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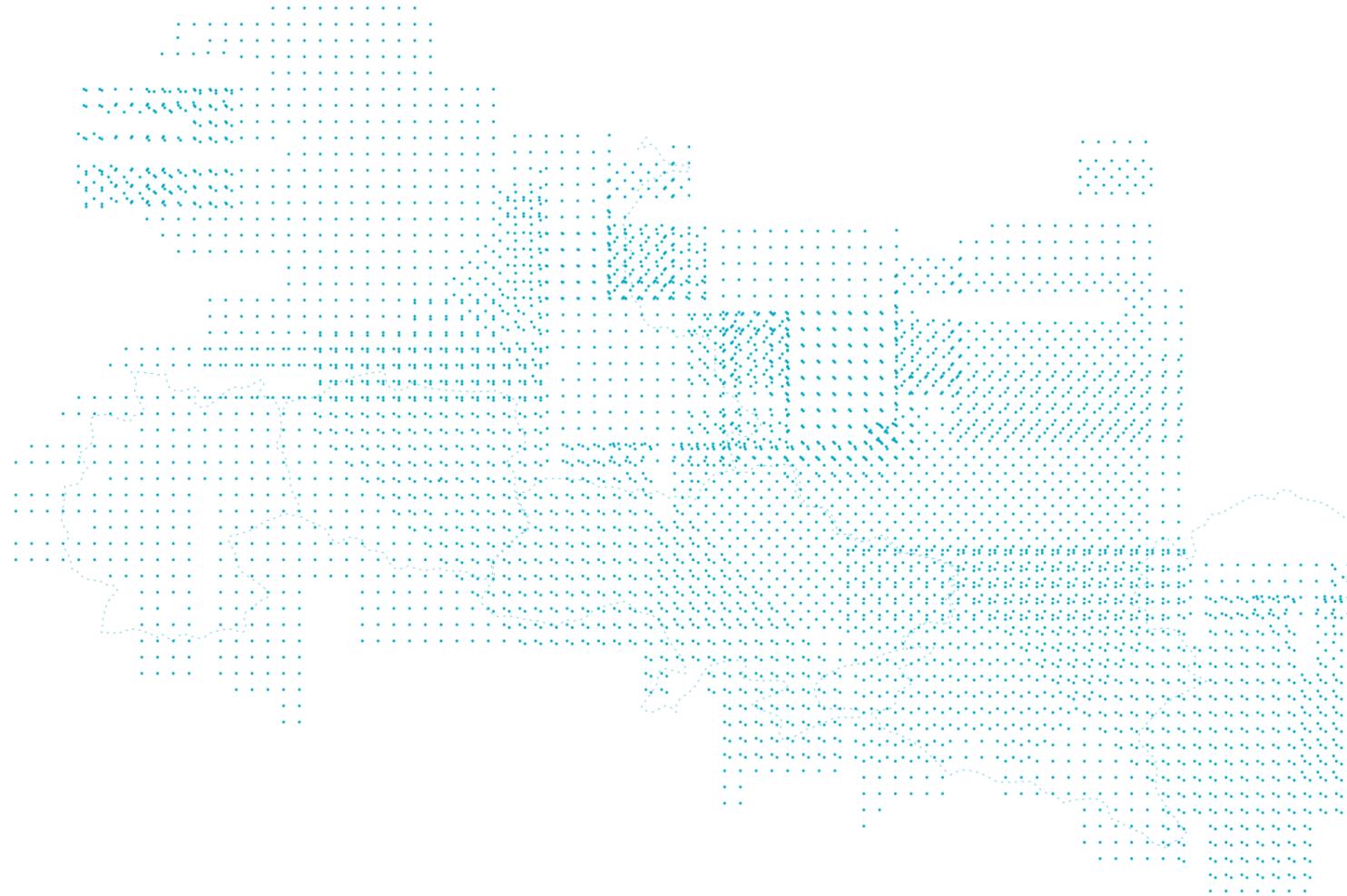
Eastern policy has for many years been a complicated and emotionally charged issue in Polish-German relations. A frequent claim made in public debates on this issue is that the two countries are once more divided in their views. However, the results of a survey conducted simultaneously by the Institute of Public Affairs and the Bertelsmann Stiftung in Poland and Germany reveal that Poles and Germans hold basically similar views on issues connected with the Russia-Ukraine conflict. Although differences between them are visible, the two countries are closer to each other in their opinions on Russia than many Polish and German commentators assume. Poles and Germans share the same negative assessment of the state of their countries' relations with Russia. Also both publics support EU sanctions. Moreover, they are willing to support Ukraine economically but would not like to see further deterioration of relations with Russia. As for Russians, they also regard their country's relations with Poland and Germany as bad. Despite the fact that they view the conflict from a completely different perspective than Poles and Germans, a clear majority of Russians do not support any military engagement of Russia on the side of the separatists in eastern Ukraine.

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JACEK KUCHARCZYK
AGNIESZKA ŁADA
GABRIELE SCHÖLER
ŁUKASZ WENERSKI

CLOSE TOGETHER OR FAR APART? POLES, GERMANS AND RUSSIANS ON THE RUSSIA-UKRAINE CRISIS



INSTITUTE OF
PUBLIC AFFAIRS

| BertelsmannStiftung

JACEK KUCHARCZYK, AGNIESZKA ŁADA,
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European Programme

The report was published in cooperation with „The future of Europe”
Programme of Bertelsmann Stiftung.

Translation: Translation: George Lisowski and Jason Lowther

Proofreading: Elena Rozbicka

Statistical analysis: Yuriy Taran

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ISBN: 978-83-7689-257-3

Published by:
Fundacja Instytut Spraw Publicznych
00-031 Warszawa, ul. Szpitalna 5 lok. 22
tel. (22) 55 64 260, faks (22) 55 64 262
e-mail: isp@isp.org.pl, www.isp.org.pl

Typesetting and printing:
Ośrodek Wydawniczo-Poligraficzny „SIM”
00-669 Warszawa, ul. Emilii Plater 9/11
tel. (22) 629 80 38
www.owpsim.pl

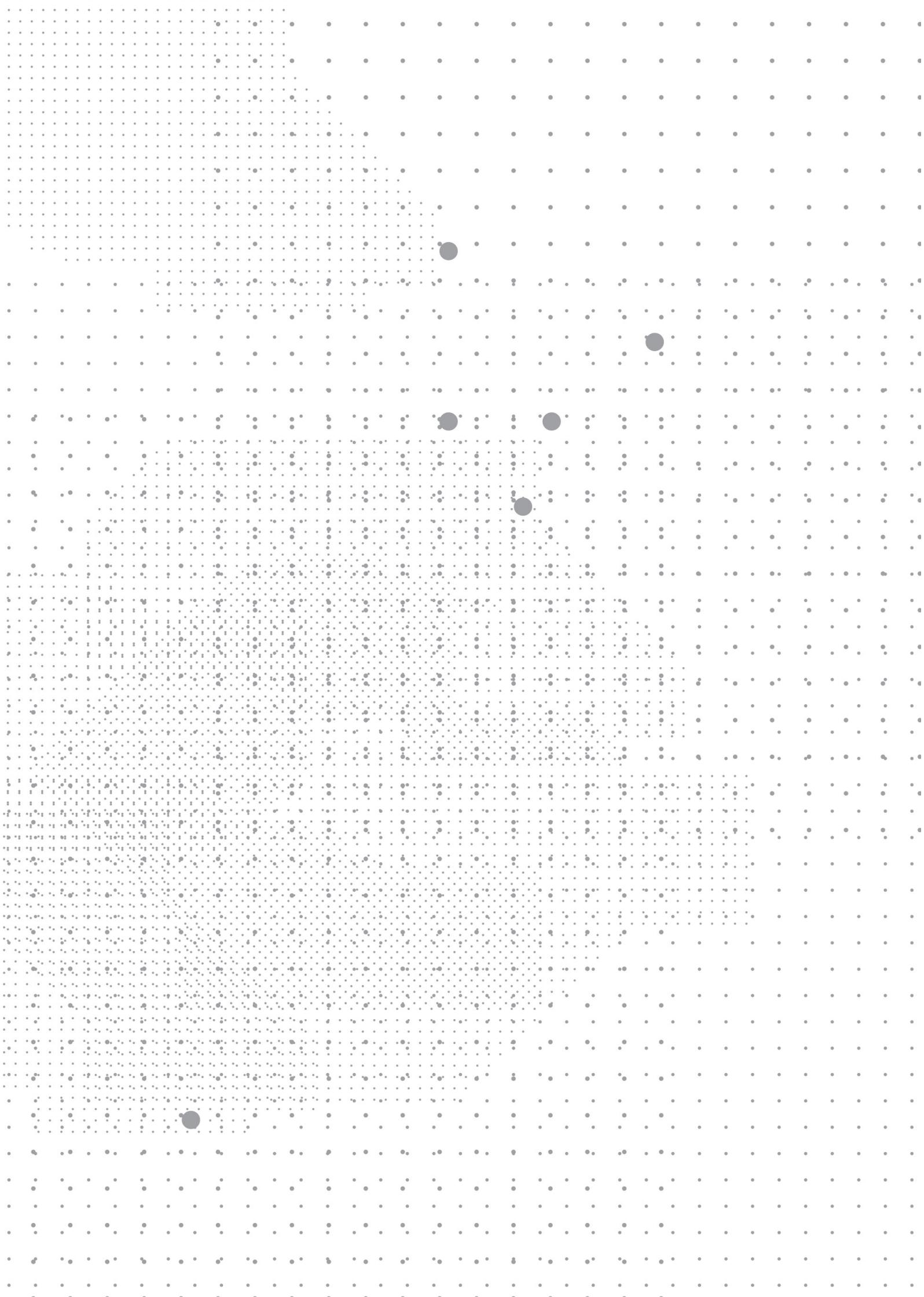


Co-funded by the
Europe for Citizens Programme
of the European Union

The European Commission support for the production of this publication does not constitute an endorsement of the contents which reflects the views only of the authors, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein



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Opinions of Poles and Germans

- ▶ Poles and Germans are not as divided regarding their opinions on relations with Russia and the conflict in Ukraine as conventional wisdom suggests. At the same time there are quite significant differences of opinion within both societies.
- ▶ Poles and Germans assess the state of the relations between their countries and Russia similarly. More than three-fourths of the respondents think the relations are bad (78%).
- ▶ Poles and Germans also share the opinion that it is not Ukraine that is responsible for the conflict. However, while a clear majority of Poles believe the responsibility lies with Russia (61%), Germans are here divided with a comparable group of 39% blaming Russia and 43% seeing responsibility on both sides of the conflict.
- ▶ Poles and Germans differ somewhat when it comes to the assessment of the military threat posed by Russia to their country. While Poles are convinced that Russia is a threat to Poland (76%), with only 14% not seeing a threat, half of Germans (51%) do not perceive any military threat from Russia, and 41% do see a threat.
- ▶ German society is divided in their opinions of whether Russia exerts economic pressure on their country. Such pressure is acknowledged by 44%, while 46% do not see it.
- ▶ Poles are much more critical of the Polish government's policy regarding the Russia-Ukraine conflict than the Germans are concerning their government's policy. Only one in four Poles positively assesses the activities of the Polish government, while more than the half of the Polish respondents have a negative opinion (51%). In the case of the German survey, it is exactly the other way round, with 53% positive assessments and 39% negative ones. In both cases among the critics of their government's policy are both those who think the policy should be stronger as well those who think it should be less tough on Russia.
- ▶ Poles assess the policy of the German government regarding the crisis more negatively than positively and worse than the Germans themselves. The percentage of the German positive opinions on their country's policy is nearly twice as high as the Polish opinion regarding Germany's policy (53% to 28%).

- ▶ When asked whether their countries have common or different interests in their policy towards Russia, both publics are very divided in themselves. As compared to 2013, fewer people in Poland and Germany are convinced that their countries share the same interests. Germans are considerably more convinced about both countries' common interests towards Russia than are Poles (48% to 32%). The plurality of respondents in Poland (46%) doubt that both countries have common interests, while in Germany such skepticism is shared by just one third (34%) of the respondents.
- ▶ In both countries there is little support for easing the sanctions against Russia. The majority of Poles and Germans favour either strengthening the sanctions or keeping them at the present level. Still the percentage of Germans who favour easing and strengthening the sanctions is exactly the same (23% each) while in Poland five times more respondents would opt for tougher sanctions than for reducing them.
- ▶ Poles and Germans want to support Ukraine economically (56% and 55% respectively), whereas both publics are opposed to providing military assistance for Ukrainian army. By the same token, both societies are reluctant to endorse assistance for Ukraine if this would lead to further worsening of relations with Russia.
- ▶ A substantive majority of Germans (70%) and plurality of Poles (45%) oppose the lifting of EU visa requirements for Ukrainians, while 30% of Poles and only 17 per cent of Germans are in favour of visa liberalization for Ukraine.

Opinions of Russians

- ▶ The Poles and Germans are not alone in opposing Russia's involvement in the conflict in Ukraine. Amongst Russians themselves, Russia's involvement in the conflict on the side of the separatists in the Donbas region has less support than neutrality.
- ▶ Only 7% of Russians think that Russia should send its armed forces to Ukraine to assist the separatists.
- ▶ Russians almost unanimously assess the current state of Russian-Ukrainian relations as bad.
- ▶ Russians are well aware of the political and economic costs of the current Russian policy towards Ukraine – it is leading to a deterioration of relations with countries such as Poland and Germany, and the sanctions imposed on Russia negatively influence the state of the Russian economy.
- ▶ Over half of Russians perceive relations with Poland (67%) and Germany (52%) as bad. However, these countries are not perceived as posing a threat to Russia.
- ▶ Russians are worried about the United States. Two-thirds of Russians (67%) believe that the United States poses a threat to their country.



In the year that has passed since the annexation of Crimea by Russia, the Russia-Ukraine conflict has undergone various phases, mobilizing the international community to undertake actions in this matter. Although up until now the European Union has managed to work out a common official position in relation to Russia and to assess the crisis (as it has developed), it is in fact very divided. Some countries are seeking to return to normal relations with Russia and do not see a need to continue sanctions. Other countries believe that EU policy towards Vladimir Putin must not be softened, and that, in case of further violations of agreements by him, more severe measures should be taken. The Polish and German governments belong to the latter group, yet in both countries, there is a common belief that the Eastern policy again strongly divides the two countries. Selective media reports on the other country's (government's) stance and the omission of the context of quoted statements of politicians contribute to such a perception. The result is that the general public receive an incomplete picture – and as a consequence often form a false impression – of the position of the government and society of their neighbour. Following public and expert debates and public opinion surveys more closely in both countries allows us to discover that the divisions between Poles and Germans are not as great as might be assumed from the commentators' remarks. Differences are rather emerging *within* each of two societies in their assessment of the Russia-Ukraine conflict and of the actions that should be taken in response.

In order to test this hypothesis, the Bertelsmann Stiftung and Institute of Public Affairs undertook to carry out nearly identical surveys in the two countries. Cooperation in formulating questions, the choice of the period of the survey, as well as a joint analysis of the survey results allowed us to indicate the real similarities and differences in the opinions of Poles and Germans concerning the Russia-Ukraine conflict and the policies of our governments towards Russia and Ukraine. Furthermore, the research allowed us to better understand existing differences of attitudes within both our societies, as well as to define common areas on which constructive cooperation in the European Union can be based. In turn, these findings can help us to work more effectively on bringing closer together not only the positions of governments or experts, but also those of German and Polish public opinion.

Given that it is primarily the assessment of Russia's government policies and of the attitudes of Russian society that is considered to divide Poland and Germany, we extended the studies by adding a short survey carried

out in Russia itself. Including Russians' answers helped in formulating recommendations for joint Polish-German actions in the European arena.

In interpreting the results of the studies, it is worth paying attention to two issues. Firstly, in many cases, there is no clear majority of respondents supporting a given point of view or solution in any of the studied societies. Usually one point of view or assessment receives a higher proportion of affirmative answers than others, but it does not often exceed 50%. Thus we often write about the largest groups of respondents who have expressed a given opinion – and not about the majority of respondents. For this reason, answers to some questions cannot be reduced to a simple “Poles think this, and Germans think that” (as surveys in which most respondents subscribe to a particular viewpoint are often interpreted). As we pointed out earlier, on some issues, divisions within our societies are clearer than the differences in opinion between Poles, Germans, and Russians.

Secondly, the time frame when the surveys were carried out is also important: in the period after the Minsk II agreement was signed, but before the Russian opposition activist, Boris Nemtsov, was murdered. When conducting the public opinion survey concerning such dynamic developments, these events must have had an impact on the distribution of responses to some of the questions, especially on German assessments concerning Russia. In our opinion, however, the timing does not affect the general findings from the study, which should become a significant element of public debate in our countries and of the dialogue of experts and politicians in Germany and Poland.

The survey was conducted in Poland by TNS Polska on a representative sample of 1000 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 adult Germans, and in Russia by Lewada Centre on a representative sample of 1600 adult Russians in the period from 20 to 24 February 2015 by the face-to-face method.



Introduction

The misunderstandings¹ that are mounting in Polish-German relations regarding the Eastern policy and the ongoing Russia-Ukraine conflict are focused around several issues. For years, the two societies have differed in their assessment of the relations of their respective countries with Russia. In the course of the development of the crisis (from the time of the *Euromaidan* protests), Poles and Germans – as could often be heard – have had differences of opinion as to who is guilty of stirring up and escalating the conflict (Russia or Ukraine), how to react to it (by introducing sanctions and/or supporting Ukraine – economically, politically, or militarily), as well as regarding whether Russia constitutes a threat. On both sides of the Oder, both neighbours criticized each other's government policies and also sometimes their own. In Poland, it was also often suspected that Germany was making decisions under pressure from Russia. Asking identical questions in both countries allowed us to establish in what respects the two societies indeed differ, and what unites them in their views on the events in the east and the policy of their governments towards these events.

