

POLES AND RUSSIANS. DIALOGUE AND ATTEMPTS AT CHANGING THE STEREOTYPE

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Abstract

A crusade against ethnic stereotypes is one of the manifestations of the principle of political correctness now obligatory in Europe. They are considered to be the source of xenophobia and racism, and a hindrance to the construction of common Europe and the development of European post-national awareness. According to the author, lack of familiarity with ethnic stereotypes would seriously impede understanding many phenomena, for instance the nature of the relationships between various ethnic/national groups; this includes tensions in Polish/Russian relations. The article presents most crucial elements of the stereotypical image of Russians in the eyes of Poles and vice-versa. It also discusses initiatives to further the Polish/Russian dialogue (especially those undertaken by the Centre for Polish-Russian Dialogue and Understanding). Among others, those initiatives are meant to alter negative stereotypes which still divide Poles and Russians and hinder dialogue between the two nations. Dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church active in Poland and the Russian Orthodox Church is also supposed to contribute to changes in those stereotypes. The author considers the effects of actions undertaken by institutions whose aim is to further the Polish/Russian dialogue, their influence on the relations between Poland and Russia, and the possibility of changing negative stereotypes. She also describes various attitudes which anthropologists may assume with reference to the inter-ethnic dialogue.

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Przejawem obowiązującej w Europie zasady poprawności politycznej jest m. in. walka ze stereotypami etnicznymi. Są one uważane za źródło ksenofobii i rasizmu oraz przeszkodę w budowaniu wspólnej Europy i konstruowaniu europejskiej świadomości post-narodowej. Zdaniem Autorki, bez znajomości stereotypów etnicznych bardzo trudno byłoby zrozumieć wiele zjawisk, np. charakter relacji między różnymi grupami etnicznymi/narodowymi, w tym – napięcia w stosunkach polsko-rosyjskich. W artykule ukazane zostały najważniejsze elementy stereotypowego obrazu Rosjan w oczach Polaków i Polaków w oczach Rosjan. Omówiono także inicjatywy na rzecz dialogu polsko-rosyjskiego (przede wszystkim podejmowane przez Polsko-Rosyjskie Centrum Dialogu i Porozumienia). Mają one służyć m. in. zmianie negatywnych stereotypów wciąż dzielących Rosjan i Polaków, utrudniających porozumienie polsko-rosyjskie. Do zmiany tych stereotypów ma też przyczynić się dialog między Kościołem rzymskokatolickim działającym w Polsce i Rosyjską Cerkwią Prawosławną. Autorka zastanawia się nad efektami działań podejmowanych przez instytucje mające służyć dialogowi polsko-rosyjskiemu, ich wpływem na stosunki Polski z Rosją oraz możliwością zmiany negatywnych stereotypów. Wskazuje też na różne postawy, jakie mogą przyjąć antropolodzy wobec dialogu międzyetnicznego.

Key words: Poland, Russia, dialogue, ethnic stereotypes.

*To a teacher, thanks to whom I have personally learnt
how unjust and hurtful stereotypes can be.*

AGAINST STEREOTYPES

A few years ago, a student of ethnology/cultural anthropology at the University of Toruń, having listened to my lecture concerning ethnic stereotypes,¹ said: “Why speak of stereotypes at all? They only get propagated by this!”. Coming from someone interested in ethnology/cultural anthropology, this observation is astonishing; yet it is in perfect harmony with the mode of thinking and acting which is aimed to eradicate stereotypes from the social discourse, especially from the public sphere. Its enthusiasts consider ethnic stereotypes to be, among others, a serious hindrance to the construction of common Europe and the development of European post-national awareness. They perceive those stereotypes to be the source of xenophobia and racism, and even treat them as a pathology (on this topic, see McDonald 1993, pp. 219–220; Dębicki 2012).² This mode of thinking is observable in Poland as well. In my opinion, the recent (2012) criticism levelled at an advertisement issued by one of the banks and mobile-phone operators (in which a “White Man” in traveller’s garb was accompanied by a half-naked African with a shield and spear) may be considered a manifestation of this trend. Opinions were voiced that this advertisement made use of the negative stereotype of the Other as backward in relation to Western civilisation. In the same year, a well-known actress invited criticism when, speaking in public, she used the stereotype that ascribes a negative feature (stinginess) to one of ethnic groups. In the early 2013 I witnessed the statement of a certain ethnologist who, speaking before the forum of more than a few dozen, declared that contemporary museum collections which refer to traditions of exhibition design propagate a stereotypical image of ethnic groups and hence ought not to be made available to museum-goers.

Maryon McDonald warns against a one-sided and emphatically critical perception of stereotypes. She also recalls the anthropologists’ considerable contribution to the investigation of cultural differences, functions fulfilled by ethnic stereotypes³

¹ I discussed these issues as a part of a lecture cycle concerning the ethnology/anthropology of Europe.

² These authors do not give concrete examples of fighting stereotypes, but only signal the existence of the phenomenon of the striving towards the removal of stereotypes from the public sphere; they also present their own (critical) opinions on this topic.

³ It needs to be recalled that ethnic stereotypes, to, most generally speaking, “images in our heads”, evaluating assessments of particular groups. The author of the concept of a stereotype as the “image in our heads” is Walter Lippmann, an essayist and commentator associated with, among others, “New York Herald Tribune”. His book entitled *Public Opinion* was published in 1922. Lippmann publicised the term ‘stereotype’, first used in 1798 by the printer Denis Didot to denote the ready-made, rigid matrices used in printing. Lippmann stated that people perceive reality by means of of simplified images – stereotypes, because they are unable to grasp it in its entire complexity (McDonald 1993, p. 220; Wilska-Duszyńska 1971, p. 99).

and roles they play in, for instance, the shaping of the “Us” – “Them” or “The Ours” – “The Strangers” relations and the development of some groups’ identity. McDonald emphasises that in the process of building the pan-European community, it is impossible to ignore internal divisions, cultural boundaries or the diversity resulting from e.g. the presence in the European space of ethnic/national minorities (including those created by immigrants). She also states that instead of battling stereotypes by means of prohibitions, it is necessary to accept the fact of their existence. Marcin Dębicki assumes a similar tone, stating that “instead of fighting stereotypes, which [...] are an immanent element of the way a (very) large part of people functions – [...] it is better to show their true face” (Dębicki 2012, p. 328).⁴ The heart of the matter lies not in vehemently negating stereotypes, because examples that would confirm their veracity or question it are equally easy to find. What is indispensable is precisely to show this dual nature of theirs, to accentuate “not so much the falsity as the main feature of a stereotype, as the limited and conditional range of validity of the ‘truth’ contained in this scheme” (*ibidem*, p. 337). Additionally, Dębicki is of the opinion that “postulates to remove stereotypes outside scholarly or press, which are being voiced here and there” are not possible to fulfil; “all efforts aimed at the eradication of stereotypes are, in fact, attempts to remove a thing which is irremovable” (*ibidem*). People use clichés/schemata to think with, they encounter stereotyping from the earliest age, generalised assessments regarding certain collectives function in science, the press or politics. National stereotypes still play a significant role in contemporary Europe. The categories of nation and national identity continue to be of paramount importance to many of its residents (*ibidem*, pp. 328–329, 334). Dębicki considers it possible that differences between particular nations “will continue to be potent as long as identification on a national level is sufficiently important to the Europeans” (*ibidem*, p. 334). He also asks “whether communities gathered around any idea – nation, Europe, region, religion, denomination, race, gender etc. – are at all able to sustain their identity without negative references, and thus avoiding all types of stereotyping or even segregation?” (*ibidem*, p. 338). In his opinion, the answer is in the negative. “[Because] even when the European dimension of identity is reached, it is difficult to imagine a situation of people renouncing stereotypes altogether. It seems more probable that the stereotypes shall change their character, from national to religious or civilisation-related ones” (*ibidem*, p. 335). Dębicki concludes that “even if, with respect to collective identity, sometime in the future the national level is significantly diminished in favour of the regional level, this will not free us from the phenomenon of stereotyping” (*ibidem*, p. 338).

