

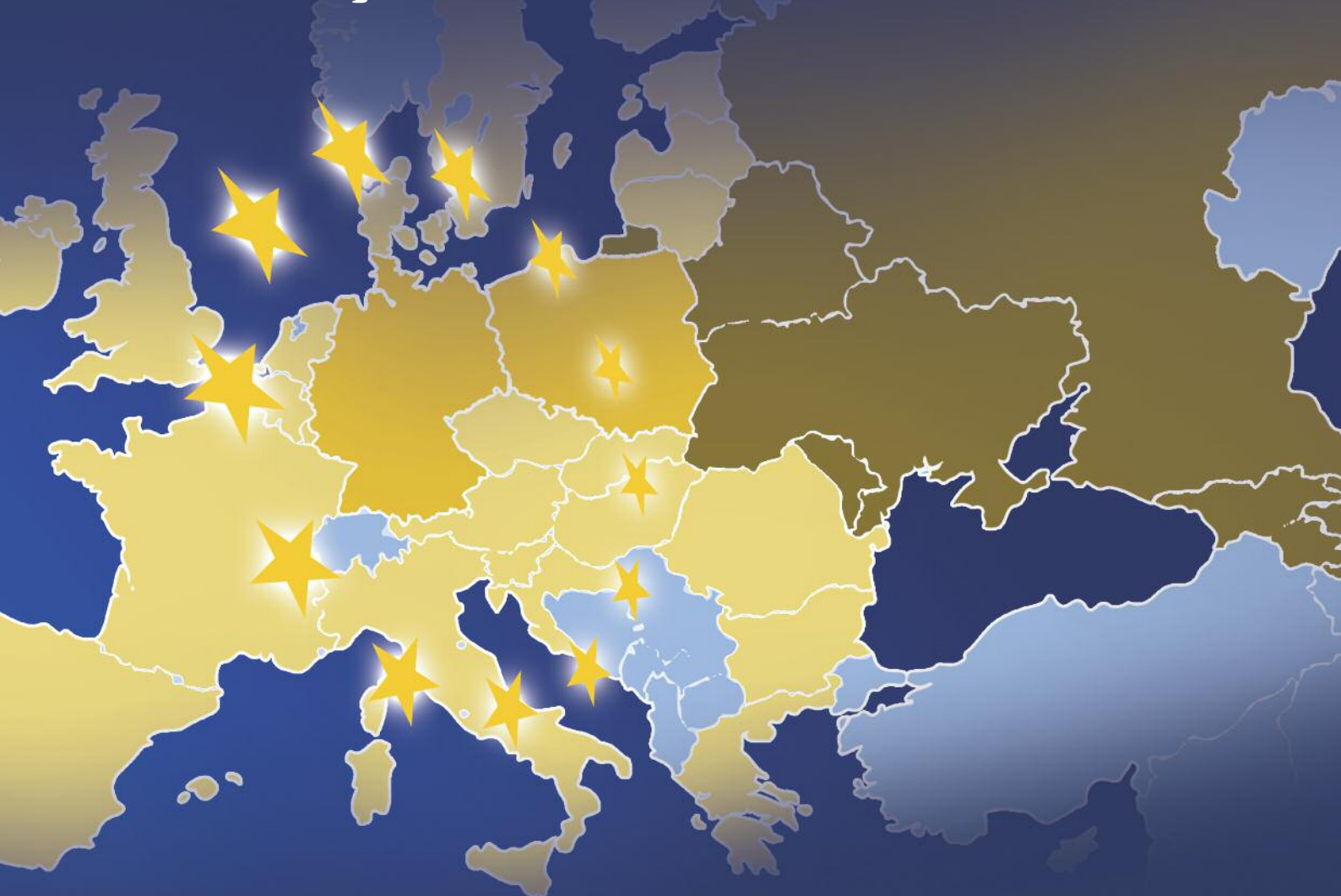


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# Polish–German cooperation in strengthening European Policy towards the East



Weronika Priesmeyer-Tkocz  
Bartosz Rydliński

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The individuals listed below had participated in the discussions. They are not responsible for the content of this paper. The recommendations reflect the views of the authors. The affiliations are provided for identification purposes only.

