



DEBATE

Thierry de MONTBRIAL, President and Founder of the World Policy Conference

I think that this is a remarkable undertaking and, if I may say so, a very moving one too. We do not have time for a full discussion, but I would like to ask two questions myself and I will ask Kishore if he will ask another.

My first question is: Has your work already had an impact and, if so, what kind of impact, particularly in the public sphere?

Secondly, in the case of France and Germany, a number of attempts have been made, especially in the last two decades, to produce joint history text books and these attempts have failed miserably. The text book exists, but fundamentally no one is using them, or perhaps even reading them, beyond a few professors.

Can you briefly comment on these two points?

Adam Daniel ROTFELD, Former Minister of Foreign Affairs of Poland, Co-Chairman of the Polish-Russian Group on Difficult Matters

Yes, it definitely has an impact. I would like to say that the first impact was when our foreign ministers and prime ministers met each other and decided to accept some of the recommendations of our group. One of them was the establishing of the two centres we mentioned.

In addition, the most important effect, in my view, was the meeting of Prime Minister Donald Tusk and the Prime Minister of Russia, Vladimir Putin, in Gdansk on 1 September 2009 to commemorate the 70th anniversary of the outbreak of the Second World War. This was a recognition by the head of the Russian government that the Second World War started on the 1 September 1939 and not on the 2 June 1941 as was commonly accepted by the Russian people for more than 60 years.

He said during his speech in Gdansk that since it was possible to initiate the process of reconciliation between France and Germany, between Germany and Russia, then why is it not possible between Poland and Russia. He took this German French reconciliation as a kind of point of departure. Then when we met with the prime ministers in Smolensk last year on 7 April 2010, both of them promised us that they would follow what we recommended.

The work of our group provoked a lot of questions in many countries: If this process is possible between Poland and Russia, then why is it not possible between the Baltic States, especially Latvia and Russia? They established very similar groups. I will not talk about these other countries as Anatoly will probably say a few words about this.

The last thing I would like to say is that we were invited to many capital cities this year. Most recently, and to me the most significant, was an invitation to the Holy See. We were blessed by the Pope in a private audience. He said that it is his wish to establish a new type of relations, not only between Poland and Russia, but between the Roman Catholic Church and the Russian Orthodox Church.

I would like to say that that kind of impact is more than enough in my view. Frankly, it is much more than I expected when we started our work in June 2008.



Anatoly TORKUNOV, Rector of the Moscow State Institute of International Relations, Co-Chairman of the Polish-Russian Group on Difficult Matters

I should add that our activities have been supported from the beginning by the Russian Orthodox Church and by the Polish Kościół. The representatives of both churches participated in our meetings.

As far as the impact of our work is concerned, I think it had very serious impact, even in terms of Russian public opinion. We prepared recommendations and some of them were accepted by the governments and new materials were published about the Katyn tragedy on our president's website. Almost four million people read this material. The process of transferring the archives on the Katyn matter began and almost all of the documents are now on the Polish website.

It was important regarding Russian public opinion, but even more so for Polish public opinion. It was also important for Russians that the president and the prime minister said who should be blamed for this crime in Katyn. The famous movie on Katyn by [Andrzej Wajda](#) was shown on a state run television channel twice. The truth is purifying, as Prime Minister Tusk said in Smolensk.

I think that for our society it is very important to know the truth because according to polls just a few years ago, 40% of our population thought that the Polish officers were killed by Germans on that day.

Kishore MAHBUBANI, Dean and Professor in the Practice of Public Policy of the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy at the National University of Singapore

Thierry, I completely agree with you that this is truly remarkable and I think we should follow up by nominating them for the Nobel Peace Prize. I will explain why. Can you imagine other countries which have difficult relationships, India-Pakistan, Greece-Turkey, Thailand-Cambodia, USA-Iran, setting up a group on Difficult Matters. That would be enormously helpful.

In the course of your discussions and deliberations, you must have come up with a few general principles on how you handle an inherently difficult relationship. I do not know if you can suggest some principles here, if not then some other time, but it would be very valuable for the world to learn how you cross such a painful historical divide and come to a common understanding. What are the principles the world has to use?

