

Relations between the Soviet Union and the Polish People's Republic (1944-1989)

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In 1944-1989 the USSR and the Polish People's Republic became military-political allies. The Soviet and Polish rulers at the time sought to foster a relationship of alliance, friendship and cooperation between the two countries. But part of Polish society saw these relations as inequitable and limiting the country's sovereignty.

On May 22, 1944 the USSR recognized the *Krajowa Rada Narodowa*, (KRN), or the National Home Council (a kind of parliament created by the political left), and on July 26, 1944 the Polish Committee of National Liberation. After the Committee was transformed into the Provisional Government, the Soviet Union established diplomatic relations with it on January 25, 1945.

Poland was liberated from Nazi occupation by the Soviet Army (3, 246,000 troops took part) and the *Ludowe Wojsko Polskie* (the Polish People's Army). In the fight for the liberation of Poland more than 600,000 Soviet soldiers died (according to the General Staff of the USSR Armed Forces, 477,295 soldiers died between July 1944 and March 1945,¹ 1,636,000 people were wounded and maimed for life during the battles in Poland.

The Soviet Army did bring to Poland a dependence on the USSR, but by the same token it saved the Polish people from extermination. Under the fascist plan "*Ost*," there were to be no Poles on Polish territory beginning from 1960. The British Historian N. Davis writes that a Nazi victory even if it would not have totally annihilated the Poles would have turned them into German slaves. So the fact that Stalin's victory turned them into a Soviet satellite need not evoke horror. Things might have been much worse.² According to Wojciech Jaruzelski, "dependence meant the creation of a state with various kinds of restrictions and shortcomings, but still a Polish nation-state."³

In connection with the entry of Soviet troops into Poland the resolution of the State Defense Committee (SDC) of the USSR of July 31, 1944 and the Directive of the Red Army General Staff to troops commanders of August 1, 1944 read in part: "No Soviets or other Soviet government bodies shall be created and no Soviet regulations introduced in the areas occupied by the Red Army"; "no

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obstacles shall be put to religious worship, Catholic churches and prayer houses shall not be touched"; "The property rights of Polish citizens must be guaranteed." At the same time the directive prescribed "not to recognize the Polish government in exile in London and to regard their representatives as imposters and treat them as adventurers."⁴ The majority of Poles welcomed the Soviet Army as liberators. But there were some hostile acts: about 1000 Soviet soldiers died from shots fired in their backs.⁵

The Polish People's Army was the only allied army that took part in the storm of Berlin, and the Polish flag was erected along with the Soviet flag on its ruins. Polish soldiers took part in the Victory Parade in Moscow's Red Square on June 24, 1945. On April 21, 1945 a Treaty on Friendship, Mutual Assistance and Postwar Cooperation was signed between the Soviet Union and the Polish Republic. Joseph Stalin said during the signing of the Treaty: "The old rulers of Poland did not want to have allied relations with the Soviet Union... The significance of this treaty is that it liquidates the old and harmful policy of playing between Germany and the Soviet Union and replaces it with the policy of alliance and friendship between Poland and its Eastern neighbor."⁶

During and after the war Poland's fate was, as often before, decided by the great powers, in the first place the Soviet Union, at the Crimean (Yalta) and the Potsdam Conferences. During the Crimean Conference in February 1945, the Soviet Union's Western allies finally recognized the Curzon Line as the Soviet-Polish border.

Stalin was committed to creating a strong and friendly Poland. Thanks to the Soviet Union, the Polish Republic, which gave up Western Ukraine and Western Byelorussia, expanded significantly to the north and west at the expense of the economically advanced German lands seized during the rule of the Piast Dynasty (about one-third of the present-day Polish territory) and its own broad access to the Baltic Sea. In reality, Silesia and Upper Pomorze (Pomerania) had long ceased to be Polish and had been developed by the Germans. In handing them over to the Poles Stalin took advantage of the postwar geopolitical situation to reverse the centuries-old tradition of Russian-Polish hostility and open a new chapter in the relations with Poland. As a result, the Polish-German border was established along the Oder-Neisse Line.

