

# PERSPECTIVES ON REUNIFIED GERMANY

## IMPRESSIONS FROM POLAND

*Bartosz T. Wieliński*

"To cheer for the Germans is evidence of a lack of respect for past generations"<sup>1</sup> posted well-known sports journalist Krzysztof Stanowski on his Facebook page, sparking a debate in Poland. It was 9 July 2014, one day after the Germany-Brazil semi-final in which the German team booted the host team out of the World Cup with a final score of seven goals to one. The well-known joke was revived: in football, there are 22 players on the field and at the end, the Germans win. But Stanowski dampened the mood. "The longer I live, the more I realise how little time has passed since these crimes were committed, since the genocide. I'm sorry, but I will not cheer for the Germans. You can tell me that they're different people now – and okay, maybe they are different. But they should stay away from me and my family," he wrote. Hundreds of his readers then asked him what he knew about the Second World War and why he believed that Germany had not changed. But Stanowski also found support for his attitude, which is why he emphasised his views in another post: "It's simply not right for Poles to cross our fingers for all of Berlin to explode with happiness (and if all of Berlin goes crazy, a great multitude of very old German men go crazy, too). This is a blow to history."<sup>2</sup>

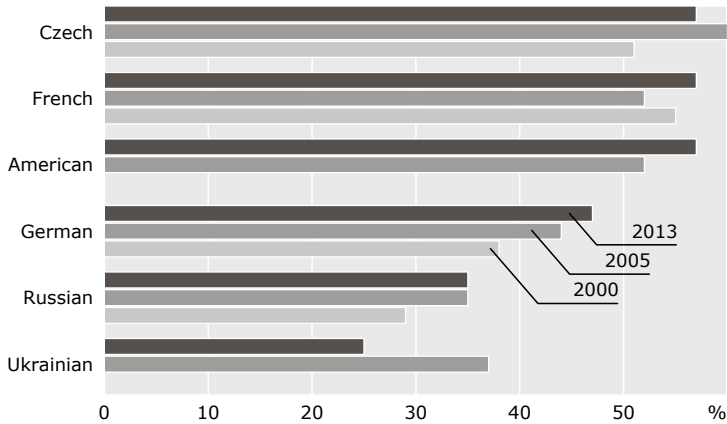


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- 1 | Łukasz Woźnicki, "Dziennikarz sportowy o mundialu: 'Kibicowanie Niemcom to brak szacunku dla poprzednich pokoleń'" (A sports journalist on the World Cup. 'To cheer for the Germans is evidence of a lack of respect for past generations'), *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 9 Jul 2014, [http://wyborcza.pl/1,75478,16299944,Dziennikarz\\_sportowy\\_o\\_mundialu\\_\\_\\_Kibicowanie\\_Niemcom.html](http://wyborcza.pl/1,75478,16299944,Dziennikarz_sportowy_o_mundialu___Kibicowanie_Niemcom.html) (accessed 8 Oct 2014).
- 2 | Krzysztof Stanowski, "Jak co wtorek..." (Just like any other Tuesday...), *Weszło*, 15 Jul 2014, <http://weszlo.com/2014/07/15/jak-co-wtorek-krzysztof-stanowski-72> (accessed 8 Oct 2014).

Fig. 1

**Relations between the Polish People and selected Nations: Degree of Sympathy in 2000, 2005, and 2013**



Source: Own illustration modified from Łada, n. 3, 20.

