

# **KRESY WSCHODNIE OR THE PARTNER IN THE EASTERN NEIGHBORHOOD: MODERN POLISH POPULAR PERCEPTION OF UKRAINE**

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**Abstract:** *This article analyzes modern Polish society's perception of Ukraine. Several traditional Polish spatial narratives can be identified, ranging from Kresy Wschodnie (i.e., Eastern Regions - the post(neo)colonialist geopolitical and cultural concept which regards lands of Ukraine, Belarus, and Lithuania that belonged to the Second Polish Republic in the interwar period as a "lost dominion of Poland") to the idea of Intermarium (the powerful regional political, military, and economic alliance of the nations between Black Sea and Baltic Sea). Poland has not avoided contemporary European tendency of the right populism's rise, though not without its own specific. The ruling Polish party Prawo i Sprawiedliwość or PiS (Law and Justice Party) masterfully exploits nationalistic sentiments of the electorate and appeals to the so called "traditional values," indirectly legitimizing the ultra-right-wing political movements, the presence of which on social and political landscape of Poland is becoming more and more noticeable. In fact, it is Poland's shift to the right of the political spectrum, which creates the conditions for the change of Polish public opinion towards Ukraine.*

**Keywords:** *Discourse, Intermarium, Kresy Wschodnie, Poland, Populism, Ukraine.*

## **KRESY WSCHODNIE YA DA DOĞUDAKİ ORTAK: POLONYA'DA MODERN POPÜLER UKRAYNA ALGISI**

**Öz:** *Bu çalışma modern Leh toplumunun Ukrayna algısını incelemektedir. Bu çerçevede, Polonya'da, Kresy Wschodnie'den (Doğu Bölgeleri - Ukrayna, Belarus ve Litvanya'yı iki savaş arası dönemdeki İkinci Polonya Cumhuriyeti'ne dahil olan "Polonya'nın kaybettiği*

*topraklar” olarak kodlayan post (neo) kolonyal jeopolitik ve kültürel kavram) ve Intermarium düşüncesi (Baltık Denizi ve Karadeniz arasında kalan bölgedeki ulusların siyasi, askeri ve ekonomik güçlü bölgesel ittifakı) arasında değişen geleneksel mekansal anlatıları tespit etmek mümkündür. Avrupa’daki çağdaş eğilimle paralel olarak, Polonya’da da, kendine has özellikleriyle birlikte, sağ popülizmin yükseliştir. Polonya’da iktidarda olan Prawo i Sprawiedliwość (PiS; Hukuk ve Adalet Partisi) toplumdaki milliyetçi duygu ve düşünceleri başarılı bir şekilde araçsallaştırarak ve “geleneksel değerlere” söylemine dayanarak, ülkedeki aşırı sağı meşrulaştıran bir pratik sergilemektedir. Nitekim, Polonya’da aşırı sağ her geçen gün daha da güç kazanmaktadır. Esasen, Leh toplumunun Ukrayna’ya dair görüşünü belirleyen şey, Polonya’da görülen sağ siyasete doğru kayıştır.*

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** *Söylem, Intermarium, Kresy Wschodnie, Polonya, Popülizm, Ukrayna*

## Introduction

*All life for all of us is just a patchwork of thoughts, words, objects, events, actions, and interactions in Discourses.*

James Paul Gee<sup>1</sup>

The article aims to analyze modern Polish society's perception of Ukraine. As a main theoretical framework, this paper applies Discourse Analysis Method in order to examine selected media texts including social media, with the consideration of the connection between populism and on-line communication.<sup>2</sup> This article does not claim to absolute impartiality, keeping in mind, that "it is impossible for a discourse analyst to be neutral, because he/she is part of a social, cultural and historical context."<sup>3</sup> As its theoretical background, this article holds to the definition of discourse as "broad patterns of talk - systems of statements - that are taken up in particular speeches and conversations. Thus, various discourses operate in a particular text; put differently, the text draws on, or is informed by, these discourses."<sup>4</sup> It should be emphasized that, it is extremely important to focus not only on what is said but also how it is said, as discourses shape people's perception of the phenomena. To reflect on selected texts in such perspective one should apply discourse analysis as "a way of reading that is made possible by immersion in a particular culture, which provides us with a rich tapestry of 'ways of speaking' that one may recognize, 'read', and relate to in dialogue context."<sup>5</sup>

It is important to state that this article is neither all-encompassing nor exhaustive on the topic. The theme of the Polish-Ukrainian relations and, in particular, the Poles' perception of Ukraine and Ukrainians, is such a vast topic that it can hardly be fully disclosed even in a book-length study, not to mention an article.

Realizing that outside the borders of Poland and Ukraine the peculiarities of the historically established relationship between these two nations,

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1 James Paul Gee, *An Introduction to Discourse Analysis: Theory and Method* (London and New York: Routledge, 2005), 7.

2 Bruce Bimber, "The Internet and Political Transformation: Populism, Community, and Accelerated Pluralism," *Polity* 31, no. 1 (Autumn 1998): 133-160.

3 Corene de Wet, "A Media Discourse Analysis of Racism in South African Schools," *International Education Journal* 2, no. 5, (July 2001): 101.

4 Corene de Wet, "A Media Discourse," 100.

5 Corene de Wet, "A Media Discourse," 100.

which are influencing their perception of each other, are known to only a few specialists, the first part of the article is devoted to a short excursus into this problematic.