Similarly to McDonald and Dębicki, I am of the opinion that honest and reliable education is of crucial importance – to explain what stereotypes are, how they emerge, what roles they fulfil, and to sensitise people to the fact that those stereotypes may

⁴ All citations from Polish-language texts have been translated for the purpose of the current article (translator’s note).

be unfair towards certain ethnic/national groups and their members. Ethnologists/anthropologists seem particularly well-suited to this mission, since they possess specialist knowledge and rich source materials regarding cultural differences, ethnic stereotypes and the “Us” – “Them” relationships.⁵ A person who is aware that his/her thinking is not free from stereotypes and who understands their nature may correct his/her manner of regarding specific ethnic/national groups, including his/her own group of reference. Such person may strive to avoid transferring the image of the group onto every individual that represents it or ascribing to the entire group features characteristic to individuals who identify with it. It is also important whether a stereotype is used, for instance, to vilify some person or group and expose them to ridicule; whether they are used for the purpose of propaganda; whether they are propagated with full awareness of doing so or heedlessly, by repeating information the sources of which are not always possible to point out.

The striving to eliminate ethnic stereotypes from the public sphere, and perhaps even, generally, from our thinking, is probably a manifestation of political correctness. It may also be perceived as an element of the unification policy. Yet, willy-nilly, stereotypes are an important part of culture, European culture not being an exception. Many phenomena would be exceedingly difficult to explain without familiarity with stereotypes or without paying heed to conditions that influenced their shaping. Tensions in Polish/Russian relations are case in point; speaking more broadly, the character of relations between various ethnic/national groups would be difficult to understand without the awareness of relevant stereotypes. It would also be difficult to appreciate the initiatives undertaken in the recent years to further the Polish/Russian dialogue. One of their aims is to change the current manner of perceiving Russians by Poles and vice-versa.

THE DURABILITY OF STEREOTYPES AND INTER-ETHNIC RELATIONS

The Polish/Russian relations seen in the distorting mirror of stereotypes have been the subject of many studies (see e.g. de Lazari (ed.) 2004; de Lazari (ed.) 2006; Giza 1993; Kępiński 1990; Magdziak-Miszewska et al. (eds.) 2002; Niewiara 2000). It must be remembered that the image of the Russians (in Polish: *Rosjanie*; also termed *Moskale* [Muscovites] or *Rusini* [Ruthenians]) in the eyes of the Polish society was formed in

⁵ Ewa Nowicka considers anthropology to be “a particularly liberating science; liberating from ethnic stereotypes, racial biases and national prejudices. Anthropology fulfils this liberating function through the intense influence of views, assumptions and trends of thinking mandatory in this science on social awareness” (Nowicka 1997, p. 14). She also states that “of all the practical influences exercised by anthropology,” she herself is inclined to consider this one to be “the greatest, and socially the most important” (*ibidem*).

the atmosphere of political conflicts and struggle for influence, in the shadow of the ever-growing power of Moscow in Europe and in the waning days of the Commonwealth of Poland and Lithuania. In principle, the stereotypical image of Russians, elements of which have survived intact to our times, emerged in the 16th and 17th century. Yet Ruthenians are called barbarians⁶ and cruel brigands already in *Kronika polska* by Wincenty Kadłubek, dating from the late 12th/early 13th century (Sucharski 2006, p. 77). In the 16th-century Polish literature, Russians were described as “bearing enslavement patiently” (*ibidem*, p. 82), but also as false, aggressive, greedy, savage, relentless and cruel (*ibidem*, p. 83–88), “accustomed to bearing the yoke” (*ibidem*, p. 88). The Russians’ civilisational inferiority and lack of manners were mentioned (*ibidem*, p. 93). Features ascribed to them were “duplicity, fraudulence, avarice, falsity, corruption, inclination to bearing false witness, inclination to stealing, drunkenness, violence” and disrespect for the law (*ibidem*, p. 97). To Poles, Russians seemed to be barbarians occupying the lands “outside the orbit of the world”, in its periphery, similarly to, for instance, the Tartars, with whom the Commonwealth fought many wars (Miłosz 2010, pp. 20–21). They were irritated by the Russians’ “incomprehensible docility in the face of their rulers’ despotism, their inclination to breaking promises, duplicity [...] the savagery of their customs was ridiculed” (*ibidem*, p. 20).

Not all the sources present an exclusively negative image of Russians, however. For instance, the 16th-century journals and travel diaries inform of their physical prowess and endurance, the strength and considerable manpower of the Russian army (Niewiara 2000, p. 132). Yet already in the 17th century there appear remarks concerning the adverse features of Russian soldiers: demoralisation, dishonourable behaviour towards the residents of conquered lands, lack of patriotism. The Russians’ docility was criticised, because it was considered to be enforced with the rod (Niewiara 2000, pp. 132–133, 137–139). The phenomenon of an alteration in the stereotype (in this case, that of a Pole) occurred in Russia as well, in the mid-17th century (Piczugin 2006, p. 343).

Throughout the 18th century Poles were increasingly often “experiencing Russia’s domination. They perceived it as ruling over ‘a half of the terrestrial globe’, subduing countless nations of Europe and Asia, certainly no longer heeding Polish rights” (Niewiara 2000, pp. 139–140). Russia was presented as an “imperialist, acquisitive state [...] based on a political regime essentially different from that in other countries worldwide, struggling with difficulties resulting from its diplomatic isolation and low economic level [...]” (Serczyk 1978, p. 12). Russia’s increasing power, its participation in the partitions of the Commonwealth⁷ and the bloody suppression of national uprisings in 1831 and 1863 did much to fix this image permanently (*ibidem*, pp. 12–14). Russia was identified with an “Asiatic, non-European, barbarian culture and civilisation”

⁶ This feature is invariably found in the stereotype of a Russian, also in the later periods (see e.g. Bohun 2006, pp. 206–209, 217–235, 272–273, 299–302).

⁷ In concert with Austria and Prussia, who also shared in the spoils.

(Niewiara 2000, p. 141). “The perception of Muscovites as barbarians is accompanied by disparaging remarks as to their education” (*ibidem*, p. 142). Russians were described as bellicose, savage, cruel, deceitful, covetous, conniving, grasping, quick to betray, lie, cheat and steal. They were accused of a lack of good manners, coarseness, overuse of alcohol, passivity, arrogance, and blind obedience towards the regime and its officials (*ibidem*, pp. 134–136; see also Giza 1993, pp. 43–48).

