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European Values and Search for Identities

Introduction

I appreciate this invitation addressed to me by the Council of Europe to deliver a lecture on common European values and historical memory in search for a common European identity. I am aware that many scholars and thinkers in this room would have certainly be much better a lecturers than me on the subject. In Poland, it would be hard to imagine a finer expert, speaker and author of ruminations about Europe, its common values and historical roots than Professor Bronisław Geremek whom I dedicated my lecture delivered last November at the University of Warsaw.

His speech addressed to the German Bundestag on 28 January 2002 explained the historical roots and foundations on which we are building the edifice of a common Europe and the values that guide European nations. Bronisław Geremek told the German Bundestag: “I wish to speak about the crimes of a totalitarian system on the example of just one city—my city of Warsaw, and on the example of just one life—my own life”¹. I cite these words today, because almost seventy years have passed since that Great War. New generations have grown up, for which World War II is distant history and whose knowledge of it comes mainly from movies, books and school textbooks. With increasing rarity they hear accounts of it from family members. That is so because there are fewer and fewer people who can attest that Professor Bronisław Geremek’s fate mirrored their own personal experiences.

Bronisław Geremek’s speech to the Bundestag could well be dubbed *Topography of a Crime*. It is an illustration—on the example of a city in Central Europe—of what happened here in occupied Warsaw, whose people were murdered and whose houses, shrines and public buildings were razed to the ground. “I recall that misfortune and that crime of the national-socialist system,” Geremek went on, “without trying to play the accountant who tallies the losses, or the judge who metes out justice. This is more of an incomplete glance at the phenomenon of enormous evil seen through the prism of one city’s experiences and one life. It is also an attempt to reflect on the common memory and its genesis”².

¹ Excerpts of the speech were only published in Poland after Bronisław Geremek’s death (the English translation and German original will be attached to the text of this lecture—in booklet under preparation by the Bronisław Geremek Centre. Warsaw 2014.

² Ibidem.

Memory

Thus, Bronisław Geremek believed that there existed something like a common European memory. Does it, in fact? Certainly, the experience of the two criminal totalitarianisms—Nazism and Stalinism—does occupy an important place in the collective memory of Europe and Europeans. Yet that memory, though shared at the level of general reflection by scholars, intellectuals and writers of the caliber of Bronisław Geremek in Poland, Sandor Marai in Hungary, Raymond Aron in France, Vasily Grossman in Russia or Thomas Mann and Günter Grass in Germany, differs significantly from what millions of Poles, Hungarians, Frenchmen, Russians or Germans have conveyed to their children and grandchildren.

A separate issue, that I will revisit later, is what shapes the collective memory and new identity of contemporary Russians, Ukrainians or Belarusians.

If we reflect—in line with Cicero's oft-quoted question: Is history the teacher of life? (*Historia est magistra vitae?*)—the answer will be negative. Yet that question, taken from the treaty *On the Orator* (*De Oratore*), cited in full, conveys a somewhat different meaning. Cicero asked: "And as History, which bears witness to the passing of the ages, sheds light upon reality, gives life to recollection and guidance to human existence, and brings tidings of ancient days, whose voice, but the orator's, can entrust her to immortality?"³. Thus, Cicero understands historical memory as something that encompasses evidence of the time and strives for the truth. It is meant to be a living memory and not just a teacher of life. Often, contemporary politicians and writers—following in the footsteps of the conservative German historian-revisionist Ernst Nolte—advocate the so-called "historical policy". I refer to "the so-called" historical policy because I consider the term *historical policy* itself to be somewhat unfortunate. In essence, it confuses different subject matter. That is so because politics signifies striving for the implementation of ideas (as defined by Plato and Aristotle); for the acquisition, preservation and consolidation of power (according to Machiavelli); for participation in power or influence on the way it is shared (according to Weber).

In other words, politics in its essence refers to the present and is aimed at shaping the future. History, on the other hand, concerns the past. Accordingly, the term "historical policy" implies a selective and instrumental treatment of history. In one of her essays, Anna Wolff-Powęska notes pertinently that "all the post-communist countries seeking new identities after 1989 have invoked history (...) In the emotional building of ties reference has often been made to the collective sense of having been wronged and betrayed by foreign powers. For Czechs and Slovaks that meant the Munich Treaty, for Hungarians—the Trianon Treaty, for Poles—Yalta and Potsdam"⁴.