The second part of the article analyzes several texts illustrating the Poles' perception of Ukraine and Ukrainians. As the chronological limit of research, the article takes 2015-2017. In these years, *Prawo i Sprawiedliwość*, PiS, "a socially conservative, Eurosceptic and nationalist party,"<sup>6</sup> won the power and actively reshaped the political landscape of Poland. In this way, the article considers selected statements of politicians representing the ruling party, as well as the opinions of common Internet users, which could be found on the social platform Quora, which allows people to interact by posing questions and/or suggesting answers on all possible topics, including the one of this paper. As the official statement says:

Quora's mission is to share and grow the world's knowledge. ... We want to connect the people who have knowledge to the people who need it, to bring together people with different perspectives so they can understand each other better, and to empower everyone to share their knowledge for the benefit of the rest of the world.<sup>7</sup>

A computer search on Google engine in above mentioned chronological limit with a combination of the words Poland and Ukraine provided the samples. The final section of the article is reserved for a brief conclusion from the results of the analysis.

### **"Radix Malorum," Grudges of the Past and the Way Out of Labyrinth**

*The Bible tells us to love our neighbors, and also to love our enemies; probably because generally they are the same people.*

**G.K. Chesterton**<sup>8</sup>

6 Remi Adekoya, "Xenophobic, authoritarian – and generous on welfare: how Poland's right rules," *The Guardian*, accessed November 11, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/oct/25/poland-right-law-justice-party-europe>.

7 "About Quora," Quora, accessed October 30, 2017, <https://www.quora.com/about>.

8 "G.K. Chesterton, ILN, 7/16/10," *The American Chesterton Society*, accessed October 28, 2017, <https://www.chesterton.org/quotations-of-g-k-chesterton>.

These wise words of the epigraph to this chapter said by great British philosopher could be considered as a good advice to any nation in the world, but the European ones in particular, for the dramatic history of the continent. Indeed, the course of the history of Europe was largely determined by conflicts in which the immediate neighbors clashed, challenged each other's territories and attempted to shift their borders. For Western Europe, a textbook example of such confrontation, which has repeatedly shaken the whole European civilization, is the one between France and Germany. The defeat of the Second French Empire in the Franco-Prussian war resulted in a united German state and, at the same time, laid the foundation for a deep geopolitical rupture which led, one could argue, to two world wars. Historians and political thinkers of both sides set the ideological basis of the confrontation of these states, using, among other things, discourses that turned public opinion toward an allegedly existing primordial conflict between two civilizations or, using the terminology of those times, "races," Gallic and Teutonic,<sup>9</sup> only one of which was to prevail in this geopolitical zero-sum game. It is no accident that after the catastrophe of the Second World War, which put all of Europe to the brink of destruction, one of the most important aspects of building a new postwar peace was the policy of Franco-German reconciliation,<sup>10</sup> including the reconciliation of the reciprocal discourses by which two nations created a new narrative about each other, from hostile rivalry to peaceful cooperation and good-neighborliness.<sup>11</sup>

In Central and Eastern Europe, hereinafter referred to as the CEE, perhaps the most striking example of such confrontation between neighboring nations, if we take out from the equation Russia, as only a partially European country, which has, moreover, some unique characteristics due to its size and geopolitical role and thus cannot be observed in the sole European context, is the relationship between Poland and Ukraine. Throughout the first half of the twentieth century, these two nations engaged in a bloody struggle, with the scale ranging from a full-fledged war to individual terrorist acts, which has caused numerous casualties on both sides, primarily among the civilian population, and left deep scars in the historical memory. The Polish-

9 J. W. Jackson, "On the Racial Aspects of the Franco-Prussian War," *The Journal of the Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland* 1 (1872): 30-52.

10 Lily Gardner Feldman, "The Principle and Practice of Reconciliation in German Foreign Policy: Relations with France, Israel, Poland and the Czech Republic," *International Affairs* 75, no. 2 (1999): 333-356.

11 Alice Ackermann, "Reconciliation as a Peace-building Process in Postwar Europe: The Franco-German Case," *Peace&Change* 19, no. 3 (1994): 229-250.

Ukrainian conflict made its own significant contribution to the sum of events that gave historian Timothy Snyder the ground for naming this territory stretched from the Baltic to the Black Sea as “Bloodlands.”<sup>12</sup>

Discourses created in both societies for describing each other in this traumatic period were woven into already existing narratives that emerged over centuries of uneasy coexistence in adjacent territories. After the Second World War, Poland, the Polish People’s Republic, and Ukraine, the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic within the USSR, received modern borders established by peace treaties. Both countries also found themselves inside the Communist bloc, behind the Iron Curtain, under the unshakable control of Stalin.<sup>13</sup> Ironically, both the Ukrainians and the Poles, with all their mutual invectives, were unable to conduct independent national policies, as anything in their relations which went beyond what was approved by Moscow’s discourse of the “internationalist friendship among the brotherly peoples of the socialistic camp,” and were ruthlessly oppressed by the communist officials. Paradoxically, such “freezing” of the national life of both countries gave Poland and Ukraine time to heal the wounds, at least, partially, and, more importantly, to develop a new discourse with which Poles and Ukrainians could address each other, peacefully and constructively. As Timothy Snyder wrote:

Since the end of the Second World War, Lithuanians have believed that Poland would seize Vilnius if given the chance, while Poles recall Ukrainians (after the Germans) as the greatest and most vicious wartime enemy. Since 1989 Poland and its eastern neighbours Lithuania and Ukraine have successfully negotiated issues of past conflict, in large part because of awareness of the problems memory must pose for statesmen.<sup>14</sup>

The uniqueness of such a change in relations between Poland and its eastern neighbors is that it became possible thanks to the efforts of a cohort of intellectuals working not in Poland but abroad, the group of émigrés who did not accept the post-war communist regime and were free in their creativity from its ideological fetters. This is about the

12 Timothy Snyder, *Bloodlands: Europe between Hitler and Stalin* (New York: Random House, 2011), viii.

13 Georges Mink, *Vie et Mort du bloc soviétique* [Life and Death of the Soviet Bloc. In French] (Paris: Casterman, 1997).

