

UDC 327(476:438)

EVOLUTION OF BELARUSIAN-POLISH RELATIONS AT THE PRESENT STAGE: BALANCE OF INTERESTS

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The present article is dedicated to the analysis of the Belarusian-Polish relations' development during the post-USSR period. The conclusion is made that despite the geographical neighborhood of both countries, their cultural and historical proximity, cooperation between Minsk and Warsaw didn't comply with the existing capacity. Political contradictions became the reason for that, which resulted in fluctuations in bilateral cooperation, local conflicts on the inter-state level. The author makes an attempt to identify the main reasons for a low level of efficiency in bilateral relations and to give an assessment of foreign factors impact on Minsk and Warsaw policies.

Key words: Belarusian-Polish relations; Belarusian foreign policy; Belarusian and Polish diplomacy; historical policy.

ЭВОЛЮЦИЯ БЕЛОРУССКО-ПОЛЬСКИХ ОТНОШЕНИЙ НА СОВРЕМЕННОМ ЭТАПЕ: ПОИСК БАЛАНСА ИНТЕРЕСОВ

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В представленной публикации анализируется развитие белорусско-польских отношений на протяжении периода после распада СССР. Делается вывод о том, что, несмотря на географическое соседство двух стран, их культурную и историческую близость, сотрудничество Минска и Варшавы не соответствовало имеющемуся потенциалу. Причиной тому являлись политические разногласия, следствием которых стали перепады в двухстороннем взаимодействии, частые конфликты на межгосударственном уровне. Автор пытается выяснить основные причины невысокой эффективности двусторонних связей, дать оценку влияния внешних факторов на политику Минска и Варшавы.

Ключевые слова: белорусско-польские отношения; внешняя политика Беларуси; белорусская и польская дипломатия; историческая политика.

Over the past three years there is a noticeable expansion of official contacts between Belarus and Poland. The government circles, the societies of the two countries hope to intensify Belarusian-Polish cooperation in all significant areas. There is a noticeable contrast between the recent positive trends in relations that started in August, 2014 and past practices.

For nearly twenty years the two neighbouring countries that are close to each other in historic and cultural terms and have unlimited possibilities for economic cooperation, have had few positive political contacts. The potential for economic cooperation due

to geographic proximity was only partially used by the two countries. The relations between Warsaw and Minsk at different times varied from tension to some degree of discharge.

Poland was among the first states to recognize Belarusian independence before the final collapse of the USSR. The recognition act was secured in October, 1991 by signing the Declaration on Good-Neighbourliness, Mutual Understanding and Cooperation. On 23 June, 1992 the countries signed the basic political legal document – the Treaty on Good-Neighbourliness and Friendly Cooperation that consists of 29 articles [1].

Образец цитирования:

Шадурский В. Г. Эволюция белорусско-польских отношений на современном этапе: поиск баланса интересов // Журн. Белорус. гос. ун-та. Междунар. отношения. 2017. № 1. С. 46–52 (на англ.).

For citation:

Shadurski V. G. Evolution of Belarusian-Polish relations at the present stage: balance of interests. *J. Belarus. State Univ. Int. Relat.* 2017. No. 1. P. 46–52.

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In May, 1992 on the basis of the Polish Consulate General the Polish Embassy was opened in Minsk. Belarusian Embassy in Warsaw opened in July, 1992.

However, the first contacts of independent Belarus and Poland were marked by different approaches to many problem solutions.

Why the huge neighbourhood potential was not largely implemented by Minsk and Warsaw at the start of formal relations, what prevented the two countries to go beyond the standard international treaties and agreements in the first half of the 1990's? One of the reasons, in our opinion, was the various foreign policy directions and priorities of the two states. After the collapse of the Soviet Union and the socialist system, while Belarus was still trying to define its geopolitical identity, Poland took a steady course towards the Euro-Atlantic integration. This course included distancing from Russia and, as a result, from the whole post-Soviet area.

