

Krzysztof Łazarski*

Recovering Forgotten History: A study case of politics of memory in Poland

Przywracanie zapomnianej historii. Przykład polityki historycznej w Polsce

Abstract: The Conference on “Recovering Forgotten History” is one of the oldest attempts undertaken in the III Republic to defend Poland’s (and East-Central Europe’s) image abroad, especially in the US. From 2006, the Conference has organized its seminars, originally bi-annually and now annually, to provide a forum for discussions between the authors of English-language history textbooks and monographs, and Polish historians who review those publications. Arguments are scholarly, grounded in evidence of primary sources and historiography, therefore, they are convincing in combatting Western prejudices and clichés about Poland and East-Central Europe. Additionally, the Conference provides opportunities for sightseeing of Poland’s historical places. As a result, the work of the Conference leads not only to the removal of countless mistakes and misinterpretations in the reviewed books but also to a change of guests’ attitudes toward this part of Europe. For the most part, they are academic teachers, who can also influence students through their classes. The Conference achieves all of this while having very modest means at its disposal.

Keywords: college core curriculum, academic textbooks in history, historical monographs, politics of memory, image of Poland

Streszczenie: Konferencja „Przywracanie zapomnianej historii” jest jedną z najstarszych prób podjętych w III RP mających na celu obronę wizerunku Polski (i tej części Europy) za granicą, przede wszystkim w Stanach Zjednoczonych. Od 2006 r. Konferencja organizuje seminaria, początkowo dwa razy w roku, później raz w roku, na których spotykają się autorzy anglojęzycznych podręczników i monografii historycznych z polskimi historykami, recenzującymi ich publikacje. Konferencja zwalcza zachodnie uprzedzenia i stereotypy na temat Polski i Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej, opierając się na źródłach historycznych i dorobku historiografii. Dodatkowo Konferencja umożliwia wiedzanie Polski, zwłaszcza miejsc związanych z jej historią. Dzięki jej pracy nie tylko usunięto wiele błędów i opacznych interpretacji w recenzowanych książkach, ale też wielokrotnie zdołano zmienić stosunek innych do naszej części świata. W większości są nimi nauczyciele akademicy, którzy później

* Krzysztof Łazarski – PhD Habil., Łazarski University, Poland, ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2561-3511>, e-mail: k.lazarski@lazarski.edu.pl.

oddziałują na studentów w salach wykładowych. Cele tej Konferencji osiąga przy stosunkowo niewielkich nakładach finansowych.

Słowa kluczowe: programy wykształcenia ogólnego na amerykańskich uniwersytetach, podręczniki akademickie do historii, polityka historyczna, wizerunek Polski

If men were truly sincere, delivered judgment by no canons but those of evident morality, then Julian [the Apostate] would be described in the same terms by Christian and pagan, Luther by Catholic and Protestant, Washington by Whig and Tory, Napoleon by patriotic Frenchman and patriotic German. I judged the Poles by their enemies. And I found it was an almost unailing truth that their enemies were the enemies of magnanimity and manhood. If a man loved ... all the trampled mire of materialistic politics, I have always found that he added to these affections the passion of a hatred of Poland. She could be judged in the light of that hatred; and the judgment has proved to be right.¹

For a historian, the notions of politics of memory or historical narration (polityka historyczna) are an odd idea. It goes against the best principles of a historian's craft, as captured in the quoted epigraph of Lord Acton. Historians are to write about the past with objectivity, without regard for their national, political, religious, and social loyalties, and as close to the truth as our limited capacity for knowing it allows. These were the ideals conceived in the 19th century (if not by Thucydides), and they still remain the methodological canons of genuine historians. Naturally, historians realize that their knowledge of the past is only partial, inasmuch as our understanding of all reality is partial. Omniscience is not a human faculty. However, until fairly recently no one questioned that the absence of full knowledge prevents us from seeking partial knowledge and that this search requires objectivity and integrity as well as the use of methods appropriate for a given field. History has worked such methods, indispensable in seeking the truth about the past, and its methodology could be the envy of any social science.

1 Krzysztof Łazarski has cooperated with the Conference on Recovering Forgotten Past from its beginning. The author would like to extend special thanks to Professor James Collins for his advice and for revisions of the final text of the article. The quotations are from: J. Acton, 'Inaugural Lecture on the Study of History', in: *Lectures on Modern History*, eds. J.N. Figgis, R.V. Laurences, Macmillan, 1906, p. 18; G.K. Chesterton, 'Introduction', in: *Letters on Polish Affairs*, ed. Ch. Sarolea, Oliver and Boyd, 1922, p. 8.

In recent decades, however, the past – as much as the present – has become a victim of post-modern trends. For the post-modern mind, the era of certainty is over: since we cannot know the whole truth and have no indisputable criteria to distinguish truth from untruth (Enlightenment's idea of omniscience turned into its opposite), the best we can have is an opinion, by its nature subjective. One of the first victims of this new intellectual fashion was history, increasingly marginalized in the public forum and replaced by an impostor: historical narratives. Storytelling takes place of history telling, a single artifact substitutes for solid evidence, and the imagination of self-proclaimed specialists replaces careful recreation of the past by scholars. Mass media loves new historical narratives but, worse, governments and powerful lobbies have begun to use them to revise the perception of the past, in particular, that about World War II (WWII), the Holocaust and responsibility for it (curiously, communism, its crimes and its culprits raise much less interest). Unexpectedly, Poland found itself in the eye of the storm because new historical narratives try to fundamentally modify Poland's role in WWII and in the Holocaust.

This article is on one of the oldest (if not the oldest) attempts undertaken in Poland to counteract these new trends, i.e., on the ongoing conference titled "Recovering Forgotten History: The image of East-Central Europe in English-language academic textbooks and monographs." Convened for the first time in 2006, the conference continues its work in spite of its changing fortunes and will soon gather for its eighteenth seminar. Although with altered formal affiliation, it is still organized by the same group of enthusiastic individuals who remain structured as an NGO, although they utilize state support to achieve their aims.

In 2013, at the moment of the Conference's crossroads, when its very existence was threatened, I authored an article on its first seven years.² Now, it is time to take a look at its fourteen years of work as a whole. My article asserts that the Conference is one of the most cost-effective endeavors that defends Poland's image abroad without resorting to telling stories, propaganda and half-truths, but adhering

2 K. Łazarski, 'Przywracanie zapomnianej historii: czy wizerunek Polski w świecie może być zmieniony?', *Arcana*, no. 4-5/111-113, 2013, pp. 33-56.

to strict scholarly standards. Furthermore, it does not focus on temporary short-term goals but aims for lasting long-term effects. Finally, the article proposes several recommendations that should be implemented if the conference is to pursue its goals without hindrance.