In determining the Soviet-Polish border the Soviet government agreed to step back a little from the Curzon Line in favor of Poland handing over Bialystok and Przemysl together with adjacent territories. Although the German lands (101,000 square kilometers) were added to the Polish Republic while it receded on the Soviet-Polish border, the overall Polish territory had diminished as compared with the prewar period from 388,600 square km to 312,700 square kilometers, i.e., by 20%. After adjustment, the Soviet-Polish border was 1,244 km long.

The presence of Soviet armed forces in Poland and massive Soviet aid enabled the left-wing forces in Poland to gain and hold power in the country. Because of the new government bodies (not only the Polish Army, but also the state security service) were formed with the most active Soviet participation and under Soviet control, its social base was narrow, People's Poland from the outset

was heavily dependent on the Soviet Union, which remained the case until October 1956.

In 1944-1945 the Soviet NKVD troops, more than 8,000 men, played a key role in fighting the forces of the Polish Government in exile and the units of *Armia Krajowa* (which, according to various estimates, was 250,000-350,000-strong in the spring and summer of 1944) and other armed units which gradually transformed themselves into an anticommunist insurgency.⁷ The military units were disarmed and their members were arrested. In March 1945 the political leaders of the insurgents headed by the *Armia Krajowa* commander Leopold Okulicki were arrested. In June 1945 the "Trial of the 16" in Moscow sentenced them to various terms in Soviet labor camps. Most of the detainees were not presented with any charges of committing specific misdeeds other than having been members of the *Armia Krajowa* during the German occupation. So they were released. Those who were not sentenced (15,000-20,000 members of the *Armia Krajowa*) were sent into the interior of the USSR as internees at POW camps. Only about a thousand Polish citizens arrested in 1944-1945 were sentenced and banished to the GULAG. The casualties of the insurgents who opposed the pro-Soviet regime amounted to 10,000 dead and 80,000 arrested in 1944-1948. Between 38,000 and 48,000 people had been taken to the USSR.⁸

From the late 1940s the CPSU and the Polish United Workers Party (PUWP) attempted to build Soviet-Polish relations on the basis of common ideological, political and economic goals, friendship and cooperation. Poland became part of the Soviet bloc joining the Council of Mutual Economic Assistance (COMECON) in 1949 and the Warsaw Treaty Organization in 1955. It was not by chance that the Warsaw Treaty was called "Warsaw" and not "Prague" or "Budapest" treaty. Control over Poland by the Soviet-led socialist camp was crucial for the outcome of a possible military standoff with the West.

The Soviet Union granted a massive credit of \$450 million (in 1945-1955 Soviet credits ran at \$625 million, of which Poland received over \$375 million by the end of 1955) in order to implement an ambitious plan of industrialization of Poland and to turn it from an agricultural into an industrial-agrarian country, which was the common European trend of the time. According to the Polish historian Andrzej Skrzypek, the size of the credit was comparable to and even exceeded the credit Poland might have received under the Marshall Plan.⁹

The Soviet Union systematically interfered in the personnel issues (membership of the Politburo, Secretariat of the PUWP Central Committee, the Government). Up until October 1956 Soviet military presence in some parts of Poland was also perceived as limiting the country's sovereignty because there were no legal documents to justify the stationing of Soviet troops (two tank and one Air Force divisions) and the Polish leadership was not even told about their troop strength. Other irritants in society were the appointment of a Soviet Marshal, Konstantin Rokossovsky (a Pole), as Defense Minister in 1949, the filling of many leading posts in the Polish People's Army by Soviet officers of Polish extraction (prewar Polish officers had been discharged from the Army), the presence of Soviet advisers in the Army (about 150 people in 1954) and in security

bodies (89).¹⁰ The Polish Military Intelligence Service was controlled by officers of a special department of the NKVD. There was *de facto* dual subordination in the state security bodies.