It is difficult to give an unambiguous assessment of how effective the Belarusian vector of Polish politics in the first half of the 1990s was. Apparently, Poland was willing to play a more significant role on Belarusian and Ukrainian lands, and actively participate in domestic and foreign policies' formation of these countries. However, in order to achieve such an ambitious goal Warsaw did not have the necessary resources. One of the main characteristics of the Polish political elite not only in the 1990's, but also at all subsequent stages was the desire to patronize the neighbouring Eastern European states and be the "advocate" of Kiev and Minsk in the EU and Western community as a whole. However, neither Ukraine nor Belarus agreed with this "division of responsibility" in the bilateral relationship. They preferred other more powerful states of the West to be "their advocates".

The Belarusian Foreign Minister in 1990–1994 Piotr Kravchenko in his book "Belarus at a turning point. The diplomatic breakthrough into the world" stressed that the road to a constructive relationship with the Polish colleagues was not strewn with roses. In particular, as an example he noted that in 1993 no member of the Polish Cabinet attended the official reception dedicated to the Independence Day organized by the Belarusian Embassy in Warsaw. The Belarusian side decided to reciprocate [2, p. 66].

In his memoirs P. Kravchenko mentioned that significant differences existed in Belarusian-Polish relations even before the establishment of diplomatic relations. Thus, in October, 1990 the Belarusian side refused to sign the declaration proposed by the Polish Minister of Foreign Affairs K. Skubiszewski. The Belarusian side explained the refusal to sign the declaration by the fact that the treaties between Poland and the Soviet Union did not take into account Belarusian national interests. The Foreign Minister of Poland was informed about the concerns around the situation with the Belarusian minority in the Bia-

lystok region. The questions of Belarusian cultural values restitution were acutely raised. According to the memoirs of the former Belarusian Minister, the Belarusian statement shocked the high-ranking Polish representative [3, p. 17–20].

Belarusian-Polish relations became tense when in November, 1996 Belarus held a national referendum on amending the country's constitution. On 19 November, 1996 the Sejm of the Republic of Poland adopted a statement in which the Belarusian reality was criticized: "An open conflict in Belarus threatens the stability of the situation in Europe. Authoritarianism threat can seriously affect and delay democratization and transformation to market economy in certain countries of the region". In the document the Polish parliamentarians appealed to the international community, European politicians, and especially to the authorities and political elites of the neighbouring countries to show solidarity with the opposition political forces in Belarus [4].

Poland's accession to NATO (1999) and the European Union (2004), the signing of the Treaty establishing the Union State of Belarus and Russia (1999) by Minsk revealed that the neighbouring states realized their geopolitical aspirations and, thus, found themselves in the competing economic and military-political groups.

Warsaw, along with other capitals of the European Union members continued to be an active critic of the Belarusian authorities, supported sanctions against Belarusian leaders, provided moral and financial support to the opposition structures. The author wrote about this in the previous work [5].

During the whole period of diplomatic relations the most sensitive issue of Belarusian-Polish relations that remains unresolved until now was the split of the Belarusian Union of Poles which occurred in 2005. According to the Polish side, the acute crisis did not happen without the interference of the Belarusian authorities. The Belarusian side had exactly the opposite opinion. In 2005–2007 the relations were so tense that Belarus and Poland stopped interaction not only at the top governmental level, but also at the level of separate administrative units.

TV channel "Belsat" (December, 2007) and "Radio Ratsya" (1998) began and continued broadcasting on Polish territory. The broadcasting is based on information sources alternative to Belarusian government information. According to the information provided by the Deputy Foreign Minister of Poland Marek Ziolkowski in an interview with the newspaper "Rzeczpospolita" from 2007 until 2015 TV channel "Belsat" received 157 million zlotys from the government. In total 500 million zlotys were allocated to Belarusian projects in this period [6].

