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Up-coming breaking points in Polish-German relations?

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Up-coming breaking points in Polish-German relations?

Abstract: Today, Europe faces serious political and economic challenges and problems many of which still await to be recognized. The objective of this paper is to examine three developments that might turn into challenges and affect the Polish-German relations in the near future. If unaddressed promptly, they might lead to a new caesura between Berlin and Warsaw. These developments include: first, the return of the so-called German Question and a debate about Germany's role in Europe, which from a historical but also geopolitical point of view has always had a significant influence on Poland. Second, there is a comeback of the idea of the Intermarium (Międzymorze). We see a cooperation between East-Central European states, which some experts discuss as an alternative for Polish foreign policy. Last but not least, Russia has returned to its traditionally central factor shaping politics in the region. A "Russo-German romance"¹ would have serious consequences for the Polish-German relations.

Keywords: Polish-German relations, Poland, Germany, Russia, caesura, breaking points, Intermarium.

Introduction

When historians talk about historical evolutions, they very often look for caesuras. When talking about a certain historical event, it is relevant to answer the question of how long processes endured. Periodization is an important analysis instrument in historiography. It is essential to understand complex courses of events. That understanding helps us to establish order in a chaotic collection of historical data. Normally historians start to ask the question whether a historical event was important or not many years or even decades after it actually took place.

1 G. Friedman, 'Geopolitical Journey, Part 2: Borderlands', *Geopolitical Weekly*, June 3, 2014, https://www.stratfor.com/weekly/20101108_geopolitical_journey_part_2_borderlands (2016-03-14).

The former Chinese Prime Minister Zhou Enlai is claimed to have said that even 200 years after the French Revolution, it would be too early to evaluate this caesura in world history.² The objective of this paper is to do the opposite, i.e. this paper seeks to address the question if a new caesura in the Polish-German relationship is likely to emerge. To this end, the argument is structured as follows. At first, we briefly focus on the last big breaking points, the breakdown of the former Eastern Bloc as well as 9/11. We continue by giving a short overview about the current situation in the ‘Common European House’. Later we will pay attention to three factors that could lead to a caesura in Europe. We will end with the question whether those factors could endanger the relations between Warsaw and Berlin.

1. The post-Cold War era

When we think of the last big caesura that shaped the way we look at the world it is the year 1989. Poland – after years of struggle with the Communist regime – embarked on a process of economic and political transformation, the Iron Curtain fell and the Berlin Wall was opened on 9 November.³ The fall of the Soviet Empire and the end of the Cold War initiated a period of more or less stability in the world.⁴ Some announced the so-called “end of history” based on the victory of Western civilization.⁵ This victory was derived from the fact that the majority of the East Bloc states later became part of the West.⁶ At the same time the Russian Federation, the successor of the USSR,

- 2 The anecdote is based on a translation mistake. Zhou was actually asked about the French student revolts in 1968, cf. R. McGregor, ‘Zhou’s cryptic caution lost in translation’, *Financial Times*, June 11, 2011.
- 3 At this point one should also remember the so-called Pan-European Picnic, a peace demonstration at the border between Austria and Hungary on 19 August 1989. Together with the Solidarity movement in Poland and the peaceful demonstration in East Germany, which led to the fall of the Berlin Wall, the Pan-European Picnic is seen as one of the milestones in the process of the Fall of the Soviet Union.
- 4 In Europe that narrative is only disturbed by the wars in Yugoslavia and the Caucasus, which of course also took place in Europe – even though at its peripheries.
- 5 F. Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man*, New York: Free Press, 2006 [first published in 1992].
- 6 One could also say that countries like Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia or Hungary did not become part of the West by their entry to NATO and the EU, but simply re-joined the West.

was no longer a danger for the West – mostly because of destabilizing domestic problems under Boris Yeltsin.⁷

This Post-Cold War order seemed to be shaken by the tragic developments of 9/11. Despite the trauma that the terror attacks have caused in the US, there is a tendency to question the status of 9/11 as a caesura.⁸ An anthology published already in 2003 by Mary Dudziak sees 9/11 more as a continuation than a clear breaking point.⁹ The results of 9/11 are mostly seen in the so-called War on Terror led by the United States. While all Western nations commonly condemned 9/11, the War on Terror showed a division in Europe, especially in the years 2003-2004. On the one hand, many European nation states joined the Coalition of the Willing. On the other hand, there was an axis Paris–Berlin–Moscow, which was not willing to support the US intervention in Iraq. The war in Iraq showed very obviously that there was no common European foreign policy, still it did not challenge Europe's foundations in the 2000's on a long-term basis.