Recent polls conducted by the Institute of Public Affairs show that nearly 50 per cent of Poles feel sympathy towards the Germans whereas 15 per cent would not feel this. The decided majority is of the opinion that Poland and Germany must work together.<sup>3</sup> Germany is Poland's most important trading partner. In 2013, the volume of trade between the two neighbouring countries was more than 78 billion euros. Imports from and exports to Germany each account for more than one-quarter of the total volume of Polish trade.<sup>4</sup> In addition, economic relations are characterised by a high level of direct investment in both sides. Polish petroleum company Orlen is just one example of this in addition to numerous small and medium-sized companies. A total of nearly 1.4 billion euros was invested in the other side of the Oder in 2013.<sup>5</sup> In economic terms,

3 | Cf. Agnieszka Łada, *Deutsch-Polnisches Barometer 2013. Das Bild Deutschlands und der Deutschen in der polnischen Gesellschaft nach zehn Jahren Gemeinsamer EU-Mitgliedschaft*, Instytut Spraw Publicznych (Institute of Public Affairs), Warsaw, 2013, [http://kas.de/wf/doc/kas\\_36301-1522-1-30.pdf](http://kas.de/wf/doc/kas_36301-1522-1-30.pdf) (accessed 23 Oct 2014).

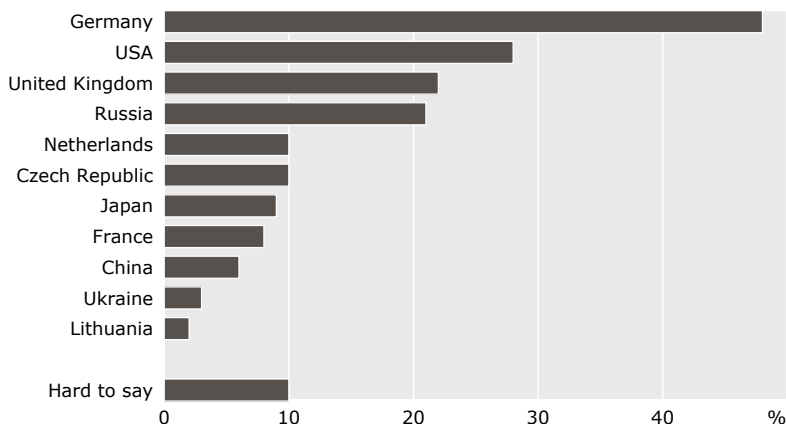
4 | Cf. Germany Trade & Invest, "Wirtschaftsdaten kompakt – Polen", 27 May 2014, [http://www.gtai.de/GTAI/Content/DE/Trade/Fachdaten/PUB/2012/11/pub201211228003111\\_159160.pdf](http://www.gtai.de/GTAI/Content/DE/Trade/Fachdaten/PUB/2012/11/pub201211228003111_159160.pdf) (accessed 8 Oct 2014).

5 | Cf. Jacek Lepiarz, "Polacy ostro handlują z Niemcami" (The Poles are trading heavily with Germany), *wGospodarce*, 2 Apr 2014, <http://wgospodarce.pl/informacje/12000-polacy-ostro-handluja-z-niemcami-okna-i-zywnosc-zdobywaja-portfele-niemieckich-klientow> (accessed 8 Oct 2014).

a quarter of a century after the fall of the Berlin Wall, German-Polish relations could hardly show a better balance. However, this is only one side of the coin.

Fig. 2

**Countries that Poland should cooperate the closest with according to the Polish people**



Source: Own illustration modified from Łada, n. 3, 34.

Germany remains an enemy for the Polish conservative right-wing parties, and is a target of propagandist attacks. In recent months, the Law and Justice Party (*Prawo i Sprawiedliwość*, PiS) led by Jarosław Kaczyński, along with groups of politicians who have left the PiS or were expelled, have ramped up their verbal attacks. Interestingly, climate policy was drawn into this. Voices from this camp warned that Germany wanted to destroy Polish mines with its demand for lower carbon dioxide emissions.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, they stated that Poles living in Germany were being deprived of the nationality because they will not be awarded the status of a national minority in Germany.<sup>7</sup> Another accusation levelled by the Right is that German policy makers would go behind Poland's back to align with Moscow. This also includes the charge that former Polish

6 | Cf. "Niemcy dążą do zniszczenia polskiego węgla" (The Germans seek to destroy Polish coal), PiS, 20 Jun 2014, <http://www.pis.org.pl/article.php?id=23057> (accessed 8 Oct 2014).

