

Understanding Russia? Helping Ukraine? Poles and Germans on the Russo-Ukrainian Conflict*



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The paper analyses public opinion on the Russo-Ukrainian conflict in Germany and Poland in the context of the EU policy responses to it, utilising the concept of “strategic culture”. Seeing Russia as a military threat and attributing the main blame for the conflict to it makes people in both countries more likely to support Ukraine. However, it does not explain all the differences between the supporters and opponents of aiding Ukraine.

KEYWORDS:

Strategic Culture; Russo-Ukrainian Conflict; German Public Opinion; Polish Public Opinion; *Russlandversteher*; European Defence and Security Policy

The role of culture and national identity as factors that contribute to uniting or disuniting of the EU has received increasing attention, making it difficult to disregard it in the analysis of the various aspects of European integration, including the public support for it.¹ Differences in strategic cultures have been proposed as the (main) reason for the lack of a robust and coherent EU foreign policy and offered as an explanation for the lack of consensus between EU Member States regarding the responses towards the Russo-Ukrainian conflict.² This paper utilises the concept of “strategic culture” to analyse public opinion on the Russo-Ukrainian conflict in Germany and Poland³ in the context of the EU policy responses to it.

“Strategic culture”, a term historically pertaining to the Cold War period nuclear strategies of different countries, has more recently been employed to explain differences between various EU Member States’ positions on common security challenges

* An earlier take on this topic was published as: Joanna FOMINA, *Narrowing the Gap: Convergence of German and Polish Public Attitudes towards the Russo-Ukrainian conflict*, in: Piotr Bajor — Kamila Scholl Mazurek (edd.), *Eastern Chessboard. Geopolitical Determinants and Challenges in Eastern Europe and the South Caucasus*, Kraków 2015, pp. 9–28.

1 Liesbet HOOGHE — Gary MARKS, *A Postfunctionalist Theory of European Integration: From Permissive Consensus to Constraining Dissensus*, *British Journal of Political Sciences* 39, 2008, pp. 1–23.

2 Molly KRASNOŃBSKA, *Europeanization of Poland’s Strategic Culture: Managing the 2013/14 Ukraine Crisis*, draft paper, <https://ecpr.eu/Filestore/PaperProposal/48346673-2aa6-4313-9eb1-1e05bb00d5ec.pdf> [retrieved 28.8.2016].

3 I extend my deep gratitude to the Institute of Public Affairs in Warsaw and to the Bertelsmann Foundation for sharing the research results collected as part of their project. In Poland the survey was conducted by TNS (Taylor Nelson Sofres) Polska on a representative sample of 1,000 adult Poles in the period from 13 to 18 February 2015; in Germany — by TNS EMNID in the period from 13 to 21 February 2015 on a representative sample of 1,000 adult Germans.



that limit or decelerate the EU responses.⁴ According to the classic definition by Jack Snyder, “strategic culture” is “the sum total of ideals, conditional emotional responses and patterns of habitual behaviour that members of the national strategic community have acquired through instruction or imitation and share with each other in regards to strategy.”⁵ He refers to the strategic culture of a whole community, of which the decision-makers are just one part. In this sense, studying public opinion responses to concrete developments on the international political scene through the prism of shared “strategic culture” is justified. Public opinion on foreign and security policy is very much shaped by culture.⁶ Public opinion is also one of the main “keepers” of strategic culture, alongside with elites, political institutions and popular culture.⁷ Historical memory, pre-existing perceptions and attitudes, national symbols and values shape public understandings of current affairs, their interpretations by the media and representations in political debates.

Contemporary scholars of strategic culture have been keen on avoiding the determinism of the first generation of their earlier peers, presenting more loose definitions, e.g.: “culture either presents decision-makers with a limited range of options or it acts as a lens that alters the appearance and efficacy of different choices.”⁸ In other words, “strategic culture” does not fully determine a single response to a security challenge, but rather sets the context for the strategic choices and limits their range. This take on the roots of foreign policy choices leaves room for complementary explanatory factors. The interplay of history, geography and culture shapes “cultural narratives of national situation, rank and security”, including such elements as “internal cultural cohesion; interaction with neighbours; defeat and occupation; threat perceptions, past material and imperial ambitions and traditions.”⁹ Thus in our discussion, the historically shaped perceptions of Russia are significant.

The lack of internal cohesion of national cultures should also be emphasised. Thus, national strategic culture is bound to encompass sometimes competing national narratives, and thus conflicting values, perceptions and attitudes. As Christoph O. Meyer puts it: “governments are often motivated by more than one reason, and norms can clash on different levels.”¹⁰ As we will see below, not only there are considerable dif-

4 Bastian GIEGERICH, *European Security and Strategic Culture: National Responses to the EU's Security and Defense Policy*, Baden-Baden 2006; Christoph MEYER, *The Quest of a European Strategic Culture*, New York 2006; Kerry LONGHURST — Marcin ZABOROWSKI, *The New Atlanticist: Poland's Foreign and Security Priorities*, London 2007.

5 Jack SNYDER, *The Soviet Strategic Culture: Implications for Limited Nuclear Operations*, Santa Monica 1977, p. 8.

6 Bastien IRONDELLE — Frédéric MÉRAND — Martial FOUCAULT, *Public Support for European Defence: Does Strategic Culture Matter?* *European Journal of Political Research* 54, 2015, pp. 363–383.

7 Isabelle DUYVESTEYN, *Intelligence and Strategic Culture*, London 2013, p. 2.

8 Alastair Iain JOHNSTON, *Thinking about Strategic Culture*, *International Security*, Volume 19, Number 4, Spring 1995, pp. 32–64, p. 42.