2. A bunch of problems in a house divided

Today, the EU faces several challenges within and outside its borders. In 2008, the EU was shattered by the financial crisis. The Greek debt crisis is not solved yet and the Union is still tackling this problem¹⁰, which was pushed into the background by another issue. The EU faces the problem of hundreds of thousands of refugees entering the territory of EU member states asking for asylum. At the same time, the United Kingdom has a very difficult stance towards the EU and has decided to leave the Union. Europe is separated into different

7 Cf. L. Shevtsova, *Yeltsin's Russia: Myths and Reality*, Washington: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1999.

8 To the same conclusion came a scientific conference in Heidelberg (Germany): Hsozkult, 'Zeitenwende 11. September? Eine transatlantische Bilanz zehn Jahre danach' [Turning point 9/11? A transatlantic balance sheet ten years after], *Hsozkult*, October 15, 2011, <http://www.hsozkult.de/conferencereport/id/tagungsberichte-3847> (2016-03-14).

9 M. Dudziak, *September 11 in history: A watershed moment?*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2003.

10 A. Visvizi, 'Greece and the Troika in the context of the Eurozone crisis', in: J. Magone, B. Laffan, Ch. Schweiger (eds), *Core-Periphery Relations in the European Union. The Politics of Differentiated Integration in the European Political Economy*, London and New York: Routledge, 2016, pp. 149-165.

zones.¹¹ For instance, economically, we see a division between a strong north and a weaker south.¹² Especially since the intensification of the migration crisis we can also see an upcoming partition between Western and Eastern member states.¹³ In late 2015 ideas of the so-called mini-Schengen were up to debate, which wanted to exclude among others the Eastern member states from the common Schengen Area.¹⁴

Outside its borders, there are also several issues, which threaten the success of the European project. The situation in Syria will remain very dangerous and will probably worsen the refugee crisis even more. In proximity, NATO partner Turkey is more and more coming into conflict with Russia. Beside the Middle East, the number of refugees coming from the Maghreb states could rise, too. The conflict between Russia and Ukraine is still going on and Moscow continues to provoke the West. On the other side of the 'big pond', presidential elections will be held in November, which could lead to a changed US foreign policy. We would probably not see a return of American Isolationism, but the danger of a turn away from global governance. As a result, the EU could be forced to be even more active on the world scale.

In all those present challenges whether it is the refugee crisis or the question of dealing with Russia, the European Union is 'a house divided'¹⁵. The reactions of European states towards those issues are not united. Europe, of course, is no monolith. Throughout centuries, Europe has gained a lot from being a continent of "many different cul-

11 Cf. G. Friedman, *The Next 100 years: A forecast for the 21st century*, New York: Random House, 2009, pp. 74-76.

12 Cf. S. Alonso, 'A perfect storm: Europe's growing North-South divide', *Policy Network*, September 12, 2013, http://www.policy-network.net/pno_detail.aspx?ID=4459&title=A+perfect+storm%3a+Europe%27s+growing+North-South+divide (2016-04-25).

13 Cf. L. Macek, 'Refugee crisis: a further East-West rift in Europe?', *Interview*, Fondation Rober Schuman, <http://www.robert-schuman.eu/en/european-interviews/0088-refugee-crisis-a-further-east-west-rift-in-europe> (2016-04-25).

14 H. Burchard, 'Five nations consider mini-Schengen: Discussions underway on radical changes to border-free zone', *Politico*, November 19, 2015, <http://www.politico.eu/article/nations-mini-schengen-borders-passports-travel-freedom-migration-refugees/> (2016-04-25).

