



## In the context of declassified theses of 2008: another look on contemporary Polish-Ukrainian relations

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This article shows changes in the relationship between Ukraine and the Republic of Poland during the final years of Viktor Yushchenko's presidency in Ukraine. The analysis has been prompted by a release of the previously classified 2008 document, known as «Theses on the Polish policy towards Russia and Ukraine,» which described the necessity for Poland to change its foreign policy in favor of Russia instead of Ukraine. Following the research of presented sources and literature, including the declassified document, it has been shown in the article how Poland's acceptance into the EU and the Schengen Area had negatively influenced Polish-Ukrainian cross-national cooperation, together with Poland's own secret change of priorities. This change has forced Ukraine, which saw Poland as its main partner in the strategy of the foreign policy related to the entry into EU, to act despite its own geopolitical interests. In the meantime, certain changes in the Ukrainian and Polish political life from 2005 to 2010 also influenced Polish-Ukrainian relations and made the previous «alliance of two presidents» impossible.

**Keywords:** Ukraine; the Republic of Poland; Viktor Yushchenko; Witold Waszczykowski; classified documents

## У контексті розсекречених тез 2008 року: ще один погляд на сучасні польсько-українські відносини

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Ця стаття демонструє зміни у відносинах між Україною і Республікою Польща в останні роки президентства Віктора Ющенка в Україні. Аналіз викликано випуском раніше класифікованого документа 2008-го року, відомого як «Тези про політику Польщі щодо Росії і України», який свідчив про необхідність Польщі змінити свою зовнішню політику на користь Росії замість України. З огляду на представлені джерела та літературу стаття ілюструє як прийняття Польщі до складу ЄС та Шенгенської зони наклало певні складнощі на двосторонню співпрацю, разом з таємною зміною пріоритетів зовнішньої політики у Польщі; водночас змушуючи Україну, яка продовжувала бачити Польщу в якості свого головного партнера щодо проєвропейської стратегії зовнішньої політики, діяти проти своїх власних геополітичних інтересів. У той же час деякі зміни в українському та польському політикумі з 2005 по 2010 рік також вплинули на хід польсько-українських відносин, зробивши попередній «союз двох президентів» неможливим.

**Ключові слова:** Україна; Республіка Польща; Віктор Ющенко; Вітольд Вашиковський; засекречені документи

## В контексте рассекреченных тезисов 2008 года: еще один взгляд на современные польско-украинские отношения

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Эта статья демонстрирует изменения в отношениях между Украиной и Республикой Польша в последние годы президентства Виктора Ющенко в Украине. Анализ спровоцирован выпуском ранее классифицированного документа 2008 года, известного как «Тезисы о политике Польши в отношении России и Украины», свидетельствующий о необходимости Польши изменить свою внешнюю политику в пользу России вместо Украины. Учитывая представленные источники и литературу, статья показывает как принятие Польши в ЕС и Шенгенскую зону наложило определенные сложности на двустороннее сотрудничество, в совокупности с закулисной сменой приоритетов внешней политики в Польше; в то же время заставляя Украину, которая продолжала рассматривать Польшу в качестве своего главного

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партнера в проєвропейській стратегії зовнішньої політики, діяти проти своїх власних геополітичних інтересів. Крім того, деякі зміни в українській і польській політичній житті з 2005 по 2010 год також впливали на хід польсько-українських відносин, зробивши попередній «союз двох президентів» неможливим.

**Ключевые слова:** Україна; Республіка Польща; Віктор Ющенко; Вітольд Вашиковський; засекречені документи

**Introduction.** Polish-Ukrainian relations have been the chosen topic of author's study for some time, and when the researcher looks for historical trends (especially in contemporary relations, on which there are no all-encompassing and all-explaining history books that would «make sense out of everything»), researcher often finds seemingly unexplained main shifts and changes. Of course, a scientific approach requires some explanation to be found, and so the changes end up explained by other trends, by changes in the inner politicum of countries, etc. In the context of one particular revelation regarding a shift in Polish-Ukrainian relations, I'm not sure if I wanted to be proven right. The above-mentioned case is about a sudden rise of «appeals to historical memory» in the Polish politicum, including even the highest levels of it in the year 2009, which were discussed in a number of author's articles. A small set of the most recent theses was published at the «Travnevi Studii» («May's Studies») journal of Donetsk National University in 2016 [1, pp. 119-122].