The mounting social and economic crisis, a crisis of leadership within the PUWP, and the crude violation of Polish sovereignty by the Soviet Union culminated in a political crisis in October 1956. Luckily, unlike in Hungary, the crisis was resolved by political means, by the Polish forces and without Soviet military interference, by introducing substantial changes in Soviet-Polish relations. During the days of the crisis a Soviet tank brigade had moved to within several tens of kilometers of Warsaw, but it was merely a show of muscle. The Soviet Union did not have enough troops for a full-scale invasion of Poland, and the situation was very sensitive. On October 19, 1956 during Soviet-Polish negotiations Nikita Khrushchev eventually decided to back Wladislaw Gomulka and ordered Marshal Ivan Konev to stop the advance of the tank column.

The Soviet side made concessions and Poland got rid of odious signs of dependence upon Moscow. Soviet advisers were removed from the security bodies and the Polish People's Army, Konstantin Rokossovsky and other Soviet officers were recalled to the USSR. All the problems in economic relations—settlements for transit in 1945-1954 (to the GDR), supplies of Polish coal to the USSR at reduced prices (\$1.12 per ton compared with the world price of \$10 plus) were settled. The Soviet Union wrote off Poland's debts to it (\$261.2 million in civilian credits, \$276.8 million in military credits, a total of \$538 million¹¹).

The Treaty between the Government of the USSR and the Government of the PRP on the legal status of Soviet troops temporarily stationed in Poland¹² was signed in December 1956 in Warsaw. The Treaty sealed two important provisions: the Soviet military presence was temporary meaning that it could neither affect Poland's sovereignty nor provide grounds for interference in the country's internal affairs.

In 1956 the PUWP secured the right to a sovereign internal and external policy and induced the CPSU leadership to treat Poland as an equal partner, a sovereign and independent subject of international relations. Since the rule of Wladislaw Gomulka Poland's policy combined independence in domestic affairs with adherence to the alliance with the USSR. From a satellite Poland turned into an ally of the Soviet Union. It put forward high-profile foreign policy initiatives—the Adam Rapacki Plan on creating a nuclear-free zone in Central Europe (1957), the Gomulka Plan (1963) and the Jaruzelski Plan (1987)—aimed at reducing armaments in Europe. Under the Warsaw Treaty in the event of a military conflict with NATO Poland was to have its own frontline (the troops of other socialist countries were supposed to be integrated into the Soviet Army).¹³

However, part of Polish society resented the fact that Poland belonged to the Soviet bloc and was committed to building "real socialism" in the country. The sociopolitical and economic crises of 1956, 1968, 1970 and the 1980s initially made the peculiar, Polish, road to socialism and departure from the Soviet model more pronounced and eventually led to a relatively massive opposition to "real socialism" in Poland. These crises gave vent to anti-Sovietism, which was a new

form of Polish Russophobia. At the same time, those were the years of large-scale Soviet-Polish cooperation in all fields. There were massive cultural exchanges and a sustained interest of the Soviet and Polish peoples in each other and deep interpenetration of cultures. Human contacts were multiplying.

By the second half of the 20th century there was hardly any trace left in the Soviet Union of the traditional imperial Polonophobia. Ordinary Soviet people regarded the Poles and Poland quite normally, Polish culture—fiction, theater, cinema, popular music and fine arts—became part of the intellectual luggage of millions of Soviet people. The names of Andrzej Wajda, Krzysztof Zanussi, Zbigniew Cybulski, Daniel Olbrychski, Anna German, Barbara Brylska, Maryla Rodowicz and other representatives of Polish culture were widely popular. Polish literature and arts were associated with political audacity and artistic innovation. In the 1970s—1980s as many as 100 titles of Polish books were published in the Soviet Union every year. Soviet Russian songs became part and parcel of Polish mass culture, as witnessed by the annual Soviet song festivals in Zielona Góra. Among the Polish intelligentsia the ballads of Bulat Okudzhava and Vladimir Vysotsky translated into Polish by Wojciech Młynarski, Jacek Kaczmarski, Paweł Orkisz, Agnieszka Osiecka, M.B. Jagiello, Jerzy Czech, Wiktor Woroszyński, Ziemowit Fedeciński and many others were very popular.

