POLISH-RUSSIAN RELATIONS: 
HISTORY, GEOGRAPHY AND GEOPOLITICS

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The history of Polish-Russian relations had been dominated by the serious problems ranging from war and occupation to regional rivalry. The relations are no better shape in the past two decades. Probably, the recent period has witnessed an escalation of a number of crises emanating from historical memory and clashing geopolitical concerns. There has been an expanding third party factor in the relations following Poland's joining NATO in 1999 and entrance to the European Union in 2004. Russian relations with the U.S. and the EU are coming under increasing stress because of the problematic Russian-Polish relations. Poland has a strategically important position in Eastern Europe. It is one of the transit countries for Russian natural gas to the EU, which makes Poland important to both Russia and the EU. The U.S.-Poland talks to place a part of a proposed U.S. missile defense system in Poland illustrates the significance of this strategic position on the Western frontier of Eurasia and the newly conceptualized Greater Middle East. The strains on Russian-Polish relations are not restricted to foreign policy and security issues. There is also a strong domestic dimension with a highly sensitive perception of historical legacy of the relations and rising societal tension toward each other. For that reason, minor problems may turn into serious debates and diplomatic scandals between the two states. In this sense, Russian-Polish relations preserve a unique mechanism of problem creation utilizing domestic and foreign policy issues.

There is a tendency to explain the Russian-Polish relations through the impact of a number of recent and short term developments. However, the roots of the problematic situation should be found in more than a thousand years of historical relations. Poland has history has left traces of pain and suffering in the collective
consciousness of Polish people. There is a common sense that Russia had been behind all these negative developments. We hold the idea that the relations have structural patterns and only a comprehensive analysis which goes beyond the myopic focus on current problems may help to discover the root causes and the determinants of the relations between these two states. In this article, we will discuss the Polish-Russian relations putting emphasis on the long-lasting influences of the burden of historical relations and clashing geopolitical concerns. In this sense, first part of this article outlines the historical development of these relations. We will next analyze the role and influence of the burden of history in the problematic relations. It will be followed by a further analysis of the clashing geopolitical concerns between Russia and Poland. Finally, we will discuss what lies ahead and how future relations will be shaped.

**Historical Background**

Poles belong to the Western Slavic part of the Slavic peoples and their first state was established by the Piast Dynasty in 966. After the emergence of a common Russian threat, the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and the Kingdom of Poland created a joint entity in 1386 and began to be known as the Commonwealth of Both States (Poland and Lithuania) (Rzeczpospolita Obojga Narodów) or known in short as “Rzeczpospolita.” Under the Jagiellon dynasty’s rule, which lasted until 1572, this Commonwealth became one of the most powerful states in Eastern Europe ruling in territories from the Baltic Sea to the Black Sea. In today’s terms, the Commonwealth consisted of Lithuania, Belarusia, Poland, Ukraine, Latvia, Estonia, and Kaliningrad, parts of Russia, Hungary, Czech Republic and Slovakia. The major challenge to the Commonwealth was endless Russian threats and subsequent attacks. Russia waged violent and severe wars against Sweden and Poland in the first half of 17th century. Poland’s armies invaded first Smolensk and later Moscow in 1611. A Russian patriot, Kuzman Minin, organized a people’s army in Nijniy Novgorod and freed Moscow from Polish invasion on 4 November 1612.1

Poland was much more influential and powerful than Russia in the first half of 17th century. The major powers of the Eastern Europe were the Kingdom of Sweden, Poland and the Ottoman Empire. The balance of power began to shift to Russia in the second half of the 17th century. In 1667, Sweden acquired the Baltic lands of Poland,
while Russia occupied Eastern Ukraine. Poland was under scrutiny of the Russian Czardom, Prussia and the Ottoman Empire since Poland’s dispartition or invasion would likely result in negative results for the regional powers. However, neither Poland’s strength nor regional status quo would be able to protect Poland’s unity due to a number of weaknesses. These were the land-locked character of kingdom, the Polish tradition of importing rulers from abroad, which lead to outside intervention in Polish internal affairs, the failure of controlling vast geography, the extensive privileges of local rulers, the dominance of landed aristocracy and the overruling rights of royal class. In addition, while Poland was losing its power base, there were rising centers of power, like Berlin and Moscow. As a result, the new power centers put an end to Poland and partitioned the country.  

