Australian National University

ANU CENTRE FOR EUROPEAN STUDIES

ANU Centre for European Studies Briefing Paper Series

Poland and the New World Disorder

John Besemeres

Vol.8 No.2 (July 2017)
ISSN 1838-0379

The ANU Centre for European Studies Briefing Paper Series is an interdisciplinary series that aims to provide a concise overview of the latest research promoting greater understanding of issues relating to Europe, the European Union and the Europe-Australia relationship.

The Papers serve as a summary of these issues, and as a ready information source for the preparation of submissions, media releases or reports for use by university students, government departments, diplomats and other interested parties, as well as the general public.

The Briefing Papers also showcase the work of the Centre, providing an avenue of public outreach for the broad range of workshops, seminars, public lectures and conferences that form the Centre's work program.

They showcase, too, the research projects supported by the Centre through its appointment of highly qualified scholars as staff members, postdoctoral research fellows, adjuncts and associates, and by its competitive visiting fellowship program.

All ANUCES Briefing Papers can be viewed on our website: http://politicsir.cass.anu.edu.au/centres/anu-centre-for-european-studies/publications/briefing-papers

Recent Briefing Papers

Poland and the New World Disorder | John Besemeres | July 2017 | Volume 8 Number 2

ANUCES/ABC's Big Ideas – Exploring Brexit | January 2017 | Volume 8 Number 1

Preparatory Approaches to Overcoming Regulatory NTBs in an EU–Australia FTA | Andrew Charles Willcocks and Anne McNaughton | June 2015 | Volume 7 Number 4

Religious Freedom and the Principles of Subsidiarity and Margin of Appreciation: The Jurisdictional Responsibilities and Interrelationships of the European Court of Justice and the European Court of Human Rights | Raphaela Thynne | October 2016 | Volume 7 Number 3

Equality and Convergence in Nordic Societies in the Long Run: Europe and Other Comparative Mirrors | Jari Eloranta, Jari Ojala, Jaakko Pehkonen and Lars Christian Bruno | July 2016 | Volume 7 Number 2

The Italian Patient in 2016: Weak But Not Poor | Heribert Dieter | June 2016 | Volume 7 Number 1

European Trade Treaties: Key Intellectual Property Demands | Hazel V.J. Moir | December 2015 | Volume 6 Number 4

ANUCES Roundtable Summary – Russia: What's Next? | Richard Rigby, Peter Rutland | June 2015 | Volume 6 Number 3

Sino Russian Relations under Putin and Xi Jinping | Kyle Wilson, Stephen Fortescue and Rebecca Fabrizi | May 2015 | Volume 6 Number 2

Australia–European Cooperative Security in a New Strategic Environment | March 2015 | Volume 6 Number 1

The Australian National University
Centre for European Studies (ANUCES)

1 Liversidge Street, Building #67C
Canberra ACT 2601, Australia

Professor Jacqueline Lo, ANUCES Executive Director
T +61 2 6125 9896
E europe@anu.edu.au
W http://politicsir.cass.anu.edu.au/centres/anu-centre-for-european-studies

Poland and the New World Disorder[1]

John Besemeres, The Australian National University

ANU Centre for European Studies Research Fellow Dr John Besemeres was this year's guest of honour and speaker at the Polish Constitution Day Commemorative Dinner in Melbourne. The Dinner has taken place annually since the inaugural event in 2002, featuring a different guest speaker each year.

Guest speakers from previous years have included former Governor of Victoria Sir James Gobbo AC CVO QC; former Chief Justice of the High Court of Australia The Hon Murray Gleeson; former Prime Minister of Australia The Hon Tony Abbott MP; Professor Norman Davies; international concert pianist Roger Woodward AC OBE; former Deputy Prime Minister, Ambassador to the Holy See The Hon Tim Fischer AC; and Brigadier Gary Hogan AM, CSC.

Patrons for the 2017 Dinner included the Ambassador of the Republic of Poland in Australia, His Excellency Paweł Milewski; Honorary Consul General for the Republic of Poland in Victoria Dr George Luk-Kozika OAM; and former Prime Minister of Australia The Hon Kevin Rudd.

This article is an edited version of the notes for the address delivered by Dr Besemeres to mark the Anniversary of the 3rd of May 1791 Polish Constitution.

People often ask me about my connection with Poland, so let me start by giving you the shortest version. My parents were of English and Scottish background, their grandparents raised, like me, in country Victoria. To meet a Melbourne University requirement, I had to study a language from scratch and Russian chose itself from a small group. After going to the UK for graduate study in the 1960s, I met larger numbers of Poles as well as Russians and began travelling to both Moscow and Warsaw when my modest graduate scholarship permitted it.

I found the Russians and the Poles strikingly different peoples. By contrast with most Russians, who seemed to like to repeat safe, rehearsed propaganda phrases, the Poles I met were startlingly free with their opinions, which were mostly irreverent about their communist

[1] The author would like to thank his old friend and former colleague, the eminent analyst of Russian foreign policy, Dr Bobo Lo, author inter alia of the authoritative study "Russia and the New World Disorder" (Chatham House/Brookings Institution London/Baltimore 2015) for permission to quote his apt title, and for much else besides.

government. Even party members, particularly after a drink or two, were often remarkably frank.

