

HISTORICAL DETERMINANTS OF THE CONTEMPORARY POLISH-RUSSIAN RELATIONS: GEOPOLITICAL AND NATIONALISTIC (ETHNIC) DIMENSION

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In the article the historical determinants of the Polish-Russian relations will be analysed with reference to two crucial variables determining the relations between both states, i.e. the geopolitical and the nationalistic dimension. The basic conclusion of this article is the fact, that in the history Poland was the main rival of Russia in the struggle for dominance in Central and Eastern Europe. Besides, the tsarist and Soviet Russia applied great numbers of aggressive methods of ethnic polity (the forced expulsion or genocide).

Keywords: foreign policy, geopolitics, nationalities/ethnic issue, national and ethnic minorities, Poland, Russian Federation.

Introduction. In the article the historical determinants of the Polish-Russian relations will be analysed with reference to two crucial variables determining the relations between both states, i.e. the geopolitical and the nationalistic dimension. Generally, Poles see Russia from the angle of negative historical experiences, which situate this state as a power hostile towards the Polish interests. The dominating element of bilateral relations is the image of Russia as the continuator of the aggressive policy of the tsarist Russia and the Soviet Russia (the USSR), which aspires to restoring its imperial role in the world politics. The above-mentioned phenomena allowed to formulate the following research hypothesis: among the most important historical determinants of the contemporary Polish-Russian relations are the rivalry for geopolitical influence in the East-Central Europe, the ethnic policy of the Russian and Soviet authorities aimed at depriving Poles of their national identity, and the extermination of the Polish intellectual elite.

There are two objectives of this paper. The first is to present the historical determinants of the present Polish-Russian relations in the context of the significance of two crucial aspects determining bilateral relations between those states (geopolitics and the issue of nationality). The second is to fulfil the function of organising knowledge on shared historical experiences of Poland and Russia, the aim of which is to provide an introduction to the subject, which is a particularly useful as an educational element.

Before we proceed to the analysis of the main research topic, the research paradigm adopted in the article requires clarification. The paper is based on two notions: geopolitics and the issue of nationality (ethnicity). For the purposes of the analysis geopolitics was defined not as a distinct science, but rather as a «(...) subjective interpretation of political-geographical and other important factors, the intention of which is to extend national, state or block interests, in particular in terms of influence, control, strengthening, establishing or confirming political, economic and military power» [7; 5, p. 13]. The issue of nationality (ethnicity) concerns the reality of an national minority in a state in which discrimination against that minority was confirmed or in the case when a particular group declares that they are discriminated, whether or not in fact we are dealing with such a situation [6, p. 94]. Moreover, the issue of nationality will be broadened by the aspect of the national identity of a given ethnic group, and so it also pertains to the internal situation of the dominating nation (titular). The article uses historical names of the states, to which the current Republic of Poland and the Russian Federation are successors. In case of Poland the issue of geopolitical coexistence of Poland and Lithuania in one state organism was also included.

Analysis of recent research and publications.

In the framework of the chosen research problem and the subject of the article, a circle of academics researching the Polish-Russian relations and historical events connected with bilateral relations of those states should be presented. The geopolitical and civilizational Polish-Russian rivalry was the subject of the research of A. Nowak, who undertook the analysis of the military and political conflicts between Poland and Russia, emphasizing the key importance of the fact that Poland and other states from the region (particularly Ukraine) broke out from the Soviet dominance for the disappearance of the Russian empire [10]. The determinants of the Polish-Russian relations were studied by F. Ozbay and B. Aras [11, p. 27-42]. The Turkish researchers showed a series of fundamental elements determining the history of the Polish-Russian relations; however, they concentrated mainly on the historical factor, and devoted less attention to the geopolitical one. Next, T. Gruzewski analysed transformations of the tsarist Russia at the beginning of the 20th century and demonstrated the processes and phenomena that with time lead to the outbreak of the Bolshevik revolution and geopolitical changes in East-Central Europe – political changes in Russia were one of the crucial reasons of regaining independence by Poland in 1918 [3]. The Czech political scientist Jiří Vykoukal examined the territorial contexts of the thoughts of Poles on Russia, analysing historical Polish attitudes towards Russia [15]. Among researchers studying the contemporary Polish-Russian relations, historical threads were of interest to some Polish and Russian researchers, including G. Cimek, M. Franz, K. Szydywar-Grabowska [1, p. 15-39], R. Zięba [18], A. E. Taras [14], and P. V. Stegnyy [2].