1. Origins and rationale of the Conference

● The idea of the Conference goes back to 2005, when Andrzej Sulima Kamiński, Professor of History at Georgetown University in Washington DC, began his parallel work at Łazarski University (LU), Warsaw. He initiated the Institute for Civic Space and Public Policy at LU (2006), and the Conference became its first and foremost project. The aim of the Conference is to review American college textbooks, usually called World Civilization(s), and, increasingly, English-language monographs on Poland. It is also to provide a forum for discussion between Polish historians-reviewers and the authors of the textbooks and monographs in the presence of their editors. The purpose of the reviews and the discussions is to remove errors and misconceptions relating to the Polish past and, in this way, to produce a more genuine image of Poland.³ To understand the opportunities which this approach offers, let us first focus on American college education and the textbooks on the history of civilizations (CIV).

1.1. Survey courses in CIV at American colleges

Unlike European higher education in which qualified young individuals begin to study a given field of knowledge at a Bachelor level (for example, history, chemistry, or computer science), American high school graduates can pursue their education in colleges that do not focus on one field but provide general higher education (a “liberal arts” approach). During a four-year college degree, the students must first pass a series of courses belonging to the “core curriculum”

3 K. Łazarski, *Przywracanie zapomnianej historii...*, pp. 34, 36. All documents relating the Conference are kept by the Foundation for Civic Space and Public Policy, Warsaw. Most of them can now be accessed through its website, <http://civicspace.org.pl/> (in Polish), and <http://civicspace.org.pl/en/> (in English). All quoted documents from this and other websites were accessed between 15 February and 20 March 2020. Cf. 'Prof. Krzysztof Łazarski about Project "Recovering Forgotten History"', 18 August 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ll-voHpaGeo>, 0:20-1:00 min.

that includes philosophy, science, history, literature, arts, psychology, sociology, logic, etc. Then, during the last two years, they chose major and minor fields in which they deepen their knowledge and skills.

The students, naturally, do not take all subjects or courses in the core curriculum, but World Civilizations is often a preferred option. This survey course in world history was originally designed in the early 20th century but introduced under the name “Western Civilization” only after World War I. Its aim was to bring Western heritage to American students. Political correctness and the shifting composition of American society led to a name change in the 1980s and 1990s. Still, even under its new title, the course provides a solid foundation in European history, beginning in antiquity and continuing to the present.⁴

The nature of survey courses in CIV presents an opportunity and a challenge for countries such as Poland. On the one hand, CIV courses are offered to nearly all undergraduate students (keep in mind that the US has about fourteen million college students) as a two or three-semester course in history.⁵ On the other hand, world history squeezed to the CIV course is highly selective and Poland, along with the whole of East-Central Europe (except for Germany), exists only on the margin of “main” events. For Europe’s history, this means centering on France, Germany, England and Italy (although even the latter country vanishes after the Renaissance). Other states are treated as secondary; for example, Spain is prominent in the Age of Discovery but hardly mentioned later. Muscovy-Russia is the opposite case; hardly mentioned earlier, it gains prominence with the reign of Peter the Great. East-Central Europe – in the textbooks, habitually termed Eastern Europe – gets from time to time a brief treatment but is usu-

4 Some trace its origins to the late nineteenth century when American universities gave up classical curriculum, cf. G. Allardyce, ‘The Rise and Fall of the Western Civilization Course’, *American Historical Review*, vol. 87, no. 3, 1982, pp. 697-698. However, this survey course became common in the 20th century after both Columbia University and the University of Chicago introduced such classes in 1919 in response to the perceived failure of Western Civilization during World War I. The course entered a crisis and transformation as a long-term effect of the 1960s, cf. P.N. Stearns, *Western Civilization in World History*, Routledge, 2003, pp. 9-28.

5 In 2019 America had about 20 million students, but only 13.9 attended four-year colleges, <https://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=372>.

ally placed on the margins of other “worldwide” events.⁶ In the worst case (so far only included in one textbook), it is mentioned mainly in the context of the rise of Moscow and Russia.⁷

Poland usually merits a few paragraphs mention about the Middle Ages, a little more on the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and its partitions, then a brief review of events leading to the re-emergence of Poland after World War I, somewhat more on the outbreak of WWII and the Holocaust, and finally, a more detailed account on the fall of communism. It is not much. What is still more significant is the context in which Poland is presented.

Leaving aside the Middle Ages (the least controversial as far as Polish history is concerned), the Commonwealth can be shown as a case of an original political regime with limited and representative government and rights for its numerous citizens (the nobles), which made it the largest space for civic liberty in Europe between the 16th and 18th centuries. Alternatively, it can be seen as an example of political anarchy, backwardness, and the estate egoism of the nobles and their exploitation of the peasant-serfs. Poland reborn can be viewed in the context of saving Europe from Bolshevik barbarism, with the Battle of Warsaw listed as one of the twenty most important battles in world history, or can be barely mentioned as one of the Eastern European states that mistreated minorities and had ridiculous claims to the status of European power. In WWII, Poles can be presented as stubbornly resisting the Nazi occupation (Soviet invasion and terror is habitually downplayed) and contributing the fourth largest fighting force in the anti-German Alliance, or can be mainly seen as an indifferent witness (if not participating perpetrator) of the Holocaust,

6 Cf. ‘Prof. Curtis Murphy about the Project “Recovering Forgotten History”’, 28 August 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qjooSHuB6Ng>; ‘Prof. Andrzej S. Kamiński, “Recovering Forgotten History”’, 26 August 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pn8QUElnR2w&t=35s>.

