

Barriers and Breakthroughs:  
The Polish-Russian Group on Difficult Matters  
and Its Attempt at Historical Reconciliation 2002-2015

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B.A. Russian and East European Studies, University of Virginia, 2020

A Thesis presented to the Graduate Faculty  
of the University of Virginia in Candidacy for the Degree of  
Master of Arts

Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures  
(Contemporary Russian Studies)

University of Virginia  
May, 2022

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## Abstract

Poland and Russia share a troubled history that frequently appears in their political dialogue. The Polish-Russian Group on Difficult Matters was founded by the Polish and Russian governments in 2002 to help remove these historical issues from contemporary Polish-Russian relations. This thesis will evaluate if this attempt at historical reconciliation through the Polish-Russian Group on Difficult Matters was successful, what impact the group may have had on Polish-Russian historical reconciliation, and if the Russo-Georgian War in 2008, the Smolensk air disaster in 2010, and the Ukraine crisis beginning in 2013 were factors that impacted the work of the group and the general process of historical reconciliation. This study uses qualitative methods to analyze the contributions of the Group on Difficult Matters to Polish-Russian historical reconciliation. The factors that aid or damage historical reconciliation that Jerzy Wiatr identified in his work, *Polish-German Relations: The Miracle of Reconciliation*, will provide the analytical framework for this study's analysis of the work of the Polish-Russian Group on Difficult Matters and the impact of contemporary events on the process of historical reconciliation. The study finds that the Polish-Russian Group on Difficult Matters failed to achieve full historical reconciliation between Poland and Russia in the period 2008-2015, and that perceptions of history remained embedded in Polish-Russian relations. The main factor that led to the failure of the working group and its aim of historical reconciliation was opposing Polish and Russian security interests over events in Ukraine that began in 2013.

### **Acknowledgements**

I would like to extend my most sincere gratitude to Professor Dariusz Tołczyk and Professor Allen Lynch for their time, support, and guidance throughout my studies and this research project. Your eagerness to discuss my ideas at length and provide feedback on my research and writing allowed me to pursue my interests throughout my time at the university and to complete this thesis. I would also like to extend my sincere thanks to the faculty and staff of the Slavic Department, especially Professor Mark Elson and Professor Edith Clowes, for their excellent instruction and guidance throughout my time in undergraduate and graduate studies. Lastly, to my family and friends, thank you for your encouragement and support throughout my studies and research.

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## **Introduction**

Russian foreign policy enjoys a great deal of attention from policy makers and political scientists in the trans-Atlantic community. After World War II, the Soviet Union, the predecessor of the Russian Federation, held an important status in the bipolar world order as the only major opposition to American hegemony and as a major nuclear power. Although the Russian economy underwent severe depression in the 1990s and rampant corruption stymied the recovery of the state, the post-Soviet Russian Federation has remained a major actor in world politics. Poland, on the other hand, garners considerably less attention from policy makers and political scientists. This lesser degree of attention is unsurprising, as Europe contains major powers like Germany, France, and the United Kingdom. Nevertheless, Poland is an important player in Europe. Its size, population, military capabilities, member status in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the European Union (EU), and key geopolitical position make it an important member of the trans-Atlantic community, especially on the issue of relations between Russia and NATO or Russia and Europe. Poland's relationship with Russia carries weight, arguably having the potential to determine or substantially influence NATO's policy and the EU's policy towards Russia. Recognizing the importance of Polish-Russian relations and attempting to better understand them, this study focuses on the issue of historical reconciliation between Poland and Russia, examining the attempt to overcome differences in two opposing nationalist governing myths. More specifically, the purpose of this study is to evaluate the impact of the Polish-Russian Group on Difficult Matters on Polish-Russian relations between 2008 to 2015. To understand if historical reconciliation affected Polish-Russian relations or if reconciliation was rather affected by

external events in Polish-Russian relations, this study examines the progression of the discussion about twentieth-century history between Poland and Russia as it coincided with key contemporary issues, including the Russo-Georgian War in 2008, the Smolensk air crash in 2010, and the Ukraine crisis that began in 2013 and resulted in the Russian annexation of Crimea and the War in Donbas.

The research questions that this study attempts to answer are: What was the impact of the Polish-Russian Group on Difficult Matters on the relationship between Poland and Russia 2008-2015 in the area of historical reconciliation? Did significant events such as the Russo-Georgian War, the Smolensk air disaster, and the Ukraine crisis impact the work of the group or the general process of historical reconciliation? Was the attempt at historical reconciliation successful?

These questions present significant challenges to any attempt to answer them. Firstly, examining the relationship between two states and their foreign policy forces the researcher to consider the importance of factors like domestic interests, individual political figures, real material interests of the state, nationalist governing myths, and memory. Secondly, whose perception of history are we discussing when we speak about historical reconciliation? Perceptions and memories are held by individuals. Although multiple individuals can share perceptions and memories, referring to a 'nation's perception' has a sizable margin of error since some of a nation's population may have differing, indeed, sometimes opposing views. Identifying a smaller group of people is necessary—although there is inevitably generalization at even that level, the margin of error will be smaller. Thirdly, how do we measure success in historical reconciliation? The reconciliation between two countries in the realms of 'historical memory' or

‘nationalist myth’ is not as simple as the reconciliation between two sides in an armed conflict. The latter typically has some ritualistic ceremony where two authorities representing their respective sides agree to peace, while the first has no authority with the power to decide how people think. Again, perceptions and memories are held by individuals—not monolithic nations. However, national political elites can assist in guiding other individuals in their nations’ to reconciliation, and the reconciliation between political elites in both nations can almost certainly be the first step towards a more general reconciliation between their nations. For the case of this study, I will look at historical precedence: the historical reconciliation of Poland and Germany. In the literature review, I will explain the conclusions of Jerzy Wiatr on the subject of Polish-German reunification, and explain the factors that he identified that will be the measurements of success and failure of historical reconciliation in this study. Furthermore, I will focus on the actors involved in this ‘first step’ towards historical reconciliation: political elites, namely, the main political authorities in Poland and Russia and the Polish-Russian Group on Difficult Matters, made up of educated elites from both states. If these political and educated elites fail to reconcile, it would be difficult for a grassroots movement to pursue reconciliation between their nations.

These thoughts in mind, the hypothesis for this research that attempted to offer a tentative answer to the research questions was: perceptions of history remained embedded in Polish-Russian relations between 2008 and 2015 and influenced perceptions in the two states, but the main factor that determined the success or failure of Polish-Russian historical reconciliation was material power factors. To test this hypothesis, the work of the Polish-Russian Group on Difficult Matters will be compared against

simultaneous contemporary events in Polish-Russian relations. The first chapter will introduce the background of the group and the state of Polish-Russian relations from 2002 until 2008. The second chapter will examine the beginning of the group's work and determine how historical reconciliation may have interacted with the Russo-Georgian War, both of which took place in 2008. The third chapter will examine the group's work from 2009-2010, a relatively calm period of time in Polish-Russian relations, and determine if the group made any progress on historical reconciliation absent any major upset in Polish-Russian relations. The fourth chapter will examine the historical reconciliation process and how it interacted with Polish-Russian relations from 2010, when the Smolensk air crash occurred, to 2012. The fifth chapter will analyze the state of the historical reconciliation process and its relationship with the events in Ukraine 2013-2015. The sixth and final chapter will provide an account for the state of Polish-Russian historical reconciliation after 2015 and briefly discuss any foreseeable future opportunities the process of historical reconciliation to continue.

This study is relevant to political scientists and policy makers who are interested in the Polish-Russian relationship, EU-Russian relations, NATO-Russian relations, and US-Russian relations. Poland is a member state in NATO and the European Union and, geopolitically, occupies a large swath of territory between Central Europe and Russia. Consequently, the state of its relationship with Russia impacts EU and NATO member states, as well as non-member states in Eastern Europe, Belarus and Ukraine among them. Additionally, the time period of interest, 2008-2015, accounts for major events in Polish-Russian relations, including the controversy over the installation of a US-funded missile defense system in Poland, the Smolensk air disaster, the Ukraine crisis, and the

ongoing conflict in Ukraine. These issues that have arisen in the last two decades remain relevant in NATO-Russian, EU-Russian, US-Russian, and Polish-Russian relations. This study's contribution to understanding the importance of historical perceptions in the Polish-Russian relationship may aid policy makers in their attempts to design effective policy in other areas or in other relationships.

This study is also important for its contribution to the scholarly discussion on the intersection of historical perceptions, or nationalist governing myth, and foreign policy. An extensive analysis of the impact of historical reconciliation on Poland and Russia's bilateral relationship in the twenty-first century does not appear in the literature. In contrast, historical reconciliation between Germany and other states, including Poland, over twentieth-century history has enjoyed a considerable amount of attention from scholars. However, the scholarship on contemporary discussion about historical issues in Poland and Russia is typically limited to how these states' governments use collective memory and nationalist governing myth to gain domestic support or unite the country. Understanding these perceptions in the context of foreign affairs deserves more attention, especially considering the almost constant appearance of history in the rhetoric of Polish and Russian politicians.

The key terminology relevant for this study comes from sociology and political science. 'Nationalist governing myth,' a term in the discipline of sociology, grew out of discussions about 'national memory,' a term which had been used with different definitions across literature to the detriment of clarity. Additional key terms, 'ideational factors' and 'real material factors' are key to this study and come from political science.

Ascribing to specific definitions for these terms will elucidate this study's focus and argument.

This study takes the definition of the term 'nationalist governing myth' from Duncan Bell. In "Mythscape: Memory, Mythology, and National Identity," Bell challenged the inaccurate uses of the terms 'collective memory' and 'national memory.' He judged the definitions of these terms that he was encountering in the literature to be imprecise and inaccurate. Specifically, he rejected the attribution of a total memory to an entire community, especially when it is attributed to those not present at the historical event. He sought to give agency to individual actors in these communities who do not fully accept the 'collective memory' or 'national memory' that totalize people's experiences. To rectify this issue, Bell introduced a new definition for 'collective memory' and a new term 'nationalist governing mythology' and its definition, arguing that important distinctions between these two must be recognized. He defined 'collective memory,' also called 'collective remembrance,' as "the product of individuals (or groups of individuals) coming together to share memories of particular events, of time past," which, consequently, means memory "can be shared only by those who were present at the event that is being remembered."<sup>1</sup> By creating this definition, he challenged previous scholars who defined 'collective memory' as a community's "shared understanding(s), conceptualization (s), or representation(s) of past events generally considered to be vital in the forging of group identity," arguing that this definition better fits the term 'myth.'<sup>2</sup> Similarly, he criticized the use of the term 'national memory' as a "totalizing mnemonic

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<sup>1</sup> Duncan S. Bell, "Mythscape: Memory, Mythology, and National Identity," *British Journal of Sociology* 54, no. 1 (March 2003): 63–81, 65.

<sup>2</sup> Bell, "Mythscape: Memory, Mythology, and National Identity," 65.

that forms the basis of the nationalist narrative: the alleged unified, coherent memory shared amongst *all* of the people concerning *their* national past.”<sup>3</sup> Coining a new term, ‘nationalist governing myth,’ Bell offered a precise definition: “a story that simplifies, dramatizes and selectively narrates the story of a nation's past and its place in the world, its historical eschatology: a story that elucidates its contemporary meaning through (re)constructing its past”<sup>4</sup> in “the attempt to impose a definite meaning on the past, on the nation and its history.”<sup>5</sup> Since the publication of his essay, Bell’s definitions for ‘collective memory’ and ‘nationalist governing myth’ have become widely accepted among scholars in the discussion of memory. For the topic of this study, his term ‘nationalist governing myth’ is most relevant, as the Russian and Polish states maintain a definite understanding of the past in their rhetoric and have different perceptions of the same historical events—a prescribed understanding and perception of history.

Finally, the last key terms, ‘ideational factors’ and ‘real material factors,’ come from political science and are related to international relations theories. The two international relations theories relevant to this study are constructivism and realism. Both theories present different arguments for the most important factors in international relations, and therefore different arguments for what determines policymakers’ formulation of foreign policy. According to realist theory in international relations, the behavior of states can be explained by material factors, such as economic or military power, and a state’s primary aim is to consolidate and maintain power. Realism asserts that each state’s options and ability to act depend on its relative power position in the

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<sup>3</sup> Bell, “Mythscape: Memory, Mythology, and National Identity,” 74.

<sup>4</sup> Bell, “Mythscape: Memory, Mythology, and National Identity,” 75.

<sup>5</sup> Bell, “Mythscape: Memory, Mythology, and National Identity,” 74.

international system—how its economic, military, political, and technological capabilities compare to those of other states.<sup>6</sup> The constructivist theory in international relations presents the argument that material factors cannot solely explain the behavior of states, and that ideational factors drive state behavior. Constructivism supposes that intangible factors like values, culture, ideas, and norms significantly influence how a state's leaders understand and assess their situation, therefore affecting whatever policies they choose to adopt in response to their situation.<sup>7</sup>

### **Literature Review**

This section will present an overview of the key literature related to the questions of this study. The relevant literature covers the role of 'national myth' in Poland and Russia, historical reconciliation between Poland and Russia, and real issues in contemporary Polish-Russian relations. These authors' arguments were the main literature that informed my approach to this study.

Prizel's book, *National Identity and Foreign Policy: Nationalism and Leadership in Poland, Russia and Ukraine*, explores the interaction between national identity and foreign policy in Poland and Russia, mainly focusing on the twentieth century. He believes this relationship between national identity and foreign policy cannot be ignored because national identity only exists in opposition to the 'Other' and, therefore, has an impact on policy formulation. Prizel presents the argument that the weak political institutions in Poland, Russia, and Ukraine and weak civil societies have prompted the states to rely upon 'national identity' as a source of societal cohesion, exacerbating its

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<sup>6</sup> Joanna A. Gorska, *Dealing with a Juggernaut: Analyzing Poland's Policy toward Russia, 1989-2009* (Lanham, MD, UNITED STATES: Lexington Books, 2010), 21-22.

<sup>7</sup> Gorska, *Dealing with a Juggernaut: Analyzing Poland's Policy toward Russia, 1989-2009*, 19-20.



influence on foreign policy.<sup>8</sup> He argues that the rise of ‘nativist national identity’ in Poland and Russia in the twentieth century allows the states to extend nationalism to the popular level, not restricting it to the elite like earlier ‘messianic nationalism,’ and to pursue their real material interests in foreign policy and emphasize defense of the nation against neighboring states, rather than messianic struggle.<sup>9</sup> Prizel warned about the directions Poland and Russia may take after the 1990s, when he wrote this book. He argues Poland may turn to anti-modernist popularism if its ‘return to Europe’ does not go as it expects, and could contribute to the rise of populism in Ukraine and Lithuania and reintroduce Poland as a ‘grey zone’ between Germany and Russia.<sup>10</sup> In Russia, he argues, that national identity is weak and still feeling the repercussions of the fall of the USSR, bring up some feelings of historical nostalgia. He warns that “the rhetoric of ‘defensive’ and ‘restorative’ nationalism could become aggressive” because of the cognitive dissonance among Russian mass politics and revisionist ideas of the elites.<sup>11</sup> Ultimately, Prizel’s work indicates the power of nationalism in Russia and Poland, and how it can influence the behavior of states on the world stage.

Gorska makes the argument that Polish foreign policy towards Russia 1989-2009 can best be interpreted as defensive realism in her book, *Dealing with a Juggernaut: Analyzing Poland’s Policy toward Russia, 1989-2009*. She rejects the argument that

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<sup>8</sup> Ilya Prizel, *National Identity and Foreign Policy: Nationalism and Leadership in Poland, Russia and Ukraine*, Cambridge Russian, Soviet and Post-Soviet Studies (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 413.

<sup>9</sup> Prizel, *National Identity and Foreign Policy: Nationalism and Leadership in Poland, Russia and Ukraine*, 415.

<sup>10</sup> Prizel, *National Identity and Foreign Policy: Nationalism and Leadership in Poland, Russia and Ukraine*, 420.

<sup>11</sup> Prizel, *National Identity and Foreign Policy: Nationalism and Leadership in Poland, Russia and Ukraine*, 424.

“history-derived ideational factors” significantly impacted Polish foreign policy and that these factors were rather used by Polish politicians domestically to clarify foreign policy or to reject policy adjustments that Russia preferred.<sup>12</sup> Although she accepted that ideational factors had some influence, she argues that material power considerations drove Polish foreign policy, evidenced in the Polish government’s cooperative and non-cooperative policies on four significant issues that she examined. Polish politicians pursued a cooperative policy on the issues of the Soviet military pullout in the 1990s and energy policy, making policy adjustments in line with Russia’s preferred policies when they perceived moderate security pressures.<sup>13</sup> They pursued non-cooperative policies on the issues of NATO membership and the Katyn issue, when non-cooperative policy better served Polish policymakers’ material power considerations. Gorska’s analysis and conclusion that Polish foreign policy from 1989-2009 can best be understood through the lens of realism provides a reliable scholar’s argument about Polish foreign policy in the lead up to this study’s main area of interest. Additionally, her point that ‘ideational factors’ were most at play in the Katyn issue compared to all other cases raises the question of how much impact do ideational factors have on historical reconciliation? This study intends to explore this question.

Taras’ article, “Russia Resurgent, Russophobia in Decline? Polish Perceptions of Relations with the Russian Federation 2004–2012” examines Polish elites’ and citizens’ attitudes towards Russia from 2004 to 2012 from public opinion surveys and how these attitudes may have impacted Polish policy toward Russia. Taras found that, generally,

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<sup>12</sup> Joanna A. Gorska, *Dealing with a Juggernaut: Analyzing Poland’s Policy toward Russia, 1989-2009* (Lanham, MD, UNITED STATES: Lexington Books, 2010), 17.

<sup>13</sup> Gorska, *Dealing with a Juggernaut: Analyzing Poland’s Policy toward Russia, 1989-2009*, 156.

Polish citizens' attitudes toward Russia became more favorable over time, and "Russians' favourable ratings doubled between 1993 and 2011."<sup>14</sup> However, he argues the main source Polish negative attitudes toward Russia is "sensitivity to the Russian state's international behavior."<sup>15</sup> The 2008 Russo-Georgian War and the disruption in Russian gas supplies to Europe contributed to an increase in negative attitudes of Poles toward Russia, but that the Smolensk air crash in April 2010 did not follow this same pattern. Rather, a survey conducted in May 2010 indicated that Poles appreciated the reaction of the Russian state and citizenry to the crash and maintained positive views of Russia—29% thought Polish-Russian relations were good, and 15% said they were bad.<sup>16</sup> However, surveys from September indicated that the earlier positive opinions diminished: only 19% of Poles said Polish-Russian relations were good and 28% said they were bad.<sup>17</sup> Taras believes this shift is because "Some of the conspiracy theories of a Russian hand in the plane crash had clearly gained adherents over the summer and the polarisation deepened during the Presidential election campaign."<sup>18</sup> As for how these attitudes impacted foreign policy, he argues that ideational factors played a role in Polish foreign policy between 2005 and 2007 because of the influence of the Kaczyński brothers, as "The social construction of Russia as adversary was critical to the election, then survival,

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<sup>14</sup> Raymond Taras, "Russia Resurgent, Russophobia in Decline? Polish Perceptions of Relations with the Russian Federation 2004–2012," *Europe-Asia Studies* 66, no. 5 (July 2014): 710–34, 718.

<sup>15</sup> Taras, "Russia Resurgent, Russophobia in Decline? Polish Perceptions of Relations with the Russian Federation 2004–2012," 718.

<sup>16</sup> Taras, "Russia Resurgent, Russophobia in Decline? Polish Perceptions of Relations with the Russian Federation 2004–2012," 719.

<sup>17</sup> Taras, "Russia Resurgent, Russophobia in Decline? Polish Perceptions of Relations with the Russian Federation 2004–2012," 719.

<sup>18</sup> Taras, "Russia Resurgent, Russophobia in Decline? Polish Perceptions of Relations with the Russian Federation 2004–2012," 719.

of the conservative government for these two years.”<sup>19</sup> Taras argues the ‘Polish exceptionalism’ and anti-Russian stance promoted under the Kaczyński brothers strained not only Polish-Russian relations, but also Polish-EU and Polish-German relations. He cited the Kaczyński brothers’ strong support for EU and NATO membership for Georgia and Ukraine as evidence of their antagonization of Russia.<sup>20</sup> However, he argues that Tusk’s approach of personal diplomacy and steady rapprochement with Russia to be more popular amongst the Polish population, contributing to Civil Platform’s success in the 2007 and 2011 parliamentary elections and Poland’s improved dialogue with Russia.<sup>21</sup> The Kaczyński brothers’ approach, in his opinion, is not in Poland’s interests and is only appealing to the older generation of Poles.<sup>22</sup> Taras’ article exhibits the complicated perceptions of Russia in Poland among political elites and average citizens. His observations and arguments in his time frame of interest, 2004-2012, will contribute to this study’s understanding of Polish perceptions and how they may have affected or been affected by Polish-Russian historical reconciliation. However, one must also consider his argument in the context of what happened after 2012—Law and Justice, Jarosław Kaczyński’s party, won the majority of Sejm seats in the 2015 parliamentary elections and has remained in power to the present. This indicates that Taras’ argument that a majority of Poles dislike Kaczyński’s negative perception of Russia and

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<sup>19</sup> Taras, “Russia Resurgent, Russophobia in Decline? Polish Perceptions of Relations with the Russian Federation 2004–2012,” 724.

<sup>20</sup> Taras, “Russia Resurgent, Russophobia in Decline? Polish Perceptions of Relations with the Russian Federation 2004–2012,” 727.

<sup>21</sup> Taras, “Russia Resurgent, Russophobia in Decline? Polish Perceptions of Relations with the Russian Federation 2004–2012,” 730.

<sup>22</sup> Taras, “Russia Resurgent, Russophobia in Decline? Polish Perceptions of Relations with the Russian Federation 2004–2012,” 731-2.

Russophobic rhetoric may need to be reconsidered or that Polish attitudes changed after 2012.

In his article, “Russia: Power and History,” Alexei Miller discusses ‘historical politics’ in post-communist Poland and Russia, among other states. He argues that the politicization of history is inevitable at an individual level, beginning with historians who are influenced by their research, the contemporary social situation, or their identity and personal beliefs.<sup>23</sup> However, he focuses specifically on the state-level ‘politics of memory,’ a term which he defines as regulation of collective memory: “commemoration [...], the focusing of attention on certain historical themes and the suppression or marginalization of others, and the payment of pensions to veterans of certain wars but not to veterans of others.”<sup>24</sup> The state plays an important role in regulating this memory through controlling access to state archives, determining history education in schools, and funding historical research and museums.<sup>25</sup> Miller focuses mainly on Russia and identifies its government as taking an active role in regulating this memory, using all of the aforementioned tools of memory regulation, especially restricting access to state archives under the control of security services, and institutionalizing memory regulation in the Commission to Counteract Attempts to Harm Russia’s Interests by Falsifying History in 2009.<sup>26</sup> Although he focuses less on Poland, Miller mentions the Institute of National Remembrance, created in 1998, as a Polish government institution with a similar purpose, and argues that the Polish government also pursues similar methods of memory

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<sup>23</sup> Alexei Miller, “Russia: Power and History,” *Russian Politics & Law* 48, no. 4 (August 7, 2010): 8–34, 8–9.

<sup>24</sup> Miller, “Russia: Power and History,” 10.

<sup>25</sup> Miller, “Russia: Power and History,” 10.

<sup>26</sup> Miller, “Russia: Power and History,” 25–26.

regulation. Miller's article indicates the seriousness with which Poland and Russia treat the creation of a common interpretation of history to use for political purposes. His topic and time period coincide with the focus of this study, so his contributions about the tools and methods of memory regulation and its political purpose will be considered in this study's analysis and evaluation of Polish-Russian historical reconciliation.

Although this study focuses on Polish-Russian historical reconciliation, Jerzy Wiatr's book, *Polish-German Relations: The Miracle of Reconciliation*, on the Polish-German relationship offers an example of successful historical reconciliation in the past few decades. His analysis of Poland and Germany's relationship after World War II to 2014 indicates what is necessary for historical reconciliation to be successful and what may hinder that process. Despite the enormous obstacles that stood in the way of reconciliation—the Oder-Neisse line controversy, psychological repercussions of World War II, the impact of the geopolitics of the Cold War, and the attitudes of citizens in both states—Poland and Germany were able to overcome them. Wiatr credits the efforts of private citizens and religious institutions, the Federal Republic of Germany's recognition of Poland's western territory, the removal of negative stereotypes from education in history, the agreement between the Polish and German states on mutual national interests, and the growth of personal contact between states for the success of reconciliation. Wiatr also suggests factors that slow or potentially reverse the process of reconciliation: unwillingness or inability to understand the other party's perspective, domestic pressures that interfere with political figures' attempts to improve relations, persistent negative stereotypes, and the influence of nationalist political parties and their rhetoric. His identification of these aspects of bilateral relations as either conducive or damaging to

reconciliation between two states will be used in my study to evaluate the successes and failures of the most recent Polish-Russian attempt at historical reconciliation.

In his article, “The Politics of the Past: Polish-Soviet and Polish-Russian Efforts at Historical Reconciliation,” George Soroka analyzes Soviet and post-Soviet attempts at historical reconciliation between Russia and Poland from the 1980s on. The purpose of his investigation was to discover why these historical commissions were created, how the expectations for them changed over time, and if these efforts were successful in reconciling historical issues and improving Polish-Russian relations. Soroka argues that the commissions’ “success or failure was conditioned on political factors they could not control or, in many instances, even adequately anticipate.”<sup>27</sup> He believes that geopolitical factors and the political parties in power in Russian and Poland affect these commissions’ potentials for success. After examining the different failed attempts, Soroka concludes that “it is difficult to imagine how a genuinely constructive dialogue about the past can occur in the foreseeable future” since both states are embracing nationalist rhetoric.<sup>28</sup> He notes that while commission members displayed cooperation and agreement in their work, Polish and Russian governments do not reflect this in their rhetoric, indicating that this is not a scholarly issue, but a political one.<sup>29</sup> The questions that Soroka offers answers to in his research are very similar to the ones this study proposes to answer. This study can be interpreted as a test of his findings, contributing a separate analysis of the years 2008-2015 that investigates historical reconciliation in this period at a deeper level

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<sup>27</sup> George Soroka, “The Politics of the Past: Polish-Soviet and Polish-Russian Efforts at Historical Reconciliation,” *Problems of Post-Communism*, January 25, 2021, 1–18, 9.

<sup>28</sup> Soroka, “The Politics of the Past: Polish-Soviet and Polish-Russian Efforts at Historical Reconciliation,” 12.

<sup>29</sup> Soroka, “The Politics of the Past: Polish-Soviet and Polish-Russian Efforts at Historical Reconciliation,” 4, 11-12.

and offers conclusions and evidence to assess the accuracy of Soroka's conclusions for this period.

### **Boundaries**

This study explores the results of work of the Polish-Russian Group on Difficult Issues, which sought to resolve conflict between Poland and Russia over historical issues, and examines how significant events 2008-2015 may have impacted the group and progress towards its goals. Boundaries for the research included the time period of interest, the historical period brought up in discourse, which contemporary events will be examined for their impact on the historical reconciliation process, and the extent to which these contemporary events will be discussed. The time boundary, 2008 to 2015, includes key events in Polish-Russian relations during the post-Soviet period, and will be the focus of this study. An understanding of the developments of Polish-Russian relations since the fall of the Soviet Union are necessary to understand the chief themes of their relationship, but including them in this study is not necessary to reach conclusions about the period of 2008-2015. Events in twentieth-century history between Poland and Russia were the main historical issues studied by the Polish-Russian Group and Difficult Matters, as twentieth-century history is the most disputed and contested period in post-Soviet Polish-Russian relations. Detailed analysis of these historical issues will be outside the boundaries of this study, however, since this study seeks to examine Polish-Russian dialogue on these issues rather than the issues themselves. In-depth analyses of the Orange Revolution, the Russian Georgian War, the Smolensk air crash, and the Ukraine crisis events and the Polish and Russians reactions to them also fall outside the boundaries of this research. Providing thorough analyses of these events is not necessary



to examine if or how they impacted the Polish-Russian Group on Difficult Matters. Brief explanations of these events and the general reactions of the Polish and Russian governments may be necessary, however, to understand the general political environment surrounding the working group.