Many factors, of course, affect respondents' assessment of mutual relations, the crisis, and government policy, including factors linked with demographic features and other general characteristics of the given respondent. In the case of Germany, answers may differ according to whether the respondent comes from east Germany or west Germany, since residents of the former German Democratic Republic had a completely different experience with Russia and its propaganda than persons from the former Federal Republic of Germany. In Poland, on the other hand, it can be assumed that the regional breakdown is unlikely to play a role, although a key factor is establishing whether a respondent has greater knowledge on political subjects (which can be assumed in persons declaring an interest in politics). Poles in general have problems with assessing many political issues (the tendency appears in many public opinion surveys), and the rather scarce reports from the world arena in the Polish media do not give them a chance to develop their own opinions. Although news on the Russia-Ukraine conflict is, by Polish journalistic

¹ For more on Polish-German misunderstandings in the assessment of approaches to Eastern policy, see Ałada, *Ostpolitik 2014. Fünf Missverständnisse zwischen Deutschen und Polen / Polityka wschodnia 2014. Pięć nieporozumień między Polakami a Niemcami (Eastern Policy 2014. Five Misunderstandings between Poles and Germans)*, Institute of Public Affairs and Bertelsmann Foundation, Warsaw/Gütersloh 2014.

standards, accessible and regular, its lack of setting in the broader context of international politics changes the perception of audiences.

State of both countries' relations with Russia

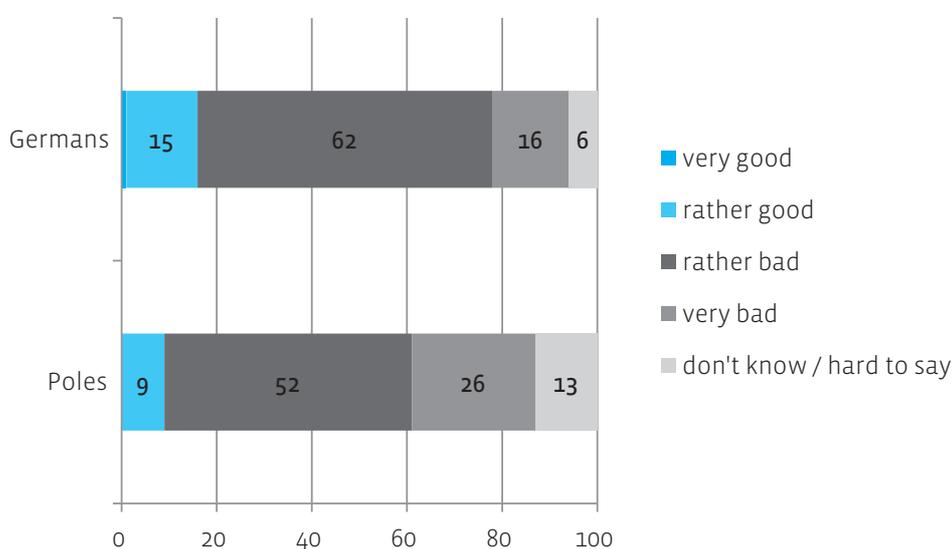
The relations of Poland and Germany with Russia were always very different. The development of economic relations, history, cultural contacts, and the sort of “infatuation” that Germans have traditionally felt for their “Eastern neighbour”, as they used to and still call Russia, have all had an influence on the state of these relations.² These differences have meant that for years Germans have generally assessed their relations with Russia as being better than Poles have assessed their own relations with Russia. The current crisis has caused major changes in these assessments and has drawn Poles and Germans closer in their perception of relations with Russia.

Poles and Germans now similarly assess the state of relations between their respective countries and Russia. More than three-quarters of those asked consider the relations bad (78%). However, in Poland, many more people than in Germany claim that the state of their country’s relations with Russia is very bad (26% compared to 16%). Also, in both countries there is virtually no belief that relations are very good (only 1% in Germany and 0% in Poland chose this response). However, in Germany, 15% of respondents assess relations as rather good, while in Poland only 9% chose that response.

Poles and Germans are unanimous in their assessment that relations between their respective countries and Russia are bad. Over two-thirds of respondents in each country say this

Figure 1.
How would you describe the current relations between your country and Russia? Opinions of Poles and Germans in 2015 (in %)

Source: Institute of Public Affairs / Bertelsmann Stiftung 2013, 2015



² In Germany, for example, a sort of “Gorbimania” is still prevalent today – a gratitude to the former leader of the USSR, Mikhail Gorbachev, (which has “rubbed off” onto Russia in general) for allowing the reunification of the two German halves. For more on the development of Polish-Russian and German-Russian relations, see: J.Kucharczyk, A.Łada, C.Ochmann, Ł.Wenerski, *Polityka i życie codzienne. Niemieckie spojrzenie na Polskę i Rosję / Im Osten was Neues? Das Bild Polens und Russlands in Deutschland (Politics and Everyday Life. The German View of Poland and Russia)*, Institute of Public Affairs, Warsaw 2013, and G.Gromadzki, J.Kucharczyk, A.Łada, C.Ochmann, Y.Taran, Ł.Wenerski, *Ludzie – historia – polityka, Polska i Niemcy w oczach Rosjan / Menschen - Geschichte - Politik, Russische Ansichten zu Polen und Deutschen (People – history – politics, Poland and Germany in the Eyes of the Russians)*, Institute of Public Affairs, Warsaw 2012.

In Poland, persons declaring an interest in politics are particularly strongly convinced of the bad state of Polish-Russian relations. In Germany, residents of the eastern *länder* assess the state of relations with Russia worse; 12% of them rate these relations positively, compared to 17% from west Germany.

Such a poor assessment of relations with Russia represents a major change, especially in the case of German public opinion. The German assessment of German-Russian relations has significantly changed in the last two years. In the year 2013, nearly half of respondents believed these relations were very or rather good (47%), whilst now this percentage has decreased to 16%. At the same time, the group of those assessing relations as bad or very bad has grown from 42% to 78%.

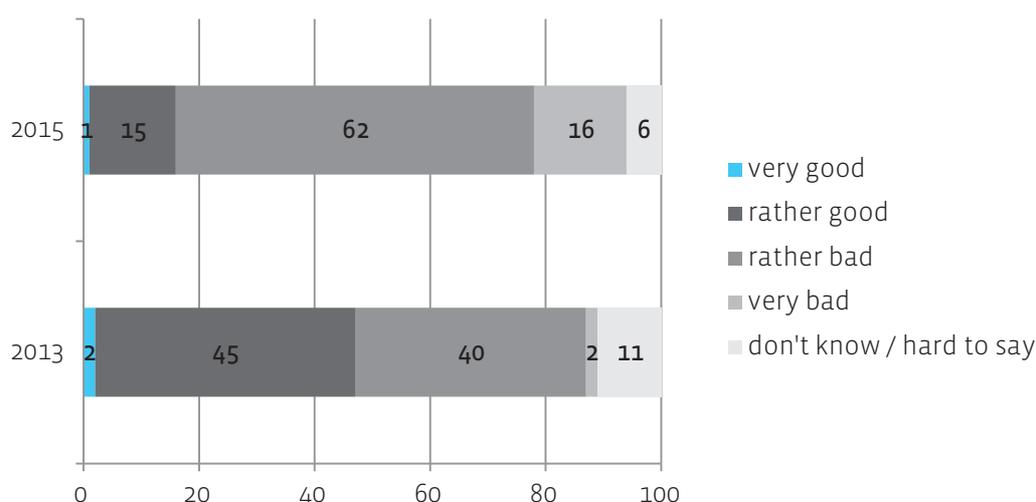


Figure 2. How would you describe the current state of relations between Germany and Russia? Opinions of Germans in 2013 and 2015 (in %)

Source: Institute of Public Affairs / Bertelsmann Stiftung 2013, 2015

In Poland, the attitude towards relations with Russia has usually been more critical than in Germany, hence the change is smaller but also noticeable. To a similar question asked by *Centrum Badania Opinii Publicznej* (Center for Public Opinion Research) in April 2008 (however, respondents also had the choice of an intermediate reply in that survey: “neither good nor bad”), somewhat more than one-quarter (27%) of respondents chose the answer that the state of relations is bad, in 2009 – 40% chose this answer, in 2011 – 42%, and in May 2014 – 65% (in the 2014 survey, 3% of Poles stated that relations are good, and 27% neither good nor bad).³

These changes are an evident reaction of both societies to Russian activity in Ukraine and Moscow’s aggressive policy as well as to the reluctance on Russia’s part to get involved in real cooperation.

³ CBOS, *Polacy o stosunkach polsko-rosyjskich i polityce wschodniej Polski* (Poles on Polish-Russian Relations and Poland’s Eastern Policy), Research Report no 77/2014, Warsaw, May 2014.