A deficit of research on the meaning of the geopolitical and ethnic context in the Polish-Russian relations is visible in world literature. While in the Polish and Russian academic research an impressive group of scientists studies the spheres connected with bilateral relations, in the remaining states of the region of East-Central Europe and in the Anglo-Saxon states this subject is a research field that arouses limited interest. All the more so it is worthwhile to examine the historical examples of the significance of the geopolitical and ethnic issues in the Polish-Russian relations, that is states that in the last centuries have exerted considerable influence over the crucial phenomena in the European politics – particularly in the region of East-Central Europe.

Geopolitical and nationalistic issue in the Polish-Russian relations. The Polish-Russian relations are marked with centuries of difficult geopolitical coexistence, which to a considerable degree influence the contemporary state of bilateral relations. It is possible to divide the history of the Polish-Russian neighbourly relations into nine main geopolitical

orders marked with a growth in importance of the ethnic issue in particular periods. These are:

1. The geopolitical isolation in the international space (966-1385). The history of the Polish and Russian statehood dates back to similar times, i.e. the 9th and 10th centuries. Kievan Rus' came into existence earlier in Kiev on the Dnieper River (Russians and Ukrainians are having a dispute between themselves over the entitlement to this legacy), where the power was held by the Rurik dynasty (in 988 they decided to adopt the Eastern Christianity). In historiography the beginning of the Polish state is dated back to 966, when Prince Mieszko I from the Piast dynasty was baptised. Polish lands were removed from the main events in Europe, which provided time for national and state reinforcement. Rus' however was conquered by the Mongols in the 13th century and in that time functioned divided between a few centres (dominated by Veliky Novgorod and Moscow). During the reign of Dmitry Donskoy, the Grand Duchy of Moscow defeated the Mongols for the first time in the Battle of Kulikovo in 1380, which marked the beginning of gaining independence from the Mongolian control. Consecutive centuries were characterized by an increasing geopolitical significance of the Kingdom of Poland, the key element of which included a personal union between the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and the Kingdom of Poland in 1385 [12, p. 11-116; 17, p. 180-189]. The nationalistic context in this geopolitical order includes developing a separate existence in terms of nationhood and statehood in the shape of the Piast state, whereas in case of Rus' it regards a lack of a uniform national identity.

2. The geopolitical dominance of the Crown of the Kingdom of Poland united with the Grand Duchy of Lithuania (1385-1686). After the personal union with Lithuania, the Kingdom of Poland begun to gradually increase its geopolitical potential. The kingdom became stronger particularly after the victorious war with the Teutonic Knights (1409-1411) during which they removed the threat in the north and after the Union in Horodło (1413), strengthening the ties with the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. However, the Grand Duchy of Moscow was at the stage of the forming its geopolitical separateness. Coronation of the Grand Duke of Moscow Ivan IV the Terrible to the Tsar of All the Russias in 1547 along with incorporation of lands (including the Khanates of Kazan and Sibir) constituted the origins of the Russia we know today. Nevertheless, in that time the biggest geopolitical power in East-Central Europe and one of the most important states in the world was the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth established in 1569 (on the basis of the real union of the Kingdom of Poland and Lithuania) [4]. In that period, beginning with the Livonian War (1558-1583) the Polish-Russian wars started [18, p. 35]. After the Rurik dynasty died out (after the death of Feodor I in 1598), the struggle for power in Russia began (the so-called Time of Troubles). The Commonwealth of Poland joined in the conflict which turned into a Polish-Russian war that lasted from 1609 to 1618. In 1610 Polish armies captured Moscow which they eventually had to abandon after a prolonged siege laid by Russian units (1612). Russia faced the threat of a collapse and having its lands captured by the Poles. Under the influence of the followers of the Orthodox Church, who were afraid of the Polish Catholicism, the state was united. The war ended with the signing of Truce of Dywilino (1618). The House of Romanov assumed reign in Russia, during the following century engaging in European matters and increasing their geopolitical potential. Meanwhile, the Commonwealth was torn with external conflicts (among others war with Sweden) and