It took much more to make most Russians open up to a genuine conversation. While on closer acquaintance the Russians could be seen to share with Poles a similar, Slavonic warmth, and even sometimes a curiosity about the world, ideological shutters would tend to close again during any prolonged conversation.

Poles seemed to have a natural democratic temperament, however constricted by the regime under which they had to live. And for all that they differed among themselves about various issues, they displayed a certain natural, defiant unity of perception about the world.

This sturdy political culture of the communist period owed much to history. In particular, it reflected the centuries of nobles' democracy (demokracja szlachecka) that had preceded the three Partitions of Poland in the late eighteenth century; the long years of mainly Russian oppression and repression that the country had suffered since the Partitions; and the tragedies and disasters of the twentieth century that had first liberated their country, and then seemingly trapped it again in a new and even worse Russian servitude.

By the standard of its time, the nobles' democracy of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth of roughly the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries was remarkably democratic. Unfortunately, however, it was too democratic: while it guaranteed the rights of the nobility (not a small group, perhaps 10% of the population), it enabled them to defend selfish private interests at the expense of the state, and to prevent rational majority decisions being taken in the Polish parliament.

Among the main abuses were the notorious *liberum veto* (right of veto) and the *konfederacja* (confederation). The liberum veto, whose original rationale was to promote democratic consensus, increasingly enabled individual nobles to block legislation and even to dissolve the Sejm and rescind its decisions.

The confederation was an accepted institution whereby particular social groups or groups of influentials could band together in pursuit of their objectives. In the later phases of the Commonwealth, however, confederations increasingly engaged in collusion with foreign interests, undermining the independence of the country and blocking necessary reforms.

In the eighteenth century, pressure from its more powerful imperial neighbours to east and west, Russia, Prussia and Austria-Hungary, combined with the anarchic tendencies of

Poland's own governance, was progressively enfeebling nobles' democracy and the elective monarchy that stood at its apex.

From the 1760s, a patriotic reform movement developed, led by the enlightened last King of Poland, Stanisław August Poniatowski. Seeking to avert looming disaster, the reformers developed and enacted the remarkably progressive Constitution of May the Third, 1791.

The Constitution was aimed at preserving the country's independence, and extending democratic rights to much of society, while eliminating the anarchic abuses, including *liberum veto* and the *konfederacja*, which had laid the country wide open to partition.

It drew on the most progressive ideas of its time, and is widely regarded along with the Constitution of the United States as one of the great pioneering achievements in the development of modern democracy.

Unfortunately for Poland, the Constitution of May the Third was too little, too late, and too progressive. The imperial neighbours had no interest in a rejuvenated Poland, and viewed the Constitution as a threat. With Russia taking the lead, they had already helped themselves to large chunks of Polish territory in the First Partition of 1772.

Fearing the spread of radical ideas from France and tempted by the prospect of further territorial gains, Catherine the Great decided to strangle the new Constitution at birth, and seize a further large chunk of Polish land.

She was aided in this by the Targowica Konfederacja led by some of Poland's wealthy landed nobility (magnates). The word 'Targowica' is still thrown about in Polish political debates to characterise anyone seen as too close to Moscow. Under pressure to do so from his erstwhile lover, Catherine, even the reformist King Stanisław August, who had personally drafted much of the Constitution, acceded to the Targowica Konfederacja in the vain hope of salvaging something from inevitable military defeat.

Polish armed resistance to the Russian military intervention was heroic, with Tadeusz Kościuszko, better known to Australians as 'Kozziussko', playing a leading role. But ultimately it was doomed to failure, and a further partition ensued.

Following that Second Partition, Kościuszko returned to the fray, leading the 1794 popular revolt against the Russian empire that will forever bear his name – *Insurekcja Kościuszkowska* or *Powstanie Kościuszkowskie*, the Kościuszko Uprising. Again and in a way

that was sadly to become emblematic of most Polish national struggles from then until the 1980s, despite all the courage and sacrifice, this movement was crushed, and followed by the Third Partition of 1795.

But the Constitution of May the Third and the Kościuszko Uprising did much to inspire all the yearning and endeavour that kept the Polish national idea alive until Poland was finally restored to the map in the wake of World War I. And they were still relevant again in subsequent travails during World War II and the renewed Russian oppression that followed.

The shaping of Poland's political culture that emerged from these tragic events has been strongly positive: patriotism, instinctive resistance to foreign impositions, idealism, with a readiness to sacrifice, reinforced by a strong and steadfast faith in the national Catholic Church, a strong awareness of and commitment to democratic values, and the rights of individuals, a readiness to show solidarity with others within and beyond Poland's borders in a joint struggle for self-determination ('for your freedom and ours'), a strong and unambiguous identification with the West, and a historic tradition of tolerance, exemplified in the acceptance in past centuries of Jewish and Muslim settlers.