The building of a national community based on common memory is understandable and natural. Problems appear when history is treated selectively

³ M. T. Cicero: *De Oratore*, book II, chapter IX, (trans. E.W. Sutton), Harvard University Press MCMLXVII.

⁴ Anna Wolff-Powęska: *Polacy—Niemcy. Kultura polityczna. Kultura pamięci.* (Poles-Germans. Political culture. Culture of remembrance). Poznań—Wydawnictwo Naukowe UAM 2008, p. 99.

and national memory is decreed by politicians and the institutions they establish, when the history of a nation is restricted to glory and splendor, while shameful, ignominious or even criminal facts are omitted or denied. Asked about Germany and the Germans (“To what past should they refer, seeing how the most recent past was scarred by crime?”), Wolff-Powęska replies: “Defeat, guilt, humiliation and shame pose the gravest challenges to the democratic identity. (...) Patriotism and motherland predate the nation-state. They are connected with freedom. The more mature and sovereign a nation, the greater its ability to engage in self-criticism and show self-distance”⁵.

The eminent Polish intellectual and medievalist, Karol Modzelewski—author of the excellent monograph *Barbarian Europe (Barbarzyńska Europa)*—took a similar position. In his autobiography Modzelewski writes: “Shame belongs to the category of higher feelings. Shame for the ignominious deeds of one’s compatriots (...) is an unmistakable sign of national bond. In the sphere of European culture we do not believe in collective responsibility. We feel that the perpetrators of deeds we condemn should themselves answer for them. However, if we are truly bound by a sense of national community we inevitably feel shame for any ignominious deeds committed by its members and on its behalf”⁶.

That ascertainment is pivotal to the understanding of many difficulties and obstacles in Poland’s relations with its neighbors in the East and West. National complexes—regardless if they are inferiority or superiority complexes—do not facilitate dialogue, which inherently assumes such values as dignity and sensitivity of the partner. In this context, Wolff-Powęska rightly cites John Paul II, who said that “love of one’s homeland endows all other nations with the same rights as those enjoyed by one’s own and thus constitutes a path to the arrangement of social love” and that “polishness, in effect, means diversity and pluralism and not narrow-mindedness or insularity”⁷.

Alas, such enlightened and open attitudes to patriotism and national identity are neither common nor dominant among historians in Germany, Russia or Poland. Some nations, such as the Poles, carry within themselves and cultivate the memory of the victim; others—e.g. the Germans—have a sense of guilt for the wrongs and suffering inflicted upon peoples and states they invaded and occupied (this is one of the causes of historical revisionism); still others—e.g. the Russians—build their national identity and derive pride from the fact that their forebears scored a great victory over the Nazi Third Reich. From the Polish point of view the end of World War II did mean that millions of lives were saved. Yet that victory did not bring liberation. As Sandor Marai observed, Soviet soldiers drove out the occupiers from our countries but could not give us freedom because they did not have it themselves.

The three neighboring nations—the Germans, Poles and Russians—are simultaneously nurturing different historical memories. Meanwhile, the new

⁵ Ibidem, pp. 104-105.

⁶ Karol Modzelewski: *Zajeżdżimy kobyłę historii. Wyznania poobijanego jeźdźca* (Foundering the mare of history. Confessions of a saddle-sore rider). Warsaw—Wydawnictwo Iskry 2013, p. 48.

⁷ Anna Wolff-Powęska: *Polacy—Niemcy* (Poles—Germans), op. cit., p. 101.

political reality and the new international security environment pose new challenges.

Proponents of “historical policy” tend to forget that Nolte’s works triggered in Germany the so-called dispute of the historians (“Historikerstreit”). It was set in motion not only by his attempt to relativize the denouncement of Nazism as a criminal system, but also—and this is still shocking today—his justification of sorts of the “Final Solution” (Endlösung) or the annihilation of the Jews by the German National-Socialist regime.

The difference between “historical memory” and “historical policy” is the same as between truth and half-truth, between seeking historical truth and attempts at its instrumentalization and exploitation for specific political goals by different groups, parties and state institutions. It is with that in mind that the authorities define obligatory standards for history textbooks, assign names to towns and streets, erect monuments and establish new museums. It would be desirable for these institutions and museums to inspire people to think and ask questions, rather than to offer simplistic and biased answers.

