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RUSSIAN-POLISH RELATIONS: NEED FOR NEW STRATEGIC APPROACH

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Executive Summary

Russia and Poland as neighbors have to interact in some way. They have to determine the form of the bilateral relations, clarifying the strategic goals of the development of this cooperation.

The existing situation with an atmosphere of the bilateral relations depending on a generally unfavorable political situation contradicts the interests of both countries. At the same time new challenges, such as EU enlargement itself and the resulting geopolitical changes in Central and Eastern Europe bring new elements within these relations.

There is a need to create a new strategy for the Russian-Polish relations that could form the basis for a future development of the interstate interaction allowing the two states to leave behind problems and obstacles existing now.

The initiative to present a new strategy for the Russian-Polish relations should come from Poland. While Russia is focused on the past concerning its relations with Poland and can not produce a strategy that would be applicable for the future, Poland seems to have all the necessary tools to initiate and provide the strategy for future development of the relations with Russia.

This strategy should first of all be aimed to achieve some clear strategic goals. It seems logical to focus on one goal and produce a strategy fulfilled by the appropriate tactics aimed to achieve this goal. After checking all possible strategic goals of the Polish policy towards Russia (these goals are most sharply defined in an official document "**Założenia polskiej polityki zagranicznej wobec Rosji**") we have picked up the goal "to develop mutually beneficial bilateral relations" as the most appropriate one. The realization of this goal can also help to fulfill all other tasks.

Secondly, this strategy should be relevant to the contemporary situation. The majority of the problems in the Russian-Polish relations are of historical nature. In order to present a real-working strategy we should think only about new challenges and future perspectives.

Thirdly, the strategy should be realistic leaving aside the far-fetched problems based on idealistic perception of modern international relations.

The main components of the proposed strategy are the following ideas:





1) to set aside factors and events located outside of the frames of bilateral relations *sensu stricto*

2) to demonstrate to Russia that Poland is its ally and supporter in Europe

3) to focus on some concrete spheres and problems (such as economic cooperation, infrastructure improvement, the work on positive images of both countries etc.)

Once this approach for formulating the strategy is followed, several steps should be taken, which are then presented in this policy paper

1.Introduction. The need to formulate new strategy for Russian-Polish relations: why now?

The relationship between Moscow and Warsaw, never particularly easy throughout the last decade, is currently far from the potential that exists between the two countries given the geographic, historical, economic and other possibilities for cooperation. This cooperation develops unstably; the general atmosphere of the bilateral relations depends on a political situation and seems to be generally unfavorable. The political dialog is dominated by the issues of historical nature, which impede the solving of other burning problems in all spheres. At the same time, modern challenges bring new elements within these relations.

For example, the EU enlargement has brought new problems, as well as new possibilities and obligations for both countries. Poland is keen to integrate its bilateral relations into the web of cooperation between Russia and the European Union. Moreover, Warsaw's intention in the European Union is to bring its own eastern policy ideas into the hierarchy of objectives of the Common Foreign and Security Policy. But in order to do this, Poland has to present these ideas as a clear strategic approach.

On the other hand, from the point of view of Russia, Poland now acts as an EU member state on the international arena. Considering Poland to be an active participant of the EU eastern policy, Russia seeks ways to influence the process of formulation of this policy, *inter alia* through interaction with Poland (both supporting or counteracting the Poland's initiatives). Though, even as far as only EU-factor is concerned, it is clear that both Russia and Poland are now interested in more real-working approaches to formulation of an explicit policy towards each other.



Studying the interstate relations, we must also take into account the internal political situation. The parliamentary and presidential elections in Poland, and the electoral campaign have affected the relations with Russia in a negative way. The public debate on this topic in Russia, provoked by the mass-media discussion, was dominated by the evaluation of Polish policymakers' statements concerning Russia. These statements were rather harsh because of the electoral campaign and the positions taken by the major political parties so the perception of the future of Russian-Polish relations was also negative in mass-media of both countries. At the same time, according to some more in-depth analysis, carried-out by political researchers both in Russia and in Poland, the radical political changes taking place in Poland are forming a basis for revising the conception and approaches to the foreign policy of the country.