9 Jolyon HOWORTH, *Security and Defence Policy in the European Union*, Basingstoke 2007, p. 178.

10 C. MEYER, *The Quest*, p. 19.

ferences in the strategic cultures of Poland and Germany, but also there are internal differences within each country, which will be discussed presently.



SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE STRATEGIC CULTURES OF POLAND AND GERMANY

A single historical experience of that has shaped the strategic cultures of contemporary European states most profoundly is World War II: “Different European attitudes towards the use of force are rooted in twentieth century history, particularly the experience of World War II and the Cold War. Each European country experienced the war differently, and thus drew different conclusions from it”.¹¹

Important differences, are historically and culturally formed perceptions of war in both countries as well as perceptions of the neighbouring countries. Already, in the context of the war in Iraq, different responses of Germany and Poland were explained by differences in the strategic cultures of the two countries. Germany, being significantly more powerful than Poland, opposed the Iraq war, continuing to see itself as a “civilian power”.¹² Indeed, the traumatic experiences of WWII made pacifism an important trait of German national identity, and the war guilt has made any military confrontation with Russia highly unlikely. As Jochen Bittner, a political commentator on *Die Zeit*, put it succinctly: “Would the Germany of today help liberate the Germany of 1944? You don’t need to tap Angela Merkel’s phone to find the answer: It’s no.”¹³

In contrast, Poland has not been an aggressor in the immediate past, while its heroic engagement in WWII, including the Warsaw uprising, has been overly romanticised. Thus war, a just military intervention in defence of freedom and democracy, has much more positive connotations here. One example here could be Poland’s position on the intervention in Iraq, and another Poland’s enthusiastic support for Georgia’s military resistance to Russia’s annexation attempts in 2007. Poland has also been keen on having NATO bases established on its territory. Yet, the geographical immediacy of Russia as well as the relatively weaker position of Poland make retaliation on the side of Russia in case of military support for Ukraine in the Russo-Ukrainian conflict more likely, and thus its support for military intervention is less enthusiastic. When the Law and Justice party’s presidential candidate Andrzej Duda suggested that sending Polish troops to Ukraine was worth considering, Prime Minister Ewa Kopacz strongly criticised this notion, referring to the government’s primary responsibility to ensure the security of Poland.¹⁴

11 Adrian HYDE-PRICE, *European Security, Strategic Culture, and the Use of Force*, European Security 13, 2004, No. 4, pp. 323–343, here p. 325.

12 *Ibid.*, p. 325.

13 Jochen BITTNER, *Rethinking German Pacifism*, The New York Times, 4 November 2013, at: <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/11/05/opinion/bittner-rethinking-german-pacifism.html?adxnml=1&adxnmlx=1383588292-sg0o871fq3CvTE4YxoDCng> [retrieved 28.8.2016].

14 Joerg FORBRIG (ed.), *A Region Disunited? Central European Responses to the Russia-Ukraine Crisis*, Washington 2015.



Moreover, although Poland and Germany, along with Sweden, have played the most prominent role in promoting the Eastern Partnership (EaP), there are important differences in the perceptions of and policies on Russia and Ukraine in the two countries. In simple terms, while Poland has been more focused on cooperating with Ukraine and ensuring that it becomes a stable and predictable neighbour, Germany has been more focused in developing relations with Russia, for a number of reasons, including economic and historical ones. Moreover, although proximity may also impact perceptions of countries, it is not only a matter of geographical distance. While for Poland Ukraine has served a real and imagined cordon sanitaire ensuring security against Russia, Germany, without sharing a border with Russia still refers to it as its “Eastern neighbour”, as if putting in brackets the countries in between, namely Poland and Ukraine.¹⁵

Poland’s geographical location and the history of its relations with the two powerful neighbours has strongly defined Poland’s strategic culture. Indeed, as Michta noted: “Poland’s basic security dilemma has been the country’s place on the map between two powerful states: Germany and Russia.”¹⁶ The Polish-Russian historical legacy goes certainly deeper than the immediate experience of the Soviet Union’s aggression against Poland in WWII, and the memories of bloodily suppressed independence uprisings of the 19th century and the forced russification, as well as the Polish-Soviet war in the 1920s are still alive. Indeed, the association between “Russophobia” and “the Polish question” was made as early as the 19th century.¹⁷ The two contrasting visions of Poland’s international relations, articulated by the two founding fathers of modern Poland — Roman Dmowski, the founder of the National-Democratic movement, and Józef Piłsudski, leader of the Polish Socialist Party and Prime Minister — have been the basis for the advent of contemporary political cleavages. Piłsudski opted for a multi-national and multi-ethnic state, recognized the national aspirations of the East European nations between Poland and Russia, and militarily supported the Ukrainian pro-independence anti-Russian uprising. He also opted for an interventionist and proactive foreign policy. Finally, as Piłsudski believed that Russia posed the greatest threat to Polish national aspirations, he ultimately chose Germany as the ally. Dmowski’s vision of the state was exclusively ethnic. He was not interested in national aspirations of other nations. Neither did he support an active foreign policy since the primary responsibility of the state was ensuring security for the Polish nation. He saw Germany as the biggest threat to Poland’s territorial integrity, and consequently opted for closer ties with Russia. This dichotomy helps us understand the dynamics of Polish foreign policy as well as public perceptions and preferences for Poland’s performance on the international scene.¹⁸

15 Jacek KUCHARCZYK — Agnieszka ŁADA — Gabriele SCHÖLER — Łukasz WENERSKI, *Close Together or Far Apart? Poles, Germans and Russians on the Russia-Ukraine Crisis*, Warszawa 2015.