The dispute of the German historians highlighted the existence of differences in historical memories of the same dramatic events, the witnesses of which are still alive. This applies to divisions within a single state states—and not only different memories cultivated in different states. That is why professional historians bear the particular responsibility for leaving to future generations a true image of what happened and for effectively preventing a “repetition of history” on our continent.

Continuity and change

Europe got its history lesson and paid a high price for it. However, experience shows that there are no eternal solutions: no issue is settled and closed for ever.

By its very nature the historical process signifies continuity and change. This can be illustrated on the example of the process of normalization and subsequent reconciliation between Poland and Germany. The letter of the Polish bishops sent in 1965 to German bishops, the essence of which was expressed by the words “We forgive and ask forgiveness”, initially did not meet with understanding among the leaders of the German Catholic Church—or many members of the clergy and Catholics in Poland. It was an act of courage and political wisdom, far ahead of its time. Only fifty years later has it been recognized in Poland and Germany as a turning point. The same has happened with the much-photographed, heart-felt gesture of Willy Brandt, who on 7 December 1970 kneeled before the Monument to the Heroes of the Warsaw Ghetto.

The then Polish authorities ignored that act of contrition, humility and shame. There were opinions that it was a theatrical gesture—purely for show; others insisted that “Brandt had kneeled in front of the wrong monument”. And in Germany, Vice-President of the Union of Expellees Friedrich Walter claimed that “kneeling in a foreign country like that contradicts all international norms. According to Western Christian custom a man only kneels before God”. Much of the German public opinion considered Brandt’s gesture degrading. At the time, Willy Brandt did not know how it would be received. Alas, he did not meet with

understanding in his homeland. What he did get were invectives, accusations that the Chancellor lacked patriotism, that he was alienated, or simply—that he was a traitor. Today, that natural human reaction of a man, who bore no responsibility because he had fought against the Nazis in Germany and outside its borders—but had a moral compass and did something that could have been expected of millions of his compatriots—caused that the image of Willy Brandt kneeling in Warsaw became “one of the most moving political icons of the latter half of the 20th century”⁸. Forty years later, speaking at the Royal Castle in Warsaw, former German President Christian Wulff, whose political supporters were critical of Brandt, thus described that act of both contrition and courage: “We witnessed the creation of an image of a different German, a different Germany: a Germany that is freedom-oriented, democratic and peace-loving, a Germany that seeks understanding with its neighbors”⁹. In his memoirs, Brandt confided: “Standing over the abyss of German history and under the burden of the murdered millions I did what people do when their tongue fails them”¹⁰.

That evolution of the stance of Germany and Germans illustrates the dynamics of the phenomenon we call collective memory. At first, there is a rather prevalent need to negate the truth, contradict facts and expel them from one’s memory. Courageous attitudes displayed by leaders and moral authorities encounter social resistance. But in a democratic society they gradually gain acceptance and are received by the next generation as something natural. “However, good memory does not depend on itself,” observes Polish novelist Eustachy Rylski.—“Without nurturing it dies, in contrast to ill repute and infamy, which feed by themselves on anything that happens along. Good memory can be discerning. Like beauty, it is inevitably gone before you notice. But ugliness persists immovable, like a rock”¹¹.

All nations, without exception, are entitled to their own memory. No one can impose on anyone else the alloy or amalgamation that is composed of family stories, books one has read, movies and theatre shows one has seen, school lessons, university lectures and results of historical research. However, it is reasonable to expect that scholars—professional historians and researchers—as well as writers and journalists will not intentionally conceal and distort the truth about facts and events, or bend it to fit the opportunistic requirements of current politics.

Professor Wolff-Powęska is right when she notes: “A crudely politicized historical memory does not integrate—but divides, it does not educate—but instigates repetition of historical mistakes (...). It does not teach responsibility for the state, or build social ties—but carries destruction and incites fear on an imaginary

⁸ Adam Krzemiński: *Przyklęk pokoju* (Kneeling for peace). “Polityka”, no. 49 of 4 December 2010, pp. 68-70.

⁹ Christian Wulff: *Dla Niemiec i Polski przyszłość leży w Europie* in: *Europa kontynent pojednania?* (For Germany and Poland the future lies in Europe: Europe—a continent of reconciliation?) Warsaw—Friedrich Ebert Stiftung and CSM 2012, p. 83.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*.