7 J. Coffin et al., *Western Civilization: Their History and Their Culture*, 2 vols., 17th ed., Norton, 2012, pp. 326-328, 476-479. With few exceptions, the Conference does not provide information about the errors in the reviewed books because their authors and publishers do not want publicity about it. Reviewer confidentiality has never been required but it is tacitly assumed, for otherwise the Conference would lose their Western partners. This reference does not reveal any particular errors of the reviewed books but an attitude toward Poland and East-Central Europe that is common in most CIV survey texts. Furthermore, this CIV textbook is a very positive example of the Conference’s impact. Its 19th edition did not just correct errors, but thoroughly reedited its content on Poland. For details, see below, 3.2: CIV Textbook Revisions.

understood as the extermination of the Jews. Finally, in showing the fall of communism, the textbooks can emphasize Polish continuous resistance against communism and the crucial role of the Solidarity movement (and of Pope John Paul II) in its demise, or can focus on Gorbachev and the fall of the Berlin Wall, and assign a bigger part to the Czech Velvet Revolution than to the events in Poland.⁸

1.2. Survey textbooks

In evaluating opportunities created by CIV courses, we should also take into account the textbooks used. Typically it is a book of roughly 1000 pages in an A4 format. Although, as mentioned, the students are to digest it during two or three semesters, it is still a lot of material, full of unknown events, names and dates (American elementary and high school education usually does not include courses in European history). Those events, names, and dates have to be put in some reasonable context that disregards national borders if the students are to understand them. It is therefore important that Poland is shown: first, as an alternative mode of development that in the past created a gentry democracy instead of an absolute monarchy (the Commonwealth); second, as sometimes decisive in European and world history (the Battle of Warsaw, the Solidarity movement and the fall of Soviet communism); third, as intertwining with fundamental historical trends (for example, modern nationalism, WWII). The worst solution is when Polish history is added to main European developments as something secondary, included out of the historian's respect for the past, but without much expectation that the students would pay any attention to it.

Another significant point about survey textbooks is that they are often revised, usually every three years, with some parts cut and others expanded or added. The official reason for these frequent revisions is that the authors and editors want to deliver up-to-date knowledge to the students and to include themes omitted in the past. Those new themes vary, from issues of race and slavery, the position of women in family and everyday life, to more recently, gender/sexual traits and the treatment of sexual minorities. New topics are introduced at the

8 Cf. 'Prof. Krzysztof Łazarski about Project "Recovering Forgotten History"...', 2:50-4:38 min.

cost of cutting out some parts of a more traditional presentation, focused on political, cultural and economic history (the textbook cannot get thicker indefinitely).⁹ The role of the editors is very important in this task, as they put pressure on the authors to revise the previous edition and indicate the direction of the revisions. This is one of the reasons why the Conference always insists on the presence of editors.

Finally, one characteristic of the American market for CIV textbooks is that it is limited to a small, exclusive group of publishers. There are no more than a dozen publishers who produce such textbooks, and their number is shrinking. Large publishing houses buy out copyrights for textbooks that have a good position in the market and continue to edit and republish them in hundreds of thousands of copies. When the original authors retire (often three or four historians, one for antiquity, one for the Middle Ages and one or two for modern history), they are replaced by scholars of the next generation. As a result, such textbooks undergo gradual changes that reflect the research and specialization of new authors.

1.3. Opportunities

CIV survey courses offer enormous opportunities for affecting an important segment of American society, its future elite. If college students gain positive impressions in their encounter with Poland's history, this image tends to remain throughout their life. If, however, it is something that only burdens their memory or, worse, if it is seen as a history of anarchy, exploitation, weakness, suffering, and anti-Semitism, the reception cannot be positive.

Given all of the above, the aims of the Conference become self-evident. By showing Polish historians' points of view to the authors and editors of CIV textbooks (and monographs on Poland), and by supporting them with historical evidence, the Conference produces a more complex image of Poland, worthy of memory, and far different from frequent American clichés and prejudices. Naturally, that image

9 There seems to be another, unofficial reason for so frequent new editions: survey textbooks are very expensive, costing often well above a hundred dollars. Publishing houses want the students to buy new editions, instead of using old ones, whose price significantly drops each year (usually by 3/4). Teachers are encouraged to use them by getting free "desk copy" and other teaching materials from the publishers.

must be convincing to the authors and editors if they are to undertake the task of revising their publications. How is the Conference able to achieve this in practice, or at least, how is it trying to achieve this?

From the first session, back in December of 2006, the Conference spontaneously worked out its *modus operandi* in dealing with American and other foreign guests. Polish historians do not write regular book reviews but prepare a list of mistakes and comments on particular passages or paragraphs of a given text and then discuss them during the Conference (this list is also given to the authors and editors after the Conference).¹⁰ Why has this method proven to be effective?

In spite of many editions, survey textbooks tend to contain numerous mistakes. Their authors specialize only in some parts of a given epoch, or in one region but write about the entire epoch (as rule, nearly none specializes in East-Central Europe).¹¹ For example, a historian of early modern French history, writing on early modern Europe, has to rely on monographs authored by others, especially when writing on the more obscure East-Central Europe. For textbook purposes, the historian has to summarize and generalize research conducted by others and therefore he or she is likely to make mistakes, sometimes slight (dates, spelling of names), but sometimes serious (confusing nearly everything). For some reason, textbook maps are even more liable to errors, some of which are truly appalling.

Neither the authors nor the editors want to have errors in their publications, therefore they appreciate and welcome the work of the reviewers. Correction of relatively simple faults is accepted usually without much discussion, especially if the reviewers are unanimous. For example, if the author claims that medieval “towns in the East extracted none of the special charters of rights that characterized towns in the West,” the reviewers point out that charters based

10 I described the reason for this approach in my previous article on the Conference (K. Łazarski, ‘Przywracanie zapomnianej historii...’, pp. 39-40). In brief, the authors did not accept lightly criticism of their works in the presence of their editors. They became very defensive and the First Conference could have been the last if it did not change its approach. On how the authors view this approach (and the quality of local experts), see ‘Prof. David Mason about Project “Recovering Forgotten History”’, 28 August 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ScxZPCz1ZxA>.

11 Among a dozen CIV survey books only one includes a historian (Theodore R. Weeks) whose research focuses on the late modern history of the territory of the former Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth: F.L. Kidner et al., *Making Europe: People, Politics, and Culture*, Houghton Mifflin, 2007. The text was reviewed in 2007 and republished in 2013 by another publisher (Cengage Learning).

on the Magdeburg laws were given to Polish towns as early as the 12th century, and that later they spread throughout the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth.¹²

Somewhat graver mistakes are found in the following statement: "In Poland the Catholic Church, which condemned usury, often led the way in persecution; rumors that Jews were ritually sacrificing Christian children during Passover found credulous ears. In 1762, Ukrainian peasants killed at least 20 thousand Jews in the bloodiest pogrom of the century."¹³ Without going into a discussion about usury and Church teaching, the reviewers pointed out that the linkage of the Catholic Church with the pogrom perpetrated by the Ruthenians peasants and Cossacks (in all likelihood Orthodox) is preposterous. Furthermore, since the passage certainly referred to the Human Massacre (1768, not 1762), the Poles and the Uniates were as much its victims as were the Jews. Why were they not mentioned?