internal conflicts (Cossack uprising under the leadership of the Hetman Bohdan Khmelnytsky), which facilitated the Russian side to get the upper hand in the rivalry with the Polish-Lithuanian side. As a result of the Treaty of Pereyaslav (1654) between the Cossacks and the Russians, a considerable part of the contemporary Ukraine was to be incorporated into Russia, and the Cossacks renounced the Polish protection and recognized the Russian authority. As a result of the treaty a Polish-Russian war broke out. It was ended with the Truce of Andrusovo (1667) and confirmed with the Eternal Peace Treaty of 1686. In consequence, the Commonwealth lost a considerable part of its eastern lands and deepened its geopolitical disadvantage [12, p. 147-180; 17, p. 181-190]. The nationalistic dimension includes development of the Russian identity and the national separateness, as well as the dominance of the Polish element in the population constituting the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth [4], which particularly concerned the Polonization of the Lithuanian and Russian local gentry.

3. The growth of the power of Russia and undermining the position of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth (1686-1795). In the 18th century the Commonwealth was losing in significance to Russia that was growing strong (the Russian Empire was proclaimed in 1721), made considerable conquests in the wars with Sweden and Turkey, and gained a convenient position for political and military offensive against the Commonwealth. In the years 1762-1796 Russia under the rule of Catherine II became one of the most important states in the world. The Tsarina pursued the policy of consistent limiting the sovereignty of the Commonwealth for the benefit of Petersburg, interfering in internal affairs of the state. Most of all, she contributed to the three partitions of the Commonwealth (1772, 1793 and 1795) and the fall of the King Stanisław August Poniatowski (the Targowica Confederation) [12, p. 262-293; 17, p. 182-191]. The issue of nationality in that geopolitical setting concerned the Russian expansion from the East to the West and of internal antagonisms in the Commonwealth – the internal conflict led to the Polish-Russian war and the fall of the Commonwealth.

4. The fall of the Commonwealth under the pressure of the Russian expansion to the West – reinforced with the expansion of Prussia to the East (1795-1918). The loss of independence initiated attempts to re-establish the sovereign Commonwealth that lasted for 123 years [16], the unsuccessful Kościuszko Uprising in 1794 was only the first act in the struggle to regain independence. The next state was the alliance of Poles with the Emperor Napoleon Bonaparte, who established a quasi independent Duchy of Warsaw (Russia disagreed to put the word «Poland» back on the world map). Geopolitical rivalry between France and Russia on the European continent in 1812 developed into an armed conflict in which the Polish armed forces (mainly the army of the Duchy) also took part. Repelling the Napoleonic offensive in 1812 made Russia the dominating power in Europe. A small part of the Polish territory became the Kingdom of Poland (informally known as Congress Poland) dependent on the tsarist Russia (the tsar was also the king of Poland), but with an autonomous status. This state of affairs was maintained until 1832, when after the fall of the November Uprising (1830-1831) the autonomy was limited, and the constitution was replaced with the Organic Statute of the Kingdom of Poland. Further incorporation of the Kingdom to Russia occurred after the defeat of the January Uprising (1863-1864). In consecutive years the office of the governor-general was introduced on the Polish lands, and the name of the Kingdom of

Poland was replaced with the name of the Vistula Land [12, p. 309-482; 17, p. 181-191]. The nationalistic issue concerned the functioning of the Polish nation, after the partitions of the Commonwealth, in three separate states (the quasi independent states, i.e. the Duchy of Warsaw, the Kingdom of Poland and the Republic of Kraków were an exception), the majority of which lived under the Russian rule. Poles were subjected to persecution and attempts to deprive them of their national identity (Russification and Germanization) [16, p. 271-276].