At the moment Poland has no clear strategy concerning its relations with Russia. There are also no long-term strategic objectives for developing of these relations. It can be said, that Russia is an Achilles' heel of the Polish foreign policy: Warsaw has neither formulated an explicit policy towards Russia nor developed activities at the EU level comparable to those for Ukraine. As far as Ukraine is concerned, here Poland has a clear strategic vision of the development of the relations with this country, following this strategy with an appropriate tactics in practically all spheres (both political contacts as well as economic cooperation, cultural and people-to-people contacts). We can see nothing of the kind in case of Poland's relations with Russia. There are a lot of obvious reasons for Polish-Ukrainian relations to be more developed than Polish-Russian relations, especially in some particularly fields, but anyway Polish well considered and consisted cooperation with Ukraine can serve as a positive example for that with Russia. At the moment, unfortunately, the so called "Ukrainian factor" in Russian-Polish relations plays a negative role: Poland's policy towards Russia is to put Ukraine first. It is linked with implementation of the main goal of Polish eastern policy as a whole: to have a democratic and stable developing eastern neighbors. This goal, however, seems to be too general to be applicable to Poland's policy towards Russia.

At the moment there is a lack of consistency in Poland's policy towards Russia. The "gas conflict" is a good example here. Firstly, in the early 90-ties, Poland wanted to have as much as possible formalized and developed cooperation with Russia in the field of energy supply. Then Poland got interested in diversification of gas supply sources, working for re-negotiating of





already-signed contracts with Russia and eluding new gas transit system building. Now, responding to the Baltic pipeline project, Poland is showing the wish to participate in this project or to reanimate the old ones (such as the second line of Yamal pipeline – see the interview of the new Polish president, Lech Kaczynski, on 21 December 2005 for TVP 2).

As a consequence of the lack of clear strategy Poland's attitude toward Russia is determined by unfounded fears and history-based beliefs very often being in conflict with other interests of the country, for example in the economic sphere. The example of the Baltic pipeline and Poland's reaction to this project proves that Poland in fact suffers losses because of its fears concerning the relations with Russia and because of the lack of consistency in Poland's policy toward Russia. Poland would like to reduce what it sees as overdependence in the field of energy, being historically scared about any sort of dependence on Russia. For that reason Warsaw is trying to diversify its oil and gas supplies and achieve independence in its pipeline policies. But other energy-supply projects are rather economically unjustified and unfavorable, and rejecting additional cooperation projects with Russia in this field (for example, not involving Russian corporations in the privatization of the energy sector) Poland very often faces a conflict with its present-day economic interests. Poland's position to reduce cooperation with Russia in the energy field, delaying decision on other new pipeline projects, was one of the reasons for Russia to negotiate the Baltic pipeline project with Germany.

As we can see, the Russian-Polish relations are not developing well under the circumstances of lack of clear strategic vision for these relations. There is no need to prove that this situation generally contradicts the interests of both countries. Russia and Poland, two geographically close neighbors, "are doomed to cooperate" as one of the Polish politicians once said. They can't avoid interaction because of common border, economic and political interests and the interpersonal ties. The question is what this interaction should look like. It could be either a strategic partnership or a pent-up animosity. The existing circumstances support the idea of a partnership.

Different sorts of partnership could be formed between the two countries. For example, the US-UK strategic partnership is based on historical, cultural and security interests' identities. The declared strategic partnership between Poland and Ukraine appeared under the influence of new challenges in Central and Eastern Europe and is based on some ideological, political, and





economic interests of both countries. There can be also other sorts of partnership applicable to the Russian-Polish relations. Both countries have common interests in many fields, such as economic, cultural, people-to-people contacts, as well as in the realms of politics and security. The existing few diverging interests can be made less important if they cease to generate discord in the bilateral relations that would be determined as a partnership. It is also clear, that only Russia and Poland can determine the character of their bilateral relations.