After 1956 and until the late 1980s Poland exerted a powerful influence on the intellectual elite in the Soviet Union. According to Russian poet and translator Vladimir Britanishsky, “initially Poland was for us a window to freedom... later it became our window to Europe.”¹⁴ After the 1956 crisis Poland opened up to the West. Western ideas and values reached the USSR through Poland. Poland was a spiritual bridge with the West. Polish newspapers and magazines were important sources of information. Some Soviet intellectuals learned Polish to be able to read them, to gain access to Western literature published in Poland in translation. “Poland was the romance of my generation,” the poet Joseph Brodsky said. Dozens of Soviet and Polish research institutes and hundreds of scientists engaged in fruitful cooperation in the 1970s—1980s.

The military-political and economic ties between the USSR and Poland were growing stronger. From 1945 to 1989 the USSR was the biggest foreign trade partner of Poland. Because Poland had become part of the socialist camp its economic development was harnessed to the interests of that camp, in the first place the Soviet Union. For many years Poland was the second or third most important Soviet foreign trade partner. Until the mid-1980s the Soviet Union accounted for a third of Polish foreign trade (about a quarter in the second half of the 1980s) and Poland in the 1950s—1980s accounted for about 10% of Soviet foreign trade.

During the period of industrialization (1949-1955) the Soviet Union rendered Poland massive financial and technical assistance, supplied plant and machinery for 30 major industries, including defense enterprises. The Soviet Union takes the credit for the emergence of several new industrial sectors in Poland, such as ship-building, aviation and automotive industries, oil refining and chemistry, copper extraction and copper smelting, etc. In 1948-1989 more than 150 industrial enterprises were built with Soviet technical assistance (more

than 350 production entities were built and refurbished). They include the metallurgical complexes in Krakow and Katowice, the high-grade alloyed steel complex called Warsaw, the oil refinery in Plock, automobile plants in Warsaw and Lublin, several power stations, the metro in Warsaw, etc.

The structure of Soviet-Polish trade changed substantially in the 1950s—1980s. While in the 1950s—1960s Soviet exports to Poland were dominated by plant and machinery, in the 1970s—1980s they were dominated by fuel and raw materials. In the 1950s—1960s the export of Soviet machines and equipment grew from 36 million rubles to 579 million rubles, i.e., 16-fold. At the same time in 1946-1983 Soviet oil and petroleum product exports grew from 122,000 tons to 14,871,000 tons, that is, by 122 times, the export of natural gas grew from 88,000 cubic meters to 6,007 million cubic meters and of iron ore from 212,000 tons to 8,835,000 tons. The structure of Polish exports to the USSR evolved in the opposite direction. In 1950-1984 the share of fuel, raw and other materials dropped from 40 to 18%, of farm products and foodstuffs from 12 to 2%. Meanwhile the share of machines and equipment in 1950-1989 grew from 26 to 64% or from 36 million rubles to 3.2 billion rubles, i.e., by 98 times.¹⁵

In the 1950s—1980s the Soviet Union made available to Poland free of charge hundreds of licenses and sets of technical documentation for the manufacture of armaments and other military hardware, Polish partners enjoyed free services of powerful Soviet design offices which enabled them to produce AN-2, Yak-12, Mig-15bis, Mig-17F/PF, Mig-19 planes, Mi-1, Mi-2, B-3, Mi-4 helicopters as well as the T-55 tanks, etc. Poland made a lot of money by selling military hardware produced under Soviet licenses to third countries. Poland became a leading world exporter of tanks.

The Soviet Union emerged as the main supplier of raw and other materials for the Polish economy. In the 1970s—1980s the USSR supplied 100% of Poland's needs for oil, gas and cast iron, 68% of its needs for petroleum products, 85% of iron ore, 88% of manganese ore and 60% of cotton.