16 Andrew MICHTA — Vojtech MASTNY, *East Central Europe after the Warsaw Pact: Security Dilemmas in the 1990s*, New York 1992, p. 75.

17 Jolanta DARCEWSKA — Piotr ŻOCHOWSKI, *Russophobia in the Kremlin’s Strategy. A Weapon of Mass Destruction*, Warszawa 2015.

18 Kerry LONGHURST — Marcin ZABOROWSKI, *The New Atlanticist: Poland’s Foreign and Security Priorities*, London 2007.



The main rationale behind Poland's EU integration was to throw off the yoke of the Soviet Union's de facto post-war occupation.¹⁹ While fears of Germany may still linger, and translate into Poles' Euroscepticism, the perception of the threat coming from Russia, especially after the recent events in Ukraine and earlier in Georgia, is more widely held. What is more, just as Germany was viewed as an advocate of Poland in the EU during the pre-accession period, Poland today is often seen as an "advocate of Ukraine in the EU",²⁰ with successive Polish governments supporting Ukraine's pro-European aspirations. Poland has been known to pursue a "two-pronged foreign policy traditions of rooting itself in the West and spreading Western influences farther in the East, arguing against the understanding of Europe as a 'lifeboat in which one tries to prevent others from getting on board', and constructing the identity of Poland as a bridge to the East."²¹ This insistence on bridging the EU with post-Soviet Eastern European countries, and especially with Ukraine, may have historical and symbolic as well as purely pragmatic reasons. On the one hand, democracy and freedom ideals resonate with the Poles strongly, while centuries of shared statehood, geographical and cultural proximity, common historical legacy, all this certainly contributes to the special status of the relations with Ukraine. On the other hand, a stable and independent Ukraine is also as a buffer zone protecting Poland against more volatile Russia. Thus, the motto attributed to Józef Piłsudski "there is no free Poland without free Ukraine, there is no free Ukraine without free Poland"²² has more than one meaning here.

Pro-Russian sentiment is also present in Poland, largely shared by the radical right (fascination with the alleged Russian might, the imperial legacy) and the radical left (anti-fascism, alter-globalism and the Soviet legacy).²³ Anti-Ukrainian sentiment is also common in certain political circles and is rooted in the memory of the mass slaughter of ethnic Poles by ethnic Ukrainians (and vice versa) in Volhynia,²⁴ making parts of Polish society particularly susceptible to anti-Ukrainian propaganda referring to "Fascist Banderovets".²⁵

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- 19 Józef NIŻNIK, *Are There Positive Effects of Euroscepticism?* in: Alina Bârgăoanu — Loredana Radu — Diego Varela (edd.), *United by or against Euroscepticism? An Assessment of Public Attitudes towards Europe in the Context of the Crisis*, Newcastle upon Tyne 2015, pp. 208–222.
- 20 Interview with Cornelius Ochmann, director of Polish-German Cooperation Foundation, Polish Radio Programme I, <http://www.polskieradio.pl/7/129/Artykul/1400526,Dyrektor-Fundacji-Wspolpracy-PolskoNiemieckiej-Polska-adwokatem-Ukrainy-na-arenie-miedzynarodowej-> [retrieved 28.8.2016].
- 21 Maria MALKSOO, *The Politics of Becoming European: A Study of Polish and Baltic Post-Cold War Security Imaginaries*, London 2010, p. 79.
- 22 *Lecture by Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Poland Bronisław Geremek*, *Recueil de documents*, 1998, Vol. 54, Polish Institute of International Affairs, p. 79.
- 23 J. FOMINA, *Narrowing the Gap*, pp. 11–12.
- 24 Joanna FOMINA — Joanna KONIECZNA-SAŁAMATIN — Jacek KUCHARCZYK — Łukasz WENERSKI, *Polska — Ukraina, Polacy — Ukraińcy. Spojrzenie przez Granicę*, Warszawa 2013, pp. 49–52.
- 25 J. FOMINA, *Narrowing the Gap*, p. 12. "Banderovets" is a term used by the Russian propaganda to denounce Ukrainians by accusing them of being radical nationalists. A "Bandoro-



Yet, the level of pro-Russian sentiment in Poland certainly could not surpass the German Russophilia, which in the words of Karl Schlögel is “a mixture of sentimentality, nostalgia, cowardice and kitsch”²⁶ — in other words, a fascination with the Russian “enigmatic soul”, high culture and assumed moral superiority, mainly due to Soviet Union’s victory in WWII.²⁷ Unlike the Poles, the fact that the Soviet Union was also an aggressor in WWII is not preserved in the collective memory of Germans. Germany’s war guilt is enhanced by Russia’s skilful monopolisation of the war suffering,²⁸ and what Snyder calls “martyrdom imperialism” or “implicitly claiming territory by explicitly claiming victims”.²⁹ In other words, Russia, as the Soviet Union’s successor, manages not only to claim victory over Nazi Germany, but also the whole toll of the war suffered by the population of the Soviet Union as Russian, ignoring the fact that it was the territories of Ukraine and Belarus that were entirely occupied by Nazi Germany, and thus the civil populations of these countries suffered the most, while Ukrainians served in the Soviet Army alongside Russians and other nationalities. The acceptance of these claims, on the one hand, leads to supporting Russia’s claims to the territories of the Eastern European countries, and on the other, it generally acknowledges its moral superiority and increases Germany’s war guilt.