15 It was the US President Abraham Lincoln, who during the so-called Lincoln-Douglas Debates of 1858 (or Great Debate of 1858) named the United States a house divided. On 16 June 1858 he expressed his opinion that "[a] house divided against itself cannot stand. (...) I do not expect the Union to be dissolved – I do not expect the house to fall – but I do expect it will cease to be divided. It will become all one thing or all the other". See: D.E. Fehrenbacher, 'The Origins and Purpose of Lincoln's "House-Divided" Speech', *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, vol. 46, no. 4, 1960, p. 622.

tures, traditions and languages”¹⁶. Indeed, it is not without reason that the motto of the EU is “united in diversity”. Certainly, Europe has faced a lot of crises before, which showed different opinions of the member states on particular issues. Besides, there are optimists, who say that a crisis always leaves Europe strengthened. The very problem in this moment could be that while still being very diverse and varied, Europe could be less and less united. The results of a missed unity could even lead to very pessimistic scenarios. The majority of European politicians might say that failing is not an option. Still a disintegration of the European Union is one scenario that cannot be ruled out. In a recent poll, conducted by the German Forsa Institute, only 12% of the Germans said that by 2020 the European Union would remain in its current form. A majority of 54% answered the EU was probably going to lose its member states.¹⁷

Those problems we see today in the ‘Common European House’ also strain the relations between direct neighbours like Germany and Poland. Differences between Berlin and Warsaw are not only based on the change of government in Poland in autumn 2015. When we take a step back and look at the bigger picture, we can see three developments that take place in Europe at the moment. They could not only be strong factors to worsen Polish-German relations but could lead to a split between the two partners and therefore could be a problem for Europe as a whole.

3. The return of the German question

Germany plays not only a key role but probably the most important role. At the moment, Berlin has a huge influence on European politics.¹⁸ This is actually quite astonishing because the prevention of a strong Germany has always been one of the foundations of Europe. As former EU commissioner and present Viadrina lecturer Günter

16 European Union, ‘The EU motto’, *About EU-Basic Information*, http://europa.eu/about-eu/basic-information/symbols/motto/index_en.htm (2016-03-14).

17 IP, ‘Wird die EU im Jahre 2020 noch in ihrer jetzigen Form bestehen?’ [Will the EU be the same in 2020?], IP-Forsa-Frage [Opinion poll] 03-34/16, *Internationale Politik* (IP), March/April 2016, p. 5.

18 In the author’s view, the isolation of Germany under Merkel, as it is seen by some observers, is only temporary.

Verheugen once mentioned, one of the aims of European integration was always about integrating Germany so that it would not be a threat to other European nations.¹⁹ What we see at present is the return of another problem – the German Question.

The so-called German Question (*die Deutsche Frage*) came up during the Napoleonic Wars for the first time.²⁰ The question was what a unified Germany could look like and what role it could play in the Concert of Europe. It played a major role in 19th- and 20th-century politics. In 1990, the problem seemed to be solved when the GDR joined the Federal Republic of Germany (the so-called Reunification of Germany). To avoid a too powerful Berlin, Germany was strongly integrated into the Union (until 1993 the European Community). As it is well known it was a strong French demand that Europe should be united by a common currency.

In the 1990's France and Germany were "the engine of the European project". In 1993 the creation of the Weimar Triangle was the trial to connect Poland, the biggest country of the former Soviet satellites, to this engine – as an eastern cylinder. The financial crises of 2007/2008 showed that the Franco-German engine slowed down.²¹ At the same time, the Weimar Triangle could not strengthen this engine. As a result, the influence of Berlin has been growing in the last years. In general, one could say that the influence of Brussels has decreased and shifted to the European capitals – especially to the German. It was, for example, not the European Union which conducted negotiations during the Ukraine crisis in 2014, but the so-called Normandy format under the Franco-German lead. Berlin is also leading

19 G. Verheugen, 'Weiche Währung, harte Zeiten – Ist der Euro in Gefahr?' [Soft currency, hard times – Euro in danger?], G. Verheugen during the political talk show Maybrit Illner, *Maybrit Illner*, ZDF, Berlin, broadcast December 12, 2010. Cf. Programm.ARD.de, <http://programm.ard.de/TV/Programm/Sender/?sendung=287256122031866> (2016-04-14).

20 For further information on the German Question see: M. Görtemaker, 'Die deutsche Frage in der internationalen Politik' [The German Question in international politics], *Dossier: Deutsche Teilung, Deutsche Einheit*, Bundeszentrale für Politische Bildung, <http://www.bpb.de/geschichte/deutsche-einheit/deutsche-teilung-deutsche-einheit/43750/die-deutsche-frage?p=all> (2016-04-26). Cf. D. Miles, 'Solidarity or Self-interest? European Integration and the German Question', *Carnegie Ethics Online*, August 17, 2015, Carnegie Council on Ethics in International Affairs (CCEIA), http://https://www.carnegiecouncil.org/publications/ethics_online/0108 (2016-04-26).