7 | Cf. "Posłanka Pis: Niemcy dyskryminują Polaków" (Law and Justice Party MPs: Poles are discriminated against in Germany), *Telewizja Republika*, 31 Jan 2014, <http://telewizjarepublika.pl/poslanka-pis-niemcy-dyskryminuja-polakow-potrzebny-zespol-ds-mniejszosci-polskiej-w-niemczech,1360.html> (accessed 8 Oct 2014).

Prime Minister (and new President of the European Council) Donald Tusk was a puppet of Berlin, and that under his rule, Poland was a satellite state of Germany.<sup>8</sup>



Sporting neighbours: When the Polish and German national soccer teams compete, it is an emotional event that receives broad media attention, as pictured here during the EC qualification on 11 October 2014. | Source: © Adam Litwiniuk, ATP, picture alliance.

When Russia wrested the Crimea from Ukraine this spring, and in Poland (as in many other places) the conversation turned towards the necessity of increasing NATO's presence in Eastern Europe, Jarosław Kaczyński declared his refusal for German army units to be deployed in Poland: "I would not want any German troops. At least seven generations must pass before this could happen,"<sup>9</sup> he said, referring to the German crimes committed during the Second World War. When Tusk was confirmed as President of the European Council on 30 August 2014, PiS politicians and journalists with similar views adopted the same tone: "Has the vassal been rewarded?" asked PiS MEP Zdzisław Krasnodębski via Twitter. "Tusk has been rewarded in this way, because he has not caused any trouble for Germany," added journalist Bronisław Wildenstein.<sup>10</sup> Such remarks

8 | Cf. "Błaszczak: Polska 'satelitą Niemiec'" (Poland is a satellite state of Germany), *Rzeczpospolita*, 19 Aug 2014, <http://rp.pl/artukul/1134096.html> (accessed 8 Oct 2014).

9 | "Kaczyński nie życzy sobie niemieckich wojsk w Polsce" (Kaczyński does not want any German troops in Poland), *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 2 Apr 2014, [http://wyborcza.pl/1,75478,15730311,Kaczynski\\_nie\\_zyczy\\_sobie\\_niemieckich\\_wojsk\\_w\\_Polsce\\_.html](http://wyborcza.pl/1,75478,15730311,Kaczynski_nie_zyczy_sobie_niemieckich_wojsk_w_Polsce_.html) (accessed 8 Oct 2014).

10 | Sławomir Jastrzębowski, "Skrzytykuję Kaczyńskiego, jeśli na to zasłuży" (I criticise Kaczyński when he deserves it), *Super Express*, 5 Sep 2014.

from the PiS camp could be overlooked. However, polls from August show that one in three Poles would vote for that party. How does this fit with the opinion that only 15 per cent of respondents harbour antipathy towards the Germans?

In the context of German-Polish relations, football has always been a trigger of negative emotions. Prior to matches, resentments and old jokes are revived and the tabloids contribute accordingly. For example, the German tabloid *Bild* and the Polish *Fakt* (both belong to the Axel Springer Group) both published tasteless illustrations of Polish and German football players prior to the European Cup in 2008. Politicians from the ultra-conservative (and extremely anti-German) League of Polish Families even demanded that the Polish-born stars of the German national football team, Miroslav Klose and Lukas Podolski, renounce their Polish citizenship.<sup>11</sup> Whenever the two teams meet on the field, this seems to trigger this reflex described in certain media.