### **Methodology**

The data and evidence for this study came from Polish and Russian government documents, including press releases and publications, transcripts of speeches by prominent political and government figures, news articles from state-owned media organizations in Poland and Russia, remarks from members of the working group, Polish-Russian Group on Difficult Matters, and other relevant political or cultural figures. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Poland, and the Polish Institute of International Affairs maintain websites with archives that give access to past press releases, interviews, and speeches from government officials that are pertinent to the research topic. The official communiques from meetings of the Polish-Russian Group on Difficult Matters, published in the group's work, *White Spots--Black Spots: Difficult Matters in Polish-Russian Relations, 1918-2008*, were the main sources for understanding the group's activities. Additionally, state-owned media organizations, such as the *Polish Press Agency* (PAP, *Polska Agencja Prasowa*) and the *Russian News Agency TASS* (TASS, *Информационного агентства России «ТАСС»*), maintain archives of articles and interviews accessible online that are relevant to the key events mentioned in the research questions and often published information from government representatives and interviews with key figures. These sources were chosen, as they may most accurately reflect the sentiments of the Polish and

Russian states or the Polish-Russian Group on Difficult Matters, and indicate how genuinely each state desired to reach a mutual understanding on the topic of common history and what the status of the working group was throughout its activities.

The evaluation of sources and appropriate analysis were vital to producing accurate answers to this study's research questions. The examination of the government-sponsored yet autonomous Polish-Russian Group on Difficult Matters and the foreign policies of Russia and Poland required finding appropriate sources that accurately reflected the work of the group and the state of Polish-Russian relations. To understand the relationship between the Russian and Polish governments, reliable secondary sources or official statements from government officials or publications on official government websites were the primary sources for this study to understand the positions of the Polish and Russian governments on issues and to analyze their relationship. State news agencies served a similar purpose as sources that reflected government agenda and stance, but this study assumes that they do not provide the same level of certainty as foreign ministries' websites that their materials reflected the official government stance. To understand the work of the Polish-Russian Group on Difficult Matters, the primary sources mainly came from the websites of MGIMO, a Russian state university, *Gazeta Wyborcza*, *TASS*, and *PAP*, which published articles written by members of group and interviews of members or relevant government officials in the Polish and Russian foreign ministries. The group's publication, *White Spots--Black Spots: Difficult Matters in Polish-Russian Relations, 1918-2008*, also acted as a primary source in providing communiques from after group meetings. Information about contemporary events in Russian-Polish relations came from initial reports on the events from state news agencies, statements from relevant

government officials, and secondary sources that reflect the commonly accepted understanding of these events in scholarship.

The qualitative method of content analysis was the method by which primary source data was analyzed and evaluated. To evaluate the data, its source, content, and date of creation were all considered to determine the data's validity, potential bias, and implication for this study's hypothesis. To determine whether the work of the Polish-Russian Group on Difficult Matters had any positive or negative impact on the process of historical reconciliation, the work of the group was compared against the factors that Jerzy Wiatr identified in his work, *Polish-German Relations: The Miracle of Reconciliation*, as impacting Polish-German historical reconciliation. Similarly, to determine if contemporary events such as the Russo-Georgian War, the Smolensk air disaster, and the Ukraine crisis impacted Polish-Russian historical reconciliation, political issues surrounding these events were compared against Jerzy Wiatr's factors. Polish and Russian national interests for these events, evident in political actions or speeches from major political figures, were also considered to determine if these events would have had a major impact on Polish-Russian relations and, by extension, the reconciliation process.

The factors that Wiatr identified as positively impacting the reconciliation process were adjusted for the Polish-Russian context: the efforts of private citizens and religious institutions, concessions by either nation to peacefully resolve disputes, the removal of negative stereotypes from education in history, the agreement between Poland and Russia on mutual national interests, and the growth of personal contact between them. The factors that Wiatr identified as slowing or potentially reversing the process of reconciliation in the Polish-Russian context are: unwillingness or inability to understand

the other party's perspective, domestic pressures that interfere with political figures' attempts to improve relations, persistent negative stereotypes, and the influence of nationalist political parties and their rhetoric.

### **The Polish-Russian Group on Difficult Matters and Contemporary Issues in Russian-Polish Relations**

#### **2002-2008: Background of the Polish-Russian Group on Difficult Matters**

This section will provide the background to the work of the Polish-Russian Group on Difficult Matters, explaining its origins, its initial purpose, and why the beginning of its work was delayed. Brief overviews of the Katyń massacre of 1940 and the Polish-Soviet Joint Historical Commission that functioned between 1987-1987 will be presented before examining the initiation the Polish-Russian Group on Difficult Matters in 2002. The impact of contemporary issues in Polish-Russian relations between 2002 and 2008 is evident, and the later part of this section will examine how the Orange Revolution 2004-2005 became a major event that brought up larger differences in Polish and Russian foreign policies and damaged Polish-Russian relations, including the newly formed Polish-Russian Group on Difficult Matters.

One cannot speak of Polish-Russian relations after the Second World War, and especially about historical reconciliation, without acknowledging the legacy of the Katyń massacre. The Katyń massacre was the mass murder of around 21,800 Polish prisoners of war by the People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs (NKVD) in the spring of 1940 at NKVD POW camps in Kozelsk, Ostashkov, Starobelsk, and other NKVD jails in the Belorussian Soviet Socialist Republic (SSR) and the western part of the Ukrainian

SSR.<sup>30</sup> The memorandum proposing the mass executions had been submitted by Lavrenti Beria, USSR People's Commissar of Internal Affairs, and was approved by the Politburo on March 5, 1940.<sup>31</sup> The document bears the signatures of Stalin, Voroshilov, Mikoyan, Beria, and the names of Kalinin and Kaganovich to indicate their approval of the action.<sup>32</sup> The victims were mainly Polish military officers and police, but intelligence agents, clergy, landowners, and state officials were also among them.<sup>33</sup> The officers murdered at Katyn included more reservist officers than regular and retired officers combined, so most were not professional soldiers, but professors, doctors, judges, lawyers, engineers, journalists, and teachers who had been called up to defend Poland in the war.<sup>34</sup> The few that managed to evade execution were Polish privates who were sent home and privates and non-commissioned officers from ethnic minorities, such as Germans, Czechs, Belarusians, Ukrainians, and Jews with the exception of Jews from Nazi-occupied areas of Poland, who ended up in the hands of the Nazis and, therefore, most likely murdered.<sup>35</sup>

The Nazis discovered the mass graves in 1943, exhuming bodies and personal documents found with them. Concluding that this was a Soviet crime, they capitalized on the murder of these Poles, using the crime as propaganda to incite Poles against the Soviets. For decades, the Soviets concealed the truth of their responsibility for the

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<sup>30</sup> Anna M. Cienciala, Natalia Sergeevna Lebedeva, and Wojciech Materski, eds., *Katyn: A Crime Without Punishment*, trans. Marian Schwartz, Anna Cienciala, and Maia Kipp, Annals of Communism (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 1.

<sup>31</sup> Beria to Joseph Stalin, memorandum accepted by the Politburo, 5 March 1940, in "PART I: Prisoners of an Undeclared War, 23 August 1939–5 March 1940," *Katyn: A Crime Without Punishment*, ed. Anna M. Cienciala, Natalia Sergeevna Lebedeva, trans. Marian Schwartz, Anna Cienciala, and Maia Kipp, 118-120.

<sup>32</sup> Beria to Joseph Stalin, memorandum accepted by the Politburo, 5 March 1940, in "PART I: Prisoners of an Undeclared War, 23 August 1939–5 March 1940," *Katyn: A Crime Without Punishment*, ed. Anna M. Cienciala, Natalia Sergeevna Lebedeva, trans. Marian Schwartz, Anna Cienciala, and Maia Kipp, 120.

<sup>33</sup> Cienciala, Lebedeva, and Materski, *Katyn: A Crime Without Punishment*, 27.

<sup>34</sup> Cienciala, Lebedeva, and Materski, *Katyn: A Crime Without Punishment*, 29-31.

<sup>35</sup> Cienciala, Lebedeva, and Materski, *Katyn: A Crime Without Punishment*, 27-28.

massacre, opting to blame the Nazis for the war crime. It is probable that Khrushchev ordered the destruction of personal documents of the victims and the Troika decisions to remove evidence of Soviet responsibility.<sup>36</sup> Throughout the existence of the Polish People's Republic, many Poles quietly bore the burden of the murder of these servicemen and servicewoman in addition to the murder and deportation of millions of other Polish citizens by the Nazis and Soviets throughout the war. The majority of Katyn victims were poor gentry in the intelligentsia—the main population that produced Poland's political, cultural, religious, and intellectual leadership and that directed the future of the nation.<sup>37</sup> The Nazis had targeted this same group of Poles to cripple any organized Polish resistance to German occupation and to exploit the disorganized and uneducated Polish population for forced labor. For the Soviets, these groups of Poles were counter-revolutionaries and a threat to Soviet domination over Poland as patriots who wanted an independent Poland, which is why historians who have investigated the massacre and subsequent cover-up generally agree that the victims stood no chance of surviving the war.<sup>38</sup> Katyn left a tangible effect on Poland with the loss of thousands of patriotic, educated Poles, but it also imprinted on the Polish psyche, becoming a symbol of the trauma inflicted on the nation during the Second World War and subsequent Soviet domination in the communist period. It is not surprise that the massacre became a friction-point in the Polish-Soviet relationship during *glasnost*—once Poles faced less consequences for speaking openly about it—and the Polish-Russian relationship after the fall of the Soviet Union.

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<sup>36</sup> Cienciala, Lebedeva, and Materski, *Katyn: A Crime Without Punishment*, 241.

<sup>37</sup> Cienciala, Lebedeva, and Materski, *Katyn: A Crime Without Punishment*, 25.

<sup>38</sup> Cienciala, Lebedeva, and Materski, *Katyn: A Crime Without Punishment*, 42-147.

The Polish-Soviet Joint Historical Commission, founded in 1987 and operating until 1989, aimed to reconcile Polish and Soviet historical perspectives in an effort by both countries' leadership to legitimize Wojciech Jaruzelski's leadership in the politically tumultuous Polish People's Republic and to improve intra-Bloc relations.<sup>3940</sup> Its body was composed of Polish and Soviet Party and army historians, its meetings were conducted privately, and the historical issues it discussed included the 1920 Polish-Soviet War, the outbreak of World War II, and, although it was not on the agenda at first, Katyń.<sup>41</sup> However, the commission failed to reach an agreement about responsibility for the Katyń massacre and only led to louder public demands in Poland for a genuine examination of history, putting more pressure on Jaruzelski's government rather than increase its popularity.<sup>42</sup> Elizabeth Valkenier argues that tensions between the Polish and Soviet sides in the commission led to its failure. The Polish side was struggling to maintain popular legitimacy and survive the political instability that threatened its existence, pushing it to demand candor and publicity in the commission about historical issues.<sup>43</sup> The Soviet side, however, did not have an interested public and, therefore, did not face popular demands for transparency. So, the Soviets refused to admit to the NVKD's execution of Poles at Katyń and generally condemned the Polish demands for Soviet repentance, as admitting to its past crimes would add to the debates about de-Stalinization in the USSR.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Elizabeth K. Valkenier, "Historiography and Liberalization in Polish-Soviet Relations," in *Final Report to National Council for Soviet and East European Research* (Columbia University, 1989), v, 4.

<sup>40</sup> Cienciala, Lebedeva, and Materski, *Katyn: A Crime Without Punishment*, 245.

<sup>41</sup> Elizabeth K. Valkenier, "Historiography and Liberalization in Polish-Soviet Relations," in *Final Report to National Council for Soviet and East European Research*, v-vii.

<sup>42</sup> Elizabeth K. Valkenier, "Historiography and Liberalization in Polish-Soviet Relations," in *Final Report to National Council for Soviet and East European Research*, vi-vii.

<sup>43</sup> Elizabeth K. Valkenier, "Historiography and Liberalization in Polish-Soviet Relations," in *Final Report to National Council for Soviet and East European Research*, viii, 4.

<sup>44</sup> Elizabeth K. Valkenier, "Historiography and Liberalization in Polish-Soviet Relations," in *Final Report to National Council for Soviet and East European Research*, 16-7.

Valkenier states three probable reasons for the failure of the Soviets to admit to the NKVD's responsibility for Katyń:

1. *Legal*: killing interned officers is a crime under the Nuremberg statutes and would make the USSR liable to legal prosecution for compensation. According to one Polish source (closely in touch with the Soviet Institute of State and Law), Gorbachev, before his official visit to Poland, consulted with experts and, after finding out about Soviet legal liability, changed his mind about admitting Soviet responsibility.

2. *Diplomatic*: Stalin used the persistent demands of Sikorsky's London government-in-exile for explanation on Katyń as an excuse to break diplomatic relations and to start organizing in earnest a more pliant regime for Poland, located in the USSR. Admission of Soviet responsibility for Katyń would make Stalin's action groundless and cast considerable shadow over the foundations for the postwar Polish-Soviet "alliance."

3. *Political*: undermining the "legitimacy" of the nucleus government formed in the USSR after the break in diplomatic relations would undermine the legitimacy of the current Communist government in Warsaw, its direct descendant.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Elizabeth K. Valkenier, "Historiography and Liberalization in Polish-Soviet Relations," in *Final Report to National Council for Soviet and East European Research*, 24-5.



Any one of these reasons would make the Soviet's acknowledgement of the USSR's responsibility for the massacre unlikely, and all of them together would make it almost impossible. The Polish-Soviet Joint Historical Commission was not able to address the Pole's most important 'blank spot' in their mutual history, and the commission's work was largely constrained by the its members' need to remain ideologically and politically in line with their governments. The largest success in the attempt at reconciliation was that it had been attempted, that a bilateral working group was created to address the issues. The precedent it set—acknowledging the importance of dialogue on these historic issues to reconcile Polish-Soviet historical perceptions—would leave an example for the future Russian Federation and the Republic of Poland to imitate.

Ultimately, the Soviet admission of responsibility for Katyn' came not as a result of a joint working group, but from Gorbachev's policy of *glasnost*, which had allowed more access to Soviet archives, and an ultimatum from Jaruzelski.<sup>46</sup> In 1989, three Russian historians were given access to the Soviet archives, and within only a few months found materials on Polish prisoners of war with multiple indications that these prisoners were the same as those found in mass graves in Katyn'.<sup>47</sup> Natalia Lebedeva, one of the historians who had access to the archives and who would later become a member of the Polish-Russian Group on Difficult Matters, gave an unauthorized interview and some of the archival materials to *Moskovskie Novosti* [*Moscow News*] in March 1990, which were published to the surprise and anger of the Party.<sup>48</sup> To add to the pressure on the Soviet Union, in early 1990, Jaruzelski threatened that he would not proceed with his

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<sup>46</sup> Cienciala, Lebedeva, and Materski, *Katyn: A Crime Without Punishment*, 251.

<sup>47</sup> Cienciala, Lebedeva, and Materski, *Katyn: A Crime Without Punishment*, 250.

<sup>48</sup> Cienciala, Lebedeva, and Materski, *Katyn: A Crime Without Punishment*, 252.

official trip to Moscow that April unless the Soviet Union officially declared responsibility for Katyn.<sup>49</sup> With no recourse available, the Soviet Union officially accepted responsibility for the Katyn massacre on April 13, 1990: Gorbachev handed over the NKVD lists of prisoners who had been executed in the spring of 1940 to Jaruzelski on his state visit to Moscow, and the Soviet news agency *TASS*, declared that the NKVD, specifically Beria and Merkulov, were responsible for about 15,000 prisoners who had disappeared.<sup>50</sup>

Understanding this background, one can see that an organized attempt to reconcile Polish and Russian historical grievances was not new to the twenty-first century. In January 2002, President Putin made his first official visit to Poland. The meetings with President Aleksander Kwaśniewski went well—Putin at one point stated, “There are no irritating factors in relations between Russia and Poland now.”<sup>51</sup> Both leaders affirmed their commitment to improving the relationship between their nations and discussed trade and economic issues, as well as Russia’s desire for the geographically separated region of Kaliningrad to remain unaffected by EU enlargement.<sup>52</sup> In addition to these economic and territorial issues, historical issues in Polish-Russian relations were discussed during the visit and the Polish-Russian Group on Difficult Matters was born. Adam Daniel

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<sup>49</sup> Cienciala, Lebedeva, and Materski, *Katyn: A Crime Without Punishment*, 251-252.

<sup>50</sup> Cienciala, Lebedeva, and Materski, *Katyn: A Crime Without Punishment*, 252-253.

<sup>51</sup> “Putin nazval minuvshee desjatiletie v otnoshenijah mezhdu RF i Pol’shej ‘periodom upushhennyh vozmozhnostej’” Путин назвал минувшее десятилетие в отношениях между РФ и Польшей ‘периодом упущенных возможностей’. [Putin called the past decade of relations between Russia and Poland ‘a period of missed opportunities’], *ITAR TASS*, January 16, 2002, <http://global.factiva.com/redir/default.aspx?P=sa&an=tassru0020020121dy1g0033f&cat=a&ep=ASE>.

<sup>52</sup> “Kompleks dvustoronnih i mezhdunarodnyh problem obsudili v Moskve Vladimir Putin i Aleksander Kvas'nevskij” Комплекс двусторонних и международных проблем обсудили в Москве Владимир Путин и Александр Квасьневский [A range of bilateral and international issues were discussed by Vladimir Putin and Aleksander Kwasniewski in Moscow], *ITAR TASS*, June 6, 2002, <http://global.factiva.com/redir/default.aspx?P=sa&an=tassru0020020607dy66000xg&cat=a&ep=ASE>.

Rotfeld and Anatoly Torkunov, the chairs of the group appointed in 2007, later described the joint group's creation as an attempt to overcome the obstacle of historical issues in their present attempts to develop their relationship.<sup>53</sup> The original group, made up of Polish and Russian government officials, officially met twice in Moscow, first in November 2002, then in June 2005.<sup>54</sup> Despite the Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Sergei Lavrov, and the Polish Minister of Foreign Affairs, Adam Daniel Rotfeld, expressing their desire for the group to continue its work after the June 2005 meeting, the group would not meet again until 2008 with an entirely new set of members.<sup>55</sup>

Over the few years after Vladimir Putin's optimistic 2002 visit to Poland, Polish-Russian relations went through difficult trials—the Orange Revolution that began in November 2004, the 2005 Russian ban on Polish meat and plant exports, the Polish opposition to the Nord Stream pipelines, and increased tension over historical issues. The Orange Revolution, in particular, created rifts in the relationship that negatively impacted any progress the newly founded Polish-Russian Group on Difficult Matters could make in historical reconciliation. The following paragraphs will explore the Polish and Russian policies towards Ukraine during the 2004 Ukrainian presidential election and explain

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<sup>53</sup> Adam Daniel Rotfeld and Anatoly V. Torkunov, *White Spots—Black Spots: Difficult Matters in Polish-Russian Relations, 1918-2008* (Pittsburgh PA, UNITED STATES: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2015), 2.

<sup>54</sup> Denis Mironyuk and Krzysztof Żegota, “Działalność Polsko-Rosyjskiej Grupy Do Spraw Trudnych Na Rzecz Przewycięzania Różnic w Ocenie Historii Stosunków Polsko-Rosyjskich: Geneza - Przebieg Współpracy - Osiągnięcia [Activities of the Polish-Russian Difficult Matters Group for Overcoming Differences in the Assessment of the History of Polish-Russian Relations: Origin - Course of Cooperation - Achievements],” in *Polityka Pomnikowa w Polsce Wobec Poradzieckich Miejsc Pamięci* [Monument Policy in Poland Towards Post-Soviet Memorials], ed. Arkadiusz Żukowski et al. (Olsztyn: Instytut Nauk Politycznych Uniwersytetu Warmińsko-Mazurskiego w Olsztynie, 2016), 142-3.

<sup>55</sup> Denis Mironyuk and Krzysztof Żegota, “Działalność Polsko-Rosyjskiej Grupy Do Spraw Trudnych Na Rzecz Przewycięzania Różnic w Ocenie Historii Stosunków Polsko-Rosyjskich: Geneza - Przebieg Współpracy - Osiągnięcia [Activities of the Polish-Russian Difficult Matters Group for Overcoming Differences in the Assessment of the History of Polish-Russian Relations: Origin - Course of Cooperation - Achievements],” in *Polityka Pomnikowa w Polsce Wobec Poradzieckich Miejsc Pamięci* [Monument Policy in Poland Towards Post-Soviet Memorials], ed. Arkadiusz Żukowski et al. (Olsztyn: Instytut Nauk Politycznych Uniwersytetu Warmińsko-Mazurskiego w Olsztynie, 2016), 142.

how their contrasting policies worsened their relationship and increased tension over historical issues.

The 2004 Orange Revolution in Ukraine became a major, contentious issue in the Polish-Russian relationship. The November 2004 Ukrainian presidential election that pronounced Viktor Yanukovich as the victor faced serious allegations of corruption and election fraud. Hundreds of thousands of Ukrainians attended protests in Kyiv and other cities across Ukraine, wearing and parading the color orange in support of the opposition candidate, Viktor Yushchenko.<sup>56</sup> In early December, the Ukrainian Supreme Court ruled the 21 November election fraudulent and ordered a rerun of the election to be held on December 26, 2004, resulting in Yushchenko, the opposition, winning the vote.<sup>57</sup> Throughout these tumultuous events, Poland and Russia were involved on opposite sides of the conflict.

Before the November election had even been held, the Polish Sejm adopted a resolution on October 22 that stated Poland's support for free and fair elections, calling them the "main element of the democratic order in the rule of law" and a "guarantee of the deepening of the process of integration of Ukraine with Euro-Atlantic structures."<sup>58</sup> To make Poland's interests very clear, the resolution also stated, "The Sejm would like to assure that it will not cease its efforts to support Ukraine in its cooperation with the

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<sup>56</sup> Andrew Wilson, "Ukraine's 'Orange Revolution' of 2004: The Paradoxes of Negotiation," in *Civil Resistance and Power Politics: The Experience of Non-Violent Action from Gandhi to the Present*, ed. Sir Adam Roberts and Timothy Garton Ash (Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, Incorporated, 2009), 335.

<sup>57</sup> Andrew Wilson, "Ukraine's 'Orange Revolution' of 2004: The Paradoxes of Negotiation," in *Civil Resistance and Power Politics: The Experience of Non-Violent Action from Gandhi to the Present*, 335.

<sup>58</sup> Republic of Poland, Sejm Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej [Sejm of the Republic of Poland], *UCHWAŁA Sejmu Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej z Dnia 22 Października 2004 r. w Sprawie Wyborów Prezydenckich Na Ukrainie* [Resolution of the Sejm of the Republic of Poland of 22 October 2004 on the Presidential Elections in Ukraine] (Warszawa, 2004), [https://orka.sejm.gov.pl/opinie4.nsf/nazwa/3345\\_u/\\$file/3345\\_u.pdf](https://orka.sejm.gov.pl/opinie4.nsf/nazwa/3345_u/$file/3345_u.pdf).

European Union and the [North Atlantic Treaty Organization].”<sup>59</sup> On November 12<sup>th</sup>, Polish Foreign Minister Włodzimierz Cimoszewicz visited Ukraine after calling for free and fair elections, notably missing his scheduled meetings with Prime Minister Yanukovych and President Kuchma, to meet, instead, with the speaker of the Ukrainian parliament, the head of the Ukrainian Central Election Commission, and the opposition candidate, Viktor Yushchenko.<sup>60</sup> After the second vote was held on November 21 and protests erupted in Ukraine against the electoral fraud, Poland played an important role in the European Union’s intervention. Polish President Kwaśniewski became an important mediator in the political chaos, arriving in Kiev on November 26 to meet with Ukrainian and other European leaders to resolve the situation between the two major candidates and their constituencies.<sup>61</sup> The Sejm issued an appeal on November 25 amidst the protests in Ukraine. Citing the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the Council of Europe, and the European Parliament’s findings of fraud in the election, the Polish parliament called upon members of the Ukrainian parliament: “Do everything in your power for truth, freedom and democracy to prevail.”<sup>62</sup> Poland took an active role throughout the election because its leadership believed that supporting the liberal, democratic Yushchenko was “a way to resist the neoauthoritarian influence of Putin's

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<sup>59</sup> Republic of Poland, Sejm Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej [Sejm of the Republic of Poland], *UCHWAŁA Sejmu Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej z Dnia 22 Października 2004 r. w Sprawie Wyborów Prezydenckich Na Ukrainie* [Resolution of the Sejm of the Republic of Poland of 22 October 2004 on the Presidential Elections in Ukraine] (Warszawa, 2004), [https://orka.sejm.gov.pl/opinie4.nsf/nazwa/3345\\_u/\\$file/3345\\_u.pdf](https://orka.sejm.gov.pl/opinie4.nsf/nazwa/3345_u/$file/3345_u.pdf).

<sup>60</sup> “Newslines - November 15, 2004,” *RadioFreeEurope/RadioLiberty*, November 15, 2004, <https://www.rferl.org/a/1143282.html>.

<sup>61</sup> Oleksandr Sushko and Olena Prystayko, “Western Influence,” in *Revolution in Orange: The Origins of Ukraine’s Democratic Breakthrough*, ed. Michael McFaul and Anders Åslund (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2006), 139-140.

<sup>62</sup> Republic of Poland, Sejm Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej [Sejm of the Republic of Poland], *Apel Sejmu Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej z Dnia 25 Listopada 2004 r. Do Rady Najwyższej Ukrainy* [Appeal of the Sejm of the Republic of Poland 25 November 2004 to the Supreme Council of Ukraine] (Warszawa, 2004), [https://orka.sejm.gov.pl/opinie4.nsf/nazwa/3475\\_u/\\$file/3475\\_u.pdf](https://orka.sejm.gov.pl/opinie4.nsf/nazwa/3475_u/$file/3475_u.pdf).

Russia over Ukraine and to spread stability and prosperity.”<sup>63</sup> Poland’s obvious support for Yushchenko, its active role in the situation, and declarations of support for Ukraine joining the EU and NATO could only induce conflict with Russia, which had opposite interests for the outcome of the Ukrainian election and for Ukraine’s future.

For a government whose leader who had only two years previously stated, “[Poland] is the most significant partner on the widest range of issues,” the Kremlin surely felt insulted as Poland’s policy toward Ukraine stood in opposition to Russia’s.<sup>64</sup> Moscow’s policies towards Ukraine were to keep the country in Russia’s sphere of influence, seeking closer economic cooperation and Ukrainian leadership that would be in line with the Kremlin’s interests. In April 2004, the lower house of the Ukrainian parliament ratified a treaty with the Russian and Kazakh parliaments for the Single Economic Space (Eurasian Economic Space) “in which regulation of their economies would be shared and trade tariffs abolished to ensure the free movement of goods, services, capital, and labor.”<sup>65</sup> Viktor Yanukovich, the Ukrainian prime minister at the time, praised the decision of the parliament, calling Russia a strategic partner and arguing that the agreement would improve the Ukrainian economy and make Ukraine more competitive for a chance at EU membership, which political opponents criticized and

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<sup>63</sup> Oleksandr Sushko and Olena Prystayko, “Western Influence,” in *Revolution in Orange: The Origins of Ukraine’s Democratic Breakthrough*, 130.