Yet the prevailing sentiment in Polish society was that postwar economic cooperation between Poland and the USSR benefited only the Soviet Union. In order to determine who benefits and to what extent from trade and economic relations specialized studies are needed (which is hampered by the lack of complete documentation and the fact that the prices and currency exchange rates were fixed in an administrative-command way, i.e., arbitrarily). However, it is known that in the 1970s—1980s the prices at which the Soviet Union supplied energy, iron ore, etc. to Poland and other COMECON countries were substantially below world prices (for example, oil was sold at half the world price). Another benefit that accrued from the economic partnership with the USSR was fixed prices independent of fluctuations in the world market established for specified periods of time. At the same time, according to American economists, the USSR bought products of machine building industry from Poland and other COMECON countries at prices two or three times higher than world prices. True, in the 1970s—1980s the machines and equipment Poland supplied to the Soviet Union were made from component parts acquired in the West for hard currency, but Poland, for its part,

re-exported to the West some of the Soviet oil bought with "transferable rubles." So the Polish argument that trade and economic relations with the USSR did not benefit Poland hardly holds water. According to American economists, in 1960-1984 Poland derived benefits in the amount of \$23 billion from trade with the USSR.¹⁶ Jaruzelski denies that Poland was ever a colony of the Soviet Union: "Of course it experienced Soviet pressure and sometimes *diktat*, but not exploitation: even in the hardest of times the Poles lived better than the Russians."¹⁷

Recurrent systemic crises in Poland led the Kremlin to regard Poland as the weak link in the socialist community, and an unreliable member of the Warsaw Treaty. Therefore the Soviet Union kept a particularly close eye on the situation in Poland during such crises, and took a more relaxed attitude in calmer periods. One must give due to the Soviet leaders that during the crises they never contemplated Soviet military interference in internal Polish affairs, trusting the PUWP leadership to sort out the situation in the country on its own. The main levers were financial and economic aid, persuasion, and occasional pressure, albeit it was becoming less and less effective.

During the political crisis in December 1970 Edward Gierek, backed by the CPSU leadership, became the First Secretary of the Central Committee of the PUWP. However, in spite of a show of loyalty and friendly noises with regard to Moscow, he and his entourage ignored most of Moscow's advice or acted contrary to it.¹⁸ Georgy Shakhnazarov, a member of the CC CPSU department in charge of links with the Communist and Workers' Parties of socialist countries gave this interpretation: Gomulka had won the right to run the country his way and Gierek availed himself of that right. There was hardly a summit meeting during which Leonid Brezhnev, prompted by his advisers, did not try to persuade the Polish leader that it was necessary to recall Gomulka's "mistaken decision" to suspend wholesale collectivization of agriculture. The Poles were endlessly criticized of being too tolerant towards the Catholic church, of flirting with the Polish diaspora in the US, allowing private stalls to do their trade in the center of Warsaw, etc. Gierek chose not to argue, pretended that he agreed, grinned and promised to think about it and make amends at the next plenum of the party, but things never went beyond that. He himself and Premier Piotr Jaroszewicz were pragmatics, if not reformers, and in any case they did not want to be pushed around. The Soviet Gosplan accused the Poles of "risky political experimenting" and the Soviet leaders warned the Polish colleagues against serious mistakes. But the Polish colleagues dismissed the advice.¹⁹

The crises of 1980-1981 caused much concern in the Soviet leadership. The fate of the Soviet bloc hung in the balance. The then US President Ronald Reagan openly sided with the political opposition represented by the top leaders of the Solidarity movement and sought to sever Poland from the Soviet Union. A special CC CPSU Commission headed by Mikhail Suslov (the so-called Suslov Commission) was set up to assess the events in Poland on August 25, 1980.