The new balance of power in Europe replaced Sweden, Poland and the Ottoman Empire with Russia, Prussia and Austria. Poland was partitioned by the increasing pressure of the major actors of this new balance of power in 1772. Poland’s territory was divided into three: Austria grabbed the South, Prussia acquired the Center and North, and Russia dominated the East. These three states partitioned Poland twice in 1793 and 1795, and Poland finally disappeared from the map in 1795. 19th century Polish history is full of rebellions and political struggles for independence. In this period, the uprisings against Russian occupation were violently repressed by Russian army. The well known Polish rebellions were those in 1830 and 1863. All these negative developments left deep and traumatic traces in the Polish national memory. Polish migrants who fled to the Ottoman Empire and France used this negative Russian involvement as a glue to preserve their national identity. Poles were without a national state for 123 years. The Polish state was established again in 1918 after the failure of Germany and the withdrawal of Russia in the aftermath of World War I. Poland reemerged in the territories of Western Prussia and Poznan with access to Baltic Sea, which was given to the Poles by the Versailles Peace treaty on 28 June 1919. This new Polish state had a short experience of parliamentarian democracy but found itself in a state of insecurity and instability. This chaotic situation ended with Marshall Jozef Pilsudski’s authoritarian rule and tight measures to provide security in Poland.  

The problematic years did not end for the Poles even after they regained their independence. Germany recovered quickly after WWI and created a new fear of large scale war and occupation again in
Europe in the 1930s. Soviet Russia was afraid that the Western powers would use Germany against them and was seeking ways to avoid any German offensive in the future. The most concrete move was the Soviet Union’s initiative to sign a Non-Aggression Treaty which stated that ideological differences between Soviet Union and Germany would not prevent friendly political and economic relations. This Treaty was signed on 23 August 1939. Not surprisingly, Germany increased its pressure on Poland after signing this Treaty with the Soviet Union. In September 1939, Germany invaded Poland without declaring a war. German armies occupied the vast majority of Poland toward the end of the same month including Warsaw. The Soviet Union quickly occupied some territories of Poland based on the Non-Aggression Treaty it signed with Germany. Soviet Union and Germany even signed an additional agreement which determined the partition of Poland between them on 28 September 1939. This agreement is known as Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, which indicated that Germany would grasp Western Poland including Warsaw and Soviet Union will integrate Eastern Poland to its territories. This was the fourth partition of Poland in history. Poland’s independence lasted only two decades after 1918.

After the German and Soviet invasions, former the Polish administration established an exile government in Paris. After the fall of France in 1940, this exile government moved to London. The Polish people—under both German and Soviet controls—faced severe oppression, forced migration and massacre. German Nazis massacred Polish Jews and the Soviet administration forced massive numbers of Poles to move to Siberia and Kazakhstan or to work in labor camps. There was a brief period of warm relations between the Soviet Union and Poland’s government in exile after Germany attacked Soviet territories in 1941. However, this dialogue ended in 1943 after the Soviets insisted on continuing to occupy the Polish lands it acquired in 1939. The Soviet army stopped the German army at Stalingrad in November 1942 and progressed to Warsaw in the summer of 1944 after gaining a definite victory against the Germans. The Polish exile government started an uprising in Warsaw against Germans, when the Soviet army was approaching the city. The Soviet army stopped its advance after reaching Vistul and waited two months until German forces totally destroyed the Polish rebels.

In January 1945, Soviet forces attacked again, drove the German army out of Warsaw and established a pro-Soviet administration and
army by uniting communist elements in Poland. The U.S. and England accepted the Soviet demands over Eastern Poland during the Yalta Conference in February 1945. Poland’s border was redrawn and included German territories with a reference to the Oder-Neisse Rivers at the Potsdam Conference in August 1945. Poland’s borders shifted West with new territories taken from Germany, replacing the areas of Eastern Poland given to the Soviet Union. The immediate development after this border delineation was an outflow of Germans from territories of Poland, placing the formerly migrated Poles in these new lands, Soviet forces dictated a communist system for the country, deployed Soviet military forces in Poland and removed non-Socialist cadres from the state bureaucracy.