<sup>64</sup> “Pol’sha nikogda ne byla dlja Rossii prsto sosedom - “jeto naibolee znachimyj partner po samomu shirokomu krugu voprosov”, zjavil Putin” Польша никогда не была для России просто соседом – ‘это наиболее значимый партнер по самому широкому кругу вопросов’, заявил Путин [Poland has never been just a neighbor for Russia – “it is the most significant partner on the widest range of issues,” said Putin], ITAR TASS, January 17, 2002, <http://global.factiva.com/redir/default.aspx?P=sa&an=tassru0020020118dy1h000h1&cat=a&ep=ASE>.

<sup>65</sup> “CIS: Russian, Ukrainian, Kazakh Parliaments Ratify Treaty On Single Economic Space,” RadioFreeEurope/RadioLiberty, April 21, 2004, <https://www.rferl.org/a/1052410.html>.

Western figures warned against.<sup>66</sup> The treaty was in line with Moscow's objectives, bringing Ukraine closer to its influence and likely making its hope for EU ascension more difficult. However, the remaining potential for Ukraine to grow closer to the EU and NATO, possibly becoming a member state in both organizations in the future, was dangerous for Russian geostrategic interests. For this reason, the Russian policy for the 2004 Ukrainian presidential election was to produce a desirable outcome for Russia, aiding a candidate that would be open to adjusting Ukrainian foreign policy to align with Russian interests.

Russia's support for Viktor Yanukovich in the 2004 November election was hardly concealed. Petrov and Ryabov, who wrote "Russia's Role in the Orange Revolution," argue that Aleksandr Voloshin, the chief of the Russian presidential administration, formulated the Russian policy in 2003 to cooperate closely with Ukrainian President Kuchma and in July 2004 to support the candidate that Kuchma chose, not going into dialogue with any other candidates.<sup>67</sup> Petrov and Ryabov quote Vyacheslav Nikonov, a Russian political consultant who had worked on Yanukovich's campaign, as stating, "Our Ukrainian policy was locked on Kuchma, and therefore, on the candidate he chose. It was not Putin who chose Yanukovych."<sup>68</sup> To support Yanukovich in the elections, Moscow sent public relations experts, political consultants, and millions of dollars to his campaign and tried to bolster support for cooperation with

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<sup>66</sup>"CIS: Russian, Ukrainian, Kazakh Parliaments Ratify Treaty On Single Economic Space," RadioFreeEurope/RadioLiberty, April 21, 2004, <https://www.rferl.org/a/1052410.html>.

<sup>67</sup> Nikolai Petrov and Andrei Ryabov, "Russia's Role in the Orange Revolution," in *Revolution in Orange: The Origins of Ukraine's Democratic Breakthrough*, ed. Michael McFaul and Anders Åslund (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2006), 146-147.

<sup>68</sup> Nikolai Petrov and Andrei Ryabov, "Russia's Role in the Orange Revolution," in *Revolution in Orange: The Origins of Ukraine's Democratic Breakthrough*, 146.

Russia rather than the West through granting economic and political concessions.<sup>69</sup> In September 2004, Yushchenko was poisoned with dioxin and suffered facial disfigurement, which many Ukrainians attributed to Russian involvement and hardened them against Russian attempts to promote pro-Russian sentiment.<sup>70</sup> In another display of support for Yanukovich, President Putin visited him and President Kuchma on November twelfth and thirteenth before the second round of elections would take place—the same time as the Polish prime minister’s visit to display support for the opposition.<sup>71</sup> After the second vote declared Yanukovich victor and protests erupted against the electoral fraud, Russia scrambled to save face as Western nations emerged to help Ukrainian authorities investigate electoral fraud and resolve the conflict.

On November 23, Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Sergei Lavrov, gave assurances that Russia was not involved in the internal affairs of any states, including Ukraine, and condemned the protests and attempts to storm government buildings as an imitation of the Rose Revolution and illegal, suggesting that Ukraine follow the “procedure provided for by the Constitution” for any objections to the outcome of the election.<sup>72</sup> To counter the “words sounded from Europe that Ukraine must be with the West,” Lavrov stated that Russia has “its own legitimate interests” and “We expect our

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<sup>69</sup> Nikolai Petrov and Andrei Ryabov, “Russia’s Role in the Orange Revolution,” in *Revolution in Orange: The Origins of Ukraine’s Democratic Breakthrough*, 148, 152.

<sup>70</sup> Nikolai Petrov and Andrei Ryabov, “Russia’s Role in the Orange Revolution,” in *Revolution in Orange: The Origins of Ukraine’s Democratic Breakthrough*, 155.

<sup>71</sup> Nikolai Petrov and Andrei Ryabov, “Russia’s Role in the Orange Revolution,” in *Revolution in Orange: The Origins of Ukraine’s Democratic Breakthrough*, 157. “Newline - November 15, 2004,” *RadioFreeEurope/RadioLiberty*, November 15, 2004, <https://www.rferl.org/a/1143282.html>.

<sup>72</sup> Andrej Shirokov and Mihail Petrov, “Glava MID RF ne schitaet, chto povtorenie na Ukraine ‘revoljuciju roz’ otvechaet interesam naroda strany” Глава МИД РФ не считает, что повторение на Украине ‘революцию роз’ отвечает интересам народа страны [Russian Foreign Minister does not believe that a repeat of the ‘Rose Revolution’ in Ukraine is in the interests of the country’s people], *ITAR TASS*, November 23, 2004, <http://global.factiva.com/redir/default.aspx?P=sa&an=TASSRU0020041123e0bn0060p&cat=a&ep=ASE>.



neighbors in the post-Soviet space to respect and take [these interests] into consideration.”<sup>73</sup> Russia’s overt policy of maintaining Ukraine in Russia’s sphere of influence was not surprising, considering the events earlier that year. In May 2004, three previous republics of the Soviet Union on Russia’s western border—Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania—and former Warsaw Pact nations—Poland, the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Slovakia—had joined the European Union. To make matters worse for Russia, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Slovakia had just become member states in NATO in March 2004, five years after Poland, the Czech Republic, and Hungary had blazed the path. Moscow saw the EU and NATO creeping up to its borders and into its sphere of influence. Ukraine became the red line—Russia refused to let Ukraine fall under their influence at the cost of central Russian geostrategic interests. Poland’s policy of supporting Ukraine’s aspirations for ascension to the EU and NATO and its public declarations of its hopes for Ukraine were a major point of contention with Russia.

The opposition of Polish and Russian policies on the matter of Ukraine’s orientation was the most significant issue in Polish-Russian relations at the time that challenged both nations’ security and economic interests. Examining and tracking the conflict between Russia and Poland over the Orange Revolution and the disputes that arose over perceptions regarding historical events reveals that a negative trend in the Polish-Russian relationship from opposing policies before and during the Orange Revolution was reflected by a negative trend in how historical issues were brought up and

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<sup>73</sup> Tamara Frolkina, “Sergej Lavrov podcherknul nedopustimost’ recidiva myshlenija ‘holodnoj vojny’ v podhode k situacii na Ukraine” Сергей Лавров подчеркнул недопустимость рецидива мышления ‘холодной войны’ в подходе к ситуации на Украине [Sergey Lavrov stressed the unacceptability of a relapse into Cold War thinking in an approach to the situation in Ukraine], *ITAR TASS*, December 19, 2004, <http://global.factiva.com/redir/default.aspx?P=sa&an=TASSRU0020041219e0cj0005p&cat=a&ep=ASE>.

discussed. In March 2005, Russia's Chief Military Prosecutor announced that the Russian investigation into Katyń, which had been initiated on March 22, 1990, had been terminated on September 21, 2004 for confidential reasons and that 36 of the 183 volumes of documents for the case had been classified.<sup>7475</sup> Responding soon after, the Sejm adopted a resolution to commemorate the sixty-fifth anniversary of the Katyń massacre, its members hardly veiling their contempt for the termination of the Russian investigation: "We are convinced that only revealing the full truth about the crime and condemning and punishing all its perpetrators will serve to heal the wounds and shape good neighborly relations between the Republic of Poland and the Russian Federation."<sup>76</sup> The resolution demanded Russia release all the documents related to the case, reveal the names of the Katyń crime's perpetrators and denounce them, and recognize the crime's "genocidal nature," challenging the results and announcements of the Russian investigation.<sup>77</sup> A few months later in May 2005, Moscow hosted world leaders, including President Kwaśniewski, to celebrate the sixtieth anniversary of the Allied victory against the Nazis. Despite the invitation to attend, "Mr. Putin not only relegated Mr. Kwaśniewski to a back row among the visiting dignitaries, he also did not acknowledge Poland as a wartime ally, much less apologize for the Soviet Union's anti-

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<sup>74</sup> Waław Radziwinowicz, "Utajnianie Katynia" [Classification of Katyn], *Gazeta Wyborcza*, March 18, 2005, <https://classic.wyborcza.pl/archiwumGW/4330853/Utajnianie-Katynia>.

<sup>75</sup> Jerzy Malczyk, "Śledztwo rosyjskie [Russian investigation]," *Dzieje*, April 1, 2010, <https://dzieje.pl/aktualnosci/sledztwo-rosyjskie>.

<sup>76</sup> Republic of Poland, Sejm Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej [Sejm of the Republic of Poland], *Uchwała Sejmu Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej z Dnia 22 Marca 2005 r. Upamiętniająca 65. Rocznicę Zbrodni Katyńskiej* [Resolution of the Sejm of the Republic of Poland of 22 March 2005 Commemorating the 65th Anniversary of the Katyn Massacre] (Warszawa, 2005), [https://orka.sejm.gov.pl/opinie4.nsf/nazwa/3819\\_u/\\$file/3819\\_u.pdf](https://orka.sejm.gov.pl/opinie4.nsf/nazwa/3819_u/$file/3819_u.pdf).

<sup>77</sup> Republic of Poland, Sejm Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej [Sejm of the Republic of Poland], *Uchwała Sejmu Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej z Dnia 22 Marca 2005 r. Upamiętniająca 65. Rocznicę Zbrodni Katyńskiej* [Resolution of the Sejm of the Republic of Poland of 22 March 2005 Commemorating the 65th Anniversary of the Katyn Massacre].

Polish pact with the Nazis of 1939”<sup>78</sup> and further offended some Poles by honoring former Polish communist leader Wojciech Jaruzelski.<sup>79</sup> In June, the Polish-Russian Group on Difficult Matters met and both the Russian and Polish Foreign Ministers voiced their desire for the group to continue its activities, but it would not meet again until 2008. Contemporary issues in Polish-Russian relations continued to arise and appear publicly in both states’ policies and rhetoric. Russia placed an embargo on Polish meat and plant goods and responded to Polish plans to host a US missile defense system by threatening to place its own missiles near NATO borders while Poland voiced its disapproval of Russian and German expansion of the Nord Stream pipeline, which threatens Polish energy security, and demanded an end to the embargo. The issues in the Polish-Russian relationship that stemmed from Russia’s desire to have a sphere of influence in Eastern Europe and Poland’s staunch opposition to this policy for its own security interests damaged the process of historical reconciliation, renewing disregard for the other party’s understanding of historical events and using inflammatory rhetoric as a show of frustration with the other party. Thus was the context of the beginning of the Polish-Russian Group on Difficult Matters. Already, differences in Polish and Russian security interests impacted the ability of the group to function.

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<sup>78</sup> Richard Bernstein, “After Centuries of Enmity, Relations Between Poland and Russia Are as Bad as Ever,” *The New York Times*, July 3, 2005, sec. World, <https://www.nytimes.com/2005/07/03/world/europe/after-centuries-of-enmity-relations-between-poland-and-russia.html>.

<sup>79</sup> Jeremy Bransten, “Russia: Did Putin Come Out Shining, Or With Moscow’s Prestige Weakened?,” RadioFreeEurope/RadioLiberty, May 12, 2005, <https://www.rferl.org/a/1058843.html>.

## 2008: Inauguration of the Polish-Russian Group on Difficult Matters, the Russo-Georgian War

This section will explore the conditions that prompted the second era of meetings of the Polish-Russian Group on Difficult Matters, who the members selected to participate in group were, the goals of the group, and the work of the group's initial meetings. Additionally, it will examine if the Russo-Georgian War had a significant impact on Polish-Russian relations, and if this impact hit hard enough to damage the work of the group.

In October 2007, the Polish parliamentary elections resulted in the defeat of incumbent Prime Minister Jarosław Kaczyński and his party, Law and Justice (PiS, *Prawo i Sprawiedliwość*), by Donald Tusk and his party, Civic Platform (PO, *Platforma Obywatelska*). This turnover of political leadership indicated greater willingness on the Polish side to make concessions to mend the Polish-Russian relationship. The position of Polish Foreign Minister Anna Fotyga, appointed by President Lech Kaczyński in 2006, clearly displayed the attitude of PiS leadership towards Russia: in May 2007, she earned criticism from the opposition for describing the Russian embargoes on Polish meat and plant products as a “kind of declaration of war”<sup>80</sup> and for allegedly refusing to visit Moscow or even respond at all to an official invitation from her Russian counterpart.<sup>81</sup> A month later, she made headlines for her statements that threats from Russia had

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<sup>80</sup> “Fotyga: Embargo w kontaktach handlowych to rodzaj wypowiedzenia wojny” [Fotyga: Embargo in trade contacts is a kind of declaration of war], *Gazeta Wyborcza*, May 18, 2007, <http://global.factiva.com/redir/default.aspx?P=sa&an=GAZWYB0020070518e35i0001e&cat=a&ep=ASE>.

<sup>81</sup> “Fotyga nie przyjęła zaproszenia Ławrowa do Moskwy” [Fotyga did not accept Lavrov's invitation to Moscow], *Gazeta Wyborcza*, May 17, 2007, <http://global.factiva.com/redir/default.aspx?P=sa&an=GAZWYB0020070517e35h00034&cat=a&ep=ASE>.

incentivized Poland to strengthen its military capabilities.<sup>82</sup> Fotyga was among the group of ministers that PO, led by Donald Tusk, attempted to dismiss in July 2007.<sup>83</sup> PO's defeat of PiS in October 2007 spelled a reorientation of Polish policy towards Russia.

PO's official election program laid out its goals in foreign policy, taking the position that relations with Russia needed to be conducted without "unnecessary emotions and empty gestures" in a "patient political dialogue" that aimed to ease tensions.<sup>84</sup> It proposed a vision of better relations with Russia: "In the interests of both our nations, hit hard by history, lie good neighborly relations and extensive economic, social, cultural, and local government contacts. We reject the fatalism of history and believe that the construction of these relations is possible."<sup>85</sup> The mention of their mutual history in the context of Poland's relationship with Russia indicates that PO, at the very least, believed that their history could impact their contemporary relationship. The new government's readiness to improve relations with Russia prompted the development of contacts and dialogue between the two states. In December 2007, Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergei Lavrov extended an invitation to Prime Minister Donald Tusk and other Polish Ministers via the newly appointed Polish Minister of Foreign Affairs Radosław Sikorski, who immediately accepted the invitation. After the meeting, Sikorski commented "This marks the opening of a new chapter in Polish-Russian relations," while

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<sup>82</sup> "Fotyga: Groźby Rosji zmuszają Polskę do myślenia o umacnianiu potencjału militarnego" [Fotyga: Russia's threats force Poland to think about strengthening military potential], *Gazeta Wyborcza*, June 9, 2007, <http://global.factiva.com/redir/default.aspx?P=sa&an=GAZWYB0020070609e3690001b&cat=a&ep=ASE>.

<sup>83</sup> "Większość ministrów odwołanych, Fotyga znów powołana" [Most ministers dismissed, Fotyga reappointed], *Gazeta.pl*, July 9, 2007, <https://wiadomosci.gazeta.pl/wiadomosci/1,143907,4470673.html>.

<sup>84</sup> Platforma Obywatelska [Civic Platform], *Program PO: Polska Zasługuje Na Cud Gospodarczy* [PO Program: Poland Deserves an Economic Miracle] (Warsaw, 2007), 78, [http://www.leszczyna.info/wp-content/uploads/2011/12/program\\_wyborczy\\_po7-ebook.pdf](http://www.leszczyna.info/wp-content/uploads/2011/12/program_wyborczy_po7-ebook.pdf).

<sup>85</sup> Platforma Obywatelska [Civic Platform], *Program PO: Polska Zasługuje Na Cud Gospodarczy* [PO Program: Poland Deserves an Economic Miracle], 79.

Lavrov reflected his sentiment in saying, “We want to establish normal relations.”<sup>86</sup> The meeting also had the result of both sides announcing the renewal of the Polish-Russian Group on Difficult Matters and the names of the new Polish and Russian chairs of the group: former Polish Minister of Foreign Affairs Adam Daniel Rotfeld and the rector of the Moscow State Institute of International Relations (MGIMO), Anatoly Torkunov.<sup>87</sup> By the time Prime Minister Tusk made his visit to Moscow in February 2008 to meet President Putin, Prime Minister Zubkov, and the presidential candidate, Medvedev, Russia had already removed the embargoes on Polish meat and agricultural products.<sup>88</sup> Adding to the new, hopeful atmosphere, in March, Donald Tusk adhered to his party’s program in a Russian interview, stating “The ‘ice age’ in the relations of the two countries is becoming just a page of history.”<sup>89</sup> Other issues in the relationship remained, not the least of which were the Polish and American plans to install a ballistic missile defense system in Poland and the Nord Stream pipeline project between Russia and Germany, but both sides after the 2007 Polish parliamentary elections displayed a willingness to make concessions and build dialogue. In this environment, the Polish-Russian Group on Difficult Matters could once again begin its business of historical reconciliation.

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<sup>86</sup> Dominika Pszczółkowska, “Tusk Jedzie do Putina” [Tusk goes to Putin], *Gazeta Wyborcza*, December 7, 2007, <https://classic.wyborcza.pl/archiwumGW/4995105/TUSK-JEDZIE-DO-PUTINA>.

<sup>87</sup> Dominika Pszczółkowska, “Tusk Jedzie do Putina” [Tusk goes to Putin].

<sup>88</sup> Tomasz Bielecki, “Tusk Wiezie do Moskwy Odwilż” [Tusk takes the thaw to Moscow], *Gazeta Wyborcza*, February 8, 2008, <https://classic.wyborcza.pl/archiwumGW/5031582/Tusk-wiezie-do-Moskwy-odwilz>.

<sup>89</sup> Donald Tusk, “Donal’d Tusk, prem’er-ministr Respubliki Pol’sha” Дональд Туск, премьер-министр Республики Польша [Donald Tusk, Prime Minister of the Republic of Poland], interview by Mikhail Gusman, March 1, 2008, <https://tass.ru/arhiv/640544>.

The first meeting of the renewed Polish-Russian Group on Difficult Matters was held June 12-14, 2008 in Warsaw. The Russian membership consisted of historians, political scientists, economists, an employee of the Federal Archival Agency of Russia (*Rosarchiv*), employees of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation that specialized in law and Polish relations, a sociologist, and a recognized literary and music critic.<sup>90</sup> The Polish side consisted of political scientists, historians, a former vice-minister of foreign affairs and national defense, a former and a current General Director of the State Archives, and an editor of a Russian publication about Poland, *Novaya Pol'sha* (*Новая Польша*).<sup>91</sup> The group agreed on the most important objective to guide their work: improve mutual trust and respect between Russia and Poland to improve bilateral relations through addressing sensitive issues from their mutual history.<sup>92</sup> From the very beginning, the new group membership was concerned with public opinion regarding the work of the group, access to archives and historical documents to complete their investigations, maintaining their awareness of their designation as a group to inform decision-makers but not replace state officials in conducting diplomacy, involving the

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<sup>90</sup> Rossijsko-pol'skaja gruppa po slozhnym voprosam [Russian-Polish Group on Difficult Matters], "Sostav Rossijskoj Chasti Gruppy Po Slozhnym Voprosam, Vytokajushhim Iz Istorii Rossijsko-Pol'skih Otnoshenij" Состав Российской Части Группы По Сложным Вопросам, Вытекающим Из Истории Российско-Польских Отношений [Composition of the Russian Part of the Group on Difficult Matters, Arising from the History of Russian-Polish Relations], June 16, 2008, <https://mgimo.ru/files/13713/Participants.doc>.

<sup>91</sup> Rossijsko-pol'skaja gruppa po slozhnym voprosam [Russian-Polish Group on Difficult Matters], "Sostav Rossijskoj Chasti Gruppy Po Slozhnym Voprosam, Vytokajushhim Iz Istorii Rossijsko-Pol'skih Otnoshenij" Состав Российской Части Группы По Сложным Вопросам, Вытекающим Из Истории Российско-Польских Отношений [Composition of the Russian Part of the Group on Difficult Matters, Arising from the History of Russian-Polish Relations].

<sup>92</sup> Rossijsko-pol'skaja gruppa po slozhnym voprosam [Russian-Polish Group on Difficult Matters], "Kommjunike Po Itogam Zasedanija Gruppy Po Slozhnym Voprosam, Vytokajushhim Iz Istorii Rossijsko-Pol'skih Otnoshenij" Коммюнике По Итогам Заседания Группы По Сложным Вопросам, Вытекающим Из Истории Российско-Польских Отношений [Communiqué on the Results of the Meeting of the Group on Complex Issues Arising from the History of Russian-Polish Relations], June 12, 2008, <https://mgimo.ru/files/13713/Komunikat.doc>.

Catholic and Russian Orthodox churches when possible, the potential joint-publication of their work, and reviewing and evaluating the previous work of the group between 2002-2008.<sup>93</sup> High profile Polish politicians met with the group at the first meeting, including President Lech Kaczyński, Chairman of the Council of Ministers Donald Tusk, and Foreign Minister Radosław Sikorski. The group appeared hopeful, yet with realistic expectations, and prepared to carry out its work to improve the Polish-Russian relationship. Unbeknownst to any of the group members, a war would break out between Russia and Georgia in less than two months after the first meeting, creating the potential for the Polish-Russian relationship to suffer serious damage and possibly snuff out any progress that the group might have made before its real work began.

To understand the lead-up to the 2008 Russo-Georgian War, it is important to understand what caused Russia to intervene in South Ossetia the first place. In April 2008, at NATO's Bucharest summit, NATO had welcomed Ukraine's and Georgia's aspirations to join the alliance and laid out the next steps for both to continue on the path towards membership.<sup>94</sup> However, neither country received a Membership Action Plan (MAP) since some NATO members like Germany were opposed to expansion since they feared a poor reaction from Russia.<sup>95</sup> So, countries that wanted membership for Georgia and Ukraine, like Poland, had to settle for the vague language about 'future' membership

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<sup>93</sup> Rossijsko-pol'skaja gruppy po slozhnym voprosam [Russian-Polish Group on Difficult Matters], "Kommjunike Po Itogam Zasedaniya Gruppy Po Slozhnym Voprosam, Vytokajushhim Iz Istorii Rossijsko-Pol'skih Otnoshenij" Коммюнике По Итогам Заседания Группы По Сложным Вопросам, Вытекающим Из Истории Российско-Польских Отношений [Communiqué on the Results of the Meeting of the Group on Complex Issues Arising from the History of Russian-Polish Relations].

<sup>94</sup> "Bucharest Summit Declaration - Issued by the Heads of State and Government Participating in the Meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Bucharest on 3 April 2008," NATO, April 3, 2008, [http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official\\_texts\\_8443.htm](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_8443.htm).

<sup>95</sup> Angela E. Stent, *The Limits of Partnership: U.S.-Russian Relations in the Twenty-First Century* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2014), 166-167.



for both countries.<sup>96</sup> NATO's decision at the summit pointedly ignored the February 2007 speech that President Putin had delivered to European and American leaders at the Munich Security Conference, in which Putin condemned NATO expansion and American hegemony.<sup>97</sup>

The declaration of the Bucharest summit now made it in Russia's interest to block Georgia's path to membership by exacerbating issues in the Georgian separatist regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, and Georgian President Mikhail Saakashvili, emboldened by NATO's stated intention of extending membership to Georgia and determined to clear any obstacles to Georgia's inclusion in the alliance, had it in his interest to resolve the issue of these separatist regions.<sup>98</sup> Tensions rose between Russia and Georgia in the summer of 2008 over the issue of the two regions, until war broke out on 7 August 2008.<sup>99</sup> Georgia attacked the capital of South Ossetia, and Russia intervened, sending forty thousand troops to defend South Ossetia.<sup>100</sup> On 12 August 2008, a cease-fire was declared, and on 25 August, Russia recognized the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia from Georgia, essentially dashing Georgia's hopes to join the NATO alliance.<sup>101</sup> A few months after the war, Polish President Lech Kaczyński made Poland's support for Georgia and its NATO ambitions clear once more by visiting President Saakashvili in Tbilisi. The November trip made headlines, as Poles and Georgians claimed that Russians

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<sup>96</sup> Angela E. Stent, *The Limits of Partnership: U.S.-Russian Relations in the Twenty-First Century*, 166-167.

<sup>97</sup> Vladimir Putin, "Speech and the Following Discussion at the Munich Conference on Security Policy" (Munich, February 10, 2007), <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/24034>.

<sup>98</sup> Angela E. Stent, *The Limits of Partnership: U.S.-Russian Relations in the Twenty-First Century*, 168.

<sup>99</sup> Angela E. Stent, *The Limits of Partnership: U.S.-Russian Relations in the Twenty-First Century*, 170-171.

<sup>100</sup> Angela E. Stent, *The Limits of Partnership: U.S.-Russian Relations in the Twenty-First Century*, 171.

<sup>101</sup> Angela E. Stent, *The Limits of Partnership: U.S.-Russian Relations in the Twenty-First Century*, 171.

opened fire on the motorcade carrying President Kaczyński and President Saakashvili near the border with South Ossetia, which Russia denied.<sup>102</sup> Obviously, Polish and Russian security interests clashed over the question of Georgia's membership in NATO. However, the next meeting of the Polish-Russian working group proceeded without delay.

During their June meeting, members of the Polish-Russian Group on Difficult Matters had agreed to hold the next meeting in Moscow during the fall of 2008. Even after the events of the August, the second meeting was held as planned October 27–28, 2008. Following the example of Polish politicians a few months earlier in Warsaw, Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov attended the Moscow meeting, stated his support for the group's mission to de-politicize their mutual history, and agreed to improve the group's access to archival materials.<sup>103</sup> The meeting was productive—members agreed to create a major joint publication on historical issues in Polish-Russian relations, decided which topics they would address and who would work on each section, discussed improving access to archives, and agreed to produce a second joint publication that the Moscow State Institute of International Relations (MGIMO) and the Polish Institute of International Relations (PISM) would distribute to commemorate the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Second World War.<sup>104</sup> Special emphasis was placed on addressing the Katyń crime in the major publication, but other topics that were proposed included issues during the

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<sup>102</sup> “Shots Fired near Georgian, Polish Leaders’ Convoy,” *Reuters*, November 23, 2008, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-georgia-presidents-shots-idUSTRE4AM1V420081123>.

<sup>103</sup> Rossijsko-pol’skaja gruppа po slozhnym voprosam [Russian-Polish Group on Difficult Matters], “Kommjunique Po Itogam Zasedaniya Rossijsko-Pol’skoj Gruppy Po Slozhnym Voprosam” Коммюнике По Итогам Заседания Российско-Польской Группы По Сложным Вопросам [Communiqué on the Results of the Meeting of the Russian-Polish Group on Difficult Matters], October 27, 2008, [https://mgimo.ru/files/36305/2008-10-28\\_Kommunikat.doc](https://mgimo.ru/files/36305/2008-10-28_Kommunikat.doc).