Poland’s defeat in the struggle against Russia for influence in Europe, which finished with its three successive partitions, came as a surprise to many Poles (Miłosz 2010, p. 21). Additionally, they felt humiliated by being defeated by Russians, whom they had looked upon as inferiors. In their opinion, Polish superiority was caused by Poland’s belonging to the Western, Catholic world (*ibidem*, p. 22). Russians, in turn, were irritated by the fact that Poles, although “subdued, showed their contempt of their conqueror, denying him any merit [...]” (*ibidem*, p. 21; see also Piczugin 2006, pp. 387–388).

The Russian poet Alexander Pushkin did not conceal in his verses his “anger against the wild pride of the vanquished, who did not want to admit that they had been conquered once and for all, who were conspiring and dreaming of revenge [...]” (Miłosz 2010, p. 21). According to Czesław Miłosz, Pushkin’s poems “are [...] more than a condemnation of a nation trying to regain its independence. The memory of the great rivalry is still vivid in them; Poland’s existence would again revive the question to whom Polotsk and Kiev were supposed to belong, and thus would strike at the ‘to be or not to be’ of the empire [...]” (*ibidem*). Miłosz notes the presence of “all hostile feelings” in the Polish/Russian relations, “from contempt and disgust to hate, which [however] do not exclude an unfathomable mutual attraction, albeit always marked by distrust [...]” (*ibidem*, p. 19).⁸

Russians often considered Poles to be men with no honour or dignity. After the partitions of the Commonwealth, Polish society produced “many traitors and career-seekers, who were not going to mourn the loss of independence. Many of them immediately rushed to the new master to serve him faithfully, and forgot their origins [...]” (Giza 1993, p. 13; see also *ibidem*, p. 36). “An ignoble, deceitful, fraudulent Pole, a man of no character, inclined to debase himself, constituted a familiar motif” (*ibidem*, p. 95). The Russian poet and literary critic Prince Pyotr Vyazemsky, emphasising the “age-old Polish/Russian hostility” (*ibidem*, p. 17), wrote that “Poles are our enemies to no greater extent than we are theirs. The only point of difference is that their weapon is a little knife for sharpening quills, while ours – an axe” (*ibidem*). Russians blamed Poles for the bad relations, criticised their pro-Western sympathies, accused them of

⁸ First edition: Cz. Miłosz, *Rodzinna Europa*, Instytut Literacki, Paris 1959, pp. 108–128; reprint: Cz. Miłosz, *Rodzinna Europa*, [in:] *Dzieła zebrane*, Wydawnictwo Literackie, Cracow 2001, pp. 146–172 (after Miłosz 2010, p. 283).

“attempting to thwart Russia on the pan-European arena” and perceived the history of Poland as the “school of anti-Russian feeling” (*ibidem*, pp. 34–35).

“Poles were considered to be champions of democracy and freedom, and this was called anarchy in Russia. Russians [...] vilified Poles for their love of the Golden Freedom, which to any tsar of Russia was a particularly hateful concept” (*ibidem*, p. 11). Other points of disagreement were “the rivalry for primacy in the Slavonic lands” and “the fierce struggle for the Belorussian, Ukrainian and Lithuanian territories, increasingly strongly desired by the successive tsars and defended by Poles with great determination until the end of the 18th century” (*ibidem*). Let it be added that the struggle for dominance in those territories is still continuing (see e.g. Piczugin 2006, pp. 376–385; Rotfeld 2012, pp. 28, 54). “When it comes to those territories, disputed and still central to the future of Europe, the Polish and Russian political interests turned out to be tragically antithetical” (Piczugin 2006, p. 379). Causes of their antagonism include (and have included for a long time) also “Polish pro-Western sympathies”, “Polish fascination with the West, often [...] uncritical and almost idolatrous” (Giza 1993, p. 10; cf. Rotfeld 2012, p. 25). The Catholic denomination prevalent in Poland was considered by Russians to be a religion “worse [...] than Orthodoxy and alien to the Slavonic spirit. In their opinion, those Slavs who were Catholic by this very fact became ‘Judases’ and enemies of the Slavonic lands. [...] What is more, in 19th-century Russia it was being scientifically proved that initially, in the 8th and 9th century, the early-medieval Poland was an Orthodox country and only in the second half of the 10th century, as a result of the ‘betrayal’ of Mieszko I, it became Catholic” (Giza 1993, p. 10).⁹ In the eyes of Poles, in turn, Orthodoxy was a “false” faith; it was considered “pagan”. Yet it was also pointed out that religion was a source of strength to Russians, further reinforced by “national pride” (Niewiara 2000, p. 140).

In the 19th century, the fundamental source of antagonisms in the Polish/Russian relations were “the partitions, but also the pro-German policy of the tsars, as well as the Poles’ pro-Western political and cultural orientation, which profoundly irritated Russians, and the Polish national uprisings, the Russians’ desire to possess and dominate, their ruthlessness towards Polish patriots and their pan-Slavism, Poles’ certainty of their civilisational superiority over Russians etc. All this progressively inflamed the already nearly pathological hate” (Giza 1993, p. 6). Antoni Giza adds that “in this *sui generis* contest of two hates, an increasingly important role was played by the widely disseminated opinions, the aim of which was to ridicule the opposite nation, to ascribe to it a whole gamut of features – negative ones, of course [...]” (*ibidem*, p. 12).

The partitions of Poland and loss of their own state cemented the Polish perception of Russia as the enemy of freedom (Sucharski 2006, p. 108). Written in emigration, the

⁹ The Polish scholar Dr Paweł Ładykowski has informed me that such information is still being disseminated in Russia and is often accepted as scientifically proven and true.

works of the great Polish poet Adam Mickiewicz present the tsarist Russia as a state based on deceit, despotism, cruelty and contempt for the people (*ibidem*, p. 112). Another émigré writer, Henryk Kamiński, described Russia as a barbarian state, governed by “blind violence” and “rotting in slavery” (*ibidem*, pp. 121–122). To Józef Ignacy Kraszewski, Russians were “slayers of the Polish nation” (*ibidem*, p. 124), pagans and men of “primitive savagery” (*ibidem*, p. 125). They were characterised by “an inclination to lying, impiety (the peasantry excepted), meekness, snitching, spying, ubiquitous chaos [...], pride and vainglory” (*ibidem*). Literature of the Romantic era cemented and reinforced the majority of prejudices and negative elements of the stereotypical image of Russians in the Polish eyes. “The seeds of prejudices had existed earlier, of course; but they were appropriated by the Romanticism and distinctly strengthened. [...] Polish identity and cultural ‘programming’ are still in a prevalent measure defined by that era. The same pertains to the Polish/Russian relations. In the first half of the 19th century, especially in the period between the uprisings (1831–1863), almost the entire gamut of prejudices springing from the perception of Russia in categories negative from the point of view of ethics, politics and civilisation becomes visible. The perception of the East (North) as an alien, inhuman, Asiatic world and of its barbarism, savagery, hostility, despotism, slavery, cruelty, pride, duplicity and many other features are rooted in the Romanticism. Those notions permeate the current common images of Russia and Russians, which are the material for the contemporary, similarly negative stereotype” (Bohun 2006, pp. 211–212).

