

# POLAND–RUSSIA SOCIAL DIAGNOSIS 2013

How Poles see Russia, Russians  
and Polish-Russian relations

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and Russian-Polish relations



Warsaw 2013



Report on public opinion research in Poland and Russia



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CENTRE FOR  
POLISH-RUSSIAN DIALOGUE  
AND UNDERSTANDING

Report on public opinion research in Poland and Russia

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Public opinion survey: Centrum Badania Opinii Społecznej (CBOS)

Qualitative research: Grupa IQS

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# Contents

► Programme outline	4
► How Poles see Russia, Russians and Polish-Russian relations. Report on public opinion research in Poland	6
1. About the research	6
2. Key takeaways	7
3. Detailed results of the research	8
► How Russians see Poland, Poles and Russian-Polish relations. Report on public opinion research in Russia	14
1. About the research	14
2. Key takeaways	15
3. Detailed results of the research	16
► Figures	24
► Polish comment on findings of Polish and Russian research	34
► Russian comment on findings of Russian and Polish research	37

## Programme outline

The Polish Centre for Polish-Russian Dialogue and Understanding and the Russian Foundation "Centre for Russian-Polish Dialogue and Understanding" have launched a joint programme of regular public opinion research in Poland and Russia, to obtain reliable data about the attitudes held by Poles towards Russia and the Russians, and by Russians towards Poland and the Poles.

Our intention is to use the knowledge so obtained in the activities of both centres of dialogue and understanding, and also in our efforts to counter what we perceive as a deficit of knowledge by Poles about Russia and Russians about Poland, to disseminate information about both countries, and counter stereotyping and prejudice, which are still present in the two societies. We are convinced that the findings of our research will attract wider interest in both countries, inspire further studies into mutual relations, contribute to public debate about these relations, help optimise the conduct of both countries' foreign

policies, and that they may be used in developing commercial and investment strategies, thus helping to promote economic contacts. We want to monitor how public mood changes over time in the two countries, and in order to obtain comparable results we have opted to conduct our research in the same time, using the same methods and the same research tools. The regularity, synchronisation and methodological coherence impart to this research a truly exceptional character. Initiated in 2012, it will serve as reference for successive years' studies, and therefore, in order to make our comparable data as accurate as possible, we decided to commission both qualitative and quantitative research.

As part of quantitative research, a group of questions was added to omnibus surveys conducted in Poland and Russia. The questions were about subjects such as the public perception of Polish-Russian relations on two levels, namely between the states and between the peoples; the image of the other party; the persistence of stere-

otypes about both countries and both peoples; the awareness of cultural proximity/distance; the scope of Poles' and Russian's personal experiences and contacts, and their influence on how the two peoples see each other; and also the public perception of current developments in Polish-Russian relations.

The advantage of omnibus surveys is that they cover a representative sample of the population and offer insights into quantitative distribution of opinion. But this method also has a drawback in that it fails to produce an in-depth picture of public sentiments and opinions, especially regarding their root causes. And as it happens, the Polish-Russian relations are strongly impacted by deep-rooted prejudices and stereotypes. It is therefore so important to have a thorough understanding of thinking patterns and emotions not to be captured by quantitative research. This understanding comes from focus group research in both countries, an important, qualitative part of our project.

The present report consists of two presentations of national research findings, delivered by reputed agencies present on the Polish and Russian markets, and these presentations are followed by comments and conclusions from a Polish expert and from his Russian colleague. For members of the public interested in taking more detailed analyses by themselves, the complete survey findings and transcripts of focus group interviews will be posted at the website of the Centre for Polish-Russian Dialogue and Understanding ([www.cprdip.pl](http://www.cprdip.pl)).

This report opens a research cycle which, we expect, will produce over several years an in-depth picture of how Poles and Russians perceive each other. For a dialogue to bear fruit and for an agreement on difficult matters to be brought closer, we have to transcend conventional wisdom and seek a deeper understanding of both communities' consciousness and of factors which underlie their attitudes and actions.

# How Poles see Russia, Russians and Polish- -Russian relations

Report from a Polish public opinion research  
commissioned by the Centre for  
Polish-Russian Dialogue and Understanding

## 1. About the research

**1. Survey of a sample of 1,036 adult Poles.** The random sample reflects the population in terms of these characteristics: sex, age, education, size of city/town/village of residence, voivodship (region). The field part of the research was conducted by the polling agency Public Opinion Research Centre (CBOS).

**2. Qualitative research in the form of six focus groups.** Interviews were held separately with younger (20-35 years of age) and older people (36-55) in a big urban centre (Warsaw), a medium-sized city (Toruń) and a small town (Puławy). Grupa IQS took care of the field part of the research.

The research was conducted in November and December 2012.

## 2. Key takeaways

1. The image of Russia among Poles – with Russia understood as a state – is highly negative. It is perceived as unfriendly towards Poland, not eliciting trust, governed in an authoritarian manner, and at the same time, poorly organised, ineffective, full of contrast and pathology. Among Polish associations with Russia, those related to the political sphere and Russia as a state are the most frequent.
2. At the same time, though, knowledge about Russia among Poles and their actual contact with that country and with its citizens seem to be fairly limited: only a small percentage of Poles declare ever having visited Russia, and contemporary Russian product brands are unknown at all. The space of associations about Russia is consequently filled with either symbolism and the past (Katyn, war, Soviet domination) or fairly generalised descriptions of political and social developments (authoritarianism, lack of freedom, corruption, oligarchy), plus possibly the names of Russian leaders.
3. The Russians as a people are perceived noticeably better, and the distinction between attitude towards the state and attitude towards the people is very conspicuous here. While Russians are seen by Poles as quite far removed in cultural and mental terms, they are also assigned features which elicit respect and sympathy: openness, cordiality, hospitality and being people with whom one can have a heart-to-heart conversation. On the Russian side, the attitudes to the Polish state and to the Polish people are identical.
4. Based on qualitative research findings, there are grounds to conclude that distance and dispassionate description (rather than emotional assessment) predominate in Poles' attitude towards Russia and the Russians. Russia, with its attributes, is seen as an element of the international environment, one which we have to reconcile with, rather than seeking to change. Despite the domination of negative feature in the perception of Russia, it would be wrong to conclude about dislikes or Russophobia among Poles. Rather, this seems to be a case of political realism in the description of international relations.
5. In statements obtained from Poles, a strong conviction can be detected to the effect that the present stability of Poland's geo-political situation is a value so important that its preservation warrants refraining from hasty, overly emotional decisions and gestures. Thus, all Polish moves towards Russia should be marked by prudence, restraint and far reaching pragmatism. Such are also the expectations from Polish government and institutions in charge of foreign policy.
6. When it comes to the Smolensk catastrophe (air crash of the presidential plane near Smolensk on 10 April 2010 in which 96 people died, including Polish President Lech Kaczyński, his wife, and many officials) and efforts to establish all of its causes and circumstances, the Russian authorities are seen as foot-dragging, or even overtly reluctant. But it must be noted that the Smolensk theme was scantily represented in the course of qualitative research: respondents seemed to be shunning the subject and they did not bring it up on their own in the context of Polish-Russian relations. One could get the impression that, to some extent, this is like a taboo, a subject unwillingly mentioned either because of its sheer weight or for fear of an excessive polarisation of discussion in case it were taken up.

## 3. Detailed results of the research

### 1. The image of Russia among Poles – with Russia understood as a state – is highly negative.

Replying to an open-question request for top-of-mind association with Poland/Russia, respondents presented the most general, basic attitudes to the neighbouring country and its inhabitants. The most general conclusion is that Poles perceive Russia mainly in terms of politics and statehood. Russia is seen as a state unfriendly towards Poland, not eliciting trust, governed in an authoritarian manner and, at the same time, poorly organised, ineffective, full of contrast and pathology. **Figure 1a.** ► p. 24. In Polish respondents' replies to the question about top-of-mind associations with Russia, five broad sets of associations can be distinguished.

**1.** The strongest one (38%) is about what can be described as "Russia as a state". Characteristically, it is the state-related, political associations that dominate in Russia's perception among Poles. Within this group, the names of Russian politicians crop up frequently, most notably of Vladimir Putin. The political system of present-day Russia is referred to as "authoritarianism", "dictatorship" and "a strongman's rule", and restrictions on civil rights are emphasised. References are also made to Russia's great-power position on the international scene.

**2.** The second largest group of associations, almost equally strong (35%), is about Polish-Russian relations and, most frequently, they have to do with the contemporary topic of the Smolensk air crash. There are also many associations with complex issues related to Polish-Russian history, such as the massacre of Polish officers in 1940, and the time of Poland's parti-

tions. Also falling into this category were general opinions about a poor state of Polish-Russian relations, or about Russia.

**3.** The third segment (31% of all respondents) includes associations which can be grouped into the category "Russia as geographical and cultural space". This is a set of neutral, descriptive associations related to geography (size of the country, low temperatures), scale of Russia's natural resources, and the sphere of culture.

**4.** The fourth category (30%) includes associations with the contemporary Russian society. Negative developments and social pathology are in the fore: the deep social inequalities of Russian society, poverty of a large portion of Russian population, associations with alcohol and alcohol addiction, with crime and with corruption. These associations are in line with the image of Russia that can be detected from replies to other questions of the research project. Poles name Russia most frequently when asked about countries with varied manifestations of social pathology. **Figure 2.** ► p. 26 It holds the top position on the list of countries most strongly identified with social inequalities. **Figure 3.** ► p. 26

**5.** The fifth category, perceptibly smaller (20%) includes associations with the 1917–1991 period in Russia's history. References are made to communism, totalitarian system, the Gulag, Soviet politicians, and also World War II.

Poles' opinions about Russia are fairly strong, near one or the other extreme of the descrip-

tion spectrum. And so, Russia is perceived by an average Pole as a country which does not quite elicit trust and which is undemocratic, but also as an interesting country worth visiting. **Figure 4a.**  **p. 26**

Poles see Russia as the main “enemy” among Poland’s neighbours. **Figure 5a.**  **p. 27** This assessment is strongly related to opinions about

Russia’s attitude towards establishing the circumstances of the Smolensk catastrophe. Among those believing that Russia’s behaviour in this respect has been correct, close to 30% claim that the Russian state has a hostile agenda towards Poland. And this proportion grows to more than 50% among the respondents who think Russian government has not behaved correctly with the Smolensk investigation.

## 2. “Most distant among the close ones”: the Polish map of cultural affinity

It is fair to say that Poles consider themselves a part of the cultural community that has developed among the peoples of Central and Eastern Europe. Due to linguistic similarity, “dense” mutual contacts and a shared history (including many personal histories), those perceived as culturally close are primarily Western Slavs and – perhaps a result of common statehood in the past – also the Lithuanians. The strongest affinity is felt towards Czechs and Slovaks.

As for the Russians, the similarity is seen by Poles as perhaps the weakest, but still as stronger than with the Western European peoples (except for the Germans) or the Americans. **Figure 6a.**  **p. 27**

The cultural and mental distance between Poles and Russians can be measured by differ-

ences in the pattern of values that each community holds dear. Poles declare attachment to the idea of freedom, respect for family and tradition, strong religious beliefs, and holding honour in high regard, while their view of the Russians is that of a people for whom pride and respect for authority are of key importance. The belief that the Russians hold authority in respect is very strong indeed among the Poles: of all the values studied in the research, this one is the most revealing of differences in Polish and Russian approaches. Poles are actually convinced that the Russians value despotism more than democracy. Other values seen as espoused by Russians are mentioned much less frequently (among these, there are also values close to Poles: freedom and honour).