Responsibility for the Russia-Ukraine conflict

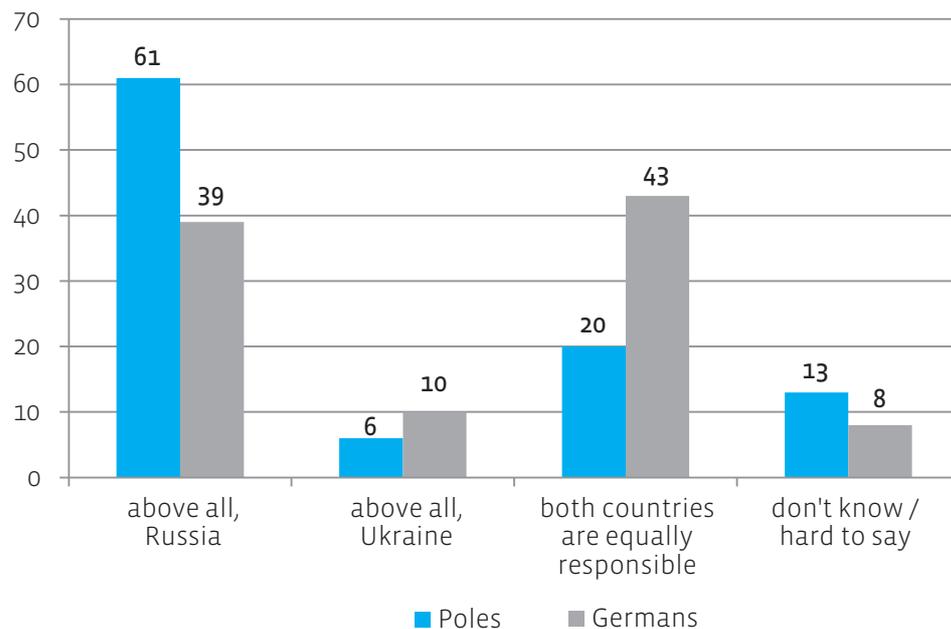
Both societies agree that it is not Ukraine that is responsible for the conflict. However, whilst Poles mainly ascribe responsibility for the crisis to Russia (61%), Germans are divided in their opinions – 39% see responsibility on the Russian side, and 43% on both sides: the Russian and Ukrainian

Poles and Germans also share the opinion that it is not Ukraine that is responsible for the conflict. However, while a clear majority of Poles believe the responsibility lies with Russia (61%), Germans are divided on this issue, with a comparable group of 39% blaming Russia and 43% seeing responsibility on both sides of the conflict. So, while the percentage of Poles who claim the Russian side is solely responsible is ten times higher than the percentage believing the Ukrainians are to be blamed (61% to 6%), the difference between Germans holding these opinions is only four times (39% to 10%). At the same time, twice as many Germans as Poles (43% to 20%) see responsibility for the conflict on the part of both countries.

However, if we sum up the answers indicating Russia's responsibility and the answers indicating responsibility on both sides, the percentages in Germany and Poland are comparable. In total, 81% of Polish respondents and 82% of German respondents chose these two answers. This is an even better indication that Poles and Germans differ only in their assessment of whether Ukraine shares responsibility for the conflict.

Figure 3.
Who is responsible for the Russian-Ukrainian conflict?
Opinions of Poles and Germans in 2015 (in %)

Source: Institute of Public Affairs/Bertelsmann Stiftung 2015



In Germany, the perception of Ukrainian responsibility for the conflict may be the result of a lack of experts with broader knowledge on the subject of Ukraine who could communicate it to the public. Another factor is the strong pro-Russian propaganda in Germany, thanks to which, one often hears how Ukraine contributed to exacerbating the conflict. However, there is no

correlation between opinions as to who is responsible for the conflict and assessments of German-Russian relations.

In Poland, opinions blaming Ukraine in expert or media debates have been virtually absent. While there is an awareness that the actions of the Ukrainians cannot always be assessed positively, this does not imply perceptions that Ukrainian policy has provoked the armed conflict. Respondents who rate Polish-Russian relations well constitute an exception. They decidedly more often (than respondents in general) perceive responsibility for the conflict on the Ukrainian side, and more rarely on the Russian side. Similarly, those Polish respondents who rate the state of Polish-Russian relations as bad, more often (than the general population) ascribe responsibility to Russia for the outbreak of the conflict.

On the Polish side, persons interested in politics blame Russia particularly often. In Germany, inhabitants of east Germany relatively more frequently ascribe responsibility to Ukraine (17%, compared to 8% of west Germans). At the same time they blame Russia more rarely (29%, compared to 42% west Germans).

Military threat and economic pressure from Russia

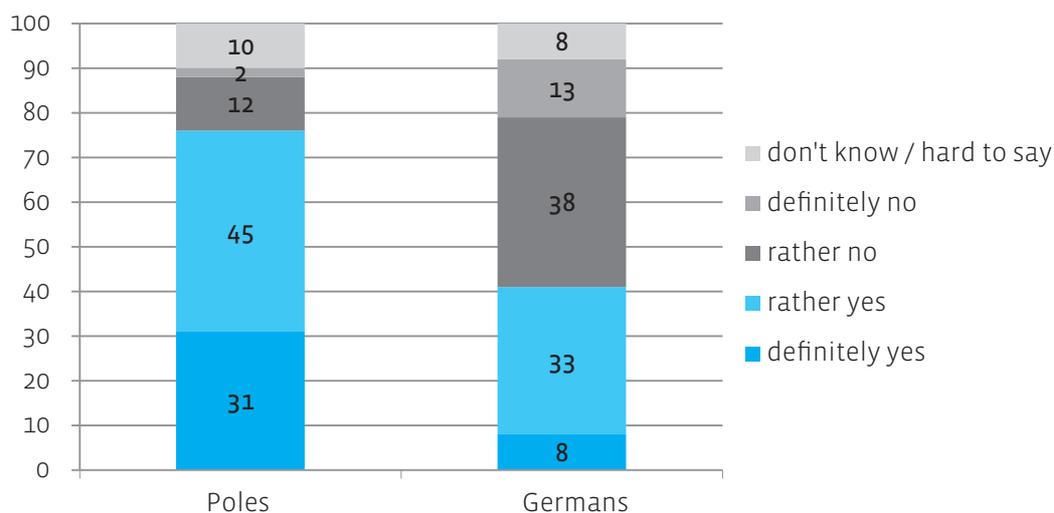
Assigning blame to Russia for the development of the conflict is directly linked with the assessment of the extent to which Russia can generally pose a military threat. In relation to their country, Poles perceive this question very directly, since historically they have often been victims of Russian aggression and the activities of Russian armies which have been tragic in their effects, even when these troops came into Poland as allies. Although Germany has also fought wars with Russia in the past, and Soviet troops were stationed for years in the former GDR, experience from the past does not play such a role. The voluntary withdrawal of Soviet troops, and above all, the social conditions of their stationing in the former GDR are the reason for disbelief that such an army is capable of attacking Germany. In the west of the country, on the other hand, it is what is often summarily termed “the German pacifists” who absolutely refuse to believe that Russia may seek a military solution to the conflict.

Hence, Poles and Germans differ somewhat when it comes to their assessments of the military threat posed by Russia to their country. While Poles are fairly convinced that Russia is a threat to Poland (76%), with only 14% not seeing a threat, half of the Germans (51%) do not perceive any military threat from Russia, whereas 41% do see a threat. The percentage of Poles who are strongly convinced such a threat exists is four times higher than the percentage of Germans (31% as opposed to 8%).

Poles and Germans differ greatly in their assessment of the military threat that Russia poses to their respective countries. 76% of Poles and 41% of Germans perceive a threat

Figure 4.
Does Russia pose a
military threat to your
country? Opinions of Poles
and Germans 2015 (in %)

Source: Institute of Public
Affairs / Bertelsmann
Stiftung 2015



The percentage of Poles who feel a threat from Russia is very high, but the group of Germans who perceive such a threat to their country is also relatively large in number. The difference between the percentage of those who perceive a threat those who do not see one is relatively small amongst Germans (10 percentage points). Persons who do not feel a threat probably see the Russia-Ukraine conflict as local,⁴ not having an influence on their life, and far from the borders of their country. Germans currently – in contrast to Poles – see a relatively greater risk elsewhere: in terrorism (about half of Germans fear terrorist attacks in Germany⁵) or the Islamic State. In recent months, articles have appeared in the media about German citizens – mainly, but not only, of Arab origin – joining groups of supporters of the Islamic State or even joining the fight on the side of the Islamic State. The proximity of this problem means that other threats, e.g., from Russia, do not seem so serious. Furthermore, Germans know decidedly less than Poles about the conflict in the east, since media reports on this subject are more modest than in Poland. However, in general, international news/features are more common on German television and radio, and in the press or on websites than in Poland. The topics raised are very varied: for example, besides reports about the situation in Eastern Ukraine, conflicts in Africa and the Middle East are also covered. In Poland, if foreign issues are raised, news about Russia dominates, as well as, specifically, news about the Russia-Ukraine conflict and about Germany.

Furthermore, the fact that Germany does not see a threat from Russia may stem from the German pacifist attitude to the world, which has its roots in the German history of the last century. This attitude manifests itself in thinking along lines such as: Germany does not want to attack anyone and is ready to pursue peace at any price, nor does it allow itself to suspect other countries

⁴ In the case of the war in Georgia, Germany also perceived the conflict as local, whereas in Poland, it was seen as a war and as a threat to European principles.