The example above is by no means singular and illustrates well Western clichés and ignorance about Poland and East-Central Europe in general. It is especially blatant in the case of textbooks because their authors and editors do their best to avoid controversial issues that raise serious doubts among historians and try to render the established views in historiography. In the example above, it is only of secondary importance whether the author misunderstood the sources or was misled. The fact remains that it was not double-checked as it should have been, but assumed it to be true. Apparently, the internal reviewers of this publishing house made the same assumption: that Poles and the Catholic Church are anti-Semitic.¹⁴

Authors and editors are open to genuine arguments and if the evidence is straightforward, they are ready to remove errors and revise their work. Furthermore, they often do much more: taking advantage of what they learned during the Conference and from the visit to Po-

12 J. Merriman, *A History of Modern Europe: From the Renaissance to the Present*, 2nd ed., Norton, 2004, p. 27. This book is not a survey textbook, but a textbook for graduate students and a popular reference book. Merriman not only substantially revised sections on Poland in the next edition of his book but became one of American coordinators of the Conference and its permanent participant.

13 J. Merriman, *A History of Modern Europe...*, p. 364.

14 Cf. 'Efekty projektu "Przywracanie zapomnianej historii"', 14 September 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TPLdZ4B62xw&t=723s>, 6:05-11:55 min.

land, they introduce other changes that respond to the concerns of Polish historians. Certainly, this was the case with the author of the above passage.

1.4. Monographs and manuscripts

Nearly from its beginning – to be exact, from its third seminar in December 2007 – the Conference reviews not only the CIV textbooks but also national histories (Russian, German, and others), monographs and, subsequently, unpublished manuscripts. The reason for this extension is obvious: the authors of the survey textbooks use books on national history and monographs on a given topic or region and therefore, mistakes in the latter find echoes in errors of the former. Furthermore, those books and monographs are read by historians in general, by graduate students of history, and by the interested public, thus they influence the wider image of Poland and the region as well. Their readership is much smaller, yet their impact is no less important, especially if the documents serve as reference books for authors of textbooks or for journalists.

As for the scope of publications that the Conference considers for reviews, its focus is first on Poland and then on its neighbors. Among the latter, the lands of the former Commonwealth are seen as a priority. But Polish history is not only linked with Lithuania (and the Baltic states), Belarus and Ukraine, but also with Russia, Prussia and Germany, the nations of the former Austro-Hungarian Empire and, finally, with history of the East-European Jews. As a result, the Conference's scope increasingly extends to East-Central Europe. An additional reason for this extension is that the ignorance and bias visible in the treatment of Poland also concerns the entire region. By necessity, the Conference began to represent the interests of nearly the entire Intermarium region.

Lists of monographs and manuscripts for review are proposed by interested publishing houses. In the beginning, when the Conference was not well-known, publishers were reluctant to risk cooperation with it. Now, however, the Conference has established contacts with some major scholarly publishers and can be much more selective in choosing texts for reviews. Among the publishers who for years have been cooperating with it are such publishing houses as: Harvard University Press; Oxford University Press; Cambridge University Press;

the University of Pittsburgh Press; the University of Toronto Press; Indiana University Press; Houghton Mifflin Harcourt; W.W. Norton; Routledge; and Rowman & Littlefield.¹⁵ Editors from their history divisions usually participate in each of the Conference's seminars.

Putting aside the scope, the remaining criteria for accepting books for review are relatively simple. In case of printed monographs, priority is given to those which are to be republished. As for manuscripts, they should be pre-approved for publication by the respective publishers.¹⁶ Further, the organizers of the Conference consider the availability of local reviewers and the number of texts that can be examined. The Conference has modest and unstable means and very few staff and so can only review a very limited number of texts. At first, it could only review three to five books (usually CIV textbooks and other publications on general history), and it was only as of the 10th seminar (2012), that it began to review between seven and eleven texts. So far, the largest number of texts was evaluated during the 15th seminar (2017), when the Conference dealt with fourteen texts.¹⁷

As mentioned, the reviews and the discussions between foreign authors and Polish specialists and, increasingly, their colleagues from Ukraine, Hungary, Slovakia, and Lithuania, proceed in an open atmosphere, with arguments grounded in evidence from primary and secondary sources. Exchanges are frank and frequently discuss controversial issues in detail, such as the relationship of Poland with its neighbors and in particular the question of anti-Semitism and the Holocaust. Unlike in the case of CIV textbooks, whose Western authors usually have only a vague notion of East-Central European past, the discussions between the authors of monographs and manuscripts and their reviewers are more of an exchange among experts who ei-

15 Cf. Discussed books (<http://civicspace.org.pl/en/>) and programs for Conference's seminars, Documents of the Foundation for Civic Space.

16 A good example for such monographs is G. Stokes, *The Walls Came Tumbling Down: Collapse and Rebirth in Eastern Europe*, Oxford University Press, 1993. The 2nd edition was published in 2011 after being reviewed in 2008 by Conference experts (<http://civicspace.org.pl/en/konferencja/fifth-conference/>). A similar example for manuscripts is S. Doucette, *Books Are Weapons: The Polish Opposition Press and the Overthrow of Communism*, University of Pittsburgh Press, 2017, after being reviewed in 2016 (<http://civicspace.org.pl/en/konferencja/fourteenth-conference/>). Both publications prove that Western scholars can have excellent insight into East-Central European history.

17 Cf. <http://civicspace.org.pl/en/conferences/>.

ther know a given topic equally well or in which the author may be much more fluent than the reviewers. Pointing out errors is as always welcomed, but influencing interpretation is much harder, especially if the reviewers themselves differ in their opinions. In such cases, the presence of editors plays a crucial role: after sitting at Conference's seminars for several years, they themselves are becoming familiar with the central problems of Polish history. There is no doubt that as a result of the reviews some authors have had to either substantially revise their manuscripts or search for another publisher.