- Constanze Aka, Institute for European Politics
- Ireneusz Bil, Ph.D., "Amicus Europae" Foundation of Aleksander Kwaśniewski
- Łukasz Grajewski, Eastbook.eu
- Ireneusz Paweł Karolewski, Prof. Ph.D., University of Wrocław
- Emilie Mansfeld, German Council on Foreign Relations
- Thomas Mehlhausen, Ph.D., University of Potsdam
- Cornelius Ochmann, Foundation for Polish-German Cooperation
- Weronika Priesmeyer-Tkocz, Ph.D., European Academy Berlin
- Iwona Reichardt, Ph.D., New Eastern Europe
- Bartosz Rydliński, Ph.D., "Amicus Europae" Foundation of Aleksander Kwaśniewski
- Bastian Sendhardt, Friedrich Ebert Foundation
- Susanne Zels, POLIS180



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# Polish–German cooperation in strengthening European Policy towards the East

While discussing the possibilities of strengthening Europe's Eastern policy in the context of Polish-German relations, it should be noted that for the past several years this task has been extremely challenging. On the one hand the creation of the Eastern Partnership of the European Union in 2008 seemed to be a success of Poland and Sweden, with strong support from Germany. On the other hand, the Kremlin's policy to increase Vladimir Putin's influence in Russia and the former Soviet republics, together with multiple challenges in the European Union, have made the process extremely difficult. This paper aims to draw

attention to the possible grounds for Polish-German cooperation towards Ukraine and other countries within the Eastern Partnership (EaP). While celebrating 25 years of Polish-German partnership, it is worth considering what these countries have in common and what they can possibly do together for the democratic and stable development in the post-Soviet area.

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## On the Polish and German concepts of foreign policy

At the onset of our analysis, it is important to note that both Polish and German Eastern Policy is based on two strategically-intellectual concepts about the East. On the one hand, there is the post-war idea of Jerzy Giedroyc and Konrad Mieroszewski from the Parisian “Kultura”, and on the other hand is Egon Bahr’s “Ostpolitik”.

The intellectual concept of Giedroyc is based on the conviction that strong and independent neighboring countries are in the interests of a fully sovereign Poland. This idea became the basis for Polish foreign policy after 1989. Independent Lithuania, Belarus and Ukraine provide a guarantee of success of Polish Eastern Policy and a sustainable independence of the Republic. However, other pillars of Giedroyc’s vision are often forgotten, without which stabilization is impossible.

The concept of “Ostpolitik” which originates in the period of Willy Brandt’s government, is still used today and believed to determine Germany’s approach to the post-Soviet space, regardless of the declarations of various governing coalitions. In its original form, Egon Bahr’s concept was determined through the idea of “change through rapprochement” (Wandel durch Annäherung) to regulate the relations between the Federal Republic of Germany and the German Democratic Republic. The approach aimed to es-

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establish and strengthen the political and economic relations with other countries in the Eastern Bloc with a strong position for Poland and the Soviet Union. Even today, for conservative circles of the German social democracy, as well as in the radical interpretation of the post-communist left, it represents a well-sounding concept which determines Germany’s approach to the East. The policy can be seen as manifesting itself in such ways as the search for an understanding of the

Kremlin elite's actions or the perception of Russia as the main partner for Germany in Eastern Europe. However, it would be a mistake to generalize that the idea of “Russia First” is the main determinant in German foreign policy towards the post-Soviet space. The policy of Chancellor Angela Merkel and the ideas represented by the Green Party, emphasizing German support for Ukraine's reforms and openly criticizing the illegal annexation of Crimea by the Russian Federation. The general consensus to maintain sanctions against the Kremlin's violation of international law and territorial integrity clearly indicates that Berlin's policy is closer to Giedroyc's view than to Bahr's. If the approach to the East doesn't divide but rather connect Warsaw and Berlin, then it is important to consider in what ways both countries can work together in order to improve the common neighborhood.

## What's next for the Eastern Partnership?

The years 2013 and 2014 had been very difficult for Ukraine. The outbreak of the Revolution of Dignity (Euromaidan) was a result of the Association Agreement not being signed by President Viktor Yanukovich. This became a turning point for the European Neighborhood Policy and the Eastern Partnership in the EU. The project which had in its main aim a peaceful approach to the former Soviet countries as they adapt the Western European model of integration, ended in a bloody conflict and Russia's annexation of Crimea.