14 Timothy Snyder, “Memory of sovereignty and sovereignty over memory: Poland, Lithuania and Ukraine, 1939–1999,” in *Memory and Power in Post-War Europe: Studies in the Presence of the Past*, ed. Jan-Werner Müller (Cambridge University Press, 2002), 39.

magazine *Kultura* and, first of all, about its ideological inspirer and editor Jerzy Giedroyc.<sup>15</sup> In post-war Europe, when the wounds of the bloody conflicts were still fresh, it was *Kultura* that “started carrying features dedicated to Ukraine, launching a broad scale campaign aimed at overcoming misconceptions in the relations between Poland and Ukraine.”<sup>16</sup> Moreover, *Kultura* was not a uni-dimensional Polish movement. Giedroyc successfully managed to include representatives of Ukraine in the dialogue. He “did his utmost to convince liberally minded Ukrainian intellectuals (e.g., Yurii Sheveliov, Leonid Mosendz, Yevhen Malaniuk, Ivan Kedryn-Rudnytsky, Ivan Koshelivets, Yurii Lavrinenko, Borys Levytsky, Ivan Lysiak-Rudnytsky) to cooperate with *Kultura*.”<sup>17</sup>

Giedroyc and his team managed to rise above national stereotypes for strategic planning of the future truly independent Poland. Under his guidance *Kultura*,

sought sovereignty over memory: memory not as individual recollections, not as a collective phenomenon, nor as a reaction to communism, but as a political problem which could be addressed in a future independent Poland by political means. We Poles, their argument ran, may think it natural to reclaim the eastern territories stripped from us by the Soviet Union, but the interest of preserving the Polish state and thus the future of the nation demands that we recognise existing borders. We Poles might think it natural to assert our superiority as the bearers of Western culture in the east, but it would be more profitable to the Polish state to accept our eastern neighbours as equals. We should learn the histories of Lithuania, Belarus and Ukraine, understand that they treated episodes of their pasts with the same sorts of biases Poles applied to their own past, and even appreciate that the eastern neighbours’ views of past relations could check Polish prejudices.<sup>18</sup>

Against all odds, this project succeeded. With the collapse of the Soviet bloc the new truly democratic and independent Poland had managed to

15 Marek Suszko, “Kultura and European Unification, 1948-1953,” *The Polish Review* 45, no. 2 (2000), 183-195.

16 Yurii Shapoval, “The topical legacy of Jerzy Giedroyc,” *The Day*, accessed October 28, 2017, <https://day.kyiv.ua/en/article/society/topical-legacy-jerzy-giedroyc>.

17 Yurii Shapoval, “The topical legacy.”

18 Timothy Snyder, *Memory of Sovereignty*, 55.

establish constructive relations with its Eastern neighbors, including countries with the territories of former Second Polish Republic, or “*Kresy Wschodnie*” in old Polish discourse i.e. Ukraine, Lithuania, Belarus. The post-communist government of Poland turned out to be a diligent student of Giedroyc and built up its eastern policy in accordance with his doctrine. The government of independent Ukraine went in the process together with the Polish neighbors. President Kwaśniewski and President Kuchma made a symbolic step, the importance of which cannot be overestimated, as Tatiana Zhurzhenko stated:

in 1997 the ‘Common Declaration of the Presidents of Ukraine and Poland on Mutual Understanding and Reconciliation’ was signed in Kyiv. ... While in 2003 the Ukrainian and Polish parliaments got involved in the contentious debates on the interpretation of the Volhynian tragedy, both presidents met at the commemorative ceremony in the village of Pavlivka in Volhynia and made a joint statement on the need for reconciliation.<sup>19</sup>

It seemed that, despite all the difficulties involved in overcoming mutual historical grudges, both countries were moving in the direction of reconciliation and productive cooperation. Although in both states there were always forces, usually representatives of right-wing and ultra-right parties and movements, striving not for reconciliation, but for instrumentalising the tragic events of the past to accumulate political capital, in general one could say that never before in history the relations between independent Poland and independent Ukraine have been better. So what went wrong? This is exactly the question the prominent analyst of the European Council on Foreign Relations Joanna Hosa is asking.<sup>20</sup> Concerned by the mass manifestation in Warsaw on the Polish Independence Day, November 11, 2017, where xenophobic and racist slogans shouted by the right-wing groups were visibly present. Even more concern was caused by the absence of clear condemnation of such unacceptable behavior from the Polish government and the ruling party, as above mentioned analyst underlines that:

pictures from Poland, and the government’s non-reaction, left other Europeans nonplussed and alarmed. Has Poland gone completely fascist? What is this country? What is their problem?

19 Tatiana Zhurzhenko, “Memory Wars and Reconciliation in the Ukrainian–Polish Borderlands: Geopolitics of Memory from a Local Perspective,” in *History, Memory and Politics in Central and Eastern Europe*, ed. Georges Mink & Laure Neumayer (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 178.

20 Joanna Hosa, “Poland, what went wrong?”



Can I still travel there, or will someone punch me in the face?  
This is happening in the EU?<sup>21</sup>

As another observer correctly noticed,

Saturday's march was not organized or officially promoted by the governing right-wing Law and Justice party. Yet, despite the extremist slogans and posters, officials refrained from condemning the march for days, and even publicly voiced support: in a statement on Monday, Poland's Foreign Ministry defended the march as a largely patriotic event and "a great celebration of Poles," although the ministry condemned racist, xenophobic and anti-Semitic remarks.<sup>22</sup>

The Ukrainophobic sentiments which were raising in Polish society in the years 2015-2017 under the rule of PiS, with its appeal to the "traditional Polish values," is just one aspect of a general conservative and sometimes outright xenophobic and Eurosceptic attitude of the current Polish government, the attitude which disturbs both the liberal-minded Polish citizens and the institutions of the European Union. Without claiming that the blame for the sharp deterioration in relations between the two neighboring countries rests solely on Poland, as there are also enough political actors in Ukraine who commit reckless steps that can complicate mutual understanding between partners, it is vital to observe the rhetoric of the Polish officials representing PiS since its triumphant takeover of power in 2015 and how the discourse towards Ukraine and Ukrainians formed by such acts of speech resonates in the Polish society.