But some less positive features deriving from historic experience have also sometimes been apparent in modern times: the perceived need for a Kościuszko or a Piłsudski can give rise to a potentially unhealthy cult of the leader to which Piłsudski himself and his immediate successors were not immune; a tendency to see domestic rivals as in cahoots with foreign enemies like the Targowica group; or to see distinct ethnic groups within the nation or on its borders as deeply suspect; a proclivity accordingly to prefer conflict to compromise both domestically and externally; and a risk that patriotism can morph at times into self-admiring exceptionalism. These features are not of course unique to Poland.

Polish history is studded with heroic deeds and romantic heroes. Children often identify strongly with these figures, and politicians find such roles attractive. Poland's current circumstances don't seem obviously tragic or heroic to outside observers. But some Polish politicians continue to seek romantic hero or martyr status for themselves and their party.

A fierce argument broke out some months ago about whether President Lech Kaczyński and other Polish leaders who died in the Smoleńsk air disaster could be said to have 'perished', or to have 'fallen', as if in a war against Russian aggression. Most non-Polish observers at this stage do not find the term 'fallen' appropriate.

But for many Poles, a war crime still seems the logical, even the only possible explanation. Again the influence of history is apparent. The Partitions, repeated Russian invasions over centuries, Katyń, and the attempted Russification and Sovietisation of Poland after World War II, all contribute powerfully to this mindset.

Defence Minister Antoni Macierewicz, who has led the recent investigations into the disaster, lost his father to murder by the Moscow-controlled Polish secret police in the Stalinist period. Suspicions are understandable and run deep.

To take another example, one hears the comment directed against Poland's paramount leader, Jarosław Kaczyński, a longstanding anti-communist dissident, that he wasn't interned during Jaruzelski's Martial Law. The intended message is that he must have been seen as an asset by the regime.

Defence Minister Macierewicz displayed outstanding courage in his career as an anti-communist dissident over decades. But he still seems to feel a compelling need to take valiant and adventurous, even adventurist steps in the more prosaic present, as for example when he ordered a nocturnal military raid to take over a NATO facility in Poland. This seems a strange way to treat allies.

It is clear then that Poland's past, and the political culture it has brought about, continue to exert a strong influence on national life. Polish political culture is the political culture of a nation long under siege or indeed under occupation by hostile neighbours. And on balance that culture is undoubtedly a good thing. Poland may well still need all the valour it can muster, and at short notice. The present relative calm may yet prove short-lived.

But now is surely a time above all for sober and meticulous preparation, and the strengthening of key alliance relationships abroad and national unity at home, rather than dramatic gestures, history wars, or the comprehensive recasting of Poland's political system.

Let us now look at Poland's international context more closely. Both by impulse and professional experience I'm what I like to call a todayologist. For much of the past 50 years, my daily work routine has included trying to assess the current direction of events in Poland's wider region, and where they might be heading next.

Poland has prospered since the fall of communism, with successful if painful 'shock therapy' leading to rapid and sustained economic growth from a very low starting point. Performance in governance against accepted democratic yardsticks has also been strong: regular elections,

fairly frequent, but not excessive, changes of government, integration of the post-communist parties into the new democratic culture nationally, and successful accession to the key European and trans-Atlantic institutions.

Thanks to its widely respected foreign policy and domestic governance over the years since 1990, Poland has won the full acceptance of other EU and NATO members.

Until recently, Poland appeared to face few intractable domestic or external issues. The EU and NATO were thriving, and Poland with them. But in recent years, darker clouds have begun to gather.

The problems became evident in 2008 with the Global Financial Crisis and the Russian invasion of Georgia on a contrived pretext in August of that year. These two major setbacks to the end of history seriously dented EU and NATO credibility.

President Vladimir Putin had already adopted a decidedly hostile posture towards the West the previous year. First there was his aggressive speech at the Munich Security conference in February 2007, and later in the same year, Russia's cyber-war and menacing destabilisation tactics against Estonia for the intolerable offence of having moved a monument from a central square to the outskirts of its own capital.

Despite these unambiguous signals, many leading EU countries responded weakly, almost apologetically. With Germany taking the lead, they blocked the bids of Ukraine and Georgia to join NATO at the April 2008 Summit in Bucharest for fear of 'provoking' Russia.

US President George W Bush had strongly supported the two candidatures, but by then he was a lame duck viewed with scepticism in core EU countries, and was unable to overcome European resistance. This outcome made clear to Putin that he could use military force against either Georgia or Ukraine with impunity.

Barack Obama's victory in the US presidential elections in November 2008 led to the launching of his 'reset' with Moscow in March 2009, so just a few months after Russia's invasion. The 'reset' essentially rewarded Russia for its bad behaviour, and encouraged more of the same.

It was an explicit repudiation of Bush's positive response to countries like Poland and the Baltic States who, because of a wholly justified fear of Russia, had been seeking protection in NATO membership.

Obama was hoping to use the ‘reset’ for disarmament. Putin, however, was planning to embark on a big military build-up, with steep annual increases in arms production over the next decade, aimed at modernizing and greatly expanding Russia’s military capabilities.

Russia’s more aggressive policies seemed at first mostly directed against former republics of the USSR rather than the West as a whole. And having swallowed parts of Georgia, including half of its Black Sea littoral, Putin was content at first to go along with Obama’s gift of a reset.

