



RUSSIA THE FOCUS OF POLAND'S PRESS

1. Post Smolensk

Russia continues to capture the interest of the Polish press, marking a rapprochement between the two countries. First there was the moving ceremony in which prime ministers Tusk and Putin commemorated the seventieth anniversary of the Katyn massacre, spring 1940, when tens of thousands of Polish officer prisoners-of-war were secretly mown down by Stalin's secret police (Nkvd) – a crime the Soviets denied until Gorbachev had the courage to own up in April 1990. That mood was consolidated by the Smolensk air crash in which the returning Polish president Lech Kaczyński and his wife Maria lost their lives along with 94 others, top brass of the state and army. Russia lent help with investigations into the cause, and the Russian people showed unexpected sympathy for their Polish neighbours in their hour of mourning.

Russia's *glasnost* over the Katyn massacre took another step on 28th April when the federal archive *Rosarkhiv* website (1) scanned and published seven documents confirming the Soviets' responsibility for wiping out 22,000 Polish officers at Katyn. It was President Medvedev (2) who decided to make the documents public. Declassified since the early Nineties, they have hitherto been viewable by historians alone. The president's gesture was intended as tangible expression of his solidarity with Warsaw and the Poles. So far, however, none of the culprits have been identified and no investigation is afoot in Russia, despite requests lodged by certain families of victims.

News of this publication has had a mixed reception in Poland. Prime minister Tusk stressed how the Smolensk tragedy now acts as a catalyst for a new phase of cooperation between Moscow and Warsaw. Paweł Zalewski, an MEP and member of the governing party "Civic Platform", joined by Sławomir Dębski from the Polish Institute for International Relations, argues that divulgence of information already known to historians of both countries contributes nothing new to the truth and cannot be sufficient grounds for entente with Moscow. For his part, left-wing MP Tadeusz Iwiński sees the Russian decision as part of a "belated but inevitable process of Russo-Polish reconciliation"(3).

That a battery of American patriot missiles should have arrived in Poland after two years' negotiations and preparations may curtail the new entente. The American air-defence base at Morąg (about 70 km from the Russian enclave of Kaliningrad) is only to become operative in case of emergency: at any juncture it may be linked up to the chief base of Ramstein in Germany. For the time being the missiles are to remain unloaded and will serve for manoeuvres – it being the American troops' task to train their Polish counterparts. Russia has questioned the utility of deploying missiles when it adds nothing to the two countries' security or mutual trust. The missiles will not be fitted with their warheads, giving Russia some cause to wonder what they are doing on Polish soil. There have been various explanations. The missiles are meant to compensate for the failure to build the space-shield George W. Bush promised Poland and the Czech Republic but his successor Barack Obama reneged on. The Americans may also have intended this as a gesture of appreciation for the Polish contingents committed to Iraq and Afghanistan (\$).

2. vis-à-vis the European Union

The Polish political spectrum differs in its view of Russian conduct, but signs of détente continue. At an informal gathering (4th May) of foreign ministers from EU countries participating in the Eastern partnership (EP) (Ukraine, Moldova, Belarus, Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan), held at Poland's Baltic town of Sopot, minister Radosław Sikorski invited Russia to join the EP "group of friends". Since its inception the Russians have looked askance on this venture as providing a structure for European influence in the post-Soviet area. The group of friends mentioned by Sikorski may extend to include countries such as Norway, Canada, the United States and Japan. Poland tried to intercede with Georgia on this. The Georgians are for ostracizing Russia whom they suspect of not wanting to 'be friends' with EP countries or cooperate with Brussels (5).

Just as improved relations between Warsaw and Brussels could benefit Russia-EU relations as well, so greater goodwill by Brussels could provide fertile ground for strengthening the Poles' new *Ostpolitik*. Yet the twenty-fifth Russia-EU summit (June 1st) held at Rostov-on-Don, the port-city some thousand kilometres south of Moscow, ended with the merest of non-binding declarations on partnership for modernization, leaving wide open the burning issue of simplifying visa regulations (6).

Partnership for modernization entails a common agenda that ought to stimulate economic and social reforms. Some of its priorities are: bringing technical standards into line, promoting a low-carbon sustainable economy and dialoguing with civil society. Moscow and Brussels also reached an agreement over protecting secret information: on this the deputy chief of Russian secret services (FSB) Sergei Smirnov will liaise with the High Representative for EU Foreign Policy and Security, Catherine Ashton.

As for the long-term target of abolishing visas, both sides said they were committed to a concrete step forward based on a gradual approach. Actually Russian president Dmitri Medvedev told the final press conference that Russia has already handed Brussels a draft agreement on the subject. The Kremlin's view is that visas have a bad effect on all points of EU-Russia cooperation.