### **Space and Power, Polish Perception of the East Neighborhood**

For the objective of this article, it is necessary to ask questions how and why a discourse of hostility between Ukraine and Poland has been (re)created by representatives of the Polish ruling party since 2015. Such task could be approached through a careful examination of the language,

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21 Joanna Hosa, "Poland, what went wrong?".

22 Rick Noack, "How Poland became a breeding ground for Europe's far right," The Washington Post, accessed November 14, 2017, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2017/11/13/how-poland-became-a-breeding-ground-for-europes-far-right>.

which has been used by Polish political establishment recently with all its consequences in international relations between two nations.

But how did this political turn happen? The short answer: very fast. Just four years before the major shift to the right in 2011, the centrist Polish party Civic Platform celebrated a victory, leaving both the left and the right far behind and “this was a sixth successive loss in elections of varying kinds for the nationalist Law and Justice Party of Jarosław Kaczyński.”<sup>23</sup> Moderate pro-European forces rejoiced: it seemed like a decisive triumph of reasonable pragmatism over the reactionary realm of the right, dominated by

Law and Justice narrative, which affirmed that, despite all external appearances (15 plus years of democratic elections, frequent changes of government, the entry of Poland into NATO and the European Union), Poland continued to be ruled by a sinister crypto-communist *układ* (establishment) in active cahoots with Moscow.<sup>24</sup>

Poland was remaining a reliable partner of Ukraine, even the best partner one could say, its “advocate” in the institutions of the European Union and NATO.

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But, obviously, PiS swallowed this bitter pill, did its homework, and learned from its failure. Poland did not stay away from the pan-European tendency of the rise of the popularity of right-wing sentiments, boosted by an anti-migrant rhetoric. And, according to the leading journalist of Foreign Affairs Remi Adekoya, PiS used this political conjuncture to the full extent:

The right-wing populist party swept to power in Warsaw two years ago ... The government has found fertile ground for its portrayal of Western Europe as a place run by fanatical multiculturalists and militant secularists who are so obsessed with political correctness they have lost all sense of self-preservation—revealed most clearly, this story runs, by its acceptance of Muslim migrants who don’t assimilate to their new societies and are potential terrorists. Kaczyński maintains that the country can reach a level of economic development on par with the West while

23 John Besemeres, *A Difficult Neighbourhood* (ANU Press, 2016), 129.

24 John Besemeres, *A Difficult Neighbourhood*, 132.

keeping so-called traditional Polish values and maintaining its homogenous, Catholic, white demographic makeup. PiS should not be viewed as having somehow brainwashed Poles into the xenophobic views many now seem to subscribe to; rather, it simply tapped into underlying worldviews and emboldened the expression of them via the legitimizing power of the state. A nationalist genie has been let out of the bottle, and there are few forces that could help restrain it anytime soon.<sup>25</sup>

There is a paradoxical situation when Poland, with a statistically insignificant number of Muslim population, acts as one of the most prominent heralds of the Islamic threat in the EU. The thinking of the besieged fortress spreads in the country, as people conduct massive religious ceremonies at the borders to “protect Poland from the invasion of Muslims.”<sup>26</sup> This is hardly a sound behavior, for the absence of a significant Muslim presence in the country, but supporters of so called “traditional values” do not appeal to reason, preferring to manipulate emotions and irrational fears, fear of hostile “others” in this case. An alarming signal for Ukrainians is that such a discourse began to include them as people who do not profess Catholicism and as the bearers of “anti-Polish beliefs” and even “deeply anti-human, anti-European values”<sup>27</sup> if we look at rhetoric some Polish politicians are using. An excellent example of the situation when the opposite discourses can bear the same name, as representative of Poland while talking about “European values” does not mean the tolerance and respect for the rights of minorities, but, rather, something from the realm of “white Christian Europe”. And he does not grant Ukraine a privilege of being a part of this “civilized world”.

One could argue, that the approach of the Polish government in this case is a typical example of the securitization which, as emphasized by security studies scholar Sébastien Loisel,

claims that the scope and content of security threats cannot be analyzed objectively but that they depend on a particular

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25 Remi Adekoya, “Why Poland’s Law and Justice Party Remains So Popular,” *Foreign Affairs*, accessed November 3, 2017, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/central-europe/2017-11-03/why-polands-law-and-justice-party-remains-so-popular>.

26 “Poland Catholics hold controversial prayer day on borders,” *BBC News*, accessed October 15, 2017, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-41538260>.

27 “Warsaw not to disclose list of Ukrainians banned from entering Poland,” *The Kyiv Post*, accessed November 13, 2017, <https://www.kyivpost.com/ukraine-politics/warsaw-not-disclose-list-ukrainians-banned-entering-poland.html>.

discursive mechanism. A political actor addresses an audience about a lethal threat to a referent object (most often the survival of the State or the nation, and claims that ordinary rules need to be breached to grant him exceptional powers to prevent the threat and restore security.<sup>28</sup>

At the same time Polish political establishment tries to use Ukrainian question in the dispute over refugees crisis with the EU authorities. “Prime Minister Beata Szydło and Jarosław Kaczyński, chairman of Prawo i Sprawiedliwość, have been trying to convince EU states that they cannot accept refugees from the Middle East because they are already burdened by those from Ukraine,”<sup>29</sup> while in reality:

since the events of EuroMaidan, just 20 Ukrainians have received refugee status (and 18 of them only after appeal). Even though many Ukrainians came to Poland directly or indirectly because of the war, being granted international protection verges on the impossible. Ukrainians do not benefit from Poland’s social care system, even though they contribute to the country’s economic development and pay their taxes.<sup>30</sup>