⁵ <https://www.tagesschau.de/inland/deutschlandtrend-257.html> [retrieved: 27.03.2015].

of aggressive intentions. Hence, most probably a significant proportion of Germans do not allow the thought to enter their heads that some country (in this case, Russia) may constitute a military threat to them.

The specific period of conducting the survey also undoubtedly had an impact on the distribution of responses amongst Germans – the survey took place before the murder of Boris Nemtsov. The murder of the Russian oppositionist had a much greater influence on the internal German discussion about security than the ongoing Russia-Ukraine conflict. Since the time of this murder, the atmosphere in Germany has changed. Analysing reactions and debates, one can especially assume that not only has the picture of Russia changed (to that of a country in which political opponents are killed), but also the approach to personal safety, which, according to current German opinions, is threatened, since Russia is unpredictable. In Poland, this murder did not trigger such changes, because Poles had already for some time stopped believing in the democratic and peaceful attitude of Russia.

West Germans sense a military threat to Germany from Russia more frequently (44%, in comparison to 31% of east Germans). There is also a clear correlation between the origin of a respondent from east Germany with a more frequent attribution of responsibility for the crisis to Ukraine and less sense of threat from Russia. The experiences of east Germans with the Soviet Army in the former GDR may influence such assessments. The Soviet Army was stationed on their land for several decades, and so they had an opportunity to see if it constituted a threat.

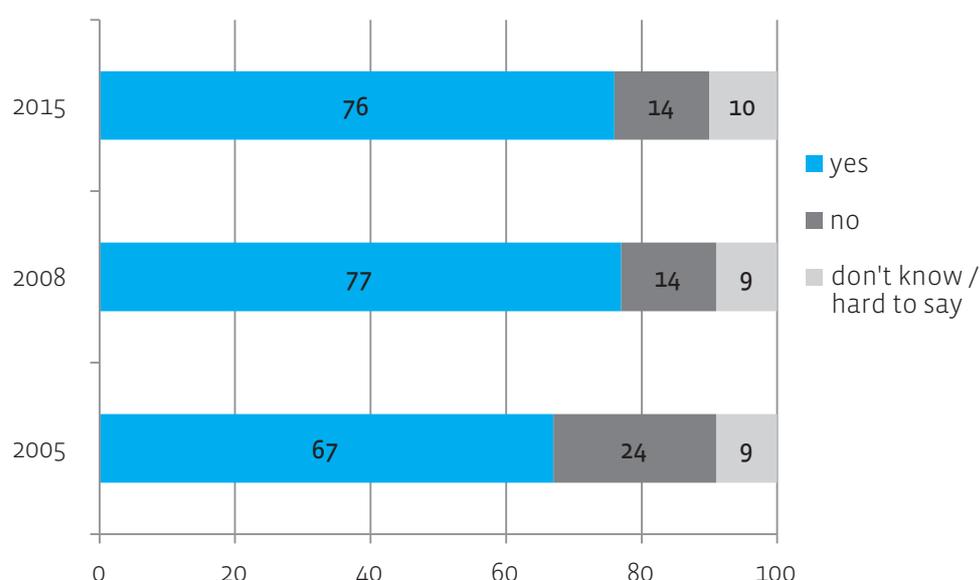
In Poland, people interested in politics perceive a threat from Russia relatively more frequently, as well as those who above all blame Russia for the conflict, and assess Polish-Russian relations as bad.

Poles' sense of threat from Russia has evolved over the years, increasing at moments when Russia has demonstrated its military power. For example, in 2006, 59% of respondents feared Russia, and in 2010 – 49%.⁶ However, shortly after the war in Georgia in 2008, 77% of Poles surveyed thought Russia posed a military threat to Poland (with 33% agreeing strongly and 44% rather agreeing with this opinion). Currently almost identical results are noted.

6 CBOS, Poles on national security and NATO, Research Report no. 48/2014, Warsaw, April 2014.

Figure 5.
Does Russia pose a
military threat to Poland?
Opinions of Poles in 2005,
2008 and 2015 (in %)

Source: Institute of Public
Affairs 2005, 2008 and
Institute of Public Affairs /
Bertelsmann Stiftung 2015



An important element of German-Russian relations is economic cooperation. In 2013, i.e. just before the outbreak of the Russia-Ukraine conflict, Germany's trade balance with Russia was over 77 billion euros.⁷ German trade contacts were based on the cooperation of many companies, including the largest concerns that have factories in Russia. Russia is also an important – though not the only – supplier of oil and gas to Germany. These links mean that especially in Poland there is a suspicion that German policy yields to pressure from business circles for whom the best possible relations with Russia are important.

Germans are divided in their opinions as to whether Russia exerts economic pressure on their country. 44% of respondents perceive such pressure, 46% do not

perceive by 44%, while 46% do not see it. This division shows that many people are aware how much the German economy is linked with the Russian economy. However, whilst a certain percentage of respondents certainly evaluate these links negatively, fearing too great Russian influence, others do not necessarily assess these influences negatively, as pressure from

Russia. Probably in this case even more than in the case of other responses, the respondents' opinions depend on their personal situation – for example, an indirect or direct link with the Russian economy (e.g., through work for a German firm exporting to Russia).

⁷ In the same year, the trade balance with Poland was 78.5 billion euros. In 2014 the trade balance with Russia was 67.7 billion euros and with Poland 87.3 billion euros, which, in the case of relations with Russia, is a drop of 12%, and, in the case of Poland, an increase of 11.2%. See: Deutscher Handel mit Mittel- und Osteuropa, Statistisches Bundesamt / bearbeitet Ost-Ausschuss der Deutschen Wirtschaft.

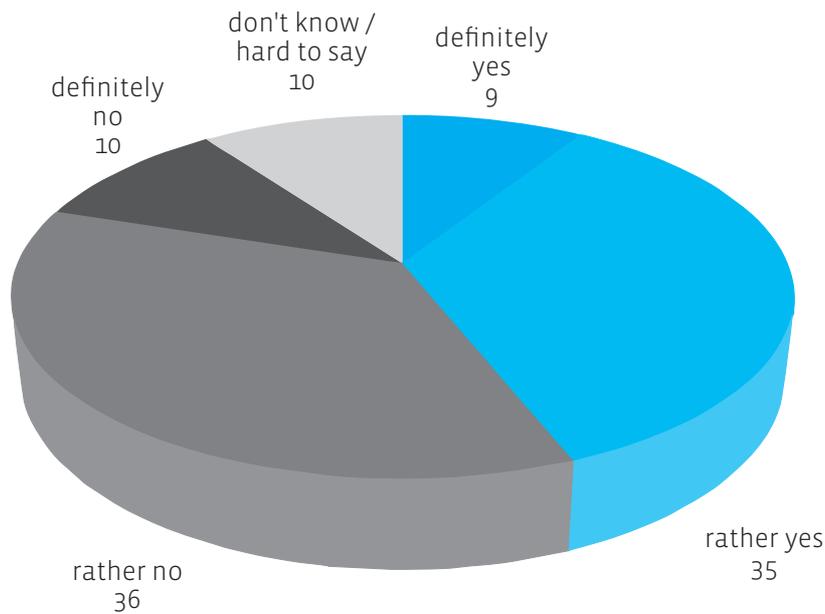


Figure 6.
Does Russia exert economic pressure on Germany? Opinions of Germans in 2015 (in %)

Source: Institute of Public Affairs / Bertelsmann Stiftung 2015

Polish and German government policy regarding the conflict

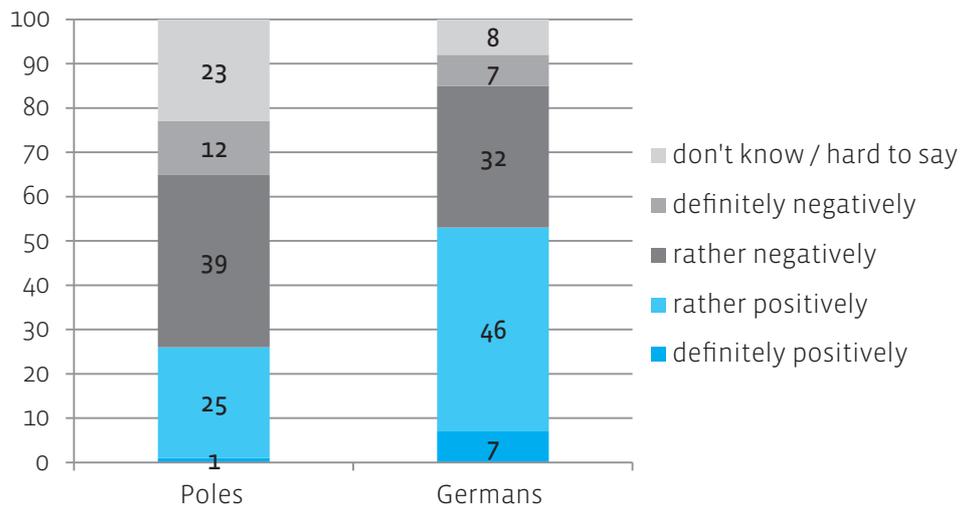
The assessments of the two societies concerning Russian responsibility for the conflict and Russian economic influence shape expectations that citizens have of the actions of their respective government in the face of the existing conflict. In this case, however, opinions are also influenced by internal political and cultural factors, as well as economic interests.