One of these projects was the Kalinowski programme. The Polish government began its funding after Belarusian presidential elections (2006). The programme

implied that Polish universities admitted Belarusians who left the country for political reasons.

A certain political thaw in relations between Belarus and the West, including Poland, began to take place, starting in March, 2008, following the signing of the Agreement on opening of the European Commission Office in Minsk between Belarus and the European Commission. In the following 2009 Belarus received an invitation to become a member of the new EU programme "Eastern Partnership", which had been initiated by Poland and Sweden in spring, 2008.

An important event in Belarusian-Polish relations can be considered the signing of the Agreement on Local Border Traffic in 2010. The document called for a simplified border crossing procedure by the citizens of both countries living in the 30-kilometers border area [7].

However, it should be noted that in spite of the interest on the side of Polish authorities, at the time of writing, the agreement has not entered into force. The Belarusian government has not completed the formal act – has not sent a note that the necessary procedures have been carried out through the diplomatic channels. As a possible reason for "freezing" of the agreements, the experts name that the Belarusian side fears that the increase of people crossing the border in both directions, will not only require a significant increase of border security expenses, but also an increase of the flow of cheaper industrial and agricultural goods from neighbouring countries to Belarus.

In February, 2010 the Head of Belarusian Foreign Ministry Sergei Martynov visited Poland. On 2 November, 2010 Minsk was visited by the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Poland Radoslaw Sikorski, who promised the Belarusian authorities to provide a concession loan of 3 billion USD in the event of a "democratic transition" [8].

Belarusian-Polish relations again exacerbated after the presidential elections in Belarus (December, 2010). In January, 2011 the EU imposed sanctions against a number of Belarusian officials and companies that, in the opinion of the European institutions, were guilty of violating election laws and other "illegal acts". The sanctions were actively supported by the Polish side, after that the history of Belarusian-Polish conflict replenished with new negative developments.

In response to the expansion of sanctions list by the Council of Foreign Ministers of the EU on 28 February, 2012 the Belarusian Ministry of Foreign Affairs suggested that the Head of the EU Delegation in Minsk M. Mora and the Ambassador of Poland L. Sherepka leave Belarus "for consultations, to inform their leadership about the firm Belarusian position on unacceptable pressure and sanctions". Earlier that day, the Foreign Ministry of the Republic of Belarus recalled its representatives from Brussels and Warsaw for consultations. Heads of diplomatic missions of EU

member states, along with several other ambassadors supported their colleagues and also left the Belarusian capital [9].

The negative effects of the diplomatic conflict led both sides to understanding the futility of further confrontation. The Belarusian leadership pardoned the detained opposition activists. In return, the EU refrained from adding more Belarusian citizens to the sanctions lists. Over the following months in 2012 and 2013 both sides began to express their desire to improve the relations between Minsk and the EU, Minsk and Warsaw. Belarus intensified contacts with Polish partners in the framework of "Eastern Partnership". In September, 2012 in the framework of cultural co-operation Poland hosted the Days of Belarusian Culture for the first time in the last 17 years.

The Summit of the EU Programme "Eastern Partnership" in Vilnius (November, 2013) did not bring any unpleasant surprises to official Minsk. At the meeting, where the Foreign Minister Vladimir Makei made a speech, Belarus was not harshly criticized, concrete proposals on relations improvement between the EU and Belarus were voiced.

The policy of Belarusian authorities towards the US and the EU, including neighbouring Poland, was becoming more pragmatic. In difficult economic conditions, the Belarusian government adopted a policy to reduce the over-dependence on the Russian market, diversification of trade and economic relations, building mutually beneficial relations with all foreign partners, and, above all, the ones in geographic proximity.

The crisis in Ukraine that happened soon after the Vilnius meeting of "Eastern Partnership", profoundly changed the geopolitical situation in Eastern Europe, added more drama in Belarus' relations with the neighbouring countries and gave a new meaning to its foreign policy. Minsk took a constructive position with regard to the armed conflict, undertook efforts for the peaceful resolution of the military clashes in South-East Ukraine.