<sup>104</sup> Rossijsko-pol’skaja gruppа po slozhnym voprosam [Russian-Polish Group on Difficult Matters], “Kommjunique Po Itogam Zasedaniya Rossijsko-Pol’skoj Gruppy Po Slozhnym Voprosam” Коммюнике По Итогам Заседания Российско-Польской Группы По Сложным Вопросам [Communiqué on the Results of the Meeting of the Russian-Polish Group on Difficult Matters].

interwar period and the beginning of World War II. Notably, there was no mention of the issues that had arisen in their bilateral relations since their last meeting.

The outbreak of the Russo-Georgian War in 2008 did not have a visible, detrimental effect on the work of the Polish-Russian Group on Difficult Matters. Continuing to participate in the meetings after such a visible international incident that involved Russia challenging NATO's eastward expansion was confirmation that this group's work was a priority for the Polish leadership or at the very least within Poland's interests to continue. For Russian officials, the working group may have served as a public display of their willingness to cooperate with the West and its serious commitment to mending the Polish-Russian relationship. The high hopes exhibited by Russian and Polish government representatives that were present at the first of the group's meetings in the early summer of 2008 did not appear to have diminished by the fall of 2008. Compared to the previous years, in which the group could not function because of poor relations between Poland and Russia, the continued existence of the group and its work was a major success for historical reconciliation.

The renewed Polish-Russian Group on Difficult Matters had great potential in 2008, according to Jerzy Wiatr's indicators of successful historical reconciliation. The atmosphere of the first few meetings, the participation of government officials, and the outcomes of the meetings reflected the positive factors that contribute to a successful attempt at historical reconciliation. The group members stated their intent to incorporate religious institutions in their work, specifically the Roman Catholic and Russian Orthodox churches, the most influential religious institutions for many Poles and Russians. Additionally, the group was aware of its public image and considered how its

work would be received by both nations' citizens. Although there was not yet any discussion about removing stereotypes from education in history or discussions about how to grow personal contacts between the two countries, the group was on the path to success. The governments also did not inhibit the work of the group, although no special steps were taken by either to make concessions or agree on mutual interests in areas other than historical reconciliation. However, both governments continued the work of the group despite the conflict in interests that arose in the summer of 2008 between Poland and Russia, demonstrating willingness to continue work despite opposing security interests. Russia did not withdraw from the group in retaliation for Polish support of Georgia's desire to join NATO. Significantly, none of the factors that hinder historical reconciliation were noticeable obstacles—unwillingness or inability to understand the other party's perspective, domestic pressures that interfere with political figures' attempts to improve relations, persistent negative stereotypes, and the influence of nationalist political parties and their rhetoric did not appear to affect the group.

#### 2009-2010: Meetings of the Group Prior to the Smolensk Air Crash

This section is concerned with the work of the Polish-Russian Group on Difficult Matters in 2009 and 2010 as it led up to the Smolensk air crash. It will evaluate the achievements of the group in the relatively calm period between the Russo-Georgian War and the Smolensk air crash, and examine if the group's work had any discernable impact on Polish-Russian relations. In this time period, the working group received more visibility. The highest levels of both governments could see the fruits of its efforts to foster historical reconciliation.

At another of the group's sessions on the 28<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup> of May 2009 in Kraków, the group members discussed the Katyń massacre around its seventieth anniversary in addition to reviewing their work for the approaching joint publication. The members unanimously decided that the victims of Katyń should be honored publicly in both countries and that this commemoration should be institutionalized in the form of organizations dedicated to preserving their memory.<sup>105</sup> Rotfeld and Turkunov were tasked with drafting proposals for this effort to send to Russian and Polish political leadership. The meeting also gave a fair deal of attention to the involvement of spiritual leaders in the process of reconciliation. The group reflected positively on the separate meetings that the group had with Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk and Cardinal Stanisław Dziwisz, the Archbishop of Kraków.<sup>106</sup> In the official communiqué for the meeting, the group thanked Russian Orthodox and Roman Catholic leaders for “[lending] a spiritual and moral dimension to the process of overcoming difficulties on the path to deepening mutual understanding.”<sup>107</sup> In their preface to the group's publication, *White Spots—Black Spots: Difficult Matters in Polish-Russian Relations, 1918-2008*, Adam Daniel Rotfeld and Anatoly Turkunov wrote that they had sent letters to the Polish and Russian foreign ministers after this meeting to inform them that the group had reached the limit of what they could contribute to the discussion on Katyń, and that the upcoming

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<sup>105</sup> Polsko-Rosyjska Grupa do Spraw Trudnych [Polish-Russian Group on Difficult Matters], “Komunikat Końcowy z Posiedzenia Polsko-Rosyjskiej Grupy Do Spraw Trudnych” [Final communiqué from the meeting of the Polish-Russian Group on Difficult Matters], May 29, 2009, [https://mgimo.ru/files/114074/2009-05-29\\_Komunikat\\_pol.doc](https://mgimo.ru/files/114074/2009-05-29_Komunikat_pol.doc).

<sup>106</sup> Polsko-Rosyjska Grupa do Spraw Trudnych [Polish-Russian Group on Difficult Matters], “Komunikat Końcowy z Posiedzenia Polsko-Rosyjskiej Grupy Do Spraw Trudnych” [Final communiqué from the meeting of the Polish-Russian Group on Difficult Matters], May 29, 2009.

<sup>107</sup> Polsko-Rosyjska Grupa do Spraw Trudnych [Polish-Russian Group on Difficult Matters], “Komunikat Końcowy z Posiedzenia Polsko-Rosyjskiej Grupy Do Spraw Trudnych” [Final communiqué from the meeting of the Polish-Russian Group on Difficult Matters], May 29, 2009.

seventieth anniversary of Katyń and beginning of World War II may contribute to a growth in negative sentiment that could worsen the bilateral relationship.<sup>108</sup> To counteract this potential scenario, Rotfeld and Turkunov proposed that the discussions on this topic be institutionalized, creating centers that would prevent the falsification of history through supporting historical research, contributing to the education of youth, and preserving burial sites of Poles and Russians in both states, including the burial sites of the victims of Katyń.<sup>109</sup>

The session held November 9, 2009 in Moscow shared a similarly positive atmosphere and made further progress. Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Alexander Grushko attended the meeting, signaling again that high-level officials supported the work of the group. The group discussed the visit by Vladimir Putin, then prime minister, to Sopot, Poland to meet with Prime Minister Donald Tusk in September, and the decision made during his visit to create centers in Poland and Russia that focused on their mutual history.<sup>110</sup> The group members celebrated the positive outcome and stated their hope that these centers be non-governmental and non-profit institutions—suggestions that the group decided to include in proposals for the Polish and Russian governments. Besides the state visit and institutionalization of historical reconciliation, Torkunov highlighted the “growth of cooperation in the trade and economic sphere,” indicating that

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<sup>108</sup> Adam Daniel Rotfeld and Anatoly V. Torkunov, *White Spots—Black Spots: Difficult Matters in Polish-Russian Relations, 1918-2008* (Pittsburgh PA, UNITED STATES: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2015), 9.

<sup>109</sup> Adam Daniel Rotfeld and Anatoly V. Torkunov, *White Spots—Black Spots: Difficult Matters in Polish-Russian Relations, 1918-2008* (Pittsburgh PA, UNITED STATES: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2015), 10.

<sup>110</sup> Rossijsko-pol'skaja gruppа po slozhnym voprosam [Russian-Polish Group on Difficult Matters], “Kommjunike Po Itogam Zasedaniya Rossijsko-Pol'skoj Gruppy Po Slozhnym Voprosam, 9 Nojabrja 2009 g.” Коммюнике По Итогам Заседания Российско-Польской Группы По Сложным Вопросам, 9 Ноября 2009 г. [Communiqué on the Results of the Meeting of the Russian-Polish Group on Difficult Matters, 9 November 2009], November 9, 2009, <https://mgimo.ru/files/126014/Kommunikat9.11.09.doc>.

he considered forms of personal contact besides political ties were necessary for historical reconciliation.<sup>111</sup> For the rest of the group's meeting, special attention was given to the commemoration of victims in the Polish-Soviet War of 1920 and the Katyń massacre of 1940. The group agreed upon the importance of commemorating those killed in action and prisoners of war that died in captivity during the Polish-Soviet War of 1920—a topic with which the Russian group members and politicians were especially concerned. In preparation for the seventieth anniversary of the Katyń massacre, the group decided to hold a special session in Smolensk in April 2010 to commemorate the victims at Katyń along with the Roman Catholic and Russian Orthodox churches.<sup>112</sup> Unbeknownst to the group, the Katyń commemoration in Smolensk, April 2010 would mark yet another national tragedy for Poland.

As April 2010 grew nearer, the commemoration ceremonies in Smolensk drew more attention for the list of guests that would be attending. In early February 2010, Prime Minister Vladimir Putin invited Prime Minister Donald Tusk to attend the Katyń commemoration ceremonies with him. Adam Daniel Rotfeld emphasized the monumental nature of this invitation—it would be the first time a Polish prime minister attended a joint ceremony related to the Katyń massacre “since the Polish state regained full

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<sup>111</sup> “Pol’sha i Rossiya Sozdatut Centry Sovmestnoj Istorii — Gruppa Po Slozhnym Voprosam” Польша и Россия Создадут Центры Совместной Истории — Группа По Сложным Вопросам [Poland and Russia Will Create Centers of Shared History - Group on Difficult Matters], Official Site of MGIMO Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Russia, November 9, 2009, <https://mgimo.ru/about/news/smi/125910/>.

<sup>112</sup> Rossijsko-pol’skaja gruppa po slozhnym voprosam [Russian-Polish Group on Difficult Matters], “Kommjunike Po Itogam Zasedaniya Rossijsko-Pol’skoj Gruppy Po Slozhnym Voprosam, 9 Nojabrja 2009 g.” Коммюнике По Итогам Заседания Российско-Польской Группы По Сложным Вопросам, 9 Ноября 2009 г. [Communiqué on the Results of the Meeting of the Russian-Polish Group on Difficult Matters, 9 November 2009], November 9, 2009.

sovereignty and the Russian Federation ceased to be the Soviet Union.”<sup>113</sup> A day after the official invitation was extended to Prime Minister Tusk, President Lech Kaczyński announced—without any word of an official invitation from Moscow—“I am happy that the prime minister will be in Katyń, but the highest representative of the republic is the president and I will be there,” sardonically adding, “I hope I will receive a visa.”<sup>114</sup> Minister of Foreign Affairs Radosław Sikorski publicly responded, “I would advise him otherwise.”<sup>115</sup> Drama erupted in the Polish press over the conflict between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Chancellery of the President. In late February, the spokesman for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Piotr Paszkowski, commented that, against protocol, the Chancellery of the President had bypassed the ministry by informing the Russian Embassy in Warsaw directly to transmit the message of his attendance to President Dmitri Medvedev.<sup>116</sup> The Chancellery of the President quickly responded that it had sent letters to the Minister of Foreign Affairs Radosław Sikorski and the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Andrzej Kremer in January 2010 that informed them of the president’s decision and that the note to the ambassador was only a courtesy.<sup>117</sup> By early March, the dispute appeared to have been quelled, with the head of the Chancellery of the President announcing that Ministry of Foreign Affairs had officially asked President Kaczyński to

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<sup>113</sup> “Rotfeld o zaproszeniu Tuska do Katynia: ważne dla polsko-rosyjskich relacji” [Rotfeld on Tusk’s invitation to Katyn: important for Polish-Russian relations], *Dzieje*, February 3, 2010, <https://dzieje.pl/aktualnosci/rotfeld-o-zaproszeniu-tuska-do-katynia-wazne-dla-polsko-rosyjskich-relacji>.

<sup>114</sup> Ewa Czackowska, “Kaczyński w Katyniu” [Kaczyński in Katyn], *Rzeczpospolita*, February 5, 2010, <https://www.rp.pl/artykul/429532-Kaczynski-w-Katyniu.html>.

<sup>115</sup> “Prezydent w Katyniu? MSZ odradza” [President in Katyn? The Ministry of Foreign Affairs advises against], *TVN24*, February 8, 2010, <https://tvn24.pl/polska/prezydent-w-katyniu-msz-odradza-ra124709-3579583>.

<sup>116</sup> “Kancelaria Prezydenta i MSZ o obecności prezydenta w Katyniu” [The Chancellery of the President and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on the president’s presence in Katyn], *Dzieje*, February 22, 2010, <https://dzieje.pl/aktualnosci/kancelaria-prezydenta-i-msz-o-obecnosci-prezydenta-w-katyniu>.

<sup>117</sup> “Kancelaria Prezydenta i MSZ o obecności prezydenta w Katyniu” [The Chancellery of the President and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on the president’s presence in Katyn], *Dzieje*, February 22, 2010, <https://dzieje.pl/aktualnosci/kancelaria-prezydenta-i-msz-o-obecnosci-prezydenta-w-katyniu>.



chair the Polish delegation to the Katyń ceremonies on April 10.<sup>118</sup> The April 2010 commemoration ceremonies were off to a politically charged and contentious start in the planning stage.

The dispute between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the president's staff over the visit to Smolensk was hardly surprising. The opposition party, Civic Platform (PO), had a plurality in the Sejm and held the office of Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs, whereas the presidency was held by Law and Justice (PiS), the Kaczyński brothers' party. With the 2010 presidential elections approaching, tensions were running high between Sejm leadership and the president. However, the dispute settled, and it was decided that Prime Minister Donald Tusk would travel to Smolensk to meet with Prime Minister Vladimir Putin on April 7<sup>th</sup> while President Lech Kaczyński would travel separately to participate in the commemoration ceremony on April 10, which was organized by the Council for the Protection of the Memory of Struggle and Martyrdom.<sup>119</sup> Despite the drama in Poland between the two political parties, the participation of the Polish prime minister and president in commemoration ceremonies on the seventieth anniversary of the Katyń massacre, including one which the Russian prime minister would attend, was a major step towards reconciliation in the Polish-Russian relationship.

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<sup>118</sup> "Min. Stasiak: Prezydent Będzie w Katyniu 10 Kwietnia" [Minister Stasiak: The President Will Be in Katyn on April 10], Official Website of the President of Poland, March 4, 2010, <https://www.prezydent.pl/archiwum-lecha-kaczynskiego/aktualnosci/rok-2010/art.9,1248,min-stasiak-prezydent-bedzie-w-katyniu-10-kwietnia.html>.

<sup>119</sup> "Stasiak: prezydent udaje się do Katynia samolotem" [Stasiak: president goes to Katyn by plane], Dzieje, March 4, 2010, <https://dzieje.pl/aktualnosci/stasiak-prezydent-udaje-sie-do-katynia-samolotem>.

Apart from the drama between the Sejm leadership and office of the president in Poland, promising indicators appeared that boded well for the ceremonies in April and supported the work of the Polish-Russian Group on Difficult Matters. Bogdan Borusewicz, Marshal of the Polish Senate, and Sergei Mironov, chairman of the Russian Federation Council of the Federal Assembly, released a joint article to Polish and Russian newspapers in February 2010 that discussed the histories of their nations, emphasizing the moments in which the Polish and Russian nations fought against a common enemy, such as in the Battle of Grunwald against the Teutonic Order and in World War II against the Nazis, but also recalling the difficult memory of Stalinism in their past.<sup>120</sup> Both representatives celebrated developments that allowed their peoples to move beyond their painful ‘historical memory,’ and look forward to the future together. One area which they highlighted was the work of the Polish-Russian Group on Difficult Matters, drawing attention to its contributions in exploring the contentious history of the twentieth century. Whether intentional or not, they gave importance to the same factors that Jerzy Wiatr identified as preconditions for successful historical reconciliation. Specifically, they identified the growth of interpersonal contacts, such as political, economic, and cultural exchange, mutual national interests such as economic cooperation, overcoming negative stereotypes, youth education in history, and the involvement of Russian Orthodox and Roman Catholic religious institutions as important to the process of overcoming their

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<sup>120</sup> Sergei M. Mironov and Bogdan Borusewicz, “Pamiętamy o przeszłości, myślimy o przyszłości” [We remember the past, we think about the future] (Gazeta Wyborcza, February 8, 2010), <https://classic.wyborcza.pl/archiwumGW/7161851/Pamietamy-o-przeszlosci--myslimy-o-przyszlosci>.

marred past.<sup>121</sup> Their main message was clear: Russians and Poles had to look to the future while still remembering and learning from their past.

April 2, 2010, the week before Donald Tusk and Vladimir Putin met in Smolensk, the Russian government-owned television channel, *Rossiia* [*Russia*], screened *Katyń* (2007), a film directed by Andrzej Wajda, a renowned Polish director and the son of a Polish officer murdered at Katyń, in a widely viewed eight o'clock evening slot.<sup>122</sup> After the screening concluded, *Rossiia* even brought together a group of high-profile figures to discuss the Katyń massacre and the declassification of archived materials related to the crime, including the head of the Russian Federal Archival Agency, the director of the Institute of Universal History of the Russian Academy of Sciences, the chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the State Duma, the president of the Russian Filmmakers Union, and the head of the Department of the History of International Relations and Foreign Policy of Russia of MGIMO.<sup>123</sup> For many Russians, this was an educational moment—a substantial number knew nothing or very little about the Katyń massacre. According to a Levada Center poll in March 2010, 47% of Russians had not heard of the Katyń massacre and 10% “found it difficult to answer” the question, “Have you heard about the Katyń tragedy: the execution of Polish officers who were in Soviet camps?”<sup>124</sup> A month later in mid-April after the airing of Katyń on national television and Putin’s

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<sup>121</sup> Sergei M. Mironov and Bogdan Borusewicz, “Pamiętamy o przeszłości, myślimy o przyszłości” [We remember the past, we think about the future].

<sup>122</sup> Jerzy Malczyk, “Rosja/ Media: pokaz ‘Katynia’ to krok na drodze przywracania prawdy” [Russia/ Media: “Katyn” screening is a step on the road to restoring truth], *Dzieje*, April 2, 2010, <https://dzieje.pl/aktualnosci/rosja-media-pokaz-katynia-krok-na-drodze-przywracania-prawdy>.

<sup>123</sup> Jerzy Malczyk, “Rosja/ Media: pokaz ‘Katynia’ to krok na drodze przywracania prawdy” [Russia/ Media: ‘Katyn’ screening is a step on the road to restoring truth].

<sup>124</sup> “Rossijane o problemah rossijsko-pol’skih otnoshenij” Россияне о проблемах российско-польских отношений [Russians on Problems in Russian-Polish Relations], Survey (Russia: Levada Center, April 26, 2010), <https://www.levada.ru/2010/04/26/rossiyane-o-problemah-rossijsko-polskih-otnoshenij/>.

meeting with Tusk, another Levada Center poll revealed that only 19% had not heard of it and 7% found it difficult to answer the same question.<sup>125</sup> After years of criticism directed at Russia surrounding its official investigations into Katyń, its inadequate public acknowledgement of who was responsible for the crime, and its denial to turn over official Soviet documents regarding the crime, a Russian state-owned television channel aired a movie that did not shy from attributing the massacre to the NKVD and depicting the subsequent cover-up by the Soviet authorities.

All of these aforementioned events led up to the meeting between the Polish and Russian prime ministers in Katyń on the seventh of April 2010. In a historic ceremony, Putin and Tusk commemorated the Katyń massacre, demonstrating their nations' respect and mourning for the victims by laying wreaths and praying at the Katyń memorial. Adding to the visibility of the event, other major Polish figures attended the ceremony, including Lech Wałęsa, Tadeusz Mazowiecki, Andrzej Wajda, Chief Rabbi of Poland Michael Schudrich, and clergy from the Polish Orthodox Church, Lutheran Church, and Roman Catholic Church.<sup>126</sup> Prime Minister Tusk recognized that Prime Minister Putin displayed an unusual act of reverence:

“Today, when we saw the Russian prime minister bowing his head before the Katyń victims, when we saw how he, kneeling, placed candles on the Polish graves in Katyń, a part of us may recognize this as normal. But

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<sup>125</sup> “Rossijane o problemah rossijsko-pol’skih otnoshenij” Россияне о проблемах российско-польских отношений [Russians on Problems in Russian-Polish Relations], Survey (Russia: Levada Center, April 26, 2010), <https://www.levada.ru/2010/04/26/rossiyane-o-problemah-rossijsko-polskih-otnoshenij/>.

<sup>126</sup> “Tusk z Putinem na uroczystościach 70. rocznicy zbrodni katyńskiej” [Tusk with Putin at the 70th anniversary of the Katyn massacre], *Dzieje*, April 7, 2010, <https://dzieje.pl/aktualnosci/tusk-z-putinem-na-uroczystosciach-70-rocznicy-zbrodni-katynskiej>.

when we began our work and our discussions on the political level and among researchers, this would not have been normal. We waited for this moment.”<sup>127</sup>

He went on to state that there is still progress to be made, but that Poland and Russia were on the right track to having a productive partnership, especially in regard to economic exchange and energy issues.<sup>128</sup> Putin reflected Tusk’s sentiment in his comments and additionally announced that they had made a verbal agreement that day to ensure gas supplies from Russia to Poland until 2037.<sup>129</sup> In a symbolic act, Putin and Tusk presented a memorial plate to the Church of the Resurrection of Christ near the Katyń memorial, which held Russian and Polish icons and religious imagery to symbolize their reconciliation.<sup>130</sup><sup>131</sup> After the ceremony, Putin and Tusk met with members of the Polish-Russian Group on Difficult Matters in Smolensk to hear a report on their work and commended their efforts.

The historic meeting between Tusk and Putin—under such a scrutinous eye from a Polish audience that still grieved the NKVD’s victims at Katyń—drew both praise and criticism. Chairman of the Committee on Foreign Affairs in the Sejm, Andrzej Halicki,

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<sup>127</sup> “Tusk: Władimir Putin przyjął zaproszenie do Polski” [Tusk: Vladimir Putin accepted the invitation to visit Poland], *Dzieje*, April 7, 2010, <https://dzieje.pl/aktualnosci/tusk-wladimir-putin-przyjal-zaproszenie-do-polski>.

<sup>128</sup> “Tusk: Władimir Putin przyjął zaproszenie do Polski” [Tusk: Vladimir Putin accepted the invitation to visit Poland], *Dzieje*, April 7, 2010.

<sup>129</sup> “Tusk: Władimir Putin przyjął zaproszenie do Polski” [Tusk: Vladimir Putin accepted the invitation to visit Poland], *Dzieje*, April 7, 2010.

<sup>130</sup> “Putin dopuskaet, chto Katyn’ mogla byt’ mest’ju Stalina za gibel’ v Pol’she sovetskih plennyh” Путин допускает, что Катень могла быть местью Сталина за гибель в Польше советских пленных [Putin admits that Katyn could have been Stalin’s revenge for the deaths of Soviet prisoners of war in Poland], *Korrespondent*, April 7, 2010, <https://korrespondent.net/world/russia/1064467-putin-dopuskaet-chto-katyn-mogla-byt-mestyu-stalina-za-gibel-v-polshe-sovetskih-plennyh>.

<sup>131</sup> “Putin i Tusk pochtily pamjat’ zhertv Katyni” Путин и Туск почтили память жертв Катини [Putin and Tusk honored the memory of the victims of Katyn], *Vesti*, April 7, 2010, <https://www.vesti.ru/article/2139357>.

called Putin's speech at Katyn "strong and meaningful."<sup>132</sup> He especially found Putin's condemnation of totalitarianism and its evils against Russians, Germans, Poles, and other groups to be impressive. But for some on the Polish side, a concern about Russia's handling of the issue overshadowed the events of the day. Professor Wojciech Materski, a member of the Polish-Russian Group on Difficult Matters did not share Halicki's enthusiasm: "The meaning of Prime Minister Vladimir Putin's speech is clear: we want to build a future with Poland, but without settling the Katyn crime."<sup>133</sup> Materski took issue with Putin's attribution of the Katyn massacre to the totalitarian system rather than the Soviet state and for failing to name the executioners. However, he concluded, "The most important thing is the mere presence of the Russian Prime Minister at Katyn. He said much, although significantly less than he could have said."<sup>134</sup> To some, Materski's criticism perhaps sounds too harsh and deliberately ignorant of the magnitude of the progress from the Russian side on this issue. Putin's words had indicated a move towards the future, but without erasing this horror from memory: "It would be hypocritical to say that everything is left in the past. No. We are obliged to keep memory of the past."<sup>135</sup> Such words from a Russian leader after decades of controversy at the site of the Katyn massacre were unprecedented. At the same time, Putin's words sounded empty to people like Materski when the Russian government's actions did not follow through on Putin's words—a dispute still remained between the families of the Katyn victims and Russia

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<sup>132</sup> "Halicki: wystąpienie Putina mocne i wymowne" [Halicki: Putin's speech strong and meaningful], *Dzieje*, April 7, 2010, <https://dzieje.pl/aktualnosci/halicki-wystapienie-putina-mocne-i-wymowne>.

<sup>133</sup> "Materski: Putin chce budować przyszłość, nie rozliczając się ze zbrodni" [Materski: Putin wants to build a future without accounting for crimes], *Dzieje*, April 7, 2010, <https://dzieje.pl/aktualnosci/materski-putin-chce-budowac-przyszlosc-nie-rozliczajac-sie-ze-zbrodni>.

<sup>134</sup> "Materski: Putin chce budować przyszłość, nie rozliczając się ze zbrodni" [Materski: Putin wants to build a future without accounting for crimes], *Dzieje*, April 7, 2010.

<sup>135</sup> "Putin i Tusk pochtli pamjat' zhertv Katyni" Путин и Туск почтили память жертв Катynи [Putin and Tusk honored the memory of the victims of Katyn], *Vesti*, April 7, 2010.

over the 2004 termination of the investigation of the Military Prosecutor's Office of the Russian Federation into the Katyn massacre. After years of challenges and appeals from the families of the victims and Memorial (International Historical Educational Charitable and Human Rights Society "Memorial"), the ruling had not been overturned, so the families of the victims brought the issue up to the European Court of Human Rights, where it remained during the April 2010 commemoration.<sup>136</sup>

The period 2009-April 2010 in Polish-Russian relations was a promising era in the relationship with multiple indicators that the quest for historical reconciliation would be successful, thanks to the efforts of the Polish-Russian Group on Difficult Matters. The number of high-level relationships being built between both governments before and during the Smolensk visit on 7 April 2010 indicated that both sides were committed to fostering personal contacts. Proposed by the Polish-Russian Group on Difficult Matters and enshrined in an agreement between Putin and Tusk, the foundation was laid to create centers focused on Poland and Russia's mutual history, institutionalizing historical reconciliation apart from the working group. These future centers had the potential to create lower-level contacts and relationships in both states and to offer educational opportunities to the communities with which they would interact. This progress in building personal relationships, institutionalizing historical reconciliation in the form of centers, combined with continued recognition of the importance of the working group from members of both governments, spoke to a mutual desire to improve the relationship and the acceptance that this was in both nations' interests. Putin's public

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<sup>136</sup> "Rassledovanie 'katynskogo dela'. Spravka" Расследование 'катынского дела'. Справка [Investigation of the 'Katyn affair'. Synopsis], RIA Novosti, April 6, 2010, <https://ria.ru/20100406/218669127.html>.

acknowledgement that the Soviet Union was responsible for the murder of these Poles and the airing of *Katyń* on state-owned television for a Russian audience could be considered concessions from the Russian side and a good-faith attempt to heal the rift. Even the presence of religious leadership was visible in this period: the working group met with Metropolitan Hilarion and Cardinal Dziwisz in 2009, and representatives of the Russian Orthodox and Roman Catholic churches were present at the Katyń commemoration in April 2010, imitating God's forgiveness and love as examples for their flocks. The Polish-Russian Group on Difficult Matters had facilitated this progress by drawing high-profile government figures to endorse their work in attendance at their meetings, proposing the creation of centers focused on their mutual history, and deciding to host their spring 2010 meeting in Smolensk to commemorate Katyń, drawing multiple high-profile figures to participate and, therefore, display both states' commitment to reconciliation. All of Jerzy Wiatr's indicators for success were present in this period apart from the removal of negative stereotypes from education in history and agreements on items of national interest, but even progress had been made towards that with the agreement to create the history-focused centers.