The current policy paper aims to present the basis and main constituencies for a new strategy for Russian-Polish relations. In order to fulfill this task we have to determine, which country has more possibilities to initiate and provide this strategy. Next, we will formulate the basic goal of this strategy, and propose main factors to be used for it. In the conclusion some concrete steps and tactics for realization of the strategy will be presented.

It is very important to mention here, that we don't take "strategy" as a formalized document, a sort of "road map". There was already an example of such document published in 2001 ("Zalozenia polskiej polityki zagranicznej wobec Rosji), which was not really used in practice and does not correspond to contemporary challenges. The strategy can take a form of general aspirations in the interstate relations, but must be then implemented.

2. Which country should initiate formulation and adoption of the strategy?

The new strategy requires an initiator. The initiative can come from Russia or from Poland. Let's consider both variants to find the proper one.

2.1. Can Russia bring this new strategy into life?



If we consider Russian attitude towards Poland, we must take into account that Russia is generally not satisfied with a new situation in Central and Eastern Europe, especially with Poland's new role in Europe.

The EU enlargement has changed the "balance of power" in this region in a harmful way for Russia. The "orange revolution" in Ukraine and Poland's activity concerning this event have sent a clear message to Russia: its interests are threatened. Poland's success in mobilizing a certain degree of interest among European partners, or at least in raising awareness, must have been particularly hard to swallow for certain Russian observers. Even more important was President Kwasniewski's comment that "for any major power a Russia without Ukraine is better than a Russia with Ukraine", to which he added that this also applied to the United States (and not only to Poland), was hardly subtle but it revealed one of the overriding goals of the Polish eastern policy, namely, to pull Ukraine out of Russia's orbit. The sharp responses from Moscow show that Kwasniewski's statement was understood correctly there. One of these responses in the long run was a "crackdown" in relations with Poland. By this "crackdown" Russia is seeking possibilities to recover from losses caused by its failure to exert influence upon its western neighbors as it used to be.

In other words, Russia tries to ignore new factors, pretending that nothing has changed since the disintegration of the Soviet Union. It means that Russia is focused on the past concerning its relations with Central and Eastern European countries and, consequently, cannot produce and follow a strategy applicable for the future.

2.2. Poland as an initiator on new strategy for developing of the relations with Russia

Poland seems to have all the necessary capacities to initiate and provide a new strategy for relations with Russia. First of all, Poland plays an important role in this region especially after the EU enlargement, so it is one of the important European counterparts for Russia, even if Russia does not accept Poland's position.

At the same time, Poland's activity concerning the situation in Ukraine was taken by Russia as infringement of its interests, some steps aimed against Russia, which leads to growing tensions



in Russian-Polish relations. In order to change this situation Poland should show Russia its will to have good bilateral relation as a "strategic constant" with all possible difficulties to be settled through dialog and cooperation. In other words, Poland should concentrate on common interests in its relations with Russia, paying much less attention to issues of difference. The appearance of the new strategy, both officially presented or just being realized step-be-step as a sort of political trend, can help Poland to do so.

There is also another argument for Poland to start thinking about a new strategy for bilateral relations with Russia. In order to influence the EU eastern policy, Poland must present a clear strategy towards Russia. The EU institutions do not need any sort of bridge between Brussels and Moscow, but are interested in some clear and concrete proposals concerning relations with Russia and other CIS-states. Here is a niche for Poland, which can help it to play a more significant role within EU.