Germany’s Russophilia is closely associated with the term *Russlandversteher*. A *Russlandversteher* claims to *understand* and thus justify Russia’s actions, in particular the policies towards the US, EU and most of all, the Eastern Partnership countries. Significantly, representatives of this “understanding” crowd can be found even in the highest echelons of power, including former German Chancellor Helmut Schmidt, who referred to Russia’s annexation of the Crimea as *understandable*, or Gerhard Schroeder, who in turn, celebrated his 70th birthday literally in Putin’s arms in St. Petersburg.³⁰

Germany’s conflicted identity dates back much earlier than the period of the Cold War. A major historiographic debate concerns Germany’s *Sonderweg* (special path), a concept usually employed to explain Germany’s departure from the normal course of western democracies to Nazism. But, a variation of this concept also reflects the ambivalence of Germany vis-à-vis the West embodied by the USA and the East

vets” is a follower of Stepan Bandera, a controversial Ukrainian political activist and leader of the independence movement in Ukraine, imprisoned during the Nazi occupation and later killed by the KGB in 1959.

26 Interview with Karl Schlögel and Sonia Margolina, *Putin ist Dschinghis Khan mit Internet*, Die Welt, 2 May 2014, <http://www.welt.de/kultur/literarischewelt/article127510809/Putin-ist-Dschinghis-Khan-mit-Internet.html> [retrieved 28.8.2016].

27 J. FOMINA, *Narrowing the Gap*, pp. 10–11.

28 Timothy SNYDER, *Holocaust: The Ignored Reality*, The New York Review of Books, 16 July 2009, <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/2009/jul/16/holocaust-the-ignored-reality/> [retrieved 28.8.2016].

29 Ibid.

30 Yale H. FERGUSON, *Rising Powers, Global Governance: Theoretical Perspectives*, in: Jamie Gasparth (ed.), *Rising Powers, Global Governance and Global Ethics*, Abingdon 2015, pp. 21–40.



embodied by Russia. Although Germany is very much a Western country, a liberal democracy upholding the rule of law and a member of the Atlantic Alliance, it has a sentimental attitude towards Russia. Indeed, only 45 percent of Germans, according to an ARD-Deutschlandtrend poll taken in April 2014, believe that Germany's rightful place is "in the Western Alliance", while 49 percent say that Germany should hold a "place in the middle" between the West and Russia.³¹

Moreover, some scholars differentiate between two sometimes clashing and sometimes complementary traditions within the German strategic culture: "the never again" narrative and the "never alone" narrative. The first one emphasises the German pacifism, while the second espouses the belief that only by being fully integrated into international structures (EU, NATO) can Germany preserve its democratic nature, hence the emphasis on cooperation with others.³² Finally, several empirical studies have demonstrated differences between East and West German residents in the social, cultural and political sphere.³³ We can also expect differences in the attitudes towards Russia and Ukraine and different preferences in policy responses to the conflict.

Bearing these differences in mind, we can expect very different positions of the German and Polish publics on the Russo-Ukrainian conflict, the role of Russia and Ukraine in it, as well as preferred policy options. In what follows we will look at similarities and differences in the public perceptions of Russia as a threat and sole aggressor, as well as favoured policy responses to the Russo-Ukrainian conflict by the societies in the two countries.

POLISH AND GERMAN RESPONSES TO THE RUSSO-UKRAINIAN CONFLICT

Differences in strategic cultures, as the term is broadly understood, appear to have shaped the different perceptions of Russia with regard to the threat in Germany and Poland. While three quarters of the Poles believe that Russia poses a military threat to Poland, the Germans are more divided in their opinions with only 41% of them believing this. Military aggression of Russia appears more conceivable to Poles due to their historical experiences as well as geographical proximity. Interestingly enough, a similar level of fears about Russia as a military threat was evoked by the Russia-Georgia war (77%), so this is not only a matter of geographical proximity, whereas in 2005 this share was only somewhat lower at 67%.

Only a small number of people in the two countries is ready to lay the blame for the conflict solely on Ukraine. However, the Germans are more inclined to pin the blame on both parties (43% compared to 20% among the Poles), while the Poles are

31 Markus WEHNER, *How Should Europe Respond to Russia? German View*, European Council on Foreign Relations, 2014, http://www.ecfr.eu/article/commentary_how_should_europe_respond_to_russia_the_german_view356 [retrieved 28.8.2016].

32 Anja DALGAARD-NIELSEN, *The Test of Strategic Culture: Germany, Pacifism and Pre-emptive Strikes*, Security Dialogue 36, 2005, No. 3, pp. 339–359.

33 Jonathan GRIX — Paul COOKE (edd.), *East German Distinctiveness in a Unified Germany. New Germany in Context*, London 2003.



more likely to point to the sole responsibility of Russia (61% to 39% among the Germans). In other words, while there are differences in opinions on whether Ukraine is to blame at all, the Poles and the Germans emphasise unequivocally Russia's responsibility — 81% and 82%, respectively.

The Russian-Ukrainian war and the attempts to formulate common European responses have heightened the feeling that Poland and Germany have divergent interests in their policies on Russia. However, in Poland, this change is more perceptible: the number of people believing in common interests has dropped by 11 percentage points on 2013, while in Germany the number of optimists has not changed significantly. What is more, the differences in the policies on Russia are perceived as an important problem in the two countries' mutual relations (Poles — 65%; Germans — 62%).³⁴ These results reflect the Polish uneasiness about both of its neighbours, as discussed above. Moreover, the years of close cooperation and the membership in the EU have not fully dispelled the Poles' suspicions against Germany, especially in the context of their relations with Russia. The Russo-Ukrainian conflict has fanned the previously somewhat subsided negative sentiments and fears in some strata of society.