As these developments may indicate, Poland was falling into the orbit of the Eastern Bloc represented by the Soviet Union. It was transformed to a Soviet style regime and the new constitution changed the name of country to the People’s Republic of Poland in 1952. Poland’s economy was re-organized to address the needs of the Soviet Union and a centrally planned economic model was implemented gradually starting in 1948. The shift was toward heavy industrial plants like iron-steel factories or military industries. After Joseph Stalin, the Polish people attempted to facilitate a newly emerging environment of relative freedom under Nikita Khrushchev, but the rising demands were oppressed severely in 1956. Such riots occurred in 1976 country wide, but ended with the same lack of success. In 1978, there was an important external development for Poland when Polish Cardinal Karol Wojtyla was chosen as the Pope John Paul II and became leader Catholic Christians. His visit to Poland in June 1979 was a turning point for a new set of developments in this country. The Polish people gained a source for increased self-confidence against communist dominance which was in decay throughout the whole Eastern Bloc. The Solidarity Movement in Poland played an important role in decreasing communist influence through the massive riots and political struggles in the 1980s. The Communist administration had to agree to negotiate the list of demands of the workers. The increasing tension between the Solidarity Movement and the Communist Party led to declaration of a state of emergency on 12 December 1981. The leaders of the Solidarity Movement were arrested and the riots were oppressed violently by the state forces.

A massive resistance to the state of emergency occurred and the opposition gained strength in this process. There was a new wave of
riots in 1988, which resulted in talks between the government and opposition in 1989. The Polish opposition reached its aim of a freer Polish political system as a result of both their decisive resistance and a number of international developments such as the emergence of glasnost (openness) and perestroika (restructuring) policies in the Soviet Union, a suitable international environment and Western countries’ support for reform in Poland. Free elections were held in 1989, which ended with the first non-communist government in the Eastern bloc. After the disappearance of the Warsaw Pact and fall of Soviet Union, there has been substantial changes in former Soviet territories and transformation in international systems.

After the Soviet Union, Russian-Polish relations were far from promising and even worse than during the Soviet era. The joint schemes in political, economic and cultural realms were ended and the differing interest perceptions in many regional issues surfaced. Poland turned its face to the West in military, economic and political terms. There seemed no other alternative to solve the problems of the economy and security in the absence of the socialist system. This choice of integration into Western world was presented to the Polish people as an opportunity for Poland to make rapid progress to reach the level of the developed world.  

In the mid-1990s, the expected result of Poland’s bid for EU membership was worsening Russian-Polish relations. The relations turned to short term scandals, political maneuverings and cyclical warming of relations. The worst relations that Russia has in the former Soviet sphere is with Poland. One needs to understand the deep and historical involvement of these two countries to understand the problematic nature of the relations. A myopic focus on short term problems would fall short of providing a comprehensive understanding of Russian-Polish relations. It would be impossible to get rid of the burden of history and historical representations such as Poland as a victim and Russia as the oppressor which surface in a determinative manner in the relations.  

The Burden of History in Russian-Polish Relations

There are different perspectives in Russia and Poland on the causes and results of World War II and Poland’s involvement in this war. The different approaches have been reflected negatively in the relations. The Polish government still holds the Russians responsible
for the “Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact” signed in 1939. Although Poland’s borders were partly determined by this pact and has international legitimacy, it is one of the major sources of problems between Russia and Poland. Another interesting fact is that some of the territories lost by this Pact are now part of Belarusia and Ukraine, but Poland has no territorial demands on these countries. There is a trauma from partition and Russia is held responsible in collective consciousness of the Polish people. Thus, Russian moves in regional and international politics have been followed carefully with this burden of history. Any step implies a threat to Polish national interests and falls into the category of aggravating Polish sensitivity. This perception is to a lesser extent valid for the West, which has been held responsible for delivering Poland to the Soviet sphere of influence at the Yalta Conference.