¹¹ Eustachy Rylski: *Warunek* (Condition). Warsaw—Świat Książki 2005, p. 246.

threat”¹². The molding and imposing of myths or events and facts taken out of historical context and interpreted for the needs of current politics has little in common with reviving the historical image of one’s national community. Rather, it serves as a band-aid for complexes, which only strengthens stereotypes: on the one hand—that your own is nation exceptional and noble, forever on the light side of the force, and on the other—that it has always been maligned by “alien” and hostile forces, that are the very emanation of evil.

In Europe (and not only Central-Eastern Europe) it is a rather common practice, the resurgence of which we witness in times of uncertainty and crisis. Suddenly it turns out that much of the public opinion in democratic states, which for years have backed the building of a common Europe—free of xenophobia, populism and extreme nationalism—is swayed by primitive demagoguery amounting to slogans like “France for the French”, “Finland for the Finns”, “The Netherlands for the Dutch”. The list of examples could be extended. I intentionally picked the countries which, in the opinion of Europeans, till recently were seen as icons of tolerance and openness.

Values and the law

The point is that no nation or society is immune to these phenomena. The European Union has recognized that the countering and preventing of populism and xenophobia constitutes a moral and political obligation—and granted this the status of binding law (article 2 and article 7 of the Treaty on European Union and the Charter of Fundamental Rights)¹³. Union law defines the space in which respect for human dignity, human rights, freedoms, democracy and the rule of law are all binding. There is no doubt that these obligations stem from remembrance of past totalitarian regimes, based on lawlessness, intimidation, terror and trampling of human dignity.

In effect, the European Union has created not only legal but also material premises for effectively eliminating the possibility of war between member states and countering armed conflicts in states associated with the Union. There is a widespread conviction that the Union is primarily a form of and structure for economic integration. After all, the economic sphere was the focus of the Coal and Steel Community, the Common Market, the European Economic Community and finally—to a large extent—of the European Union itself. In effect, many citizens of Union states feel that it is financial and economic matters that determine the status and effectiveness of the institution, whereas, in reality, the quite exceptional place of the Union in the history of Europe has not been decided by money but by the fact that for the first time in the annals of the continent states committed to respecting common values established a union.

¹² Anna Wolff-Powęska: *Historia z recyklingu* (Recycled history). „Gazeta Wyborcza”—Świąteczny Magazyn, 9—11 November 2013, p. 28.

¹³ *Treaty on European Union. Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union. Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union*. (In force as at February 2013). Warsaw—Lexis Nexis 2013.

The strength of the Union lies not so much in treaties, norms, procedures and mechanisms as in the fact that all the instruments of the institution are tailored to ensure effective implementation of obligations that concern the citizens of the Union states¹⁴. This means that the Union and its member states are duty-bound to respect the dignity of the human person, equality and solidarity. For the first time in history, European states created a space of freedom, security and justice for the individual and undertook protection of these values.

And so, the human person became a subject. This is a new concept—not only in the realm of politics and morality, but also in the sphere of law. Security of the individual has gained a status that constitutes a challenge to the position of the state as the only subject of international law. The individual has gained the right to have a say in European affairs. At the same time, the security of the state—which hitherto constituted a supreme value—increasingly finds itself in collision with the rights of the human person, i.e. rights of the citizens to have their privacy, dignity and freedom respected.

This view is convincingly corroborated by the shock and indignation in Europe caused by the disclosure by Edward Snowden—regardless of his motives—of the practices of US security agencies, which in a systematic and institutionalized way tapped the phones of citizens of other states, including the leaders of friendly countries. These actions contravened the law. They violated the dignity of individuals and their right to privacy, which in Europe may be restricted only in exceptional, justified cases—at the request of prosecutors and with court approval. Certainly, foreign security services cannot operate within the territory of other states without the consent and cooperation of constitutional organs of the countries concerned, whose citizens are suspected of terrorist or criminal activity. No power has ever been entitled to take such actions, nor can such illegal practices be tolerated today, when—as an analyst observed intelligently—“this new, subjective role of the individual in international politics is the key factor transforming international relations and their traditional paradigms. The tension between the individual and the state is probably the most crucial process undermining the existent international system”¹⁵. The problem is broader, for it also concerns the tension between the nation and state, on the one hand, and between the community and society (including the international community) —on the other¹⁶.