The inclusion of national histories, monographs and manuscripts led to some changes in the Conference's name. Initially, its subtitle was simply: "The Image of East-Central Europe in American Textbooks." In 2014, it changed to "The Image of East-Central Europe in English-Language Textbooks," and finally to "The Image of East-Central Europe in English-Language Academic Textbooks and Monographs."¹⁸

2. Organization and proceedings of the Conference

As mentioned, the Conference was originally run by the Institute for Civic Space and Public Policy affiliated to Lazarski University. Between 2006 and 2013, LU paid for the administrative costs of organizing the Conference and took the risk of covering all expenses if any official sponsors changed their minds and partially or fully renege on their promises. After LU terminated its financial support in 2014, the Conference ceased to be affiliated to it. Since then it has been run solely by the Foundation for Civic Space and Public Policy, although the individuals who actually organize the Conference have not changed. As before, Prof. Sulima Kamiński is its main animator (and the founder of the Foundation) and Eulalia Łazarska (previously the managing director of the Institute and now the president of the foundation's board) is in charge of all administrative and financial affairs. The Conference also has the same US coordinators, Prof. James Collins (Georgetown University) and Prof. John Merriman (Prince-

¹⁸ Cf. Programs for Conference's seminars, Documents of the Foundation for Civic Space. There were some less fortunate changes, such as "The Image of East-Central Europe in Anglo-Saxon Textbooks" (2012).

ton University), in recent years joined by Peter Kracht (University of Pittsburgh Press), and the same core of local historian-reviewers, expanded if necessary by a dozen or two other experts.¹⁹

Preparatory work for each seminar lasts from around a year or up to two years if the number of books for review is greater. The authors and editors often have busy schedules and it takes time to confirm their attendance. Additionally, the logistics of each seminar – booking hotels, restaurants, conference rooms in several towns, sometimes outside of Poland, air and train tickets, etc. – takes a few months of intensive work. Applying to various institutions and foundations for grants to cover the costs of annual seminars of the Conference, keeping finance and account records, and assessing tax returns require a lot of administrative work as well. All of these tasks are performed by a very small team of the Foundation for Civic Space and Public Policy, ordinarily no more than two persons, of which one is usually a part-time assistant.

Originally, the Conference organized its seminars twice a year, in December and late May or early June (2006-2009). These times were chosen because they are the most convenient for American college professors (Christmas recess and the beginning of the summer vacation). As of 2010, the seminars are held once a year in the summer but gather a larger number of participants. There were 12 participants in 2006, 15 in June 2009, 17 in 2010 and 72 in 2017 (the largest seminar that included six American and Polish coordinators, 15 authors, nine editors and 42 experts). Seminar duration increased as well, from six days in 2006 to 13 in 2019. Naturally, with the growing number of participants not all attendees can take part in all events. Experts and

19 For the structure of the Foundation, see <http://civicspace.org.pl/en/foundation/>. The Foundation's website does not provide names of the experts. They are, however, listed in the program of each seminar (see Documents of the Foundation for Civic Space and Public Policy). Four experts participated in the Conference from its first seminar in 2006: Wojciech Fałkowski (Warsaw University), Krzysztof Łazarski (Lazarski University), Daria Nałęcz (Polish Academy of Science) and Andrzej Nowak (Jagiellonian University). This team was joined by Adam Kożuchowski (Academy of Science) in 2008, Marek Wierzbicki (KUL, IPN) in 2012, and Spasimir Domaradzki (Lazarski University) and Endre Sashalmi (University of Pécs, Hungary) in 2013. In 2017, the Conference engaged 42 Polish and foreign experts; in 2019, that number was 37.

increasingly authors attend only that part of the Conference which concerns them.²⁰

In addition to discussing the reviewed texts, the Conference also includes sightseeing, always in Warsaw, Kraków and the vicinities (Wilanów, Wieliczka, Auschwitz, etc.). Sometimes the participants also visit other cities, for example, Gdańsk, Malbork, Lublin, Zamość, Sandomierz, Poznań, Gniezno, Łódź, Toruń, etc. A few times the Conference included foreign trips to Vilnius (2014), L'viv (2014 and 2015), Budapest (2016) and Kiev (2019). Sightseeing plays a supplementary role to illustrate the topics discussed during book reviews and to show evidence of Poland's and the Commonwealth's past. The visit to Budapest was arranged on the occasion of discussions about shared historical experiences between Poland and Hungary.²¹ For Western guests, especially those who have come to Poland and East-Central Europe for the first time, sightseeing is an eye-opening experience. It certainly plays an important role in destroying clichés and building a more positive image of Poland and the region in general.

Each seminar is usually chaired by Prof. Kamiński, sometimes substituted by Prof. Collins, Prof. Merriman or one of Conference's permanent experts. The presence of American historians sometimes seems vital for the Conference's credibility. Although as stated, its experts focus on particular errors and misleading passages in the texts under review, such exchanges often lead to more general discussions which may touch upon such topics as the Commonwealth's multinational and multireligious character, its civic liberties, its repeated attempts to regain independence after the partitions; or on Poland's stubborn resistance to the German and Soviet occupations during WWII, and to communist oppression after the war. The picture that subsequently emerges often leads to disbelief on the faces of foreign guests. In such a situation, they usually direct their eyes to Prof. Kamiński (and the American coordinators of the Conference), seeking confirmation or denial on their part. Preconceptions about East-Central Europe

20 Cf. Programs of respective seminars, Documents of the Foundation for Civic Space and Public Policy.

21 Ibidem.

are so deep-seated that it usually requires more than one visit to dissipate them.²²

There is no doubt that the Conference has a great impact on its foreign participants. The scholarly atmosphere during discussions about the reviewed books builds trust and respect; sightseeing offers empirical evidence about the past of East-Central Europe; and evening dinners provide further opportunities for the exchange of views between the participants in more informal ways and allows them to get to know each other better (sometimes, to become friends). All of this helps to undermine Western preconceptions about this part of Europe and builds a more positive image. As a result, the authors, who are both researchers and teachers, often change the way in which they do research and teach about the region. The editors, in turn, are better prepared to evaluate submitted texts about this region. What follows, can be seen from testimonies of the Conference's foreign participants:²³

Meredith Veldman (2007), Associate Professor of History, Louisiana State University

I very much appreciate your and the other participants' close reading of my chapters. A textbook goes through numerous drafts and a mindboggling number of reviewers, "experts" and editors and yet no one in this lengthy process caught the numerous errors spotted by you, Jim, Daria, Chris, and Wojciech. And even more important, the conference raised crucial questions about the way we present such pivotal episodes as the Renaissance and Reformation, the "triumph" of absolutism, and the interwar crisis of democracy. I am very much looking forward to bringing these questions to my fellow authors and to recasting key points of our narrative. I am also planning to revise a number of my Western Civ lectures this fall, beginning with an entirely new lecture that I hope to call "Where's the West? Poland-Lithuania in the Early Modern Era."

22 Cf. 'Efekty projektu "Przywracanie zapomnianej historii"...', 14 September 2017.

23 All quotations are from <http://civicspace.org.pl/en/conferences/> and the number of years of each seminar. Cf. 'Recovering Forgotten History', 8 October 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h2baQ6QLQ-M>, 9–10 min; 'Recovering Forgotten History 2019', 13 July 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8Nn6U9dCpK8>.