#### **WOUNDS THAT HAVE YET TO HEAL**

"The German-Polish relationship is neurotic,"<sup>12</sup> wrote esteemed journalist on both sides of the border and doyen of Polish experts on Germany, Adam Krzemiński, a few years ago. This diagnosis still applies today. But is there reason to fear that this assessment is not only shared by older, more conservative Poles, but also by the younger generation of 30 to 40-year-olds? This observation that something has broken down among younger people is not wrong. They dreamed of a Europe in which Poland would be just as normal a country as its Western neighbours. Due to their rather critical attitude towards their own history, they have distinguished themselves as advocates of reconciliation. At the same time, this means taking responsibility, for example for the pogrom against the Jewish citizens of Jedwabne in 1941.

11 | Cf. "Odebrać obywatelstwo Podolskiemu i Klose" (Podolski and Klose must be denied citizenship), *WP Wiadomości*, 9 June 2008, <http://wiadomosci.wp.pl/kat,48996,title,Orzechowski-odebrac-obywatelstwo-Podolskiemu-i-Klose,wid,10035827,wiadomosc.html> (accessed 8 Oct 2014).

12 | Adam Krzemiński, "Inny widoczny Znak" (Another visible sign), *Polityka*, 28 May 2009.

The subsequent generations view the past through the lens of films and comics; for them, history is told in black and white in a similar way to how it is represented by the conservative Right. Different symbols convey this attitude. These include the anchor symbol used by the Polish resistance movement. Young people wear the symbol of the Polish resistance movement in the Second World War on t-shirts; it is painted on walls next to the coats of arms of their football teams. There is also room for the “evil Germany” rhetoric in this patriotic fever, positioned against

**A contentious issue in the political and public sphere is how to treat the Germans: as advocates on behalf of Poland’s return to Europe or as descendants of criminals and revanchists.**

the country where nothing has changed in half a century, the country that ambushed Poland, the country one should not cheer for at sports events. A contentious issue in the political sphere as well as civil society is how to treat the Germans: as friends, allies, advocates on behalf of Poland’s return to Europe or as descendants of criminals and revanchists. Perceptions of their neighbours fluctuate back and forth between these images in a cyclical manner. The negative images gain the upper hand when the populist forces believe themselves to be safe. This up and down has affected German-Polish relations and has demonstrated that the nearly 25 years that have passed since reunification is too short a time to step out from under the shadow of this tragic history.

Another factor that affects political and societal relations is Russia. One example of this is that many Polish commentators think the efforts of German Chancellor Angela Merkel and Foreign Minister Frank Walter Steinmeier to urge Russia to relent on the Ukraine conflict are naïve, whereas Berlin considers it rational, balanced and responsible. Some voices from the far right go even further and accuse the Germans of undermining NATO, pushing Ukraine into Russia’s sphere of influence and enabling German companies to have better business relations with Russia.<sup>13</sup> The symptoms of the German-Polish neurosis clearly do surface here.

13 | Cf. Krzysztof Rak, “Niemiecki adwokat Putina” (Putin’s German solicitor), *Rzeczpospolita*, 2 Sep 2014; Piotr Gabryel, “Oto jak Niemcy zdradzają Polskę” (How Germany is betraying Poland), *Do rzeczy*, 1 Sep 2014.

## RECONCILIATION AND SOLIDARITY

“The work of the Holy Spirit was seen there,”<sup>14</sup> said Archbishop Alfons Nossol, remembering the Reconciliation Mass in Krzyżowa near Wrocław. The resistance group known as the Kreisau Circle, founded by Helmuth James von Moltke, was active there between 1940 and 1944. On 12 November 1989, Tadeusz Mazowiecki, the first non-communist Prime Minister of Poland, and German Chancellor Helmut Kohl met at this historic site. Archbishop Nossol continued: “This mass was a symbol of reconciliation between God and men, between men with God and between men and men. John Paul II taught us that we should love other people as we love our own. That patriotism cannot be based on the hatred of others, but on love. [...] That was a great moment in the history of both countries, as well as the Church.”