The negative image of Russia and Russians, reinforced in the Polish society by means of, among others, literary texts, diaries and journals, was not an exception. The perception of Russia in Western Europe was the same. It was associated with barbarity, savagery, lack of culture, aggression, menace, indolence, despotism, lack of initiative, cruelty, autocracy, backwardness, drunkenness, illiteracy or absolutism. Russia was presented in opposition to the West, to the latter ascribing, among others, rationalism, culture/civilisation, progress, democracy (de Lazari, Riabov 2010, pp. 318–320; Żakowska 2010, pp. 338–345). Identified with the East, Russia was being located outside the boundary of Europe. The country and its inhabitants were caricatured as an animal, a grotesque bear (Żakowska 2010: 338).¹⁰ This “barbaric monster” was supposed to express the Russian alienness, strength, bloodthirstiness, savagery (*ibidem*, p. 344). The lash held in its paws was a symbol of despotism (*ibidem*, p. 345).¹¹ The metaphor

¹⁰ Another symbol of Russia was Ivan the Cossack, a savage, vulgar, uncouth and aggressive barbarian (Żakowska 2010, pp. 342–343). A Hungarian map dating from 1877 shows Russia as a huge octopus, enfolding a large part of Europe, as well as Turkey, a part of Central Asia and Persia in its tentacles (Demski 2008, pp. 100–107). “The metaphor of the octopus alludes to Russia’s widespread and numerous interests” (*ibidem*, p. 107); on the stereotype of Russians, see also de Lazari, Riabov 2010; de Lazari (ed.) 2004; de Lazari (ed.) 2006; Malia 1999; Neumann 1999.

¹¹ For more on caricatures as a manner of expressing the stereotypically perceived ethnic and social relations, see Demski 2008; Demski, Baraniecka-Olszewska (eds.) 2010.

of Russia as a bear originated from the late 17th-century German political rhetoric. The philosopher Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, even though he regarded Tsar Peter I with favour, called Russia a “baptised bear” (*ibidem*, p. 344).

From the second half of the 19th century onward, the Western Europe, especially Germany, began to change the attitude towards Russia. The Russian victory in the Crimean War (1853–1856) and the economic and legal reforms undertaken in Russia, which in the West were perceived as a step towards its Europeanisation, chiefly contributed to this change. A fascination with the Russian culture and spiritual values was growing in many milieus of the West. Russia began to be perceived as a part of Europe, and its culture as an element of the European culture (*ibidem*, pp. 346–347). Yet, despite those changes, the stereotypical image of a bear is still occasionally used in the Western countries to denote Russia and Russians. This metaphor is familiar also in the post-Communist states (de Lazari, Riabov 2010, pp. 319, 324).

The bear as a symbol of Russia and Russians, personifying such features as, for instance, savagery, lack of culture and despotism, was a popular motif in Polish satirical magazines of the inter-war period (1918–1939). Elements referring to the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, which emerged after the First World War, to the Soviet imperialism, Bolshevism and atheism (treated as an opposition to the Christian Europe) were added to the image of the bear at that time (de Lazari, Riabov 2010, pp. 320–323). Russians remained a faraway, alien and menacing people (*ibidem*, p. 324). The negative image of Russia/the USSR and Russians dominated also in the Polish press of the inter-war period (Giza 1993, pp. 135–136; Serczyk 1978, p. 14; Sucharski 2006, pp. 137–141; Stobiecki 2006, pp. 175–185).

In the Socialist era, the Polish/Russian relations “could be written about only in positive terms, to satisfy the needs of politics and the official propaganda” (Giza 1993: 6; see also Romek (ed.) 2000; Tokarz 2011). The negative image of Russians and the USSR (“the evil empire”) was, however, present in the émigré literature (Sucharski 2006, pp. 144–157). In Poland, the strategy of silence ended only in the 1990s (Giza 1993, p. 6). Significantly, in spite of the protracted efforts of the official propaganda and censorship to prevent any negative features of Russians or information critical to the USSR from reaching the social awareness, many elements of their negative stereotype are still current today. This is confirmed by, for instance, research conducted by Joanna Zienkiewicz among the students of Pedagogy at the Academy of Podlasie (since 2010 University of Podlasie) in Siedlce.¹² Her research revealed that Russians are perceived

¹² The research concerned the image of selected ethnic/national groups inhabiting Eastern Europe. Participants were given a scale “containing 42 pairs of antonymous descriptions, prepared by Ida Kurcz and modelled on Osgood’s Semantic Differential Scale. The respondents’ task was to assess, on seven-point scale, whether a given nationality is associated with a particular description. The respondents were provided with [among others] the following pairs of descriptions: talkative – reticent, a collectivist – an individualist, arrogant – polite, [...] savage – cultured, joyless – joyful, cowardly – courageous, [...] meek – proud, [...] uneducated – educated, [...] passive – active [...]” (Zienkiewicz 2005, p. 149).

as characterised by loud behaviour, violent nature (marked by 88% of respondents), talkativeness (83%), vainglory (75%), materialism (69%). Moreover, a stereotypical Russian is “poor, greedy, stubborn (65%), dirty, duplicitous, undependable (56%), [...] mendacious, aggressive, conservative (52%), arrogant, hostile (50%), dishonest, untidy, uneducated, savage, cold, a collectivist, unambitious (44%), disagreeable, dependant on others, stupid, cruel, remote (32%), inflexible, dumb, lazy (29%), passive, undignified (25%)” (Zienkiewicz 2005, pp. 149–150). It is quite obvious that many of the above features have already been mentioned in the stereotypical characterisations of Russians; it is, therefore, possible to speak of a continuation of those stereotypes. But the image of this group is not exclusively negative; it is characterised by an ambivalence typical to stereotypes.¹³ Some of the respondents considered Russians to be “proud, courageous (65%), strong (56%), joyful (52%), demonstrative (45%), self-sufficient, open, hard-working (40%), active, affable, entrepreneurial (30%), educated, agreeable, familiar (25%)” (*ibidem*, p. 150). Zienkiewicz does not explain from where her respondents were drawing their knowledge of the Russian character. The influence exercised by, for instance, family tales, literature, history taught at school, films, Russian music, theatre and art, direct contacts or the media on the respondents’ perception is not assessed. Most often it is assumed that stereotypes are passed on “in the process of an individual’s socialisation. We have no inborn notions; neither do we have inborn stereotypes” (Chlewiński 2001, p. 123). Far more rarely, in my opinion, are we given any information as to the circumstances in which particular individuals encounter certain stereotypes, their reactions to this phenomenon, their attempts to confirm or disprove stereotypes etc.

