, the main responsibility for the Volhynia crime lies with "extremist activists in the ranks of the national liberation movement of both nations" (Kuczma 2003).

As the proponents of this position claim, submissiveness, not to say acceptance of the "sensitivity" of the other side of the historical dialogue expressed in such a way ultimately helped to convince our new eastern partners that the official Polish memory neither threatens their fresh sovereignty nor undermines their separate identity. In the case of Ukraine, it should be added that the balance of Poland's politics of history in building good relations was certainly influenced not only by the efforts of its implementers but also by factors beyond its control. First, John Paul II's visit to Kyiv and Lviv in June 2001 was extremely fruitful for Polish–Ukrainian reconciliation, and secondly, the mass

social and political support that Poland gave to the Orange Revolution in 2004.

Relations with Russia set a completely different context for the evolution of Polish politics of history after 1989. Until August 1991, the Polish political elite was not convinced that Russia could distinguish itself from the Soviet Union. In 1990, the government of Prime Minister Mazowiecki continued to implement the concept of “voluntary Finlandization” (the term was coined by a researcher of this area of politics, Joanna Strzelczyk)—still towards the Soviet centre. The “two-track” policy pursued by Minister Skubiszewski in the following months was still, in fact, functioning without Russia: while one “track” of this policy led to the recognition of the independence of Vilnius, Kyiv, Minsk, and Riga, the other still led to Moscow as the (weakened but still dominant) centre of the USSR (Strzelczyk 2002, pp. 15–218).

For Polish historical memory, this meant lining up Moscow with the vision of an eternal empire against which protests the exploited periphery. The periphery is more advanced on the road to independence (such as Poland and other “bloc” countries in Central and Eastern Europe) compared to weaker states, because they are closer to the centre of power (such as the Baltic republics, Belarus or Ukraine, the latter of which is in a special position). There was not much space in this image for a democratic, anti-imperialist Russia, which at that time seemed to be represented by the political movement centered around Boris Yeltsin. Moreover, the elites of the emerging Third Polish Republic (in the years 1991–1992, which were crucial for Russia) were not ready to cooperate with the sharp anti-communist course in politics of history that Yeltsin chose at that time for his own political game. It should be noted that in those years there were voices that Kremlin, already in the hands of Yeltsin, was preparing for the anti-communist “Nuremberg”, which was to be organised by Vladimir Bukovsky who then worked in the most secret archives of the CPSU with the consent of the President of Russia (Bukowski 1998, pp. 67–103; Pipes 1993, pp. 127–131). In Poland, however, discussions were heard of the threat of “zoological anti-communism”.

In the years 1989–1991 Russia was not present in the Polish politics of history. It was still replaced by the Soviet

Union, which was also referred to in historical matters with a great deal of “caution.” Prime Minister Mazowiecki was the first to receive the head of the KGB, Vladimir Kryuchkov, without paying special attention to the historical connotations of this fact in public opinion. He went to Moscow not on the first, like his predecessors, but the second trip abroad—after the Vatican. He did not want to pay homage to Lenin in the mausoleum but agreed to a “courtesy visit” to the office of the leader of the revolution in the Kremlin. At the same time he had to explain himself regarding the “bottom-up politics of history”, which was expressed in Poland after the announced “end of communism” by, among other things, the dismantling of monuments to revolutionary activists (such as Lenin and Dzerzhinsky), and even, unfortunately, by the devastation of the graves of Soviet soldiers (Kuczyński 1993, p. 123). On the fortieth anniversary of the Katyn massacre, President-General Jaruzelski visited its location, but in order to balance this tribute to the “new,” he combined this visit with a visit to Lenino (Malik 1990).

During Jaruzelski’s visit to Moscow, Mikhail Gorbachev recognized the responsibility of the NKVD for the murdered in Katyn—and nowhere else. However, the explicit requests from the Polish side during the subsequent visits were finally successful. Graves in Miednoye and Kharkiv were “found” at the beginning of the summer of 1990. In response, the Polish government asked Moscow to participate in the exhumation of the victims and the commemoration of the location of crimes perpetrated on Polish officers.