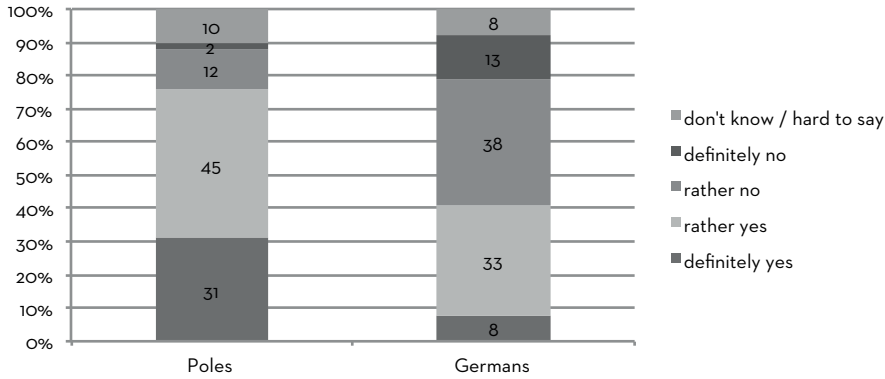
Bearing these differences in mind, the stances on policy responses to Russia's behaviour vis-à-vis Ukraine appear to be surprisingly similar. The majority of Germans and Poles support sanctions against Russia (76% Poles and 66% Germans), but the Poles more often support tightening of the existent sanctions (41% and 23%). It is worth noting that a more Germans support continuation of sanctions and attach the main responsibility for the conflict to Russia. In other words, even if the Germans appear to be more "understanding" of Russia, and more often believe that Ukraine is equally responsible for the conflict, the majority not only recognise Russia's responsibility, but also believe that Russia has to bear consequences for its actions.

Slightly over half of the population in the two countries believe that their country should provide economic assistance to Ukraine. It is notable that there is a difference in the number of "don't know/hard to say answers". One likely explanation is that the Poles are more often ambivalent about economic aid and they may feel Poland has a moral obligation to support Ukraine, yet also believe that Poland is too poor to engage in economic support of other countries.

While the majority of the Poles and the Germans are in favour of economic aid, they strongly oppose support of a military character — with only 25% of the Poles and 10% of the Germans favour this form of aid. Significantly enough, the question covered not only (more controversial) direct military intervention, but also supplies of military equipment or training for Ukrainian soldiers. These results are particularly interesting for our discussion of the role of strategic culture. Despite the expectations of greater support for military engagement on the part of the Poles, the level of public support for this is in fact rather low, even though it is higher than in Germany. Differences within societies are notable here.

While German pacifism is understandable in the light of the foregoing discussion, in the case of Poland, the fear of retaliation on the side of Russia has presumably

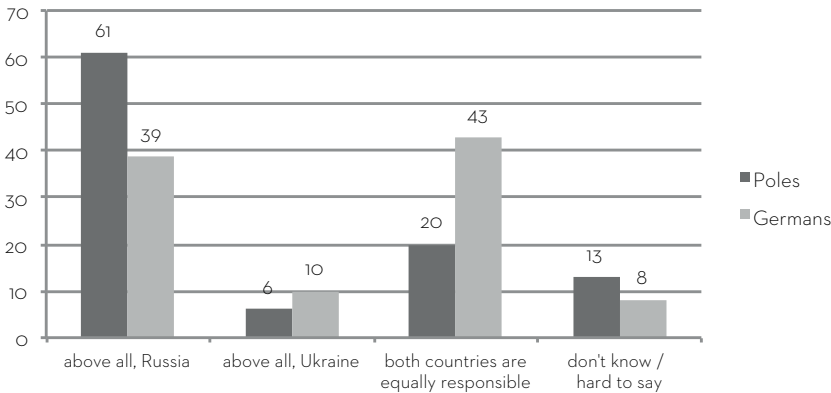
34 Agnieszka ŁADA, *German-Polish Barometer 2015*, Warszawa 2015, p. 8.



GRAPH 1: Perceptions of Russia as a military threat. Opinions of Poles and Germans.

Q: Does Russia pose a military threat to your country?

Source: Bertelsmann Foundation and Institute of Public Affairs, 2015.



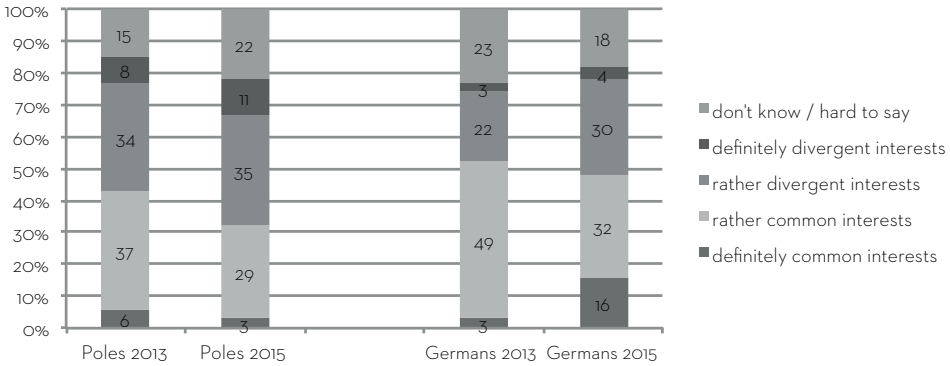
GRAPH 2: Main responsibility for the conflict. Opinions of Poles and Germans.