3. What the strategy for Russian-Polish relations should look like

3.1. The strategy should be aimed to achieve some clear strategic goals

Poland has no clear strategy concerning its relations with Russia; the goals presented for this strategy have little in common with practice. The main goal of the Poland's policy towards Russia is a part of general aim of Polish eastern policy: "to have a democratic and stable developing eastern neighbors". Poland wants to see Russia more democratic, predictable and providing clear domestic and foreign policy, which must help to build good-neighbor relations with this country. At the same time Poland also contributes to the democratization process in other CIS states, making it the main goal of its eastern policy. At first glance these two goals seem to be of common nature, but in fact they contradict each other. Russia takes Poland's activity in Ukraine, for example, as a threat to its interests. As a result, we have an adverse effect of deterioration in Russian-Polish relations. It means that there can be no one common goal for Polish policy towards its eastern neighbors: the policy ought to differentiate between those neighbors because of their specificity, which is especially important in case of Russia. If Poland will not manage to single out its policy towards Russia from the common eastern policy, the third possible goal listed above concerning Poland's relations with Russia - to support good relations





on the EU-Russia level - seems to be unrealizable. As we can see, the strategic goals Poland has toward Russia seem to be of general nature and are not linked with tactics. Furthermore, they contradict each other and cannot be reached simultaneously in the nearest future. It is impossible to build a new strategy on these goals if the strategy is to be real. The easiest way out is to rank these goals, making some of them the key-elements of the strategy, and leaving others to be fulfilled afterwards.

It seems hence logical to focus on one goal and create a strategy to be implemented with appropriate tactics aimed to achieve this goal. Let us review these goals once again:

- To see a democratic stable peaceful Russia
- To finish democratic transition in Poland's eastern neighboring countries
- To support good relations on the EU-Russia level
- To have mutually beneficial bilateral relations with Russia

The first goal - to see a democratic stable peaceful Russia – is obviously not an easy-to-reach one. In fact, it is unrealistic since Poland is not able to do anything about the Russian domestic policy. The focus on the second goal - to finish the democratic transition in Poland's eastern neighboring countries – hampers the process of realization of any other goals. The third one cannot be reached without accomplishment of the last goal - to develop mutually beneficial bilateral relations with Russia. In fact, if we analyze this forth goal thoroughly, we will find out that its realization can help us to fulfill all other task with time. Consequently, we must focus on this particular goal leaving others aside as less important for this period of time since in fact it is the only way to improve Russian-Polish relations.

3.2. The strategy should be relevant to the contemporary situation

If we focus on the last goal, we should focus on a short- to medium-term horizon, i.e. only about the modern challenges and the future perspectives. Most of the problems in the Russian-Polish relations are linked with historic events and memory of both countries. These problems are undoubtedly rather important and not-to forget issues, but they should not dominate modern



political relations. Moreover, if we are focused on the improvement of the Russian-Polish relations, we have to leave the problem of a historical nature to the historians and clear the field for modern bilateral relations development. The Russian-Polish relations in the future must correspond to modern challenges as they develop over time.

3.3. The strategy should be realistic

As we have already mentioned, some of the possible strategic goals for development of the relations with Russia are not realistic, i.e. they cannot be achieved in the nearest future and require serious political and other changes. Russia has already declared a "practical approach" to its foreign policy and generally follows this approach in its relations with western countries. Polish foreign policy has some idealistic elements, which in case of relations with Russia turns to be an obstacle. The new strategy for relations with Russia should be different. It should be more practical and results-oriented focusing on a concrete goal and leaving aside problems and problems caused by different perception of some historical and modern events.

3.4. The strategy should be accompanied with an easy-to-fulfill tactics

If we say that there should be a realistic approach toward building a strategy we must be even more conscious about tactics aimed to bring this strategy into life. The strategy in modern circumstances should be designed to be easily implemented, i.e. should be clear, relevant to the contemporary events and focused on some easy-to-reach goals. Presenting a strategy, we must bear in mind practical steps arising for the realization of this strategy. Only such a strategy followed by the clear tactics has a chance to introduce new tendencies into modern Russian-Polish relations.

4. The components and features of the strategy

4.1. Bilateral relations determination

Following the need to focus on the one concrete strategic goal – to develop bilateral relations - we must also focus on some specific problems to be solved in this context.