As for damaging factors, domestic pressures that interfere with political figures' attempts to improve relations, and persistent negative around stereotypes did not appear to have stifled progress in improving the discussion around historical issues during this period. However, unwillingness to understand the other party's perspective came up on a few occasions. Putin's characterization of the Katyń massacre at the commemoration ceremony in April 2010 and Wojciech Materski's subsequent criticism of that characterization could arguably indicate Russia's unwillingness to understand the Polish



perspective on what true attribution of the Katyń crime would require. There was also the unresolved issue of the closed investigation of Russian Military Prosecutor's Office into Katyń, which had been closed since 2005, and the classified documents related to the investigation. In 2009, the Military Collegium of the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation declared that resuming the investigation into Katyń would be against Russian law, since the statute of limitations had passed for that type of crime.<sup>137</sup> On a matter of such importance for Poles, this would have been viewed as Moscow deliberately ignoring the Polish desire to see justice in the case or any previously unseen materials related to the crime. Additionally, it could be argued that the influence of political parties and their rhetoric had negative impact. The domestic infighting between the Polish Foreign Ministry and the Chancellery of the President surrounding the April 2010 commemoration ceremonies created unnecessary political drama over an event that should have been uniting for Poles. PO and PiS politicians treated the ceremonies as an avenue to improve their image to the Polish public, perhaps in an attempt to gain more respect and support before the upcoming elections in Poland, rather than what it was supposed to be—a solemn event held in memory of murdered Polish patriots. This may have had the effect of politicizing the event for the Polish audience, although this is difficult to measure. However, the Russian side did not interfere and granted that both the prime minister and the president could attend the ceremonies, letting the Poles battle out their disagreement amongst themselves. Whatever the effect in Poland on the public's perception of their political parties, they could not point fingers at the Russians for stoking the fire. For this reason, while political parties and their rhetoric may have

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<sup>137</sup> Jerzy Malczyk, "Śledztwo rosyjskie [Russian investigation]," *Dzieje*, April 1, 2010, <https://dzieje.pl/aktualnosci/sledztwo-rosyjskie>.

negatively affected the progress towards historical reconciliation surrounding the seventieth anniversary of Katyń, it was likely limited since the Russian government remained neutral in the conflict. Overall, the factors that enabled progress in reconciliation outweighed the factor that may have had detrimental effects, and the era was a net positive for historical reconciliation.

As monumental as the meeting between Tusk and Putin was at the commemoration of Katyń, the events of April 2010 were overshadowed by yet another tragedy in Smolensk. Seventy years after the massacre of Polish officers and three days after Tusk and Putin had laid flowers together in remembrance of those killed outside Smolensk, a plane crash would end the lives of many notable Poles, including the Polish president. Historical reconciliation would face yet another obstacle: the death of Poland's head of state and major political, cultural, and military leaders on Russian soil.

#### 2010-2012: In the Aftermath of the Smolensk Air Crash

This section examines the period from the moment of the Smolensk air crash through 2012, and presents the argument that the Smolensk air disaster did not have a significant impact on the group in the first couple months after the crash. However, as time went on, the event gained more significance and negatively impacted the ability of the group to pursue its work and facilitate reconciliation between Poland and Russia. The section will first explain what the Smolensk air disaster was, its controversies, and its significance in Polish-Russian relations. After this brief initial explanation, the section will examine the comments by members of the group, politicians, and government officials in Poland and Russia regarding the air crash and the progress and obstacles the group faced throughout the period.

Three days after Tusk and Putin met in Smolensk, on 10 April 2010, the Tupolev Tu-154M Polish Air Force jet carrying President Lech Kaczyński crashed, killing Kaczyński and all others on board. The ninety-five other victims included the president's wife, Maria Kaczyńska, the last Polish president-in-exile, Ryszard Kaczorowski, some of the highest-ranking officers of the Polish military including the Chief of the General Staff and commanders of the Land Forces, Air Force, and Navy, 18 members of the Polish parliament, religious leaders, and family of the Katyń victims, among others.<sup>138</sup> Even the Polish-Russian Group on Difficult Matters did not escape the disaster unscathed—one of the group's members, Andrzej Przewoźnik, perished in the disaster.<sup>139</sup> The events leading up to the crash, the cause of the crash, and who bears responsibility have remained at the center of controversy since.

Almost immediately after the crash on April 10, President Medvedev ordered the establishment of a state commission to investigate the cause of the crash and appointed Prime Minister Vladimir Putin as the commission's chairman, granting him the power to determine its composition.<sup>140</sup> The Russian government formed a joint commission between the Interstate Aviation Committee (МАК, *Межгосударственный*

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<sup>138</sup> "Lista Pasażerów Rządowego Samolotu" [List of passengers on the government plane], Prezydent.pl, April 10, 2010, archived at <https://web.archive.org/web/20100413010541/http://www.prezydent.pl/aktualnosci/katastrofa-samolotu/art%2C3%2Clista-pasazerow-rzadowego-samolotu.html>, <http://www.prezydent.pl/aktualnosci/katastrofa-samolotu/art%2C3%2Clista-pasazerow-rzadowego-samolotu.html>.

<sup>139</sup> Adam Daniel Rotfeld and Anatoly V. Torkunov, *White Spots—Black Spots: Difficult Matters in Polish-Russian Relations, 1918-2008* (Pittsburgh PA, UNITED STATES: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2015), 646-647.

<sup>140</sup> President of the Russian Federation Dmitrii Medvedev, "Распоряжение Президента Российской Федерации От 10.04.2010 г. № 225-рп" [Order of the President of the Russian Federation Dated April 10, 2010 No. 225], President of Russia, April 10, 2010, <http://kremlin.ru/acts/bank/30908>.

*авиационный комитет*) and the Russian Ministry of Defense to investigate.<sup>141</sup> Polish representatives and technical experts from Poland also participated in their investigation.<sup>142</sup> The Polish air accident investigation was carried out by the Committee for Investigation of National Aviation Accidents (KBWLLP, *Komisja Badania Wypadków Lotniczych Lotnictwa Państwowego*), a commission that can be appointed by the Minister of Defense to investigate state and military aircraft crashes, under the leadership of Jerzy Miller, the then Polish Minister of Internal Affairs and Administration.<sup>143</sup> Poland also created an investigation on April 10 led by the District Military Prosecutor's Office in Warsaw, which was separate from the air accident commission that aimed to determine the causes of the crash, not hold any parties responsible.<sup>144</sup>

The initial response to the crash—aside from the shock and horror—stood as example as to how Russians and Poles could come together when faced with tragedy. The evening of April 10, President Medvedev announced on Russian national television that April 12 would be a National Day of Mourning.<sup>145</sup> In his address, he called Poles “dear

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<sup>141</sup> Mezhgosudarstbennyj Arviacionnyj Komitet [Interstate Aviation Committee], “Ty-154M N101 10.04.2010,” January 10, 2011, <https://mak-iac.org/rassledovaniya/tu-154m-n101-10-04-2010/>.

<sup>142</sup> Mezhgosudarstbennyj Arviacionnyj Komitet [Interstate Aviation Committee], “Ty-154M N101 10.04.2010.”

<sup>143</sup> Marta Rawicz, “Szef MON polecił zbadanie sprawy publikacji zdjęć w raporcie podkomisji smoleńskiej. Antoni Macierewicz przeprasza [The head of the Ministry of Defense ordered an investigation into the publication of photos in the report of the Smolensk subcommittee. Antoni Macierewicz apologizes],” Polska Agencja Prasowa SA, April 12, 2022, <https://www.pap.pl/aktualnosci/news%2C1154173%2Cmon-polecil-zbadanie-sprawy-publikacji-zdjec-w-raporcie-podkomisji>.

<sup>144</sup> Mateusz Martyniuk and Colonel Zbigniew Rzepa, “Komunikat Prokuratury Generalnej i Naczelnej Prokuratury Wojskowej” [Announcement of the General Prosecutor's Office and the Chief Military Prosecutor's Office] (General Prosecutor's Office of the Chief Military Prosecutor Office, April 27, 2010), <https://pk.gov.pl/aktualnosci/aktualnosci-prokuratury-krajowej/komunikat-prokuratury-generalnej-i-naczelnjej-prokuratury-wojskowej/>.

<sup>145</sup> “Medvedev: 12 Aprelja v Rossii Ob"javlen Nacional'nyj Traur” Медведев: 12 Апреля в России Объявлен Национальный Траур [Medvedev: April 12 in Russia Declared National Day of Mourning], Vesti, April 10, 2010, <https://www.vesti.ru/article/2067307>.

friends,” assured that there would be a thorough investigation, and extended his deepest condolences on behalf of Russians.<sup>146</sup> Later that night, Prime Minister Putin joined Prime Minister Tusk in laying flowers at the plane’s wreckage in Smolensk. It was even reported that they exchanged an embrace before speaking with the rescuers at the site, hearing about the investigative process and identification of the bodies.<sup>147</sup>

However, these friendly interactions were drowned out in the suspicions and blame that grew louder only a couple months after the crash when disputes arose over the investigations. In October 2010, Edmund Klich, accredited Polish representative to MAK, reported to the Sejm Infrastructure Committee and Justice and Human Rights Committee that multiple requests for information, materials, and participation from Polish investigators in the investigation since April 2010 had been ignored or blocked by the Russian side.<sup>148</sup> There were two reports that came out in 2011 after investigations from the Polish and Russian sides into the crash, and differences between them were picked over. The final report on the results of the technical investigation from MAK was published in January 2011.<sup>149</sup> Its conclusion was that the immediate cause of the crash was the decision of the Polish pilot in command to land at Smolensk-Severny airport

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<sup>146</sup> “Medvedev: 12 Aprelja v Rossii Ob”javlen Nacional’nyj Traur” Медведев: 12 Апреля в России Объявлен Национальный Траур [Medvedev: April 12 in Russia Declared National Day of Mourning], Vesti, April 10, 2010.

<sup>147</sup> “Putin i Tusk vozlozhili cvety na meste krushenija samoleta pol’skogo prezidenta” Путин и Туск возложили цветы на месте крушения самолета польского президента [Putin and Tusk laid flowers at the crash site of Polish president’s plane], Vesti, April 10, 2010, <https://www.vesti.ru/article/2085828>.

<sup>148</sup> Republic of Poland, Sejm Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej [Sejm of the Republic of Poland], *Biuletyn Nr 4283/VI*, Bulletin number 4283 of the VI parliamentary term, Komisja Infrastruktury (Nr 329) [Infrastructure Committee n. 329], Komisja Sprawiedliwości i Praw Człowieka (Nr 235) [Justice and Human Rights Committee n. 235], (Warsaw, 21 October 2010), 10-15, [http://orka.sejm.gov.pl/Biuletyn.nsf/0/C66ADE03E2400CF6C12577E600509FCD/\\$file/0428306.pdf](http://orka.sejm.gov.pl/Biuletyn.nsf/0/C66ADE03E2400CF6C12577E600509FCD/$file/0428306.pdf).

<sup>149</sup> Komissija po rassledovaniju aviacionnyh proisshestvij [Air Accident Investigation Commission], “Okonchatel’nogo Otcheta Tu-154M Bortovoj Nomer 101 Respubliki Pol’sha” Окончательного Отчета Ту-154М Бортовой Номер 101 Республики Польша [Final Report Tu-154M Tail Number 101, Republic of Poland] (Mezhgosudarstvennyj aviacionnyj komitet [Interstate Aviation Committee], January 12, 2011), [https://mak-iac.org/upload/iblock/abd/finalreport\\_rus.pdf](https://mak-iac.org/upload/iblock/abd/finalreport_rus.pdf).

despite warnings from the airport's air traffic control and from the crew of the Polish Yak-40 aircraft, which had landed earlier that day, that the meteorological conditions did not meet the minimum requirements for landing the aircraft—the vertical visibility was reportedly around 40-50 meters in the thick fog.<sup>150</sup> The report also stated that aviation psychologists and pilot experts concluded that the presence of the Commander-in-Chief of the Polish Air Force in the cockpit until the crash exerted psychological pressure on the pilot in command, impacting his decision to disregard risks and land the aircraft.<sup>151</sup> The release of the Polish report in July 2011 revealed similar conclusions about the immediate causes of the crash, attributing the cause of the crash to “descent below the minimum descent altitude at an excessive rate of descent in weather conditions which prevented visual contact with the ground, as well as a delayed execution of the go-around procedure.”<sup>152</sup> However, it deviated in stating that the Russian “Approach Control confirming to the crew the correct position of the airplane in relation to the [runway] threshold, glide slope, and course [might] have affirmed the crew's belief that the approach was proceeding correctly although the airplane was actually outside the permissible deviation margin” as a circumstance contributing to the crash and did not

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<sup>150</sup> Komissija po rassledovaniju aviacionnyh proisshestvij [Air Accident Investigation Commission], “Okonchatel'nogo Otcheta Tu-154M Bortovoj Nomer 101 Respubliki Pol'sha” Окончательного Отчета Ту-154М Бортовой Номер 101 Республики Польша [Final Report Tu-154M Tail Number 101, Republic of Poland], 195, 207.

<sup>151</sup> Komissija po rassledovaniju aviacionnyh proisshestvij [Air Accident Investigation Commission], “Okonchatel'nogo Otcheta Tu-154M Bortovoj Nomer 101 Respubliki Pol'sha” Окончательного Отчета Ту-154М Бортовой Номер 101 Республики Польша [Final Report Tu-154M Tail Number 101, Republic of Poland], 207.

<sup>152</sup> Committee for Investigation of National Aviation Accidents, “Final Report from the Examination of the Aviation Accident No 192/2010/11 Involving the Tu-154M Airplane, Tail Number 101, Which Occurred on April 10th, 2010 in the Area of the SMOLENSK NORTH Airfield,” July 29, 2011, <http://mswia.datacenter-poland.pl/FinalReportTu-154M.pdf>. Archived at <https://web.archive.org/web/20111025133735/http://mswia.datacenter-poland.pl/FinalReportTu-154M.pdf>, 318.

mention psychological pressure on the pilots as a cause or circumstance.<sup>153</sup> The District Military Prosecutor's Office in Warsaw did not release a report on its findings in 2011, and its investigation is ongoing in 2022.<sup>154</sup> The discrepancies between the final reports on the causes of the crash, allegations of Russia mishandling evidence, and frustrations related to accessing all evidence caused upset in Polish society and among politicians, sparking suspicions among Poles that Russia may be refusing to cooperate for nefarious reasons.

As the investigations into the crash went on, the Polish-Russian Group on Difficult Matters continued its work and achieved some major goals it had set. The sixth plenary session of the group that took place in Warsaw on October 4, 2010 covered significant ground. Keeping precedence with the meetings prior to the April 2010 crash, a high-level Polish government official joined the meeting, Deputy Foreign Minister Henryk Litwin, and, although he was not present, the newly elected Polish President Bronisław Komorowski had praised the group for its work.<sup>155</sup> At the meeting, members gave special attention to the air crash in Smolensk, paying tribute to its victims, including their colleague, group member Andrzej Przewoźnik, and other contributors to the group that perished. The sympathy extended to Poles from the Russians in the aftermath of the tragedy was cited as “yet another impulse in the process of rapprochement between the

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<sup>153</sup> Committee for Investigation of National Aviation Accidents, “Final Report from the Examination of the Aviation Accident No 192/2010/11 Involving the Tu-154M Airplane, Tail Number 101, Which Occurred on April 10th, 2010 in the Area of the SMOLENSK NORTH Airfield,” 318.

<sup>154</sup> Jarosław Kaczyński, “Jarosław Kaczyński dla PAP: sprawa odpowiedzialności bardzo wielu ludzi w Polsce za katastrofę smoleńską jest aktualna” [Jarosław Kaczyński for PAP: the issue of responsibility for the Smolensk catastrophe remains current for very many people in Poland], interview by Grzegorz Brzuszewski and Tomasz Grodecki, *Polish Press Agency*, April 12, 2022, <https://www.pap.pl/aktualnosci/news%2C1154160%2Cjaroslaw-kaczynski-dla-pap-sprawa-odpowiedzialnosci-bardzo-wielu-ludzi-za>.

<sup>155</sup> Adam Daniel Rotfeld and Anatoly V. Torkunov, *White Spots—Black Spots: Difficult Matters in Polish-Russian Relations, 1918-2008*, 648.

two nations.”<sup>156</sup> Attention was given to the group’s publication, *White Spots—Black Spots: Difficult Matters in Polish-Russian Relations, 1918-2008*. The publication was a pinnacle moment in the group’s work that represented the first joint attempt by historians, archivists, and researchers to present both nations’ perceptions of historical issues in Polish-Russian relations from the ninety-year period.<sup>157</sup> Notably, the group agreed that Turkunov and Rotfeld should petition their respective ministers of education and centers of secondary and higher education to add the book to their libraries as a resource for history teachers to use in their courses.<sup>158</sup> In a similar vein, the group discussed the progress made in the establishment of the Centers on Polish-Russian Dialogue and understanding, which Putin and Tusk had agreed to in September 2009, and the potential for group members and other national institutions to participate in the centers’ work. As mentioned on multiple occasions prior, the matter of access to documents and archives arose, specifically the exchange of archival documents between both sides and President Dmitri Medvedev’s decision to declassify materials associated with the Katyn’ crime.<sup>159</sup>

The next session of the group was held in Riga on June 1, 2011. In the first acknowledgement of trouble, the communiqué released after the meeting stated, “The participants expressed concern over attempts to disrupt the dialogue and understanding between Poland and Russia. They noted the need for the further popularization of research and scientific work that enhanced links between the two countries,” but did not

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<sup>156</sup> Adam Daniel Rotfeld and Anatoly V. Torkunov, *White Spots—Black Spots: Difficult Matters in Polish-Russian Relations, 1918-2008*, 647.

<sup>157</sup> Adam Daniel Rotfeld and Anatoly V. Torkunov, *White Spots—Black Spots: Difficult Matters in Polish-Russian Relations, 1918-2008*, 647.

<sup>158</sup> Adam Daniel Rotfeld and Anatoly V. Torkunov, *White Spots—Black Spots: Difficult Matters in Polish-Russian Relations, 1918-2008*, 647.

<sup>159</sup> Adam Daniel Rotfeld and Anatoly V. Torkunov, *White Spots—Black Spots: Difficult Matters in Polish-Russian Relations, 1918-2008*, 648.



directly name the Smolensk air crash or any specific political rhetoric or event as the disruptive factor.<sup>160</sup> Attempting to overcome these obstacles to dialogue, the group highlighted methods through which the current issues could be mitigated, while at the same time continuing with its mission of historical reconciliation. The group members that were present agreed upon the need to prepare a joint report on relations between EU and Russia and a joint publication on the Polish-Russian relationship in matters of security and cooperation.<sup>161</sup> They embraced the reports that they heard on the dialogue between the Roman Catholic and Russian Orthodox churches, and hoped a joint document that was in progress “would lend Polish-Russian relations a new, spiritual dimension.”<sup>162</sup> Representatives of the ministries of culture of Poland and Russia presented the group members reports on the initial progress made by the Polish-Russian Centers for Dialogue and Understanding, which were beginning their work. The members of the Polish-Russian Group on Difficult Matters contributed to determining the mission and composition of the centers’ Joint International Council.<sup>163</sup>

After the June 2011 meeting, but before the December 2011 meeting, two important events took place, relevant to the group’s work. Firstly, in August 2011, the Polish Ministry of Culture revealed Sławomir Dębski to be the director of the Polish-Russian Center for Dialogue and Understanding.<sup>164</sup> Dębski was a member of the Polish-

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<sup>160</sup> Adam Daniel Rotfeld and Anatoly V. Torkunov, *White Spots—Black Spots: Difficult Matters in Polish-Russian -Relations, 1918-2008*, 649.

<sup>161</sup> Adam Daniel Rotfeld and Anatoly V. Torkunov, *White Spots—Black Spots: Difficult Matters in Polish-Russian -Relations, 1918-2008*, 649.

<sup>162</sup> Adam Daniel Rotfeld and Anatoly V. Torkunov, *White Spots—Black Spots: Difficult Matters in Polish-Russian -Relations, 1918-2008*, 649.

<sup>163</sup> Adam Daniel Rotfeld and Anatoly V. Torkunov, *White Spots—Black Spots: Difficult Matters in Polish-Russian -Relations, 1918-2008*, 649.

<sup>164</sup> “Sławomir Dębski ma zostać szefem polsko-rosyjskiego Centrum Dialogu” [[Sławomir Dębski to become head of the Polish-Russian Center of Dialogue], *Dzieje*, August 18, 2011,

Russian Group on Difficult Matters at the time, had been acting as the Ministry of Culture's plenipotentiary for the establishment of the center, and was the previous director of the Polish Institute of International Affairs (PISM).<sup>165</sup> His academic and professional work on Polish-German and Polish-Russian relations, especially his work in the Polish-Russian Group on Difficult Matters, certainly made him one of the best candidates to guide the center in its research and its relationship with the sister center in Russia. The second event of interest was that Pope Benedict XVI held a personal audience and received the co-chairs of the group, Turkunov and Rotfeld.<sup>166</sup> Both had been in Rome to attend the conference organized by the Polish Embassy to the Holy See and the Russian Embassy in Rome, titled, "Poland-Russia: Breaking Stereotypes," where the co-chairs of the group spoke to representatives of the Holy See about the work of the group.<sup>167</sup> The conference and the personal audience with the Pope, as well as an interview with Rotfeld on Vatican Radio, spread awareness about the attempt of the Polish-Russian Group on Difficult Issues to reconcile the two nations and indicated the support of the Roman Catholic Church, also evident in the separate dialogue between the Church in Poland and the Russian Orthodox Church. Highlighting the significance of the participation of religious authorities during his radio interview, Rotfeld noted, "[...] there is no doubt

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<https://dzieje.pl/content/s%C5%82awomir-d%C4%99bski-ma-zosta%C4%87-szefem-polsko-rosyjskiego-centrum-dialogu>.

<sup>165</sup> "Sławomir Dębski ma zostać szefem polsko-rosyjskiego Centrum Dialogu" [Sławomir Dębski to become head of the Polish-Russian Center of Dialogue], *Dzieje*, August 18, 2011.

<sup>166</sup> "Benedikt XVI Zainteresovan v Razreshenii «slozhnyh Voprosov» v Pol'sko-Rossijskih Otnoshenijah" Бенедикт XVI Зайнтересован в Разрешении «сложных Вопросов» в Польско-Российских Отношениях [Benedict XVI Is Interested in Resolving 'Difficult Matters' in Polish-Russian Relations], Official Site of MGIMO Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Russia, October 6, 2011, <https://mgimo.ru/about/news/smi/211467/>.

<sup>167</sup> "Benedikt XVI Zainteresovan v Razreshenii «slozhnyh Voprosov» v Pol'sko-Rossijskih Otnoshenijah" Бенедикт XVI Зайнтересован в Разрешении «сложных Вопросов» в Польско-Российских Отношениях [Benedict XVI Is Interested in Resolving 'Difficult Matters' in Polish-Russian Relations], Official Site of MGIMO Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Russia, October 6, 2011.

that the position taken by the Russian and Polish Churches provides the most significant impact on the process of achieving reconciliation.”<sup>168</sup> The recognition from the Vatican—and the Pope himself—gave further legitimacy to the group’s work, and emphasized for Catholic and Orthodox Poles and Russians the importance of reconciliation with their Christian brothers.

At the next session of the group in St. Petersburg on December 8, 2011, the group looked towards the future and did not discuss the obstacles in the current relations between the two states. Returning to the publication of *White Spots—Black Spots: Difficult Matters in Polish-Russian Relations, 1918-2008*, the group examined the progress on the translation and publication of the book in English.<sup>169</sup> Sharing the costs of the English publication, both the Polish and Russian sides of the group hoped it would become widely available to English speakers in 2012. Access to and research work in state archives was brought up again, but they eventually put aside historical research. The group turned to discussions of future work on security issues, and how to facilitate dialogue between Polish and Russian experts.<sup>170</sup> Additionally, they spoke about a report on EU-Russia relations, which some group members and experts had prepared and presented in November 2011. The group agreed on adding annexes to the report by March 2012, including an annex on international cooperation in the Baltic area, and another on the cooperation between Russia and the EU in education, the humanities, and

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<sup>168</sup> “Бенедикт XVI Заинтересован в Разрешении «сложных Вопросов» в Польско-Российских Отношениях [Benedict XVI Is Interested in Resolving ‘Difficult Matters’ in Polish-Russian Relations], Official Site of MGIMO Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Russia, October 6, 2011.

<sup>169</sup> Adam Daniel Rotfeld and Anatoly V. Torkunov, *White Spots—Black Spots: Difficult Matters in Polish-Russian Relations, 1918-2008*, 650.

<sup>170</sup> Adam Daniel Rotfeld and Anatoly V. Torkunov, *White Spots—Black Spots: Difficult Matters in Polish-Russian Relations, 1918-2008*, 650.

the sciences.<sup>171</sup> The group members also participated in a meeting with the Polish and Russian Centers for Dialogue and Understanding, which they had helped establish, and contributed their opinions to the plans of work at the centers for 2012.<sup>172</sup>

The subsequent session of the group in Warsaw, held late May and early June 2012, included representatives from the Polish and Russian Centers for Dialogue and Understanding, the Russian Ambassador to Poland, Aleksander Alekseyev, and the Polish Foreign Minister Radosław Sikorski.<sup>173</sup> Adding to the high-profile officials in attendance, Polish President Bronisław Komorowski greeted the group members at Belweder Palace.<sup>174</sup> The group had new members brought on to replace some original members who had departed, such as Katarzyna Pełczyńska-Nałęcz, who had gone on to her appointment as Undersecretary of State in the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs in January 2012.<sup>175</sup><sup>176</sup> The session covered a considerable amount of ground, discussing cooperation between the Warsaw and Moscow Centers for Polish-Russian Dialogue and Understanding, the possibility of mutual recognition of education diplomas by both governments, and archival documents, especially Soviet documents connected to the

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<sup>171</sup> Adam Daniel Rotfeld and Anatoly V. Torkunov, *White Spots—Black Spots: Difficult Matters in Polish-Russian Relations, 1918-2008*, 650.

<sup>172</sup> Adam Daniel Rotfeld and Anatoly V. Torkunov, *White Spots—Black Spots: Difficult Matters in Polish-Russian Relations, 1918-2008*, 650.

<sup>173</sup> Adam Daniel Rotfeld and Anatoly V. Torkunov, *White Spots—Black Spots: Difficult Matters in Polish-Russian Relations, 1918-2008*, 651.

<sup>174</sup> Adam Daniel Rotfeld and Anatoly V. Torkunov, *White Spots—Black Spots: Difficult Matters in Polish-Russian Relations, 1918-2008*, 653.

<sup>175</sup> Rossijsko-pol'skaja gruppa po slozhnym voprosam [Russian-Polish Group on Difficult Matters], "Sostav Rossijskoj Chasti Gruppy Po Slozhnym Voprosam, Vytেকajushhim Iz Istorii Rossijsko-Pol'skih Otnoshenij" Состав Российской Части Группы По Сложным Вопросам, Вытекающим Из Истории Российско-Польских Отношений [Composition of the Russian Part of the Group on Difficult Matters, Arising from the History of Russian-Polish Relations], June 16, 2008, <https://mgimo.ru/files/13713/Participants.doc>.

<sup>176</sup> "Katarzyna Pełczyńska-Nałęcz Podsekretarzem Stanu w MSZ [Katarzyna Pełczyńska-Nałęcz is Undersecretary of State in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs]" (Office of the Spokesperson of the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, January 18, 2012), <https://archive.ph/uLaa#selection-559.10-559.27>, <http://www.msz.gov.pl/Katarzyna,Pelczynska-Nalecz,Podsekretarzem,Stanu,w,MSZ,48157.html>.