While significant deterioration of the situation in Eastern Europe was taking place, on 28–29 August, 2014 the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Belarus Vladimir Makei paid a working visit to the Republic of Poland. During the visit, he met with his Polish counterpart Radoslaw Sikorski and discussed the current situation in the region, as well as a number of bilateral issues. V. Makei also had talks with the Deputy Prime Minister – Minister of Economy of Poland Janusz Pehotinski. The parties discussed the meeting preparation of the Joint Belarusian-Polish Commission on Economic Cooperation [10]. During the visit the decision to launch the Belarusian-Polish commission of historians was made, its leaders were appointed: from the Belarusian side – BSU professor Victor Shadurski, from the Polish side – professor Andrzej Kunert.

In our opinion, this ministerial visit can be considered a new phase in Belarusian-Polish relations,

though some Polish politicians link the beginning of relations improvement with the fact that the Party "Law and Justice" came to power in Poland [6].

In May, 2015 Andrzej Duda the representative of the Polish conservative party "Law and Justice" was elected the President of Poland. As a result of the same party victory in the Polish Sejm elections in October, 2015 Beata Szydło became the Head of Government. Among other priorities, the Polish Conservative government declared the establishment of a new kind of foreign relations, including its relations with the East. In contrast to the "Europeanists" of the "Civic Platform" party, "traditionalists" from "Law and Justice" called for a more active and Poland-oriented policy in the post-Soviet space.

The development of Belarusian-Polish contacts traditionally occurred with the relations improvement of Belarus and the EU. Mainly, the constructive position of the Belarusian authorities on Donbass crisis-resolution contributed to positive dynamics of the interaction between Brussels and Minsk. Minsk became the meeting place for the parties, for which it was named "Eastern European Geneva" by many experts. Since September, 2014, the capital of Belarus began to hold regular meetings of the Tripartite OSCE Contact Group to discuss concrete ways to de-escalate the armed conflict in the Eastern regions of Ukraine. In February, 2015 there was a meeting of Heads of the four States (Norman format) in Minsk, which contributed to a significant reduction in armed clashes in the region.

With a growing international prestige of Minsk the EU abolished personal sanctions, as well as sanctions against three Belarusian companies (15 February, 2016). Warsaw took a constructive position on the sanctions lifting issue.

Another significant event in the dialogue launched between the two countries was the visit of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Poland Witold Waszczykowski to Belarus (22–23 March, 2016). It happened more than five years after the previous visit of the Polish Minister (November, 2010). The fact that V. Waszczykowski visited Vaukavysk, the city where his mother was born and lived for some time added more meaning to the event.

In October, 2016 Warsaw again was visited by the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Belarus Vladimir Makei, who was received by the President of Poland Aleksander Duda. During the same month Minsk was visited by the Deputy Prime Minister of Poland, Minister of Economic Development Mateusz Morawiecki. In addition to the meetings, including some at the highest level, the Polish leader participated in the opening ceremony of the Belarusian-Polish Economic Forum "Neighbourhood-2016" (October, 24).

Under the conditions of deepening of Russia – NATO, Russia – EU contradictions Belarus preferred a very careful foreign policy rhetoric. Thus, Belarus considered

the actions taken by NATO and the US to strengthen the NATO presence in the Baltic countries and Poland as a challenge leading to tension increase in the regional security area, but, according to the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Belarus, not an immediate and direct safety threat to the Republic of Belarus [11].

And finally, at the end of a politically saturated on 4–6 December, 2016 the Polish Senate Marshal Stanisław Karłowicz paid a working visit to Belarus. He met with President of Belarus Alexander Lukashenko and leaders of both chambers of the National Assembly of the Republic of Belarus Mikhail Myasnikovich and Vladimir Andreichenko [12]. In diplomatic language the visit of Polish Senate leader meant the resumption of official Belarusian-Polish contacts at the parliamentary level. As it is known, these contacts were officially frozen by the decision of the governing bodies of the European Union in September, 1997.