21 Cf. C. Demesmay, H. Stark, 'Den deutsch-französischen Dialog öffnen: Dreieckskonstellationen im Dienste der europäischen Integration' [To open German-French dialogue: Triangular constellations in the service of European Integration], *DGAPanalyse*, no. 6, 2015, pp. 3-6.

in the Greek debt crisis. Germany shows a lot of sway in EU personnel decisions, too. For example, the German exertion of influence in choosing Donald Tusk as President of the European Council cannot be denied.²² Summarizing, one can say that the German Question has returned. On the one hand, the European partners have to think about how to deal with German dominance in Europe. On the other hand, Berlin has to choose a strategy how to fulfil this role. This could be a kind of partnership in leadership. A Europe dominated by Germany is probably neither in the interest of the European Union nor of the European nation states. It is actually a status, which the founding fathers of Europe wanted to prevent from the very beginning. For the very moment, Germany only hesitantly and limitedly takes advantage of its situation. Although Germany is already discussing its new role²³, even though it does not yet know how to use its position.

4. 'New East Bloc'?

Viewed from a historical perspective, the German Question has always been closely linked to the fate of Germany's Eastern neighbours. Growing German influence conflicts with the vision of a more influential Poland by the Polish political right. Especially members of the governing Law and Justice (PiS) party claim that the Civic Platform (PO) allegedly paid too much attention to the position of Berlin (but also Brussels) and should concentrate more on the advantages for Poland. When Warsaw questions close ties with Berlin, it will have

22 R. Vetter, 'Gezeitenwechsel: Polens Rechte erobert die ganze Macht' [Turn of the tide: Polish political right gains all the power], *Osteuropa*, no. 1/2, 2016, p. 26.

23 In 2014 there were different comments on Germany's role in the world, for example by President Joachim Gauck (J. Gauck, 'Deutschlands Rolle in der Welt: Anmerkungen zu Verantwortung, Normen und Bündnissen' [Germany's global role: Comments on responsibility, norms and alliances], Reden [Speeches] January 31, 2014, <http://www.bundespraesident.de/SharedDocs/Reden/DE/Joachim-Gauck/Reden/2014/01/140131-Muenchner-Sicherheitskonferenz.html> (2016-03-14)). Cf. R. Neukirch, G. Repinski, 'Foreign Policy Rethink: Germany Weighs Stronger Military Role', *Spiegel Online*, January 28, 2014, <http://www.spiegel.de/international/germany/germany-considers-increasing-role-in-foreign-military-missions-a-945771.html> (2016-03-14). Also worthy of note is the Review 2014 discussion of the Federal Foreign Office, *Review 2014 Außenpolitik weiterdenken* [Review 2014 rethinking foreign policy], <http://www.aussenpolitik-weiter-denken.de/de/themen.html> (2016-03-14).

to seek new political formats. One solution could be a stronger cooperation with its East Central European partners.

The term 'New Eastern Bloc' first appeared probably in the German media.²⁴ It is meant pejoratively to describe the coordinated policy of states in East Central Europe. The reason for the cooperation is mainly the refugee crisis. The core of the cooperation is chiefly the Visegrád Group.²⁵ During the last years, the V4 has been dormant.²⁶ The refugee crisis did not directly reconnect the group from the very beginning. Poland's position under Prime Minister Ewa Kopacz was much closer to Germany than to the other Visegrád states. There was a gap between this orientation towards Berlin and the Polish electorate. Only since the lost election of the Civic Platform and the forming of the new government under Beata Szydło, there has been an agreement within the Visegrád Group. But are concerns about the way how to handle the Refugee Crisis a binding strong enough for the partners in East-Central Europe? When thinking about a common position against Russia, we immediately remember Budapest's policy towards Moscow. This is at the same time a bone of contention especially between Poland and Hungary. We might see a strong cooperation between them in questions of inner European problems. Lately, the proverb "Pole, Hungarian: Two brothers, both for the sabre and for the drinking glass" has often been used to describe the relations between the administration of Viktor Orbán and Jarosław Kaczyński's PiS government. But there

24 B. Kálnoky, 'Ein neuer „Ostblock“ arbeitet am Anti-Merkel-Plan' [A new 'East Bloc' is working on an anti-Merkel plan], *Die Welt*, February 15, 2016, <http://www.welt.de/politik/ausland/article152256885/Ein-neuer-Ostblock-arbeitet-am-Anti-Merkel-Plan.html> (2016-03-14); J. Puhl, 'Polen und die Flüchtlingskrise: „Regierungen lernen dazu oder werden ausgewechselt“' [Poland and the Refugee Crisis: 'Governments have to learn or will be replaced'], *Spiegel Online*, February 17, 2016, <http://www.spiegel.de/politik/ausland/polen-regierungen-lernen-dazu-oder-werden-ausgewechselt-a-1077619.html> (2016-03-14).