Not trusting Stanislaw Kania and Wojciech Jaruzelski the Kremlin put its stake on the party conservatives, the so-called "concrete" within the PUWP, uniting it and grooming it for seizing power in the country. During the 1980-1981

developments Moscow never seriously contemplated direct military interference in Polish affairs, hoping that “healthy forces” within the party would be able to bring the situation in the country under control. Georgy Shakhnazarov reports that at the very first meeting of the Polish Commission Mikhail Suslov said: “Comrades, we should proceed from the premise that military intervention in Poland is not an option. We can discuss any options but this one.”²⁰

Three days before martial law was imposed, on December 10, 1981, Yury Andropov said addressing the Politburo of the CC CPSU: “Jaruzelski is again raising the issue of our military interference. We have already told him that we cannot interfere in Polish affairs, we would not do it, but apparently he does not have much trust in his own army. So as a safeguard he would like to have our pledge that we would step in. But we have to explain to him again that we will not interfere in Polish affairs. He should rely only on his own resources. It is one thing if Solidarity gains the upper hand in Poland and it would be quite another thing if we invaded and the whole Western world came down upon us with sanctions, etc.”²¹

However, to bring pressure to bear on the development of the situation in Poland a pretence was made of preparing a Soviet military invasion, a pretence that the military took at its face value: Soviet troops were concentrated on the Polish border, exercises were held, reconnaissance missions were carried out on the ground, rumors were being spread about an imminent invasion of Poland, etc. Pictures taken by American satellites bore this out and suggested that the Soviet Union was about to invade Poland.

In the late autumn of 1981 Jaruzelski and his supporters found themselves between a rock and a hard place: between the power-hungry extremist leadership of Solidarnost and the party conservatives, backed by Moscow, who had rallied and were ready to seize power. In this situation the leader of party reformers took the only correct decision: he introduced martial law in the country on December 13, 1981. If he had not done, that the country would have plunged into chaos and bloody confrontation which would inevitably have brought the party conservatives to power. The imposition of martial law spared the country a tragic outcome, the deaths of thousands and possibly tens of thousands of people, above all members of Solidarity. But for the martial law of 1981, the opposition in Poland would not have come to power in 1989. Jaruzelski said in an interview: “The decision to impose martial law was our own Polish decision... it saved Poland.”²²

After the imposition of martial law the Kremlin tried to dictate to Jaruzelski who to be friends with and who to avoid. Moscow and Berlin hinted on several occasions that he should be resolute, should not be toothless or too liberal. Jaruzelski politely but firmly resisted attempts to impose a line of behavior on him and stayed his own course. Of course he had to reckon with the fact that Poland was dependent on Moscow.²³

In the first half of the 1980s, in connection with the events of 1980-1981 public sentiments in Poland towards the USSR and its people dramatically deteriorated. In the second half of the 1980s sympathy for the Soviet Union and the Soviet people began to mount in connection with *perestroika*. This was borne out by opinion polls. While in 1982 only 32% of Poles had friendly feelings towards

the Soviet people, that percentage rose to 45 in May 1985. In 1978, 90% of respondents considered the USSR to be a friendly state, in 1981 the figure was 55%, in May 1985, 73% and in May 1986 65%.²⁴ On the other hand, there was disenchantment with "real socialism" in Polish society which increasingly looked towards Western values and the West in general.

In the concrete situation in Poland at the time, the Soviet *perestroika* objectively tended to encourage further liberalization of the sociopolitical situation in the country paving the way for the further advance of reforms. Mikhail Gorbachev wrote in his memoirs: "Jaruzelski ardently supported the changes in the Soviet Union... I attribute the General's commitment to reform to the fact that he had found out to his own cost that complicated problems could not be solved by force, that profound changes in the social and state system were needed."²⁵ Gorbachev himself described the experience of Polish reforms as a test ground for *perestroika*.²⁶

In 1986-1989 Soviet-Polish links in all areas went back to the precrisis level. The groundswell of anti-Soviet sentiments in Polish society had been staved off.²⁷ In April 1987 a joint commission of Soviet and Polish scientists was set up to look into the history of relations between the two countries and eliminate the so-called "blank spots" in the history of Soviet-Polish relations during the Stalin times. The list of the problems included: the Soviet-Polish war of 1920, the disbanding of the Communist Party in 1938, the secret protocol to the Soviet-German Pact of August 23, 1939, the Soviet military campaign of 1939 and deportations from Western Ukraine and Western Byelorussia, the Katyn affair, the Warsaw uprising, etc. In April 1990 the Soviet authorities publicly admitted the responsibility of the NKVD for the massacre of Polish POWs in the spring of 1940. In July 1988, during Gorbachev's visit to Poland the Poles gave Gorbachev the kind of enthusiastic and spontaneous welcome that they had previously reserved only for the Polish Pope, Jaruzelski recalls. An opinion poll revealed that 78% of respondents liked Gorbachev.²⁸