The co-occurrence of positive and negative features in the image of Russians is revealed also by the results of research by Danuta Lalak and Katarzyna Rychlicka-Maroszek, conducted upon the students of the University of Warsaw. The respondents singled out joyfulness and a sense of fun (ca. 70% of responses) as the most important features of the group. Over 40% stated that Russians were ruthless; they were also described as crooks and swindlers. From 30 to 40% considered them to be stubborn, careless, crafty and uneducated. At the same time, it was stated they were open and hospitable. The fewest respondents marked such features as cleanliness, modesty, honesty, humility, amenability, culture, ability to get on with people (Lalak 2007, p. 97). The author does not state from what sources her respondents were drawing their knowledge of the Russian character; she only emphasises that “attribution of features typifying the representatives of a [particular] nation is based mainly on stereotypical perceptions concerning them [...], which are characterised by a much greater durability than the political assessments made on the spur of the moment” (*ibidem*, p. 98). She

¹³ In the case of some respondents, we may be dealing with the combination of fascination and distrust remarked by Miłosz.

also remarks that “feelings aroused by other nations can be treated as an indicator of emotional attitudes towards the members of those nations and, to a certain extent, an indicator of the communication possibilities in inter-cultural relations” (*ibidem*), pointing out that “the attitude to other nations is the net result of experiences deriving from historical past, current political situation, stereotypes rooted in the social awareness, and personal observations and experiences concerning members of [those] nations”¹⁴ (*ibidem*). According to Lalak, the study of distance cultural is “a sounder and more reliable measure of inter-cultural relations than the declarations of sympathy or antipathy in relation to selected nations” (*ibidem*, p. 97). The question that must be answered, however, is whether “the declared cultural proximity is an imperative to action; whether it stimulates establishing contacts and weakens the categorising and discriminative power of the ‘otherness’ syndrome” (*ibidem*).

Conclusions as to the Poles’ attitude to other ethnic/national groups can be drawn on the basis of surveys, since 1993 conducted systematically by the Public Opinion Research Center (Centrum Badania Opinii Społecznej, henceforward: CBOS). Their results indicate the sympathy, antipathy or indifference towards the Others. From a comparison of data obtained from surveys conducted in consecutive years, conclusions can be drawn also with regard to the transformations in the attitudes to selected groups (or lack thereof). For instance, the survey conducted by CBOS in the year 2005 indicated that more than a half of the Polish respondents declared a clear dislike of the Russians, Romanians, Romany (Gypsies) and Arabs” (Lalak 2007, p. 104). Similar research conducted by CBOS in 2012 indicated that the negative attitude towards Russians persisted but, negative responses accounting for over 30% of the overall number of responses, it has diminished in relation to the year 2005.¹⁵ In my opinion, comments to the research results, which appeared in the Internet, are as important as the results themselves. Those comments included criticism levelled at the Russians. An extreme case was a statement by an Internet user who considered declaring a liking towards this group (and a liking for the Germans as well) to be a symptom of pathology.¹⁶ The

¹⁴ Those observations and experiences may vary considerably. In the early February 2013 I was in the Studio Theatre in Warsaw. The play was “Marriage” by Nikolai Gogol, directed by Ivan Vyrypaev. During the break, I overheard a middle-aged gentleman who sat next to me remarking to his young lady companion: “The Russians have no sense of humour”. This remark did not concern only the show, very innovatively staged by a Russian director on the basis of a play by a Russian dramatist. Their rather loud conversation indicated that the gentleman had been to Russia several times and his assessment of Russians was based on his own experience. I, in contrast, also having been to Russia a few times, would never say that they are devoid of a sense of humour. A similar conclusion springs from the already mentioned research by D. Lalak and K. Rychlicka-Maroszek; let me emphasise that joyfulness and a sense of fun were the features of Russians pointed to by a clear majority of respondents.

¹⁵ A similar percentage of negative responses was noted in relation to the Chinese, Vietnamese and Turks; <http://sondaz/wp.pl/lat.1515,wid.15302327.wiadomosci,html/ticaid...> (accessed 11 Feb. 2013).

¹⁶ *Ibidem*.

surveys indicate that only a section of the Polish society evinces a negative attitude towards Russians (as well as towards the other ethnic/national groups taken under consideration in the research). The questions that arise concern the origin of the differences in attitudes, and the influence of, for instance, personal experiences, fortunes of the closest relatives, political views, the knowledge of history, the reading matter or the media on the attitudes towards the Others.

Results of the surveys “constitute [among others] a basis for reflection concerning the potential openness of the Polish people towards the ‘aliens’ [...]” (Lalak 2007, p. 104). Crucial questions to pose here are the following. Are those results in any way used in practice? Have any politicians evinced an interest in them? May the attempts at a mutual warming by means of initiatives furthering the Polish/Russian dialogue, which have been undertaken in the recent years, be considered an answer to the negative attitude of a part of the Polish society towards Russians which was confirmed by that research?

Before I move on to the discussion of those initiatives, I would like to point out that, similarly as many elements of the negative image of the Russians persist in Poland, a critical view of the Polish people is still dominant in Russia. Features ascribed to them are, among others, vainglory, arrogance, malice, taking excessive pride in belonging to the Western culture, insincerity, pathological ambition, lack of humility, bitterness, too-high opinion of themselves, excessive political ambitions. Poles are perceived as unruly, vain, egoistic, “sick with Russophobia” (see e.g. Piczugin 2006; quote p. 357). Nikolai Alyekseev stated that in the Russian opinion, Polish people “have a screw loose, [are] feverish, daft, swindling, incapable of state-building activity, ungrateful, entirely groundlessly considering themselves to be Europeans, Jesuit-Catholics, braggarts, miserly and prodigal at the same time, lechers, drunkards. But also – men of honour, courteous, romantic, heroic, patriots of their own country, ‘brother Slavs’, good drinking companions” (quoted after Piczugin 2006, p. 341).

Russian historiography plays an exceedingly important role in the shaping of the Russian’s attitude to Poles. Russians are still very much affected by Nikolai Karamzin’s *History of the Russian State*, dating from the early 19th century. They are, for instance, convinced that they had had the right to conquer other states, Poland including, and that “Poland is a legitimate Russian property” (Piczugin 2006, p. 374; for more, see Kutiawin 2006). Russians do not feel any guilt with regard to Poles, whereas a part of the Polish society expects them to apologise for, among others, Stalinist repressions, the capture of Poland’s eastern territories in September 1939, the execution of Polish officers at Katyń and other execution grounds. Russians are sure of their reasons, while of many historical events they simply “have no knowledge at all [...]”. Hence they do not understand the Polish ‘reckoning’ with history [...]” (de Lazari 2006, p. 18). Andrzej de Lazari is of the opinion that “history is not, and probably for a long time will not be, a factor that would contribute to the shaping of friendly relations between Poland and Russia [...]” (*ibidem*). He also emphasises that Polish-Russian conflicts are rooted not

only in history and the ways of its interpretation; they also originate from “a different ‘cultural programming’, as well as from the usurpation of the privilege of possessing the Truth and Righteousness [...]” (*ibidem*, p. 25). Poles and Russians differ also in their manner of understanding many notions, for instance country, nation, state, land, honour, pride, an individual or a collective. Their approach to life and its mundane aspects is different (de Lazari 2006; Piczugin 2006, pp. 401–410). In order for them to get mutually acquainted and to communicate better, dialogue is indispensable.