Edward Muir (2009), Professor in the Arts and Sciences, North Western University

Not only did your gracious hospitality ... make the trip a pleasure, but the opportunity to see so much of Poland and its historical sites altered my conception of the history of the West, the theme of our textbook. In fact, my letter to you has been delayed solely because I returned enthusiastic about revising the book and have spent the past months completely immersed in the text.

Gregory L. Freeze (2010), Professor of History, Brandeis University

The conference ... provided a much-needed impulse to "de-Russify Russian historiography"; that is, to see Russian history from the perspective of its neighbors ... [It] provided a valuable antidote to this over-reliance on Russian sources and the Russian historical narrative ... To the list of required foreign languages for graduate students (and scholars!) I would now add Polish to the Russian and German that have traditionally prevailed.

Matthew Jefferies (2011), Professor of German History, University of Manchester

Two commentators who discussed my work, Professor Kożuchowski and Professor Mikietyński, asked some probing questions and pointed out a number of errors which I will endeavor to correct if the books appear in second edition. I am ashamed to say this was my first visit to Poland, but I know it will not be my last. The landscape and the people ... made a big impression on me, and I particularly enjoyed visiting Sandomierz and Zamość.

Kathleen McDermott (2014), Executive Editor for History, Harvard University Press

I found the comments ... informative and instructive ... The experience also helped me as an editor to understand issues in historical interpretation that I will be able to bring to my readings of other manuscripts ... The program provided a wonderful opportunity ... to establish connections with scholars

who may serve as manuscript reviewers or even authors of books ... Being able to visit sites ... known to me through books brought Poland's and the region's history to life ... underscoring the historical richness, complexity, and centrality of a large part of Europe that all too often is seen as tangential to European history as a whole.²⁴

Susan McEachern (2015), Editorial Director, Rowman & Littlefield

The next editions of my three textbooks (Doris Bergen's *War and Genocide*, Alexander Murphy's *The European Culture Area*, and David Mason's *A Concise History of Modern Europe*) will be greatly enhanced by the general conceptual suggestions and specific factual critiques your reviewers provided, especially on Poland, Germany, and Russia. Their impressive knowledge of the history of the region and the specific challenges facing it were invaluable for authors approaching their subjects from an American perspective, enabling them to analyze issues with much more nuance. The reviews were greatly enriched by my authors' ability to discuss their books face to face with the commentators and to experience first-hand how historical and current issues are viewed and debated in the region itself.

Alexander B. Murphy (2015), College of Arts and Science, University of Oregon

The conference itself was most interesting, providing me not just with an opportunity to discuss my book with scholars who had read it carefully, but to learn from the discussion of other books and to enhance my knowledge of Central Europe through our joint explorations ... As a result of the insights they provided, I will be able to provide more nuanced coverage of Poland and its neighbors in the next edition of the book, which in turn will help improve North American students' understanding and appreciation of the region.

24 Cf. Kathleen McDermott about Project "Recovering Forgotten History", 26 August 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vUXz9gYek-A>.

Jennica Baines, Ph.D. (2019), Acquiring Editor, Global and International Studies, Indiana University Press

I am writing today to thank you for the extraordinary opportunity offered by the Foundation for Civic Space and Public Policy to attend the seventeenth annual gathering of “Recovering Forgotten History” ... This is my second year attending the conference, and I feel that I can speak now with authority on the benefits this conference offers not only to the authors and editors who attend, but also to the study of Polish history, anthropology, and religious and gender studies.

Ruth Schwertfeger (2019), Professor Emerita, College of Letters and Science, University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee

My reflections necessarily began with a response to the written reports forwarded by three experts ... Their comments were explicit and objective and helped me edit and correct a manuscript ... I believe the conference was unusually effective because the rapport between the author and the experts was a protected space. The purpose of the exchange was clearly to enhance and promote the scholarship of the author. The editor was a nice lateral accompaniment ... but the center of attention was on the author. Where else do you get that? By way of contrast, let me illustrate: Some years ago, at a NEH [National Endowment for the Humanities] summer workshop, a participant with enough talk for another set of teeth was allowed by the moderators to rattle on with eye-glazing zeal that basically sabotaged the workshop. On reflection, I am grateful that our moderators kept the focus firmly on the exchange between author and experts and protected us all from the merely garrulous ... As it turned out, there were many other opportunities over meals to exchange helpful sources and information.

3. Challenges

In its work, the Conferences have faced and continue to face serious challenges, some of which are objective i.e., grounded in the nature of the subject matter with which it deals, but others are artificial, resulting from indifference, bureaucracy and other causes. Looking

from a different angle, the first set of problems originates in external circumstances existing mainly beyond Polish control and borders, while the second is exclusively domestic. Let us take a look at both.

3.1. Negative stereotypes

As mentioned, Poland and East-Central Europe suffer from negative stereotypes common in the US but also present in Western Europe. Leaving aside the prejudices of ordinary people and limiting our perspective to biases in academia, their origins can be traced mainly to 19th-century historiography and politics. This was the time of writing national histories, and the battle of European powers about the past became nearly as intense as their struggles about the present (Ranke's and Acton's appeals for objectivity in history notwithstanding). Stateless Poland could not participate in this rivalry, while individual historians (Lelewel, Kalinka, Bobrzyński, Smoleński, Korzon and others) could not match the impact of the world's powers. Even worse, the history of the East-Central region fell under the tutelage of two empires which justified their imperialism by maligning their victims. History textbooks have largely preserved the image of the European past as narrated in that period. "The 19th century's stranglehold on the historical imagination means that American textbooks invariably look at the region from the Dnieper to the Rhine in terms of Germany and Russia, that is, in terms of the empires of the late 19th century."²⁵

Delayed industrialization and absence of liberal regimes at the time when representative government was becoming standard in the western part of the continent are additional reasons for persistent prejudice and ignorance about East-Central Europe. The image of the West that modernized itself and benefited from liberal regimes versus the backward, "un-European" East did not diminish in the 20th century but increased as a result of the Iron Curtain and the division between the liberal West and the Soviet East. Rejoining "Europe" af-

25 J. Collins, 'Remarks about two Conferences "Recovering Forgotten History"', undated letter to the Institute for Civic Space and Public Policy, 2007, <http://civicspace.org.pl/en/konferencja/second-conference/>.

ter 1989 has improved the perception of the “East” but did not erase some biases until today.²⁶

If Europe (and the West in general) now celebrates multinational, multicultural, and multireligious societies (dissenting voices notwithstanding), it somehow fails to notice that East-Central Europe: first lived for centuries with such diverse neighborhoods, communities, and states (Zamość, in particular, illustrates this point; the rows of houses of Armenian, Jewish and Italian merchants always make a big impression on foreign visitors); second, was more advanced in this respect than its Western counterparts throughout the early modern period; third, became economically and politically backward not only as a result of its own neglect and faults, but also as a result of aggression on the part of the empires of Russia, Prussia, Austria, and the Ottomans. Perhaps the main guilty party was not the old post-medieval order with its society of estates and the contradiction between the base and superstructure as the Marxists claim, but aggressive neighbors and their brutal exploitation.²⁷

3.2. CIV textbook revisions

As mentioned, the survey textbooks undergo frequent revisions. This offers a chance for the Conference to introduce changes which positively impact the image of Poland (and of East-Central Europe), but at the same time, this opportunity creates a risk that the changes will be removed by the next round of revisions. This means that the Conference has to return every few years to the same textbooks and convince the authors and editors to keep past alterations and to introduce new ones, if necessary.