Dmitry Medvedev, whom Putin had installed as his replacement in the presidency from 2008 to 2012, was allowed to run a mini-liberalisation domestically and a mini-rapprochement with the West externally. But it was always apparent that he had little real power, and that Putin would make sure his reforming initiatives went nowhere.

Then came Putin’s brazen announcement in 2011 that he would return to the presidency and that Medvedev would not be allowed to stand for a second term. Many Russians in the big cities felt the announcement of this top-down decision insulted their supposed role as electors.

When the regime quite visibly rorted the parliamentary elections that took place in December 2011, there were huge demonstrations on the streets which went on for months.

Putin responded to this unprecedented discontent with characteristically KGB tactics – a neo-Stalinist crackdown domestically, and a stridently, even at times hysterically anti-US policy both domestically and externally. He wanted to make sure that the presidential elections in 2012 were not threatened by people power.

Putin’s aggression has continued to be most in evidence against the former Soviet republics, especially Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova. But since returning to the presidency in 2012, Putin has also become much more confrontational in his behaviour towards the global West generally, including Australia.

Australia’s efforts to seek justice for the 38 citizens and permanent residents killed in the MH17 crash have elicited only lies, propaganda and, at times, denial of access in response. When the Abbott government showed its displeasure about Russian behaviour in Ukraine before the G20 summit, Russia responded by sending highly capable warships into international waters near Australia.

Nearer to home, Moscow has particularly, though not exclusively, targeted Poland and the Baltic States, and also the Nordic and Scandinavian countries. The tactics have not been subtle: overflights of contiguous airspace, military build-ups in the near vicinity, nuclear intimidation, aggressive military exercises, cyber hacking and lying propaganda. Some of the overflights were extremely risky and represented a danger to civil aircraft in and around the targeted countries.

One large military exercise, Zapad 2013 (West 2013) involved the grotesquely counter-factual scenario of Polish-inspired 'terrorist' violence in Belarus aimed at destabilising the country (note the typical neo-Soviet 'projection' of preferred KGB tactics onto the alleged intentions of their Western adversaries). Belarus troops were heavily involved in the 'exercise', which concluded with a simulated tactical nuclear strike on Warsaw.

In general, one could say that Russian policies towards the Western strategic community since Putin returned after his election scare in 2011-12 have been a sustained confidence trick, a veritable Ponzi scheme, a mixture of lies, threats, violence, espionage, fake facts and fake events, skilful propaganda and occasional mini-peace offensives.

From time to time we get offers to reach phony deals whereby Russia would supposedly join with the West in pursuit of IS (it has done little enough of that to date) in exchange for the West permitting Russia to resume control of its 'sphere of privileged interests' and to complete its massively violent restoration of the Assad dynasty. Remarkably, Western naivety and ignorance of the KGB modus operandi is such that many people in the West, including the current incumbents of the White House, seem to take that as an expression of good faith.

It's not at all clear that in a longer perspective the Kremlin is not also hoping to regain decisive influence in the Baltic States and Poland, in addition to Ukraine and the other former western republics of the Soviet Union. But as a former British ambassador to Moscow, Sir Andrew Wood, recently wrote, "Ukraine is not the West's to give away".[2]

The reaction of EU countries to these developments has often been weak or inaudible, as with their initial sanctions on Russia over Ukraine. The more serious of the EU sanctions would probably not have been agreed to at all, were it not for MH17 having killed large numbers of Dutch citizens.

[2] Andrew Wood, 'A Relationship with Putin Offers Little to Trump,' *Chatham House*, 6 February 2017, available at https://www.chathamhouse.org/expert/comment/relationship-putin-offers-little-trump

Nor would the sanctions have had much impact on Moscow, were it not for the simultaneous sharp drop in oil and gas prices, which were far more important factors in bringing about Russia's current recession.

The sanctions need to be renewed by the EU every 6 months, and there are always some EU members who publicly question the wisdom or justice of the sanctions and seem to be contemplating a vote against renewing them. This of course encourages Russia to stand pat, hoping not unreasonably that the sanctions will in due course be lifted without any quid pro quo on their part.

One of the reasons for the European countries' flaccid response to the overt Russian threat has been its relatively poor economic performance since the GFC and the various problems that have emerged as a result.

Introducing a common currency in much of the EU without a common fiscal policy proved to have been bad mistake. Eurozone members in deep fiscal trouble like Greece have great difficulty in maintaining the severe austerity required of them.

Some EU countries, Germany and Poland notable among them, have performed well economically over the last decade, but many have not, including 'core' EU members like France and Italy. Germany's solution of wages discipline and an export-led recovery from the GFC is almost by definition not one that most struggling EU economies can replicate.

As a result, euro-scepticism within the EU has strengthened further in recent years. As elsewhere in the Western world, populism generally has burgeoned throughout the EU, paving the way for Brexit, and similar movements in other countries.

Another key factor involved in the EU malaise has been the uncontrollable flood of asylum-seekers. The Brussels response to this, led very much by Germany, with its 'open door' approach, has been immensely controversial within the EU, particularly between older and newer member states.