**Figure 9a.**  **p. 30**

## 3. The Russians are perceived noticeably better than Russia

In Poles’ perception, the distinction between attitude towards the state and attitude towards the people is very important. The Polish view of the Russians is that, although distant culturally and mentally, they do have traits which elicit respect and sympathy. Things are differ-

ent when opinions about Russia come into the picture.

If the average Pole were asked how they perceive the attitude towards Poland on the part of different states and, then, how they perceive

the attitude exhibited by the people of those states, there would be noticeable differences in several instances. In the case of Russia and Belarus, the attitude towards Poles is seen as much better on the part of those countries' inhabitants than their state apparatus. This perceived discrepancy between interstate and interpersonal relations gets deeper where the respondent knows personally a Russian. But it must be noted that, even with this distinction taken into account, Russians are seen by Poles as being relatively least friendly towards them.

A different picture emerges in relations with Germany: among the countries compared, it is the only one in respect of which interstate relations are perceived as clearly better than interpersonal relations.

Focus group participants in Poland emphasised Russians' good, cordial attitudes towards Poles, and they also opined that the negative perception of the Russians may stem from unfavourable interstate relations. The occasional personal experience of direct contact with Russians is usually highly positive, with the Russians described as hospitable, helpful and kind.

► *They are great people, and the Polish stereotype about Russians is false. Just as Germans perceive Poles as drunkards and thieves, so we treat Russians.*

► *As I see it, all this talk about Russia is just media clutter. It is not true that we and the Russians do not like each other; the truth is that at the interpersonal level we do like them and they like us. But the problem lies with those in power – in our country and in their country – and in their slanders. Those people just want to make us believe that our relations with Russians are bad.*

► *The politicians may bicker endlessly, but when it comes to a common person from Poland and a common person from Russia, if they find some common ground, then there will be no problem at all: they will like each another, and those resentments of higher-ups will not be seen among us, the people.*

► *When we visit them, they are very friendly. They really think highly of us. I haven't been there for quite a long time, but once we were a model for them, a replica of the West where you live a better life.*

► *Despite our very tortuous history, the people-to-people relations are amazingly good.*

► *Friendly; Sincere and hospitable; Cheerful; Sociable; I would say they write good books – for the past three months I have been reading only Russian authors.*

► *People there are nice and helpful; they wear their hearts on their sleeves.*

#### 4. Sparsity of direct contacts conducive to stereotyping

Poles' knowledge of contemporary Russia and contacts with that country and its people look like pretty much limited: only a small percentage of Poles declare having ever visited Russia, and contemporary Russian product brands are unknown at all. The space of associations about Russia is consequently filled with either symbolisms and the past (Katyn, war, Soviet domination)

or fairly generalised descriptions of political and social developments (authoritarianism, lack of freedom, corruption, oligarchy), plus possibly the names of Russian leaders. The proportion of Polish respondents who have never been to Russia stands at 89%, and only 7% declare having been on a tourist visit to that country. Some 11% have at one time been in Russia for what-

ever reason. **Figure 14a.**  **p. 32** This is fairly little, remembering that Russia is one of Poland's neighbours. But some 30% Poles declare knowing or having known a Russian citizen personally.

Where direct interpersonal relations are "dense", this usually leads to the emergence of more realistic, less stereotyped two-way attitudes and opinions. In our research, when we compare the replies about the image of Russia given by those who have visited and those who have not visited that country, it turns out that in most cases the views of both groups show no significant differences. And if differences emerge, they are selective, applying to only certain dimensions of mutual relations and only certain aspects of the image. For example, the respondents who have been to Russia (or who know a Russian personally) more

frequently believe that Russia is an undemocratic country. At the same time, though, they are more likely to consider Russia a country worth visiting. In most cases, however, such differences could not be detected.

Some 16% respondents said they had contact with Russian brands over the preceding 12 months. But when more detailed questions were asked, it appeared that they spoke about entire product categories, such as alcohol, cars, radio/TV/household appliances, fuels, foodstuffs and cigarettes – and only in respect of the first three of these aggregates could respondents name any brands. Characteristically, these are often brands known from the past (such as Minsk refrigerators and Rubin TV sets in the radio/TV/household appliances category). **Figure 15.**  **p. 33**

## 5. Large dose of realism in Poles' attitude towards Russia

The attitude towards Russia and the Russians is predominantly one of a distance and dispassionate description, rather than emotional involvement. Russia, with its attributes, is seen as an element of the international environment, one which has to be reconciled with, rather than sought to be changed. Despite the domination of negative feature in the perception of Russia, it would be wrong to conclude about dislikes or Russophobia among Poles. Rather, this seems to be a case of political realism in the description of international relations.

 *There are different interests at play, and this leads to particular consequences which may be less favourable to one country – just as ourselves today – and more favourable to the other, one which pursues a stronger policy.*

 *I think we all know that it is Russia [who holds the upper hand in mutual relations]. All we can do is say 'no', but this may be taken into account, or may be not.*

 *We cannot afford turning our backs on them. It is just as with the embargo on Polish imports. We have no other markets where to turn. And they do have.*

 *Despite everything our cooperation with the Russians is good, and for the most part we have viable business contacts. Probably all our companies supply the Russian market, which is huge, and they readily buy our products.*

 *It takes a capable, mature and intelligent person to realise that one should not be scared by what Russians say and only should do what is needed, in an effective way – and clearly spell out what they are allowed to do in contacts with us and what are our goals.*

 *The truth is that Russia is our neighbour, and we should be on good terms and cooperate with it, because we have the goods to sell them and their market is big. We should live*

*well with them – I’m not saying ‘on our knees’, but it is important that business should grow.*

► *If I serve my country’s interests, which are not aimed against anybody, and then it turns out that some frictions and tensions emerge somewhere, well, this may even be a good thing because every conflict brings with it a solution. So I think that the right thing to do is follow your own path.*

► *Listen, Russians, there will be plenty of tension between us; let’s brace ourselves for tensions, differences, etc. – but we must not turn our backs on one another and must stop lashing out. Instead, let’s sit at a table, drink vodka and seek to solve problems – as long as it takes to reach a conclusion.*

The respondents, and especially the younger ones, brought up in a free Poland, have a sense of durability and stability of the international environment, including Poland’s international position. Threats from Russia are viewed either in a purely theoretical context, or on economic level (dependence on energy sources, risk of a market for Polish products being closed – but these provoke no great emotions). These threats do not result from any particular ill-will towards Poland on the part of Russia but are, in a way, “normal” and characteristic of Russia’s attitude towards neighbours – being its foreign policy tools.

► *I think that those imperial-era relations between us, when they wanted to take us under their heel, are the thing of the past. Now they simply ignore us. Perhaps, we are not partners yet.*

► *When they have some hidden agenda, they flatter us. But things will get civilised, I believe, once we interact more – when more Russians do business in Poland and more Poles do business in Russia.*

► *Maybe a new generation, one yet to be born, will be more reasonable in their thinking.*

► *I believe that a chance for Poles and for Russians, at a national and social level, is offered by new technology. If both countries take this path, then none of them will be able to do everything on its own, and so they will be thinking with the future in mind.*

Replies by Polish respondents seem to reveal a strong conviction that Poland’s present geopolitical position is a value so important that its preservation is well worth refraining from hasty, overtly emotional decisions and gestures. Thus, all moves taken by Poland towards Russia should be cautious, restrained and highly pragmatic. The same is expected from Polish government and institutions in charge of foreign policy.

► *Just look how much the EU has gained from our fight against Russia. The Germans have entered their market with so great strength. What was good in this bickering? Business is business, the money is at stake here. As a country, we mustn’t punch above our weight.*

► *They [i.e. some in Poland – trans.] would do well letting up on this Smolensk thing.*

► *Precisely, we would do well if we stopped chastising them.*

► *There is one simple thing we can do – make a break with history. We, and even our leaders, should sit down with the Russians and say this: Let bygones be bygones. We fought each other in the past, but now let’s forget about history. Let’s do business together. If one party wants to do something, then OK, let them do that, but let the other party do something else. We meet our obligations and we see to it that you meet yours, we forget about history and we are no longer Russophobes, let’s do business together.*

## 6. Critical view of Russian authorities' role in establishing the circumstances of Smolensk catastrophe

Russian government is seen as foot-dragging, or even overtly reluctant, with efforts to establish all causes and circumstances of the Smolensk catastrophe. But it must be noted that the Smolensk theme was scantily represented in the course of qualitative research: respondents seemed to be shunning the subject and they did not bring it up on their own in the context of Polish-Russian relations. One could get the impression that, to some extent, this is like a taboo, a subject unwillingly mentioned either because of its sheer weight or for fear of an excessive polarisation of discussion in case it were taken up.

► *I don't feel like taking up this subject once again; It is overblown; I think it is played up in the media; This is a sensitive issue; We attack the Russians, they attack us, and so it goes over and over again. And the media are stirring things up...The media are behind it.*

► *They are up to something. Even if that was not their work, you will not deny that all that followed the catastrophe is not normal.*

► *No-one can remedy this; It will drag on and on, without end; The investigation will never be completed. It is just as with Kennedy's death,*

*where new theories have always been cropping up; It depends on how particular people see it: for some the whole thing is already wrapped up, for some it will be in the future, for some others it will never be.*

But the findings of the polling survey clearly demonstrate that the opinion expressed about the stance taken by the Russian authorities in the investigation of the catastrophe is strongly correlated with opinions about Russia. Those believing that Russian government is foot-dragging or reluctant about the investigation usually have a more negative view of Russia than those who think the Russian authorities have acted properly – and, for example, they more frequently describe Russia as an undemocratic country, whose intentions towards Poland are hostile and which is not to be trusted.

Those persons have a distinctly lower view of the entirety of Polish-Russian relations, compared to the remaining respondents. It can be concluded that the assessment of the Russian authorities' role in the investigation of the catastrophe is a stronger predictor of opinion about Russia than factors such as personal acquaintance with a Russian or the experience of having visiting Russia for whatever reason.

# How Russians see Poland, Poles and Russian-Polish relations

Report from a Russian public opinion research commissioned by the Foundation “Centre for Russian-Polish Dialogue and Understanding”

## 1. About the research

**Designation:** Public assessment of, and potential for, Polish-Russian cooperation. Research commissioned by the Foundation “Centre for Russian-Polish Dialogue and Understanding”.

**Methodology:** The research was conducted simultaneously in Russia and in Poland, from November to December 2012, in two stages: a national public opinion survey involving 10 questions, and focus groups.

**1. Quantitative research.** The survey, using the method of structured interview, was taken on a sample of 1,600 adult Russians. The sam-

ple was selected to be representative of these characteristics: sex, age, education, type/size of city/town/village of residence. The research in Russia was conducted by the All-Russian Center for the Study of Public Opinion (VTsIOM).

**2. Qualitative research.** It took the form of six focus groups, with interviews held separately with younger (20-35 years of age) and older people (36-55) in a big urban centre (Moscow), a medium-sized city (Ekaterinburg) and a small town (Vsevolozhsk). The research was conducted by the All-Russian Center for the Study of Public Opinion (VTsIOM).

