



Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

Workshop “Towards a Strategy for Reconciliation in the OSCE Area”

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Panel 2: Historical Reconciliation – Lessons Learned and Best Practices

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1. Decision on the establishment of the Russian-Polish and Polish-Russian Centers for dialogue and understanding was taken as a result of the meeting of V.Putin and D. Tusk in Smolensk in April 2010. Russian-Polish Group on the complex issues of common history (exists since 2005, co-chairmen A.V. Torkunov and A.D. Rotfeld) came out with this initiative. It was meant that the two Centers will undertake organizational and financial support of the cultural, scientific and educational cooperation between Russia and Poland, aimed at the overcoming negative stereo-types of the past’s perception. Ministries of culture of Russia and Poland are the founders of the Centers, stating the budget of 1 mill. euro each on the parity basis for the period of 2012-2014. Polish center was founded as the government structure, based on the Decree of the President of the Republic of Poland of March 25-th 2011 and the law of the Seim (Polish Parliament) of April 7-th 2011 and started functioning by the summer 2011. Russian center was established by the decree of the President of the Russian Federation dated October 14-th 2011 as a non-commercial foundation with the state financing. Its aims and goals, as stated in the Act of the Russian government of March 28-th 2012, are - development of the dialogue between the two countries, supporting research and dissemination of historical knowledge, national heritage and culture, strengthening of understanding, creating better conditions for the development of Russian-Polish political and economic relations, promotion of cultural, scientific, educational and youth exchange. Governing bodies of the Russian-Polish Center is the Board (chairman – head of the Federal Archives Agency A.N. Artizov) and the Board of Trustees (Professor S.M. Shakhrai). Academician A.V. Torkunov was elected chairman of the Expert council. Center set to work as from August 1. Official presentation took place September 28-th. Its Internet address is www.rosopolcentr.ru.
2. Russian and Polish Centers interact effectively as instruments within the Group on the complex issues of the common history. Landmark projects undertaken this year:
 - International conference “Smutnoye Vremya (Troubled Times) in Russia and Swedish Potop (Deluge) in Poland: an experience in overcoming State crisis in the XYII century” (October, Moscow) with about 60 leading historians participating from both counties. An Archival and documental exhibition was set up on the margins of the conference, computer copies of the documents from the Russian archives, rare works of the Russian historians on this subject were put on display at the specially inaugurated internet- portal. Both the conference and the exhibition were of great success due to the celebration of 400 years of overcoming Smuta.

-Visit of the Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia to Poland in August (for the first time in the history of bilateral relations) during which the Primate of the Russian Orthodox and Polish Catholic Churches addressed a Joint Message to the peoples of both countries. On the invitation of the Polish colleagues representatives of the Russian Center took part in protocol and organizational matters of the visit, which was held on the “neutral” secular ground – Royal Castle in Warsaw. Director of the Russian Centre and Polish minister of culture gave a joint interview to Polish TV. Russian TV also broadcasted on November 4-th – Day of the national unity in Russia - a discussion between the director of the Russian Center and metropolitan Ilarion (second person in Russian Church hierarchy) on the subject of the Joint Message.

- In October-November two Russian teenage volunteers who took part in the liquidation of the consequences of a devastating flood in the town of Krimsk participated in the sea cruise around Europe “School under the Sails” together with their Polish coevals. This project was held under the guidance of a famous Polish sailor captain K. Baranovsky. By the end of the cruise they had a meeting with the Russian Ambassador in Poland and there was a press-conference in the newspaper “Komsomolskaya Pravda” in Moscow. It was announced there that the two Centers decided to give a bilateral character to this project.

3. The abovementioned events show that activities of both Russian and Polish Centers, such as joint scientific researches, seminars and conferences, encouraging of contacts between representatives of civil society and church, go along the same lines with the principles of the OSCE Euro-Atlantic Security initiative.