Thus, more than one million Ukrainian workers in Poland by any means cannot be named “refugees” and by applying such terminology Polish government deliberately labels Ukrainians in Poland as a burden who must be grateful and should know their place, as people of second sort. Unfortunately, such perception of people with refugee status is quite common not only in Poland but in the CEE in general. This only exacerbates the traditional pejorative discourse describing the Ukrainians, which took shape in Poland for centuries and still lives in many strata of the population, as some Poles perceive their neighbors “either as a branch of the Polish nation or as primitives: *Cossacks*, *Haidamaks*, *rezuns*. [Haidamak: a Cossack paramilitary band from the 18th century. Rezun: an archaic Polish word meaning both a murderer and somebody of Ukrainian origin].”<sup>31</sup>

28 Sébastien Loisel, “Discourse Analysis and Foreign Policy Analysis: Introducing Speech Act Theory in European Foreign and Security Policy,” ECPR Joint Sessions of Workshops, accessed November 15, 2017, <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/0048/f56189eeb6ff8359c5d18a3a27d870d9b912.pdf>.

29 Kaja Puto, “Second-hand Europe: Ukrainian Immigrants in Poland,” Political Critique, accessed October 30, 2017, <http://politicalcritique.org/cee/poland/2017/ukrainian-immigrants-in-poland>.

30 Kaja Puto, “Second-hand Europe.”

31 Kaja Puto, “Second-hand Europe.”

It should also be recalled that, as the journalist and activist Kaja Puto writes,

the situation of Ukrainians in Poland under the PiS government has been impacted not only by anti-immigration policies and the “Poland first” approach typical of the populist right, but also by tensions in Polish-Ukrainian relations. Typically for the bloodlands of Central Europe, this is about memory conflicts.<sup>32</sup>

One of the most critical points of clashing of Ukrainian and Polish historical narratives is the figure of Stepan Bandera,<sup>33</sup> one of the leaders of Ukrainian nationalist movement in the first half of XX century:

For some Ukrainians, particularly in western Ukraine, Bandera is a symbol of guerrilla warfare against Soviet and Polish hegemony, an example for some soldiers fighting today in Donbas. From the Polish perspective, Bandera is above all a symbol of the Volhynia massacre, the mass killings of Poles by Ukrainians (and, on a smaller scale, Polish retaliation), which took place in 1943–1944 under German occupation.<sup>34</sup>

From this point, for Poles calling a Ukrainian *banderowiec*, supporter of Bandera, is the equivalent of calling him/her a murderer. It is curious that the very different historical narratives of Poland and Russia, often describing the same events in diametrically opposite tone, completely agree on the assessment of the national movement of Ukrainians and Bandera in particular. If one checks Polish version of Google search engine page [www.google.pl](http://www.google.pl) for *ukraińcy + banderowcy*, Ukrainians + supporters of Bandera, that would result in about 64700 findings.<sup>35</sup> That result is only approximately ten times less than the one of the same algorithm in the Russian version [www.google.ru](http://www.google.ru) *украинцы +*

32 Kaja Puto, “Second-hand Europe.”

33 Eleonora Narvselius, “The “Bandera Debate”: The Contentious Legacy of World War II and Liberalization of Collective Memory in Western Ukraine,” *Journal Canadian Slavonic Papers* 54, no. 3-4 (2012): 469-490.

34 Kaja Puto, “Second-hand Europe.”

35 “Polish version of Google search engine [www.google.pl](http://www.google.pl) for *ukraińcy + banderowcy*,” accessed November 5, 2017, [https://www.google.pl/search?source=hp&ei=YZMZWv3-OKnI6AS83buQAQ&q=ukrai%C5%84cy+banderowcy&oeq=ukrainiec+bandero&gs\\_l=psy-ab.3.1.0i22i10i30klj0i22i30k1.3189.35510.0.47722.17.16.0.0.0.157.1690.7j9.16.0....0...1.1.64.psy-ab..1.16.1684.0..0j35i39klj0i131klj0i10klj0i203k1.0.5dRd4JB1cTU](https://www.google.pl/search?source=hp&ei=YZMZWv3-OKnI6AS83buQAQ&q=ukrai%C5%84cy+banderowcy&oeq=ukrainiec+bandero&gs_l=psy-ab.3.1.0i22i10i30klj0i22i30k1.3189.35510.0.47722.17.16.0.0.0.157.1690.7j9.16.0....0...1.1.64.psy-ab..1.16.1684.0..0j35i39klj0i131klj0i10klj0i203k1.0.5dRd4JB1cTU).

*бандеровцы*, which results in 657000 findings.<sup>36</sup> And one should keep in mind size of Polish population comparatively to the Russian one.

To move the situation around Polish-Ukrainian memory battles from bad to worse, the movie *Wolny* (*Hatred*, in English translation) appeared on screens in 2016. The director of the movie, Wojciech Smarzowski, is far from being a right wing himself. According to the article by Kaja Puto, Smarzowski,

called the film a bridge leading to reconciliation ... He also publicly declared that he opposes the use of the film for the purpose of political conflict. Thus, he refused to accept a high financial prize that Jacek Kurski, the director of government-controlled public television, offered to grant him.<sup>37</sup>

But all the same, the movie was instrumentalized. Its topic is too controversial and too painful. Apart from being a piece of art, this movie was doomed to be use by those Polish political actors who are actively applying anti-Ukrainian discourse, as “it solidifies Polish stereotypes about Ukrainians by portraying them as cruel and sadistic peasants.”<sup>38</sup> What is even more important, that this movie underlines the old Polish spatial discourse:

the post-colonial fantasy of Kresy – the Polish historical narrative of the multi-cultural, supposedly idyllic, eastern frontiers of the Rzeczpospolita – a territory (together with Volhynia) that was incorporated into the Soviet Union after 1945. For Ukrainians, Kresy is part of the history of Polish colonialism, as it represents centuries-long ethnic and class discrimination(s) when the Ruthenians were above all peasants, subjected to Polish or Polonised nobility, who were put under nationalist and minority rights’ movements after 19th century skids.<sup>39</sup>