The most popular survey textbooks have close to 20 editions. Originally created around WWII, they have now passed through generational changes. The old team gradually retires, and new authors take over their work. Sometimes this generational replacement brings rad-

26 Cf. N. Davies, *Europe: A History*, Harper Perennial, 1998, p. 9-16. On Western bias toward Poland and Eastern Europe in the past and present, see ‘Recovering Forgotten History...’, 3:00-6:00 min; ‘Efekty Projektu “Przywrócenie zapomnianej historii”...’, 4:35-6:00 min.

27 East-Central Europe still waits for a revision of its past, for which it needs as powerful a mind as that of Tocqueville, who turned the blame for the French Revolution from the old French society of estates to absolute monarchy.

ical improvement for the better: a textbook that in the past entirely neglected Poland and the region in general goes through a thorough revision and presents East-Central Europe as it deserves. Naturally, the Conference with its reviews, discussions, and sightseeing play an enormous role in such changes. At other times, however, the revisions made by new authors do not improve but worsen the picture, for example by reducing the role of Poland in resisting and overthrowing communism, and disproportionately augmenting that of Germany and Czechoslovakia. The Conference cannot always counteract this, especially, if a new edition is submitted for review at an advanced stage of publication.²⁸

The Conference will also face a new serious challenge, this time resulting from publishers' attempts to substantially reduce the size of a typical survey textbook. As elsewhere, American students are more and more addicted to electronic media and their brief messages and suffer from a short attention span. Young people are increasingly incapable of reading longer texts, and the thick CIV textbooks go well beyond their capacity to digest.

The Conference first encountered such an attempt at its 2019 seminar. The publisher of one of the most popular and best textbooks (if not the best) tried to cut its size down to about 600-700 pages, or about 30 to 40 percent of its previous size. The result was dramatic. Nearly all information of "secondary" importance vanished from the book, while its narration of the past became in general incomprehensible. Apparently, the new authors chose the easiest way to deal with their task: instead of rewriting whole chapters in a more concise way, they simply cut some sections out and left others intact. The reviewers severely criticized this approach, not only because of their East-Central European concerns but also in the interests of clarity. It is as yet too

28 For a positive example, see J. Cole and C. Symes' e-mail to the participants of the 13th Conference (2015) in which they inform participants about revisions in their textbook. The Conference reviewed the 17th edition of their textbook in 2013 (11th seminar) and continued its reviews in 2015 and 2016 (13th and 14th seminars); the changes were introduced in the 19th edition: <http://civicspace.org.pl/en/konferencja/13th-conference/>. Cf. J. Cole, C. Symes, *Western Civilizations: Their History & Their Culture*, 2 vols., 19th ed., Norton, 2017; 'Prof. Carol Symes about Project "Recovering Forgotten History"', 26 August 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RATFhKJlzGE>. As for the other example, cf. K. Łazarski, 'Przywracanie zapomnianej historii...', p. 39.

early to see the results in this case, however, there is no question that cutting textbooks' size will soon be done by other publishers as well.

3.3. Domestic challenges

Nearly from its inception, the Conference encountered enthusiastic endorsements from Polish authorities on the one hand, and indifference and obstacles on the other. This would not have been surprising had support and resistance not come from (nearly) the same quarters. What is even more odd is that verbal support of high state officials went hand in hand with growing bureaucratic hindrance or indifference at lower levels. At the same time, the Conference has not met with any criticism that it does something wrong, or with demands for improving its work. On the contrary, it has been frequently praised for doing an extraordinarily good job.

The Conference has always relied on funds received principally from state institutions. Originally, it was the Ministry of Foreign Affairs within its program of "Promotion of Knowledge on Poland" and "Promotion of Knowledge on Poland, History" (*Promocja Wiedzy o Polsce oraz Promocja Wiedzy o Polsce, Historia*). Special recognition is due to PGNiG Foundation whose generous grants have saved the conference a few times. Other grant donors have included the Ministry of Science and Higher Education, the Ministry of Education, the Museum of Polish History, some local self-governments, the PZU Foundation, the Kronneberg Foundation, the WBK Bank (when chaired by M. Morawiecki), and more recently, the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage, the National Centre for Culture (*Narodowe Centrum Kultury*), the Orlen Foundation, and the Polish National Foundation (*Polska Fundacja Narodowa*). It has also been awarded some foreign grants from the Visegrad Fund, Georgetown University, and the American Embassy in Warsaw. The Polish Academy of Arts and Sciences (*Polska Akademia Umiejętności*) has supported the Conference in other ways. It has not provided monetary grants, but each year has hosted a part of the proceedings within its magnificent headquarters in Kraków.²⁹

29 The sponsors are listed on <http://civicspace.org.pl/en/conferences/>, a website page for each of the Conference's annual seminars.

As for the attitudes of high governmental officials, the Conference gained the support of the former Minister of Foreign Affairs Radek Sikorski; former Minister of Education Professor Ryszard Legutko; former Ministers of Science and Higher Education, Michał Seweryński, Barbara Kudrycka and Lena Kolarska-Bobińska as well as former Minister and Vice-Premier Jarosław Gowin; and Minister of Culture and National Heritage and Vice-Premier Piotr Gliński. President Andrzej Duda took over the honorary patronage of the Conference from 2016 to 2019 and, hopefully, will continue to do so in the future. Words of appreciation also came from Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki. In his letter to the participants of the 18th Conference in June 2019, he wrote:

There is no better way to discover history than academic work, in the form which you have chosen ... Your conference is a beautiful example of organic work, because you discuss all publications concerning Poland and Central-Eastern Europe page by page ... Even the best organized marketing campaign will not have any major impact on historical awareness in a long-range perspective, an impact that your work will certainly have ... I see your activity not only as work for Poland, but more for truth and justice. I believe this project will be continued and will be an important point in agendas of people and institutions – Polish and foreign alike.³⁰

In spite of these endorsements and declarations of support and praise, the Conference has never had stable sources of financing for its work. Sponsors were either occasional or altered their priorities after a year or two of providing funds, or lost interest after personnel changes in their leadership. Furthermore, sponsors' rules and procedures do not usually take into consideration the specific circumstances in which the Conference works.