It is worth mentioning that the concern for the graves of Polish victims and heroes, and, more broadly for the graves of Poles scattered all over the world, is not an element of politics of history, but rather an almost elementary habit specific to Polish culture and tradition. During the period of the Third Polish Republic, this custom was successfully institutionally supported in the form of the activities of the Council for the Protection of Struggle and Martyrdom Sites (*Rada Ochrony Pamięci Walki i Męczeństwa, OPWiM*). This institution, already operating in the Polish People’s Republic, gained a new impetus especially in 1992 when Władysław Bartoszewski took over the chairmanship of the institution, and, in fact, Andrzej Przewoźnik directed its work. The Council of the OPWiM

“records and examines the condition of memorial sites, graves, cemeteries, graves of collective victims, mass murders, etc. in the areas belonging until 1939 to the Republic of Poland, but also in the territories of the former Soviet Union countries—to which Poles arrived in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. [...] In the electronic register, there are today over twenty thousand objects and places connected with events significant for the history of the Nation and the Polish State, which have remained beyond the eastern border of the Republic of Poland.” The Council also took up “the process of commemorating the victims of the Katyn massacre, i.e. the exhumation and construction of Polish war cemeteries in Katyn, Miednoye, and Kharkiv, reconstruction of the Cemetery of the Defenders of Lviv, reconstruction of twelve cemeteries of soldiers from the Army of General W. Anders in Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan, or renovation of such cemeteries as Rossa, the Antakalnis Cemetery in Vilnius, and the Ukrainian mass graves of victims of crimes committed by German, Soviet, or Ukrainian nationalists (Ponary, Koniuchy, Poryck, Huta Pieniacka, etc.)” (A letter from Andrzej Przewoźnik, Secretary General of the OPWiM, to the Deputy Minister of Culture and National Heritage, Tomasz Merta, dated March 22, 2007, in the collection of the Museum of Polish History, which shared with me its electronic version for the purposes of this publication—author’s note).

Remembrance and respect for the compatriots who were murdered and died in the East has not yet imposed any influence on politics of history. It did not even seem to be defined by such gestures as the restoration of the date for the celebration of the Armed Forces Day in 1923–1947, i.e., 15 August. The date introduced by the communists, 12 October, to commemorate the Polish–Soviet brotherhood of arms at Lenino, was first replaced with 3 May (celebrated in the years 1990–1991 also as a holiday of the army), and only by a resolution of the Sejm of July 30, 1992 with 15 August: the anniversary of the 1920 Polish victory over the Red Army at the Battle of Warsaw. The importance of this date in relations with Russia (which was emerging from the centre of the post-Soviet space), as well as the sense of the politics of history of the Third Polish Republic, led in this direction, were to be

finally explained only in terms of the political relations between Warsaw and Moscow. These, however, proved to be primarily determined by twists in the internal politics of both countries.

After the presidential elections at the end of 1990, it was Lech Wałęsa who became the main, so to say, playmaker in the foreign policy of the Polish state—which in its historical aspects turned towards Russia. On the Russian side, Boris Yeltsin had a similar role from the end of 1991. The year 1992, when 15 August (and the memory of 1920) was restored to the Polish calendar of official state celebrations, was a time when Polish–Russian relations did not create an “updating” context for this date. At that time, Yeltsin’s Russia dissociated itself from the heritage of the Soviet invaders of Poland of 1920. Wałęsa’s visit to Moscow, concluded with signing on May 22, 1992 the treaty “on friendly and good-neighbourly cooperation” (without any reference to history), and, above all, the final agreements on the withdrawal of Russian troops from Poland, included the visit of the Polish President in Katyn as an important point of “politics of history”. Wałęsa used this opportunity to talk about reconciliation between Poles and Russians, that is reconciliation through the memory of Soviet crimes; see *Oświadczenie prezydenta Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej*, Katyn, May 23, 1992, in (Magdziak-Miszewska 1998, p. 40).