Some of the new members, including Poland, have been emphatic that immigration policy must be a national responsibility and that any scheme of compulsory quotas allocated to all EU members is unacceptable.

They did not see why they should be compelled to assist other states whose levels of prosperity and welfare expenditure were much greater than theirs, and whose liberal immigration policies had, in their view, led to the problem in the first place.

It is very difficult to have a discussion of immigration policies almost anywhere in the Western world, without the 'r' for racist word quickly being invoked. And while there are increasingly strong, overtly anti-immigration parties in many European countries, any questioning of the wisdom of large immigration flows from radically different cultures quickly leads to name-calling.

After the refugee crisis went from bad to worse, the debate in the EU became extremely heated. Hungarian PM Viktor Orban criticised what he called Chancellor Merkel's 'moral imperialism' on the subject. Many observers, meanwhile, became concerned that the crisis was facilitating the rise of ugly and potentially destabilising hard-right movements in Western electorates.

What we are dealing with here is, of course, the rise not only of populism, but also of political correctness in all its forms, not just those relating to immigration issues. This brings us quickly back to Putin's Russia.

In the last few years the idea has crystallised in Kremlin circles that it should direct more of its external propaganda towards the hard right as well as the hard left, and give it an explicitly anti-PC intonation.

Putin's own regime is, of course, a mixture of neo-Stalinism and military chauvinist neo-fascism, so he knows well whereof he speaks. Moscow began reaching out quite nakedly, not just to its old allies, the Chavezes and Castros of Latin America, or the unreconstructed communists of Eastern and Southern Europe, but also the Marine Le Pens and Frauke Petrys of core EU countries.

Le Pen's party has received generous Kremlin-linked funding and also regular red-carpet receptions in the Kremlin. Shortly before the French presidential election, she was received personally by Putin himself.

Putin's tactic of appealing simultaneously to both ends of the spectrum has been brilliantly successful. The West has characteristically been slow and irresolute in its response, and is still floundering.

While it flounders, of the four front runners in the French presidential election, on East-West issues, three ardently favoured chummy relations with Putin and removing sanctions. Putin has supported all three by hybrid interventions.

As we speak, it appears that the only one of the four who is sound on Russia, Emmanuel Macron, will save us by winning the run-off. Moscow has focussed its mendacious talents on discrediting Macron. If, despite that, he does win, it will have been more due to the West's good luck than good management.

In general, we can say that the Kremlin's subversive propaganda against Western targets on Putin's watch, especially since his return to the presidency in 2012, has been incomparably more effective than any Soviet equivalent.

And now we have the election of Donald Trump to the position of leader of the Western world, aided and abetted by the Russian regime, which he still carefully avoids criticising.[3]

Recently, however, whether fully in accord with Trump's intentions or not, his key foreign and defence officials have been speaking out robustly against Russian actions in Ukraine and Syria, and in support of the US's traditional alliance partners.

This suggests that whatever Trump's own views might be, he has nonetheless made some good appointments; and that US policies towards East-West relations seem to be to some degree under adult supervision. But President Trump is nothing if not unpredictable.

When Trump first emerged as a prospective President, John Howard told the ABC that in his view, Mr Trump was not a fit person to be President of the United States. When he was nonetheless elected, Mr Howard was invited to repeat his earlier comment.

But he said instead something along the lines that as Mr Trump had been elected legally, allies had the obligation to treat him with the respect due to his office, and to work to strengthen their relationships. I think John Howard was right each time.

On the positive side, however, Trump's own impulses sometimes seem to promise possible improvements in Western policy. After years of ineffective containment efforts during which North Korea's nuclear capability advanced alarmingly, Trump's approach of overtly

[3] Interview with John Besemeres, 'Dancing with the Bear: Trump and Russia,' Australian Institute of International Affairs, 22 February 2017, available at http://www.internationalaffairs.org.au/australian_outlook/dancing-with-the-bear-trumps-russian-connection/

confronting Kim's regime and pressuring China to step up may be what was needed after the softly-softly 'strategic patience' of Barack Obama.

Similarly, his robust demand that European NATO states finally meet their long-standing target of 2% of GDP spending on defence may shock them into action. And he has strongly supported the East Europeans on the issue of the EU's migration crisis, which some will welcome, while not necessarily applauding all his plans and comments on migration issues.

The Polish government has broadly welcomed the Trump accession, though it is troubled by his stance towards Russia and NATO. As a strongly pro-American country which has contributed to US-led coalitions in action while meeting NATO's 2% of GDP prescription, it should be well placed to maintain a good relationship with the new administration. But there remains much to be worried about.

How then should Warsaw be trying to position itself in this suddenly precarious international setting, as Russia tries to overturn leading Western democracies while destabilising, menacing and attacking countries in Poland's region? Certain general prudential principles seem to suggest themselves.

Poland should try to ease the increasingly confrontational domestic polarisation gripping the country. It is true that the outgoing Civic Platform-led government attempted to lock in its hold over the Constitutional Tribunal before it left office by making two appointments which the Tribunal itself found to be *ultra vires*. But the incoming Law and Justice-led government's response was disproportionate from the outset and over time has become more so. In this antipodean view, it has the primary responsibility for any effort to repair the situation.