The above-mentioned shift, which the author has focused on, is connected with the Republic of Poland's acceptance of its role of the «gatekeeper» for Eastern European countries of the European Union, and as such the occurrence of new appetites due to this position, seemingly allowing Poland to demand Ukraine's policy changes in order to get the EU support. While encompassing this aspect, the full reality of the situation ended up much direr, to the level where if anybody dared to suggest it before the great reveal, they'd probably get called out for «manipulating the facts to favor an anti-Russian narrative». Indeed, the shift in Polish-Ukrainian relations in 2009 was not only a matter of the two countries' changing their foreign policy interests, but a conscious choice in favor of Russia in Polish foreign policy theses of 2008. These theses, officially, «Theses on the Polish policy towards Russia and Ukraine» are dated March 4th, 2008, and were classified back then. This document has been recently declassified by the Polish Foreign Minister, Witold Waszczykowski. He commented on this document contents together with other people who'd been acquainted with the document. According to Waszczykowski, only four people had access to the document in 2008, among which was Radosław Sikorski, who was at that time the Minister of Foreign Affairs, and seemingly tried to show himself as the ally of Ukraine in the EU. Furthermore, the document comes after Donald Tusk's two visits to Moscow and Kyiv at the beginning of 2008. During the official visit of Donald Tusk in Kyiv, despite his declarations of commitment to further Polish-Ukrainian strategic partnership, the public opinion both in Ukraine and Poland had very small confidence about the success of such partnership in the context of his similar statements during the previous visit to Moscow in January 2008. Even then, during the negotiations of the Polish Prime Minister in Moscow, Leonid Kravchuk and

Aleksander Kwasniewski criticized his actions as «un-fair» towards Ukraine. [2, p. 69]

As for the document itself, «friendly-critical» relations with Ukraine were demanded, as well as the proclamation that «Even without mentioning huge economic interests of Poland in Russia, which concerns not only the energy sector, that plays an important role in relations of Poland with Russia and Europe, as well as the mutual cultural and intellectual interests, it is necessary to note that an active dialogue with Russia is of great political value for Poland.» Commenting on such logic, Witold Waszczykowski said that «The authors had no illusions about [the policy's] success, but decided that 'being pro-Russian' would be a kind of a tool, a trick for the relations with the West. In a way, they wanted to improve their reputation in the West.» Eerily similar to the current statements of President Donald Trump's administration regarding Russian Federation, the authors of the document noted that for the West, Russia is an important ally in the fight against Islamic terrorism without the old Soviet ideological anti-western agenda, as well as «a large storage of resources that can significantly support the economy of the Western world.» [3]

Although Waszczykowski notes that «in the recent years, Poland's policy has been pro-Ukrainian», one can't help but notice that Donald Tusk and Radosław Sikorski said exactly the same during their time in the government, despite secret promotion of a try of pro-Russian agenda, specifically in opposition to the pro-Ukrainian one. As such, it would be wise to take another look at that period of Polish-Ukrainian relations and see just how common did the classified documents had with the reality.

**Materials and methods.** The primary sources for such research (aside from the aforementioned document itself) are bilateral treaties between Ukraine and the Republic of Poland (such as the Agreement between the Republic of Poland and Ukraine on Social Security, May 18, 2012), as well as documents related to the internal affairs (such as Foreign Minister Radosław Sikorski's proclamation of the Polish Foreign Policy Priorities 2012–2016, March 29, 2012). Literature on the topic includes works of both Polish (such as J. Draus's Polish-Ukrainian relations after independence, T. Kapuśniak's Polityka Polski wobec Ukrainy, etc.) and Ukrainian (such as S. Hrabovsky's Яка Україна потрібна Польщі?, В. Andrushkiv's Україна і Польща – економічні аспекти співпраці etc.) historians, economists and journalists. Regarding the latter, information from multiple news media is especially convenient for the research, as it shows the realities of the time period and allows understanding how the most of society understood Polish-Ukrainian relations at the time.

Moving aside from the «local» Polish-Ukrainian perspective, one can suggest multiple works on country studies from Stephen R. Burant. This paper in particular

is linked to International Relations in a Regional Context: Poland and Its Eastern Neighbours. Lithuania, Belarus, Ukraine, as well as Poland, Ukraine, and the Idea of Strategic Partnership, which even though it is not written by a Polish researcher, does well to describe the Polish perspective on dealing with its neighbors, Ukraine in particular, showcasing the continuous interests of Poland.

Among the useful notes to be found on Polish-Ukrainian relations in literature, one could note the concept of a geopolitical triangle «Poland – Ukraine – Russia» (as described by Alla Kyrydon). Among the few researchers, the director of the Institute for European Integration under Lviv University, Professor Bohdan Hud has suggested some kind of the timeline, identifying three periods of modern Ukrainian-Polish relations: the «romantic» period (under Leonid Kravchuk and Lech Wałęsa), the «pragmatic» period (under President Leonid Kuchma and Alexander Kwaśniewski), and the «historical» one (Viktor Yushchenko and Lech Kaczyński).