Poles are much more critical of the Polish government's policy regarding the Russia-Ukraine conflict than Germans are of their government's policy. Only every fourth Pole assesses the activities of the Polish government positively, while more than half of Polish respondents have a negative opinion (51%). In the case of the German respondents, it is the other way round, with 53% positive assessments and 39% negative ones. Both in Poland and in Germany, in the group of critics of the policies of their respective governments, there are doubtlessly those who regard government involvement in the solution of the conflict as too great and too small: those who would wish more pro-Russian activities, and those would like even severer policies towards Moscow.

Poles critically assess the actions of their own government in relation to the conflict (51%). The opinions of Germans on the conduct of the federal government are, on the other hand, mostly positive (53%)

Figure 7.
How do you assess the policy of your government regarding the Russia-Ukraine conflict? Opinions of Poles and Germans in 2015 (in %)

Source: Institute of Public Affairs / Bertelsmann Stiftung 2015



This thesis is confirmed by juxtaposing answers to this question with opinions on the subject of responsibility for the conflict. Persons blaming both sides of the conflict for the crisis rate the activity of the Polish government in this field decidedly more negatively. In this case, it may be assumed that these persons consider government policy as too pro-Ukrainian or anti-Russian. However, Poles who ascribe responsibility to Russia, relatively more frequently (than respondents in general) speak positively about the activities of the Polish government with respect to the conflict, although even in this group there is a significant percentage of critics of the government, who – as may be supposed – would like a more decisive reaction to Moscow’s activities.

In Germany there is also a correlation between opinions on the subject of the policies of the federal government in the matter of the crisis and assumptions regarding the party responsible for its outbreak. Respondents who positively assess the activities of the German authorities more often point to the guilt of Russia in the conflict (51% of them – compared to 39% of respondents in general – blame Russia), and those who criticize the government are keener to ascribe responsibility to both countries (51%, compared to 43% of respondents in general). This confirms the hypothesis that at least some of the people who criticize the government consider its policy towards Russia as too severe. At the same time, every fourth advocate of the hypothesis that Russia is responsible for the conflict criticizes the policy of their own government, probably for not being severe enough towards the aggressor.

The differences in assessments of government policies between the two societies might be partly explained by the different political cultures in the two countries. Poles are generally quite pessimistic and negatively (and very emotionally) oriented when it comes to their own politicians. For example, in the same survey, only every fourth respondent positively assessed the general work of the government, while two-thirds of respondents had a

negative opinion on this subject. Moreover, Polish political debates are very confrontational, and even regarding security issues there is no consensus among the main political parties. However, neither belonging to the electorates of particular political parties nor the degree of interest in politics significantly differentiates assessments of government policy concerning the conflict (although supporters of both PiS and SLD somewhat more frequently criticize the government for its Eastern policy). However, correlations are already clearly perceptible in the case of opinions on the subject of the work of the government. Persons giving the government generally good ratings, relatively more frequently have a positive attitude to its policy in the Russia-Ukraine conflict: 42% of people who rate the government highly also positively assess its activities towards the crisis, whilst 55% of respondents who have a negative opinion of the government also negatively perceive its activity in the face of the conflict. Similarly, those who speak negatively about the state of Russian-Polish relations have a negative opinion (about the government's approach to the conflict) relatively more frequently than respondents in general.

Germans generally rate the policy of their government highly. In a survey conducted in February by ARD Deutschlandtrend, 57% of respondents expressed satisfaction with the work of the government. Germany is currently governed by a Grand Coalition, which means that the government is supported by a relatively large number of people – supporters of the two largest parties. Hence, answers to the question about opinions on the activities of the government undertaken in the face of the Russia-Ukraine conflict are more relevant in the case of Germany because they are not burdened by the general criticism towards coalition politicians, as in the case of Poland. Also, the policy responses to the crisis are drawn up both by the Christian Democratic Chancellor and the Social Democratic Minister of Foreign Affairs, which may increase the number of supporters of the policy.

Germans supporting the policy of their government are undoubtedly divided into two groups. One of these groups contains people who are satisfied with a policy direction that is not endeavouring to intensify the conflict. The generally pacifist attitude of German public opinion means that Germans prefer peaceful solutions, making use of the power of dialogue – and the German government is currently applying such solutions. Hence west Germans relatively more frequently than east Germans assess government policy positively (54% and 46% respectively), since it is precisely in these (western) areas that the pacifist tradition has been promoted in the last decades. However, some Germans may perceive Chancellor Angela Merkel's policy as determined rather than confrontational – standing firmly on the side of sanctions. This government approach also meets with the support of persons who perceive Russia as being responsible for the conflict and want to maintain or increase sanctions.

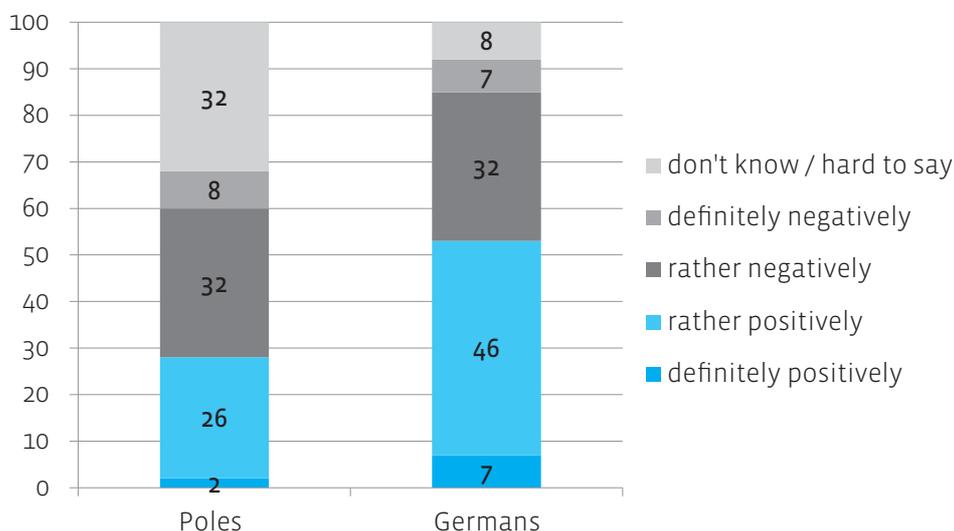
A similar percentage of respondents in both countries have a negative opinion of German government policy concerning the conflict. At the same time, almost two times more Germans than Poles assess German government policy in this context positively

Observing the Polish public debates on the crisis and the involvement of other countries, especially Germany, one might have the impression that Poles are very critical towards Germany's engagement in the conflict. Indeed, the survey shows that Poles assess the policy of the German government regarding the crisis more negatively than positively, and rate it worse than Germans themselves do. The percentage of German positive opinions on their country's policy is nearly twice as high as Polish opinions regarding Germany's policy (53% to 28%). However, the percentage of negative opinions in both countries is very comparable. At the same time, every third Polish respondent cannot give an answer to this question.

Three-quarters of Polish respondents hold identical (in both cases positive or in both cases negative) opinions about the activities of the Polish and German governments.

Figure 8. How do you assess the policies of the German federal government regarding the Russia-Ukraine conflict? Opinions of Poles and Germans in 2015 (in %)

Source: Institute of Public Affairs / Bertelsmann Stiftung 2015



In the case of Poles' assessments of the actions of the German government, the negative opinions most probably signify a conviction that Berlin is doing too little to resolve the conflict, and that its actions are too pro-Russian or too soft on Russia. Such an interpretation may seem justified if one takes into account the numerous Polish media reports in which Germany is accused of too soft an approach to Vladimir Putin's policies. In reality, however, often this interpretation is based on statements of former German politicians who today, neither play an important role in the German public debate nor have any influence on decisions made by the government. Polish listeners also often misunderstand statements of members of the German government, who – for domestic political purposes – use different rhetoric to that used in Poland, but convey a message that is substantively similar to Poland's stance.⁸

8 A.Łada, *Ostpolitik*, Op.cit.

In this context, the small number of respondents who rate German policy highly is not surprising. Such an interpretation is also confirmed by the fact that positive opinions are held more often (than by respondents in general) by persons who declare an interest in politics and who are thus – it may be supposed – also better informed about the German position. Finally, negative assessments of German actions may be linked with traditional Polish fears about German dominance in Europe and its consequences for Poland. Actions undertaken by Merkel together with the French president, but without the participation of leaders of other countries, including Poland, were strongly criticised in Warsaw. The leading role of Germany in the European reaction to the conflict in the East is in Poland perceived precisely as a symptom of the general strengthening of Germany’s position in the EU. Poles, meanwhile, do not agree whether the strengthening of the German position in Europe is beneficial for Poland or not.⁹