## 2. Key takeaways

1. The perception of Poland's intentions towards Russia is not unequivocal, although tilting towards negative. In the respondents' view, a worse attitude to Russia is only taken by Lithuania and the United States.
2. The respondents believe that common people abroad often have a slightly warmer view of Russia than their governments, and this differentiation is also seen in respect of Poland and the Poles. But in the personal relations rankings, Poland is close to the end. The respondents believe that only the inhabitants of Lithuania and the US have a more negative perception of Russia than the Poles have.
3. The respondents see Poland as a country which is rather unfriendly towards Russia. Their Polish associations are usually about Polish products, especially cosmetics, perfumes and clothing. An important detail which Russians connect with Poland is the air crash of the Polish presidential plane at Smolensk.
4. Overall, the respondents perceive Poland as a country which is rather modern, democratic and worth visiting. Their assessments of the economic situation in Poland and of the Polish state's credibility are not unequivocal.
5. Most Russians develop their opinion about Poland based on media reports, notably TV and online media. Only one in ten respondents has any personal experience of importance for his/her opinion about Poland and the Poles. Those who have developed their opinion about Poland during a visit to Poland represent a still smaller proportion.
6. The current relations between Russia and Poland are given by respondents a "3" note (on a scale from 1 to 5). The higher the educational level of the respondent, the lower the note they give to the mutual relations.
7. The Russia-Polish relations are seen by respondents as being burdened by both countries' history. It is believed that the proximity of a stronger, ambitious Russia provokes fears about a loss of independence among Poles, and that the abundant Russian natural resources and size of the country provoke Poles' envy.
8. The key role in influencing the Russian-Polish relations is played by politicians, state and party leaders, who use the media for this purpose. The role of nongovernmental organisations – cultural, religious or academic – is currently minimal, respondents believe.
9. The assessments of the dynamics of Russian-Polish relations are not unequivocal, just as are projections of the future. But there is a convergence of views on this point: Poland does not do enough to improve the relations, and actually does not seek their improvement.
10. Joint cultural programmes, tourism and youth exchanges are among those points of convergence which might contribute to the establishment of good, friendly relations between both countries.

### 3. Detailed results of the research

#### 1. Russia's relations with other states and peoples

Russians are of the opinion that most of the reviewed countries in Europe and the world are friendly towards their country. This is most pronouncedly demonstrated by leaders of Belarus (71%), Germany (70%) and China (66%). Opinions about the position of Ukraine's authorities are split, but tilting towards positive (50% of the respondents see friendly intentions, 43% do not share this view).

As for Poland, the perception of its intentions is also split, but tilting towards negative (40% vs. 47%). As Russians see it, worse attitudes towards their country are in Lithuania (58%) and the US (63%). **Figure 7b.** **p. 28**

Belarusians are perceived as an eternally friendly/close people who cannot cope without help from the "older brother":

► *Let's have an alliance with them. A brotherly people. This is the direction for our policy. Belarus will not exist without Russia, it depends on us economically.*

Germany's warm attitude towards Russia is attributed by respondents to friendship between both countries' leaders and to history:

► *This is primarily because of Putin's good relations with the former German chancellor... And generally, every German has some hang-ups after World War II, which forces them to be a bit more loyal to us than other nations are, those which do not owe us anything.*

The causes of chilly relations with the Baltic states are traced down to history:

► *The bone of contention has always been history. As a result of the war, they regard as Russian oppressors those whom we regard as liberators.*

The tense relations with the United States are explained by respondents in several ways:

► *This is all because of US military spending. They have to funnel money into big corporations and save them from bankruptcy. They have to look for enemies, and Russia springs to their mind as one.*

► *The US is far away from us; if we had closer contacts, maybe everything would be different.*

But, as the respondents see it, inter-state relations, whether warm or chilly, are not necessarily identical with people-to-people relations.

► *Actually, the attitude towards the state is not identical with the attitude towards the people. Also, much depends on whether he/she has been abroad. If not, their opinion is usually shaped by TV and online media.*

► *I think that politics is one thing and the people are another. If people maintain normal relations, then they will have normal contacts, whatever the state policy. But there are countries such as Ecuador, Cuba, Venezuela, where both the people and the politicians hate Americans – and you can't help that. Things seem to have been that way for long, for generations.*

According to those questioned, common people often have warmer attitudes towards Russia than their countries' officialdom. In particular,

Russians perceive such differentiation to be the case with the Ukrainians (65% respondents see Ukrainians as being friendly towards Russia, and 50% respondents perceive the Ukrainian state as showing friendliness), the Americans (42% vs. 29%) and the Poles (49% vs. 40%). Still, Poles come out towards the end of the table in terms of being seen as unfriendly towards Russia. More unfriendly than the Poles, in the respondents' view, are only the Lithuanians and Americans. Top of the friendliness-to-Russia rankings are the Belarusians (seen as such by 79% of the respondents) and the Slovaks (69%).

► *As for the Baltic states, things are not perhaps quite good at the state level, because they still cling to such notions as the occupation, and so on. And Finland, too, probably remembers how we behaved in the past. But people know how to come to terms with one another. With the Belarusians, too, the people are friendly to us, but at the state level – not quite necessarily so. With Ukraine, we differ on all territorial issues.*

The interviewees note that outside attitudes to Russia have been improving of late, and so has been Russia's international position:

► *Compared to the 1990s, other peoples' attitudes to Russia have been improving. This is because Russia has become more effective economically, because we have the present president, because Russia joined the World Trade Organisations, and also for other reasons. The attitude towards Russians begins to improve; it is now like during the time of the Soviet Union when we were treated with respect. In the 1990s they had only scorn for us, but now this attitude is improving.*

► *I think that our relations with Western Europe are, more or less, on an equal footing. I mean that Europeans in Western and Central Europe approach us with interest. Previously, there was reserve and even disrespect, as if we were the Third World, but now they show interest in us – and this is good.*

## 2. How Russians see Poland and Poles

The respondents' associations with Poland are usually about state affairs (6%) and unfavourable attitude towards Russia (5%). Not infrequently, Poland also elicits associations with products, notably cosmetics, perfumes and clothing (5%). An important detail which Russians connect with Poland is the air crash of the Polish presidential plane at Smolensk (4%).

While for women the notion of Poland evokes Polish-made products (7%), for men it is a "state hostile to us" (6%). An unfriendly attitude of the Poles is much more frequently mentioned by the elderly than the young people (9% vs 3%).

As far as the Polish products are concerned, only 15% of those questioned, mostly inhabitants of Moscow and St. Petersburg (22%), have

ever seen them in shops or in advertisements. Dominant among these products are articles of clothing (36%) and cosmetics (20%); less frequently seen are household appliances (8%), perfumes (5%), food articles (8%), etc. This picture took shape at the time of market shortages in the 1990s.

► *Flea markets, bazaars – when we had shortages, everybody was buying Polish goods in the belief that these goods are of higher quality.*

Regarding the image of Poland in the context of Polish policy in the international forum, three groups can be distinguished:

1. Poland as a state with an unfriendly, hostile attitude towards Russia

► ... Let them be like hedgehogs, with their prickly spines and their grudges. Their hearts need melting. Let them stay in the political fog.

► To me, they are more like scorpions – stinging and unforgiving.

► And to me, like a cactus – I mean, in their attitudes to Russia. They somehow demonstrate plenty of spines.

2. Poland as a country with an inferior position on the international arena, and lower than that of Russia

► Krylov's fable immediately springs to mind: *Elephant And Pug. Such a little dog with enormous ambitions.*

► To me, they are like stray sheep – in the positive sense. They just have to be brought back to the flock.

3. Poland as a state with no clear position of its own on international issues and one which takes the side of the stronger party

► The associations they hold for me are about a cat: if it is caressed it will extend its paws to you. Or a cunning fox. They do have this cunningness. ...

► To me, they are like the fox: it is so cunning, and you cannot trust it.

► There is a plant called bindweed, right? It will creep and cling to anything, for example to the European Union.

Generally speaking, the respondents see Poland as a country which is rather modern (37%), democratic (32%) and worth visiting (39%). Opinion is split on Poland's economic status (23% see the country as rich and 22% as poor) and credibility as a state (not to be trusted for 27% respondents, with 25% holding the opposite view).

The Russians perceive Russians and Poles as very much different. That which holds value for the Poles is seen as a trifle for the Russians, and vice versa. And so, the key values for Poland, as named by the respondents, are: spirit of enterprise (26%), religiosity (24%), tradition (21%), orderliness (20%). Most of these items come near the end of the list of Russian values, one exception being tradition (18%). The values which the Russian respondents found to be of importance for their compatriots are: tolerance (39%), sense of humour (34%), family (28%), resourcefulness (24%), freedom (21%).

Most Russians form their opinions about Poland based on information from the media, especially TV and online media. From focus-group interviews, two main types of media usage have emerged: one is getting the bulk of information from TV, sometimes with radio and/or online backup; the other is getting information only from the internet.

► TV. The internet. For example, I read *Lenta.ru*. And also our regional websites, such as *E1*.

► TV, news channels; there is not much of this kind of news, and it mostly appears on Federation-wide channels.

► I use only online media. .... No TV, sometimes the radio.

There is no uniform opinion about the most credible sources of information. Those who value TV most, usually explain their trust in this medium by arguing that the information on TV is carefully checked for credibility. On the other hand, those preferring the internet tend to criticise TV for excessive partiality and irresponsibility.

► I believe the internet is more credible. And if you can get access to any truth, it is there. You have forums there, and you can hear people's voices. But at *E1*, I believe, the news are specially edited to someone's instruction – they are not 100% credible.

► *On the internet, there are just plenty of lies; you do not see the other people, and you do not know them.*

► *Television – they do not give you information which is not fact-checked, and what they broadcast is really credible.*

Among the media providing information about Russian-Polish relations and similar subjects, there are Federation-wide channels (NTV, Programme One, Rossiya), news portals (Lenta.ru, Novosti.ru), news on web browsers' startup home pages (Yandex), Echo of Moscow radio station. Just one in ten of those questioned has developed their opinion about Poland and the Poles based on personal experience (11% have Poles among their acquaintances).

Still fewer people acquired their knowledge of Poland during a visit to this country (8%), mostly as tourists (5%). A very small percentage are those visiting Poland in connection with their work/education or to visit family/friends. **Figure 14b.** ► **p. 32** Personal contacts with Poles are seen by interviewees as a very important instrument to build good neighbourly relations. And the information gathered in this way is seen as more credible.

► *I believe, it's better to go to a country, talk with people there, and listen to what they say.*

► *Opinions must be developed not on the basis on what they say in the media, but on what people say, and what people have seen... When you gather those tidbits together, you will get a more or less true picture.*

### 3. Public perception of Russian-Polish relations

The current relations between Russia and Poland are given by respondents a "3" note (on a scale from 1 to 5). The higher the educational level of the respondent, the lower the note they give to the mutual relations (the average assessment by those with high education is 3.10, as against 3.24 for the poorly educated). **Figure 18.** ► **p. 33**

Many interviewees share the opinion that the Russian-Polish relations are weighed down with a longstanding burden of both countries' long history:

► *Well, there is the burden of shared history, when Poland was part of the Russian state at one point and then at another. There were death sentences, exile to Siberia, etc. Suppression, failure to come to the help of the Polish uprising. When the Warsaw Uprising broke out, we did not back them. The Red Army didn't go there. Let them be shot and dead – and so they were. Plus Katyn, where we seemingly have no*

*end in sight. And the air crash capped it off. The governments got stuck up, and Poles are unable to move to a level of warmer, more realistic relations without evoking history.*

► *Poles, it seems, suffer from intense trauma: they cannot forgive us the Russian-Polish war of 1920, and the presence of Soviet troops in Poland after World War II. A stereotype has developed, and they see us as a devil who wants to crash Poland, the way things were in the past.*

► *And this is not without reason. There were several factors at play. We once divided Poland between us and Germany, then we shot Polish officers, something like 700, thousands, I do not quite remember. And then the air crash, no matter if there was some guilt of ours, or there was not.*

There is also the belief that the proximity of Russia, a stronger and more ambitious country,

stokes Poles' fears about the loss of independence, and that the Russian natural resources and the country's sheer size provoke envy among Poles.