**Results and discussion.** Winding the clocks back a year from the fateful «Theses on the Polish policy towards Russia and Ukraine,» we look at Fall 2007, when the early parliamentary elections were held both in Poland and in Ukraine. These elections ended by the creation of the coalitional government of Donald Tusk (his Civic Platform party and its rival, Law and Justice) in Poland and the coalitional government of Yulia Tymoshenko (BYT collaborated with OU-PSD) in December 2007. This change of leading parties ushered in changes in the relations between two countries: they were no longer dependent merely on friendship between two presidents (Lech Kaczyński and Viktor Yushchenko), but were aimed on the satisfaction of all main fractions of the countries' parliaments [4, pp. 395-418].

Such a geopolitical project has got many discussions in the research departments of the Eastern European policy in Poland. Director of the Center for East European Studies Jan Malicki in his interview to «Polskie Radio» stated: «I want to emphasize that the strength of the Polish position in the European Union depends on what kind of support and power we have in the east» [5, p. 13].

However, almost all spheres of bilateral relations have been affected by problems associated with the entry of Poland to the Schengen area since the end of 2007, which led to new procedures and rules for the crossing of Ukrainian-Polish border by 2009 and, accordingly, have created additional challenges for the development and optimization of cooperation between the states. Obviously, Poland did not intend to fulfill its previous promise of Schengen-free borders for Ukraine, especially after it has been deemed that shunning Ukraine in favor of Russia was an acceptable change in the foreign policy of the country.

Nevertheless, on July 1, 2009 a new treaty on the control of cross-border traffic was signed during the visit of Prime Minister of the Republic of Poland Donald Tusk to Kyiv [6]. Nevertheless, the Schengen Visa issue remained unresolved. Once again during the talks, despite the relative irrelevance to main issues of the aforementioned treaty, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Poland Radosław Sikorski assured support

for Ukraine «in its effort to join the European and Euro-Atlantic family» [7].

Additionally to such geo-economical issues, the introduction of populist approach to common history into the political discourse has reared its head in Polish-Ukrainian relations once again. If in 2008 the coming political conflict was merely prepared behind the scenes, it can be said that year 2009 can be surely called the year of the «political review» of historical memory, probably more related to finding points of disagreement (rather than agreement), seeking «claims» for recessions, rather than any of the «unifying» events of shared Polish-Ukrainian history. An interesting document that characterizes that time as such is the Treaty on cooperation between the Security Service of Ukraine and the Institute of National Remembrance - Commission for the investigation of crimes against the Polish nation, signed on August, 2009. Its subject is the cooperation in the spheres of archives, research and publications of the materials that are stored in the archives of the Security Service of Ukraine [8]. Such a seemingly harmless agreement regarding «the access to archival documents related to the political repression that had taken place on Ukrainian and Polish peoples in the 20th century» became a political statement in the context of the July resolutions of the Sejm. That's not the best solution for Ukraine to keep trying to maintain its partnership with Poland as if nothing wrong has gone.

Winding the clocks further back, one must note that from the beginning of his «revolutionary» presidential campaign, Viktor Yushchenko had support among Polish politicians, including members of the Sejm and the government – among them were the former President of Poland and leader of «Solidarity» Lech Wałęsa, and the future president Lech Kaczyński (mayor of Warsaw at that time). Poland's accession to the European Union, which took place a bit earlier than the Ukrainian election (May 1, 2004), has created a new reality for Ukraine: for the first time there was a country that would actively «lobby» the Ukrainian course for EU membership and partnership with NATO among the members of the European Union. The strengthening of the partnership with Poland had not only provided new opportunities for Ukraine in the European politics, but should also strengthen Viktor Yushchenko's credibility as the president. During his several visits to the EU countries in January and February 2005, the new President of Ukraine stated that Ukraine is ready to break its «multi-vector foreign policy» and that pursuing the membership in the EU and NATO will be the main geopolitical goals from that time. He also asked for the «clear European perspective»: what exactly should be done by Ukraine to join these organizations [9, p. 281]. The EU immediately responded with the «EU-Ukraine Action Plan» that set the level of strategic cooperation between two entities for the time period before the Association Agreement is prepared and formalized [10].

However, with the end of Viktor Yushchenko's presidency approaching, Poland has started to depart from the idea of «common history» and the forgiveness of «sins of our ancestors» from both sides, and has instead started (on official level) the condemnation of the actions

of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (who, on the other hand, were repeatedly characterized as heroes by the President of Ukraine – this is the context of the whole situation that caused a political resonance). On July 15, 2009 Polish Sejm adopted a resolution accusing the OUN and the UPA «in the massacres that have the characteristic of ethnic cleansing and the signs of genocide». In addition, the resolution says that the parliament «honors the memory of the fighters of the Home Army, Self-Defense of East Lands and Peasants' Battalions who rose to wage dramatic struggle in defense of the Polish civilian population and remembers with pain victims among the Ukrainian civilian population» [11].