Modern technologies have permanently deprived the state of the ability to control communications. This happened when the world entered the information revolution, which today not only encompasses the realm of services, but has become a production force and is governed in cyberspace by its own rules, with

¹⁴ Jan Barcz: *Traktat z Lizbony. Wybrane aspekty prawne działań implementacyjnych* (Lisbon Treaty. Selected legal aspects of implementation). Warsaw 2012, pp.329-380.

¹⁵ Piotr A. Świtalski: *Emocje, interesy, wartości. Przemiany paradygmatów polityki międzynarodowej* (Emotions, interests, values. Changing paradigms of international politics). Toruń—Adam Marszałek 2013, p. 10.

¹⁶ More in: Pierre Hassner: *Koniec pewników. Eseje o wojnie, pokoju i przemocy* (The End of Axioms. Essays on War, Peace and Violence). Warsaw—Stefan Batory Foundation and Sic! 2002, p. 39.

ever smaller influence of the state. In confrontation with this new reality democratic states encounter questions answers to which are not to be found in past experience. The key question is: how do you effectively prevent new risks and hazards in the modern world without infringing on the freedoms of the individuals and their right to live in states that respect such values as dignity, freedom, equality, justice and solidarity? The world of politics also faces new dilemmas: how do you respect the subjectivity of the individual without undermining collective security? How can you effectively fight organized terrorism as well as national and international crime while respecting the human person and its new role in the international community? These issues have long been at the core of public debate in democratic countries¹⁷.

The situation is different in undemocratic states. Their governments seek full control of communications within territories under their sovereignty and in trans-frontier traffic. It is one of those areas where the world of free men is confronted by the anachronistic belief that whoever controls the flow of information can, in effect, control the thinking of his subjects. That is what happened in ancient Egypt, so magnificently described by great Polish novelist Bolesław Prus¹⁸, who in a uniquely insightful way presented the mechanism of power and the dependence of the pharaoh on priests who controlled access to information. That is what also happened in the 20th century, when two totalitarian systems—Nazism in Germany and occupied Europe, and Stalinism in Russia and the Soviet-dominated part of the world—decided that information (on a par with state terror and criminally repressive regime) was the main tool for the subjugation of nations. The North Korean regime is a rudimentary carry-over of such an “information policy” —a kind of fossil of a criminal past on a global scale. This does not mean that the freedom of access to information in other countries is universal and not subject to any restrictions.

A peculiarly conceived “historical policy” is a form of selective approach to information management. In this context two processes of reconciliation—between Poland and Germany, and Poland and Russia—are quite illuminating.

Processes of reconciliation: two experiences

Let me repeat: the process of Polish-German reconciliation was made possible by all the changes that took place within Germany as a state and within the German society. As a result of their transformations, Poland and the Poles also underwent a radical, qualitative change. But in order to ensure that the change was irrevocable, it was decided to give the process institutional form. That was augmented with the relevant undertakings in all areas of social, political, cultural and spiritual activity.

Russian Premier Vladimir Putin, during his memorable visit to Gdansk on the 70th anniversary of World War II (1 September 2009), stated: “The historic, post-war

¹⁷ In this context one may mention an international conference in Warsaw, with the participation of eminent intellectuals, papers from which were published in *Globalization, Power and Democracy*. M. F. Plattner., A. Smolar (ed.). Baltimore and London—John Hopkins University Press 2000.

¹⁸ Bolesław Prus: *Faraon* (The Pharaoh). Warsaw 1987 (1st edn.).

reconciliation of France and Germany paved the way for the establishment of the European Union. On the other hand, it was the wisdom and magnanimity of the Russian and German peoples and the farsightedness of the state leaders of both countries that made it possible to take the decisive step towards building a Great Europe. The partnership of Russia and Germany became an example of meeting half way, of looking towards the future while preserving a caring attitude to memory of the past (...). I am certain that sooner or later Russian-Polish relations will also attain a similarly advanced, truly partner-like level. This is in the interest of our nations and the whole European continent”¹⁹.

The frequent references to the process of reconciliation between Germany and France (or Germany and Russia) in the context of relations with Poland might lead to the misconception that Germany, along with France and Russia, have worked out a kind of model of reconciliation, a universal pattern for the rest of Europe. This is not so. The nature of relations between Germany and France, on the one hand, and Russia and Poland, on the other, is in each case different and unique. These relations are the resultant of different historical vicissitudes of our nations and states, different mentalities of the peoples inhabiting our countries and quite different interdependencies between the respective states.