Poland needs relative domestic harmony, but also and above all must seek to maintain and strengthen its alliances. As a NATO and EU member it is much better placed to defend Polish sovereignty than any predecessor government stretching back to 1919.

But membership does not of itself resolve the problems once and for all. Opinion polling shows that the voters in some key NATO member states, over 50% of them in Germany, for example, are reluctant to defend possible targets of Russian aggression, even member-states of NATO. Poland needs, therefore, to work hard on all its key relationships within the EU and NATO families.

A Le Pen presidency in France would deeply destabilise the EU and weaken NATO's resolve against Russia. Ukraine's position would become more parlous, and the Baltic States could be placed at risk. Fortunately, Macron seems set to win the run-off, but the situation illustrates the thin ice on which Poland is standing.

The political classes in several member states display similar weakness: Bulgaria, Slovakia, Cyprus, Greece, Italy, Austria and Hungary are all less than firm about Russia. With question marks still hovering over President Trump's policy directions, it might not take much to precipitate a domino effect towards a major weakening of Western structures.

In this situation, it is highly questionable whether Poland can risk seeming to be a less than 100% loyal club member. The pro-Putin populist tide in German electoral politics seems to have been stemmed for the moment, but many mainstream German politicians favour restoring good relations with Russia, and extreme populist forces could surge again.

Germany's enthusiasm for NATO remains muted at best, and does not need to be subjected to adverse pressures.[4] Germany's continued favour remains vital for other member states if they are to exert influence on Brussels in vital matters where they must oppose German policies, like the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline, for example.

Hungary's Viktor Orban has been swimming boldly against the tide in EU matters in recent years, but he has been careful not to alienate Germany unnecessarily. When, for example, the Polish government recently took on the entire EU in pursuit of its objective of removing Donald Tusk from the leadership of the European Council, Orban declined to support their veto.

That outcome raised two questions: is it wise for Warsaw to defy EU movers and shakers on an issue of domestic rather than vital strategic importance for Poland? And while the Polish-Hungarian relationship has very deep roots, how much weight will that partnership bear in a crunch situation?

And a related question: if Warsaw is going to reject the findings of the Venice Commission and EU consensus views on current Polish governance on the grounds of sovereignty, should it not seek to do so as unstridently as possible?

[4] Andrew Rettman, 'Germany is black spot in Nato solidarity,' *EuObserver*, 23 May 2017, available at https://euobserver.com/foreign/138000

Having successfully calculated that Brussels and Berlin will not pursue it and Budapest for democratic breaches, not at least ‘for now’ as Chancellor Merkel put it, is it wise to follow up previous controversies by summoning Tusk for a quasi-criminal interrogation in camera?

Poland has a great deal of accumulated political capital in both the EU and NATO, and deservedly so. But in very uncertain times, it would seem to most outside observers that it needs to be cautious about how and when it expends that capital.

The EU does seem currently too besieged by all its pressing problems to pursue sanctions against members in alleged breach of EU values. But is it so weak that it might not punish members it deems not in good standing by, for example, sharply reducing the amount of EU funding they receive? Influential EU leaders have hinted this and Brussels’s current approach to Brexit negotiations may offer a clue and a warning.

Also, could EU tensions at some point in the not too distant future spill over into NATO considerations? With the NATO tripwire mechanism now being at last installed in the Baltic States and Poland in the form of a modest troop deployment on the ground, Polish and regional security has been improved. At this stage it seems unlikely that Trump will reverse direction on that.

But Russia still has a clear military preponderance in that theatre and is installing formidable weaponry in Kaliningrad and elsewhere. If in what it judged to be propitious circumstances, Moscow felt ready to call the bluff of the NATO tripwire forces by launching a hybrid and conventional military attack on one of the Baltic States, it seems possible that they could be occupying one or more Baltic capitals within two or three days.

Would NATO then agree to bring up more forces to winkle the Russians out of the territory they’d occupied? Or would Western leaders speak loudly and indignantly at the UN, impose some economic sanctions and postpone more decisive intervention to another season.

The tripwire forces themselves and the consensus that underlies them are both sufficiently fragile for Poland to need to work hard on strengthening them. That requires the most harmonious relations possible with its key NATO and EU allies.

Poland is currently giving strong emphasis to the Visegrád Group of countries: Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary, and caucusing with them to increase their joint influence on intra-EU issues. Many EU countries probably operate some of the time in this way, and it makes a lot of sense.

However, historically, East-Central European countries have not always found it easy to maintain such co-operative arrangements. If the Visegrád Group countries push too hard, that could help bring on the two-speed Europe they are desperate to avoid. It is probably prudent to bear in mind that it may be hazardous to deploy such confederations against the biggest animals in the forest.

More generally, it is probably a safe overall proposition that it is good policy to avoid as far as possible making unnecessary enemies. Related to that is a second proposition: that uncertain times are not propitious for the settling of old scores.