Adam Daniel ROTFELD, Former Minister of Foreign Affairs of Poland, Co-Chairman of the Polish-Russian Group on Difficult Matters

In my view, the first principle is that all conflicts are different. I do not know if you remember the first sentence of the novel by Tolstoy, *Anna Karenina*, 'Happy families are all alike; every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way'. Conflicts are about the unhappy families and therefore they are always different. One should simply try to find what is unique, not follow some general principles, but try to find what is sensitive. For example, why was the massacre of the Polish officers taken by the Red Army in 1939, so important to the Polish people? We have had millions of Poles who have lost their lives but this massacre was important because from the very beginning it was a lie.

In other words, truth is one of the elements. Facts have to be recognised. Interpretation differs: Russians have their interpretation, we in Poland have ours. We should accept the facts. When we discussed the different, very painful issues, facts did not need to be a part of the discussion; they were accepted.

The second element is that people who are approaching each other should trust each other. Poland and Russia have quite normal relations and Minister Ivanov, who is sitting in front of me here, was there at the very beginning when he



accompanied the then Russian president on his visit to Poland in January 2002. It was then that they first discussed and accepted the establishment of a group on Difficult Matters.

One can raise the question of why this group, established in 2002, did not work successfully. There were different reasons, but the main problem was that the group was composed of high-ranking officials: foreign ministers, ministers for justice, ministers of interior, and so on. There is a need to have a group of people who are independent and when they are confronted by a lot of problems independent groups are a lot more influential than officials. This is because they are able to find solutions and answers to new questions in a more innovative and creative way.

In other words, when you are confronted with something that is unconventional, one should not follow a conventional path in the search for a solution. One should offer something unconventional as well. This is the third element that I would like to offer, but one should remember that there is always a need to find something specific and not to follow in a very mechanistic way what has been done by others.

Anatoly TORKUNOV, Rector of the Moscow State Institute of International Relations, Co-Chairman of the Polish-Russian Group on Difficult Matters

I just want to add that the composition of the group is very important. When you try to form this kind of group you should invite people with a broader view on this and that issue. As you know well that if you have, for example, a historian who has devoted all his life to the study of a short period of time, it is difficult to have that discussion with him on facts, but facts are not interpretational. That is why we try to arrange the composition of the group in a proper way.

Charles KUPCHAN, Professor in international relations at Georgetown University

I wanted to ask both of our speakers if they could glean a few lessons from their study of Polish-Russian rapprochement for US-Russian rapprochement because I think you have in President Obama, not only someone who is sincerely committed to the reset, but arguably more committed than any potential replacement, be it a Democrat or a Republican. From pushing for WTO accession, to putting NATO enlargement on ice, to revamping missile defence, you get the sense that you are pushing on an open door in Washington. Why has that process not gained more esteem? Is Moscow not interested or is Washington not doing something you think it should be doing to pursue a lasting rapprochement?

Anatoly TORKUNOV, Rector of the Moscow State Institute of International Relations, Co-Chairman of the Polish-Russian Group on Difficult Matters

That seems quite a different question, Russian-American relations. In the past, in the 19th century, of course we had some historic problems, but not too many, and almost all these questions are quite clear for both sides so there is nothing to discuss on the historic background.

As for our relations, I am absolutely sure that it is very important to involve civil society more deeply. We established a lot of groups on different tracks of negotiations with the Americans but as far as I understand only some of them are working actively. I think both sides should invite independent experts and representatives from civil society to work on these groups. It is the only recommendation I can make right now.



Adam Daniel ROTFELD, Former Minister of Foreign Affairs of Poland, Co-Chairman of the Polish-Russian Group on Difficult Matters

I am neither American nor Russian, but it appears to me that the United States is the main point of reference for Russia. Russia does not compare itself to Germany or France or the United Kingdom, but definitely to the United States. It seems to me, and I am saying this in the spirit of the work of our group, in other words in a very honest and open way, that in the main, in Russia, there is a very deep-rooted inferiority complex. This complex is connected with the post-Imperial Syndrome.

When having discussions with Russia the Americans should take into consideration the respect for dignity, and if it is taken properly then one should tell the full truth without any limitations. One should consider that dignity is a very important element in the thinking and approach of Russia to the United States, and to the rest of the world as well. That is probably not always taken into consideration by diplomats and officials.

Thierry de MONTBRIAL, President and Founder of the World Policy Conference

I am convinced that what we have witnessed with the discussion between Anatoly and Adam is important and I think there are a lot of practical lessons to be learned from that. These two men are good men, but they also have a know-how and a combination of the two is necessary for any progress in this world and I think it has to do with the discussion of values with which we started on the day before yesterday. Thank you very, very much.