The Germans, as a state and nation, have in their relations with France—*sui generis*—an inferiority complex. They do not conceal their fascination with the French civilization, with the history and culture of France. This fascination has its roots in the past and was connected with the dominance of the French language as the means of communication of the higher social classes and diplomats, and with the impact of the French lifestyle, literature and even the exquisite French cuisine. Even though Germany outperformed France in such fields as science and technology, work output, social discipline and legal culture—the German elite and society at large felt respect and admiration for France, particularly in the sphere of culture.

The attitude of Germany to its neighbors in the East, particularly Poland, was different. The German language still contains certain negative stereotypes concerning Poles. They are exemplified by such terms as *polnische Wirtschaft*—a synonym of mismanagement, or *polnischer Reichstag*—signifying anarchy and inclination to pettifoggery and quarrels.

Attempts to gloss over the responsibility for German war crimes or even to “share” that responsibility constituted a frequent new irritant in Polish-German relations after World War II. An expression of this was the use by German media of phrases like “Polish death camps” in reference to Nazi concentration and annihilation camps in occupied Poland (significantly, camps located in Austria or Germany were described as *Nazi-Konzentrationslager*, without an adjective indicating their

¹⁹ The text of Premier Vladimir Putin’s message was published under the heading *Karty historii—powód do wzajemnych pretensji czy podstawa pojednania i partnerstwa?* (Charts of history—reason for mutual recriminations or basis for reconciliation and partnership?) by the daily “Gazeta Wyborcza” of 31 August 2009.

geographic location)²⁰. In consequence, new generations of Germans could acquire the mistaken conviction that during World War II there truly did exist “Polish” death camps. These are not the only examples of ignoring the sensitivity of the Polish public opinion.

Fortunately, this did not become a substantial obstacle on the path towards Polish-German reconciliation. With time, there disappeared any doubts as to the guilt and responsibility of Germany for the crimes perpetrated by the Nazi regime. The facts in this respect were unequivocal. The Third Reich had lost the war and the victorious powers imposed on Germany a process of denazification of public life. Responsible political forces in Germany collaborated to overcome the Nazi past, bring the criminals to justice and establish good relations with all the neighbors in the East and West. As a result of the political process based on these premises and due to the actions of many social institutions, Poland today has better relations with Germany than ever before. Poland’s support for the reunification of Germany and Germany’s support for the accession of Poland to the Euro-Atlantic security structures—NATO and the European Union—marked a turning point in these relations.

There was a completely different point of departure for building a new type of good-neighborly relations between Poland and Russia. Also, there are different criteria for evaluating mutual relations. The Soviet Union did not lose the war. On the contrary, it was one of the great victorious powers, though it had suffered the greatest losses in the war with the Nazi Third Reich. For millions of Russians that victory was inseparably connected with the person of Joseph Stalin, who, on the one hand, was a dictator responsible for countless crimes committed before the war, during its course and immediately after it ended, and on the other—personified and symbolized the greatest Russian military triumph. Also, it was the Russians—as well as numerous members of other nationalities inhabiting the Soviet Union—who were the main victim of the mass-scale Stalinist crimes (though they also targeted the citizens of many other states).

In other words, the Russian people have a deep conviction that they were a victim—rather than perpetrator. Therefore, it is incomprehensible to present-day Russians why the nations of Central-Eastern Europe do not feel grateful even though millions of Soviet soldiers had sacrificed their lives for their liberation²¹. Moreover, there is no analogy between the attitude of Germans to Hitler and the NSDAP, and of Russians to Stalin and the Bolshevik party. From the psychological point of view, these situations are incomparable.

No Russian leader—before or after the disintegration of the Soviet Union—has had the courage to tell his people what Vasily Grossman wrote as early as 1960 in his great novel *Life and Fate*. Without mincing words, he exposed the criminal nature of the two totalitarianisms—Nazism and Stalinism. Grossman wrote: “The first half of the twentieth century (...) will go down in history as the time when – in

²⁰ More on the subject—see: Adam Daniel Rotfeld: *Suche nach der Identität. Über Polens Umgang mit der Geschichte*. “Spiegel” 2009, no. 23.