If there is a clear and present danger from an ancient and now again malign enemy, Russia, it is not the right moment to be settling scores with peoples or countries who may have been enemies once or have been so regarded, but who are now friends and like-minded allies. This applies even if one feels that those friends are creating unnecessary tensions over legacy issues and even if one feels strongly that one is in the right.

As a physically though not otherwise distant friend of Poland, I would like to put in a special plea for all Polish representatives and organisations to pay special attention to their dealings with three peoples in particular: the Germans, the Ukrainians and the Jews.

Relations with all three have been at times tragic and dramatic. At this point in history, however, there is no compelling reason why Poland should not have harmonious and cordial relations with all. There is some very difficult history still to be accounted for. There is a need for further research and enquiry, which should be conducted in the most cordial and courteous manner that it is possible to maintain. Quite apart from all the other important issues involved, bad relations with any of them could be damaging to Poland's international standing and vital geopolitical interests.

Firstly, the Germans. Germany is now the undisputed leader of Europe and the EU. The UK's self-disqualification makes Germany's status all the greater, for all that Merkel tried to stave off Brexit. American support for Europe is less clear than at any time for decades. If only in the spirit of 'Hang onto nurse/ For fear of something worse,' Poland should avoid clashing with Germany or Chancellor Merkel. Any disagreements should be courteous. This may be hard for Poles, but none of the present German actors had any role in World War II, and it's anachronistic as well as harmful to talk as though they did.

Secondly, the Ukrainians. Ukrainian-Polish relations have some dark and relatively unexplored chapters. Representatives of both sides have been guilty of very harsh actions and violence, even atrocities. Both have found it difficult to recognise any historic fault on their own side. These issues are painful and difficult for many people. But they must be the subject of the calmest possible dialogue in order, as Foreign Ministers Witold Waszczykowski and Pavlo Klimkin once said, that the two sides should resolve them co-operatively and bilaterally.

There is at least one aspect on which Ukrainians should focus more, namely the atrocities that took place in Volhynia during World War II. They are not doing so at present. But as the Ukrainian patriot Nadia Savchenko has said, they should watch Wojciech Smarzowski's film of that name (*Wołyń*, 2016) and come to terms with it. That said, it has to be acknowledged that despite its efforts to be objective, the film does not entirely succeed in this respect, and that unfortunately for the moment it has become a source of additional tension in the bilateral relationship.[5]

And there is at least one aspect on which Poles should focus more in addition to their not infrequently repressive policies towards their Ukrainian citizens between the wars, namely that Ukrainians have over centuries suffered even more terribly than Poles from the imperial crimes of Moscow governments.

In the 1930s, Ukrainians were the victims of one of the most appalling genocides of the twentieth century, conducted by the Soviet regime against Ukrainian peasants, with at least 4 million deaths by 'Holodomor', deliberate starvation, enforced by terrible violence. It would be good from that perspective if more Poles were to watch the recent film about these horrifying events, *Bitter Harvest* (dir. George Mendeluk, 2017).

From the late 1920s the Soviet regime had ruthlessly purged, indeed decapitated the Ukrainian national intelligentsia. And in Stalin's Great Purge of 1937, Ukrainians, Poles and Jews were singled out for particularly murderous treatment. During World War II, Ukraine suffered, like Poland, as a central part of the bloodlands, where mass casualties from all causes in the Hitler-Stalin war were at their worst.

[5] For a review of some of these issues, see Oxana Shevel, 'The Battle for Historical Memory in Postrevolutionary Ukraine', *Current History* Vol. 115, Issue 783, October 2016, available at http://www.currenthistory.com/Article.php?ID=1346

There is one thing on which Polish-Ukrainian agreement should be strategic bedrock for both sides: There is no further reason for Polish-Ukrainian mutual hostility to continue. The most difficult issues that divided them have been largely resolved, however painfully. They now have vital strategic interests in common and are natural allies in today's world.

Their insufficient awareness of each other's past sufferings is largely a by-product of the ideological straitjacket that Moscow once fastened on them. Since the fall of communism, governments on both sides of the border have seen that, and by and large have held fast to a policy of friendship and dialogue. But government officials tend at times to lapse, and so do people in many other walks of life.

Moscow is doing its very best to ensure that Polish-Ukrainian friendship should founder, by spreading fake news, and inserting trouble-making provocateurs into the bilateral relationship.[6] If they succeed in their wedge-driving, it will be a total disaster for both Poland and Ukraine.

Finally, the Jews.

Again there are dark chapters, and very serious issues in dispute on which whole libraries have been written. Many Poles feel that they are sometimes unfairly blamed for the crimes of the Germans or for crimes of individual Poles in extraordinary circumstances where the Nazis had created a system of deeply perverse incentives and disincentives for people to commit crimes which might otherwise never have occurred.

But there has been in modern times much anti-Semitism in Poland, as in most other areas of Europe, and worse than in many. There are reasons for that which explain but usually do not exculpate.

That is not the whole story of bilateral relations. Much dialogue and reconciliation is in progress. Some Jewish criticism is harsh or misconceived, and too many Polish polemics are overstated or ill-judged.