A sign of peace: The first non-communist Prime Minister Tadeusz Mazowiecki worked towards national reconciliation between Poland and Germany. On 8 November 1990, he discussed the future of both nations with German Chancellor Helmut Kohl. | Source: © Jan Bauer, Zentralbild, picture alliance.

The reconciliation between Poles and Germans did not only just begin the year the Berlin Wall fell. As early as 1965, during the proceedings at the Second Vatican Council, the Polish bishops sent their fellow German Catholics a letter with the historic words: “We forgive and ask for forgiveness.” A similar gesture was made by German politicians.

14 | Cited in Bartosz T. Wieliński “Zaczęło się w Krzyżowej” (It began in Krzyżowa), *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 11 Dec 2009.

In December 1970, German Chancellor Willy Brandt knelt before the memorial to the victims of the Warsaw Ghetto. When protests against the communist regime developed in Poland in the late 1970s, and the *Solidarność* trade union movement began in favour of political reforms, the authorities responded to the growing unrest in the country by declaring martial law in December 1981. During this period (until July 1983), Poland received 8.5 million aid packages from the Federal Republic of Germany.<sup>15</sup> The *Solidarność* factor is not an insignificant one. Without it, there never would have been a reunification as it was supported by many members of the Polish opposition.



The union *Solidarność* rebelled successfully against the communist regime in the early 1980s. Citizens in the GDR watched the strike movement of the shipyard workers in Gdansk closely, pictured here on 26 August 1980 with Lech Wałęsa, the union leader and later President of Poland. | Source: © picture alliance/AP Images.

In this context, one cannot claim that a simple chain reaction occurred in 1989 when, after the opposition won the Polish elections and the Mazowiecki government was formed, the communist system in the GDR and other Eastern Bloc countries collapsed. The Workers' Defence Committee (*Komitet Obrony Robotników*), an organisation that was formed by Polish dissidents in the second half of the 1970s, and *Solidarność* appealed to people in the GDR. Leaflets were written calling for solidarity with Polish workers, and the lettering of *Solidarność* appeared

15 | Cf. Bartosz T. Wieliński, "Od stanu wojennego do ślubu" (From a state of war to marriage), *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 15 December 2011, [http://wyborcza.pl/wyborcza/1,105226,10820519,Od\\_stanu\\_wojennego\\_do\\_slubu.html](http://wyborcza.pl/wyborcza/1,105226,10820519,Od_stanu_wojennego_do_slubu.html) (accessed 8 Oct 2014).



in graffiti. The Stasi took harsh measures against such actions.<sup>16</sup> But with effectively no success. *Solidarność* had an impact even behind prison walls. Political prisoners in Cottbus organised a hunger strike after the imposition of martial law to show solidarity with the opposition in their neighbouring country.<sup>17</sup> In Poland, we are only just now learning of these stories. Until now, many believed that the East Germans had detested everything Polish because of communist propaganda.

## **RAPPROCHEMENT WITH RESISTANCE**

Poland and reunified Germany have set their relationship on new footing. In 1989/1990, there were few or no mechanisms for cooperation between the two societies, for youth exchanges or local or municipal partnerships. The Oder-Neisse line was not yet recognised, and the status of Germans living in Poland and Poles living in Germany was unclear. Instead, there was mistrust, wounds from the past that had yet to heal and propagandist reflexes in politics and the media.

When Germany reunified, Poles did not think about whether Germany would seek a hegemonic position in Europe. The more important question was whether Germany would take back its lost territory (Masuria, Pomerania, Silesia). Throughout the 45 years the Polish People's Republic existed, Poles had been hounded by the fear of German revanchism. When Helmut Kohl opposed Polish demands to uphold the border along the Oder-Neisse line in 1990 prior to reunification,<sup>18</sup> this was interpreted as a breach of trust. German politics came into play here, as the German Chancellor did not wish to disappoint the Federation of Expellees and its member organisations.<sup>19</sup> Nevertheless he relented,

16 | Cf. Bartosz T. Wieliński, "Zdławić solidarność" (Stifling Solidarity), *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 6 Dec 2012.