Thus, the analysis of Belarusian-Polish relations over the past two and a half decades shows that the interaction developed irregularly, the cooling periods of official contacts alternated with "calm" periods and vice versa. The potential for cooperation of the two neighbouring states with strong historical and cultural ties was not fully used.

Unfortunately, there is no clear vision of the future of Belarusian-Polish relations at present too. According to the author, the countries have not yet been able to go beyond the enhanced dialogue, have not carried out real actions. The state and public structures expect more concrete and meaningful results of the interaction between the two countries, especially, in the field of economy.

The prevailing state of relations can be explained by a number of factors, which are both short-term and long-term.

The positive factors are primarily geographic proximity, similarity of cultures and languages. The number of Belarusians traveling to Poland with different purposes and Poles visiting Belarus is increasing every year. Thus, according to the Head of the Consular department of the Embassy of Poland in Belarus Marek Pendiha, in 2015 the Polish consular offices in Minsk, Brest and Grodno issued about 400 thousand of Schengen and national visas to the citizens of our country. The number of multiple-entry visas amounted to almost 270 thousand, the number of long-term visas increased by 70 % compared to 2014 [13]. The number of Belarusian visas issued to Polish citizens – tens of thousands.

The above-mentioned favorable neighbourhood relations stimulate a sustained demand in bilateral economic relations. The economy is one of the main drivers of relations. Thus, in 2015 the volume of the Belarusian-Polish trade amounted to about 1.8 billion USD, the volume of Belarusian exports to Poland – 767 million USD, imports – 1.1 billion USD. At the end of the same year, Poland became the sixth trade partner

of Belarus, in trade volume it ranked the eighth in exports, the seventh – in investments in the Belarusian economy. In 2015, the Polish capital invested about 195 million USD in the Belarusian economy. More than 350 companies with Polish capital registered in Belarus, of which more than 200 are joint ventures [14].

The facts published on the website of the Belarusian Embassy in Poland confirm a great potential in the bilateral economic relationship, there are good prospects for the advanced development. Thus, even in the situation of a general foreign trade turnover decline of Belarus (January – August, 2016) trade with Poland increased by almost 11 %.

However, the large number of advantages and mutual interest in bilateral contacts were overshadowed by political conflicts and numerous diplomatic crises. The situation analysis leads to the conclusion of an incomplete understanding by the parties of each other's motives and problems as well as a serious lack of confidence that was present in the relations between the nations over the long period in history.

Historically formed stereotypes prevented the establishment of the trust between the nations. According to some researchers, in particular, the Belarusian expert Yury Shevtsov, who published a book entitled "United Nation. Belarusian phenomenon" in Moscow in 2005, the neighbourhood with Poland was the most difficult for Belarus in the post-Soviet period [15, p. 34–35]. The researcher sees the roots of the problems in a long history associated with the existence of Rzeczpospolita (1569–1795) and the Polish Republic (1918–1939). Yury Shevtsov believes that the Polish historical consciousness considers a significant part of the territory inhabited by Belarusians a part of Polish cultural landscape and takes local Belarusian population as the part of their people who only temporarily changed their ethnic identity, language and historic memory [15, p. 360]. According to the analyst, to some extent, there is a "superiority complex" in the Polish perception of Belarus. Local Belarusian population traditionally perceived as "downtrodden and poor peasants", managed by the Polish gentry. Accordingly, the adaptation process to the existing realities, where Belarusians act as educated people who have their own attitude about history is very difficult in the present-day Poland [15, p. 361].