5. The rebirth of Poland in the result of the German and Russian defeat during World War I and stopping the Bolshevik expansion to the West (1918-1921). Regaining independence by Poland became possible after the defeat of the partitioners during World War I. Due to the fact that the majority of Polish territory was under the Russian rule, the crucial phenomenon was the fall of the tsarism in Russia that began with the Crimean War in the years 1853-1856 (against the Ottoman Empire and its allies). The defeat that Russia suffered caused introducing radical reforms in the state, among others the abolishment of serfdom. Further changes were necessitated by the Russian Revolution (1905), as well as the military defeat in the war with Japan (1905). In spite of all that, the defeats during World War I and the tsarist autocracy led to the outbreak of two revolutions (February and October Revolutions) in 1917. The Bolsheviks (Communists) under the leadership of Vladimir Lenin won the civil war and eventually established the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. The attempt to expand the communist authority to other countries of Europe ended with the defeat of the Bolsheviks in the war with Poland and its allies (1919-1920). The peace treaty signed in Riga in 1921 consolidated the re-establishment of the independence of Poland [12, p. 380-482; 17, p. 181-191]. The nationalistic aspect was visible in armed struggles for the borders of the Polish state being reborn and in the need to create a uniform state organism on the basis of territories and population that for 123 years functioned in the administrative and cultural systems of three partition states.

6. The interwar period of peaceful coexistence of both states in the conditions of an increasing persecution of the Polish minority in the USSR (1921-1939). This geopolitical order was dominated by the situation of the Polish minority in the USSR. Victory in the war with the Bolsheviks in 1921 and the need for internal consolidation in the USSR created a period of peaceful coexistence between Poles and Russians (Soviets). After the death of V. Lenin, power in the USSR was seized by Joseph Stalin, i.e. Iosif Wissarionowicz Dzhughashvili, who turned out to be the pioneer of mass ethnic cleansings, and, amongst the nations in the Soviet Union, the Polish minority consisting of about 600 thousand people was the main target of these repressions. At first they were victims of relocations and attempts to deprive them of their national identity, but with time the USSR authorities decided to strike a stronger blow. The Polish national minority, alike the kulaks, was blamed for the failure of collectivization. In the 1930s the communist terror greatly increased. According to the latest research, it was not the German Jews, but the Poles in the USSR who were the most persecuted national minority in Europe in the 1930s. Timothy Snyder noted that in the second half of the 1930s, under the pretext of espionage for Poland and active participation in the Polish Military Organization, on 11th August 1937 Nikolai Yezhov issued the NKVD order number 00485 demanding a «total liquidation of the Polish spy

structures». This resulted in arresting 143 thousand people, out of which 111 thousand were executed in the years 1937-1938. Estimates show that about 85 thousand Poles were murdered at that time. During this period Poles in the USSR were killed almost forty times more frequent than any other Soviet citizens [13, p. 111-126; 9, p. 813-861].

7. The fall of Poland as a result of an another Russian (Soviet) expansion to the West and German expansion to the East (1939-1945). The USSR began to fight in the World War II alongside Germany, which resulted in the attack on the Second Polish Republic in the framework of the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact (1939). As a result of the attack of Germany (with allied forces) on the USSR in 1941, Moscow joined the Allies. At the beginning of World War II (1939-1941) Polish citizens under the Soviet occupation became an object of ethnic persecution. The Soviets practiced mass arrests, displacements and homicide – the genocide on the Polish officers was the culminating point. In 1940 in Katyn, Tver (Mednoye) and Kharkiv the NKVD murdered over 20 thousand Poles, officers of the Polish Army and the Polish State Police, as well as civil servants. After the Germans revealed mass graves in April 1943, the Kremlin blamed the Third Reich for that crime and used the Polish efforts to explain it with the International Red Cross as an intermediary as a pretext to sever diplomatic relations with the Government of the Republic of Poland in exile. Only in 1990 the Kremlin officially recognised its responsibility for the death of Polish prisoners of war – revealing the resolution of the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party (bolsheviks) from March 1940 concerning murdering Poles [13, p. 156-163].