36 “Russian version of Google search engine [www.google.ru](http://www.google.ru) for украинцы + бандеровцы,” accessed November 5, 2017, [37 Kaja Puto, “A Film That Divides Poles and Ukrainians,” \*Political Critique\*, accessed November 3, 2017, \[38 Kaja Puto, “A Film That Divides.”\]\(http://politicalcritique.org/cee/poland/2017/film-division-ukraine-poland.”</a></p></div><div data-bbox=\)](https://www.google.ru/search?newwindow=1&source=hp&ei=B5QZWvraBYmE6QS8-7DoCA&q=%D1%83%D0%BA%D1%80%D0%B0%D0%B8%D0%BD%D1%86%D1%8B+%D0%B1%D0%B0%D0%BD%D0%B4%D0%B5%D1%80%D0%BE%D0%B2%D1%86%D1%8B&oq=%D1%83%D0%BA%D1%80%D0%B0%D0%B8%D0%BD%D1%86%D1%8B+%D0%B1%D0%B0&gs_l=psy-ab.3.0.0j0i22i30k1i9.7054.13816.0.15838.11.8.0.0.0.220.1047.4j2j2.8.0....0...1c.1.64.psy-ab.3.8.1041...0i131k1j0i3k1j0i10k1.0.BvbLbO-xm9E.”</a></p></div><div data-bbox=)

39 Kaja Puto, “A Film That Divides.”

Sadly, reactions from the both sides of the Polish-Ukrainian border demonstrated that both nations *en masse* are far from being able to conduct a mature dialogue on the topics of the tragic pages of their common history. Ukrainians as well as Poles often tend to portrait the opponent with the black color while leaving for themselves a role of innocent victim and martyr.

Going to the topic of *Kresy*, it is necessary to point out the fact that two main discourses have been cohabiting for a long time in the Polish collective political consciousness for the lands lying in the east in the immediate vicinity of Poland. The concept of *Kresy* has already been described above. The second discourse is the so-called *Intermarium* (or *Intermarum* in some sources).

The idea of “Intermarium”, formulated in interwar Poland as a principle of foreign policy, rested on the notion of Poland as an intermediary between the Baltic Sea on the one hand and the Black and Aegean Seas on the other. While historical claims to the Baltic Sea connection seem more obvious, the link to the southern European seas was also not without historical background, as the catchphrase *Polska od morza do morza* (“Poland from one sea to the other”) exemplifies.<sup>40</sup>

These two concepts correspond with two main political visions which were fully formed in the interwar Second Polish Republic but both have deep roots, going back for centuries. In both these visions Ukraine takes an important place as a crucial element of Polish geopolitical thinking, as the journalist Kaja Puto remarks:

The first (called *piłsudczykowska*, after Piłsudski, the leader of the independent left) assumes supporting Ukraine to counter the risk of expansion of Russian influence closer to Polish territory. The other one (called *endecka*, from the nationalist movement of National Democracy) treats Ukrainians as eternal historical enemies against whom even alliance with Russia is acceptable. Since Ukraine gained independence in 1991, the Polish political scene has been dominated by a Piłsudski-school consensus. But

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40 Marta Grzegnik, “Intermarium: The Baltic and the Black Seas on the Polish mental maps in the interwar period,” in *The Romanian Journal for Baltic and Nordic Studies* 6, no. 1 (April 2014), 82.

today, Poland's "National Democracy" tendency is also making itself heard.<sup>41</sup>

This can also be seen as a competition of the federalism and nationalism,<sup>42</sup> where the discourse of deep interdependency of all nations inhabiting the lands between Baltic and Black sea, which should form a Federation, *Intermarium*, for the protection of their peace together,<sup>43</sup> clashes with the discourse of Polish domination over the *Kresy* that has been there once and should return again.

With the current tendency of the ruling party in Poland to appeal to the "glorious past" in order to gain public support by exploiting the feeling of national pride, the *Kresy* discourse is becoming more and more natural for many Poles, and such neocolonial vision as regards to their eastern neighbors portends nothing good in the future. It is not a coincidence that the major right-wing weekly news magazine in the country, *Gazeta Polska* (Polish Newspaper), which "offers a good representation of the sympathies of PiS supporters,"<sup>44</sup> proposes to its readers news from Ukraine, Belarus, and Lithuania not under the title *Kraj* (Country i.e. Poland, home news) or *Świat* (World, as world news), but *Kresy*,<sup>45</sup> as something in between. If turns again to some striking similarities in Polish and Russian perception of Ukraine, one could see an alarming analogy in the way many Russian news outlets propose news from Ukraine not under the title *World news* but rather under the *Former USSR* section, as if suggesting that former republics of the USSR are not real states and are in the Russian sphere of dominance.<sup>46</sup>

It was this very newspaper, *Gazeta Polska*, which published an interview of Jarosław Kaczyński, the leader of PiS and a "gray cardinal" of the Polish politics, standing behind the nominal leaders of the state, the President and the Prime-Minister. In this interview Mr. Kaczyński

41 Kaja Puto, "Second-hand Europe: Ukrainian Immigrants in Poland," Political Critique, accessed October 30, 2017, <http://politicalcritique.org/cee/poland/2017/ukrainian-immigrants-in-poland>.

42 Timothy Snyder, "Federalism and Nationalism in Polish Eastern Policy," in *Georgetown Journal of International Affairs* 4, no. 1 (Winter/Spring 2003), 111-118.

43 Alexandros Petersen, *The World Island: Eurasian Geopolitics and the Fate of the West* (ABC-CLIO, 2011), 61.

44 Andrea Czepek, Melanie Hellwig, Eva Nowak, *Press Freedom and Pluralism in Europe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 147.