Russian influence on Polish and German policy

Opinions on the governments’ policies towards the conflict are linked with debates on the subject of Russian influence exerted on given countries. The actions of the pro-Russian lobby as well as direct economic links with Russia mean that the actions of a given government may be considered – to a greater or lesser extent – to have been undertaken under the influence of pressure from Moscow. Different experiences resulting from Poland’s and Germany’s long relations with Russia, the strength of links with Russia, and the intensity of propaganda mean that Poles and Germans differ in their assessment of Russia’s influence on their countries’ policies. Half of the Poles

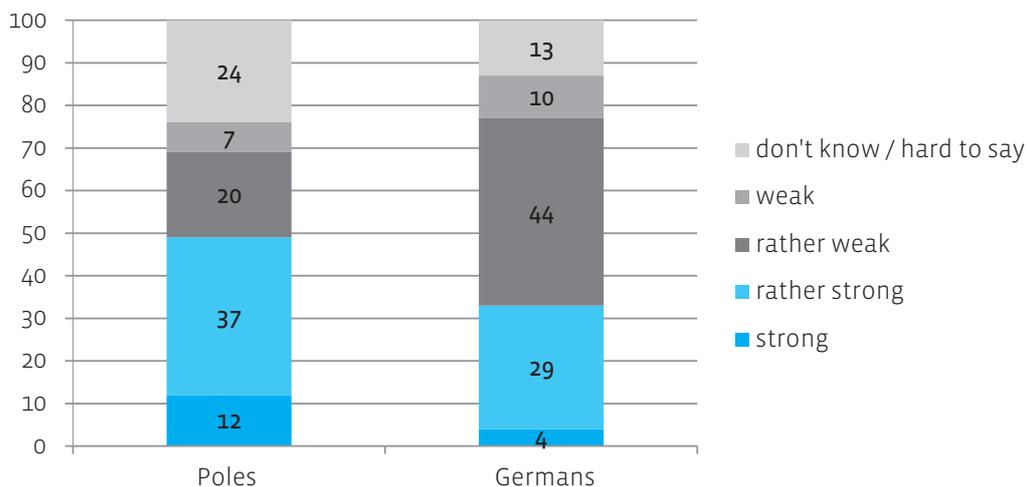


Figure 9. How strong is the influence of the Russian government on the policies of your government? Opinions of Poles and Germans in 2015 (in %)

Source: Institute of Public Affairs / Bertelsmann Stiftung 2015

⁹ 38% of Polish respondents are convinced of the benefits, whereas 35% of respondents consider that it would be neither beneficial nor detrimental for Poland. 17% of respondents see disadvantages. See: A.Łada, *Barometr Polska – Niemcy 2015. Polacy o polsko-niemieckim partnerstwie we wspólnej Europie / Deutsch-polnisches Barometer 2015. Polnische Ansichten zur deutsch-polnischen Partnerschaft im gemeinsamen Europa (Poland-Germany Barometer 2015. Poles on the Polish-German Partnership in a Common Europe)*, Institute of Public Affairs, Warsaw 2015

taking part in the survey think the influence of the Russian government on the policy of the Polish government is strong (49%), while only 33% of Germans see such an influence on their country's government. Twice as many Germans as Poles do not believe in such a strong influence (54% to 27%). There is also a significantly large group of Poles – every fourth respondent – who do not have any opinion on this question (24%).

As in the case of assessments of government policy, a significant fraction of respondents who are convinced about the influence of the Russian government on Polish policy are supporters of stronger action against Russia. And likewise, two-thirds of advocates of imparting military aid to Ukraine are convinced about such an influence. Similarly, critics of government policy are more frequently convinced about the influence of Russians on this policy. There is thus a statistically significant correlation between criticism of government policy, a conviction about Russia's influence on this policy, and support for more decisive action supporting Ukraine against Russian aggression. A strong influence is also perceived relatively more frequently by those who see Russia as a military threat to Poland.

In Germany, there is the same correlation as in Poland – respondents who perceive a military threat to their country from Russia also see the influence of the Russian government on German government policy relatively more frequently than respondents in general. Residents of west Germany (35%) perceive a strong Russian influence on the German government relatively more frequently than residents of east Germany (29%).

In Poland, there is a common opinion in public debates that Germany is under Russian pressure because of their strong economic ties and Russian propaganda activities in the country. Indeed, survey results show that 39% of Poles asked about this issue believe the Russian government has a strong influence on German policy. Still, that number does not differ very much from the percentage of Germans (33%) claiming so, and is smaller than the percentage of Poles observing a strong Russian influence on the Polish government. It is also comparable with the number of those who think Russia's influence on the German government is weak. However, the number of Poles who do not perceive such an influence on the German government is much smaller than the number of Germans expressing this opinion.

Respondents from Poland who perceive a strong Russian influence on the German government are more likely (52%, compared to 40% of all respondents) to negatively assess German government policy towards the conflict.

In conclusion, there is a significant (but not a majority) group amongst the Polish public that is convinced that Russia influences the policies of the German government, but at the same time – which may be something of a surprise – many more Poles are convinced about such an influence on government policy in Warsaw.

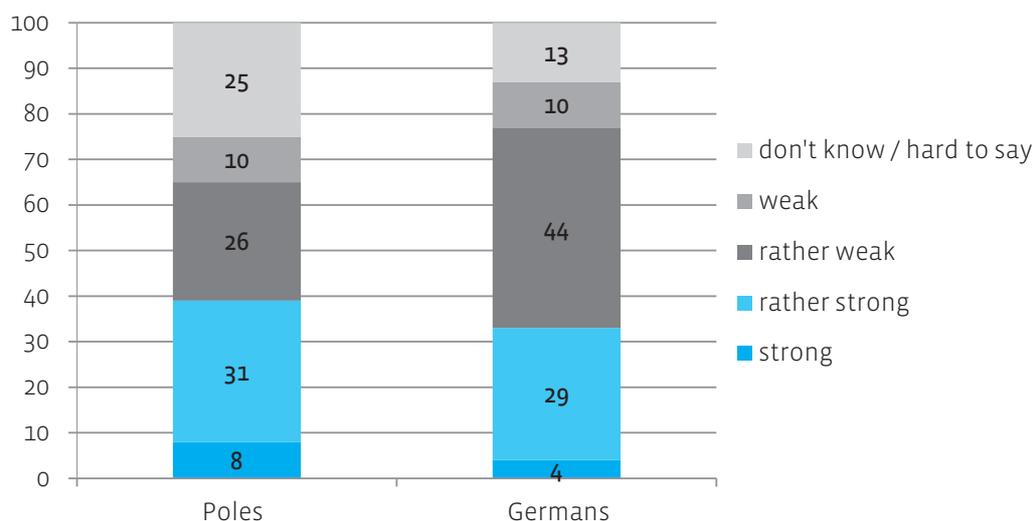


Figure 10. How strong is the influence of the Russian government on the policies of the German federal government? Opinions of Poles and Germans in 2015 (in %)

Source: Institute of Public Affairs / Bertelsmann Foundation 2015

Differences of interests in Eastern policy

Eastern policy has nearly always been perceived as dividing Poland and Germany. Poles mention it as one of the main problems in current Polish-German relations.¹⁰ In recent years, Polish and German public opinion have drawn closer, and the two governments have conducted policies that are more and more along the same lines. This has been noticed by both societies, which in 2013 claimed that Poland and Germany have common interests in their policy towards Russia. In that year, 43% of Poles and 52% of Germans surveyed shared this opinion. Since then, the situation has changed. Polish and German public opinion have drifted apart and they no longer seem to perceive a common voice in their government policies.

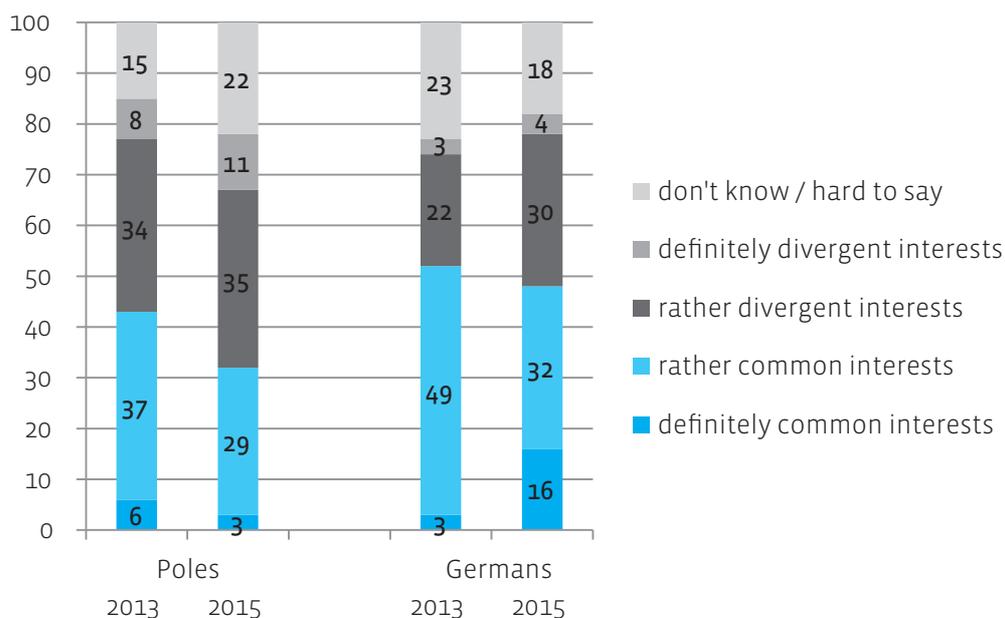
Germans are more convinced about their countries' common interests with Poland vis-à-vis Russia than are Poles (48% to 32%). The largest share of respondents in Poland (46%) does not believe that the countries have common interests, while in Germany this opinion is held by a smaller share of those sampled (34%). However, in both countries the percentage of such sentiments has increased (in Poland by 4 percentage points; in Germany by 9), while the group of respondents believing in common interests has noticeably decreased (in Poland by 11 percentage points; in Germany by 10 percentage points).