17 | Cf. Bartosz T. Wieliński, "Solidarność w tygrysyj klatce" (Solidarity in the tiger's cage), *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 17 July 2012.

18 | Róża Romaniec, "Trudna droga do traktatu" (A difficult road to agreement), *Deutsche Welle*, 13 Nov 2010, <http://dw.de/p/Q7zM> (accessed 08 Oct 2014).

19 | Officials for the Federation of Expellees (Bund der Vertriebenen) went to the Opole region to promote a referendum on the future of Silesia as if the reunification of Germany would not only concern the GDR, but also the regions east of the Oder. Cf. Klaus Bachmann, "Widoczne znaki" (Visible signs), *Newsweek Polska*, 8 Sep 2009.

also thanks to Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher's intervention. Shortly after reunification, on 14 November 1990, the border treaty was signed between the Federal Republic of Germany and the Republic of Poland.

Just one year later, the first round of talks on the accession of Poland to the European Union began. The Brussels delegation was welcomed by Jacek Saryusz-Wolski, the Polish plenipotentiary for European integration, with the words: "Ladies and gentlemen, we are not Africa."<sup>20</sup> In that respect, Warsaw expressed its wish that Poland was not to be treated as a developing country, but as a partner. The fact that this desire did not come about by chance was demonstrated by an event in 1995. The 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of liberation was being celebrated in Berlin. Although the war claimed an enormous number of Polish victims, Poland was not invited.



Towards the EU: Jacek Saryusz-Wolski underlined from the very beginning of Poland's EU membership negotiations that the country was a full and equal partner. He has been a member of the European Parliament since 2004 and has served as its Deputy President. | Source: David Plas, European People's Party (EPP), flickr ©<sup>1</sup>.

In the mid-1990s, Poles looked on their neighbours in eastern Germany with astonishment. On their way to western Germany, they could only marvel at the huge, sprawling building sites between the Oder and the Elbe. But news

20 | Cited in Bartosz T. Wieliński, "Mogliśmy być w niej wcześniej" (We could have been in it sooner), *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 29 Apr 2014.

of unemployment, industrial wastelands and emigration to western German regions provided for incredulity. Citizens of the former GDR who experienced communism will certainly disagree, but, from a Polish perspective, the GDR was paradise. There was also the question of how Poland would have looked if as much money had been invested there as the Federal Republic of Germany issued for development between Rügen and the Ore Mountains.



The German-Polish rapprochement would have been more difficult to achieve without the diplomatic skills of Foreign Ministers Bronisław Geremek (r.) and Hans-Dietrich Genscher. | Source: © Heinrich Sanden, picture alliance.

Bronisław Geremek, the former Minister of Foreign Affairs of Poland who had a tragic accident in 2008, called the transformation of bilateral relations a “miracle”.<sup>21</sup> One of his predecessors as Minister of Foreign Affairs, historian Władysław Bartoszewski, made it even clearer: “If someone would have said 60 years ago, as I stood hunched on the parade ground of the Auschwitz concentration camp, that I would have friends who were German, citizens of a democratic and friendly country, I would have taken him for a fool.”<sup>22</sup> Personalities played a crucial role on both sides of this reconciliation. Without the tenacity and courage of people like Tadeusz Mazowiecki and Helmut Kohl, without the diplomatic skills of Polish Foreign Ministers Krzysztof

21 | Bronisław Geremek, “Polityka godziwa” (Moderate policy), *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 18 May 2004.

22 | Cited in Bartosz T. Wieliński, “Polska i Niemcy. Starzy przyjaciele i młodzi awanturnicy” (Poland and Germany. Old friends and young hooligans), *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 13 Aug 2009.

Skubiszewski, Bartoszewski, Geremek and Genscher, without the determination and understanding of many like-minded people, the German-Polish rapprochement would have been more difficult. But the list of meritorious personalities is not limited to heads of government and ministers. Mayors, teachers and activists from both societies cast their prejudices down and came to know their neighbours better.