Katyń massacre.<sup>177</sup> The group also gave its official approval on the publication of the English version of the book, *White Spots—Black Spots: Difficult Matters in Polish-Russian -Relations, 1918-2008*, which they aimed to have widely distributed.<sup>178</sup> The action plan for the next six months included preparing publications on Polish-Soviet relations, recommending the use of public television channels to support dialogue and understanding between Poland and Russia, attending an October 2012 conference on the Time of Troubles, and preparing the topic and participant list for a seminar, “Christianity in the Twentieth Century: Memory, Forgiveness, Reconciliation,” between Catholic and Russian Orthodox clergymen and scholars.<sup>179</sup> The heads of the Warsaw and Moscow Centers for Dialogue and Understanding, Slawomir Debski and Petr Stegniy respectively, also introduced initiatives like youth exchanges and research opportunities that their centers could cooperate on.<sup>180</sup> Like previous meetings from this period, there appeared to have been positive results from this meeting and there was a clear path forward to improve dialogue on historical issues.

The final session of the group during this period was held in Moscow on December 3, 2012. Opened by Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov, who like other officials praised the group’s activities and the significance of its work, the meeting reflected successful themes from earlier meetings but also indicated some

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<sup>177</sup> Adam Daniel Rotfeld and Anatoly V. Torkunov, *White Spots—Black Spots: Difficult Matters in Polish-Russian -Relations, 1918-2008*, 651-652.

<sup>178</sup> Adam Daniel Rotfeld and Anatoly V. Torkunov, *White Spots—Black Spots: Difficult Matters in Polish-Russian -Relations, 1918-2008*, 651-652.

<sup>179</sup> Adam Daniel Rotfeld and Anatoly V. Torkunov, *White Spots—Black Spots: Difficult Matters in Polish-Russian -Relations, 1918-2008*, 652-653.

<sup>180</sup> Adam Daniel Rotfeld and Anatoly V. Torkunov, *White Spots—Black Spots: Difficult Matters in Polish-Russian -Relations, 1918-2008*, 652.

awkwardness around the issue of the Smolensk air crash.<sup>181</sup> Reflecting on the dialogue between the Russian Orthodox Church and the Roman Catholic Church, the group discussed the visit of the Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia to Poland and the message delivered jointly by the Russian Orthodox Church and the Roman Catholic Church during the visit, which reminded both congregations of their calling to love their neighbor, urging them to reconcile, to forgive, and to reject sin that leads to hostility.<sup>182 183</sup> The Warsaw and Moscow Centers for Dialogue and Understanding presented reports on their work, updating the group on the centers' projects and plans for the upcoming year.<sup>184</sup> Trying to involve private citizens in the work of the two centers, the group encouraged the participation of the business community in their various projects.<sup>185</sup> With regards to the Smolensk air crash, the group discussed the creation of a monument to the victims in Smolensk and the "transfer to Poland of the airliner wreckage, which was still in Russia. It was noted that the delay in resolving these issues was creating an unhealthy, emotion-charged atmosphere in bilateral relations."<sup>186</sup> Clearly, the controversies surrounding the crash investigation impacted bilateral relations and dialogue enough that the group

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<sup>181</sup> Adam Daniel Rotfeld and Anatoly V. Torkunov, *White Spots—Black Spots: Difficult Matters in Polish-Russian Relations, 1918-2008*, 653.

<sup>182</sup> Adam Daniel Rotfeld and Anatoly V. Torkunov, *White Spots—Black Spots: Difficult Matters in Polish-Russian Relations, 1918-2008*, 653.

<sup>183</sup> Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia and Archbishop Józef Michalik of Przemyśl, "Sovmestnoe poslanie narodam Rossii i Pol'shi Predstojatelja Russkoj Pravoslavnoj Cerkvi Patriarha Moskovskogo i vseja Rusi Kirilla i Predsedatelja Episkopskoj Konferencii Pol'shi Arhiepiskopa Juzefa Mihalika, mitropolita Peremyshl'skogo" Совместное послание народам России и Польши Предстоятеля Русской Православной Церкви Патриарха Московского и всея Руси Кирилла и Председателя Епископской Конференции Польши Архиепископа Юзефа Михалика, митрополита Перемышльского [Joint message to the peoples of Russia and Poland of the Primate of the Russian Orthodox Church, Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia, and the President of the Polish Bishops' Conference, Archbishop Jozef Michalik, Metropolitan of Przemyśl], August 17, 2012, <http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/2411498.html>.

<sup>184</sup> Adam Daniel Rotfeld and Anatoly V. Torkunov, *White Spots—Black Spots: Difficult Matters in Polish-Russian Relations, 1918-2008*, 654.

<sup>185</sup> Adam Daniel Rotfeld and Anatoly V. Torkunov, *White Spots—Black Spots: Difficult Matters in Polish-Russian Relations, 1918-2008*, 654.

<sup>186</sup> Adam Daniel Rotfeld and Anatoly V. Torkunov, *White Spots—Black Spots: Difficult Matters in Polish-Russian Relations, 1918-2008*, 653.

decided to recognize and discuss it. On matters related to the English-language version of book, *White Spots—Black Spots: Difficult Matters in Polish-Russian -Relations, 1918-2008*, the group considered ways to bring attention to it in the English-speaking academic community.<sup>187</sup> Potential future publications were discussed, as well, which included a multivolume document collection on Polish-Soviet relations and a publication on Polish-Soviet relations between 1939-1945 that imitated the group's previous joint publication, *White Spots—Black Spots: Difficult Matters in Polish-Russian -Relations, 1918-2008*, in its methods and goal of compromise on the historical issues.<sup>188</sup> Contemporary bilateral relations came up, too—the group touched on two studies that covered confidence-building measures, security, multilateral frameworks in their 'common neighborhood,' and stability in Europe.<sup>189</sup>

This period was generally positive for the Polish-Russian Group on Difficult Matters. The negative rhetoric in Poland regarding Russian actions after the Smolensk air crash and Russia's refusal to hand over the wreckage and other key evidence appears to have had a negative effect on dialogue, as the group alluded to the issue in the June 2011 meeting and dwelled on it in the December 2012 meeting. However, the degree to which it impacted the working group during this period appears to be limited, and it did not prevent progress in the group's work nor prevent positive developments the relationship. As for Jerzy Wiatr's factors that indicate progress towards reconciliation, Russia's refusal to hand over evidence could indicate the Kremlin leadership's hesitation to make

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<sup>187</sup> Adam Daniel Rotfeld and Anatoly V. Torkunov, *White Spots—Black Spots: Difficult Matters in Polish-Russian -Relations, 1918-2008*, 653.

<sup>188</sup> Adam Daniel Rotfeld and Anatoly V. Torkunov, *White Spots—Black Spots: Difficult Matters in Polish-Russian -Relations, 1918-2008*, 654.

<sup>189</sup> Adam Daniel Rotfeld and Anatoly V. Torkunov, *White Spots—Black Spots: Difficult Matters in Polish-Russian -Relations, 1918-2008*, 654.

concessions over an issue that was deeply important to Poland. However, all other positive factors were present. The Moscow and Warsaw Centers for Dialogue and Understanding began their work and sought to involve private citizens in their activities, especially Polish and Russian youth, indicating a desire to improve the younger generations' understanding of each other and increase the number of personal contacts between Poland and Russia. This period also had the positive engagement of the most important religious institutions for both countries, the Roman Catholic Church and the Russian Orthodox Church. The churches maintained their dialogue independently from the group, improving their relationship through their own efforts.<sup>190</sup> The August 2012 document signed by Patriarch Kirill and the head of the Polish Bishops' Conference was a tangible example of their cooperation. Additionally, the group's work had the potential to positively impact secondary and higher education and work towards removing negative stereotypes from education in history. The group had sought to make the unprecedented work that aimed to reconcile Polish and Russian views on historical issues, *White Spots—Black Spots: Difficult Matters in Polish-Russian Relations, 1918-2008*, available to secondary school teachers and students and researchers in higher education. The group also tried to facilitate discussions on mutual national interests by supporting publications on security cooperation in their common neighborhood, although the fruits of these efforts were not really discernable.

Some factors that damage reconciliation came close to impacting the work of the Polish-Russian Group on Difficult Matters in this period—domestic pressures that

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<sup>190</sup> Adam Daniel Rotfeld and Anatoly V. Torkunov, *White Spots—Black Spots: Difficult Matters in Polish-Russian Relations, 1918-2008*, 649.



interfere with political figures' attempts to improve relations and the influence of nationalist political parties' rhetoric. The highly controversial handling of the Smolensk air crash caused upset in Poland, but the most vehement anger and criticism came from PiS and its constituents, as the deceased President Lech Kaczyński was a leader of PiS, and his brother, Jarosław Kaczyński, remained as the party's leader after the president's death. PO maintained majority power in the Sejm, and after the 2010 presidential election, its candidate, Bronisław Komorowski, was elected president. In effect, much of Warsaw's relationship with the Kremlin was directed by the less nationalist PO, which almost certainly contributed to Poland's continued pursuit of a better relationship with Russia and support for the goals of the Polish-Russian Group on Difficult Matters. This mitigated some of the damaging effects that the Smolensk crash had on Polish-Russian relations and it probably prevented the Polish-Russian Group on Difficult Matters from getting caught in the crossfire between a PiS majority government and the Kremlin. Ultimately, the group was able to continue its work uninterrupted and largely unaffected by the domestic pressures and nationalist rhetoric surrounding the crash. Other factors—unwillingness and inability to understand the other party's perspective and persistent negative stereotypes—do not appear to have impacted the work of the group.

#### 2013-2015: Meetings of the Group, the Maidan Revolution, the Annexation of Crimea, and the War in Donbas

This section will examine the developments in the Polish-Russian Group on Difficult Matters and the state of Russian-Polish relations immediately prior to, during, and after the Ukraine crisis, and analyze if the working group was affected by the developments in the Polish-Russian relationship. An in-depth examination of the Polish-Russian relationship throughout the Ukraine crisis and what led to its deterioration is

beyond the scope of this research, but a general understanding of both countries' positions on the matter is essential to appreciate the political environment in which the Polish-Russian Group on Difficult Matters was operating.

Before any of the group's meetings took place in 2013, the first director of the Moscow Center for Dialogue and Understanding, Pyotr Stegnyi, was fired and replaced by Yuri Bondarenko.<sup>191</sup> Bondarenko wasted little time to form a reputation amongst his new colleagues. On 15 April 2013, *RIA Novosti* held the roundtable discussion, "Russia and Poland: history that interferes with mutual understanding," attended by Bondarenko among other Russian representatives from business, scientific, and academic communities.<sup>192</sup> In its announcement of the event three days prior, *RIA Novosti* published that, despite the work of the Polish-Russian Group on Difficult Issues, the creation of the Moscow Center for Dialogue and Understanding, research, publications, and conferences on historical issues, "[...] Russophobia has been and remains the main tool in Warsaw's relations with Moscow."<sup>193</sup> At the roundtable, Bondarenko lamented that Poles continued to bring up the Katyń crime despite the fact that "it has already been said ten thousand times that the NKVD killed on the order of Stalin," that they more recently repeatedly brought up the Augustów roundup, and that Poland lacks "elementary decency" in its

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<sup>191</sup> "Adam Rotfeld: wypowiedź Jurija Bondarienki jest niepokojąca" [Adam Rotfeld: Yuri Bondarenko's statement is disturbing], *Wiadomosci*, April 16, 2013, <https://wiadomosci.wp.pl/adam-rotfeld-wypowiedz-jurija-bondarienki-jest-niepokojaca-6031552555238529a>.

<sup>192</sup> "Kruglyj Stol 'Rossija i Pol'sha: Istorija, Kotoraja Meshает Vzaimoponimaniu'" Круглый Стол 'Россия и Польша: История, Которая Мешает Взаимопониманию' [Roundtable 'Russia and Poland: history that interferes with mutual understanding'], *RIA Novosti*, April 12, 2013, <https://ria.ru/20130412/932313399.html>.

<sup>193</sup> "Kruglyj Stol 'Rossija i Pol'sha: Istorija, Kotoraja Meshает Vzaimoponimaniu'" Круглый Стол 'Россия и Польша: История, Которая Мешает Взаимопониманию' [Roundtable 'Russia and Poland: history that interferes with mutual understanding'], *RIA Novosti*, April 12, 2013.

approach to its relationship with Russia.<sup>194</sup> His words greatly offended Polish journalists in attendance, who left in the middle of the discussion.<sup>195</sup>

The political response from Polish representatives varied: a PiS representative in the Sejm called to label Bondarenko as ‘persona non grata’ in Poland<sup>196</sup> and the spokesperson for the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs indicated that they would investigate.<sup>197</sup> As for his Polish counterparts, Robert Śmigielski from the Warsaw Center for Polish-Russian Dialogue and Understanding indicated his surprise that there were no Polish representatives invited to participate and about Bondarenko’s comments, he remarked, “[...] he evidently lacked empathy towards Poles and attempted to explain the situation, which, contrary to what he says, is not fully clarified.”<sup>198</sup> Śmigielski pointed to the published works of the Polish-Russian Group on Difficult issues and the work of the Centers for Dialogue and Understanding on current issues as indication of moving forward on these historical issues, but also brought up that the Katyn crime had not been fully worked past, since the Russian government has not handed over the files from the terminated 1990-2004 investigation.<sup>199</sup> Adam Daniel Rotfeld, co-chair of the Polish-Russian Group on Difficult Issues, responded to Bondarenko’s words, stating:

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<sup>194</sup> Wacław Radziwinowicz, “Okrągły stół polsko-rosyjski wcale nie okrągły” [Polish-Russian round table not round at all], *Gazeta Wyborcza*, April 19, 2013, <https://wyborcza.pl/7,75399,13764867,okragly-stol-polsko-rosyjski-wcale-nie-okragly.html>.

<sup>195</sup> Radziwinowicz, “Okrągły stół polsko-rosyjski wcale nie okrągły” [Polish-Russian round table not round at all].

<sup>196</sup> Radziwinowicz, “Okrągły stół polsko-rosyjski wcale nie okrągły” [Polish-Russian round table not round at all].

<sup>197</sup> “Centrum dialogu z Rosją o słowach strony rosyjskiej: zabrakło empatii” [Center for dialogue with Russia on the words of the Russian side: there was a lack of empathy], *Dzieje*, April 15, 2013, <https://dzieje.pl/aktualnosci/centrum-dialogu-z-rosja-o-slowach-strony-rosyjskiej-zabraklo-empatii>.

<sup>198</sup> “Centrum dialogu z Rosją o słowach strony rosyjskiej: zabrakło empatii” [Center for dialogue with Russia on the words of the Russian side: there was a lack of empathy], *Dzieje*, April 15, 2013.

<sup>199</sup> “Centrum dialogu z Rosją o słowach strony rosyjskiej: zabrakło empatii” [Center for dialogue with Russia on the words of the Russian side: there was a lack of empathy], *Dzieje*, April 15, 2013.

The appointment of this man [as head of the Center] is quite incomprehensible; in the last two weeks the previous director was fired and a new head was appointed. If this expresses the new point of view [of this institution], it is a contradiction of the very idea of the Russian-Polish Center for Dialogue and Understanding.<sup>200</sup>

These were strong words from Rotfeld, and they indicate that he was worried about the direction of the Moscow center and how this would impact the process of improving dialogue and pursuing historical reconciliation. His worries about how this man was chosen to replace the prior director, who had not stirred up this type of controversy, were not unfounded—this was a poor indicator for which direction Polish-Russian relations were headed. Nonetheless, Robert Śmigielski affirmed the Warsaw center's desire to continue to cooperate with the Moscow center on projects.<sup>201</sup>

The first session of this period, and eleventh session of the group, was held in Gdańsk between June 7–8, 2013. Notably, the members present reflected on how domestic politics in Poland and Russia impacted the bilateral relationship, citing positive achievements in economy, trade, culture, and science.<sup>202</sup> However, the group brought up—for the second meeting in a row—the delay in returning wreckage from the Smolensk air crash and the erection of a monument for Smolensk.<sup>203</sup> The members

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<sup>200</sup> “Adam Rotfeld: wypowiedź Jurija Bondarienki jest niepokojąca” [Adam Rotfeld: Yuri Bondarenko's statement is disturbing], *Wiadomości*, April 16, 2013, <https://wiadomosci.wp.pl/adam-rotfeld-wypowiedz-jurija-bondarienki-jest-niepokojaca-6031552555238529a>.

<sup>201</sup> “Centrum dialogu z Rosją o słowach strony rosyjskiej: zabrakło empatii” [Center for dialogue with Russia on the words of the Russian side: there was a lack of empathy], *Dzieje*, April 15, 2013.

<sup>202</sup> Adam Daniel Rotfeld and Anatoly V. Torkunov, *White Spots—Black Spots: Difficult Matters in Polish-Russian Relations, 1918-2008*, 656.

<sup>203</sup> Adam Daniel Rotfeld and Anatoly V. Torkunov, *White Spots—Black Spots: Difficult Matters in Polish-Russian Relations, 1918-2008*, 656.

implied that these issues “hinder[ed] the implementation of joint projects.”<sup>204</sup>

Nonetheless, the group paid attention to positive developments in the relationship, such as the agreement on visa-free travel for Polish and Russian citizens to Kaliningrad and north-eastern Poland, which the mayor of Gdansk praised, and the progress made in building a better relationship between the Russian Orthodox Church and the Roman Catholic Church, again citing the joint document signed by both churches in August 2012.<sup>205</sup> After multiple discussions in previous meetings on the subject on archives, the group heard the directors of the Polish and Russian state archives detail their cooperation.<sup>206</sup> And, like in the previous meeting, the group discussed the progress on the publication on Polish-Soviet affairs between 1939-1945, the compilation of a joint document collection covering Polish-Soviet relations between 1918-1945, which was to include some previously unpublished documents, and the unresolved terms for an agreement between Poland and Russia on the mutual recognition of educational diplomas.<sup>207</sup> The group also considered the possibility of exploring other topics that might be relevant as the anniversaries of World War I, the Warsaw Uprising, the Red Army’s liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau, and the victory of World War II approached over the course of the next two years.<sup>208</sup> The Warsaw and Moscow directors of the Centers for Dialogue and Understanding presented the work of their organizations since

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<sup>204</sup> Adam Daniel Rotfeld and Anatoly V. Torkunov, *White Spots—Black Spots: Difficult Matters in Polish-Russian -Relations, 1918-2008*, 656.

<sup>205</sup> Adam Daniel Rotfeld and Anatoly V. Torkunov, *White Spots—Black Spots: Difficult Matters in Polish-Russian -Relations, 1918-2008*, 655-656.

<sup>206</sup> Adam Daniel Rotfeld and Anatoly V. Torkunov, *White Spots—Black Spots: Difficult Matters in Polish-Russian -Relations, 1918-2008*, 655.

<sup>207</sup> Adam Daniel Rotfeld and Anatoly V. Torkunov, *White Spots—Black Spots: Difficult Matters in Polish-Russian -Relations, 1918-2008*, 655.

<sup>208</sup> Adam Daniel Rotfeld and Anatoly V. Torkunov, *White Spots—Black Spots: Difficult Matters in Polish-Russian -Relations, 1918-2008*, 655.

the last meeting and described their cooperation with each other, and the group extended its thanks to the first director of the Moscow center, Pyotr Stegnyy, who had departed from the position since the group's last meeting.<sup>209</sup>

The final session of the group was held in Kaliningrad on November 16, 2013. The main topic that the group covered was the activities of the Warsaw and Moscow Centers for Dialogue and Understanding in 2013 and their intended plans for 2014.<sup>210</sup> There appears to have been some tension between the two centers, as the final communique of the meeting described the discussion between Sławomir Dębski and Yuri Bondarenko as “highly animated and often critical discussion.”<sup>211</sup> Bondarenko attributed the problems they were discussing as “connected with the fact that the preceding year had been the first full year of the institution's activity under his leadership,” and the group members directed Dębski and Bondarenko to coordinate activities and find avenues to address current events and historical issues while involving citizens of both countries in their work, especially youth.<sup>212</sup> On historical issues that required attention, the group discussed the upcoming 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of World War I and how they might address it and a new publication, the Russian version of *The Forgotten Peace: Riga Peace Treaty of 1921*.<sup>213</sup> Again, state archives were given some attention, and the heads of the Russian and Polish state archives presented archival work that had been done. Giving attention to

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<sup>209</sup> Adam Daniel Rotfeld and Anatoly V. Torkunov, *White Spots—Black Spots: Difficult Matters in Polish-Russian Relations, 1918-2008*, 655-656.

<sup>210</sup> Adam Daniel Rotfeld and Anatoly V. Torkunov, *White Spots—Black Spots: Difficult Matters in Polish-Russian Relations, 1918-2008*, 657.

<sup>211</sup> Adam Daniel Rotfeld and Anatoly V. Torkunov, *White Spots—Black Spots: Difficult Matters in Polish-Russian Relations, 1918-2008*, 657.

<sup>212</sup> Adam Daniel Rotfeld and Anatoly V. Torkunov, *White Spots—Black Spots: Difficult Matters in Polish-Russian Relations, 1918-2008*, 657.

<sup>213</sup> Adam Daniel Rotfeld and Anatoly V. Torkunov, *White Spots—Black Spots: Difficult Matters in Polish-Russian Relations, 1918-2008*, 657.

contemporary issues, some group members stated their hope that research into security issues and integration initiatives might proceed at a faster pace.<sup>214</sup> After the meeting, Adam Daniel Rotfeld met with Patriarch Kirill, who “thanked the group—and especially the Polish co-chair—for their cooperation to rapprochement between the two nations,” and positively reflected on his meeting with Catholic representatives in August 2012.<sup>215</sup> Despite the intention of the group to meet again in Lublin during the summer of 2014, no later meeting would take place.<sup>216</sup>

Issues that arose in Ukraine in the fall of 2013 strained Russia’s and Poland’s relationship, and led to an era of poor relations between both countries. The most notable events in Ukraine were the Maidan Revolution, the Annexation of Crimea, and the War in Donbas. The following paragraphs will give a brief overview of the events, followed by a brief explanation about how they affected Polish-Russians relations and, by extension, the Group on Difficult Matters.

In 2013, Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovych was facing another election in 2015, and was struggling to determine how to avoid defaulting on Ukraine’s foreign debt. The EU was offering a financial package to Ukraine for signing the Association Agreement, but it was not enough to complete Ukraine’s debt payments on the billions of dollars it owed.<sup>217</sup> To pressure Ukraine into accepting the simultaneous negotiations to join the Eurasian Customs Union and reject whatever the EU had to offer, Russia adopted

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<sup>214</sup> Adam Daniel Rotfeld and Anatoly V. Torkunov, *White Spots—Black Spots: Difficult Matters in Polish-Russian Relations, 1918-2008*, 657.

<sup>215</sup> Adam Daniel Rotfeld and Anatoly V. Torkunov, *White Spots—Black Spots: Difficult Matters in Polish-Russian Relations, 1918-2008*, 657-658.

<sup>216</sup> Adam Daniel Rotfeld and Anatoly V. Torkunov, *White Spots—Black Spots: Difficult Matters in Polish-Russian Relations, 1918-2008*, 658.

<sup>217</sup> Rajan Menon and Eugene Rumer, *Conflict in Ukraine: The Unwinding of the Post-Cold War Order* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2015), 61.

policies that disrupted trade between Russia and Ukraine, such as banning some Ukrainian imports and implementing stricter border inspections for Ukrainians, which cost Ukraine between \$500 million and \$2.5 billion.<sup>218</sup> So, in November 2013, caving to worries about debt and pressure from Russia, President Yanukovich withdrew from negotiations with the EU for an Association Agreement and from negotiations for Ukraine to participate in the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA).<sup>219</sup> Less than a month later, it was revealed that Russia would provide a \$15 billion aid package to Ukraine with loan terms very favorable to Ukraine and give massive discounts to Ukraine on Russian gas, saving Ukraine \$3.5-\$7 billion.<sup>220</sup> Around 42% of Ukrainians favored EU ascension, and in protest of Yanukovich's decision to abandon negotiations with the EU and DCFTA in favor of Russia, hundreds of thousands of protestors flooded the streets in November 2013 and the following months.<sup>221</sup> After a harsh government crackdown and the protests turning violent, the opposition and the government signed a compromise agreement in February 2014 that constrained some of the president's power and called for a presidential election in December 2014.<sup>222</sup> After Yanukovich signed the agreement, he fled with no explanation, and the Ukrainian parliament voted only a few days later to remove him from office and have a new presidential election on May 25, 2014.<sup>223</sup>

Russia viewed these massive protests and abrupt changes in Ukraine's orientation as precipitated by European and American intervention in Ukraine with the objective of

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<sup>218</sup> Rajan Menon and Eugene Rumer, *Conflict in Ukraine: The Unwinding of the Post-Cold War Order*, 77.

<sup>219</sup> Rajan Menon and Eugene Rumer, *Conflict in Ukraine: The Unwinding of the Post-Cold War Order*, 77.

<sup>220</sup> Rajan Menon and Eugene Rumer, *Conflict in Ukraine: The Unwinding of the Post-Cold War Order*, 77.

<sup>221</sup> Rajan Menon and Eugene Rumer, *Conflict in Ukraine: The Unwinding of the Post-Cold War Order*, 79.

<sup>222</sup> Rajan Menon and Eugene Rumer, *Conflict in Ukraine: The Unwinding of the Post-Cold War Order*, 80.

<sup>223</sup> Rajan Menon and Eugene Rumer, *Conflict in Ukraine: The Unwinding of the Post-Cold War Order*, 81.



disrupting Russia's relationship with the country, evidenced by European and US support of the protestors, their criticism of Yanukovych and his relationship with Russia, and American officials' discussions about the direction of the Ukrainian government after Yanukovych.<sup>224</sup> Within days at the end of February 2014, Russian troops without insignia or any identification markings, stationed at the leased port of Sevastopol, took control of Crimea, which the Russian Federation then officially annexed on 18 March 2014.<sup>225226</sup> The annexation reinforced the new Ukrainian government's inclination to align more closely with Europe and eroded support for Russia among the Ukrainian citizenry.<sup>227</sup> However, the Russian government continued its disruptive actions in Ukraine, and supported pro-Russian separatists by sending combatants and military equipment to eastern Ukraine and helping establish the separatist Donetsk People's Republic (DNR, *Донецкая Народная Республика*) and Luhansk People's Republic (LNR, *Луганская Народная Республика*) in the Donbas region of Ukraine.<sup>228</sup> When DNR and LNR forces were on the verge of defeat by the Ukrainian military in the summer of 2014, Russia sent military personnel, supplies, and weapons, which reversed the direction of the conflict and inflicted heavy losses on the Ukrainian military.<sup>229</sup> Eventually, a ceasefire, the Minsk Protocol, was signed in September 2014, in which Ukraine made many concessions to the LNR, DNR, and Russia.<sup>230</sup> Another ceasefire, Minsk II, was signed February 2015 after

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<sup>224</sup> Rajan Menon and Eugene Rumer, *Conflict in Ukraine: The Unwinding of the Post-Cold War Order*, 82.

<sup>225</sup> Carl Schreck, "From 'Not Us' To 'Why Hide It?': How Russia Denied Its Crimea Invasion, Then Admitted It," Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, February 26, 2019, <https://www.rferl.org/a/from-not-us-to-why-hide-it-how-russia-denied-its-crimea-invasion-then-admitted-it/29791806.html>.

<sup>226</sup> "Ukraine Crisis: Timeline," *BBC News*, November 13, 2014, sec. Europe, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-26248275>.