45 "Gazeta Polska: Kresy," accessed November 12, 2017, <https://www.gazetapolska.pl/dzial/kresy>.

46 "Lenta.ru: USSR," accessed November 10, 2017, <https://lenta.ru/rubrics/ussr>.



reiterated his position on the memory of the conflict with Ukraine.<sup>47</sup> Without even trying to deescalate situation Mr. Kaczyński prefers to use the language of ultimatums, as his infamous catchphrase goes as *Ukraina z Banderą do Europy nie wejdzie*, “Ukraine will not enter Europe with Bandera.” Again, one could see how a Polish politician talks not about the European Union but rather about Europe in some civilization sense. In that Europe he does not include Ukraine, assuming that he has the “right” to decide who may be the part of this Europe and on what conditions. At the same time, it obviously does not occur to him that many representatives of Western Europe right now in their turn refuse Poland in being “true Europe,” in their understanding of this term, on the criterion of respect for the rights of minorities and rule of law.

It is possible to list a lot more symbolic acts of Polish officials in recent times that have been implemented in the mainstream of the *Kresy* discourse, where Ukrainians are considered as inferior. For example, Polish Foreign Minister Witold Waszczykowski, who was on an official visit to Ukraine, refused to visit the National Memorial Museum of Victims of Occupation Regimes,<sup>48</sup> because of the fact that there is a part of the museum’s exhibition about Ukrainian victims in Lviv. Vice-Consul of the Consulate General of Poland in Lutsk Marek Zapór called Lviv a Polish city.<sup>49</sup> The head of the municipal council in the village near Przemysl ordered to use the remnants of the memorial sign to the dead Ukrainians to pave the road.<sup>50</sup>

Though PiS and its representatives on different levels of power are not proclaiming anti-Ukrainian discourse directly, such actions legitimize this way of thinking and allow marginal ultra-right and revisionist

47 Jagienka Wilczak, “Historia znów nas dopada” [The History is catching up with us again. In Polish], accessed November 10, 2017,

<https://www.polityka.pl/tygodnikpolityka/kraj/1693536,1,kaczynski-ukraina-z-bandera-do-europy-nie-wejdzie-na-kremlu-pewnie-otwieraja-szampana.read>.

48 “Глава МЗС Польщі відмовився відвідати музей у Львові через слова про окупацію” [The head of the Polish Foreign Ministry refused to visit the museum in Lviv because of the words of occupation. In Ukrainian], Європейська правда [European truth], accessed November 5, 2017, <http://www.eurointegration.com.ua/news/2017/11/5/7073210>.

49 “Львів – то є польське місто: у мережі обурені заявою віце-консула Польщі” [Lviv is a Polish city: people in Internet are outraged by the statement of the Polish Vice-Consul. In Ukrainian], Європейська правда [European truth], accessed November 5, 2017, <http://www.eurointegration.com.ua/news/2017/11/8/7073340>.

50 “У Польщі рештки демонтованого пам’ятника УПА використали для будівництва дороги” [In Poland, the remnants of the dismantled monument of the UPA were used for the construction of the road. In Ukrainian], Європейська правда [European truth], accessed November 22, 2017, <http://www.eurointegration.com.ua/news/2017/11/22/7074012>.

groups to gain more popularity and to act more boldly day by day. A Polish political thinker Andrzej Zapałowski while giving interview to another prominent Polish right-wing newspaper *Nasz Dziennik* talks about Ukraine in a way similar to that which was used by the ideologist of Russian imperialism<sup>51</sup> Alexander Dugin.<sup>52</sup>

The slogan *Śmierć Ukrainie* “Death to Ukraine” appeared in graffiti “greeting” the trains’ passengers entering Warsaw.<sup>53</sup> Maps of Poland with the territories of Ukraine, Lithuania, and Belarus included, i.e., *Kresy Wschodnie*, appeared in the Warsaw Airport for the bemusement of international guests.<sup>54</sup>

Reading about these news related to the Ukrainian problematics on Polish news sites, one should also study comments section at which readers write their comments. Most of the comments in Polish contain next to nothing of constructive thoughts, but, often, some obscene language towards Ukrainians. In search for the opinions of educated Poles the article addresses the social service Quora, which was mentioned earlier. The research takes the recent questions asked about topics concerning Polish-Ukrainian relations and these are several selected answers as an interesting source for the purposes of this paper:

*Question: ‘What do Polish people think about Lviv being a Ukrainian city rather than part of Poland?’*

Answer by Piotr Szafranski:

‘Honest? Nobody in Poland was, or is happy with losing one of major centers of the Polish cultural life. Lviv was a very serious

51 Alan Ingram, “Alexander Dugin: geopolitics and neo-fascism in post-Soviet Russia,” *Political Geography* 20, no. 8 (November 2001): 1029-1051.

52 “Przed Ukrainą nie widać przyszłości” [There is no future for Ukraine. In Polish], accessed November 20, 2017, <http://naszdziennik.pl/polska-kraj/172259,przed-ukraina-nie-widac-przyszlosci.html>.

53 Warszawa [Warsaw]. “Śmierć Ukrainie. Tak stolica Polski wita pasażerów kolejowych ze Wschodu” [Death to Ukraine. This way the capital of Poland welcomes railway passengers from the East. In Polish], accessed November 16, 2017, <http://warszawa.wyborcza.pl/warszawa/7,54420,22656682,smierc-ukrainie-tak-stolica-polski-wita-pasazerow-kolejowych.html>.

54 Warszawa [Warsaw]. “Wicemarszałek Bogdan Borusewicz: Lotnisko Chopina zdjęło rewizjonistyczne plakaty” [Vice-Speaker Bogdan Borusewicz: Chopin Airport removed revisionist posters. In Polish], accessed November 21, 2017, <http://warszawa.wyborcza.pl/warszawa/7,54420,22675028,wicemarszalek-bogdan-borusewicz-lotnisko-chopina-zdjelo-rewizjonistyczne.html>.

issue. But what is past is past. Three generations of Poles and Ukrainians now (and Lithuanians, Belorussians, Germans, Czechs and Slovaks), live without fear and bloodshed due to the fact that we all decided to accept borders as they are today. Alternative? Look at Donbass. (Alas, I am wrong about Ukraine, they die on battlefields, today).