The idea of doing away with visas was first mooted in 2002 by the then president of Russia, Vladimir Putin. Years of negotiations ended in 2006 when Russia and the Union signed an agreement to simplify visa procurement for the Russians. Moscow is still pressing for the formality to be dropped, but there was opposition to this from Europe at Rostov-on-Don. Germany was quick to oppose fixing any definite date for eliminating visas; Poland's line was that the Union should not favour Russia: first visas should be dropped within the EP countries. In this she was voicing a complaint by EP countries who are against Russia benefiting before *they* do. Liberalization on visas is the most appetizing 'reward' the EU can offer its EP partners, though for the moment all that has been achieved is an agreement to simplify the process (7).

Russia has also expressed her readiness to support the Euro, some 40% of her reserves being in the currency (third position in the world, with 450 billion dollars). Europe has asked Moscow not to perform any operations undermining confidence in the single currency. The Euro is of particular interest to the Poles: since the Greek crisis they have tended to swing away from any hasty joining of the Euro zone, and are concerned at the lack of solidarity being shown inside the EU (8).

3. where election programmes are concerned

The programmes of the two main candidates for President of the Republic have centred on Russia. The candidate for the governing party "Civic Platform" (PO) is Bronislaw Komorowski, while for "Law and Justice" (PIS) it is Jarosław

Kaczyński, twin of the late president Lech. Komorowski has been steering the government and the alliance he represents towards a softening of Polish foreign policy towards Russia. The most surprising turn-around, though, was displayed by Kaczyński in the last weeks before the first ballot. As prime minister in 2005-2007 Kaczyński had been against any new partnership and cooperation agreement between the EU and Russia, demanding that Russia should lift the veto it had kept up on exportation of Polish meat over the previous two years; he also expected the EU to impose sanctions on Russia pending removal of that veto.

Besides the Katyn question, there had been tension between Moscow and Warsaw over whether to dedicate a section of the Auschwitz museum to the Russians who died under Nazism. Moscow and Warsaw kept arguing over the nationality of the Russian victims. Russian historians claimed that nearly half the six million Jews that died in the *shoah* were citizens of the Soviet Union. The Auschwitz museum countered that at least one million of those Jews were Polish, Rumanian or from other east European countries and only become "Soviets" after the 1939 agreement between Hitler and Stalin. The Russian press accused the Poles of wanting to "rewrite history" – especially as the Kaczyński twins had plans to inaugurate a 'Fourth Republic' and make a clean break with the communist legacy, including controversial measures such as *lustracja*.

Lo and behold, in the run-up to the presidentials Jarosław Kaczyński toned down his approach to something more balanced and moderate, showing greater tolerance towards Poland's two great neighbours, Russia and Germany. In thanking Russia for her solidarity over the Smolensk tragedy, Kaczyński emphasized the need to improve bilateral relations with Moscow. Again, at the 6th June rally on the Słubice bridge linking Poland to Germany, Kaczyński claimed that his project for Poland owed much to German Christian-Democracy after World War II. Dropping his former anti-German invective, he talked of Germany being Poland's main economic partner, so that the success of Poland's economy greatly depends on cooperation between the two countries and on stepping up both their economic and their political relations. The model to follow, he said, was the outline of Germany's *wirtschaftswunder* (or economic miracle) which produced prolonged economic growth dating from the Fifties (9).

- (1) <http://www.rusarchives.ru/>
- (2) *Prezydent Miedwiediew zapowiada, że Polska dostanie nieznane jeszcze dokumenty o Katyniu*, *Więcej*, Gazeta Wyborcza, 28-04-2010
- (3) *Russia declassifies documents related to Katyń massacre*, EurActiv, 30-04-2010
<http://www.euractiv.com/en/foreign-affairs/russia-declassifies-documents-related-katyn-massacre-news-491978>
- (4) W. Smoczyński, *Patrioci na Patriotach*, Polityka, 25-05-2010
- (5) *Georgia skeptical Russia can be 'friend' of Eastern Partnership*, Euobserver, 25-05-2010, <http://euobserver.com/9/30131>
- (6) J. Prus, *Rosja – UE: Partnerstwo dla Modernizacji, ale wciąż z wizami*, Rzeczpospolita, 02-06-2010
- (7) W. Radziwinowicz, *Szczyt Rosja - UE przyniósł niewiele*, Gazeta Wyborcza, 02-06-2010
- (8) W. M. Orłowski, *Kłopoty w strefie euro. Euro już nie błyszczy*, Polityka, 09-06-2010
- (9) D. Barański, *Kaczyński: zbudujemy chadecję jak Konrad Adenauer*, Gazeta Wyborcza, 07-06-2010