25 The Visegrád Triangle was established in 1991 between Hungary, Poland and Czechoslovakia. In 1993, after the dissolution of the ČSFR, it became the Visegrád Group or Visegrád Four (V4). Its purpose was to "begin a process of creating foundations and new forms of political, economic and cultural cooperation of these countries in the altered situation in the Central Europe." Cf. Visegrád Group, *Declaration on Cooperation between the Czech and Slovak Federal Republic, the Republic of Poland and the Republic of Hungary in Striving for European Integration*, February 15, 1991, <http://www.visegradgroup.eu/documents/visegrad-declarations/visegrad-declaration-110412> (2016-03-14).

26 K. Gawron-Tabor, *Współpraca państw Grupy Wyszehradzkiej w procesie integracji europejskiej w latach 1989-2009* [Cooperation of the Visegrád Group in the process of European integration in the years 1989-2009], Toruń: Dom Wydawniczy Duet, 2013.

could be huge doubts when it comes to a cooperated policy towards Russia. We might see some family squabble between the two brothers. Furthermore, there could be the question whether there is a certain leader in this bloc. Orbán has been the *enfant terrible* in the EU for some years, but Poland is still the larger country in terms of area, economically stronger and has a greater population. Generally, the cooperation of these partners is strongly connected to its political leaders. We might see a quick end of this alliance when, for example, the opposition in Poland regains power. Do we really witness the rise of a bloc between Germany and Russia? In fact, the idea of a cooperation of the states between the Baltic Sea and the Black Sea is not a new conception. The so-called Intermarium (Międzymorze) is well known in Poland. It is no secret that certain circles in Poland sympathize with that geopolitical thought.²⁷

During her visit at the Körber Foundation in Berlin, Prime Minister Szydło was asked about the concrete alternative of the Intermarium. The Polish head of government emphasized the importance of the German partner for Poland. At the same she did not reject the idea of the Intermarium. Just one day after her visit to Germany, the Visegrád Group announced that they would seal the Balkan route against refugees and showed their support for Macedonia and Bulgaria – against Merkel's will. The person who actually predicts the comeback of the Intermarium idea is the former CEO of Stratfor George Friedman. In his prognosis of "The Next 100 Years" he sees three countries as new and strong regional powers: Japan, Turkey and Poland. The Polish state would form a strong alliance with its East-Central European neighbours, which Friedman calls the 'Poland bloc'. In his eyes, Warsaw is going to surpass Germany economically and politically by 2050. According to Friedman, the reason for that will be an economic degradation of Germany and a technological support of Poland by the United States.²⁸ In several other analyses for the Stratfor Institute, he also forecasts this comeback of the Intermarium. The principal pillar

27 J. Bielecki, 'Polityka zagraniczna: Duda wraca do koncepcji międzymorza' [Foreign policy: Duda returns to the Intermarium conception], *Rzeczpospolita*, August 17, 2015, <http://www.rp.pl/Dyplomacja/308179789-Polityka-zagraniczna-Duda-wraca-do-koncepcji-miedzymorza.html> (2016-03-15).

28 Friedman, *The Next 100 years*, op. cit.

of his argumentation is America's support for the conception of the Intermarium, which for him is taken for granted. But is it?

Especially the Polish nation has had historical experiences with the support of a power which is not its direct neighbour. On the eve of the Second World War, Poland depended on the military support of the United Kingdom and France against Nazi Germany. Even with the United States, the experiences are not the best, because after being a great advocate of an independent Polish state, the Irreconcilables²⁹ gained the upper hand and the United States went back to isolationism³⁰. But still, to focus on one power for support – not only because of the historical reasons – would be naive. The US interest would be to counter steer a stronger Russian-German relationship. There are concerns that a closer contact between Moscow and Berlin could endanger the US position in Europe. Friedman concludes that “there is quite a romance under way between them”³¹. Supporting the Intermarium project can be seen as an effective tool for Washington to stabilize the balance of power in Europe and increase its own influence.³²

Of course, Friedman has to be seen primarily as a US author. His worldview is very America-centric and pro-American. He sees the chance of a rising power between Berlin and Moscow as a guarantor of the global US dominance. But Friedman is not the only one who sees a rising Intermarium between Russia and Germany.