At the same time, everybody in Poland knows about centuries of strife between Poles and Ukrainians. Just now we in Poland deal with the full impact (memory) of slaughter (no other word) of Poles in Wolhynia region, 1943. That story is now being fully told, as before the communists suppressed this, too much trouble. About hundred thousands of victims, kids and all. I will spare you how they died, many cases.

At the same time, I (a Pole) often ask myself why impaling, European history, is associated with Vlad Dracula of Transylvania. I guess we Poles are lucky, Public Relations-wise. We Poles had impaled (literally) probably more Ukrainians, over time, than Vlad could dream of threading through. At some points we had been impaling them two to a stake, not enough trees for the stakes in whole counties. There was even a popular statement of friendship, among young Ukrainians, “I hope we end up on the same stake”. Seriously.

Instead of paying for another movie theater installment of (fake story) “Texas chainsaw massacre”, have some Pole or Ukrainian tell you about (true story) our common history. Often a family history. But a warning, “Texas chainsaw massacre” is PG-13, in comparison.

So, if losing Lwów (Polish name of today’s Lviv) is a price for me, or my children, to never again to be woken up in the middle of the night to be slaughtered like pigs, illuminated by the fire of the burning village, or never to do the same, to the Ukrainians, well, I will pay.’

This answer received 4500 Views and 186 Upvotes.<sup>55</sup>

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55 “What do Polish people think about Lviv being a Ukrainian city rather than part of Poland?”, Quora, accessed November 13, 2017, <https://www.quora.com/What-do-Polish-people-think-about-Lviv-being-a-Ukrainian-city-rather-than-part-of-Poland>.

Question: ‘Should the west part of Ukraine be given back to Poland?’

Answer by Robert Dumnicki:

‘No.

Most Poles naturally think it’s now part of Ukraine and history cannot be brought back. What most Poles want (including myself) is to see Ukraine, especially Lviv city, prospering and well integrated with the rest of Europe, so that when they come to visit as tourists, they see no poverty, which breaks hearts, but good infrastructure and renovated old monuments, which are evidence of our common history.<sup>56</sup>

Question: ‘*If, purely hypothetically, Poland wanted to recapture the city of Lviv and invaded Ukraine, who would win this Polish-Ukrainian war?*’

Answer by Piotr Szafranski:

‘Sorry, but this has to be said very forcefully: if anyone in Poland tried to invade Ukraine, Ukraine response would be the lesser of the problems for the guy. Polish people would lynch such a madman.

Half of Ukraine is at the moment working in Poland. You do not need much of paperwork - you can stay/work legally 6 months out of 12. This means tons of quite personal relationships.

Also, nearly half of Polish territory is former German (yes, 500 years ago it was Polish). Few people are interested in moving Poland back East.

Also, Poland never was able to control effectively any piece of Ukraine. These guys like their freedom. And good for both them and us.

Last but not least - what would be so great in getting closer to Russia?’<sup>57</sup>

56 “Should the west part of Ukraine be given back to Poland?”, Quora, accessed November 13, 2017, <https://www.quora.com/Should-the-west-part-of-Ukraine-be-given-back-to-Poland>.

57 “If purely hypothetically Poland wanted to recapture the city of Lviv and invaded Ukraine who would win this Polish Ukrainian war?”, Quora, accessed November 13, 2017, <https://www.quora.com/If-purely-hypothetically-Poland-wanted-to-recapture-the-city-of-Lviv-and-invaded-Ukraine-who-would-win-this-Polish-Ukrainian-war>.

## Conclusion

The above mentioned answers of the Poles to these fairly controversial questions allow adhering to the position of cautious optimism. This information confirms the conclusions made during the year of author's own field research in Poland in 2016-2017 while speaking with Polish citizens of various ages and social status. Many Poles are not enthusiastic about their country turning right and, especially, about the deterioration of relations with their closest neighbors. One cannot predict future, but one thing could be stated surely: *Prawo i Sprawiedliwość* is not Poland itself, and while the time of being at the power for this party will pass, both nations, Poles and Ukrainians, still will be living as neighbors. Even at the most intense moments, the dialogue between two countries has never been fully interrupted. The news from November 21, 2017 indicate that, despite everything, the voice of reason prevailed and two nations made small but steady steps towards reconciliation.<sup>58</sup> One of the achievements of this meeting between representatives of Ukraine and Poland was the decision to resume search and exhumation work in Ukraine of the burials of the Polish victims of the communist regime. Also, an agreement was reached on the restoration of Ukrainian places of memory on the territory of Poland, which became objects of acts of vandalism over the recent years.

As it was mentioned earlier, there are two main Polish discourses in relation to their eastern neighbors and, first of all, to Ukraine, and only one of them has a future. While *Kresy Wschodnie* are indeed deeply rooted in the Polish national consciousness and have treacherous appeal of the “glorious past,” there is no going back into this river, despite all phantom geopolitical pains. One cannot know whether the dream of the *Intermarium* as a single political and economic space for peace and prosperity of all nations of the CEE will be realized, at least speaking of the near future. But one can hope that the European integration processes will contribute to the constructive development of Polish-Ukrainian relations in the spirit of mutual respect.

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58 “Польща погодилася на відновлення українських місць пам’яті, які було сплюндровано” [Poland agreed to the restoration of the Ukrainian places of memory, which were plundered. In Ukrainian], Європейська правда [European truth], accessed November 21, 2017, <http://www.eurointegration.com.ua/news/2017/11/21/7073983>.

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