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Thank you very much for listening to this excellent presentation of our group, both Co-Chairmen of this special commission on difficult questions from our history. Let me start with a few comments. A few months ago when we discussed the programme planning for the dinner debate, I insisted on having the word 'rapprochement' in the title instead of using 'reconciliation.' Russian-Polish relations have gone through two vast decades of close interactions and economics, divergences, political quarrels and mutual prejudices when it comes to historic issues, but not conflicts. I prefer not to use the notion of reconciliation while describing the relations between Moscow and Warsaw. Those not involved in conflict with each other should not reconcile, but re-approach, having in mind potential mutual benefits.

Everything that has happened within our relations over the past 20 years was very conventional for the European landscape, which witnessed strong political, strategic and economic reshuffles. Artificial dramatizing of Russian-Polish relations hides what we really have in common - our natural closeness and similar character, society changes and foreign policy evolution. It is enough to say that this year, we have \$30 billion of trade between our two countries.

Russia and Poland are countries with overlapping history and historic mythology about each other. As neighbours, we have very strong opinions of our roles in the fate of Europe. Historically, both countries highly assess their contribution to civilising their neighbours, especially the Ukraine and Lithuania. Our countries always stress the morality of their foreign policy. This mix of lost land, Eurasian breach and Sarmatian heritage dominated Russia's and Poland's foreign policy and self-perception for ages.

The greatest problem of the previous decade was the lack of new foreign policy in both societies, which led to the revival of all these myths and the emergence of the peculiar phenomenon of a historic policy, or even a historically based foreign policy. This is a complete nonsense in the contemporary role. When our group was set up, our task was to take history from politics and return it into the hands of historians.

By the way, I discovered a very interesting fact while I was preparing this presentation. I found a research paper that was prepared at the end of the 19th century about the origins of the gentry in the Russian empire. I read that 30% of all aristocrats who were in the service of the empire were of Polish origin.

I should say that our group was independent, but it was established by both our governments. When we met for the first time in Brussels, we discussed the composition of this group. From the beginning, we decided to include not only historians specialising in Russia or in Poland, or in bilateral relations, but also to include a broader range of people. Of course, we included historians, but we also included experts in international relations and experts in politics, and I think it was the right decision.

The second condition that was very important for the successful activities of our group was that around the beginning, we had direct access to our governments through our ministers for foreign affairs. During these three years, we met with the late President Kaczynski, with President Komorowski, with President Medvedev and with Prime Minister Putin. Both of our foreign ministers, Sikorski and Lavrov, opened our sessions in Moscow and Warsaw. Of course, the chemistry in the group was very important for the success of our activities.

I want to say a few words about the results. We prepared a book called *White Spots Black Spots Difficult Issues in Polish-Russian Relations*, which is a very specific book because our approach was a narrow one. It has 16 chapters written by Polish and Russian authors on the subject of our history. After we discussed all these issues, we came to the conclusion that there were much more similarities in our relations and in our approaches than we thought before. If you look at this book, and I hope that we will have an English edition next year, you will see this result. We tried to bring this book to libraries, schools, to the people because it is a popular book, not highly scientific research.



Another result of our activities was the creation of two Centres of Dialogue and Understanding in Warsaw and Moscow, funded by the governments of our two countries. Two days ago, we got together in St Petersburg with the Russian and the Polish board of these centres and we discussed the short and long-term programme of activities in the framework of these centres. It is also very important to mention that in these activities, we will include the historical archives of both countries relating to our mutual history.

Let me give the floor to Professor Rotfeld, who will mention some other aspects of our joint activities.