Additionally, the idea to increase the actions within the EU in the post-Soviet states, had been challenged when Belarus, as well as Armenia, declared its pro-Moscow orientation in foreign policy, economic and trade. Azerbaijan had already retreated to the position of a bridge between Europe and Asia and rejected the far-reaching proposals of the Western European system of democratic values and norms.

On the other hand, the balance on the systematic and economic transformations in the countries which signed the Association Agreement and the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement is far from enthusiastic. While Ukraine is fighting the war, laboriously struggling with widespread corruption and a massive reform package, the public,

despite cautious economic growth and limited inflation, remains mired in poverty. While Georgia slowly but firmly continues a pro-European course, the presidential election in Moldova resulted in the choosing of a pro-Russian president. This illustrates that the struggle for the sphere of influence and a model of integration continues.

Thus the aim for the European Neighborhood Policy and the Eastern Partnership – to create a ring of stable, democratic and economically strong partners in the East – remains out of reach. In fact, a step back has been made. Europe's Eastern Neighborhood is less stable and predictable now than it was five or ten years ago. Since 2009, Europe has had to deal with the geopolitical and economic collision with the Russian Federation and its aggressive military commitments. Even though the EU and US responded to these actions in the form of economic and political sanctions, certain activities continue. However, the longer the confrontation lasts, the more voices there are calling for an abolishment, restriction or circumvention of the sanctions which affect economy and trade between EU countries and Russia. This gradual transition to "business as usual" with Russia would mean a de facto recognition of Russia's "natural" sphere of influence in the post-Soviet space. In other words, this would be the end of the Eastern Partnership and a disaster for EU as a credible international actor.

This situation represents both a challenge and an opportunity for joint Polish and German actions in the region. Firstly, to maintain the importance of the EaP and confirm the credibility of the EU, Warsaw and Berlin should unanimously and consistently act as lawyers for the eastern affairs. Undertaken actions should be concentrated on bilateral relations and on the European and international level. It is important to create a strong coalition among EU member states to support the development and intensification of EaP and coordinate actions for the post-Soviet states.

Secondly, In regards to association and free trade agreements, the EU should condition their economic support for Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova on the actual implementation of European solutions in its legislations. This refers also to the effective promotion for pro-woman movements, pro-ecological methods and pro-democratic solutions in these countries, which should not be only a matter of assurances from Kyiv, Tbilisi or Chisinau, but real activities. Poland and Germany here could play the role as mediator of European integration in the East.

Thirdly, Warsaw and Berlin should honestly and openly communicate that European policy in the East is not guided by the principle of a "one size fits all". For countries which, for various reasons cannot or do not want to opt for political and economic integration with the EU, a pragmatic strategy should be adopted. The European Union cannot afford to exclude Belarus, Armenia and Azerbaijan from the Eastern Partnership. At the same time the continuation of dialogue based on democratic values and a community within the EU is a farce. The solution could be the return to the idea of "change through rapprochement". With limited financial resources, focus should be placed on common economic interests, ecological challenges, and support for the mobility of young people. Supporting the non-governmental sector involved in culture, sports, science and building pro-civil attitudes should also be given.

Fourthly, the EU should continue the chosen path of strengthening civil society. Next to the already existing forum of non-governmental organizations (The Civil Society Forum) and the Fund (European Endowment for Democracy), a University of the Eastern Partnership should be created. The university ought to be for both EU citizens as well as students from the EaP countries. The University, with its headquarters in one of the countries located on the border of the Eastern Partnership, could send its students for two-year scholarships in Western, Northern, Southern and Central Europe (each semester in a different part of Europe) in order to provide a better understanding of the European Union, its diversities and regional specificities. The University would provide the opportunity to other Europeans to learn about the countries of the Eastern EU neighborhood. It is worth drawing attention to the experience of the Maria Curie-Skłodowska University (UMCS) in Lublin or the European University Viadrina in Frankfurt, which for many years has been addressing its program to the students from the East. The University, despite the didactic dimension, should be supported by a group of analysts to allow an in-depth study of the processes of political and economic integration in the post-Soviet space as well as its impact on European integration.