► *They are afraid. They defend themselves against us. And the best defence is a good offense. That's why they are barking at us, the way others are doing – at the beck and call of the Americans.*

► *They treat our country with envy. What they envy us most are the natural resources, something they lack themselves. This is what torments them. Being so much envious is unsustainable and that's why they are running around in circles – and in a wrong place at that.*

► *Poland has been a small country, compared to Russia, and that, they believed, posed a threat to them. Especially when we became the Soviet Union. Russia kept growing and increasing its territory, which always scared them – but also, I believe, filled them with envy.*

► *They know perfectly well that if there is a danger lurking somewhere, then – as demonstrated by our recent history – it lies in our brave state which so much likes to attack everybody else.*

At present, the interviewees opine, the key role in influencing the Russian-Polish relations is played by politicians, state and party leaders, who use the media for this purpose. The current role of nongovernmental organisations – cultural, religious or academic – is believed to be minimal.

► *Obviously, everything depends on which political party is at the helm there; their sentiments are definitely anti-Russian.*

► *This depends on who is the head of state. There was one policy in 2005, under the president who was then in office, and that policy was directed against Russia. Now that the president*

*has changed, we get on well. Everything depends on who is the head of state.*

► *It is the mass media which mould public opinion; actually that's what the mass media are for. Elements of propaganda are quite obvious here. Every story is done at someone's behest, someone pays for it and someone wants to watch it.*

► *I know that here, in Ekaterinburg, there is a Polish community. What role do they play? None at all [shrugs]. No-one has ever heard of them.*

When assessing the dynamics of Polish-Russia relations, the interviewees differ in their opinions: some see no improvement whatever, others notice a minimal "thaw", but there are quite many who feel that the two countries get on well of late. Credit for this is equally distributed by interviewees between Poland and Russia.

► *On the surface, you have the impression of an improvement. But that's on the surface. You also feel that this will go on only until some differences of opinion emerge – and this happens quite often with them.*

► *The relations must have improved when Putin owned up to Katyn, and said that it was committed to a direct order from Stalin. Once he owned up, I believe, they have applauded it in their heart of hearts.*

► *The relations are picking up. I mean, the purely economic relations. Our entire transportation and commerce go through Poland. And the Poles, too, I believe, now show consideration for us. That's because Russia has a say on EU lobbying.*

► *My hunch is that there will be no reconciliation. Poland has scored major economic successes. And that state will not be burdened with debt. In other words, it will soon become a powerhouse.*

## 4. Prospects and opportunities for Russian-Polish cooperation

Interviewees found it extremely hard to make projections about the future of Russian-Polish relations. Those who nevertheless made such an attempt had differing opinions.

► *Prospects for relations with the Poles are positive. Well, for now these relations take such a course [makes a zig-zagging gesture by hand].*

► *I hope that in the future the relations will even improve. This is because the older generation has a lower view of the Russian-speaking, compared to the young people. Young people engage in normal contacts and have no bad feelings about the Russians. I do not know what course their ideological effort will take, but my impression is that these relations will actually improve in the future.*

► *There will be no change in Polish-Russian relations in the coming five years.*

► *They have been chilly and will remain so, I believe.*

But everybody agreed on this: Poland does not do enough to improve the relations, and possibly does not even seek their improvement.

► *Currently, it is we who are doing everything we can to improve relations. We are doing our best, but there are no such moves on their part ... they feel offended ... we try to do something on our part, but – as for now – to no avail, and with no reciprocity.*

► *We are willing, and they probably are not. They want to develop relations with the West.*

► *I think, soccer showed that they are unwilling. Their attitude is now very negative. And this is not just confined to soccer fans. But things not always take this course, and not with all countries. That's what has happened with Russia.*

► *They do not show much enthusiasm to open their arms. They are looking primarily to American money and interests – and to European, too.*

More than that, there is a widespread conviction about an extremely stereotyped attitude in Poland towards the Russians.

► *They call us occupants and aggressors. And we are sitting and waiting until Russia drops the ball again.*

► *They think Russians are pigs.*

► *If they call us Russian pigs, I won't be surprised.*

► *To them, we are undereducated, uncultured, and we do not know how to make use of our riches.*

Looking for points of convergence which might foster good, friendly relations between the two countries, the focus group interviewees usually point to joint cultural programmes and collaborative projects in the field of culture and the arts.

► *The biggest thing that can join us is culture. I know there is a Polish cultural centre in Moscow where they have regular Chopin concerts and ethnic music, which is quite like ours. We could hold, for example, such ethnic music festivals and then some points of convergence would emerge. Culture, whether classical or popular, can bring us together.*

► *Sure, it can. If we find some mutual interests, for example in the creative sphere, then some joint film productions may come as a result.*

But today's Polish culture is not seen by the interviewees as very close to Russian culture. What they perceive as the closest cultures are

those of Ukraine and Belarus. Coming next are countries of the former Soviet bloc: Slovakia, the Czech Republic, Poland and Lithuania. China and the United Kingdom are at the farthest end of cultural proximity. Poland's 5th position places the country in the middle of the rankings. It may be that the respondents perceive the cultural affinity as being rooted in the Soviet period, while seeing almost none of it today.

► *This is because we and they were reared on the same Soviet movies. To me, Poland means many things: Stanisław Lem, Polish women, actresses like Barbara Brylska, Ryazanov's star.*

► *They enjoyed big popularity with us – their films, actors, books, whodunits, and culture in general. But that was so long ago.*

Yet another path to be followed to improve Russian-Polish relations is tourism. Many interviewees pointed to the importance of personal contacts, tourist visits and youth exchanges.

► *I would begin with tourism, so that we could have more contacts. Having known each other closer, we could learn what sits in Poles' heads.*

► *Take tourism: if Russians see Poland and Poles see Russia, in large numbers, then – barring some incidents – the relations will slowly take care of themselves. University-student and school-pupil exchanges are important.*

But when prospects of personal contacts with Poles are discussed, it turns out that visiting Poland is not among current priorities for most of the interviewees. On a general level, many find Poland to be an attractive place in terms of history, architecture and ski resorts, but a visit to Poland is treated as an addition to a trip to another European country, rather than a final destination. It is also believed that Poland and Western Ukraine are quite similar, and visiting the latter is more convenient and cheaper for Russians. To many interviewees, the Polish route is all but bypassed by Russians.

► *When I contacted travel agencies telling them where we have been and asking where we could go now, no-one has ever proposed Poland to us. This direction is totally neglected.*

► *I am curious about America – but not about Poland. I think, it is not so much different as to attract our interest.*

► *Why going to Poland, when you can see precisely the same architecture and culture in Western Ukraine? Lviv, Uzhgorod – you don't need any visa, and it is much cheaper there.*

► *Only in transit. Watching that country is worthwhile only when you pass through it.*

► *Just compare Poland and the Czech Republic. Why am I going to the Czech Republic, and not to Poland? Because there is much more to be seen there.*

When discussing the impact of international processes and the countries' foreign policies upon prospects for Russian-Polish relations, the interviewees spoke highly of Poland's moves to lessen the dependence on Gazprom shipments. They cited different motives, though:

► *This is because our government will finally understand that something needs to be done.*

► *I believe they will gain. They will feel the taste of independence.*

In addition to that, a positive influence will likely be exerted by the strengthening of China's position.

► *China's growing share of the global GDP will be conducive to improvement in our relations with Poland, because that country will cease looking up to America and will increasingly be looking to the East. And in the East, there is Russia and there is China.*

The impact which can be made on mutual relations by developments in Ukraine and Belarus is mostly seen as adverse.

► *Changing to the worse. Because Poland backs the opposition in Minsk and it backs the opposition in Kiev. We are pronouncing ourselves against chaos, but the Polish government actually supports this chaos.*

► *It looks like this: we support Belarus and that country has problems with the European Union. As a result, our support for Belarus results in a worsening of our relations with Poland.*

► *It seems to me that Poles seek to compete against us in Ukraine and Belarus. They want to build their Little Europe – something like a super-power. And they are encroaching on our territory.*

The prospect of the missile defence shield being installed in Poland elicits an unequivocally negative reaction.

► *If they install the thing, the situation will change to the worse.*

► *It's unpleasant. They are so close to us, and they are so much loyal towards our opponents.*

► *They offer their territory for that. Why?*

The widest variety of opinions appeared when discussing the impact made upon mutual relations by the crash of the plane carrying the Polish president.

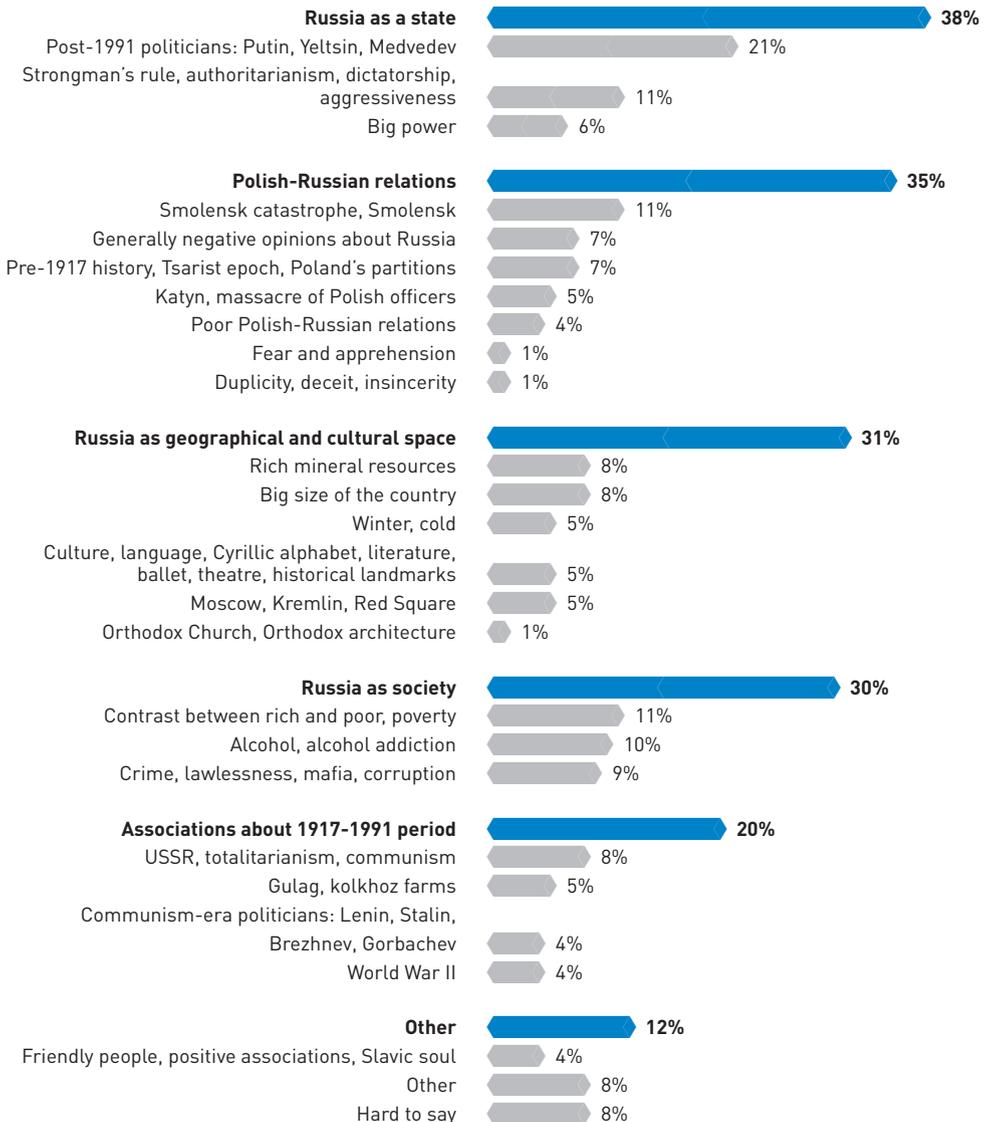
► *The catastrophe itself had the effect of worsening our relations, but the course of the investigation helped improve them. Even if these relations are not back to the level preceding the air crash, we did try to demonstrate – perhaps somewhat clumsily – that we are not to blame. We showed that despite the hysteria in Poland we treat them well and do not seek the conflict to escalate. This is why I believe that our relations have improved as a result.*