Russian-Polish relations, as it was already mentioned, are filled with a number of various issues which keep the two countries from realizing mutual benefits. Generally speaking, the main obstacle here is a lack of trust. Both Russia and Poland are keen to suspect each other of being hostile, are pre-convinced that the partner is trying to realize its interests at the expense of infringement of interests of other partner (the so called "prisoner's dilemma"). Together with the factor of lack of trust, some problems of historical nature, different stereotypes, fears and misunderstanding serve as a negative background for the developing of the bilateral relations *sensu stricto*.

The Russian-Polish relations "sensu stricto" involve bilateral political contacts, economic and interpersonal attitudes as well as cultural ties. If we manage to single out the main body of these relations we can easily find out that there are no so many undecidable problems as it seemed to be.

On the other hand, when the Russian-Polish relations are put in the context of general European problems, they are bound up with the situation in western CIS countries (Ukraine and Belarus). Certainly, it is impossible to isolate interstate bilateral relations from the international community and separate them from the integrated world arena. Moreover, international factor could be used for achieving the goal. But here we must apply the same approach as we did in a case of goals ranking: focus on some burning problems to be solved first of all, temporarily keeping others in shadow. In other words, the factors and events that are located outside of the framework of bilateral relation understood *sensu stricto* should be set aside. Following this approach we can gradually solve all problems with time.

4.2. Use of international factor

For the Russian-Polish relations to be improved, their general atmosphere must change resulting in the improvement of mutual attitudes. Recently Russia received some international activities of Poland as hostile. Therefore, the international factor should be now used *vice versa* to correct Russia's perception of Poland. Poland should show through this to Russia that it is its ally and supporter in Europe. To achieve this, Poland can first of all use the EU factor, bringing some positive elements within the EU eastern policy. If Poland manages to present realistic strategic proposals as part of this policy, acceptable both to the EU and to Russia, it would



contribute both to Russian-Polish relations' improvement and to Poland's position within the Union.

Furthermore, Poland can make use of the domestic political changes, proving the appearance of a new attitude and strategy towards Russia following the entry into power of new political groups. The new Polish government has a chance to build the relations with Russia almost from the very outset, on a "clean slate" basis. Next, Poland can also use the situation in Germany where interpersonal ties between the two leaders of the countries are likely to be much cooler (Russian president V. Putin has no such friendly relations with a new chancellor of Germany as with the previous one). Here is a time for Poland to show Russia its friendly attitude and expectations, becoming its important European ally. Poland can offer Russia some important assets concerning realization of the Russian interests within the European Union, getting rid of a stereotype of Poland viewed in the EU as a country opposing warmer relations with Russia, if not 'Russophobe'. Here Poland's role in the formation of the EU's eastern policy can be used. Although they are both members of the European Union, Germany and Poland view the EU eastern policy from different positions. Some elements of the German position are more favorable for Russia, but the Polish attitude is also applicable in some aspects. In order to prevent EU enlargement causing exclusion, Poland would like to make its eastern border – an EU external border – as permeable as possible (a plan about which Germany and other EU members harbor great reservations). It means improving cross-border procedures and transport infrastructure, which is good to Russian border regions (for example, the residents of the Kaliningrad region already enjoy Polish visas free of charge without invitations required). Poland can also support Russia's efforts in the facilitation of the EU visa regime.

It is very important now to change the Polish rhetoric in the current national policy. The Poles suspect Russia of attempting to tar them with the brush of Rusophobia within the European Union, suspecting that deliberate affronts from Moscow are intended to provoke them into overreacting and making Poland appear to other EU member states (such as France and Germany) as a trouble-maker that should be left out of discussion on cooperation with Russia. Partly it is true, so the awareness of this fact must, logically, lead to changes in Warsaw's rhetoric and the way of reaction to some events concerning Russia. However, these reactions should be less emotional and should not lead to raising of some less important problems on the European



level. Such changes finally will help to improve Moscow's perception of its eastern neighbor's initiatives.