In turn, different population groups, at different government levels in Belarus still have stereotypes that certain forces in Poland are dreaming to restore the Eastern border in the form it existed before the Second World War. A discussion dedicated to this kind of concerns, was held in the Belarusian version of "Radio Liberty" (January, 2017). For example, one of the discussion participants F. Vyachorka, Polish scholarship fellow, drew attention to a comment published in the Polish online network, stating that "in our kress (Polish border regions. – V. Sh.), is home to 5 million

Poles who stay there with the thought and hope that Poland will return and continue to expect Poland" [16].

Despite the fact that the Polish authorities repeatedly criticize such statements, the number of Belarusian opponents of the "civilizing mission of Poland" has not significantly reduced.

If we do not take into consideration the radical charges of the debate on both sides, it should be recognized that the people of both countries, unfortunately, have a very superficial understanding of their neighbours, a poor understanding of the dominant mood in the neighbouring country. As evidence of the mentioned above, can refer to the opinion of a young Polish video-blogger Michael Sikorski. In an interview with one of the Belarusian internet portals, he noted that many Poles who watched his film about Belarus on the *YouTube* were in shock. It turns out that in Belarus there are attractions, historical sites and important objects, that people normally live here. Some Poles, according to Sikorski, thinks that Belarus is North Korea [17].

At the new stage that started in the 1990s independent Poland and recently independent Belarus failed to develop an effective action strategy in relation to each other, were not able, to a full extent, to create an atmosphere of trust between the governments and societies. Polish experts recognize that Poland did not attach particular importance to the formation of a reasonable and balanced policy with Minsk. Neither Belarus had a long-term country policy. It should be noted that there were enough appeals to all parties to develop such a policy.

Opposite-vector foreign policy, different models of political and economic systems of the two countries aggravated the situation in the Belarusian-Polish relations. The Polish side has refused to fully and unconditionally recognize Belarusian political realities. Polish representatives frequently expressed their intention to support civil society in Belarus as a priority.

Belarusian-Polish cooperation was under a powerful influence of the Russian factor. Many experts and politicians from different countries continue to believe that the Belarusian issue is in the "shadow" of the relations between Poland and Russia. At various historical stages the Polish state due to national security considerations, saw the danger in its geographic proximity to Russia. According to the prevalent doctrine of Polish foreign policy sovereign Belarus and Ukraine form a kind of "barrier" between Poland and Russia. This explains the interest of Warsaw in reducing Belarus' dependence on Russia, enhancement of the differences between Moscow and Minsk, strengthening of Belarusian sovereignty. Numerous statements of the Polish establishment provide evidence for that. As it is pointed out in the book "The Guises of Belarus. Ambassador Notes" by former Polish Ambassador in Minsk Leszek Sherepka, Polish and the EU policy towards Belarus does not

depend only on Belarus. It depends on Russia, on the events in Ukraine, on how the EU itself will be transformed [18].

Depending on the state of the Belarusian-Russian, Ukrainian-Polish relations Warsaw was ready to soften its approach in relations with Belarus, ignore serious disagreements with Ukraine.

Russia, in turn, closely followed the development of Belarusian-Polish relations. When it could Russia tried to neutralize the two countries' rapprochement seen as a threat to its national interests.

Belarusian-Polish relations also have a number of more specific contradictions that until present have not been resolved.

The split of the main organization of the Polish minority – the Union of Poles in Belarus in 2005 is seen as the most serious problem that is still on the agenda. Currently, there is the Union of Poles in Belarus which is not registered in the country and, therefore, acts illegally. Recently, there could be yet another split in the structure. Officially registered in the Republic of Belarus the Union of Poles in Belarus headed by Mieczysław Lysy is ignored not only by a part of Belarusian Poles, but also by Polish authorities. Thus, the leaders and active members of this registered union are prohibited from entering Poland.

It is obvious that the problem mentioned above can be resolved only on the basis of Belarusian legislation in the course of negotiations between Minsk and Warsaw officials, as well as an active dialogue within the Polish community in Belarus.