Q: Who is responsible for the Russo-Ukrainian conflict?

Source: Bertelsmann Foundation and Institute of Public Affairs, 2015.

been an effective deterrent to engaging in any form of military support for the Poles. Otherwise, Russia’s aggression against Ukraine is still seen as a local conflict and not an imminent threat to Poland or other EU States, while the sense of solidarity with Ukraine is not strong enough to put at risk the national community.

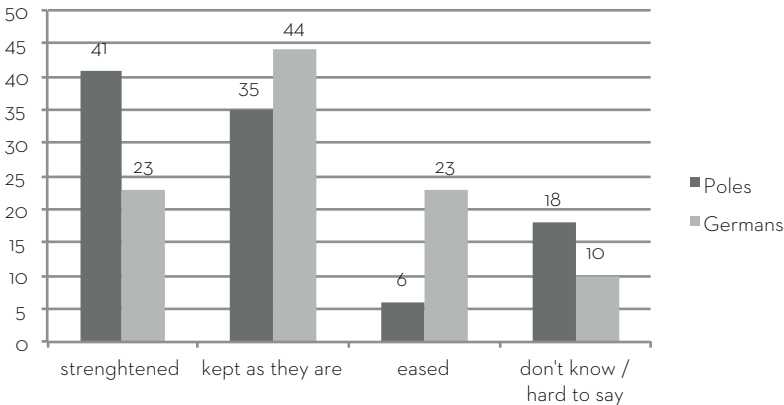
When asked about their readiness to support Ukraine irrespective of possible negative consequences, similar segments of society in the two countries are prepared to put their national interests at risk in the name of solidarity with Ukraine. This may be interpreted as a sign that opposition to military support is not merely fuelled by fears of retaliation, but by a general sense of unease about any military engagement. A similar number of Poles and Germans (37% and 35%) believe that their countries should support Ukraine, even if it means deterioration of the relations with Russia, yet large segments of societies in both countries (larger in Germany) put self-interest first.



GRAPH 3: Perception of commonality and divergence of interests of Poland and Germany vis-à-vis Russia. Opinions of Poles and Germans.

Q: Do Poland and Germany have common or divergent interests in their policy towards Russia?

Source: Bertelsmann Foundation and Institute of Public Affairs, 2015.



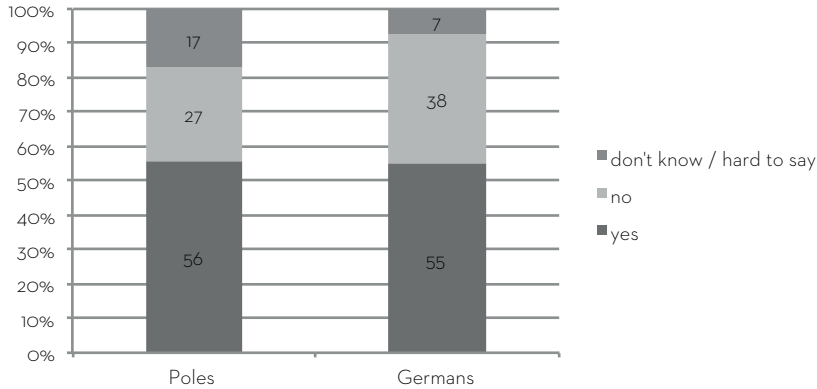
GRAPH 4: Continuation of sanctions. Opinions of Poles and Germans.

Q: Should the current sanctions against Russia, imposed by the European Union, be tightened, continued as they are or eased?

Source: Bertelsmann Foundation and Institute of Public Affairs, 2015.

The assumed combative mood of the Poles is not reflected in the opinion poll results. Although the Poles are more eager to help Ukraine, they are also more afraid of Russia — hence the high number of people who had difficulty answering this question.

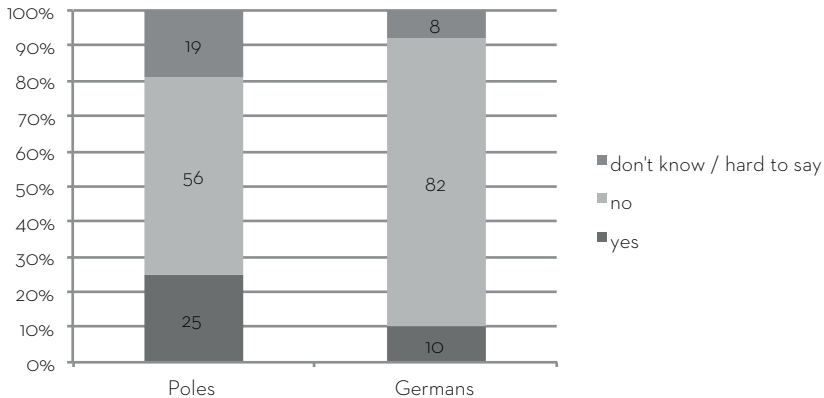
Finally, one of the flagship initiatives within the Eastern Partnership programme has been a visa waiver programme, i.e. waiving of visa requirements for short-term stays in the EU for the EaP countries' citizens. Facilitating travelling to the EU for Ukrainian citizens could also be seen as a form of assistance and of bringing Ukraine closer to Europe. However, in both countries, those in support of visa requirements



GRAPH 5: Support for economic assistance. Opinions of Poles and Germans, 2015.