POLISH/RUSSIAN DIALOGUE. ATTEMPTS AT CHANGING THE STEREOTYPE

For some years now initiatives undertaken in Poland and Russia aim to popularise the notion of Polish/Russian dialogue. To this end, the Polish-Russian Group for Difficult Issues (Polsko-Rosyjska Grupa do Spraw Trudnych) was established in 2002.¹⁷ The Polish/Russian Forum for Civic Dialogue (Polsko-Rosyjskie Forum Dialogu Obywatelskiego) was established in 2003.¹⁸ Inauguration of the Centre for Polish-Russian Dialogue and Understanding (Polsko-Rosyjskie Centrum Dialogu i Porozumienia) took place in 2011.¹⁹ The dialogue is to be furthered by, among others, scholarly cooperation (including archival research), particularly cooperation concerning the selected

¹⁷ See e.g.: *Polsko-Rosyjska Grupa do Spraw Trudnych* – Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopedia; http://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Polsko_Rosyjska_Grupa_do_Spraw_Trudnych... (accessed 6 June 2011); *Komunikat o wynikach pracy posiedzenia Wspólnej Polsko-Rosyjskiej Grupy do Spraw Trudnych*; <http://www.msz.gov.pl/Komunikat,o,wynikach,pracy,posiedzenia,wspolnej,Polsko-Rosyjskiej...> (accessed 6 June 2011); *Polska-Rosja/Kontrowersyjny początek prac Grupy do Spraw Trudnych*; <http://www.psz.pl/index/php?option=com.content...> (accessed 6 June 2011); *Zbiera się Polsko-Rosyjska Komisja ds. Trudnych*; <http://wiadomosci.wp.pl/kat,1342,title/Zbiera-sie-Polsko-Rosyjska-Grupa-ds-Trudnych...> (accessed 6 June 2011); see also Rotfeld 2012: 29–32.

¹⁸ *W Moskwie odbyło się Polsko-Rosyjskie Forum Dialogu Obywatelskiego*; <http://fakty.interia.pl/swiat/news/w-moskwie-odbylo-sie-polsko-rosyjskie-forum-dial...> (accessed 27 Feb. 2013).

¹⁹ The historian Sławomir Dębski is the Centre’s director. The Centre cooperates with, among others, Jerzy Bahr – former ambassador of Poland in Moscow, member of the Polish-Russian Group for Difficult Issues; Andrzej Grajewski – co-chairman of the board of the Foundation for Polish-German Cooperation, member of the same Group; Adolf Juzwenko – director of the Ossolineum Publishing House [the publishing house is no longer in existence – I.K.]; Jacek Miler – director of the National Heritage Department at the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage; Jerzy Pomianowski – editor-in-chief of the “Novaá Polśa” quarterly, member of the Polish-Russian Group for Difficult Issues; Adam Daniel Rotfeld – co-chairman of the Group with Anatolij Torkunov; Władysław Stępiak – head director of State Archives, member of the same Group; Łukasz Kamiński – chairman of the Institute of National Remembrance; Andrzej Kunert – secretary of the Commemoration of Martyrdom Council, member of the Polish-Russian Group for Difficult Issues, Daria Nałęcz – member of the Group, Włodzimierz Marciniak – member of the Group; <http://www.cprdip.pl/main/index.php?id-powolanie-dyrektora-centrum-polsko-rosyjs...> (accessed 21 Oct. 2011).

issued in the history, culture and national heritage of Poland and Russia, as well as by the publication of studies relative to the history of both states and to Polish/Russian relations, by pupil and student exchanges, by the organisation of relevant seminars, lectures and conferences, and popularisation of information about Poland in Russia and vice-versa. The target of the Centre's actions is to "bring the two nations closer, [...] safeguard the remembrance of the lives of Poles in Russia and Russians in Poland. [...]. The aim is also to support [...] dialogue in the contemporary Polish/Russian relations, to propagate knowledge about mutual relations in the Polish and Russian society, [...] to support the scholarly and academic milieu, as well as the non-governmental, self-governmental and economic organisations. [...]"²⁰ One of the Centre's initiatives was to commence two research projects: one pertaining to the fortunes of the Polish prisoners of war in the USSR in September 1939, the other – to Red Army soldiers who died in Poland in the years 1944–1945.²¹ The reconstruction of the Belorussian Katyń record (in cooperation with Russian researchers) is planned. The record "encompasses 3870 persons arrested by the NKVD in the eastern voivodships of the Second Republic of Poland, and subsequently executed, most probably in the Minsk prison, and buried at the nearby Kuropaty together with the bodies of other victims of Stalinist terror".²² Joint research on selected historical issues is, among others, "to promote better understanding of [...] [both] nations".²³

The Centre's actions are to "counteract unjust stereotypes".²⁴ I am puzzled as to how the concept of an 'unjust stereotype' is supposed to be understood, and also in what way this aim is supposed to be attained. Does this mean complete elimination of negative stereotypes of Russians and Poles from the public sphere and a diametrical change of the perception of Russians in Poland and Poles in Russia? By means of what methods can this aim be attained and is a complete realisation of such a scenario altogether possible? It must be remembered that a transformation of stereotypes requires a long time. Also necessary are conditions favourable to the improvement of relations between specific (ethnic/national) groups and to the evolution of an atmosphere of mutual trust.²⁵

²⁰ *Utworzenie Centrum Polsko-Rosyjskiego Dialogu i Porozumienia – czy prawo może uleczyć historię?*; http://www.eporady24.pl/utworzenie_centrum_polsko_rosyjskiego_dialogu_i_porozumienia... (accessed 23 May 2011).

²¹ *Centrum Dialogu i Porozumienia w budowie*; http://wyborcza.pl/1,75515,8944392, Centrum_Dialogu_i_Porozumienia_w_budowie... (accessed 23 May 2011).

²² *Wprost 24 – Powstanie Centrum Rosyjsko-Polskiego Dialogu i Porozumienia*; <http://www.wprost.pl/ar/26589/Powstanie-Centrum-Rosyjsko-Polskiego-Dialogu-i...> (accessed 21 Oct. 2011).

²³ *Ibidem*. These words come from the statement of Andriey Artizov, director of the Russian Archive Agency, to whom establishing the Centre for Russian-Polish Dialogue and Understanding is due.

²⁴ *Utworzenie Centrum Polsko-Rosyjskiego Dialogu i Porozumienia – czy prawo może uleczyć historię?*; http://www.eporady24.pl/utworzenie_centrum_polsko_rosyjskiego_dialogu_i_porozumienia... (accessed 23 May 2011).

²⁵ As demonstrated by, for instance, German-French relations (McDonald 1993, pp. 229–231).