► *There has been some deterioration, because our officials barred conducting an investigation... We can show them as evidence whatever we want. We can also cheat them.*

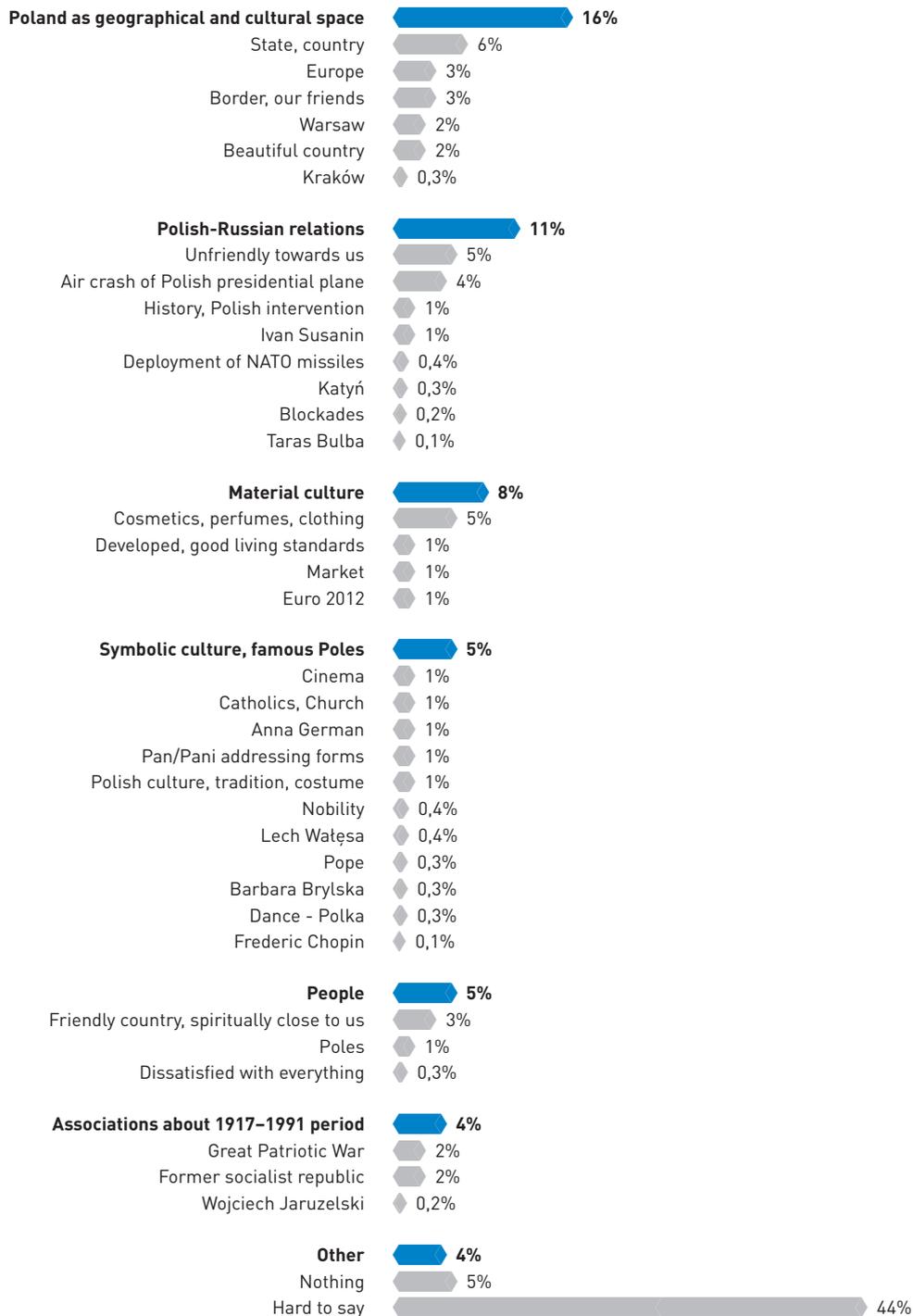
► *The president's death in the air crash has somehow brought us closer together. The Russian people felt for the Poles, and they saw that we are not such beasts as they thought us to be.*

# Figures

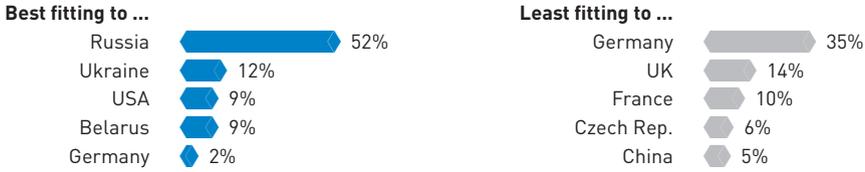
Figure 1a. Poles' association about Russia



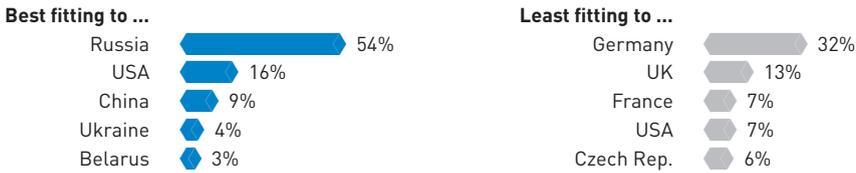
**Figure 1b. Russians' associations about Poland**



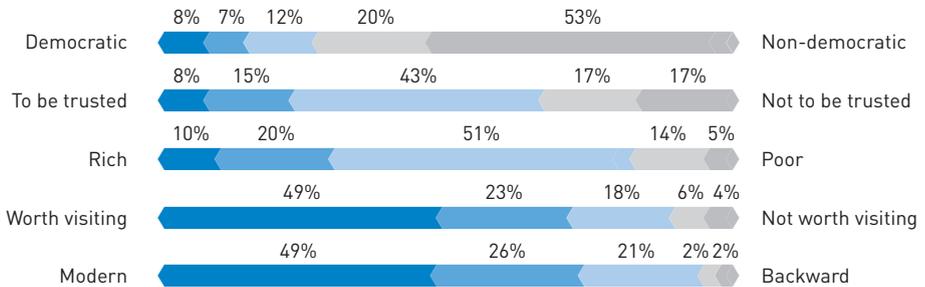
**Figure 2. Poles' opinions about countries: *In this country there is plenty of various pathology (crime, alcoholism, corruption)***



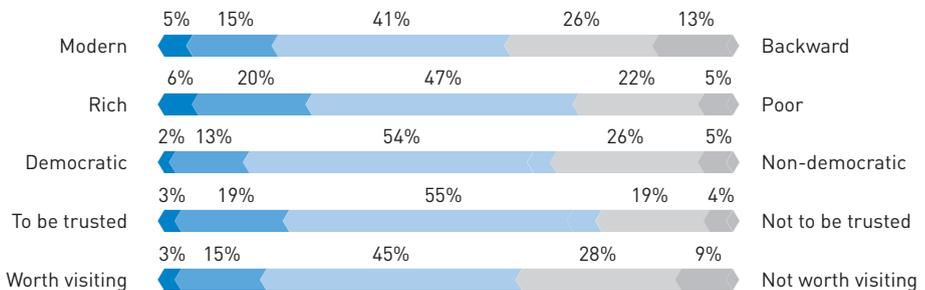
**Figure 3. Poles' opinions about countries: *This is a country of contrasts – common people's poverty side by side with opulence of the richest***



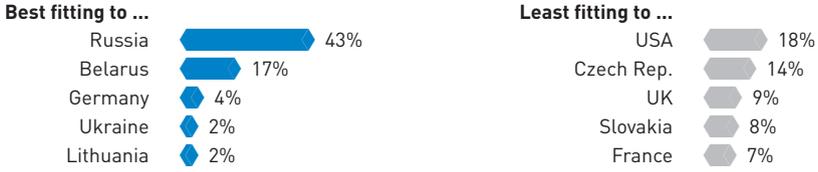
**Figure 4a. Russia's image among Poles**



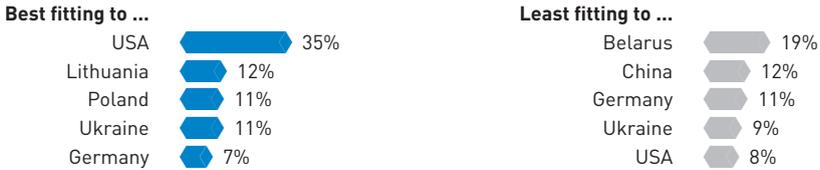
**Figure 4b. Poland's image among Russians**