But all that is irrelevant to the main point, which is that any culture of anti-Semitism or any flagrant anti-Semitic acts or declarations can discredit Poland in the eyes of the allies it values

[6] 'Kremlin financing Polish radicals: tasks, payments, and reporting to Moscow,' *InformNapalm*, 18 May 2017, available at https://informnapalm.org/en/kremlin-financing-polish-radicals-tasks-payments-reporting-moscow/

most. Ethically, historically, culturally, and geopolitically, Poland cannot afford anti-Semitism.

That doesn't mean that all sensitive subjects must be avoided – for example, that it is a historical fact that Jews were over-represented in central organs of the Communist party, both before and after the war.

But Poland's leaders, be they politicians, scholars, writers, artists, clerics, journalists, professionals, unionists or any other class of humanity, should see it as their duty to promote civilised dialogue on all issues in dispute.

On my first visits to Poland I met many Jews, who all regarded themselves as 100% Poles, and were so regarded by all their Polish friends. They reminded me of the Jewish friends I had known in Australia, who seemed to me to be very like other Australians in all essential respects. In that younger Polish intelligentsia generation of the 1960s there seemed to be very little remaining of any 'them and us' divide, though the communist regime and its Moczarite faction was trying to promote one. For those young Jewish Poles, it was a bitter discovery in 1968 to learn that they were officially deemed as not belonging to their own nation.

In recent years there have been controversies in Poland which have again inflamed old hostilities, as wartime events, suppressed during the communist era, are uncovered. The research and the careful evaluation of the evidence will be painful, and well-qualified experts will disagree about their exact import. But it will and it should continue.

I'd like to conclude with a very short reading from the great Polish classic *Pan Tadeusz* (1834) by Adam Mickiewicz, first in Polish, then in English translation. The passage nicely illustrates some of the main themes under discussion.

Pan Tadeusz has a number of interwoven threads. One of them is a Romeo and Juliet story, but more light-hearted and with a happy ending, with the families becoming reconciled, despite past bloodshed and violent disputes over property. A second, tragic one is the fate of Poland itself. The action takes place during the Napoleonic invasion of Russia and the characters have been involved at their local level in the Partitions and related uprisings. The older guests present can recall the dramas of the Second and Third Partitions, the Kościuszko Insurrection and the great moment of hope that the Constitution of May the Third represented.

Zosia, the heroine, is celebrating her betrothal to the eponymous hero Tadeusz Soplica. She begs the owner of the taverns on both families' estates, Jankiel, who is a masterly dulcimer

player, to perform for her on this occasion. He is reluctant to do so, because of his age, but loves Zosia dearly, so relents. He plays the instrument so evocatively, that he manages to conjure up all the great and sometimes tragic events of the recent decades of Polish history. The guests are spellbound.

The name of this, the last chapter in Mickiewicz's epic, is 'Kochajmy się', literally 'Let us love each other', a common concluding toast after an important social gathering, in its function, not unlike the singing of 'Auld Lang Syne' in English. It is appropriate to the dénouement of the plot, and might also serve as a summons to any Poles engaged in internecine struggles to recall that they are all Poles and should try to work together, whatever their differences.

The reading, which contains a famous reference to the Constitution of May the Third, is an excerpt from 'Koncert Jankiela' (Jankiel's concert). I will read it first in Polish and then in the wonderful English translation by Marcel Weyland, begun originally to introduce his English-speaking family to the beauty of Mickiewicz's poetry.

Mickiewicz himself wrote of Jankiel 'Żyd poczciwy ojczyznę jako Polak kochał'. As was the fictional Jankiel, Mr Weyland is a fine Jewish man and a fine Polish man. He is also a great Australian, who has made an enormous contribution to the *rozkrzewienie polskiej kultury w świecie anglosaskim*, to the spread of Polish culture in the Anglo-Saxon world.

Razem ze strun wiela
Buchnął dźwięk, jakby cała janczarska kapela
Ozwała się z dzwonkami, z zelami, z bębenki.
Brzmi Polonez Trzeciego Maja! – Skoczne dźwięki
Radością oddychają, radością słuch poją,
Dziewki chcą tańczyć, chłopcy w miejscu nie dostoją –
Lecz starców myśli z dźwiękiem w przeszłość się uniosły,
W owe lata szczęśliwe, gdy senat i posły
Po dniu Trzeciego Maja w ratuszowej sali
Zgodzonego z narodem króla fetowali;
Gdy przy tańcu śpiewano: «Wiwat Król kochany!
Wiwat Sejm, wiwat Naród, wiwat wszystkie Stany!»

From all strings there sprang,
Like janissary band music, and swelled out, and rang,
As from cymbals, and drums, and from flutes, and from bells,
– ‘Third of May Polonaise’! – And the sprightly air swells,
Breathing rapture, with pleasure the listeners ears fill,
Girls would dance, and the fellows just cannot keep still,
But these sounds for the elder folk old memories raise,
When the Diet and Senate, in those happier days,
On that first Third of May, in the City Hall fêted
King and People at last in sweet concord united!
When they sang thus while dancing: ‘Long prosper our great,
Our dear King, Diet, Nation! Vivat each Estate!’

Canberra, May 2017