A similar alliance between Washington and East-Central European countries like Poland, the Baltic states, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary and the Balkan states is directed against Russia.³³

The economist Marcin Kędzierski went even one step further and published a ten-point paper of how to create a new Intermarium.³⁴ It

29 The Irreconcilables were a group of Republican and Democratic US Senators who were unwilling to support the Treaty of Versailles in 1919.

30 Today there surely is no strong narrative when it comes to the absence of US support between the two world wars.

31 Friedman, *Geopolitical Journey*, op. cit.

32 See G. Friedman, 'Washington Returns to a Cold War Strategy', *Geopolitical Diary*, Stratfor, January 27, 2015, <https://www.stratfor.com/geopolitical-diary/washington-returns-cold-war-strategy> (2016-03-15).

33 M.J. Chodakiewicz, *Intermarium: the lands between the Black and the Baltic seas*, New Brunswick, London: Transaction Publishers, 2012.

34 M. Kędzierski, 'Time for Intermarium (the Isthmus)', Opinion, *VisegradPlus*, December 20, 2014, <http://visegradplus.org/opinion/time-intermarium-isthmus> (2016-03-15).

should be the policy of the countries in this region to “[bring] to life a new institutional unit operating within the European Union”. It should be a kind of “Central European Union” which “is almost at the same level as main EU players, such as Germany and France”. It is called an “escape forward” for East Central Europe to surprise the rest of the European continent. For Poland, there could be “no good alternative”. The Polish state should be a *primus inter pares* in this constellation. According to the author, it could be a good reaction to the ‘growing position of Germany’ and Russia’s aggression.

A comeback of the Intermarium is no abstract hypothetical idea. That possible outcome was even mentioned in 2016: “If the current situation deteriorates, Eastern Europe might witness the emergence of a new kind of Iron Curtain at the NATO-Russian border and a cordon consisting of those few countries ‘in between,’ whose security status and economic relationships remain contested.”³⁵

5. Russia back on top

Beside the mentioned thoughts in its East Central part, Europe is challenged by Russia’s new foreign policy. The change in Russian foreign policy did not start when the Russo-Ukrainian Crisis began in 2014 but much earlier. One example for that is the Russo-Georgian War in 2008, which in the same year was already called “Europe’s first war of the 21st century, which has seen Russia acting in line with the European Realpolitik models of the 19th and the early 20th centuries”³⁶.

The Russian policy already attracted the attention of some of Russia’s neighbours, who in 2008 stood united with the Georgian government. Among those advocates of Georgia was also former Polish President Lech Kaczyński, who was of the opinion that Russia’s aggression today might be directed against Tbilisi, but soon against Ukraine,

35 Munich Security Conference, ‘Boundless Crises, Reckless Spoilers, Helpless Guardians’, *Munich Security Report 2016*, [https://www.securityconference.de/en/activities/munich-security-report/\(2016-03-21\)](https://www.securityconference.de/en/activities/munich-security-report/(2016-03-21)).

36 M. Emerson, ‘Post-Mortem on Europe’s First War of the 21st Century’, *CEPS Policy Brief*, no. 167, 2008, <http://aei.pitt.edu/9382/2/9382.pdf> (2016-03-15); I. Krastev, ‘Russia and the Georgia war: The great-power trap’, *Open Democracy*, August 31, 2008, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/article/russia-and-the-georgia-war-the-great-power-trap> (2016-03-15).

the Baltic states or even Poland.³⁷ Calling Kaczyński a political prophet would be too much, but certainly Russia's neighbours watch Moscow's foreign policy suspiciously.

In contrast, it seems that, for example for Germany, Russia's foreign policy turned into a blind spot – or, at least, something that could be ignored because of economic reasons. Berlin reacted in late 2014 with the idea of founding the Centre for Eastern and International Studies under the patronage of the Federal Foreign Office. Officially its aim is to regain competence in the field of Russian studies.³⁸

Since the war in Ukraine, Russia has strengthened its influence in global policy.³⁹ Moscow's tools for that among others are the hybrid warfare, media propaganda (particularly by RT-Russia Today or Sputnik) and the support of EU-sceptical parties in Europe.⁴⁰ At the same time, one can say that the biggest advantage for Russia is Europe's weakness and disunity.