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The above-mentioned recommendations for Polish–German cooperation in strengthening the Eastern Partnership are medium- and long-term. To achieve these goals, both Polish and German governments can start the proposed activities with already existing frameworks, such as activities of local government cooperation. It is worth noting, for example, the cities of Wrocław and Gdansk, whose authorities are pursuing an active international policy especially with partners from the East. Such actions seem to have a particular importance in the times of political crisis that we are currently being faced (e.g. different visions of migration policy for EU countries). Hence, it seems reasonable that a good place to strengthen policy in the East would be with a focus on cooperation between institutions at the local levels from Poland, Germany and the countries of the EaP. Such operations may be significantly more favorable than highly formalized projects initiated by the political elites, which – as it is shown by the numerous empirical data – still lacks a certain level of trust in the societies of Eastern Europe. The reason for the low confidence in the public authorities in these countries is primarily due to a high level of corruption and limited governing effectiveness. In this situation, the more hope one can involve through cooperation at the local level, despite numerous disadvantages, seems to be much closer to the citizens, often encouraging further development of the democratization processes.

## Ukraine as *primus inter pares* of the Eastern Partnership?

A special role in the Eastern Partnership is played by Ukraine. The country that has become a symbol of European aspirations which, through its two revolutions (Orange in 2004/2005 and Dignity 2013/2014) led to a significant change in its military alliances, foreign and domestic policy. Supporting Kyiv's western path is the main point of tangential Polish and German policy. From the time of Viktor Yushchenko, politicians on both sides of the Oder and Neisse Rivers speak with one voice; saying that Poland, Germany and the European Union need a strong and independent Ukraine. This means a Ukraine with the right to its own decisions over its political economic and military allies. The presence of



Radosław Sikorski and Frank-Walter Steinmeier during the final talks between Viktor Yanukovich and representatives of the Maidan opposition was a symbol of Polish-German cooperation. It also became a symbol of its spectacular failure. No other words than failure, can describe the escape of Yanukovich from Kyiv just a few hours after the signing of the agreement, which included the heads of Polish and German diplomacy.

The subsequent events (i.e. Russia's annexation of Crimea and Russian-supported separatism in Donetsk and Luhansk separatist republics) which actually took Europe back from before the OSCE process, brought the challenges of security and territorial integrity of Ukraine to the forefront for the European Union. Thus the question arises as to what the future policy Warsaw and Berlin should apply in order to provide Ukraine as much support as possible in the fields of security. The exclusion of Poland and the EU from the Normandy format (France, Germany, Russia, and Ukraine) which seeks to regulate the status of Donbas, can be considered a very sensitive and controversial issue. Considering that a hybrid war is being waged within 1,000 km from the border on the Bug River, reflection on the optimal use of all possibilities to support Ukrainian sovereignty and independence is needed. At the absolute minimum this should mean joint Polish-German actions to concentrate on support for civilian crises-response capacities and strengthening of state institutions within the rule of law. In addition, supporting reforms in Ukraine on the local governmental level as well as business and economy would help in this regard. Poland and the former East Germany both have rich, yet sometimes painful experience, of a neoliberal transformation. Raising awareness within Ukraine on the dangers of uncontrolled deregulation, commercialization and privatization of public services, might be more beneficial than the enigmatic hints about profits from strict free-market solutions.

A common Polish-German-EU objective should be to a Ukraine that is free from right-wing extremism. The Right Sector and other nationalist groups are part of the anti-liberal and anti-European narration. Due to this, certain actions should be taken to assist Ukrainian authorities in combating such dangerous attitudes in society. Some of them have openly anti-Polish and anti-Semitic tones,

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especially caused by the lack of full reconciliation between Poland and Ukraine over the past. The example of the achievements of Polish-German reconciliation and the German and Polish experience of positive civic education and patriotism through maintaining respect for other nations and appeal to European values should be the basis for such actions. Sharing know-how in the field of counteracting negative social trends can be a real support for Ukraine, especially in times of war which, as we know from historical experience, usually creates fertile ground for extremist views.