Soviet-Polish relations acquired a partnership character. Speaking at a meeting with church hierarchs in early January 1989 the First Secretary of the CC of the PUPW Mieczyslaw Rakowski said: "For the first time we are quite independent in running our own home."²⁹ In the opinion of Russian diplomat V. Voronkov, in 1987-1988 Moscow became increasingly aware that a roundtable between the Polish authorities and the opposition was inevitable. Proof of this is that the Soviet side established discreet unofficial contacts with some members of Solidarity. The Soviet leadership came to allow for the possibility of noncommunist forces coming to power provided Poland remained a member of the Warsaw Treaty.³⁰

The results of the parliamentary elections in June 1989 and subsequent developments in the country and in Eastern Europe overturned all the logical schemes of the party reformers led by Wojciech Jaruzelski aimed at keeping overall control of the country while giving some power to the moderate opposition, plans backed by the Gorbachev leadership. The defeat of party reformers meant the defeat of the Soviet Union in Poland. The country had come under the control of anticommunists, opponents of the alliance with the USSR and pro-Westerners. Regarding themselves as heirs to the Second Rzeczpospolita they

proclaimed the Third Rzeczpospolita. The process of liberation from Soviet dependence, dubbed "the escape from the East," had begun.

A new but short page opened in Soviet-Polish relations in 1989-1991. The Soviet Union now had to establish links with the anticommunist and pro-Western opposition that had come to power in Poland and try to build relations on a new basis. While the Soviet side was genuinely committed to forming a relationship of alliance and partnership, the Polish side decided to dismantle the former relations and distance itself from the Soviet Union. Poland and Hungary were fiercely campaigning for the liquidation of the Warsaw Treaty and the COMECON.

In 1990-1991 the Republic of Poland (RP) tried to pursue a dual policy with regard to the USSR: establishing relations with the central government of the Soviet Union, on the one hand, and with the union republics, on the other. During the visit of the then Polish Foreign Minister Krzysztof Skubiszewski in October 1990 a Declaration on Friendship and Good-Neighborly Cooperation between the RSFSR and the RP was signed. However, until the end of 1991 Poland's main partner was the USSR and not Russia.

Before the signing on November 14, 1990 of a treaty with Germany recognizing Poland's western border the new authorities still sought to maintain good relations with the Soviet Union. But the day after the Treaty was signed the RP demanded, in a form that was little short of an ultimatum, an immediate withdrawal of the Soviet troops from Polish territory, access to recent history materials in the Soviet archives, etc.

In January 1991 the Polish government blocked the transit through the Polish territory of the Soviet troops being withdrawn from Germany on the grounds that the transit had not been agreed with the Polish authorities, this despite the fact that the 1956 Treaty was still in force. The new Polish authorities charged such exorbitant prices for the transit of the Soviet military hardware and troops being withdrawn from the GDR that they had to be taken out mainly by sea. From November 15, 1990 tense negotiations were conducted about the withdrawal of Soviet troops although the actual withdrawal of arms and troops had begun in July 1989. Nuclear weapons were removed in the first half of 1990. Troops continued to be withdrawn in 1991.

After the abortive GKChP coup in Moscow Soviet negotiators became more compliant, and on October 26, 1991 an agreement on the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Poland before the end of 1993 was initiated in Moscow. On December 19, 1991 an agreement was signed on the transit of Soviet troops being withdrawn from Germany through Polish territory.