**Figure 5a. Opinions about countries: *This country has unfriendly intentions towards Poland***



**Figure 5b. Opinions about countries: *This country has unfriendly intentions towards Russia***

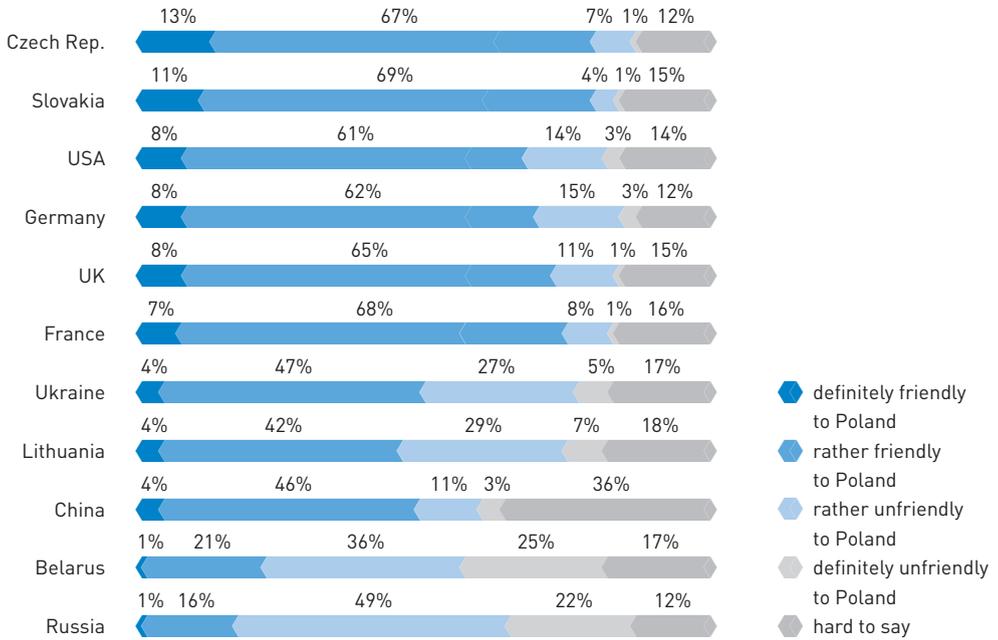
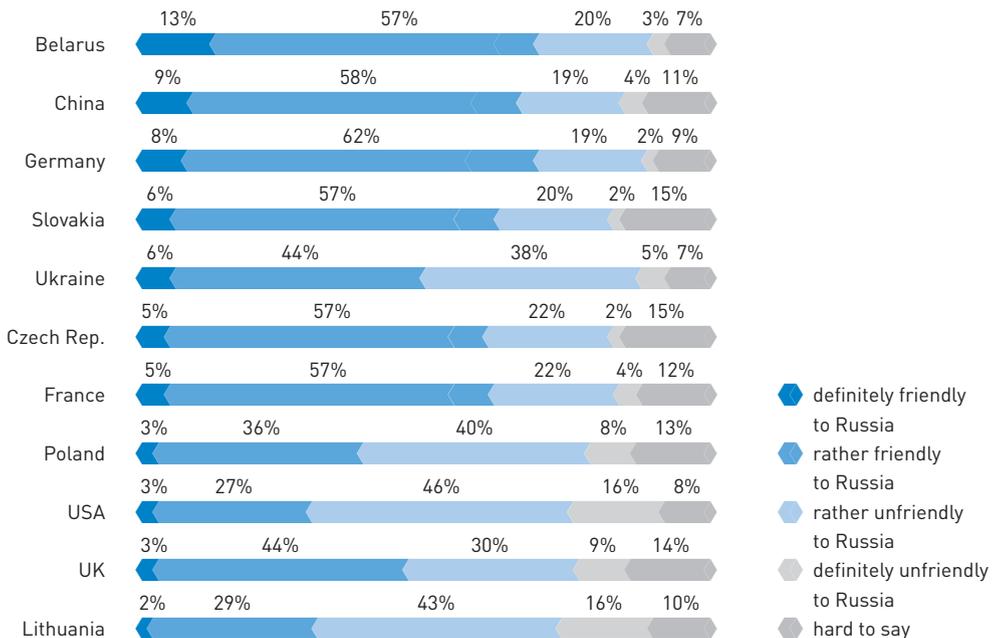


**Figure 6a. Rankings of peoples in terms of cultural/lifestyle affinity to Poles**

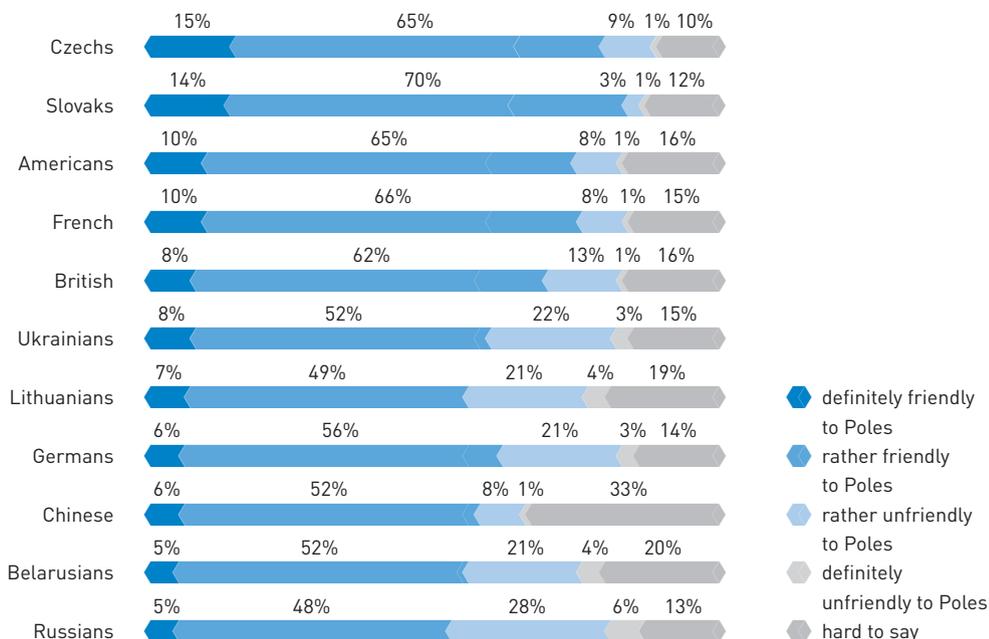


**Figure 6b. Rankings of peoples in terms of cultural/lifestyle affinity to Russians**

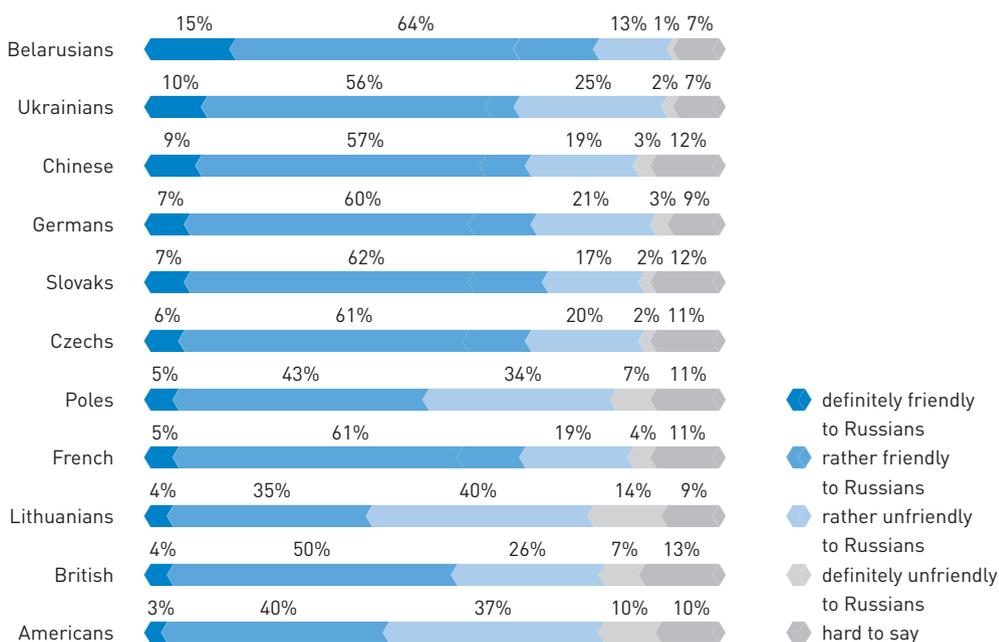


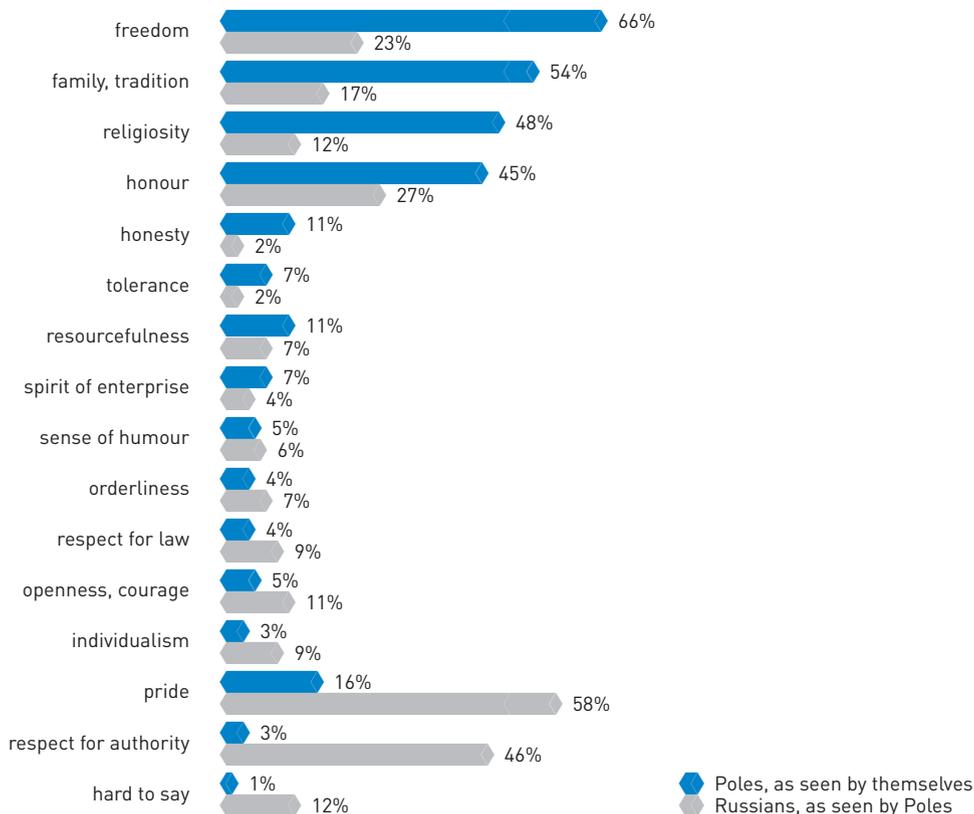
**Figure 7a. States, by attitude towards Poland****Figure 7b. States, by attitude towards Russia**