### POINTS OF CONTENTION

It may have seemed at the time of Poland's accession to the EU in May 2004 that Warsaw and Berlin would settle all disputes in a civilised manner as members of one family. However, these hopes were in vain. By 2002, a public conflict had developed. The United States under President George W. Bush prepared to invade Iraq because they accused the regime of Saddam Hussein of supporting the terrorist organisation Al-Qaeda, which was responsible for the attacks on 11 September, and developing weapons of mass destruction. The Schröder government did not want to join the alliance formed for the war effort, instead seeking proximity to Paris and Moscow. In Poland, the public interpreted the German stance as an attempt to drive a wedge between Europe and the United States, to divide NATO and protect the Iraqi dictator.

**In Poland, the public interpreted the German stance on the Iraq war in 2003 as an attempt to drive a wedge between Europe and the United States.**

For Poland, the North Atlantic Alliance and its ties to the United States are sacred. They are considered an insurance policy in the event of a conflict with Russia. Because of this, the country ruled by President Kwaśniewski and Prime Minister Miller decided to lend its support to Washington. Elite Polish soldiers and troops were deployed to Iraq. At the time, Polish citizens knew nothing of the secret agreement finalised in 2002 between the Polish and U.S. intelligence agencies. It authorised the Americans to build a secret prison for Iraqi prisoners on the site of the training center in Stare Kiejkuty. This was only brought to light in 2005 by an American journalist, and the public has only recently learned of the harrowing details.

Transatlantic relations provided the backdrop for further differences. The new government led by the Law and Justice Party in 2005 with President Lech Kaczyński soon afterwards brought about media-led taunts. This was triggered by a satirical piece in the newspaper *taz* in June 2006: "Jarosław [Kaczyński] lives with his own mother, but at least it's without a marriage certificate."<sup>23</sup> The line "Poland's new potato", published in the "Villains who want to rule the world" series, reinforced the notion that Germans are not exactly well known for their humour. This post appeared again in the press kit President Kaczyński had received in preparation for the Weimar Triangle anniversary summit. After reading this, he cancelled his visit to Germany, officially citing health reasons. The former foreign minister compared the *taz* with the Nazi newspaper *Der Stürmer* and the Polish public prosecutor's office opened an investigation against the German author for insulting a head of state. When he became Prime Minister in July 2006, Jarosław Kaczyński set about depriving the German minority of their privileges. The manoeuvres of the German Navy in the Baltic Sea, which caused a Polish ferry to have to change its course, were inflated to the point of scandal.<sup>24</sup>



Jarosław Kaczyński, chairman of the national-conservative PiS and former Polish Prime Minister, is known to criticise Germany primarily to score domestic points. | Source: Piotr Drabik, flickr ©©.

23 | Peter Köhler, "Polens neue Kartoffel", *taz.die tageszeitung*, 26 Jun 2006.

24 | Cf. Andrzej Kraśnicki, Jr. and Bartosz T. Wieliński, "Polski protest w sprawie Bundesmarine" (Polish protest of German Navy issues), 24 Aug 2006.

But the most acrimonious dispute was in regards to history. It involved claims that the Prussian Trust made against Poland, which demanded reparations for expellees for their property they had to leave behind in Polish territory. At the same time, the discussions on the Centre Against Expulsions, which was supported by the Federation of Expellees, emerged. Regardless of who ruled in Warsaw, those projects would face resistance in Poland. If

**After 1989, post-war expulsions and the handling of these legacies were the subject of intense debates.**

descendants of erstwhile expellees were to have received reparations, this would have turned the post-war European order on its head. After 1989, post-war expulsions and the handling of these legacies were the subject of intense scholarly and societal debate. Furthermore, it should not be forgotten that many Polish citizens and communities look after German cultural monuments or cemeteries.