8. The functioning of Poland in the Russian (Soviet) geopolitical order (1945-1989). Participation in the victorious coalition of the Allies during World War II allowed the USSR to make a territorial expansion in the East of the continent, leading to the establishment of the so-called Eastern Bloc, a part of which was the Polish People's Republic. The PPR lost the Eastern marches and received lands in the West, the South, and in the North. However, it is difficult to consider it compensation, since it was an element of the geopolitical game of J. Stalin [12, p. 562-654]. The nationalistic factor includes mass displacements of the Polish citizens that belonged to national minorities before the war (to the USSR, Germany, or the so-called Regained Territories in Poland), attempts to create a Soviet citizen without a separate identity, and continuation of the persecution of the Polish intellectual elite and members of the anti-Communist independence underground.

9. The establishing of the Polish-Russian relations after the collapse of the USSR in 1991: Poland functioning in the Euro-Atlantic structures. The disintegration of the USSR changed the geopolitical situation in East-Central Europe, because former Soviet republics gained independence and satellite states gained full sovereignty. The Russian Federation became an successor to all legal commitments of the USSR. During the first years of the political transformation, three issues dominated the policy of Warsaw towards Moscow: (1) attaining real sovereignty on the international arena and integration with the Euro-Atlantic structures; (2) conducting a negotiation process on withdrawal of the Soviet armies from the territory of Poland; (3) establishing diplomatic relations with the former republics of the disintegrating USSR [8, p. 689-695]. In the post-Soviet geopolitical situation the nationalistic issue refers to the functioning of national minorities in Poland and Russia, in particular their legal status and safety.

Conclusions and perspective research directions.

The aim of the article was to systematize the historical determinants of the Polish-Russian relations and demonstrating the significance of the geopolitical and nationalistic issues in the relations between Warsaw and Moscow. On the basis of the conducted analysis it is possible to form the two most important conclusions. Firstly, the verification of the research hypothesis presented in the introduction of the article: among the most important historical determinants of the contemporary Polish-Russian relations are the rivalry for geopolitical influence in the East-Central Europe, the ethnic policy of the Russian and Soviet authorities aimed at depriving Poles of their national identity, and the extermination of the Polish intellectual elite. This research showed that this verification was positive. Over the course of the past centuries Poland was the main contender of Russia in the struggle for dominance in East-Central Europe. Achieving the geopolitical upper hand and attempts of Russification of the Polish population did not lead to a final resolution of the issue of the Polish independence. The tsarist and Soviet Russia applied great numbers of aggressive methods of ethnic polity, trying to repress

the Polish identity on the territories administered and occupied by Russia (USSR). Secondly, the Polish-Russian relations are encumbered with a negative historical legacy, peculiarly in terms of the place of Russia in the Polish history. Both nations entered into rivalry in frequent armed conflicts, Poles captured Moscow, whereas Russians initiated the partition of Poland, which resulted in the disappearance of Poland from the world map for 123 years. The majority of Polish national uprisings took place in the territories annexed by Russia, which was the most repressive out of the partitioners. Subsequent events that occurred in the 20th century antagonize the contemporary bilateral relations. It pertains especially to the attack of the Soviet Russia on the Polish territory in 1919, the Soviet aggression and occupation (alongside Germany) in 1939, and the creation of a communist Polish state after the end of World War II. The perspective research includes two dimensions: (A) Analysis of the contemporary Polish-Russian relations in order to indicate the significance of the Polish state in the geopolitical doctrine of Russia; (B) What are the other further dimensions that played a major part in the relations between Poland and Russia?

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ИСТОРИЧЕСКИЕ УСЛОВИЯ СОВРЕМЕННЫХ ПОЛЬСКО-РОССИЙСКИХ ОТНОШЕНИЙ: ГЕОПОЛИТИЧЕСКОЕ И НАЦИОНАЛЬНОЕ (ЭТНИЧЕСКОЕ) ИЗМЕРЕНИЕ

Аннотация

Эта статья покажет исторические условия польско-российских отношений, в отношении двух ключевых переменных, определяющих отношения между двумя странами, то есть геополитическое и национальное измерение. Основным выводом из этой статьи является то, что в истории Польша был главным соперником России в борьбе за господство в Центральной и Восточной Европе. Кроме того, царская и советская Россия применяли весь спектр агрессивных методов этнической политики в отношении поляков (принудительные переселения или геноцид).

Ключевые слова: внешняя политика, Геополитика, национальный/этнический вопрос, национальные и этнические меньшинства, Польша, Российская Федерация.