**Figure 8a. Peoples, by attitude towards Poles**

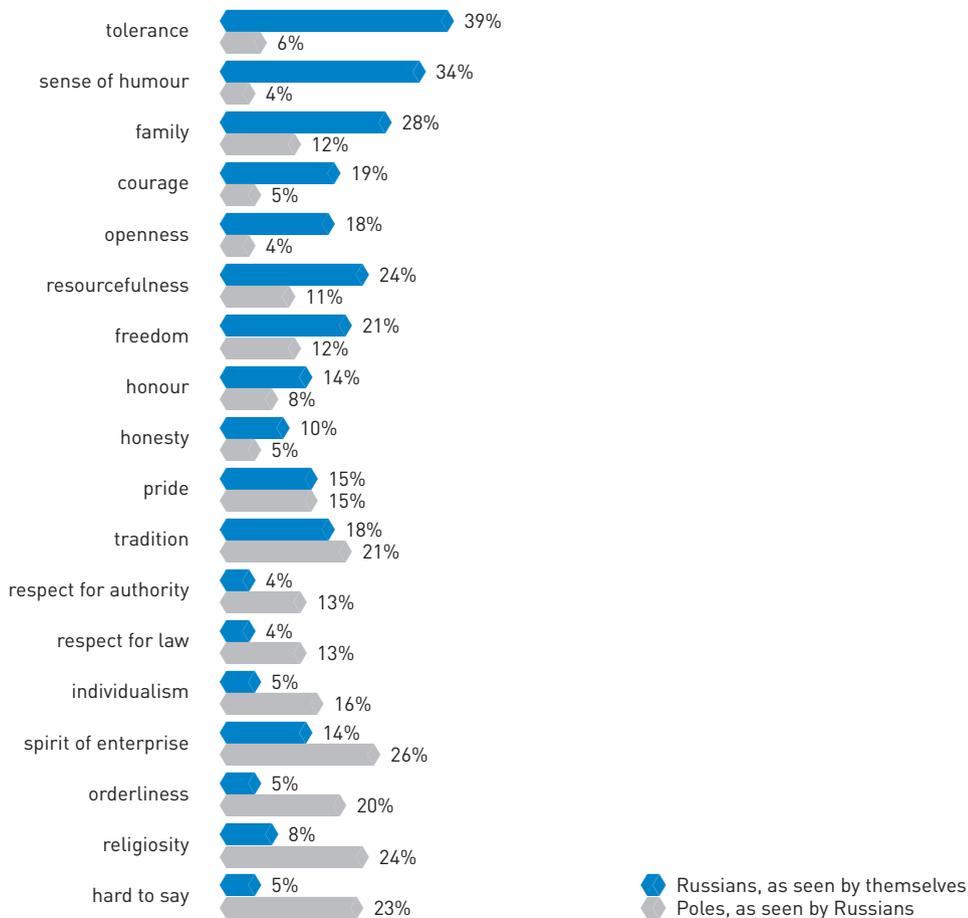


**Figure 8b. Peoples, by attitude towards Russians**

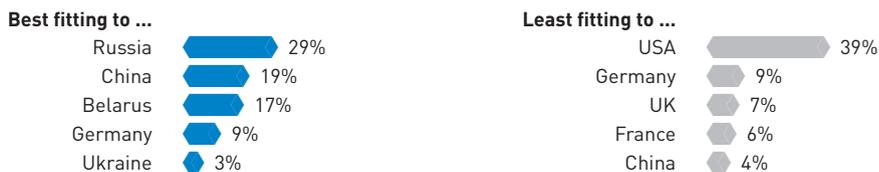


**Figure 9a. Values of importance for Poles and – and in their opinion – of importance for Russians****Figure 10a. Poles' opinions about countries: This country belongs to the same cultural community as Poland****Figure 10b. Russians' opinions about countries: This country belongs to the same cultural community as Russia**

**Figure 9b. Values of importance for Russians and – and in their opinion – of importance for Poles**



**Figure 11. Poles' opinions about countries: People in this country prefer a strongman's rule to freedom and democracy**



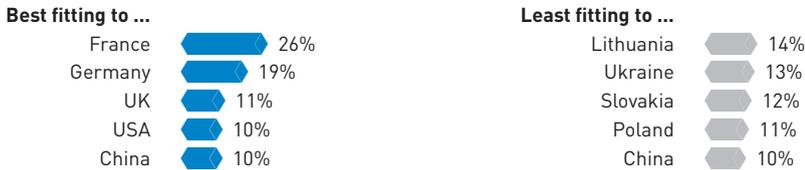
**Figure 12a. Poles' opinions about countries: *With people in this country you can have a heart-to-heart conversation***



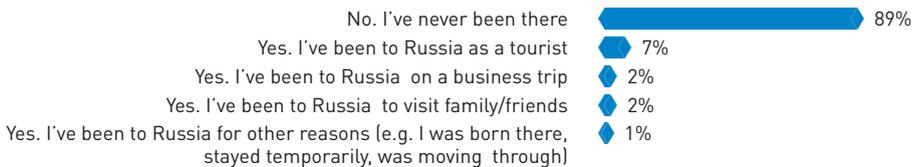
**Figure 12b. Russians' opinions about countries: *With people in this country you can have a heart-to-heart conversation***



**Figure 13. Russians' opinions about countries: *It has many achievements in culture***



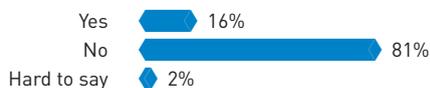
**Figure 14a. Visits by Poles to Russia**



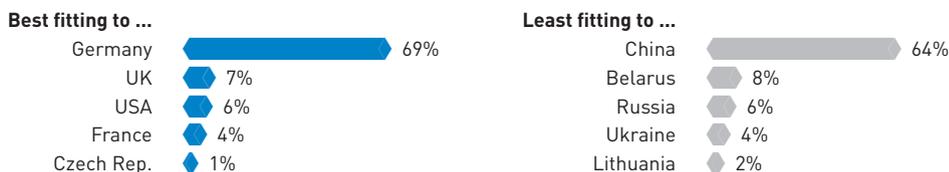
**Figure 14b. Visits by Russians to Poland**



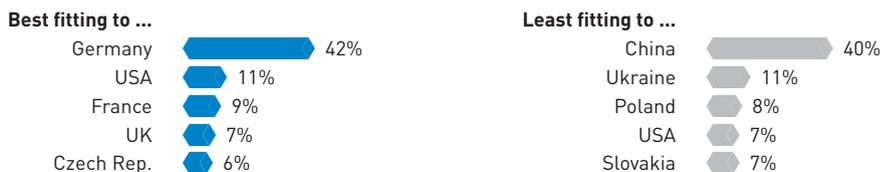
**Figure 15. Contact with Russian brands over past 12 months**



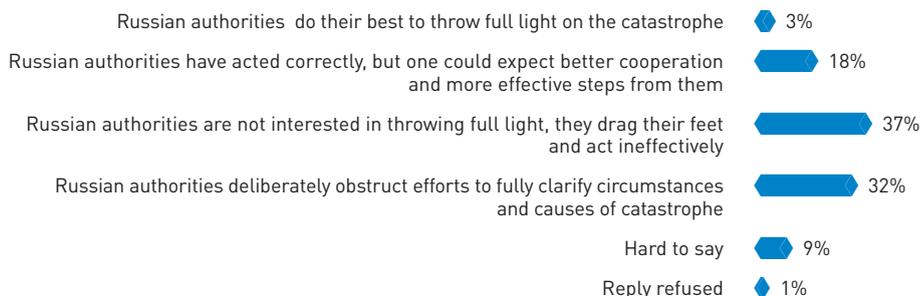
**Figure 16a. Poles' opinions about countries: Products from that country are usually of good quality**



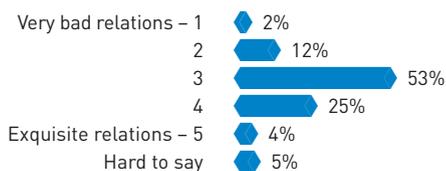
**Figure 16b. Russians' opinions about countries: Products from that country are usually of good quality**



**Figure 17. Russian authorities' approach to Smolensk investigation, as seen by Poles**



**Figure 18. How Russians see relations with Poland, on scale from 1 to 5**



# Polish comment on findings of Polish and Russian research

By Łukasz Mazurkiewicz

The findings of the research reveal fundamental differences in how Poles and Russians see the other nation. The following elements deserve special attention:

Poland and the Poles take relatively less space in Russians' collective consciousness than the space taken in Poles' consciousness by Russia and the Russians. The perception of Poland among Russians can be described as shallow and lacking distinctiveness. A very high percentage of the Russian participants in the study replied either "hard to say" or "nothing" to a question about associations elicited by Poland (49%), and answers from the remaining respondents were indistinctive and generalised.

Among the scattered, infrequent pronouncements, lacking depth and value judgement, there are no strong association groups which could be seen as dominating in Russians' perception of Poland. The bulk is a mixture of neutral geographical associations (Poland as an European country and Russia's neighbour), and associations with either contemporary or historical Polish-Russian relations. What we can find in this group includes, for example, the perception of Poland's unfriendly attitude towards Russia (5%) and the crash of the presidential plane at Smolensk. Finding a place among the other, very scarce associations is the 1610 capture of Moscow by Poles. The remaining association groups were mentioned by less than 10% of the questioned Russians; they have to do with material culture (8%), symbolic culture (5%), and also Poland's inhabitants (5%). Characteristically, the cultural associations are, for the most part, about the past. Generally, Russians do not re-

gard Poland as country known for its cultural achievements. **Figure 13.** ► p. 32

Meanwhile, when asked about Russian associations, much more Polish respondents could recollect their associations (only 8.1% had problems with that), and more accurately, too. **Figure 1a.** ► p. 24 Similarly, with responses to the other questions, the Russians took the "hard to say" opinion more frequently than the Poles. This is a major comparative finding, important for the understanding of other differences and attitudes revealed by the study. In particular, the study exposes the scale of fundamental disparities in the weight which both peoples attach to mutual relations. For Poles, and for their identity, the present and historical relations with Russia are clearly much more important than the relations with Poland and the Poles are for Russians.

The opinions held by Poles about Russia are fairly distinctive, tilting to one or the other end of the descriptive scale. **Figure 4a.** ► p. 26 In Russians' opinions about Poland, the bulk are closer to the middle of the scale. **Figure 4b.** ► p. 26 Actually, none of the five aspects in the assessment of Poland stands out perceptibly, whether in the positive or negative direction. This comes as yet another manifestation of the little-diversified and little-distinctive image of Poland among the Russians. This stems in part from Poland's poor exposure to Russian consciousness, and in part from relatively limited knowledge about the contemporary Poland and Poles.

In Poles' attitudes towards Russia and the Russians, there is a clear distinction between attitude to the state and attitude to the people.

The Russians are perceived much better than Russia. **Figure 7a. and 8a.** ▶ pp. 28, 29 Even though Russians are seen by Poles as culturally and mentally distant, they nevertheless are assigned traits which elicit respect and sympathy: openness, cordiality, hospitality, being people with whom one can have a heart-to-heart conversation. As for the Russians, a differentiation between interstate relations with Poland and people-to-people relations is all but nonexistent **Figure 7b. and 8b.** ▶ pp. 28, 29 But such duality can, to some extent, be detected in Russians' attitudes towards the US and Ukraine: for both those countries, respondents find the state attitudes towards Russia to be less favourable than the people's attitudes towards the Russians.

The two rankings of peoples in terms of cultural/lifestyle proximity, emerging from the research, are quite coherent. While Poles position themselves among Western Slavs (alongside Czechs and Slovaks), Russians perceive the closeness of Eastern Slavic peoples (Ukrainians and Belarusians). The resulting picture of what is a natural cultural environment for both peoples is thus very clear. **Figure 6a. and 6b.** ▶ p. 27 The Russians also feel fairly strong affinity with Czechs and Slovaks, while Poles seem to them least close among the Slavic nations listed in the questionnaire – although much closer than Western European peoples.