Cooperation with the young people is of fundamental importance “in the process of shaping Polish/Russian relations by means of research and study of history and culture, mutual acquaintance with national heritage”.²⁶ According to Sławomir Dębski, it may help, among others, “to decrease the influence exercised by prejudices, antipathies, mutual negative stereotypes on our relations. The older generations find it very difficult to get rid of them, as we have constantly found while observing Polish/Russian relations in the last two decades”.²⁷

In 2012, the Centre for Polish-Russian Dialogue and Understanding announced a contest addressed to schoolchildren and students, involving “financing enterprises undertaken to further dialogue and understanding in Polish/Russian relations”.²⁸ Participants were offered the following themes to select from: “1) Napoleon’s Europe in the eyes of Poles and Russians; 2) Poles in Russia, Russians in Poland – deportees, discoverers, builders, soldiers, creators, emigrants; 3) Europe in the Polish and Russian literature; 4) Architecture of the second half of the 19th century in Poland and Russia – inspirations, influences, effects, similarities and differences; 5) Transfrontier historical and cultural trails in the small-scale transfrontier mobility zone – competition for projects of jointly developed trails”.²⁹ Organisers of the contest considered it crucial that joint research projects, field trips, conferences, lectures etc. serve to show, among others, “the perspectives which are dominant in the historiography and historical memory of each of the nations”.³⁰ The “potential difference in perspectives” was deemed to be “an invitation to a dialogue [...] [encompassing various] historical issues”.³¹ It was emphasised that this difference may be “assist in [...] understanding the other side better”.³²

Another contest was announced in the early 2013. The following topics were proposed: “1. Little homelands – of whom are proud? Tracing the local heroes; 2. Poles and Russians – a mutual portrait on the example of selected literary works; 3. Mutual inspirations in music; 4. Everyday life of Poles and Russians; 5. Poland and Russia in photographs; 6. Neoclassical architecture in Poland and Russia”.³³ This contest,

²⁶ *Centrum partnerem konkursu dla młodzieży szkolnej „Historia bliska”*; the Centre for Polish-Russian Dialogue and Understanding; <http://www.cprdip.pl/index.php?id=konkurs-historia-bliska> (accessed 21 Oct. 2011). The statement by Sławomir Dębski, director of the Centre for Polish-Russian Dialogue and Understanding.

²⁷ *Ibidem*.

²⁸ *Polsko-Rosyjska Wymiana Młodzieży. Centrum Polsko-Rosyjskiego Dialogu i Porozumienia. „Polsko-Rosyjska Wymiana Młodzieży 2012: Ścieżki Tematyczne*, the Centre for Polish-Russian Dialogue and Understanding website (accessed 27 Feb. 2013).

²⁹ *Ibidem*.

³⁰ *Ibidem*.

³¹ *Ibidem*.

³² *Ibidem*.

³³ *Polsko-Rosyjska Wymiana Młodzieży – edycja 2013*, <http://skrzydlatestudia.pl/index/polsko-rosyjska-wymiana-mlodziezy-edy...> (accessed 27 Feb. 2013).

similarly to the one organised in 2012 is to contribute, among others, to “[...] developing inter-cultural dialogue between young people from the Republic of Poland and the Russian Federation; [...] developing bonds on the basis of common interests and respect for national and cultural differences; [...] mutually overcoming barriers, stereotypes and prejudices; [...] learning about Polish/Russian relations, history, culture and heritage of both nations; [...] establishing durable contacts between participants of youth exchange”.³⁴ Organisers of the contests refer to the “experience deriving from Polish/German and Russian/German relations, indicating that a youth exchange is a very effective instrument in counteracting prejudices with which relations between neighbouring nations are burdened. [...]”³⁵ They also remark that the absence of closer contacts between the young people of Poland and Russia “results in the preservation of mutual stereotypes and in effect means a very limited knowledge of contemporary Poland and Russia, the history, culture and heritage of the two nations. [...]”³⁶

The Centre for Russian-Polish Dialogue and Understanding, which commenced its activity in September 2012, considers cooperation with the young people to be its priority. Its chairman, Pyotr Stegnyi, said that the Centre “shall be oriented only towards the future”.³⁷ In my opinion, his statement is contradicted the fact that the Centre has already organised conferences devoted to the anniversary of the ousting of Polish army from Moscow in 1612 and to Napoleon’s expedition against Russia in 1812, in which the Polish legion took part.³⁸ One might wonder why special importance is ascribed to events from distant past; but the Russian manner of viewing history (including the history of Polish/Russian relations) has to be taken into consideration.

Time will tell what influence the actions undertaken by the Centre for Dialogue and Understanding will have on Polish/Russian relations (on various levels), and what effects the youth exchange will bring – whether it will noticeably contribute to a change in the stereotypical perception of Russians by Poles and vice-versa. Other necessary questions are: About what topics would the “ordinary” residents of Poland and Russia

³⁴ *Regulamin konkursu na dofinansowanie przedsięwzięć podejmowanych na rzecz dialogu i porozumienia w stosunkach polsko-rosyjskich. „Polsko-Rosyjska Wymiana Młodzieży 2012”*; the Centre for Polish-Russian Dialogue and Understanding website, chapter 2, Aims of the contest, p. 3 (accessed 27 Feb. 2013). The projects should involve organisation of meetings of pupils or students (from 10 to 20 persons from each country) in Poland and Russia. The subsidy for travelling costs, accommodation and board “cannot exceed 80% of the budget of the enterprise” (*Ibidem*, chapter 9. The Centre’s subsidy, p. 12).

³⁵ *Polsko-Rosyjska Wymiana Młodzieży – edycja 2013*, <http://www.crdip.pl/main/index.php?id=polsko-rosyjska-wymiana-mlodziezy-i-stud...> (accessed 27. Feb. 2013).

³⁶ *Polsko-Rosyjska Wymiana Młodzieży. Centrum Polsko-Rosyjskiego Dialogu i Porozumienia. „Polsko-Rosyjska wymiana Młodzieży 2012”. PRZEWODNIK*; the Centre for Polish-Russian Dialogue and Understanding website (accessed 27. Feb. 2013).

³⁷ J. Malczyk, *Piotr Stegnij szefem Centrum Rosyjsko-Polskiego Dialogu i Porozumienia*, [http:// dzieje.pl/aktualności/piotr-stegnij-szefem-centrum-rosyjsko-polskiego-dialogu-i...](http://dzieje.pl/aktualności/piotr-stegnij-szefem-centrum-rosyjsko-polskiego-dialogu-i...) (accessed 2 Oct. 2012).

³⁸ *Ibidem*. The conferences were organised in cooperation with other institutions, e.g. the Russian Archive Agency and the Institute of Slavic Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences.

feel inclined to converse (provided they are interested in mutual conversation at all), and what do they expect from official initiatives aimed at furthering their dialogue?

The media have a crucial role to play in the process of popularization of the idea of Polish/Russian dialogue. Their current actions, both in Poland and in Russia, certainly do not further this aim (on this topic, see e.g. Rotfeld 2012, pp. 60–61; Kabzińska 2011, pp. 79–88). Attention is focused mainly on information about situations involving conflicts and issues that divide Poland and Russia. This information spawns distrust, strengthens the atmosphere of suspicion and cements negative stereotypes. Much is said also about internal divisions within the Polish society, resulting from, for instance, differences in the assessment of the air crash which occurred on 10th April 2010 at the Smolensk airfield³⁹ and generally from different attitudes towards Russia and Russians. Both the past and the present policies of Russia towards Poland affect Polish/Russian relations to a considerable extent; the current policy is perceived by a part of the Polish society as an attempt to draw Poland into the sphere of Russian political influence and to make Poland dependent on the supply of raw material (gas, crude oil) and electricity from Russia (see Chichot Kremla... 2013; Kabzińska 2011, pp. 81–84).