Boris Yeltsin took the next important step that made the possibility of historical Polish–Russian reconciliation more imaginable. On October 14, 1992, his special envoy, Director of the General Directorate of Archives of the Russian Federation, Rudolf Pichoya, solemnly handed over to President Wałęsa photocopies of documents confirming the responsibility for the Katyn crime of not only the NKVD itself, but of the entire leadership of the Soviet state—the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. In other words, he did not repeat the half-truths said by Gorbachev to satisfy Poland but unveiled the full truth about the mass murder of Polish prisoners of war. Now it was a task of historians to work together on the preparation and publication of reports (*Komunikat PAP o wręczeniu prezydentowi L. Wałęsie przez R. Pichoję dokumentacji z tzw. Pakietu nr 1*, October 14, 1992, in Materski 2006, p. 523).

The reaction of the Polish Senate supported this line of politics of history, which seemed to strengthen Polish–Russian relations. In a special statement, the senators expressed their hope that the truth about Katyn would be “a warning to the future generation that will fully raise awareness of what communist totalitarianism was”, and expressed their belief in the possibility of cooperation of “new generations of Poles and Russians”, who “not forgetting the wrongs and tragic past, will make an effort to never again repeat all the evil defined by the symbolic [two] word[s]: Katyn massacre” (*Declaration of the Polish Senate on the Katyn crime*, November 13, 1992, in: Materski 2006, pp. 524–525).

An even better opportunity to consolidate this line was Yeltsin’s visit to Warsaw on August 24–26, 1993. Even before his visit, on July 11, the Vice President of Russia, Alexander Rutskoy, paid homage to the murdered Polish officers in Katyn. Yeltsin made this gesture in front of the cross in the so-called Katyn Valley in Powązki Cemetery in Warsaw. He also asked the Poles for their forgiveness. Although it was undoubtedly the most important aspect, it was not the only historical aspect of the visit. Yeltsin also brought copies of the documents of the so-called Suslov Commission, set up by dealing with the “Polish crisis” Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the Communist Party (1980–1982). The documents clearly showed that the USSR did not intend to intervene militarily, at least not in 1981—and that the decision to impose martial law inculcates Polish communists, with General Jaruzelski at the top (Strzelczyk 2002, pp. 1, 441–451; “Dokumenty »Komisji Susłowa«, *Rzeczpospolita*, August 27, 1993: reports of *Rzeczpospolita* and *Gazeta Wyborcza* from Yeltsin’s stay in Warsaw in the issues of August 25 and 26, 1993).

The gestures made during Yeltsin’s visit to Warsaw in August 1993, eagerly accepted by President Wałęsa, created the perspective of coherent politics of history in Polish–Russian relations: the evil in recent history, of crucial importance to both nations, does not burden these relations, but contradistinguishes the communists and their victims—in both nations.

This perspective, however, vanished as quickly as it appeared. However it was enough to sign an important act regulating the problem of care for the graves of Polish victims



Symbols of religious denominations of Polish officers murdered in the Katyn Forest Massacre in 1940.
Polish Military Cemetery in Katyn, Russia. October 12, 2019.
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in Russia and Soviet soldiers from World War II, or even from 1920—in Poland; see *Umowa między Rządem RP a Rządem FR o grobach i miejscach pamięci ofiar wojen i represji*, February 22, 1994, in (Materski 2006, pp. 564–568). The reason for this was both politics and history. The important, symbolic gestures of President Yeltsin towards the Polish memory of Katyn were conditioned, as it has already been mentioned, by the struggle with his internal opponents who were referring to a positive memory of the USSR. They were also the result of another political game aimed at loosening Polish–Ukrainian relations (at that time Moscow was entering a sharp dispute with Kyiv), for which Yeltsin was willing to pay even the price of his agreement (also expressed during his visit to Warsaw) to Poland’s efforts to join NATO. Both of these factors lost their importance at the turn of 1993 and 1994—after Yeltsin had dispersed the internal opposition in autumn 1993 and after the weakening of the idea of the Polish–Ukrainian axis, which President Wałęsa clearly rejected.