Generally, there are grounds to conclude that both the Poles and the Russians perceive themselves as the "most distant among the close ones". Despite certain major similarities, reflecting the shared foundations of culture (language) and longstanding neighbourhood, Poles and Russians have a strong sense of different identities, and they differently draw the map of cultural affinities. **Figure 10a. i 10b.** ▶ p. 30

Coming as yardsticks of the Poles' cultural and mental distance from the Russians are differences in both communities' underlying values. Poles differently describe the key values of importance for themselves and, in their opinion,

of importance for the other people. The same can be said of the Russians. Poles perceive themselves as valuing freedom, respect for family, tradition, religiosity, and honour, while to Russians they assign pride and respect for authority. **Figure 9a.** ▶ p. 30 But Russians see themselves as tolerant, with a sense of humour, family-oriented, resourceful and prizing freedom. In the opinion of the Russians, the differences between the two peoples are reflected in their respective attitudes to values such as family, courage and openness. Especially those two last-mentioned notions are not seen by Russians as describing the Poles. To Russians, Poles are enterprising, religious, traditional and orderly. Characteristically, in the case of those traits most strongly assigned to Poles, the differences between Russian self-description and their description of Poles are the widest. **Figure 9b.** ▶ p. 31 It can thus be concluded that in both cases, a people's own image is "lighter", more solemn and more lofty, than the image of their neighbours to whom more practical and less elevated virtues are assigned. The research has revealed, especially in its Russian part, an opposing perception of the values underlying each community. And the replies from Russian participants are actually indicative of the opinion: "Poles are such as we are not".

It should also be noted that in the Russian part of the research, much more respondents declare problems with indicating the values which they believe are representative of the other people (23% vs. 12% in the Polish survey). Nearly every Pole have some perception of a Russian – which may be stronger or weaker, and more or less stereotyped – but one in four Russians has no such associations about the image of a Pole. If it is true that a person's character and set of values are best revealed in a heart-to-heart conversation, then there is still a long way to go for Poles and Russians before they get to know each other better. As it is now, representatives of both people do not consider themselves ideal partners for such conversation. Poles in fact list Russians among those nations to whom the

notion of a heart-to-heart conversation is least fitting. **Figure 12a.** ▶ p. 32

The maps of alliances with other states and other peoples, as drawn by Poles and Russians, are so diametrically different as to help explain many other attitudes and behaviours revealed in the research. An interesting case is presented by Polish and Russian attitudes towards Germany and the Germans. Germany is perceived as a friendly state by both peoples, and in an equal degree. But the Germans as a people score less than Germany as a state. At the same time, Germany is seen by Russians as the most friendly in the group of West European countries (the remaining countries, such as the United Kingdom, France, Poland and Lithuania, fall into a group of less friendly, or outright hostile, countries). Poland is located among countries which may have hostile intentions against Russia. The percentage of respondents so believing is not high, yet Poland comes third among the countries on the list. **Figure 5b.** ▶ p. 27

There is one more aspect worthy of mention in Poles' and Russians' mutual opinions about their countries. In both studies, the negative opinions about mutual relations overtake the positive opinions. Both Poles and Russians can be seen as believing in an unfriendly attitude on the part of the neighbour. As many as 70% of the Poles perceive Russia as a country unfriendly to Poland (the sum of "definitely unfriendly" and "rather unfriendly" responses). Among the Russians, the corresponding proportion is distinctly lower, but also high (47%). **Figure 7a. and 7b.** ▶ p. 28

For both parties, contact with the neighbour is very limited. The percentage of Russians who have ever been to Poland is almost as low as that of Poles who have visited Russia (8% and 11%, respectively). Only 5% of the Russian respondents have been on a tourist trip to Poland, and only 11% declare knowing a Pole or having known one in the past. This is indicative of a low intensity of direct contacts between both peoples.

The sparsity of direct Polish-Russian contacts and the low exposure to current cultural and economic achievements of both countries is conducive to negative stereotyping. It may be noted that many associations with Poland among the Russians go back to the Soviet times, when Polish culture (Anna German, Barbara Brylska, Stanisław Lem) and Polish consumer products (Pollena cosmetics, Hortex products) were known and popular in the USSR. Today, there seems to be a wide gap here.

Summing up, in the light of findings of the Polish and Russian parts of the research, two kinds of barriers to better Polish-Russian relations could be identified:

1. Systemic, and partly geo-strategic, barriers (quite durable, although their impact may be either diminishing or growing):
  - Different scales of mutual perception, different exposure in social consciousness
  - Different maps of international alliances and sympathies, different descriptions of cultural community
  - Image setback for Russia, post-Smolensk.
2. Barriers stemming from a knowledge/contact deficit (changeable and susceptible to communications impacts):
  - Limited scale of direct contacts, weak social networks
  - Gap in mass-impact culture contacts
  - Lack of messages promoting Poland and Russia as tourist destinations.

# Russian comment on findings of Russian and Polish research

By Valery Fedorov

When analysing the attitude of the contemporary Russians towards Poland and the Poles, a host of different elements of social consciousness must be taken into account. These include: positions towards the outside world; historical reminiscences (fortunately, the history of mutual relations is full of events and developments which have made it to school textbooks); the personal experience of contacts, business/tourist travel and cooperation with Poles: familiarity with the other country's culture, gained from literature, films, songs, fairy tales; and, last not least, a general awareness of what is going on globally and among immediate neighbours.

Underlying the mutual relations are fundamental differences between our two countries, and without taking these differences under scrutiny it will not be possible to adequately interpret the available sociological data. Leaving aside religion and language, let us focus on the following aspects: the relative size of each country, its civilisation choice, membership of one of worldwide military and political blocs, how the country's development lines of the past half-century are assessed by the public opinion. If we look at these aspects, Russia and Poland could not be further apart.

If Poland is a large country by European standards, then Russia is a continent. This sets the bar high for Russians in all areas, and sometimes they may treat haughtily the partners and neighbours who have no such large area, so large population and, most importantly, who are not self-sufficient on the geo-political map of the world. And so, when Russia is adjusting the focus in its binoculars, it may happen that Poland gets lost out of sight – and even when it

is in sight, this will be only as a part of the West European and Atlantic community, and a part which is by no means the most important or the most interesting.

The choice of West European civilisation (and, more broadly, the Atlantic community) was made by Poland a thousand years ago, and was subsequently confirmed many times, including not so long ago. That choice is in firm opposition to the principal position of Russia, itself one of the global centres of power, who may join only such an alliance where it will play the lead role.

If we take the fundamental values cultivated in literature, at school, and indicative of the national spirit, the differences are no less profound. For Poland, the most important are: freedom, individualism, right of choice, national independence, and for Russia, these are: unity, shared experiences, subordination of one's own interests to the interest of the community, collectivism, imperialism.

As a member of the European Union and NATO, Poland has by its own choice limited its sovereignty, in exchange for the benefits offered by membership of one of the world's most influential alliances. Russia, conversely, does not give away even an inch of sovereignty, and is very touchy about the slightest hint of such self-limitation.

A large portion of the Russians dismiss all countries in other alliances, except for these alliances' hegemony, as unimportant satellites or as potential enemies. That is why the attitude towards them is often one of haughtiness or hostility.

The processes two countries have gone through over the past half-century are the subject of diametrically different appraisals by their societies.

In Poland, it is de rigueur to rejoice at the downfall of a pro-Soviet communist regime and unification with Europe, and to extol the advantages of the market economy and the democratic system. In Russia, there is a nostalgia for the Brezhnev era, when the Soviet Union was one of the two world superpowers; the 1991 events are mostly seen as a catastrophe and the country's historic defeat to the US; and the subsequent reforms are viewed as a scourge and a road to nowhere.

With the emergence of a new post-Soviet generation, the intensity of nostalgia and resentment has lessened a bit, but this is only a nuanced change, with all the mainstream assessments remaining unchanged: Russia is said to have taken a wrong direction after the fall of communism; what is needed is a radical and quick change towards a Soviet-like socially-oriented state which would again play a world role. The idea of returning to the European family of nations, as one of many equal-rights members, has receded into history with perestroika, and it today survives only on the fringes.

Poland has historically warranted and understandable fears of Russia, which is not only many times bigger in terms of area and military potential, but which also many times in the past either ruled over large parts of Poland and or otherwise restricted Polish sovereignty.

As we can see, this is a rather inauspicious starting point for a research into Polish-Russian relations through the prism of both publics. What can be put up to counter these tendencies towards discord, discrepancy, mutual fear, old and new traumas, and apprehension?

First, there is a thousand years' long neighbourhood, mutual familiarity and closeness of the peoples, languages, cultures and habits. Second, there are the traumatic, harsh and often bloody

experiences of mutual relations, which cannot be deleted from history, and without which it will not be possible to build national identities – more importantly for Poles, but for Russians, too (remember about a recent attempt to name as Russian national holiday the 4th of November, in remembrance of the chasing of Polish forces away from the Kremlin in 1612). And third, there are the personal experiences of acquaintance and contact – not only in the older generation but also among the young people, just entering an active stage in life.

It is only against this background that the data collected by Polish and Russian sociologists towards the end of 2012 can be presented in their historical, political, emotional and psychological context. Only against this background can keys be sought to understanding and, in the future, to formulating recommendations which would help speed up the healing of so many wounds in our relations and which would strengthen the foundations of these relations. Even if not numerous, these foundations are already there, and they can now be multiplied and strengthened.

The associations which Poland evokes among Russians today are usually about an unfriendly state, whose intentions are viewed as unfavourable. As Russians see it, the worse attitudes can be found only in Lithuania (a former Soviet republic, one of the most active during the breakup of the USSR) and in the US, the former Cold War opponent and now simply a major geopolitical rival. The respondents gave a “3” mark (on a scale from 1 to 5) to the present-day relations between Poland and Russia. The higher the educational level of the respondent, the lower their note.

As Russians see it, the Russian-Polish relations are weighed down with a longstanding burden of both countries' long history. Russians also believe that the proximity of a stronger and more ambitious Russia fills Poles with apprehension and a fear of losing their independence, but also

with envy of the Russian natural resources and size of the country. For this reason, Poland either does too little to improve mutual relations and does not care at all about that.

Poles as a society have a slightly warmer attitude towards Russia than the Polish state, Russians believe. But they place Poland towards the end in the rankings of peoples with whom Russians have warm relations. At present, the interviewees opine, the key role in influencing the Russian-Polish relations is played by politicians, state and party leaders, who use the media for this purpose. The current role of non-governmental organisations – cultural, religious or academic – is believed to be minimal.

Generally speaking, the respondents see Poland as a country which is rather modern, democratic and worth visiting. Opinion is split on Poland's economic status and credibility as a state. The country is associated with Polish products, especially cosmetics, perfumes and articles of clothing.

One in ten of the surveyed Russians has Polish associations as a result of personal experiences (which is quite a good result, given the size of the Russian population and territory). The proportion of those acquiring their perception of Poland during a visit to that country is lower – but Poland still holds a position within the Top-3 countries (along with Turkey and China) most frequently visited by Russians.

## Notes



The Polish Centre for Polish-Russian Dialogue and Understanding and the Russian Foundation “Centre for Russian-Polish Dialogue and Understanding” have launched a joint programme of regular public opinion research in Poland and Russia, to obtain reliable data about the attitudes held by Poles towards Russia and the Russians, and by Russians towards Poland and the Poles. Our intention is to use the knowledge so obtained in the activities of both centres of dialogue and understanding, and also in our efforts to counter what we perceive as a deficit of knowledge by Poles about Russia

and Russians about Poland, to disseminate information about both countries, and counter stereotyping and prejudice, which are still present in the two communities. We are convinced that the findings of our research will attract wider interest in both countries, inspire further studies into mutual relations, contribute to public debate about these relations, help optimise the conduct of both countries’ foreign policies, and that they may be used in developing commercial and investment strategies, thus helping to promote economic contacts.



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