It should be noted that the problem of the existing two (three) public associations of the Polish minority in Belarus is an integral part of a much broader issue – the situation of the Polish minority in Belarus and, accordingly, the situation of the Belarusian minority in Poland. Warsaw with more financial resources and experience compared with Belarus was most active in this area. In September, 2007 the Polish Parliament introduced "Pole's Card" – a document confirming the affiliation of a citizen in one of the CIS and Baltic countries to the Polish people. The "card" holders received some uncivil rights provided by the Polish government which caused a negative reaction of the authorities and the public in the countries involved in "Polish aid" process.

As the Head of the Belarusian Foreign Minister Vladimir Makei stated in an interview to "Rzeczpospolita" (October, 2016), Belarusian authorities are interested to make the citizens of Polish nationality to feel normal in our country [11]. From time to time similar statements are made by Polish politicians. However, despite the apparent willingness of the parties to improve the situation, many of the national minorities problems are solved slowly.

The "formula" for the advancement of Belarusian citizens of Polish origin proposed in the aforementioned book by Leszek Sherepka caused an ambi-

guous response. Thus, the former Ambassador to Belarus suggests to simplify the process of obtaining Polish citizenship to descendants of interwar Poland inhabitants (i. e. Western Belarus). He considers that the mass exodus of Grodno region residents can make the Belarusian government "change its policy towards the Polish minority" [18].

Another urgent problem that until now has not been actively discussed is a different interpretation of some most important historic issues by the parties. The Polish side sees the identification of names, places of execution and burial places of war prisoners officers of the Polish Army and other Polish citizens on the so-called "Katyn list" in 1940 as the most acute issue of this process.

Leaders of Belarusian archival institutions, as well as other officials have repeatedly stated that "Belarusian Katyn List" does not exist in Belarusian archives. In the mentioned interview to "Rzeczpospolita" (9 October, 2016) Vladimir Makei was convincing enough on this subject: "In Belarusian archives neither the state one nor the national and departmental ones such a document does not exist" [11]. The Belarusian side called for de-politicization of the repressions issue and prepare for a long thorough work. The Polish side, apparently, did not see the answer of a high-ranking Belarusian leader reasonable enough.

The foreign ministries continue to count on the cooperation expansion between Belarusian and Polish historians, which was launched in August, 2014.

At the invitation of the Belarusian part the first meeting of the commission was held in Minsk in July, 2015. The parties clarified their positions on joint activities, discussed issues of mutual interest, identified the topic of the forthcoming seminar. However, the change of government in Poland has led to the fact that the discussion about who will be the new partner of the Belarusians on joint historical commission started in Warsaw [19].

The author of the publication believes that in order to successfully start and continue the historical dialogue, it is necessary to organize the work on a step-by-step, consistent basis.

Firstly, the goals of the discussion should be specified to focus its work on strengthening Belarusian-Polish cooperation, and not creating new dividing lines. It is necessary to organize activities according to the principle that forgiveness does not mean forgetting, it involves the rejection of hatred and revenge.

Secondly, a "portfolio of historic topics" that the parties consider relevant and appropriate for joint consideration should be formed.

Thirdly, it is necessary to rank the topics according to the "complexity" of bilateral discussions and the expected public response. It is advisable to split the "portfolio" into several levels. At the initial stage it would be logical to work together on the topic, approaches to which are not radically different in the

partner countries. It is necessary to focus on the study of more neutral and less sensitive to the collective memory topics of both countries and peoples.

There is hope that the intensification of Belarusian-Polish dialogue, including the field of history, will open new horizons for bilateral cooperation. However, the framework, direction and speed of this interaction

are still not apparent. So far, there are only some positive trends and signs in bilateral relations.

At present none of the bilateral relations issues has been completely resolved. To overcome the existing barriers political will of the two countries' leadership, wide public support and favourable external influence on Belarus and Poland are required.

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Received by editorial board 22.02.2016.