More importantly, the spirits of Russian public opinion, for many of the reasons I discussed elsewhere, have already turned their backs on the anti-communist, pro-Western course based on the politics of history of recognising the historical faults of the Soviet Union (see Nowak 2005a, pp. 89–120; Nowak 2006, pp. 247–258). President Yeltsin succumbed to this growing pressure—gradually withdrawing from the course taken in August 1991, while defending its remnants against the rising wave of nostalgia for the USSR with the only politics of history in which he could look for a model for a non-communist identity of Russia—the politics that recalled the symbols and history of imperial and tsarist Russia. This is how the two-headed eagle came back, and this is how in 1995, by decree of the President, the celebration of the Bolshevik Revolution was replaced by the memory of Poles being expelled from the Kremlin in 1612. The return to history from before 1917, taking place in an atmosphere of longing for the lost greatness of the Empire (whose traditions were additionally recalled in 1995 by the aggression against Chechnya), could not create a favourable context for the politics of history of Polish–Russian reconciliation. Sincerity, or at least the strength of intention, or the very possibility of implementing a policy of reconciliation on the part of the

Russian President were called into question by the silence with which Yeltsin ignored the request expressed in Lech Wałęsa's letter of January 13, 1992 for the return of the priceless archival materials seized by the NKVD in the Polish territories after September 17, 1939, including the archives of the Piłsudski Institute; (see *List prezydenta RP L. Wałęsy do prezydenta FR B. Jelcyna z 13 I 1992*, in: Materski 2006, pp. 521–522).

In Poland, in turn, President Wałęsa himself, elected by the votes of the right wing of the Polish electorate, quickly found himself in disagreement with its significant part. What is more, above all, effective rivals appeared in the struggle to attract that part of Polish society that expected a decisive break of continuity with the Polish People's Republic. Dependence on the eastern neighbour was still treated as an obvious indicator of this continuity. Wałęsa's visit to Moscow in May 1992 had already brought about a sharp dispute between the then Prime Minister Jan Olszewski and Wałęsa on this issue. The Prime Minister opposed one of the points of the new agreement with Russia, which included establishing mixed-ownership companies with Russian capital on the territory of former Soviet bases in Poland. Wałęsa was *de facto* accused of a hidden agenda to maintain this form of dependence on Moscow. In the dispute over the right to represent the Polish independence tradition, which was intensifying after the dismissal of Jan Olszewski's government, Wałęsa counterattacked, referring to stronger rhetoric—of a lonely defender of Poland's position between the “isolating West and the rebirth of the empire” (“Fragmenty przemówienia prezydenta Lecha Wałęsy na uroczystym posiedzeniu Sejmu i Senatu w 50. rocznicę zakończenia II wojny światowej”, *Gazeta Wyborcza*, May 9, 1995).

This phrase appeared in President Wałęsa's speech to Parliament on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the victory over Nazi Germany. Even before, an evident historical controversy between Russia and Poland had already arisen, when the President of Russia was absent from the celebrations marking the 50th anniversary of the Warsaw Rising. Lech Wałęsa then uttered important words in his speech:

“**History has burdened Russia** [emphasis added by the author] with the baggage of guilt, harm, and crime of the

Soviet empire. The injustice of Insurgent Warsaw is also such baggage. This baggage is uncomfortable and is pushing us away from each other.”

He still expressed hope that both nations would “dig through the ruins of history. To the truth. To each other.” (“Przemówienie Lecha Wałęsy w czasie uroczystości pod pomnikiem Powstania Warszawskiego”, *Gazeta Wyborcza*, August 2, 1994).

The beginning of May 1995 was the time of a sharp campaign before the presidential election, in which Lech Wałęsa wanted to again win the votes of the whole right wing of the Polish electorate against his main counter candidate, Aleksander Kwaśniewski from the Democratic Left Alliance (SLD). The visit of the Prime Minister Józef Oleksy (also SLD) at the ceremony marking the anniversary of the victory over Germany to Moscow was treated by Lech Wałęsa, who manifestly remained in the country, as an opportunity to point out that May 9, 1945 was not a liberation for Poland, but the beginning of a new enslavement. The Prime Minister’s visit in Moscow was haunted by the spectre of Targowica, recalled in a political game from the Polish history (Although one should agree with Andrzej Walicki that the conflict caused by President Wałęsa around Oleksy’s departure to Moscow to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the end of World War II in Europe was a result of a political game. It was not the reason, however, for breaking the politics of reconciliation in Polish–Russian relations. It was due to a change in the internal and foreign policy of Russia itself, which dates back at least to the end of 1993—as we attempted to point out above; see Walicki 2005, pp. 110–123).