With regard to the Centre Against Expulsions, the Polish argument was that an exhibition project on all expulsions that took place in the 20<sup>th</sup> century – as advocated by Erika Steinbach – would cover over the singularity of Nazi crimes. It was feared that this project would be a manipulation of history. The German side showed understanding with these concerns. Schröder had already announced that Berlin would support Warsaw if the question of reparations for expellees should be tried before a court of law. The construction of the “Centre” was challenged outright by the German Left. When Angela Merkel became Chancellor, she reiterated Schröder’s commitment.<sup>25</sup> She also decided it would not be the Federation of Expellees which would commemorate the expulsions, but that the federal government would build a museum for the displaced. However, this was not enough for the Kaczyński government in power at the time.

In December 2006, when the Prussian Trust announced it would file suit against Poland with the European Court of Human Rights, Polish Foreign Minister Anna Fotyga said the border treaty with Germany would have to be renegotiated. In June 2007, the Polish government tried to torpedo the negotiations on the EU Reform Treaty of Lisbon.

25 | Cf. Bartosz T. Wieliński, “Rząd Niemiec po stronie Polski” (The German Federal Government on Poland’s side), *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 5 Aug 2006.

The atmosphere of German-Polish relations rapidly deteriorated and was heading towards a low point. The mutual accusations were similar to those of the 1960s and 1970s: that the Germans were revanchists and still had not finished with Nazism.



The chemistry is good: German Chancellor Angela Merkel and the new President of the European Council Donald Tusk have a friendly relationship. After Tusk's election as Prime Minister in 2007, bilateral relations experienced a noticeable improvement. | Source: European People's Party (EPP), flickr ©.

## OUTLOOK

In October 2007, Donald Tusk and his Civic Platform (Platforma Obywatelska, PO) emerged victorious from the elections. The climate of bilateral relations improved noticeably. Progress began to be made on the individual issues briefly discussed here. The European Court of Human Rights dismissed the suit filed by the Prussian Trust. Two renowned historians from Poland were invited to participate in the scholarly committee that prepared the museum exhibition on expellees. Two years ago, Angela Merkel made known in an interview with the *Gazeta Wyborcza* that she was a fan of Poland. This statement very probably stems from her youth, when she often visited the neighbouring country on holiday. There, she felt a freedom that would have been unthinkable in the GDR. Since the beginning of her chancellorship, she has travelled to Poland more than ten times on official state visits. The fact that Merkel and Tusk have a personal chemistry was certainly conducive to strengthening the bilateral relationship.

At the European level, the two countries have formed an informal alliance. Germany supported Poland in the EU budget negotiations. In return, Tusk joined in with Berlin's position to focus on consolidating budgets and initiating reforms in the face of the financial crisis. The bond between the capitals was so strong that some journalists posed the idea that Poland should replace the increasingly ailing France in the Franco-German engine of the EU. "Poland has ceased to be a problem; it now solves problems,"<sup>26</sup> was said among diplomats. The image of Poland in Germany has changed for the better. "Polish economy" no longer means chaos, rather order, stability and growing prosperity. The culmination of this rapprochement was the choice of Donald Tusk as the President of the European Council. Without the support of the Chancellor, this would not have been possible.

However, the picture is clouded by the crisis in Ukraine. At the political and public level, people in Poland prefer a more explicit stance towards the Kremlin. They seem to be rather disappointed with the approach of the German government as they do not believe the Russian president will be pacified with words alone. German business relations with Russia are also a source of criticism. In the eyes of the Polish people, the Germans are increasingly seen as those who do not stand on the side of Ukrainians fighting for their freedom. If Berlin is truly perceived in this way, this could negatively impact the future of German-Polish relations. Currently, anti-German voices are gaining in popularity in the political arena. Therefore, it is surely time to once again be more proactive if what has been achieved together over the past 25 years is to be continued.