The Soviet Union gave as it took. The new Polish administration declared that trade and economic settlements within the COMECON had to be operated in convertible currency. Subsequent analysis showed that such a switch left Poland \$1.2-1.5 billion short every year.³¹ So the Polish government started advocating the need for a transitional period. But in July 1990 Gorbachev abruptly signed a decree renouncing settlements in transferable rubles and introducing settlements between the Soviet Union and other COMECON countries in convertible currency as of January 1, 1991. A Soviet-Polish agreement to the effect

was signed on November 13, 1990. The result was the disruption of a mechanism of cooperation that had been in force for forty years and the collapse of the former links. In 1991 Polish exports to the USSR dropped by 47% as compared with 1990, and imports from the USSR dropped by 46%.

The Polish industry was hit hardest by the collapse of Soviet-Polish trade. It turned out that Poland depended on the Soviet market as much as it depended on the Soviet supplies of fuel and energy. About 300 big and medium-sized Polish enterprises employing hundreds of thousands of workers were closely associated with that market as exporters. About thirty of them shipped more than half of their output to the USSR. The loss of the Soviet market had dire economic consequences for them, many enterprises went bankrupt. A veritable catastrophe for the export of Polish machines and light industry products occurred in 1991-1992. But the defense industry, naturally, was in the most critical situation.³²

Public sentiments in Poland with regard to the Soviet Union deteriorated sharply in 1990-1991. According to the Governmental Center for the Study of Public Opinion, during a year (February 1990—February 1991) the number of people who considered the USSR to be an ally of Poland had dropped from 18% to 4% and the number of respondents who felt that Poland should be apprehensive of the Soviet Union had increased by 46%.³³ By contrast, towards the end of the Soviet period there was widespread Polonophilia in Soviet society in the political and cultural fields. Soviet sympathies towards Poland built up over the years of “real socialism” were so great that it seemed that there was a huge reservoir of goodwill that could not be frittered away quickly. After 1989 some sections of the Moscow intelligentsia came to see Poland as a country that could accomplish a relatively soft, civilized evolution away from “real socialism” to democracy and the market. It was suggested that the Soviet Union should follow the path of Polish liberal reforms.

In March 1991 the Soviet side submitted a draft new treaty on friendship and cooperation between the USSR and the Republic of Poland. It contained a controversial provision whereby the parties would renounce actions posing a threat to the security of the other side. After the failure of the GKChP coup in August 1991 the Soviet side renounced that provision.

The Treaty was initiated on December 10, 1991. During the GKChP coup RP President Lech Walesa and his following were initially undecided, but then decided to back the coup-makers. A telegram of congratulations was ready to be sent to Gennady Yanayev. Luckily, the coup failed before the telegram was sent.³⁴

The collapse of the Soviet Union in the summer-winter 1991 put an end to the Soviet-Polish relations that had gone through several phases over a period of more than 70 years.

1944-1989 was a period of common interests and many-sided cooperation between the USSR and Poland. At the same time, the Soviet Union did make attempts to impose its system on Poland, to limit its sovereignty, which generated inequality and complicated mutual relations.

In the 18th—20th centuries Poland was nursing many grudges and justified claims with regard to Russia. These centuries saw the formation of the Polish national consciousness, part of which was Russophobia, Russia-hating, and they

bequeathed a complicated and dire historical legacy to the new Russia and new Poland. Mutual resentment, once it arises, is hard to overcome. Only time and good will on the part of both Russia and Poland, mutual dialogue and cooperation can heal the old wounds inflicted on the consciousness of both peoples. Russia, more than any other country, should be interested in a free, sovereign and independent Poland. Russia needs such a Poland for its own development. In the late 20th century new opportunities were opened for Russia and Poland to establish and develop mutual relations based on new principles.

The experience of the last 200 years shows that no historical period can be an absolute model for building a new relationship. Neighborhood has never had the character of a complete and balanced partnership anywhere in the world. At the same time, for two centuries there were many people and political forces in Russia who supported the fight of the Polish people for freedom and independence, genuinely sought to bring the two peoples and countries closer together and forge a new type of relations between them.

The past need not cloud the future of Russian-Polish relations. We should take from the past only what brings us together and makes us need each other. Time will tell whether the two countries and peoples will manage to use the new historical chance for a dramatic improvement of Russian-Polish relations.

NOTES

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