As an example, the personnel of the Osventsima State Museum closed the section which presented the Soviet troops’ rescue of people in Nazi concentration camps. The museum personnel pointed out that they may open this section again if the Russians provide the documents, facts and realities about the Russian occupation of Polish territories within the frame of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact. The Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs considered this demand meaningless and ridiculous. There are different perspectives on the causes and the results of WWII in Russia and some argue that it served only the interest of the Polish people. The Chair of Poland’s Institute of National Remembrance, Leon Keres, replied to this argument with:

Yes, our borders gained certainty. But they determined these borders without our consent. They did not ask our idea for shifting our borders westward. It is right, Yalta provided decades of peace including the most difficult periods of Cold War. It is right but everything was done by force and oppression. We hear frequently that Soviet Union helped to Poland, provided protective security umbrella. But we did not demand such a help, umbrella was protecting us from the danger it produced. Socialism may be considered useful for Poland from some perspectives but it does not change the reality that our national sovereignty was restricted. Russia considers sovereignty as a high priority issue. It is normal but restricting other’s sovereignty is wrong.
The worst memory of the WWII years is the Katyn massacre. Katyn is the name of a forest area near Harkov-Mednom. After the Soviet invasion of Eastern Poland, Stalin ordered Soviet soldiers to kill 22 thousand people in the spring of 1940. They consisted of highly educated segments of Polish society including officers, doctors, policemen, teachers and others. Soviet officials hid this massacre from its own public and the outside world and held Germans responsible for this massacre until Moscow finally admitted responsibility in 1989. During Polish President Voytsech Jaruzelsky’s visit to Moscow, Soviet President Michael Gorbachev delivered the documents about Katyn to his counterpart. In his August 1993 visit to Warsaw, Russian President Boris Yeltsin visited the Katyn Memorial and apologized by putting flowers to the Memorial. However, Poland did not consider these moves satisfactory and demanded an official explanation and delivery of all Katyn documents, providing the names of any surviving perpetrators of this crime.

Poland declared 1995 as the year of Katyn memory and there were discussions to open a Katyn museum directly across from the Russian embassy in Warsaw. There are speculations that for Katyn victims and Polish exiles in Siberia Poland may demand huge indemnity payments from Russia. But Russia has taken a decisive attitude on this subject and Russian ambassador in Poland, V.M. Grinin, commented on speculations in Polish newspapers that Poland may demand 150 billion USD stated, “Only in WWII, Russia lost 40 million people. There is not this much people living in Poland. Russia does not owe anything to anyone.” Such claims did not change the strengthening Polish position to define what happened in Katyn as genocide. Poland’s President Aleksander Kwasniewski underlined the importance of this issue by saying, “We want from Russian Federation to definitely recognize that the crime committed in Katyn was genocide.”

In addition, the relations between Russia and Poland may easily worsen with the impact of domestic political developments. Two recent developments may constitute good examples. Russia disbanded the commemoration of the anniversary of the 1917 October revolution held on of 7 October in 2005. The Russian administration replaced it with a new anniversary called Unity of People’s Day to be held on 4 November. As mentioned Kuzman Minin organized a people’s army in Nijniy Novgorod and saved Moscow from Polish occupation on 4 November 1612. This choice of date created tension
and is still a source of problems between Poland and Russia. A similar development occurred after children of Russian diplomats were attacked in a park in Warsaw on 31 July 2005. Russian official circles considered this event as a political issue and sent a diplomatic note to Poland. Russia interpreted this attack as a result of rising anti-Russian feelings in Poland. In next month, two Polish diplomats and a journalist were attacked in Russia. These attacks were considered as the revenge of the attack on the diplomat’s children.

**Geopolitical Determinants in the Relations**

Poland began to follow an independent foreign policy line in the 1990s. It wants to utilize the historical background of the old and powerful “Rzeczpospolita” as a source of energy and dynamism to achieve the aims and objectives of the current Republic of Poland. Poland has three objectives in the aftermath of the Cold War in regional policy: (1) Maintaining good relations with its Eastern neighbors—Lithuania, Belarusia, Ukraine—without raising the issue that these states were established partially on former Polish territories (2) Supporting independence of the countries—Belarusia, Ukraine—which would provide a buffer zone between Poland and Russia (3) Playing a facilitator role in integration of these countries into the Western institutions and the EU.