## How should the policy towards Putin's Russia look?

Presently, the approach of both the Polish and German governments towards Russia is quite similar – since such an approach is determined by Putin's authoritarian regime. Yet, the approach of many representatives of various economic and political parties in Poland and Germany differ. The differences are caused both by the legacy of Ostpolitik in some interest groups and the poor knowledge of the post-Soviet space in the minds of German society, which is filled with guilt towards Russia.

The meaning of security is defined rather differently. In Poland, it is perceived as “freedom from Russia” and the threats coming from the East. In Germany, it is often mentioned as stability and predictability coming from the supply of natural resources. A good example of these difference in understanding security can be seen in the Nord Stream 1 and 2 projects. This is due to the dissimilarities in the perception and gradation of threats, which has to be analyzed on many levels.

When discussing Polish-German efforts in the East, we should move away from the temptation to “sum” all the perspectives and perceptions. It is worth using a European approach to international law and its observance. If what distinguishes the European Union on the international stage is the conduct of a normative foreign policy, this should be the foundation for building a common narration towards Putin's Russia. International law is valid all over the world regardless of the “sphere of influence”, the prevalence of a certain language or religion. This is one of the keys of the current world order, which

emerged after the Second World War. It is defined by the United Nations Charter; one of the most significant documents in the history of mankind. The conviction about the dominance of international relations based on legal actions instead of political power should be the ground for Polish-German appeal to other European Union countries.

By the European Union allowing for hybrid warfare in Ukraine and Russia's conduct to ignore the opinion of the international community – for example by bombing Aleppo in Syria – makes Europe weak. Poland and Germany should work together to ensure the EU maintains economic and political sanctions on the Kremlin even at the costs of their own economic losses resulting from Russia's counter-response. Only in this way can we declare that Europe's commitment to the values in an international context is not just an empty slogan, but the basis for policy.

The attitudes and actions are even more important today considering the fact that Russia now sees the current period as a chance to establish its quasi-power position in the global arena. The Kremlin's actions have caused destabilization in Western political systems by undermining the credibility of the idea of democracy in the EU. Massive propaganda in the traditional media and online social networks (Sputnik, Russia Today), the propagation of hate speech and the financing populist-nationalist movements in Europe has a great impact. Poland and Germany are the countries extremely affected by the two world wars and should stand together to safeguard peace in Europe. Both countries should jointly develop strategies for opposing the negative trend represented by Russia's current policies. The common denominator for Polish and German governments' action should be convincing other EU member states and allies in the United States and Canada that a "leniency policy" will lead to catastrophic consequences in the future.

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## Potential allies to the Polish–German cooperation

What makes cooperation effective is the ability to build alliances. Since the reconstruction of Europe's Eastern Policy is a matter for the European Union, the activities of Poland and Germany should focus on other member states. Sweden, Finland, Denmark, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia and Romania seem to be natural partners in the community's approach to the reforms in the Eastern dimension of the Common Foreign and Security Policy. In Stockholm, Helsinki and Bucharest, the Russian Federation is perceived as an imperial state and a threat to the countries individually as well as to the entire EU. Sweden and Finland, as countries outside NATO, might be even more interested in intensifying activities within the European Union. In this way, Warsaw and Berlin can count on important and influential allies for their joint actions. Strengthening cooperation with these countries might even be a priority for upcoming projects. Building a broad alliance from Scandinavia to the Balkans would not only support the view of the need for re-shaping the EU's Eastern Policy and EU-Russia relations, but will give to it a strategic and geopolitical character.

While discussing the possibilities of building alliances in the context of the East, it is worth reflecting on the meaning of the Visegrad Group and the Weimar Triangle. It seems that both concepts of regional cooperation will not provide Warsaw and Berlin substantial support. The approach of Hungary, Slovakia, the Czech Republic and France towards Russia is fundamentally different from the position of the Polish and German governments which represent a need for a strong EU response to the policy of Vladimir Putin. Especially worth mentioning is Viktor Orbán's reluctance to further extend EU sanctions against Russia. François Hollande's skepticism is equally visible. Polish-German cooperation cannot count on the full acceptance from all EU members. Instead, they should focus on garnering the support for particular projects from individual states.