5. Conclusion. Recommendations

Russian-Polish relations are currently not developed well enough, partly because of the lack of the clear vision of the future of these relations and lack of a strategy for its improvement. The current situation with several new factors being included within the Russian-Polish cooperation (for example, the EU enlargement and the substantial domestic political change in Poland) forms a good basis for the appearance of such strategy. But in order to be successful, this strategy should be different from all the proposals and initiatives presented so far.

First of all, there should be one clear strategic goal forming the basis of this strategy. The complexity of the Russian-Polish relations creates serious contradictions between the purposes for cooperation between Russia and Poland presented before. The only way to produce a real strategy is to rank these goals and pick up one of them. Secondly, this new strategy should be realistic. There is no need to present another idealistic concept about the Russian-Polish relations since both Russia and Poland need a working strategy, followed by the clear and easy-to-fulfill tactics, to improve their bilateral relations. And finally, we must focus on these bilateral relations *sensu stricto* and formulate a strategy for their improvement, leaving other factors temporarily aside.

5.1. General recommendations

The strategy, once adopted, must be followed by gradual, continued and constant implementation of its principles and ideas. We should be aware of the fact that the strategy itself can do little to improve the interstate relations, with the exception of the general clearing of the atmosphere of these relations (due to positive impulses from the appearance of the new positive strategy). Other problems can be solved only by some concrete real steps.

It is also not necessary to present a strategy as an official document or explicit concept. It is enough to communicate to relevant authorities the main principles of the strategy and the necessity to carry it out. The strategy can be presented as a sort of general political tendency with an evident practical application.

The new Polish government has a unique chance to bring completely new elements and approaches into its policy towards Russia by presenting guidelines of the cabinet's foreign policy. New Polish Foreign Minister Stefan Meller, the former Ambassador to Russia, has experience of interaction with the Russian authorities and knows the rhetoric they are susceptible to. If he and the Foreign Ministry staff adopt precise appropriate wording of their first statements, for example in comments concerning the Minister's visit to Russia, it will be enough to start bilateral relations improvement on a strategic level.



5.2. Concrete steps to begin with

1) to work on Poland's image in Russia

Generally people in Russia are poorly informed about Poland. The vision of Poland presented by the mass-media is prejudiced and is even contrary to facts. It is one of the main problems in Russian-Polish relations that the citizens and politicians of both countries know little about each other. Recently there can be seen greater interest towards the Russian language and culture in Poland, and, consequently, more information about this country. But in Russia there is practically no objective relevant information about Poland. So one of the important tasks for the new Polish government is to provide Russia with this information. A mass-media campaign (but not restricted to the "Nowaja Polska" magazine publishing) can be used for this, complemented by the policy towards the Polish diaspora (Polonia).

Polish government should think not only about supporting the Polonia, but promoting Polish culture in Russia through it. Here Poland has a unique situation with a lot of people speaking Polish and having some knowledge of this country being able to share this information with the society in which they live. In other words, they can, for example, publish articles, books, reviews concerning the contemporary situation in Poland, getting appropriate support from Polish authorities. This activity is also linked with other possible steps on a people-to-people level as a whole.

2) to make use of the economic factor

Recently the Russian-Polish economic turnover grew rapidly with the Polish exports to Russia rising noticeably (by ca.30% in the year 2004). Poland should continue supporting export to Russia. There was an unjustified "heel" towards developing of economic cooperation with the Kaliningrad region. This approach turned out to be unproductive and now Poland should focus on the whole country. And what is even more important, the economic cooperation development should not depend on the political climate in the interstate relations, but, on the contrary, help to improve it.

3) to improve infrastructure

This field is rather important and, as it was already mentioned, here we should not wait for a general policy improvement to bring these tendencies "down". Little steps matter! And if we start, for example, by improving transport infrastructure in the Russian-Polish contacts or simplification in visa policies of both countries we can finally bring new tendencies within the relations on the "high" political level.



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