There is widespread belief in Polish policy circles and the academic world that Poland’s role and influence in the EU is largely dependent on Poland’s relations and interactions with its Eastern neighbors. In this line of thought, Poland has a geopolitically advantageous position in the EU and may turn this into solid benefits.\(^{15}\) Poland developed this idea during its EU membership process and began to use the “Eastern Dimension” starting in 1998. This approach was reflected in the two following documents: “Poland’s Viewpoint on the Eastern policy of the European Union in the run-up to the EU’s enlargement to include the countries of Central and Eastern Europe in July 2001” and “Informal Document on Poland’s Proposals on Expanding EU’s Relations with the New Eastern Neighbors in December 2002.”\(^{16}\) These documents focus on raising the political, economic and legal standards of Ukraine, Belarusia and Moldova to the level of the EU.\(^{17}\) These three countries are members of the Russian led Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and the Moscow administration does not seem willing to give up its influence in the
CIS. From Poland’s perspective, the EU’s Eastern policy is narrowly focused on Ukraine and should be extended by assigning Poland a special role in this policy. Poland’s bid for a more active role within the EU framework and even leading the EU foreign policy in the Russian neighborhood underlined the fact that Poland and Russia have clashing geopolitical objectives.

If we look from a different angle, Poland’s search for democratization, human rights reform, promotion of rule of law and economic development in Ukraine and Belarusia could be considered as Polish attempts to constrain Russian imperial ambitions. Poland wants to keep Russia away from the EU’s Eastern borders and control Russian influence in a number of countries which would constitute a buffer zone between Russia and Poland. The roots of this policy of developing good relations with Lithuania, Ukraine and Belarusia go back to intellectual discussion of the Polish migrants in the West in the 1950s. The idea was to prevent a domino effect by preserving the fall of Ukraine into Russian influence, which may lead subsequently to the fall of other countries. Russia adopted a more independent policy line under President Vladimir Putin supporting the fear that the rising Russian imperial engagement westward may put regional countries into jeopardy. This perception is a lesson drawn from history. The late Leonid Kucma administration in Ukraine strengthened these perceptions by following integration policies with the Russian Federation. As a result, Poland became actively involved in the West-Russia struggle over Ukraine under the cover of supporting a democratic Ukraine for the purpose of limiting Russian influence in its neighborhood. The same struggle continues over Belarusia in the same framework.18

Russian natural gas reaches to European countries through Belarusia, Poland and Ukraine. Moscow follows a policy of offering privileged gas prices to a number of former Soviet republics and Eastern bloc countries based on the relations of these countries with Russia. Russian Deputy President, S. Yasterjemskiy, admitted that the Moscow administration uses energy resources as a diplomatic leverage against transit countries.19 Russian natural gas reaches Poland after passing through Belarusia and Poland is heavily dependent on Russian gas and oil; namely 70 percent of natural gas and 90 percent of oil it consumes. In this respect, the prestigious publication, “Rzeczpospolita” pointed out that Warsaw’s emancipation from the Russian gas monopoly is no less important than the departure of Rus-
sian troops from Polish territories. The Russian decision to increase gas prices has been a wake-up call for Poland which is trying to find alternative sources of gas supply.

Russia follows a two-track policy in natural gas supply. It is increasing natural gas prices while at the same time it is trying to avoid transit countries for carrying gas to the European markets. There are two projected routes to directly reach these markets: north and south routes. The key countries for these routes are Germany and Turkey (Blue Stream). There is increasing attention on the northern route. This is a projected pipeline which will pass through the Baltic Sea and be named the North European Natural Gas Pipeline (NEPG). There is an agreement that was signed during Russian President Putin’s September 2005 visit to Germany to start working on the project. The construction of the pipeline is supposed to be completed in 2010. It will be 1200 km long and cost more than USD 4 billion. The starting point is Vilborg city of the Leningrad province and will end in Graysfald city in Germany. This pipeline will carry 27.5 billion cubic meters natural gas annually. If a parallel pipeline is added, this volume will reach to 55 billion cubic meters. This amount is equal to half of the Russian natural gas which reaches Europe through Ukraine.