<sup>227</sup> Rajan Menon and Eugene Rumer, *Conflict in Ukraine: The Unwinding of the Post-Cold War Order*, 84.

<sup>228</sup> Rajan Menon and Eugene Rumer, *Conflict in Ukraine: The Unwinding of the Post-Cold War Order*, 85.

<sup>229</sup> Rajan Menon and Eugene Rumer, *Conflict in Ukraine: The Unwinding of the Post-Cold War Order*, 86.

<sup>230</sup> Rajan Menon and Eugene Rumer, *Conflict in Ukraine: The Unwinding of the Post-Cold War Order*, 86.

the first agreement failed to stop fighting.<sup>231232</sup> However, the Minsk agreements failed to resolve the conflict in Donbas, which remained frozen from 2015 until 2022.

Poland's upset over Russia's interference in Ukraine in 2013-2014 and Russia's perceptions of Poland as one of those European nations that tried to bring Ukraine closer to Europe at the expense of Russia had a substantially negative effect on Polish-Russian relations, and were the likely the final blow to the Polish-Russian Group on Difficult Matters. Poland, as a member of the EU and NATO that was supportive of those Ukrainians who desired to join both institutions, inevitably came into conflict with Russia over these events. It aligned with Poland's economic and security interests to have Ukraine join the same institutions as Poland, whereas Russia held the opposite interests. Russia's attempts to pressure Ukraine into rejecting the path of joining the EU and NATO was worrying for Poles. Poland had been in Russia's 'sphere of influence' for centuries, sometimes at the cost of Poland's very existence and Pole's freedom to determine for themselves how to govern and orient their state. With their ascension to NATO and membership in the EU, Poles almost certainly felt safer, but not safe enough to ignore indications that Russia was trying to exert its power over another sovereign nation in Europe—alarm bells went off for Poles who knew their own nations' history. Poland requested the long-term deployment of 10,000 NATO troops on its soil in 2014, an event that would have certainly escalated tensions with Russia if it had happened.<sup>233</sup> And Poland took on the role as a vocal critic of Russia's seizure of Ukrainian territory

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<sup>231</sup> Rajan Menon and Eugene Rumer, *Conflict in Ukraine: The Unwinding of the Post-Cold War Order*, 86.

<sup>232</sup> Andrew Lohsen and Pierre Morcos, "Understanding the Normandy Format and Its Relation to the Current Standoff with Russia," Center for Strategic & International Studies, February 9, 2022, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/understanding-normandy-format-and-its-relation-current-standoff-russia>.

<sup>233</sup> Rajan Menon and Eugene Rumer, *Conflict in Ukraine: The Unwinding of the Post-Cold War Order* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2015), 139.

and its disruptive actions in the country, and strongly advocated for the EU to levy economic sanctions against Russia.<sup>234</sup> Russia responded by banning Polish imports of fruits and vegetables, blocking Poland's access to one of its largest export markets and costing Poland approximately 0.6% of Poland's total GDP.<sup>235236</sup> As Russia still controlled Ukrainian territory and was resolute in its support for LNR and DNR separatists at the end of this period, and Poland remained opposed to Russian interference in Ukraine, Poland and Russia never overcame their differences by 2015.

A few of Jerzy Wiatr's positive factors that supported historical reconciliation were present in this period. The agreement on visa-free travel early in this period was a positive step, and serves as a solid example of both governments trying to grow personal contact between their states. However, since it was limited to Kaliningrad and north-eastern Poland, the agreement improved personal contact to a smaller extent than if it was granted to all Polish and Russian citizens to all their territories. The activities of the Centers for Dialogue and Understanding and their contribution to the growth of personal contacts and youth education on historical topics was probably weakened with the poorer relationship between the centers and the lack of political will to have the centers conduct their activities apolitically. Dialogue in this period between the Russian Orthodox Church and the Roman Catholic Church likely continued, as Metropolitan Hilarion of the Russian Orthodox Church indicated after the announcement of Pope Benedict XVI's resignation in 2013 that the Russian Orthodox Church hoped it could continue dialogue between the

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<sup>234</sup> "Russia Bans Polish Fruit and Veg amid Sanctions War," BBC News, August 1, 2014, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-28603140>.

<sup>235</sup> "Russia Bans Polish Fruit and Veg amid Sanctions War," BBC News, August 1, 2014, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-28603140>.

<sup>236</sup> Rajan Menon and Eugene Rumer, *Conflict in Ukraine: The Unwinding of the Post-Cold War Order* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2015), 129.

two churches with his successor.<sup>237</sup> And Patriarch Kirill's meeting with Rotfeld and his praise for the group's work display the Russian Orthodox Church's support for reconciliation between Poland and Russia. However, it is unclear if the Russian Orthodox Church cooperated directly with the Roman Catholic Church in Poland after Patriarch Kirill's 2012 visit.

As for concessions to the other party or an agreement on national interests, these factors were absent in this period and did not improve the Polish-Russian dialogue on historical issues. On the contrary, the negative factor of unwillingness or inability to understand the other party's perspective was obviously present. Polish and Russian opposing security interests over the situation in Ukraine were most likely the factors that led to the collapse of the Group on Difficult Matters and cooperation through the Moscow and Warsaw Centers for Dialogue and Understanding. The timeline of the collapse of the group and the beginning of the Ukraine conflict is not coincidence. The Ukraine crisis marks a turning point. Before the Maidan Revolution, the Polish-Russian Group on Difficult Matters was functioning, as were the Centers for Dialogue and Understanding, albeit with some frustrations and difficulties in cooperating. After the Ukraine crisis, the meetings for the Group on Difficult Issues were postponed indefinitely and the group suffered de facto collapse. In a 2017 interview with *RIA Novosti*, Petr Stegnyy, the first head of the Moscow Center for Dialogue and Understanding, laid the blame for the disastrous state of Polish-Russian relations at the feet of Polish

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<sup>237</sup> Lucia Bellinello, "Russian Orthodox Church Responds to Pope's Resignation," *Russia Beyond*, February 13, 2013, [https://www.rbth.com/society/2013/02/12/russian\\_orthodox\\_church\\_responds\\_to\\_popes\\_resignation\\_22787.html](https://www.rbth.com/society/2013/02/12/russian_orthodox_church_responds_to_popes_resignation_22787.html).

politicians.<sup>238</sup> He claimed they were responsible for the disruption of political dialogue with Russia after the “coup” in Ukraine in 2014, and worsened the situation by enthusiastically supporting sanctions against Russia.<sup>239</sup> Many in Poland during this period almost certainly came to the conclusion that negative historical stereotypes about Russia must have at least some truth, as they saw Russia violently meddle in one of their neighbor’s affairs. Since the Maidan Revolution, there has not been any broad calls from the Polish public or in politics to make concessions to or engage with Moscow—Poles simply do not trust Russia’s intentions. There has also been no mention of dialogue with Poland by the Russian public or by politicians—to be expected, as Russia is a much bigger matter for Poland than Poland is for Russia. Nationalist political parties in Poland critical of Russia probably benefited from confrontation with Russia over Ukraine, although it is difficult to find evidence to say that their rhetoric influenced the situation. In 2015, PiS won the parliamentary and presidential elections in Poland, and leads the government to present day.

#### 2015 Onwards: Status of the Group in Poland and Russia

This section will assess the state of the Polish-Russian Group on Difficult Matters and cooperation between other entities, present relevant figures’ retrospective opinions of the group’s work, and weigh the possibility that the group will be renewed and continue towards its original aims. This period was marked by major breakdowns in cooperation. Polish and Russian counterparts who had previously worked together through the Polish-

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<sup>238</sup> Petr Stegnyy, “Petr Stegnij: Pol’sha vedet otnoshenija s Rossiej k opasnoj cherte” Петр Стегний: Польша ведет отношения с Россией к опасной черте [Petr Stegnyy: Poland leads relations with Russia to a dangerous line], interview by RIA Novosti, August 30, 2017, <https://ria.ru/20170830/1501376521.html>.

<sup>239</sup> Petr Stegnyy, “Petr Stegnij: Pol’sha vedet otnoshenija s Rossiej k opasnoj cherte” Петр Стегний: Польша ведет отношения с Россией к опасной черте [Petr Stegnyy: Poland leads relations with Russia to a dangerous line], interview by RIA Novosti, August 30, 2017.

Russian Group on Difficult Matters or through the Centers for Dialogue and Understanding used regressive language about historical events and criticized each other. Forums that had previously produced positive results collapsed or stopped exchange with the other side.

In the area of cooperation between the Polish and Russian state archives, early in 2015 there was contention over how the head of the Russian state archives, Andrej Artizov, spoke about the Polish Home Army in World War II. In a February 2015 interview with *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* about Rosarchiv's publication of Soviet documents about the Polish underground, Artizov said, "It turned out that these underground members were accomplices of the Nazis and hindered the defeat of fascist Germany."<sup>240</sup> His words struck a nerve in Poland, and his Polish counterpart, Władysław Stępniaś, director of the Polish state archives who had collaborated with Artizov and met with him at meetings of the Polish-Russian Group on Difficult Matters, responded with surprise. He reflected on productive cooperation with Artizov over their thirty-year relationship, especially on the release of documents related to Katyń: "I do not know what motivates the statements of an otherwise balanced archivist and historian [...]"<sup>241</sup> Indicating his belief that Artizov's comments were driven by current political issues, Stępniaś stated, "So far, we have managed to avoid the pressure of current events in Polish-Russian

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<sup>240</sup> Andrej Artizov, "Kto vоевал v tylу Krasnoj armii, osvobodivshej Evropu ot fashizma" Кто воевал в тылу Красной армии, освобождавшей Европу от фашизма [Who fought in the rear of the Red Army, which liberated Europe from fascism], interview by Elena Novoselova, February 26, 2015, <https://rg.ru/2015/02/26/dokumenty-site.html>.

<sup>241</sup> "Stępniaś: 9 kwietnia spotkanie Polsko-Rosyjskiej Grupy ds. Trudnych" [Stępniaś: April 9 meeting of the Polish-Russian Group on Difficult Matters], *Dzieje*, February 27, 2015, <https://dzieje.pl/aktualnosci/stepniak-9-kwietnia-spotkanie-polsko-rosyjskiej-grupy-ds-trudnych>.

relations on archival cooperation,” and implied that he would not respond in kind by selectively presenting archival documents to form a narrative.<sup>242</sup>

In December 2015, Polish co-chair of the Polish-Russian Group on Difficult Matters, Adam Daniel Rotfeld resigned two years after the last meeting of the group.<sup>243</sup> After the November 2013 meeting, the group’s meeting planned for the summer of 2014 was repeatedly postponed, and ultimately never took place.<sup>245</sup> According to his personal MGIMO website, Anatoly Torkunov, the Russian co-chair of the group, also left his position sometime in 2014.<sup>247</sup> No explanation was given for either departure, but it can be assumed that the disintegration of the group led both men to leave, since the group had not met or continued work after 2013. The departure of the group’s co-chairs and no immediate appointment of replacements indicates that neither government was interested in resuming the group’s work at the time.

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<sup>242</sup> “Śtepnia: 9 kwietnia spotkanie Polsko-Rosyjskiej Grupy ds. Trudnych” [Śtepnia: April 9 meeting of the Polish-Russian Group on Difficult Matters], *Dzieje*, February 27, 2015.

<sup>243</sup> Irina Polina, “Rotfel’d Otkazalsja Byt’ Sopredsedatelem Rossijsko- Pol’skoj Gruppy Po Slozhnym Voprosam” [Rotfeld Refused to Co-Chair the Russian-Polish Group on Difficult Matters], ITAR TASS, December 23, 2015, <https://tass.ru/mezhdunarodnaya-panorama/2553312>.

<sup>244</sup> “MSZ: Rotfeld zrezygnował z funkcji współprzewodniczącego Polsko-Rosyjskiej Grupy ds. Trudnych” [Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs: Rotfeld resigned as co-chair of Polish-Russian Group on Difficult Matters], *Dzieje*, December 23, 2015, <https://dzieje.pl/aktualnosci/msz-rotfeld-zrezygnowal-z-funkcji-wspolprzewodniczacego-polsko-rosyjskiej-grupy-ds-trudn>.

<sup>245</sup> Tomasz Grodecki, “Posiedzenie Polsko-Rosyjskiej Grupy ds. Trudnych przełożone” [Meeting of the Polish-Russian Group on Difficult Matters postponed], *Dzieje*, March 30, 2015, <https://dzieje.pl/aktualnosci/posiedzenie-polsko-rosyjskiej-grupy-ds-trudnych-przezone>.

<sup>246</sup> Polina, “Rotfel’d Otkazalsja Byt’ Sopredsedatelem Rossijsko- Pol’skoj Gruppy Po Slozhnym Voprosam” [Rotfeld Refused to Co-Chair the Russian-Polish Group on Difficult Matters].

<sup>247</sup> “Anatolij Vasil’evich Torkunov: Rektor MGIMO MID Rossii Akademik Rossijskoj akademii nauk Chrezvychajnyj i Polnomochnyj Posol Chlen Kollegii MID Rossii” [Anatolij V. Torkunov: Rector of MGIMO Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Russia, Academician of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary Member of the Collegium of the MFA of Russia], Official Site of MGIMO Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Russia, accessed April 19, 2022, <https://torkunov.mgimo.ru/>.

In early 2017, the Polish government renewed the Polish side of the Polish-Russian Group on Difficult Matters, appointing its new members and identifying the Polish co-chair, long-standing member of the group, Professor Mirosław Filipowicz.<sup>248</sup> The Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs said it was a display of the Polish side's desire to have more communication channels than just political channels.<sup>249</sup> Polish Foreign Minister Witold Waszczykowski advocated for the reconstruction of dialogue and cooperation with Russia through this forum, and acknowledged Russian concerns about the treatment of Soviet graves and monuments in Poland, saying this was an issue that the renewed Polish-Russian Group on Difficult Issues could address.<sup>250</sup> Soon after, the Russian Foreign Ministry responded to the action on their website, publishing in English and Russian,

In a situation where political dialogue between Russia and Poland has been frozen at Warsaw's initiative, we strongly doubt the expediency of resuming the Group's activities. [...] We see no point in a selective approach to reviving bilateral dialogue formats. We are prepared to consider a resumption of activities by the Group on the Complex Issues Arising from the History of Russian-Polish

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<sup>248</sup> Marta Rawicz, "W MSZ wręczenie nominacji polskim członkom Polsko-Rosyjskiej Grupy ds. Trudnych" [At the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, nominations were handed over to Polish members of the Polish-Russian Group on Difficult Matters], *Dzieje*, March 9, 2017, <https://dzieje.pl/aktualnosci/w-msz-wreczono-nominacje-polskim-czlonkom-polsko-rosyjskiej-grupy-ds-trudnych>.

<sup>249</sup> "Prof. M. Filipowicz współprzewodniczącym Polsko-Rosyjskiej Grupy ds. Trudnych" [Professor M. Filipowicz co-chairman of the Polish-Russian Group on Difficult Matters], *Dzieje*, February 8, 2017, <https://dzieje.pl/aktualnosci/msz-prof-miroslaw-filipowicz-wspolprzewodniczacym-polsko-rosyjskiej-grupy-ds-trudnych>.

<sup>250</sup> Rawicz, "W MSZ wręczenie nominacji polskim członkom Polsko-Rosyjskiej Grupy ds. Trudnych" [At the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, nominations were handed over to Polish members of the Polish-Russian Group on Difficult Matters].



Relations in the context of a general normalisation of relations with Poland, including their political aspect, given the existence of a meaningful agenda.<sup>251</sup>

Neglecting to publish the comment in Polish, the Russian Foreign Ministry could not have sent a clearer message about how it viewed the state of Polish-Russian dialogue. Six months after this announcement from the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov accused Poland of “blocking absolutely all types of interaction between us,” “trying to take advantage of the declared existence of this Group to impose its understanding of the situation,” and of “[brainwashing] its population to be anti-Russian.”<sup>252</sup> As for the status of the Russian side of the group, according to former Russian co-chair Anatoly Torkunov in 2017, it nominally existed, but was not active nor had the Russian side appointed a new co-chair.<sup>253</sup> Polish co-chair of the renewed Polish side of the group, Mirosław Filipowicz, managed to support the publication of a secondary-school history textbook in 2018 for Polish and Russian students that incorporated views of both sides on historical events, but it was done outside the structure of the group.<sup>254</sup> In 2018, Anatoly Torkunov even suggested that it is not necessary for the group to continue its work, but that Poles and Russians should look towards the future,

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<sup>251</sup> “Comment by the Information and Press Department on the Polish Foreign Ministry’s Statement Regarding the Group on the Complex Issues Arising from the History of Russian-Polish Relations,” The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, March 23, 2017, [https://www.mid.ru/kommentarii\\_predstavatelya/-/asset\\_publisher/MCZ7HQuMqBY/content/id/2702476](https://www.mid.ru/kommentarii_predstavatelya/-/asset_publisher/MCZ7HQuMqBY/content/id/2702476).

<sup>252</sup> Sergey Lavrov, “Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov’s Remarks and Answers to Questions at a Meeting with the Students and Faculty of MGIMO University and the Diplomatic Academy of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Moscow, September 1, 2017” (Speech, Moscow, September 1, 2017), [https://www.mid.ru/press\\_service/minister\\_speeches/-/asset\\_publisher/7OvQR5KJWVmR/content/id/2851134](https://www.mid.ru/press_service/minister_speeches/-/asset_publisher/7OvQR5KJWVmR/content/id/2851134).

<sup>253</sup> Anna Wróbel, “A. Torkunov nie będzie współprzewodniczył Polsko-Rosyjskiej Grupie do Spraw Trudnych” [A. Torkunov will not be co-chair of the Polish-Russian Group on Difficult Matters], *Dzieje*, March 23, 2017, <https://dzieje.pl/aktualnosci/anatolij-torkunov-nie-bedzie-wspolprzewodniczy-l-polsko-rosyjskiej-grupie-do-spraw>.

<sup>254</sup> “W Moskwie prezentacja polsko-rosyjskiej pomocy dla nauczycieli” [Presentation of Polish-Russian assistance for teachers in Moscow], *Dzieje*, April 19, 2018, <https://dzieje.pl/edukacja/w-moskwie-prezentacja-polsko-rosyjskiej-pomocy-dla-nauczycieli>.

and stop dwelling on the past.<sup>255</sup> Coming from a former co-chair of the group, this is a surprising dismissal of the potential positive impacts of historical reconciliation.

Filipowicz and other Polish group members resigned from the group in 2019, citing lack of interest from the Polish and Russian sides for supporting its aims.<sup>256257</sup> Whether the group nominally exists today or not, it is not currently a forum for cooperation between Russia and Poland. It is unlikely that the group will be renewed and continue its work as it was originally intended.

After the dissolution of the Polish-Russian Group on Difficult Matters, some of the members from 2008-2015 have gone on to hold significant positions in political and educational spheres. Previous Russian co-chair of the group between 2007-2014, Anatoly Torkunov serves as the rector of Moscow State Institute of International Relations (MGIMO), a position he has held since 1992, and the co-chair of the Trianon Dialogue since its beginning in 2017.<sup>258</sup> He had also served 2011-2020 as the Chairman of the Board of Directors of *Channel One* (*Первый канал*), a Russian state-owned television

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<sup>255</sup> “Ректор МГИМО: Россия и Польша Продолжают Работу Над Учебником По Истории” Ректор МГИМО: Россия и Польша Продолжают Работу Над Учебником По Истории [MGIMO Rector: Russia and Poland Continue Work on History Textbook], ITAR TASS, February 20, 2018, <https://tass.ru/obschestvo/4975970>.

<sup>256</sup> Michał Kokot, “Koniec polsko-rosyjskiej grupy ds. trudnych? ‘Usłyszeliśmy, że nie są dla rządu priorytetem’” [The end of the Polish-Russian group on difficult issues? ‘We heard that they are not a priority for the government’], *Gazeta.pl*, February 13, 2019, <https://wyborcza.pl/7,75399,24455369,koniec-polsko-rosyjskiej-grupy-ds-trudnych-uslyszelismy.html>.

<sup>257</sup> Mirosław Filipowicz, “Zgon Polsko-Rosyjskiej Grupy do Spraw Trudnych” [Death of the Polish-Russian Group on Difficult Matters], interview by Robert Kowalski, February 24, 2019, <https://oko.press/zgon-polsko-rosyjskiej-grupy-do-spraw-trudnych-czaputowicz-nie-znalazl-czasu/>.

<sup>258</sup> “Anatolij Vasil’evich Torkunov: Rektor МГИМО МИД России Академик Российской академии наук Чрезвычайный и Полномочный Посол Член Коллегии МИД России [Anatolij V. Torkunov: Rector of MGIMO Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Russia, Academician of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary Member of the Collegium of the MFA of Russia],” Official Site of MGIMO Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Russia, accessed April 19, 2022, <https://torkunov.mgimo.ru/>.

channel.<sup>259</sup> Interestingly, the Trianon Dialogue, of which Torkunov is a co-chair along with his French counterpart, Pierre Morel, is somewhat similar to the Polish-Russian Group on Difficult Matters, in that it is a government-sponsored initiative between two countries, Russia and France, founded after a meeting between both countries' presidents, Emmanuel Macron and Vladimir Putin, with the aim of improving dialogue and relations between their nations' societies.<sup>260</sup> Sławomir Dębski, prior member of the Polish-Russian Group on Difficult Matters, served as the first director of the Center for Polish-Russian Dialogue and Understanding in Warsaw from 2010 until he left the position in 2016.<sup>261</sup> He went on to be appointed the director of the Polish Institute of International Relations (PISM) in 2016, where he currently works.<sup>262</sup><sup>263</sup> Katarzyna Pełczyńska-Nałęcz, who had left the group in 2012 to take up the position as Undersecretary of State in the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, became the Polish ambassador to Russia in 2014, a role which she served in for two years, and the director of the thinktank, Strategie 2050.<sup>264</sup>

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<sup>259</sup> "Anatolij Vasil'evich Torkunov: Rektor MGIMO MID Rossii Akademik Rossijskoj akademii nauk Chrezvychajnyj i Polnomochnyj Posol Chlen Kollegii MID Rossii" Анатолий Васильевич Торкунов: Ректор МГИМО МИД России Академик Российской академии наук Чрезвычайный и Полномочный Посол Член Коллегии МИД России [Anatolij V. Torkunov: Rector of MGIMO Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Russia, Academician of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary Member of the Collegium of the MFA of Russia], Official Site of MGIMO Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Russia, accessed April 19, 2022.

<sup>260</sup> "Trianon Dialogue: Strengthening Discussions between French and Russian Civil Society," France Diplomacy - Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs, accessed April 6, 2022, <https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/country-files/russia/trianon-dialogue-strengthening-discussions-between-french-and-russian-civil/>.

<sup>261</sup> "DĘBSKI Sławomir," NATO Parliamentary Assembly, May 14, 2018, <https://www.nato-pa.int/node/17691>.

<sup>262</sup> "DĘBSKI Sławomir," NATO Parliamentary Assembly, May 14, 2018.

<sup>263</sup> "Sławomir Dębski: Dyrektor PISM" [Sławomir Dębski: Director of PISM], Polski Instytut Spraw Międzynarodowych [Polish Institute of International Affairs], accessed April 6, 2022, [https://pism.pl/analicy/Slawomir\\_Debski](https://pism.pl/analicy/Slawomir_Debski).

<sup>264</sup> "The Future of Belarus and Europe. A Grand Debate at Forum Dialog Plus," Belarusian Institute for Strategic Studies, September 1, 2020, <https://belinstitute.com/en/article/future-belarus-and-europe-grand-debate-forum-dialog-plus>.

These notable figures likely brought their experiences from the working group to their new positions.

Similar to the working group, the Centers for Polish-Russian Dialogue and Understanding in Warsaw and Moscow appear to have ceased the cooperation they had under better political relations between their governments. The head of the Warsaw Center for Dialogue and Understanding, Sławomir Dębski, left the position in 2016.<sup>265</sup> His relationship with his Russian counterpart, Yuri Bondarenko, did not seem to improve after the first issues in 2013, and it appeared that their centers had very little cooperation, if any at all. Indeed, in May 2015, Debski publicly said of Bondarenko, “[Yuri Bondarenko] is the director of the Russian institution, [Moscow Center for Dialogue and Understanding], which [the Warsaw Center for Dialogue and Understanding] has nothing to do with. We do not ask anyone/we do not interfere with them.”<sup>266</sup> Of Bondarenko, specifically, Debski commented, “[Yuri Bondarenko] is truly a unique specimen. Even among Russian chauvinists it is difficult to find a similar one.”<sup>267</sup> Yuri Bondarenko quit his role as director of the Moscow Center for Dialogue and Understanding in 2018.<sup>268</sup> In an interview after he quit, he criticized what he viewed as Russophobic policies and rhetoric from PiS, the new investigation into the Smolensk air crash, which he believed

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<sup>265</sup> “Sławomir Dębski: Dyrektor PISM” [Sławomir Dębski: Director of PISM], Polski Instytut Spraw Międzynarodowych [Polish Institute of International Affairs], accessed April 6, 2022.

<sup>266</sup> Sławomir Dębski [@SławomirDebski], “@RussianClimates JB to dyr ros instytucji ROSPOLCENTR z która @CPRDiP nie ma nic wspólnego. My się nikogo nie pytamy/do nich się nie wtrącamy,” Tweet, *Twitter*, May 30, 2015, <https://twitter.com/SławomirDebski/status/604775182134296577>.

<sup>267</sup> Sławomir Dębski [@SławomirDebski], “@RussianClimates Rozumiem Pan emocje. Ale JB to naprawdę okaz wyjątkowy. Nawet wśród rosyjskich szowinistów trudno znaleźć podobny,” Tweet, *Twitter*, May 30, 2015, <https://twitter.com/SławomirDebski/status/604781080156246018>.

<sup>268</sup> Jurij Bondarenko, “«Устал от имбецилов». Почему уволится директор Росийско-польского центра” «Устал от имбецилов». Почему уволится директор Российско-польского центра [“Tired of imbeciles.” Why did the director of the Russian-Polish Center quit?], interview by Vitalij Cepljaev, March 27, 2018, [https://aif.ru/politics/world/ustal\\_ot\\_imbecilov\\_pochemu\\_uvolilsya\\_direktor\\_rossijsko-polskogo\\_centra](https://aif.ru/politics/world/ustal_ot_imbecilov_pochemu_uvolilsya_direktor_rossijsko-polskogo_centra).

was founded on baseless conspiracy theories, and the Polish media's "propaganda," which turned ordinary Poles against Russia.<sup>269</sup> He claimed that Russia had not done anything bad to Poland for thirty years and operated in good faith by removing troops, apologizing for Katyń, and giving sympathy to Poland and assisting in the investigation after the Smolensk air disaster.<sup>270</sup> He did not mention his own actions in his official capacity as director of the Moscow Center for Dialogue and Understanding in 2015 that violated international law and caused an upset in Polish-Ukrainian relations: his center brought Polish students to occupied Crimea—an event that drew serious criticism in Poland.<sup>271 272</sup>

Despite the continued function of the Warsaw and Moscow Centers for Polish-Russian Dialogue and Understanding, they do not appear to cooperate. Sławomir Dębski's successor, Ernest Wyciszkievicz, gave an interview in 2016 in which the only activity of the center that he mentioned as active was the exchange of youth and academic scholarships, and in which he aired his worries over the economic situation and attitudes of the political leadership in Russia that made the future of Russia unpredictable

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<sup>269</sup> Jurij Bondarenko, "«Устал от имбецилов». Почему уволится директор Российско-польского центра" «Устал от имбецилов». Почему уволится директор Российско-польского центра ["Tired of imbeciles." Why did the director of the Russian-Polish Center quit?], interview by Vitalij Cepljaev, March 27, 2018, [https://aif.ru/politics/world/ustal\\_ot\\_imbecilov\\_pochemu\\_uvolilsya\\_direktor\\_rossijsko-polskogo\\_centra](https://aif.ru/politics/world/ustal_ot_imbecilov_pochemu_uvolilsya_direktor_rossijsko-polskogo_centra).