As mentioned, the Conference is held in late May and early June of each year (the optimal time for American participants). The Foundation issues invitations to foreign guests in the summer and fall of the previous year. In the spring, it asks guests to purchase their air tick-

30 The full text of the PM's letter can be accessed here: <http://civicspace.org.pl/list-prezesa-rady-ministrow-mateusza-morawieckiego-do-organizatorow-konferencji-przywracanie-zapomnianej-historii/>.

ets (to be reimbursed later) and makes hotel reservations. All of this is done without any guarantee that the sponsors will actually provide funds. If they do, their decision is usually taken in the spring, sometimes as late as May, when the Conference is about to begin or has already begun. This creates a very precarious situation, bordering on total disrepute. Sometimes the sponsor transfers funds too late (the Foundation is not always reimbursed for expenses that were made prior to the sponsor's official decision), or provides lower sums than it promised, or forfeits entirely its earlier promises, and then the Foundation cannot pay its bills.

While anxiety about paying the bills is constant, an actual lack of funds has occurred a few times. In the first years of the Conference, Lazarski University came to the rescue. Sometimes, an unexpected private sponsor saved the Conference at the last minute. Other times, local governments and the Polish embassy in the US covered some small bills. So far the Conference has avoided the worst, i.e., cancelling an annual seminar or completely failing to pay its bills; however, it was forced a few times to withdraw some invitations and to postpone or cancel some events. For example, after successful seminars on Russian and German historiography, the Conference planned to organize a similar event on Polish-Jewish history. This had to be postponed for a lack of funds and has been never fully realized.³¹

Organization of each seminar would be much better and more cost-effective if the Foundation could save some money in one year and use it for expenses in the next year, instead of returning unused funds to the donors. Similarly, expenses for Polish experts could be substantially reduced (if not entirely abolished) if the appropriate body in the Ministry of Science and Higher Education treated the Conference as a scholarly conference and granted points to scholars who write reviews (now a standard method of evaluating scholarly work). Still better and fundamentally so, if the Conference had a stable, predictable budget it could rationally plan for future expenses. Unfortunately,

31 On the problem of financing the Conference, see K. Łazarski, 'Przywracanie zapomnianej historii...', pp. 48-54. In this respect, the situation after 2013 has not changed. In 2009-2010, the Conference reviewed books on Russian history; in 2011 and partly 2012, it did similar reviews of books on German history. The focus on Jewish history was only partly done in 2013 and never fully realized, cf. <http://civicspace.org.pl/en/conferences/>.

promises from various governmental officials to provide a permanent budget have not materialized for years. The Foundation is still left in an impossible situation where it invites guests, books hotels, and distributes texts to reviewers but has no knowledge of whether it can pay for it.

The Foundation is reluctant to provide exact data about its current budget and average expenses for each seminar. In the past when the Conference was much smaller, an average cost per Conference was about 200,000 zł and administrative costs (covered by LU) were about 100,000 zł per year.³² Current costs of each Conference have doubled and sometimes tripled because of its much larger size. However, the administrative costs of the Foundation have decreased and constitute about 25% of the Conference's total cost.³³

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The Conference on “Recovering Forgotten History: The Image of East-Central Europe in English Language Academic Textbooks and Monographs” enters in 2020 its fifteenth year. It is yet to be seen how it will manage the challenge brought by the COVID-19 pandemic, with closed state borders and channels of travel, and if it can hold its nineteenth seminar on the internet. Whether it succeeds or not, it will remain one of the best, most effective and longest-lasting attempts to defend the image of Poland and of “truth and justice,” as Premier Morawiecki put it.

The Conference has reviewed 109 textbooks, monographs, and manuscripts, some of them several times; it invited a similar number of authors and a few dozen editors from some of the most prestigious publishing houses in the world, and it has engaged Polish and foreign experts over 300 times. Furthermore, it organized numerous side events, such as sightseeing in Poland and abroad, and dinners on each

32 K. Łazarski, ‘Przywracanie zapomnianej historii...’, p. 48. When LU stopped its financial support for the Conference, its president said that LU cannot substitute for the Polish state in conducting historical politics.

33 Depending on the method of accounting for expenses, administrative costs in 2018 oscillated between 21% and 27%, cf. ‘Zestawienie pozycji kosztowych XVI konferencji “Przywracanie zapomnianej historii”’ and ‘Ramowy Budżet XVI Konferencji “Przywracanie zapomnianej historii” 2018’, Documents of the Foundation for Civic Space and Public Policy.

evening of the Conference, which allowed the participants to continue discussions in more informal ways. As a result, it has helped to avoid countless errors about Polish and East-Central European history and contributed to sometimes substantial reinterpretations of the history of this region. These changes and reinterpretations will stay in the reviewed texts and continue to influence opinions in English-speaking nations for the next few decades.

The Conference has also affected authors and editors in various ways: it has expanded their knowledge of the region and sometimes made them “ambassadors” of Polish history and culture. The editors can now better evaluate manuscripts that deal with Poland and East-Central Europe, while historians change the ways in which they research this part of Europe and how they teach about it. They influence the students not only through their books but also in their classrooms.

And all of this was achieved by a couple of individuals, whose number is less than the number of fingers on one hand. Their devotion, persistence, and obstinacy allowed the Conference to safely pass through various adversities and to continue its work. Naturally, they depended and continue to depend on state funds. But would those funds be better spent if the state decided to directly run a similar venture? How many employees would it have had to engage to achieve comparable effects? And would such an institution have gained the same level of trust with Western partners?

Recommendations:

- The Foundation should have a permanent budget allocated for the “Recovering Forgotten Past Conference”, such as an endowment allowing it to continue its work, i.e., to function in the same way as many Western foundations operate
- The Foundation, with the aid of the Polish government, should seek funds from other East-Central European states, as its work serves not only Poland but the Intermarium region in general
- The Visegrad Fund should contribute to maintaining the Conference not sporadically, but permanently
- The Foundation should seek more support from private businesses instead of relying only on state funds

- The Conference should be granted the status of a scholarly event with a sufficient number of allotted points, capable of attracting the participation of Polish scholars

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