Russia considers the NEGP as a strategically important project since it will help Russia escape the strains of transit countries. The crisis with Ukraine supported this perception. The Blue Stream project already decreased the importance of Ukraine as a gas transit country. The Warsaw administration does not consider these two projects favorably since they decrease Poland’s importance as a transit country. The main result of the NEGP project will be strengthening German-Russian relations, which are already in good shape. Three Baltic countries and Poland have expressed their worries about the situation and have reacted negatively to German-Russian rapprochement. These concerns have risen at a point where history meets with geopolitics. The Polish Defense Minister has presented the NEGP as something reminiscent of the “Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact” After the agreement of the NEGP project was signed, Polish President Aleksander Kwasniewski argued that this pipeline project is not secure in environmental terms and does not satisfy economic and political criteria, which should be taken into serious consideration before starting such projects. In addition, the Polish ambassador to Moscow, Jezhe Bar, told the Russian Interfax news agency, “This
project is a few times expansive than building a land pipeline. In our view, this is a political project not economical.\textsuperscript{24}

Another source of contention, though rare, between Russia and Poland is the Chechen question. For example, when Poland's Foreign Minister Adam Rotfeld commented on Russian security forces' killing of Chechen leader Aslan Masharov as political mistake, his involvement led to a diplomatic crisis between Poland and Russia. After Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs Spokesman, Aleksander Hechko classified Masharov's death not only a crime, but a politically stupid act, the tension further escalated. The Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs immediately released a harsh response that Masharov was a terrorist and was on the wanted list of Interpol. The statement also included a question, "Would Poland feel sorry if Osama Bin Laden is killed?"\textsuperscript{25} Following this statement, the Warsaw municipal Council had a session to discuss the naming of a street after former Chechen leader Cahir Dudayev, who also was killed by Russian military forces.\textsuperscript{26} These kinds of mutually aggravating acts only serve to increase distrust between two states.\textsuperscript{27}

Russian-American short term rapprochement after the September 11 attacks also warmed up Russian-Poland relations for a while. But these relations were again tense after Poland became a member of the EU in May 2004. Poland's different concerns in regional issues and active foreign policy line toward new independent states in Russia's environs began to occupy a central place in Russian-Poland relations in the aftermath of Poland's joining the European club. Putin and Kwasniewski were on the opposing sides during the Orange Revolution in Ukraine. Polish leader actively engaged in mediation attempts between presidential candidates Viktor Yanukovich and Viktor Yuschenko. Russian President Putin criticized Poland for allying with the West against Russia on the Ukrainian issue and for trying to eliminate Russia from regional politics. Polish President Kwasniewski responded that he prefers Ukraine independent from Russian domination.\textsuperscript{28}

The Russian response to Poland's position in color revolutions and other regional issues were a Russian embargo on Polish products. This embargo was issued in 2004 for meat products and expanded to agricultural products in 2005. Russia refuses to lift this embargo despite continuous attempts of Polish diplomacy. Polish officials find the health criteria for issuing this embargo meaningless and argue Russia aims to penalize Poland for having different perspective on the
color revolution in Ukraine.\(^9\) Poland vetoed, in response, the negotiations on a EU-Russia partnership in energy, trade and human rights issues. Poland argues that Moscow should lift the embargo on Polish products and accept the 1994 European Energy Charter.\(^{30}\) Poland’s position was to make sure that it would not be penalized easily as Russia attempted in the cases of embargoes toward Georgia and Moldova. The US-Poland talks of deploying a part of the U.S. missile defense system in Poland add insult to injury in Polish-Russian relations. Poland’s willingness to host the U.S. missile system has already raised a considerable reaction in Russia. Moscow regards this missile system as targeted against itself. Polish Prime Minister Jaroslaw Kaczynski commented that the U.S. missile defense system is Warsaw’s guarantee that it will not fall into orbit of Russia again for more than a few decades.\(^{31}\)

**Conclusion**

After discussing the problems of Russian-Polish relations at the crossroads of history and geopolitics, the burden should be shifted to discuss what lies ahead. Poland’s foreign policy will be based on the notion that its role and influence will depend on exploiting the advantage of its geographical position in the eastern frontier of the EU. This position has two clear implications. First, it will be a high priority for Poland to stay in the EU and further integrate into Western institutions and schemes. Second, Poland will follow an active and dynamic policy line in the Eastern neighborhood of the EU.