Q: Should your country provide assistance to the Ukrainian Army, for instance, through the supply of equipment, weapons, or military training?

Source: Bertelsmann Foundation and Institute of Public Affairs, 2015.



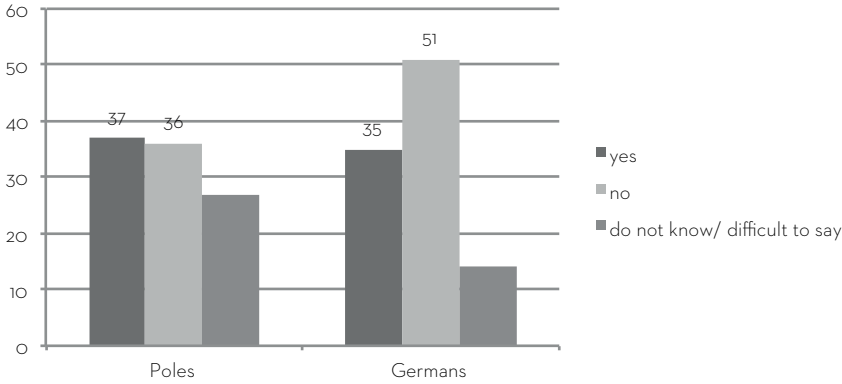
GRAPH 6: Support for military assistance. Opinions of Poles and Germans, 2015.

Q: Should your country provide assistance to the Ukrainian Army, for instance, through the supply of equipment, weapons, or military training?

Source: Bertelsmann Foundation and Institute of Public Affairs, 2015.

for Ukrainians are in the minority (30% of the Poles and 17% of the Germans). While the Germans are unequivocally against (70%), the Poles more often find it hard to make up their minds on the issue.

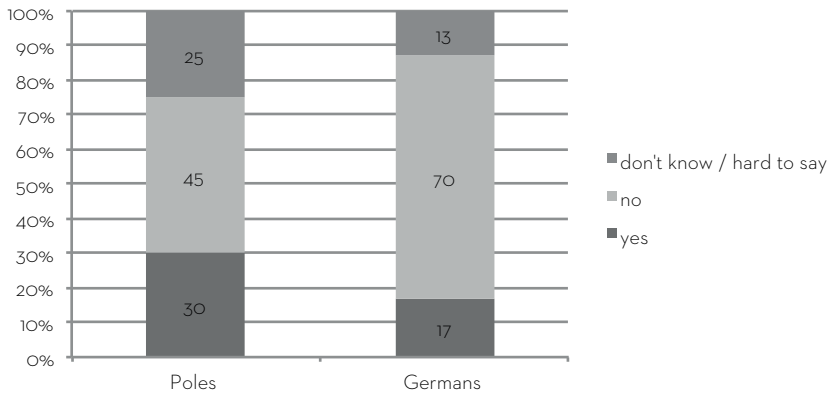
The Poles have already forgotten that during the first decade after the dissolution of the Soviet Union the citizens of the newly independent states, including Ukraine, could travel to Poland without visas. Visa waiver is often mistakenly associated with an inflow of economic migrants. The fact that the no-visa regime only applies to short trips and does not give one a right to work is not widely known. The current wave of panic about migration issues only exacerbates the situation.



GRAPH 7: Support for Ukraine, irrespective of possible negative consequences. Opinions of Poles and Germans, 2015.

Q: Should your country support Ukraine during the Russo-Ukrainian conflict, even if it results in the deterioration of the relations of your country with Russia?

Source: Bertelsmann Foundation and Institute of Public Affairs, 2015.



GRAPH 8: Support for visa waiver programme for Ukraine. Opinions of Poles and Germans in 2015.

Q: Should the European Union waive visa requirements for Ukrainians?

Source: Bertelsmann Foundation and Institute of Public Affairs, 2015.

In order to better analyse the similarities and differences in the two countries in support of Ukraine during the current conflict we have created an index of support for Ukraine.³⁵

35 The Index was created on the basis of responses to five questions regarding policy responses. In case of the question about sanctions the value of 2 was ascribed to the answer “sanctions should be tightened”, 1 — to “continued as they are” and -1 to “eased”. As for the rest of the questions, each positive response was given the value of 1 and a negative response the value of -1. ‘Don’t know’ answers were given the value of 0. As a result, a scale from 6 to -5 was created. A person who expressed their support for all forms of

TABLE 1: Support for Ukraine Index. Poles and Germans (%).

	Poland	Germany	West Germany	East Germany
UA opponents	11	30	27	43
Neutral	60	57	59	48
UA supporters	29	13	14	10
Total	100	100	100	100

Source: Own calculations on the basis of IPA and Bertelsmann Foundation data (2015).

The Index demonstrates that the number of Poles eager to support Ukraine on the majority of issues is almost three times bigger than that in Germany, and the number of persons not willing to aid Ukraine is significantly larger in Germany. Also, regional differences between East and West Germany are substantial; it is significant that more than 40% of residents of East Germany are not enthusiastic about helping Ukraine in the context of this conflict. It is also significant that more than half of the two countries' populations are not clear in their minds whether their country should provide support to Ukraine or not. The differences between the numbers of vocal supporters and vocal opponents in the two countries are also considerable: while in Poland the percentage of those who scored 5 or 6 points on the Index is 12%, in Germany it is only 4%, and the percentage of those who expressly refused any form of support for Ukraine in Poland is 2% and in Germany 8%.