As late as in 2011 Russia was thought to be only partially a major power. Russia was (and still is) a nuclear power and it still has a permanent seat in the UN Security Council. But even if Russia calls itself 'one of the most influential centres of the modern world' and a 'modern global power', it still has strong economic problems and a not very

- 37 Wprost, 'Lech Kaczyński: jesteśmy tu po to aby podjąć walkę' [We are here to start the fight], August 12, 2008, <http://www.wprost.pl/ar/136182/Lech-Kaczynski-jestesmy-tu-po-to-aby-pod-jac-walke/> (2016-03-15): "We know very well that today it's Georgia, tomorrow Ukraine, the day after tomorrow the Baltic states and later even my country, Poland." In Polish original: "[M]y też świetnie wiemy, że dziś Gruzja, jutro Ukraina, pojutrze państwa bałtyckie, a później może i czas na mój kraj; na Polskę."
- 38 A. Rinke, 'In response to Ukraine crisis, Berlin to launch new think tank', *Reuters*, January 27, 2015, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-ukraine-crisis-germany-russia-idUSKBN0Lo28420150127> (2016-03-15).
- 39 Cf. A. Kuczyńska-Zonik, 'Russia's soft power in the Baltic States', *Medzinárodné vzťahy* [Journal of International Relations], vol. XIV, no. 1, 2016, pp. 36-57.
- 40 S. Meister, J. Pulgierin, 'Perzeption und Instrumentalisierung: Russlands nicht-militärische Einflussnahme in Europa' [Perception and instrumentalization: Russia's non-military influence in Europe], *DGAPkompakt*, no. 10, 2015, p. 1. This support is still very little in Germany and Poland. While in France, Front National got money from Russia through a bank in the Czech Republic, there seem to be no such transfers in Germany yet. Still the German AfD (Alternative für Deutschland, Alternative for Germany) has some contacts with the Russian government. AfD frontman Alexander Gauland has already had some private talks in the Russian embassy in Berlin. Gauland repeatedly questions the existence of a Ukrainian nation. Generally, one can say that the AfD is very pro-Russian.

competitive economy.⁴¹ Moscow very much tries to benefit politically from being a commodity power. The question of how powerful Russia really is must be answered by experts on Russia – not so much by the so-called ‘Russlandversteher’⁴².

Russia’s new policies represent an important break. It seems that the security structure of Europe of the 1990’s is definitely a thing of the past. Moscow has significantly changed its strategies, which can be seen for example in the fact that Russia nowadays declares NATO its enemy again.⁴³

When exactly this turning point took place is difficult to say. Experts like George Friedman see the conflict between Russia and Georgia as a breaking point. Russia returned as a serious player on the chessboard of global politics. We leave the question open to be answered by experts on Russia, too. Nevertheless, dealing with Russia could be another important issue in Europe – especially in the Polish-German relations. The Russian Question of the place Russia takes in Europe, but also in the world, has not yet been answered or – in other words – has returned just like the German Question.

6. Polish-German relations in danger

In his well-known book *The Grand Chessboard* Zbigniew Brzezinski predicted that the process of reconciliation between Germany and Poland would be as successful as the Franco-German rapprochement after the Second World War.⁴⁴ This would lead to new

41 M. Klein, ‘Russland: Eine Großmacht in der internationalen Politik?’ [Russia: A Great Power in International Politics?], *Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung*, May 9, 2011, <http://www.bpb.de/internationales/europa/russland/47969/grossmacht?p=all> (2016-03-21).

42 German ‘Russlandversteher’, English ‘those, who understand’, is a pejorative term for supporters of the Russian policy towards Ukraine and the West. See The Economist, ‘Germany and Russia: How very understanding: Germany’s ambivalence towards Russia reflects its conflicted identity’, *The Economist*, May 10, 2014, <http://www.economist.com/news/europe/21601897-germanys-ambivalence-towards-russia-reflects-its-conflicted-identity-how-very-understanding> (2016-03-15).

43 See O. Olikar, ‘Russia’s New Military Doctrine: Same as the Old Doctrine, Mostly’, *Blog, RAND*, January 15, 2015, <http://www.rand.org/blog/2015/01/russias-new-military-doctrine-same-as-the-old-doctrine.html> (2016-03-20).