Poland will have the historical memory of both the golden age represented by “Rzeczpospolita” and its past partitions at four different times and border delineations represented by the “Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact”. The external reference to tough times in the past as a responsible significant other will be Russia.\(^{32}\) The mixture of these historical perceptions point to a traumatic situation, which will lead to daring in the case of having opportunity to follow an active policy line in regional policy and to caution in cases like Russian-German rapprochement. Poland’s imperial ambitions would be disciplined through partial delivery of sovereignty to the EU. However, these ambitions are running deep in the collective consciousness both at the levels of state and society.

On the other hand, the EU membership helps Poland in the cases of cautious times which surface when Polish policy-makers feel
threatened by Russia or any other external factors. The EU provides a secure political umbrella and Poland can follow a policy of fulfilling its national interest through EU schemes. However, the EU framework is neither good enough to satisfy Polish desires of keeping Russia out of regional power configurations nor does it have the necessary institutional capability to be utilized in an active and dynamic Polish foreign policy in the eastern frontiers of the EU. In sum, the EU is not likely to back Poland in its regional rivalry against Russia, which has regional and international capabilities in terms of power politics. In addition, Poland’s overplay of its hand against Russia in the EU framework is also likely to erode its position in the EU. As witnessed in the Russian embargo on Polish products, Holland, Denmark and other European countries are in line to provide the same goods to the Russian market.

Russia considers Poland as a sort of Trojan horse because of the settlement of the missile defense system issue, Poland’s involvement in the Iraqi invasion and its pro-Western position in the Ukrainian issue. Moscow divides the EU members into two: old and new Europe. From the Russian perspective, old Europe should be taken more seriously into consideration. Russian policy makers do not consider the equal vote issue as an important fact. There is a risk of underestimating the role of new member states as Russia tests the limits of Europe. Moscow’s policy of dividing EU public opinion which leads to disagreement in the EU is already in practice through the continuous Polish veto of Russian related issues. Russia aims to minimize the role and influence of Poland in this way. Only time may show the success of this policy. Another matter of time is whether Russia will accept Poland as a difficult neighbor or continue to consider it as a small country on which it can dictate its terms. On the Polish side, the future course of relations will be determined by Poland’s ability to escape from the traumatic strains of the historical memory of pains and sufferings associated with Russia. Too much ambiguity does not promise much hope for better relations in short-to-medium term, if not in long run.

Notes
1. For Russian-Polish relations see A. V. Lipatov, I. O. Saytanov, Polyaki i Ruskie: Vzaimoponimanie i Vzaimoneponimanie [Poles and Russians: Mutual Understanding and Misunderstanding] (Moskva: Indrik, 2000); A. N. Kurat, Rusya Tarihi: Baslangictan 1917'ye Kadar [Russian History until 1917] (Ankara: TTK, 1993); B. G.


5. Poland’s western borders was recognized by Federal Germany with an agreement signed on 7 December 1970.


15. Nikolay Buharin, “Rossiysko-Polskie Otносeniya i vistopenie Polsi v ES” [Russian-Poland Relations and Poland’s Joining to the EU], *Vestnik Yevropi*, 2004, No: 11.


21. For detailed information, see http://www.negpp.ru


25. “Aslan Mashadov mojet possovit presedentov Rossii i Polsi” [Aslan Mashadov may Worsen the Relations of the Head of States of Poland and Russia], Izvestia, 11 March 2005.


29. V polsko-rossiyskih otnoseniyah prisustvuyet nevejestvo..., agm.


32. Buharin, “Rossiysko-Polskie Otnoseniya i vistoplenie Polsi v ES.”

33. Andrusecko, ibid.