4. Among other projects I would like to mention a long-term program “Russia – Poland, overcoming historic stereotypes”, being undertaken by the Institute of World history, RAS and University of Lublin. Conference “Russia – Poland and new Eastern Europe” was held together with Moscow state University of International relations (November, St. Petersburg) and “Political, national and confessional lingual map of Eastern Europe: history and present times” (Vilnius – Suprasl, November, together with the Institute for Slavic Studies, RAS). Publication activities are being actively developed in cooperation with academic institutes and Federal Archives Agency.

Youth contacts are not that active yet. Russian Center is still in search of appropriate forms and methods in this sphere. We are very much interested in the relevant experience of the OSCE.

5. The Joint Message to the Peoples of Russia and Poland, signed during the visit of Patriarch Kirill to Poland, should be mentioned among the achievements of the Russian-Polish dialogue. This document is of historical and breakthrough character. Russian Orthodox and Polish Catholic churches made a very significant step in the interconfessional dialogue. It's very important that their positions coincided in family issues, upbringing, social morality. Both Orthodox and Catholics agree that Church should actively participate in the social dialogue.

The call of the two churches for reconciliation based on “unfalsified historical truth” is of special importance in the dialogue on complex matters of joint history. Special emphasis was given to the role of professional community of historians. Dialogue about the past should be projected into the future. A call for repentance and forgiveness was at the heart of the Joint message.

A conference on the problems of common history with participation of the churches is planned for the spring of 2013.

6. Research studies of the two Centers are based on the understanding that the professional historians should play the leading role in the overcoming of negative perceptions of the past. It's the professional community which could effectively change the algorithms of mass consciousness.

The guidelines of the Russian side are based on the principles of historicism and universality (full documental coverage). In other words, the problems discussed should be considered in the light of a particular historical context using full range of already known and also new documental sources. During the last meeting of the Group in Moscow in December the Russian side spoke for that the upcoming publications on the history of bilateral relations in the XX century should be based on the recently found but also on the already published documents of the Soviet period.

Speaking about dynamics of dialog we should stress that convergence in approaches is substantially higher as for the XYII-XIX centuries than for the common history of the XX century. During the abovementioned Conference on "Smuta" (Troubled Times) Russian and Polish historians were unanimous in the assessment of the XVII century as a deep state crisis. International conference "Polish and Russian political thought in the XIX century" (December) in Warsaw was held in the same course.

7. We still have different approach to the historical problems of the recent past (such as diplomatic strife on the verge of the Second World War, Katyn and postwar period). Although, we have to note political will of the leaders and part of historians to overcome the existing problems.

On the whole we are now on the comparative stage concerning the Soviet period of our history. Monograph "White spots, black spots" in which Russian and Polish historians demonstrate personal, not always coinciding assessments of the prewar and war period is a good example of the effectiveness of such approach. Joint research work on the comparative basis is to be continued in 2013.

Katyn is still a very hot topic. Federal Archives Agency came out with a suggestion to undertake a joint search of the archival documents on the personal stall of the Polish prisoners of war in Russia and vice versa. It would help eliminate a negative effect of the unverified information regularly appearing in media. E.g. the so-called "Belorussian list". Russian Center also plan to look for new archival documents on the liberation and salvation of Krakow by the Red Army in 1944-45, recovery of the Polish economy after the war. We plan to translate into Polish the book of the Russian historian G. Matveev "Polish captivity", about the Soviet-Polish war of 1920-21.

Besides, we have in our plans to search in the Polish archives for the documents on the times of Peter I, Decembrists, to study Polish sources concerning Russian emigration in Poland. A work is underway on the publication of the book about architectural monuments of the XI-XYI centuries in the Polish lands which were then part of Galicia-Volyn Rus. We consider the possibility of granting several scholarships to the Polish students and undergraduates for studies and traineeship in Russia.

Summing up, I should like to note that Russian-Polish dialogue on the difficult issues of common history is a long-term project. The task of the forthcoming period is to learn not only to listen to, but also to hear the each other's arguments. Overcoming of the past perceptions should promote widening and deepening of understanding along the full specter of bilateral relations.