44 Z. Brzezinski, *The grand chessboard: American primacy and its geostrategic imperatives*, New York: Basic Books, 1997, pp. 69-70.

geopolitical possibilities. According to Brzeziński, we could have seen a growing influence of the Weimar Triangle.⁴⁵

As we know now – almost 20 years after *The Grand Chessboard* was written – we can clearly see that this prognosis did not come true. Quite the opposite: when thinking of the challenges, which are prevailing in the European Union today there is a lot of misunderstanding between Germany and Poland.

As mentioned before, the European project faces a very stormy time at the moment. The outcome of this storm might be very pessimistic. A weak European Union is also a very great danger for the Polish-German relations. For Germany, the process of European Integration is of great importance. The German economy as one of the export world champions relies on a common European economic area. A further weakening of the political project or the reintroduction of border control could lead to considerable damage to the German economy. We also do not yet know the financial consequences of the refugee crisis. In a worst-case scenario, a complete collapse of the political or/and economical project, we could see the “Russo-German romance” come true. This would, of course, be a nightmare for Poland and other East Central European states.

Poland would have to react to a Berlin-Moscow axis. There would be no possibility to ignore a Russo-German cooperation for Warsaw. It would not make much sense to support such an alliance for the very fact that it would bring very few advantages for Poland itself. The asymmetry between Russia and Germany on the one hand and Poland on the other would be too big. The possible reaction would be to try to gain US support and a strong cooperation with other East Central European partners to form something like a new Intermarium in its region. How difficult it would be to create such an alliance is obvious. For the moment, such planning would be an incalculable risk. It is uncertain how other East-Central European states would react to an Intermarium plan, which would go much further than the Visegrád agreement. It is not certain whether the United States would want to support such a system which would probably change Europe’s security architecture completely. It is also questionable how Western

45 *Ibid.*, p. 70.

EU member states would react. Poland should ask itself the question whether it would not be a better alternative for Poland for the very moment to prevent any disintegration, to keep the EU together and – at the same time – to support London’s plans to strongly reform the European project.

Conclusions

To address the question if we face a new caesura in the Polish-German relations, the answer is “not yet... but...” In other words, Germany and Poland still nurture good neighbourly relations and remain partners at the EU level. At the same time however, the frequency of tensions between Berlin and Warsaw increases. Simultaneously, the EU faces a great number of challenges and the quality of cooperation between these two countries may play a role in view of the EU’s ability to address these challenges.

One of the main reasons for the tensions is the fact that the Polish actions are not understood in Germany. Of course, they are not totally illogical, when keeping Poland’s history in mind. Polish thoughts about the Intermarium are based on the Polish Molotov-Ribbentrop syndrome, the fear to be bamboozled by its big neighbours.⁴⁶ Polish concerns are – to a certain extent – justified. Berlin still rejects the permanent stationing of NATO troops in East-Central Europe and pursues a questionable and – in the eyes of many European partners – false policy concerning the Nord Stream pipeline project.

To avoid a strong caesura in the Polish-German relations in the next decades, we must find European and bilateral solutions to several problems: Firstly, there must be a common European answer against Russia. A divided European House is the biggest trump for the Kremlin. Secondly, we must adhere to the dialogue and cooperation between Warsaw and Berlin. If this fails, countries like Poland will for sure look

⁴⁶ The author together with Błażej Kaźmierczak created this term in their essay: B. Kaźmierczak, D.J. Lemmen, ‘Polens geopolitisches Dilemma und seine transatlantische Lösung: Ein einleitender Überblick’ [Poland’s geopolitical dilemma and its transatlantic solution: An introduction], in: A. Chylewska-Tölle, A. Tölle (eds), *Po obu stronach Odry. Europejskie, narodowe i regionalne aspekty sąsiedztwa polsko-niemieckiego* [On both sides of the Oder. European, national and regional aspects of the Polish-German neighbourhood], Berlin: Logos, 2016, p. 127.

for alternatives. A strong, but honest cooperation between those two partners will also dismantle fears over a strong Germany dominating Europe. If it is not an honest cooperation of equals, it will strengthen political powers which say that a cooperation with Germany brings more harm for Poland than good. That would for sure lead to a caesura with previously undreamed-of problems. And that would bring real division in the house which is already divided.

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