²¹ This was pointed out to me by the Head of the Federal State Archives Agency, Andrei Artizov, during the Polish-Russian Media Forum in Kaliningrad (15 November 2013).

accordance with philosophies of race and society—whole sections of the European population were exterminated. Understandably, the present day remains discretely silent about this”²². The Russian writer then posed the question: “Does human nature undergo a true change in the cauldron of totalitarian violence? Does man lose his innate yearning for freedom? The fates of both man and the totalitarian State depend on the answer to this question? If human nature does change, then the eternal and world-wide triumph of the dictatorial State is assured; if his yearning for freedom remains constant, then the totalitarian State is doomed”²³.

Those were prophetic words! The striving for dignity and freedom of the individual indeed became the primary reason for the fall of the two criminal totalitarian regimes.

It is noteworthy that the dialogue initiated between Poles and Russians about difficult matters made it easier for the leadership of present-day Russia to critically assess the crimes committed by the Stalinist regime not only against Poles, but also against the peoples of their own state. After all, Poles have long known who was responsible for the murders—in the Katyn Forest, Starobelsk, Ostashkov and other camps—of almost 22 thousand Polish officers interned in the USSR. The crime took place from 3 April to 19 May 1940—after the Red Army’s invasion of Poland on 17 September 1939, coordinated with Nazi Germany. It was then that Stalin set in motion the whole propaganda machine of covering up evidence of the crime, forging documents, chicanery and denials. The “Katyn lie” became one of the main obstacles to building a new type of relations between Poland and Russia. The term extends to many other crimes, which still poison mutual relations (to mention the Augustów Roundup). They still await an official Russian explanation and an unequivocal political and moral denouncement.

The works of the Polish-Russian Group on Difficult Matters, revived in 2008, have not focused on facts and description of events since the facts and dates were determined years ago. The Group’s new experience and achievements consisted in the fact that it managed to present the Polish and Russian points of view and assessments of the facts and to set out in a joint publication differences in the perception and historical memory of the two nations²⁴. The Polish and Russian experts presented surprisingly convergent views on the most difficult and sensitive issues (e.g. the Katyn crime, genesis of the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact, Red Army’s invasion of Poland on 17 September 1939, annexation of the Eastern Borderlands etc.). It proved much more difficult for the truth—brought to light after seventy years—to reach millions of Russians. The postulates and opinions of the scholars only served as inspiration and basis for top-level decisions by the presidents and prime ministers of Russia and Poland.

²² Translation of excerpts into English based on Vasily Grossman *Life and Fate* (trans. Robert Chandler), New York—NYRB Classics 2006.

²³ *Ibidem*.

²⁴ *Białe Plamy—Czarne Plamy. Sprawy trudne w relacjach polsko-rosyjskich (1918-2008)* (Black spots—white spots. Difficult matters in Polish-Russian relations. 1918-2008). Adam D. Rotfeld and Anatoly V. Torkunov (ed.). Warsaw—PISM 2010.

Andrzej Wajda's feature film "Katyn" had powerful impact on the attitudes of Russians: broadcast by Channel 1 of Russian television, it ensured that the truth about the Katyn crime reached millions of people. Immediately after the Smolensk air crash (10 April 2010) many other moves and decisions were made, indicating a radical change in the way the truth was to be presented about the Stalinist regime of crime and lawlessness.

Regrettably, in the event, the Smolensk disaster cast a shadow on those awakened hopes.

At the initiative of the co-chairs of the Group on Difficult Matters, the Polish-Russian dialogue and quest for understanding was given institutional character. Two centers were established in Warsaw and Moscow to stimulate contacts between scholars and intellectuals, youth exchanges, and translations of literary masterpieces of the other country. On 17 August 2012 the Patriarch of the Russian Orthodox Church paid the first ever visit to Poland. The Chairman of the Conference of the Polish Episcopate, Archbishop Józef Michalik and Patriarch Kirill I signed at the Royal Castle in Warsaw a Joint Message to the peoples of Poland and Russia, exhorting them to "forgive wrongs, injustices and any evil mutually perpetrated". The authors of the Message noted that "forgiving does not mean forgetting. For remembrance constitutes a crucial part of our identity (...). However, to forgive means to renounce revenge and hatred, to participate in building accord and brotherhood between men, between our peoples and countries, which constitutes the foundation of a peaceful future"²⁵.