DIALOGUE BETWEEN THE CHURCHES

The visit of the head of the Russian Orthodox Church, Patriarch Cyril, in Poland (16th–19th August 2012) must be considered a breakthrough in Polish/Russian relations. The “Joint Message to the Nations of Poland and Russia” was signed during the visit (17th August).⁴⁰ Observers of the political scene emphasised that the visit of Patriarch Cyril was an “unprecedented” event, since it was the first time ever that the leader of the Russian Orthodoxy came to Poland (Wiśniewska 2012, p. 1). It was also pointed out that until now “the Orthodox Church has never signed a similar [document] with any other Church” (*ibidem*). The “Message” is to serve “the mission of bringing our Churches closer and advancing reconciliation between our nations”.⁴¹ Hope was

³⁹ The President of Poland Mr Lech Kaczyński, his wife and 94 other persons, the majority of whom were high-level state, army or church officials, were killed in the air crash. Some members of the Polish society are convinced that the crash was caused by a terrorist attack engineered by the authorities of Poland and Russia (see e.g. Szymowski 2011).

⁴⁰ The document was signed by the chairman of the Polish Episcopal Conference Archbishop Józef Michalik from the Polish side, by Patriarch Cyril from the Russian side. Considering the many centuries of conflicts between the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church, as well as the prejudices existing on both sides, mutual accusations, and the fact that the trueness of faith confessed by that other, “alien” Church is sometimes questioned, the visit of Patriarch Cyril to Poland and the signing of this document must be considered to be ground-breaking events (for more on the above-mentioned conflicts and their origins, see e.g. Przesmycki 2006; Przybył 2006).

⁴¹ *Wspólne Przesłanie do Narodów Polski i Rosji*; <http://ekai.pl/biblioteka/dokumenty/x1430/wspolne-przeslanie-do-narodow-polski-i-r...> (accessed 2 Sept. 2012).

expressed that the dialogue “shall contribute [...] to healing the wounds of the past and help to overcome mutual prejudices and misunderstandings [...]”.⁴² Believers of both Churches were called upon to “plead for the forgiveness of injuries, injustices and all mutual wrongdoings”, as this was deemed crucial to “the rebuilding of mutual trust, without which no durable human community can exist or complete reconciliation be achieved”.⁴³ It was emphasised that “forgiveness does not mean [...] forgetfulness. This is because memory constitutes an essential part of our identity. [...] Yet to forgive means to forbear revenge and renounce hate, to participate in furthering concord and fraternity between people and between our nations and countries; this is a foundation of peaceful future”.⁴⁴ The necessity of building a community that would unite the believers of both the Catholic and the Orthodox Church around the shared spiritual and moral values was also underscored⁴⁵. Hope was expressed that the efforts of historians and other experts “will permit us to discover the unfalsified historical truth, help to dispel uncertainties and contribute to overcoming negative stereotypes”.⁴⁶ It is worth noting that here, again, emerges the issue of stereotypes dividing Poles and Russians, and the desire to change this situation.

Commenting on the visit of Patriarch Cyril to Poland, the sovietologist Włodzimierz Marciniak suggested that its significance may be restricted mainly to image-building (*Bez wybaczenia?* 2012, p. 13). In his opinion, “it is still too early for true reconciliation. For the time being, we need a gradual, systematic work aimed at reaching small but real aims, and noting more” (*ibidem*). Marciniak and the journalist who interviewed him mentioned negative stereotypes of the Polish people in the Russian eyes (*ibidem*), so it can be assumed that one of the above aims would be to change this image (and probably the negative perception of Russians in the Polish society as well).

Pyotr Stegnyi commented that the document signed in Warsaw “demonstrated the potential for Polish/Russian dialogue without burdens or stereotypes. This is a modern declaration, befitting the spirit of the 21st century [...]” (*Pojednanie jak igrzyska...* 2012, p. 4). The subject of stereotypes adversely affecting Polish/Russian relations has been brought up again here. But their transformation, as I have already stated, requires a long time and favourable conditions. Stegnyi observed that “we still have much work to do, but it is worth it, since the future in all areas, from politics to history or business, is at stake” (*ibidem*). He also remarked that what is important in Polish/Russian relations is not to change the assessments of the past, but to avoid committing past mistakes or being “slaves to history” (*ibidem*). He added that Poles and Russians have “a different approach to historical politics”, but that laudable changes are gradually becoming evident in this respect. “Today, we are able not only to listen to one another, but also hear

⁴² *Ibidem*.

⁴³ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁴ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁵ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁶ *Ibidem*.

what the other has to say. Earlier, a lot of things in Polish arguments irritated us, and probably even more in ours irritated our Polish counterparts [...]” (*ibidem*).⁴⁷ I do not know how large a part of the Polish and Russian society shares this view. It is certainly not a general one. It is also difficult to ascertain today what effects the visit of Patriarch Cyril to Poland and the “Message” signed during that visit will have in the long run. The question whether they will contribute to the improvement of relations between the Roman Catholic Church and the Russian Orthodox Church, as well as to a substantial change in Polish/Russian relations, remains to be answered in the future.

AN ANTHROPOLOGIST FACED WITH INTER-ETHNIC DIALOGUE

In the face of inter-ethnic dialogue (including the dialogue between Poland and Russia), anthropologists may adopt various stances. They may remain indifferent or engage in cooperation with institutions which promote it, for instance by taking part in research on stereotypes conducted by those institutions; they may also conduct relevant studies independently. In my opinion, tracing the attempts at changing stereotypes that for so long have divided the Polish and Russian nations would be a very interesting task for an anthropologist. Interesting, too, would be to look for answers to such questions as: What are the effects of the actions undertaken by institutions intended to further the Polish/Russian dialogue? How large a part of the Polish and Russian society is interested in that dialogue? What do Poles and Russians expect from pro-dialogue initiatives? About what topics would they like to converse (if they are at all interested)? It must be noted that the Polish/Russian dialogue involves mainly historical issues, and this is an area in which few Russians would feel involved. To them, Poland’s importance is mostly of economic nature (de Lazari 2006, p. 20). “In Russia, only politicians, businessmen doing business with Poles, and people planning vacations are interested in Poland. The rest... probably doesn’t even know that such a country exists [...]” (Małachowscy... 2013, p. 11).⁴⁸ It may be expected that interest in history will gradually diminish in Poland as well, one of the contributing factors being a drastic decrease in the number of history classes in school curricula.

The necessary questions to ask are: Is it possible to bring the experience of dialogue involving history to bear on politics and economy? Is dialogue even possible where financial profits, power, dominance, struggle for territory (in the material and symbolic sense) are involved, where at stake is the future, and not the remembrance and narratives of the past? Can dialogue involving history (and also culture and national heritage) be a preamble to conversation on other topics, allowing its participants to listen to and understand each other?

⁴⁷ Transformations of a similar type are also remarked upon by A. D. Rotfeld (2012, pp. 103, 107–108).

⁴⁸ These are the words of Maria Tomaszewska-Nałęcz, a descendant of the Małachowski family resident in Russia, interviewed by Witold Janczys.

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