A separate question on building alliances for changes in the EU's Eastern Neighborhood is the relationship with the United States and the United Kingdom. Donald Trump's victory as well as the Brexit will certainly complicate the search for support for

Polish-German projects in the Anglo-Saxon world. In the coming years, the UK will be more focused on negotiation of favorable conditions to leave the European Union. The shape of the American administration remains a matter of speculation. Therefore, it seems more reasonable for Warsaw and Berlin to search for different forms of influence within the political elite. In the US, it would be a matter of discussing certain aspects with Congress and Think Thanks. In London this would mean engaging with the House of Commons on UK policies in the post-Soviet space. Regardless of whether and when the actual Brexit will happen, joint actions on Eastern policy should take place as if the Brexit has not happened. So far, the United Kingdom's secession from the European Union is a media fact rather than a political decision. Theresa May's government has declared that regardless of the "European divorce", England will still be an active partner in Eastern Europe.

## Why should we believe in Polish-German cooperation?

The above-presented arguments for stronger Polish-German cooperation in the East may be considered by some as illusionary. Indeed, since 2014 we have witnessed some significant breaks in the Eastern alliance of these two. The establishment of the Normandy Format without Polish participation in discussions on resolving the conflict between Russia and Ukraine was acknowledged by the previous government of the Civic Platform and the Polish People's Party as diplomatic betrayal.

The current government of Law and Justice in Poland is happy to come back to the topic of a lack of space at the negotiating table for Poland at that time. The participation of Angela Merkel and François Hollande in the negotiations in Minsk without "the President of the European Union," Donald Tusk and "the head of EU diplomacy," Federica Mogherini, could provide a recognition of the EU's executives as being incapable of effective action in the context of the East. The German decision to build the second line of the Nord Stream pipeline connecting Russia and Germany, bypassing Poland and other

Central and Eastern European countries, unequivocally undermines Donald Tusk’s concept of an Energy Union proposed during the days of his premiership in Poland. Tensions between the current Polish authorities and the government of Angela Merkel in a symbolic dimension may also undermine the "reality" of these recommendations. However, the willingness to act together is not only assessed through the prism of mutual sympathy of the governmental representatives, but also by the quantity, variety and quality of the political, economic and social bonds, as well as by the common threat.

The feeling of community in Polish-German cooperation has both historical and moral dimensions. While celebrating this year the 25th anniversary of the signing of the Polish-German Treaty on Good Neighbourship and Friendly Cooperation it is important to point out that “naiveté” and “illusion” have been written into the mutual reception of relations of both sides of the Oder river in the last 25 years.

The Polish–German reconciliation is second only to the overcoming of German-French hate, one of the most important bilateral achievements in post-war Europe. Joint Polish and German actions in the range of economy and trade should be an example for a very strong bilateral cooperation.

Poland and Germany are two countries that enormously benefited from European integration and have a special commitment to the EU itself and its immediate Eastern neighborhood. While being torn by multiple crises, the EU is now battered and tired and reluctant to take any visionary actions. However, the recommendations presented here are necessary steps in order to make the vision of integration in the 21st century real. This is extremely necessary for the future of the European community. If we accept the present state of affairs we send a clear signal to non-democratic and anti-liberal regimes in the

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face of global threats that the European vision has come to an end. To avoid this situation, we need Poland and Germany to understand that joint efforts are at the core of the modern European vision; a vision of a democratic, economically fair and internationally effective European Union, which has not lost its ability to attract more countries. We cannot lose faith in the United Europe!



## "AMICUS EUROPÆ" FOUNDATION OF ALEKSANDER KWAŚNIEWSKI

The Foundation was established by Aleksander Kwaśniewski in 2004 to promote his accomplishments as a President of Poland such as: adoption of the Constitution of 1997, NATO and EU membership, establishment of close and good neighborhood relations within Central Europe, deepening of transatlantic cooperation, as well as progress in the process of reconciliation with Germany, Ukraine and the Jewish people. Those goals of the president's term in office have served as a point of departure for establishing the statutory objectives of the "Amicus Europae" Foundation.

The Foundation's main mission is the support for European Integration and promotion of dialogue and reconciliation as a method of solving political and regional conflicts.

The Foundation organizes debates and international conferences with participation of global leaders and various representatives of civic society. The debates promote a specific spirit of dialogue and concept of public life functioning, which is strongly related to the achievements of Aleksander Kwaśniewski's Presidency.

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