To avoid this danger, Lech Wałęsa’s victorious rival in the presidential elections of 1995, Aleksander Kwaśniewski, had to try to emphasise the memory of Katyn in his politics of history in the following years of his presidency. The catalog of President Kwaśniewski’s speeches on this matter is long, but unfortunately, it creates the impression that he just paid lip service. Perhaps the only exception was a genuinely critical moment, which was the awarding of Russian historians and amateur documentary filmmakers from the Association “Memorial” for their contribution to revealing the truth about the history of Soviet crimes against Poles—apart

from representatives of Polish circles, who, even before 1989 demanded the truth about Katyn (see *Wystąpienie podczas wręczenia odznaczeń państwowych osobom zasłużonym dla ujawnienia i udokumentowania prawdy o zbrodni katyńskiej*, April 16, 2005, in Kwaśniewski 2005, pp. 312–315.). The credibility of this element of his politics was undermined not only by President Kwaśniewski's "unstable" behaviour during his visit in September 1999 to the graves of those murdered in Kharkiv, but also by his presence at the opening of an already neo-imperialist historical event organised by President Putin on May 9, 2005 in Moscow on the occasion of the 60th anniversary of the victory (see more on this subject in Nowak 2005b). Aleksander Kwaśniewski tried to alleviate the importance of his visit, which meant that the authority of the Polish President was attached to the chariot of Vladimir Putin's politics of history—with several gestures, such as a visit to the Moscow Cemetery, where the victims of Stalinist repressions, including Polish ones, are buried, or a speech in Wrocław before his departure to Moscow, recalling the truth about the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact, Katyn, and the Trial of the Sixteen. Unfortunately, unlike the presence on the grandstand in Moscow, just behind President Putin, these gestures were completely unnoticeable to international public opinion, especially that in Russia; see (*Wystąpienie podczas uroczystości z okazji 60. rocznicy zakończenia II wojny światowej* ["Speech at the ceremony on the occasion of the 60th anniversary of the end of World War II"], Wrocław, May 7, 2005; and *Oświadczenie po powrocie z uroczystości 60-lecia zakończenia II wojny światowej w Moskwie* [Declaration on the return from the 60th anniversary of the end of World War II in Moscow], May 9, 2005, in Kwaśniewski 2005, pp. 377–391). This credibility was put into question first of all by the lack of any real efforts to ensure that the memory of Katyn was preserved in the consciousness of Poles themselves. And, even more so, that the truth about this crime (and, in its context, about the Soviet domination over Poland, resistance against its imposition and the victims of this resistance) was passed on to the unknowing or unwilling world, and especially to Western European public opinion, whose importance for Poland was still growing with its efforts to join the European Union.

...ОВ АНДРЕЙ МАНУЙЛОВИЧ • МИХАЛЕВ ФИЛИП ЕГОРОВИЧ •
ALSKI STANISŁAW • МИРОНОВ НИКИФОР ПЕТРОВИЧ • МИРОНОВ СЕД
ЛЬЕВИЧ • МІСНА WŁADYSŁAW • МИХЕЕВ ИГНАТ МИХЕЕВИЧ
СИОРОВ ИВАН ИВАНОВИЧ • МІСНІЕВИЧ KAZIMIEZ • МИХАЙЛОВ
МИХАЙЛОВИЧ • МИХАЙЛОВ ВИКТОР ИВАНОВИЧ • MILEWSKI JOZEF
КОНСТАНТИНОВИЧ • ВАХРАМЕЕВ НИКОЛАЙ
MIERZ • ВЕЛИКАНОВ МИХАЙЛ АНДРЕЕВИЧ •
Ч • СНОСНІЕВИЧ JAN • ВЕЧЕР МИХАЙЛ
СЕЕВИЧ • СНАТ ZENON STANISŁAW •
ИВАНОВНА • СНОЈНАСКИ LEON