<sup>270</sup> Jurij Bondarenko, "«Устал от имбецилов». Почему уволится директор Российско-польского центра" «Устал от имбецилов». Почему уволится директор Российско-польского центра ["Tired of imbeciles." Why did the director of the Russian-Polish Center quit?], interview by Vitalij Cepljaev, March 27, 2018.

<sup>271</sup> "Polscy uczniowie z wizytą na Krymie. Ukraińskie MSZ protestuje" [Polish students on a visit to Crimea. Ukrainian Ministry of Foreign Affairs protests], TVP INFO, September 24, 2015, <https://www.tvp.info/21772700/polscy-uczniowie-z-wizyta-na-krymie-ukrainskie-msz-protestuje>.

<sup>272</sup> "Moskiewskie Centrum Chce Posłać Polskich Uczniów Na Krym. Warszawa Protestuje" [Moscow Center wants to send Polish students to Crimea. Warsaw protests], Wiadomości, July 29, 2015, <https://wiadomosci.wp.pl/moskiewskie-centrum-chce-poslac-polskich-uczniow-na-krym-warszawa-protestuje-6027729190352001a>.

and uncertain.<sup>273</sup> Bondarenko in 2018 claimed they had purely formal relations with the Warsaw center, such as assistance in obtaining visas, but insisted they could not be called friendly relations.<sup>274</sup> Since both centers are affiliated with and supervised by their governments—the Polish Ministry of Culture and National Heritage supervises the Polish center and the Ministry of Culture of the Russian Federation has substantial control over the leadership and decision-making authorities of the Russian center—the state of the relationship between the governments determines the extent of the centers’ cooperation.<sup>275276</sup>

Looking towards the future, it is unlikely that either Poland or Russia will pursue historical reconciliation again under both countries’ current leadership and with their current national interests. Polish leadership certainly feels increasingly threatened by Russia—its fears about the Kremlin’s aggression seem even more realistic considering Russian actions in Ukraine from 2014 to present day. Russia has invaded Poland’s eastern neighbor, Ukraine, and Russian ballistic missiles have targeted Lviv, which was once a Polish city and lies less than 50 miles from the Polish border. The Kremlin has

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<sup>273</sup> Ernest Wyciszkievicz, “Nowy szef Centrum Dialogu z Rosją: W Rosji idzie ku gorszemu” [New head of the Center for Dialogue with Russia: Things are getting worse in Russia], interview by Polish Press Agency, May 30, 2016, <https://dzieje.pl/aktualnosci/nowy-szef-centrum-dialogu-z-rosja-w-rosji-idzie-ku-gorszemu>.

<sup>274</sup> Jurij Bondarenko, “«Устал от имбецилов». Почему уволится директор Российско-польского центра” «Устал от имбецилов». Почему уволился директор Российско-польского центра [“Tired of imbeciles.” Why did the director of the Russian-Polish Center quit?], interview by Vitalij Cepļajev, March 27, 2018.

<sup>275</sup> Russian Federation, Office of the President of the Russian Federation, *Ukaz Prezidenta Rossijskoj Federacii “O sozdanii fonda ‘Rossijsko-pol’skij centr dialoga i soglasija’”* Указ Президента Российской Федерации “О создании фонда “Российско-польский центр диалога и согласия” [Decree of the President of the Russian Federation on the Establishment of the Foundation “Russian-Polish Center for Dialogue and Understanding], Decree of the President of the Russian Federation n. 1350, adopted October 14, 2011, <https://docs.cntd.ru/document/902306027>.

<sup>276</sup> Republic of Poland, Office of the President of the Republic of Poland, *Ustawa z dnia 25 marca 2011 r. o Centrum Polsko-Rosyjskiego Dialogu i Porozumienia* [Act of 25 March 2011 on the Center for Polish-Russian Center for Dialogue and Understanding], Dz.U. 2011 nr 76 poz. 408, adopted April 11, 2011, <https://isap.sejm.gov.pl/isap.nsf/download.xsp/WDU20110760408/T/D20110408L.pdf>.

also warned that convoys carrying military aid from Poland to Ukraine may be targeted. Of course, Polish fears go even beyond this, to the long-standing fear that Russia could decide to gain control over the Suwalki Corridor, the gap that separates Kaliningrad from Belarus and Poland from the Baltic states. Belarusian President Alyaksandr Lukashenka's cooperation in Russia's invasion of Ukraine certainly does nothing to allay Polish fears.

These recent events have also brought about renewed discussion in Poland about the Smolensk air crash. The 2011 Polish report on the causes of the Smolensk air crash was rejected, and in 2016, the Polish Minister of Defense signed into law the Subcommittee for the Re-Investigation of the Air Accident.<sup>277</sup> The findings of the investigation were published in 2022, and at the presentation of the subcommittee's findings, the chairman said the cause of the crash was an "act of unlawful interference," pointing to the subcommittee's findings that there were two explosions on the aircraft that tore it apart and killed passengers onboard before the aircraft made impact with the ground.<sup>278279</sup> PiS chairman, Deputy Prime Minister, and head of the Sejm National Security and Defense Committee, Jarosław Kaczyński, stated in an interview that he has no doubts that the Smolensk air disaster was the result of an attack.<sup>280</sup> This issue remains

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<sup>277</sup> "Podpisanie Rozporządzenia w Sprawie KBWLLP [Signing of the Regulation on the Commission for Investigation of National Aviation Accidents]," Ministerstwo Obrony Narodowej: Podkomisja ds. Ponownego Zbadania Wypadku Lotniczego [Ministry of National Defense: Subcommittee on Aircraft Accident Re-examination], February 4, 2016, [https://podkomisjasmolensk.mon.gov.pl/pl/1\\_12.html](https://podkomisjasmolensk.mon.gov.pl/pl/1_12.html).

<sup>278</sup> "Raport z Badania Zdarzenia Lotniczego" [Report from the Aircraft Incident Investigation], Ministerstwo Obrony Narodowej: Podkomisja ds. Ponownego Zbadania Wypadku Lotniczego [Ministry of National Defense: Subcommittee on Aircraft Accident Re-examination], April 15, 2022, [https://podkomisjasmolensk.mon.gov.pl/pl/1\\_54.html](https://podkomisjasmolensk.mon.gov.pl/pl/1_54.html).

<sup>279</sup> "'Fala Uderzeniowa Rozerwała Samolot'. Prezentacja Raportu Podkomisji Smoleńskiej" [The shock wave ripped the plane apart.' Presentation of the Smolensk subcommittee report], PolskieRadio24.pl, April 11, 2022, [https://polskieradio24.pl/art1222\\_2937350](https://polskieradio24.pl/art1222_2937350).

<sup>280</sup> Jarosław Kaczyński, "Jarosław Kaczyński dla PAP: sprawa odpowiedzialności bardzo wielu ludzi w Polsce za katastrofę smoleńską jest aktualna" [Jarosław Kaczyński for PAP: the issue of responsibility for the Smolensk catastrophe remains current for very many people in Poland], interview by Grzegorz Bruszewski and Tomasz Grodecki, April 12, 2022,



unresolved in Polish-Russian relations, leaving many perplexed as to why. Clearly, Poles want clearer answers to why their president and many other important government officials and cultural figures died in a plane crash over Russian soil. After years of requests for evidence, such as the black box from the plane's cockpit that the Polish government has not had the ability to examine independently, Russia still refuses to turn it over. This deliberate inaction has left Poles to wonder: if the crash was due to pilot error alone, then why would the Russian government refuse to hand over all the evidence? Is the Kremlin demonstrating to Warsaw the power it has over them? Is there another explanation for the crash that the Kremlin does not want Poland to discover? Regardless of the answer, Russia's refusal to cooperate fully with Poland over the crash only damages the relationship by eroding trust and allowing conspiracy theories about the crash to flourish.

For Russia, Poland has been uncooperative on security issues and resistant to Russian demands and threats. Poland is currently a waypoint for Western lethal aid to Ukraine despite Russia's threats, and is serving willingly as a refuge to millions of Ukrainians fleeing the Russo-Ukrainian War. It has also poked its finger in the Kremlin's eye by sending high-level government officials, including the Polish prime minister and president, to meet with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky in Kiev in a show of support for Ukraine. Poland's refusal to cooperate with Russia prior to the war and its even more staunch position now probably make it an unlikely candidate for Kremlin influence, bribery, or blackmail. Poland probably will not act as a source pressure on the



Ukrainian leadership to make concessions in negotiations with Russia—its fears of making any concessions to the Kremlin are clear and its people galvanized in support of Ukraine. In sum, Poland is a lost cause for Russia. The Kremlin will not find much sympathy in Poland for its security concerns. In March 2022, Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki announced that Poland would not have any Russian coal, oil, or natural gas imports by the end of 2022, declaring, “Today this tool of blackmail has turned into a tool of war.”<sup>281</sup> For the Kremlin, it is yet another example of Poles’ suspicion and animosity. Even on historical issues, Poland continues to view the Katyn massacre as an unresolved issue, which Moscow has repeatedly tried to lay to rest.

Ernest Wyciszkiewicz’s thoughts in his 2016 interview give a thoughtful summation of the era of cooperation between 2010-2011:

Poles and Russians have proven more than once that they can talk to each other and cooperate well. Yes, back then, in 2010, we were also sailing in two different boats and maybe not exactly in the same direction, but somewhere far on the horizon there was the same harbor ahead of us. It turned out, however, that this thinking was probably characterized by excessive idealism.<sup>282</sup>

He also pointed to Russian historical policy, especially the myth of the Great Patriotic War, as increasingly appearing in Russian foreign policy over the years, although their

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<sup>281</sup> Zosia Wanat, “Poland to EU: Follow Our Lead on Scrapping Russian Energy,” *POLITICO*, March 30, 2022, <https://www.politico.eu/article/follow-my-lead-on-scrapping-russian-energy-poland-tells-the-eu/>.

<sup>282</sup> Wyciszkiewicz, “Nowy szef Centrum Dialogu z Rosją: W Rosji idzie ku gorszemu” [New head of the Center for Dialogue with Russia: Things are getting worse in Russia], interview by Polish Press Agency, May 30, 2016.

dialogue over these issues should have produced the opposite effect.<sup>283</sup> He defended continuing attempts at dialogue with Russia, however, and said major differences and disputes between them were to be expected in any attempt at sincere dialogue.<sup>284</sup> Wyciszkieicz's insights can inform our conclusion that Polish-Russian relations in the realm of historical reconciliation did not improve after 2015, and there was no bilateral renewal of the Polish-Russian Group on Difficult Matters nor comprehensive cooperation between the Moscow and Warsaw Centers for Dialogue and Understanding. Major obstacles remained in the path of overcoming historical issues, not the least of which was the clash between Poland and Russia over their national interests in Ukraine. The successes in dialogue and historical reconciliation that came about through the working group and the centers for dialogue were abandoned or ignored. A project that had started with optimistic goals and high energy, that for the first time produced major publications in which Poles and Russians collaborated on historical issues, and that once had all of Jerzy Wiatr's indicators for success, ultimately succumbed to major differences in Warsaw and Moscow's national interests, which to this day have not been resolved.

### **Conclusion**

The research questions that drove this study were: What was the impact of the Polish-Russian Group on Difficult Matters on the relationship between Poland and Russia 2008-2015 in the area of historical reconciliation? Did significant events such as the Russo-Georgian War, the Smolensk air disaster, and the Ukraine crisis impact the work

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<sup>283</sup> Wyciszkieicz, "Nowy szef Centrum Dialogu z Rosją: W Rosji idzie ku gorszemu" [New head of the Center for Dialogue with Russia: Things are getting worse in Russia], interview by Polish Press Agency, May 30, 2016..

<sup>284</sup> Ernest Wyciszkieicz, "Nowy szef Centrum Dialogu z Rosją: W Rosji idzie ku gorszemu" [New head of the Center for Dialogue with Russia: Things are getting worse in Russia], interview by Polish Press Agency, May 30, 2016.

of the group or the general process of historical reconciliation? Was the attempt at historical reconciliation successful? My hypothesis that attempted to offer a tentative, broader answer to these questions was that perceptions of history remained embedded in Polish-Russian relations between 2008 and 2015 and influenced perceptions in the two states, but the main factor that determined the success or failure of Polish-Russian historical reconciliation was material power factors.

To answer what impact the group had on historical reconciliation between Poland and Russia and whether the attempt at historical reconciliation was successful, this study examined each time period of interest to find which of Jerzy Wiatr's factors were present in each period, and determined if the factors that aided the process were more influential than the factors that hindered the process. Generally, across all the time periods of interest, the Polish-Russian Group on Difficult Matters succeeded in discussing historical issues that most deeply divided Poland and Russia, including Russian and Polish state archives in their research on these historical issues, positively impacting education in both states by introducing the other party's perspectives in history education, and in creating a space that encouraged and fostered contacts between Poles and Russians in the political and religious spheres. However, this study comes to a similar conclusion to George Soroka, in that some factors that impact historical reconciliation were outside the control of the group and limited the effect that the group could have on the process. While the group could advise their governments on steps they should take to reconcile with the other party, they could not control the actions and policies of the governments. Counting a major accomplishment of the group, however, is recognizing its successful appeal to the Polish and Russian governments to institutionalize dialogue and fostering of

contacts between normal citizens by creating the Centers for Dialogue and Understanding. Although these centers failed to cooperate in the poor political environment after the Ukraine crisis, they still have the potential to impact some Polish and Russians positively and the potential to cooperate again in a better political climate.

Some factors that were mostly outside the control of the group that positively impacted the reconciliation process were concessions by either nation to peacefully resolve disputes, the removal of negative stereotypes from education in history, and the agreement between Poland and Russia on mutual national interests. In the period of 2009-2010, the Russian side unilaterally decided to make a sort of concession to the Polish side, by having Putin publically state that the Soviet Union was responsible for the Katyn massacre, and airing the film, *Katyn*, on Russian national television. However, the Russian side never made the concession to hand over evidence from the Smolensk air crash in the periods 2010-2012 or 2013-2015, which was a major issue for Poland and should have been an easy concession for Russia to make. As for the removal of negative stereotypes from education in history, there was no evidence in any period of either government reforming history education so as to remove negative stereotypes or incorporate the other side's perspective in history education. The published works of the Group on Difficult Matters may have been made available to educational institutions, but its impact on history education was likely limited since they were not made a part of the curriculum at public educational institutions. Finally, there does not appear to be any evidence of agreements between Poland and Russian on mutual national interests. Both governments sent representatives to meetings of the Group on Difficult Matters and

praised its work, but outside the area of historical reconciliation, there was no major political issue over which Poland and Russia came to an agreement.

Almost all of the factors that appeared 2008-2015, which negatively impacted the historical reconciliation process, were the result of political conflicts and outside the control of the Polish-Russian Group on Difficult Matters. Two negative factors, domestic pressures that interfere with attempts to improve relations and the influence of nationalist political parties' rhetoric, appeared in 2010-2012 because of the turmoil in Poland and disputes between PiS and PO after the Smolensk air crash. In the periods of 2009-2010 and 2013-2015, the negative factor of unwillingness to understand the other party's perspective appeared because Poland and Russia could not come to an understanding over the Katyn massacre and they could not resolve their conflicting security interests that put them in opposition to each other over the Ukraine crisis. The Group on Difficult Matters could not control the appearance of these factors, nor prevent these negative factors from significantly damaging Polish-Russian dialogue and historical reconciliation process. In fact, the difference in Warsaw's and Moscow's security interests over Ukraine in 2013-2014 were ultimately what shattered the group, destroying its space for dialogue and hopes for historical reconciliation. It was simply outside the group's control—if the group ever had any positive impact on Polish-Russian relations, it was not enough to save the group itself nor the deterioration of the Polish-Russian relationship.

So, in answer to the first and last research questions, the Group on Difficult Matters contributed to progress in historical reconciliation by increasing scholarly discussion over historical issues and providing a forum for dialogue between Poland and

Russia, but ultimately it did not succeed in accomplishing historical reconciliation and it is unclear if any of the progress the group made remains.

The contemporary events of interest—the Russo-Georgian War, the Smolensk air disaster, and the Ukraine crisis—did not appear to have a major, discernable impact on the group and overall process of historical reconciliation until 2013-2014, when the Ukraine crisis began. The case of the Russo-Georgian War not having a major impact on Polish-Russian historical reconciliation in 2008 or the subsequent period of 2008-2010 was interesting, and might suggest that compartmentalization of issues in the Polish-Russian relationship in this case preserved the working group. The Smolensk air disaster had a larger impact on Polish-Russian relations, but the nature of the timeline of its investigation prevented it from having an immediate, negative impact on Polish-Russian reconciliation in the period of 2010-2012. Issues surrounding the crash existed in 2010-2012, but they would mostly boil beneath the surface until the Ukraine crisis sparked a major failure in Polish-Russian relations, and the Smolensk air crash was more openly disputed in their relationship. The crisis in Ukraine in 2013-2014 and Poland and Russia's opposing security interests over Ukraine ultimately caused a major breakdown in Polish-Russian relations, which spilled over into historical reconciliation and destroyed the Polish-Russian Group on Difficult Issues.

In answer to the research question of whether the Russo-Georgian War, the Smolensk air disaster, and the Ukraine crisis impacted the work of the group or the general process of historical reconciliation, the results of this study indicate that, yes, they did. The evidence indicates that differences in Polish and Russian security interests over

Ukraine between 2013 and 2014 led to the failure of the Group on Difficult Matters and its overall aim of historical reconciliation.

The evidence and analysis presented in this study generally agree with the hypothesis. The Group on Difficult Matters failed to achieve full historical reconciliation 2008-2015, and perceptions of history remained embedded in Polish-Russian relations. The main factor that led to the failure of the working group and its aim of historical reconciliation was opposing security interests—a material power factor.

Reflecting on the methods of this study, the use of foreign-language government sources, primarily from the internet, poses some interesting challenges that may have impacted this research. Firstly, as governments update their websites, some prior press-releases and statements from government officials disappear. The removal of these documents could be accidental, such as introducing a new website design, or they could be intentional, such as deleting an entire website and its documents. The use of a web archive service helped me find materials that are no longer published on government websites, but I had to discover that these materials once existed after a considerable amount of research, then had to hope a web archive had access to them. Another challenge was that much of the research for this study was conducted in Polish and Russian—there are not many English language sources on Polish-Russian historical reconciliation, especially primary sources. Since I have studied Polish and Russian, I was able to conduct the research in both languages. However, I am more comfortable with using Polish than Russian, so this personal bias may have impacted what materials I was able to find as data for this study and, therefore, could have impacted the results of my analysis. If I were to conduct this research again, I would first confirm that I have access

to extensive archives on government publications. I would also ensure that I take a more balanced and unbiased approach to selecting data.

The analytical approach of using the factors that Jerzy Wiatr identified as allowing for the German-Polish historical reconciliation was an appropriate lens through which to examine Polish-Russian historical reconciliation, but it is not the only one that could have applied to this study. Another lens that could reveal other conclusions is comparing the experiences and perspectives of Germany and Russia in their approach to historical reconciliation, with Poland as the control factor. Poland, stuck between the Soviet Union and Germany in 1939 and victim of atrocities from both sides, maintains the perspective of a victim when dealing with both countries on the topic of reconciliation over World War II history. Germany and Russia, however, approach historical reconciliation with Poland differently. The German experience as a powerful nation that suffered military defeat in World War II profoundly impacts how Germans perceive their history. Nazi German officials were forced to account for their crimes in the Nuremberg trials, their atrocities publicized on the global stage. Germans had to reconcile with the fact that they supported Hitler and Nazi ideology. Today, Germans freely acknowledge and are ashamed of the crimes of their forebears. The German admission of atrocities against Poles in World War II and recognition of the trauma inflicted by Nazi Germany upon Poland reduced the number of obstacles to reconciliation between their nations. The Russian experience is different from Germany's. The Soviet Union, the predecessor of today's Russian state and the state that profoundly impacts today's Russian leaders, did not suffer military defeat—the Soviet Union peacefully dissolved. Stalin, Beria, and any number of officials who were complicit in crimes against Polish citizens, or even ethnic



groups within the Soviet Union, were not held to account for their crimes during their lifetime. After the peaceful fall of the Soviet Union, citizens of the Russian Federation were able to reject responsibility for the crimes of the state that fell. However, they still perceive the legacy of the Soviet Union as a great power and the credit for the defeat of Nazi Germany as their own. Perhaps this is the root of the clash between Poland and the Russian Federation—to have a genuine conversation, to reconcile with Poland over their twentieth-century history, and to come to a common understanding over security interests, Russia must first reconcile itself with its predecessor.

While the methods or analysis of this research could have been approached differently, it still provides useful conclusions for scholars or policy makers interested in historical reconciliation and international relations. The process of historical reconciliation between two states does not occur in a vacuum, and the political environment impacts the reconciliation process. Polish-Russian historical reconciliation failed, not only because of differences in material interests, but because Poland and Russia became entrenched in their positions and refused to seek any resolution. Understanding what caused failure in the Polish-Russian case may allow for future initiatives aimed at historical reconciliation to reduce the risk of failure by mitigating the impact of negative relations on the reconciliation process.

Areas for further exploration of national reconciliation could be the Polish-Ukrainian and Russian-Ukrainian relationships. Similar to the case of this study, Poland and Ukraine have national myths that come into conflict, and they share a tense and violent twentieth-century history. However, in the last twenty or so years, there are numerous examples of positive relations between them. Poland's support for Ukraine

during the Orange Revolution, the NATO Bucharest Summit in 2008, the Ukraine crisis beginning in 2013, and the Russo-Ukrainian War of 2022 are a few such examples.

Investigating the evolution of their relationship in the twentieth and early twenty-first century may reveal an example of successful reconciliation between nations, with the opportunity to examine what factors may have led to its success.

The current state of the Russian-Ukrainian relationship does not provide fertile ground for reconciliation. Regardless of when the Russo-Ukrainian War ends and what leadership both countries may be under, the suffering and trauma that the Ukrainian nation has experienced from Russia's invasion will remain fresh in the memories of Ukrainians for many decades, and will almost certainly become a part of their national myth. These observations do not exclude the potential for research into Russian-Ukrainian reconciliation, however. In an interview with Russian journalists on 27 March 2022 during the Russo-Ukrainian War, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky was asked about how his personal attitude towards Russians changed since the beginning of the Russian invasion and if he believed that Ukrainians and Russians would ever be able to normalize relations. He responded, "[...] my attitude has worsened after [February] 24. Worsened quite a lot. The emotional component [of my attitude] towards the Russian Federation, to its people, has been lost. Even to the people."<sup>285</sup><sup>286</sup> However, near the end

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<sup>285</sup> Volodymyr Zelensky, "It's not just a war. It's much worse." Volodymyr Zelensky's first interview with Russian journalists since the war began, interview by Ivan Kolpakov et al., March 27, 2022, <https://meduza.io/en/feature/2022/03/28/it-s-not-just-a-war-it-s-much-worse>.

<sup>286</sup> Vladimir Zelenskij, «Jeto ne prosto vojna. Vse gorazdo huzhe» Interv'ju Vladimira Zelenskogo Ivanu Kolpakovu, Mihailu Zygarju, Tihonu Dzjadko i Vladimiru Solov'evu iz «Kommersanta» «Это не просто война. Все гораздо хуже» Интервью Владимира Зеленского Ивану Колпакову, Михаилу Зыгарю, Тихону Дзядко и Владимиру Соловьеву из «Коммерсанта» ["It's not just war. It's much worse" Interview with Vladimir Zelenskij by Ivan Kolpakov, Mihail Zygar', Tihon Dzjadko, and Vladimir Solov'ev from Kommersant], interview by Ivan Kolpakov et al., Transcript, March 27, 2022, <https://meduza.io/feature/2022/03/27/eto-ne-prosto-voyna-vse-gorazdo-huzhe>.

of the interview, when journalist Mikhail Zygar asked if he had a message for the citizens of Russia, Zelensky acknowledged that there are Russians who support the truth, but said they had to tear down the “information curtain” and inform other Russians about the truth.<sup>287</sup> He argued that war would only end when Russians realized the catastrophe that the Russian authorities brought upon the Russian nation and the tragedy they brought upon relations between the Russian and Ukrainian peoples.<sup>288</sup> Continuing on, he spoke about the future of their nations after the war, stating,

That is why, it seems to me, we need to think of our children and grandchildren — it is too late to think about ourselves. Today, adults like you and I are never going to forgive each other. I do not believe in that anymore. I have simply seen how Russians are reacting, I have seen the percentage of people who support Putin, and so on. I do not refer to him, but to his actions. It is not possible. But we need to fight for our children and our grandchildren.<sup>289</sup>

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<sup>287</sup> Vladimir Zelenskij, «Jeto ne prosto vojna. Vse gorazdo huzhe» Interv’ju Vladimira Zelenskogo Ivanu Kolpakovu, Mihailu Zygarju, Tihonu Dzjadko i Vladimiru Solov’evu iz «Kommersanta» «Это не просто война. Все гораздо хуже» Интервью Владимира Зеленского Ивану Колпакову, Михаилу Зыгарю, Тихону Дзядко и Владимиру Соловьеву из «Коммерсанта» [“It’s not just war. It’s much worse” Interview with Vladimir Zelenskij by Ivan Kolpakov, Mihail Zygar’, Tihon Dzjadko, and Vladimir Solov’ev from Kommersant], interview by Ivan Kolpakov et al., Transcript, March 27, 2022, <https://meduza.io/feature/2022/03/27/eto-ne-prosto-voyna-vse-gorazdo-huzhe>.

<sup>288</sup> Vladimir Zelenskij, «Jeto ne prosto vojna. Vse gorazdo huzhe» Interv’ju Vladimira Zelenskogo Ivanu Kolpakovu, Mihailu Zygarju, Tihonu Dzjadko i Vladimiru Solov’evu iz «Kommersanta» «Это не просто война. Все гораздо хуже» Интервью Владимира Зеленского Ивану Колпакову, Михаилу Зыгарю, Тихону Дзядко и Владимиру Соловьеву из «Коммерсанта» [“It’s not just war. It’s much worse” Interview with Vladimir Zelenskij by Ivan Kolpakov, Mihail Zygar’, Tihon Dzjadko, and Vladimir Solov’ev from Kommersant], interview by Ivan Kolpakov et al., Transcript, March 27, 2022.

<sup>289</sup> Vladimir Zelenskij, «Jeto ne prosto vojna. Vse gorazdo huzhe» Interv’ju Vladimira Zelenskogo Ivanu Kolpakovu, Mihailu Zygarju, Tihonu Dzjadko i Vladimiru Solov’evu iz «Kommersanta» «Это не просто война. Все гораздо хуже» Интервью Владимира Зеленского Ивану Колпакову, Михаилу Зыгарю, Тихону Дзядко и Владимиру Соловьеву из «Коммерсанта» [“It’s not just war. It’s much worse” Interview with Vladimir Zelenskij by Ivan Kolpakov, Mihail Zygar’, Tihon Dzjadko, and Vladimir Solov’ev from Kommersant], interview by Ivan Kolpakov et al., Transcript, March 27, 2022.

So, even during a war that has claimed the lives of thousands of Ukrainians and Russians the Ukrainian president suggested the possibility that their nations' future generations might find peace and forgiveness. Identifying pathways to dialogue and reconciliation may prove valuable in the future, however distant that may be. The Polish-Ukrainian and Russian-Ukrainian examples for future research and study are geographically bound in Eastern Europe, but the potential for national reconciliation can be found beyond the region. The human condition has always provided a plethora of opportunities for reconciliation between peoples with tragic and violent pasts.

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