There are also considerable differences between perceptions of Russia among the residents of East and West Germany: In all, 44% West Germans consider Russia a military threat in comparison with 32% of their fellow citizens in East Germany.

TABLE 2: Perception of Russia as a military threat. Opinions of East and West Germans and Poles (%).

	Germany Total	West Germany	East Germany	Poland
YES	41	44	32	75
NO	51	48	61	14
DK	8	8	8	11
	100	100	100	100

Source: Own calculations on the basis of IPA and Bertelsmann Foundation data (2015).

The differences in the perceptions of Russia between Poland and East Germany demonstrate that seemingly similar historical experiences such as belonging to the same political bloc, having similar political regimes, being *de facto* occupied by a powerful neighbour, may create very different perceptions of this occupier, Russia. While Poles

aid provided to Ukraine, including tightening the sanctions against Russia, would receive 6 points, a person who rejected the idea of providing support in any form mentioned in the study would receive -5 points. Respondents who scored at least 3 points, that is answered at least 3 questions out of 5 positively, were termed "supporters of Ukraine" and persons who scored between -3 and -5 points were termed "opponents of Ukraine".



have become much more suspicious towards Russia, East Germans, on the contrary, are considerably more supportive of it: they see Russia less frequently as a threat or blame it for the Russo-Ukrainian conflict.

Moreover, while there are differences between the two societies in terms of the percentage of people eager to support Ukraine, in both countries the support for Ukraine is related to the perception of Russia. Those who perceive Russia as a military threat and those who attribute responsibility for the conflict mainly to Russia are more often willing to provide Ukraine with different forms of aid as well as punishing Russia by means of sanctions. While 30% of German society refused most forms of support to Ukraine, it was 63% among those who believed that Ukraine bears main responsibility for the conflict. Similarly, while 13% expressed support for aiding Ukraine at least in three out of five cases, it was 22% among those who see Russia as the main culprit in the conflict. Similar tendencies apply in the case of Poland (see Table 3; these differences are statistically significant).

TABLE 3: Cross-tabulation: Responsibility for the conflict and support for Ukraine Index. Opinions of Poles and Germans (%).

	Who is responsible for the Russo-Ukrainian conflict?									
	Responses of Germans					Responses of Poles				
	RU	UA	RU and UA equally	DK	Total	RU	UA	RU and UA equally	DK	Total
UA opponents	16	63	3	28	30	6	22	23	8	11
neutral	62	34	55	71	57	56	47	63	85	60
UA supporters	22	3	8	1	13	38	31	15	8	29
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Source: Own calculations on the basis of IPA and Bertelsmann Foundation data (2015).

TABLE 4: Cross-tabulation: Russia is a threat and support for Ukraine Index. Opinions of Poles (%).

	Is Russia a military threat?							
	Germans				Poles			
	YES	NO	DK	Total	YES	NO	DK	Total
UA opponents	28	34	23	30	9	25	5	11
Neutral	55	56	74	57	59	52	84	60
UA supporters	17	11	3	13	33	23	12	29
	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Source: Own calculations on the basis of IPA and Bertelsmann Foundation data (2015).

In other words, those Germans and Poles who have clear opinions on the desirability of providing any forms of aid to Ukraine do not see the countries to the east of their border as a single entity. Interestingly enough, further analysis did not show statistically significant differences in terms of age, education, gender or political allegiance.



Polish and German societies perceive Russia and its responsibility for the ongoing Russo-Ukrainian conflict differently, as one might expect in the context of the diverging strategic cultures and the role of Russia in shaping them. With regard to how their countries should react to the Russo-Ukrainian war, the opinions of Polish and German societies are not so divided. The majority of the Poles and Germans are prepared to provide economic support to Ukraine and support continuation of the sanctions against Russia, yet shrink from any military intervention, visa waiving or providing support to Ukraine if that means worsening of relations with Russia.

The Index of Support for Ukraine created for the purpose of this study demonstrates that at least half of the population in the two countries are not clear in their minds about whether their country should support Ukraine. However, the number of strong supporters of Ukraine is significantly higher in Poland than in Germany. Seeing Russia as a military threat and attributing the main blame for the conflict to it makes people more likely to support Ukraine in both countries. Nonetheless, it does not explain all the differences between the supporters and opponents of aiding Ukraine. More factors than the historically shaped attitudes towards Russia need to be taken into account, which goes beyond the scope of this analysis. The concept of strategic culture cannot be treated in a deterministic way though it does facilitate contextualising the analysis of not only national policy on defence and security matters, but also of public opinion on foreign affairs.

RÉSUMÉ:

The role of culture and national identity as factors contributing to uniting or disuniting of the EU has been receiving particular attention. Differences in strategic cultures of the Member States have been proposed as the (main) reason for the lack of a robust and coherent EU foreign policy. Polish and German societies perceive Russia and its responsibility for the ongoing Russo-Ukrainian conflict differently, as one might expect in the context of diverging strategic cultures and the role of Russia in shaping them. The Index of Support for Ukraine created for the purpose of this study demonstrates that at least half of the population in the two countries are not clear in their minds whether their country should support Ukraine. However, the percentage of strong supporters of Ukraine is significantly higher than in Germany. Seeing Russia as a military threat and attributing the main blame for the conflict to it makes people more likely to support Ukraine in both countries. However, this does not explain all the differences between the supporters and opponents of aiding Ukraine. The concept of strategic culture cannot be treated in a deterministic way, though it does facilitate contextualising the analysis of public opinion on foreign affairs.

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