Plaques with names
of the Polish officers
murdered in the Katyn
Forest Massacre in 1940.
Polish Military Cemetery
in Katyn, Russia.
October 12, 2019.
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However, this allegation concerns not only President Kwaśniewski. Similarly, during the presidency of Lech Wałęsa, the state authorities did not do much in this respect. There was almost no encouragement from the state to popularise or institutionalise (apart from celebrating appropriate anniversaries and, of course, the commendable work on the state of cemeteries) the memory of Katyn, the 17 September and its consequences, the significance of the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact for Poland, the importance of the Polish–Soviet war of 1919–1920 for the whole Europe, or, finally, the almost completely forgotten victims of the national Holocaust of Poles in the USSR in 1936–1938. This conclusion can be drawn whenever we compare the activity of state politics, for example, to commemorate the fate of Jews murdered on Polish soil, including those murdered with Polish hands, as in Jedwabne with the inaction described above. Of course, a democratic state is not the only or perhaps even the most important player in the struggle for the shape of historical memory. The most important role is played here by the most influential, opinion-forming media. If in the case of politics of history addressed to Ukrainians or Lithuanians there was a specific synergy of its general direction after 1989 with the tone of the media, then in relation to Russia and the legacy of the USSR—not really. In this particular context, Poland could not appear in any other way than—to use the formula of one of the journalists of *Gazeta Wyborcza*—in the “comfortable costume of the victim”: this “costume”, that was so persistently tried to be ripped off Poles after 1989 on any occasion, possible or impossible.

The reminiscence of Katyn and all that this crime symbolised was also inconvenient for the supporters of “historic compromise.” One of the sides of this compromise, represented first by General-President Jaruzelski and then by President Kwaśniewski, derived its political genealogy directly from the Katyn crime: it paved the way for their power and to the new elite (the one after 1944). This elite wanted to hide this genealogy, reduce it, if not falsify it. In what way? By paying ritual tribute only to the memory of the victims but doing nothing or almost nothing to make this memory last in the new generations of Poles—like the memory of the Holocaust.

The results of a survey conducted in April 2007 by TNS OBOP on a representative random sample of one thousand adult Poles to examine the state of a collective memory of Katyn gives touching evidence of the effectiveness of this politics of history—the policy of appearances and forgetting. In response to the question of who is responsible for this crime, 61% answered the Soviet Union, 11% answered Germany, 19% answered that responsibility has not yet been specified, and 9% said it is difficult to say. This astonishing result becomes even more shocking when distributed according to age categories. In the 18–29 age group, only 40% of the responses indicated the USSR as responsible for Katyn, 25% Germany, 26% that responsibility has not yet been specified, and 9% that it is difficult to say. Most shocking are the results of the analysis of the detailed answers of respondents in which they repeat several dozen times that the victims of the Katyn massacre were mainly Jews (sometimes together with Poles), that the perpetrators were Germans or Russians (yes, not “Soviets”, but more often “Russians”). However, there were also several answers such as: “a murder was committed: Poles on the Jews” (*Opinia publiczna o Katyniu – zbrodni i kłamstwie. Wyniki sondażu TNS OBOP dla “Rzeczpospolitej” oraz “Warto Rozmawiać,”* April 18–19, 2007). The content of the survey was kindly made available to the author by the ordering institution: the TV program *Warto Rozmawiać* (Barbara Fedyszak-Radziejowska discussed the collective results in the *Rzeczpospolita* issue of June 23, 2007). These answers, this state of consciousness of the younger generation, brought up in the Third Polish Republic, best summarises the results of the politics of history implemented in Poland over the past 17 years.

We came closer to Ukraine and Lithuania in our examination of the past. The memory did not stand in the way to reconciliation. In relation to Russia, the attempt to reconcile based on a common condemnation of Communism was unsuccessful. When joining the EU, Poland, the largest of the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, turned out to be unprepared both to present its original civilisational and political achievements, as well as to give an effective (convincing) testimony to the crimes of the communist

system that this region had experienced for over half a century that about which Western Europe had (and still has) no idea.

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