I took up the matter again during a recent conversation with the Patriarch in Kaliningrad. On 16 November 2013 he addressed the following words to me concerning the document of August 2012: "The path that led to that event was not easy. There were many problems of a political and psychological nature Yet we pursued our goal with full awareness of the responsibility and full awareness that there was no other way. Regardless of the difficulties we encounter, nothing should be allowed to hinder our progress. We are two nations that—by the will of God—live side by side..."

Unfortunately, the annexation of Crimea and Russia's role in preventing the implementation of the right of Ukraine to make a sovereign free choice about its own future undermined the fundamental principles of the post-Cold-War system in Europe. The crisis and conflict developments between Russia and Western democracies over the future of Ukraine demonstrate the urgent necessity to redefine the set of rules shaping security system in and for Europe. There is no need now to create a new institution but to do something much more difficult. Namely, the democratic community of the European Union and the transatlantic security institutions incl. Council of Europe have to change their way of thinking about the post-Soviet system and their approach toward Russia and Eastern Europe.

²⁵ Joint Message to the peoples of Poland and Russia by the Chairman of the Conference of the Episcopate of Poland, Archbishop Józef Michalik, Metropolitan of Przemyśl, and the Head of the Russian Orthodox Church, Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia Kirill I. Warsaw, 17 August 2012.

The new challenge and new task is to define the proper answer to the question: what has to be done to restore the respect for the set of common European values?

The problem is, however, that Europe is facing its most serious crisis of values since the fall of communism, as noted Piotr Świtalski in his recent essay on *Europe and the Spectre of Post-Growth Society*²⁶. One of the very basic new values is the total elimination of force as an instrument of foreign policy and especially of coercive diplomacy. In other words, the only acceptable way to resolve the conflicts of interests is to enter into the dialogue and negotiation.

The key difference between dialogue and international negotiations consists in the fact that dialogues concern thoughts, ideas and values while negotiations pursue a balance of interests.

Truth is not—and cannot be—subject to negotiations. Moreover, truth never hinders understanding or inflames mutual relations; on the contrary – it purges them of falsehoods, hypocrisy and harmful stereotypes. The process of reconciliation will not be durable and effective if the full truth is not told—without reticence or deception.

Final remarks

On 31 October 1958, in his inaugural lecture at Oxford University, Isaiah Berlin cited a statement made a hundred years prior, in which Heinrich Heine warned the French against underestimating the power of ideas: “Philosophical concepts nurtured in the stillness of a professor’s study could destroy a civilization”. He compared Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason* to a sword used to decapitate European deism and described Rousseau’s works as a blood-stained weapon which, in the hands of Robespierre, had destroyed the old regime; he further prophesied that the romantic faith of Fichte and Schelling would one day be turned, with terrible effect, by their fanatical German followers, against the liberal culture of the West²⁷.

Isaiah Berlin dismissed that argument somewhat ironically, observing that: “The facts have not wholly belied this prediction; but if professors can truly wield this fatal power, may it not be that only other professors, or, at least, other thinkers (and not governments or Congressional committees) can alone disarm them?”²⁸.

These reflections on values and historical memory lead us to several conclusions:

First, it seems valid to conclude that people’s views and convictions are as important as the way in which they behave and act²⁹.

²⁶ Piotr A. Świtalski: *Europe and the Spectre of Post-Growth Society*. Council of Europe Publishing – Strasbourg, Febr. 2014, p. 5.

²⁷ Isaiah Berlin: *Cztery eseje o wolności* (Four Essays on Liberty). Poznań—Zysk i Ska 2000, p. 184.

²⁸ Ibidem.

²⁹ See John Lewis Gaddis: *On Moral Equivalency and Cold War History*. “Ethics and International Affairs”, 1996, vol. 10, pp. 147-148.

Second, values, ideologies and moral-ethical principles are of considerable importance in politics.

Third, we live in times when the division between politics in the domestic and foreign spheres is being eroded; there is mutual penetration of the two. What counts are not only concepts and strategies but also methods of exercising authority within states.

Moreover—and this is my fourth remark—the significance of foreign policy is diminishing; it is gradually losing its role as function of internal policy and becoming its instrument and tool.

Finally—fifth: values vital to human dignity and freedom are of key importance in the politics of democratic states. Especially, under present circumstances this requires that we reassess our way of thinking about foreign policy and change our approach to the formulation of goals and the definition of means which may be used to attain them.

But, as Kipling used to say, that's another story...