As suggested in *Gazeta Wyborcza*: «Although Kaczyński made some significant gestures toward Ukraine, now he is primarily thinking about the next year's elections. And his electorate believes that the conflict between two peoples during the war was only Ukrainians' fault» [12].

Nevertheless, Viktor Yushchenko has stated that the relations between Ukraine and Poland can be considered exemplary among the countries that have a difficult common history [13].

Yushchenko was followed by Viktor Yanukovich, who, during his presidential campaign, had declared the preference for more economy-related treaties, instead of the historical-cultural dialogue. That satisfied completely the Polish leadership, which perfectly understood Polish electorate's rejection of the reconciliation (as presented by the Ukrainian side) regarding the Volhynian massacres of 1943, and also its unwillingness to recognize any of AK's responsibility for similar crimes against the Ukrainians. Seeing Yanukovich as a target for easy manipulation in this regard, the Polish side prepared to see their woes regarding history issue to be finally made official in Ukraine as well. In the words of Bronisław Komorowski during his visit to Kyiv, «in many controversial issues of Polish-Ukrainian relations it's easier to communicate with Ukrainians originating from Eastern Ukraine, rather than with the Western Ukrainians, who still have negative emotions about the Polish-Ukrainian past» [14].

The factors of a «decline», or alternatively, a «pause» in bilateral relations between Ukraine and Poland for the post-2012 period include the fact that during this period, the two countries signed only four bilateral treaties:

1. Protocol on Amendments to the Protocol of the Agreement between the Ministry of Defense of Ukraine and the Ministry of National Defense of the Republic of Poland on military cooperation in the exchange of information and the flights of military aircraft in the airspace of both countries [15];

2. Agreement between the Government of Ukraine and the Government of the Republic of Poland on canceling payment for the issuance of national visas [16];

3. Protocol between the Administration of the State Border Service of Ukraine and the General Commandant of the Border Guard of the Republic of Poland on the conditions of the counseling centers [17];

4. Bilateral Agreement between the Ministry of Defense of Ukraine and the Ministry of National De-

fense of the Republic of Poland on the codification [18].

None of these papers dealt with issues of national history. Neither presidents, nor prime ministers of two countries commented on the controversial bills of 2013 that were being discussed in the Polish Sejm, showing apathy and disinterest on Ukrainian side. The only sign of discussion could be the event on March 2013, when Speaker of the Verkhovna Rada Volodymyr Rybak asked the leaders of both the Polish Sejm and the Senate to support the initiative to establish the Day of Memory and Reconciliation of the Poles and the Ukrainians [19].

**Conclusion and recommendations.** Thus, the period of Ukrainian-Polish relations after the accession of Poland to the Schengen area (which resulted in certain changes to the status of partnership between the two countries) can be characterized as problematic in its transitional nature (from bilateralism to cooperation within the Eastern Partnership of the EU structures). In addition, by 2009, the economic and strategic pragmatism gradually «replaced» the problems of «common historical memory» as the «main topic» of relations, since the Polish side felt no longer obligated to ignore those issues and thus had no risk to lose the support of their own voters. Now, when we have the access to previously classified documents, we can also note that the political conflict was not simply a result of Poland's «policy of strengthening» regarding its new position in the EU, but also a part of the new foreign policy doctrine, which intended to increase Polish influence in Russia using Ukraine. The fact that such a shift happened during the later years of Viktor Yushchenko's presidency highlights the fact that even his personal friend President Kaczyński considered Yushchenko's platform of a pro-Western Ukraine a «lost cause» at that time, and saw the promise of economical partnership in Russia as more valuable than the ideological one in Ukraine, especially when there were plenty of ground to build a case on the ideological difference between Poland and Ukraine, particularly regarding common history.

As for the current recommendations, one caution can be suggested. Witold Waszczykowski's messages of being helpful to Ukraine and of there being a «strong Poland in the East» are quite similar to those of Sikorski, although the fact that Mr. Waszczykowski publicized the previously classified document and discussed it with the press speaks of his sincerity. Nevertheless, despite President Petro Poroshenko's decision to finally address the Polish-Ukrainian issues regarding common history in 2014 and 2016 (which even included a public apology before the Polish people), the anti-Ukrainian voices in Poland are becoming ever stronger. Even former allies, such as Yaroslav Kaczyński, declare outright threats, demanding more Ukrainian condemnation of their history: «I plainly told President Poroshenko that they won't make it to Europe with Bandera. It's absolutely clear to me. We've already shown great patience, but everything has its limits» [20]. A careful path is needed, one that would show the Poles that Ukraine respects them as an ideological and economical partner, but at the same time Ukraine will not trade too much of Ukraine's interests in Polish favor, like it happened with the post-2008 «Theses» fiasco.



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