Poles less often than Germans perceive common Polish-German interests in policy towards Russia

¹⁰ A.Łada, *Barometr Polska-Niemcy 2015 / Deutsch-Polnisches Barometer 2015* (Poland-Germany Barometer 2015). Op.cit

Figure 11. Do Poland and Germany have common or divergent interests in their policy towards Russia? Opinions of Poles and Germans in 2013 and 2015 (in %)

Source: Institute of Public Affairs 2013 as well as Institute of Public Affairs/ Bertelsmann Stiftung 2013, 2015



Polish scepticism concerning common interests in the Eastern policy stems from several reasons. This issue has traditionally divided Poles and Germans. Therefore, when faced with media reports that emphasise these differences, Poles are inclined to believe in the lack of Polish-German agreement in this area. However, persons interested in politics see the countries' common interests relatively more frequently than respondents in general – probably due to greater knowledge about the positions and cooperation of both countries. The low assessment is also a consequence of omitting Poland from the talks conducted with representatives of Russia and Ukraine. The so-called Normandy format was received very negatively in Poland as a symbol of Poland's exclusion from activities in an area directly linked with its interests. Both of the western countries leading the talks were simultaneously accused in Polish debates of taking a too soft stance towards Moscow and yielding to its wishes, which is regarded as contrary to the Polish approach to the conflict. Hence the drop in the percentage of Poles perceiving Polish-German common interests.

The absence of Poland during talks in the Normandy format greatly agitated and polarized Polish discussions on ways of solving the conflict. Many commentators considered the absence of Poland at the table as a defeat for Polish Eastern and European policy and as evidence of the divergence of Polish and German views. This is confirmed by the strong correlations between responses concerning common interests and assessments of the activities of the Polish government concerning the conflict. Most Poles who positively assess government policy are convinced of Polish-German closeness in the matter of Russia (68% compared to 32% of all respondents). In turn, 69% (compared to 46% of all respondents) of those giving the government a negative rating in its current Eastern policy consider the countries' interests

as divergent. However, there is no significant correlation between the assessment of common policies of both countries and assessment of the influence of Russian authorities on the policy of the German government.

In turn in Germany, the general public, as already mentioned, are less knowledgeable about the development of events in the east of Ukraine and about the situation in that region. Additionally, the public knows relatively little about the Polish stance in the matter of the conflict, since generally Germans' knowledge about Poland is not great, and media reports about Polish policy are currently meagre. In the context of the Russia-Ukraine conflict, Poland is rarely mentioned. If it is mentioned, it is usually depicted as a country seeking to radically toughen policy towards Russia. Here common interests can be perceived by those Germans who are also in favour of a tough policy towards Russia and are counting on the fact that Germany will be supported in such a stance by other countries. Persons who scrupulously follow government policy and are interested in Poland may understand that in fact Warsaw and Berlin are close to each other in eastern matters. It is precisely these respondents who constitute the group claiming that both countries have decidedly common interests (16%), which has increased significantly since the last survey.

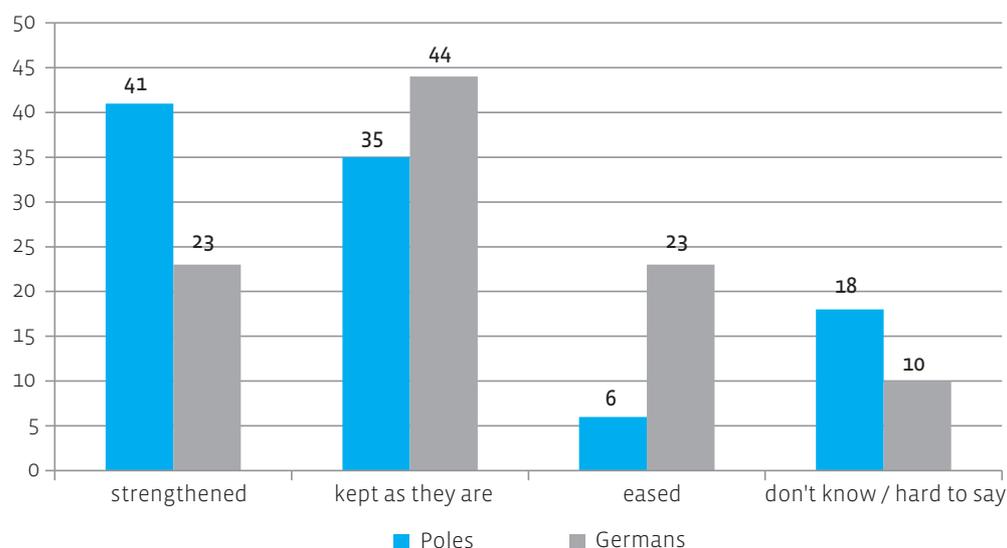
Expected reactions to the crisis

Although – as we have already noted – many Poles believe that Poland and Germany are greatly divided when it comes to what policy to adopt towards Russia, the survey shows there is only limited support for reducing sanctions against Russia in both countries. The majority of both Poles and Germans favour other solutions: either introducing stiffer sanctions or maintaining them at their present level. However, the percentage of Germans who are in favour of easing sanctions is exactly the same as it is for those strengthening economic measures against Russia (23% each), while nearly seven times more Polish respondents would opt to strengthen sanctions against Russia rather than ease them. In the German case, the largest group of respondents would like the sanctions to be kept as they are (44%), while the largest group of respondents in Poland wants to strengthen them (41%). Four times as many German respondents as Polish ones are keen to ease the sanctions.

Poles and Germans are against reducing sanctions against Russia

Figure 12.
Should the current sanctions imposed by the European Union against Russia be strengthened, kept as they are, or eased? Opinions of Poles and Germans in 2015 (in %)

Source: Institute of Public Affairs/Bertelsmann Stiftung 2015



The position of both societies on this issue is influenced by numerous factors. A number of economic groups advocate lifting or moderating sanctions, however, there is far less support for reduced sanctions in Poland than in Germany. According to data from the Committee on Eastern European Economic Relations (Ostausschuss der Deutschen Wirtschaft), Germany's balance of trade with Russia was down by 12% in 2014 in relation to 2013. Exports to Russia shrank by 18%.¹¹ Such exports accounted for around 2.6% of total German overseas trade in 2014, which is down by 0.6 percentage points in relation to 2013. By way of comparison, German exports to the EU make up approximately 58% of the country's total exports.¹² Meanwhile, in Poland's case, it is estimated that despite their negative effects, the sanctions have not hit the economy particularly hard. Polish exports to Russia have dipped by around one percentage point, falling from 5.3% to 4.3% of total overseas trade. By way of comparison Polish exports to EU countries account for 77% of the country's overall exports.¹³ In both Germany's and Poland's case, exports have suffered as a result of the West's sanctions against Russia and the latter's counter-sanctions, as well as from the general problems affecting the Russian economy stemming from, among other factors, falling petroleum prices on world markets.

Attitudes towards the sanctions are also influenced by Russian propaganda, which is, as currently even many German media outlets admit, a powerful force in Germany (for example, the vast number of pro-Russian comments drafted by Russian propagandists that can be found under texts

¹¹ While sanctions are not the only reason for this result, they are often the most stressed factor. Deutscher Handel mit Mittel- und Osteuropa, Statistisches Bundesamt / bearbeitet Ost-Ausschuss der Deutschen Wirtschaft.

¹² Statistisches Bundesamt, Zusammenfassende Übersichten für den Außenhandel (Vorläufige Ergebnisse), Fachserie 7 Reihe 1, Statistisches Bundesamt, Wiesbaden 2015.

¹³ Central Statistical Office of Poland, Foreign Trade in General and By Country I – XII 2015, Preliminary results, Warsaw, 11.02.2015.

on many websites). In addition, many of those voicing an opinion on this issue, especially on the radio or television, are calling for sanctions to be eased. The very timing of the survey itself has also affected the answers given, coming as it did just after the conclusion of the Minsk II agreement, which in Germany had raised hopes of an end to the conflict. By contrast, few people in Poland believe there will be a positive turnaround in the situation and there is greater support in the country for stepping up sanctions or maintaining them at their current levels. The mood clearly changed in Germany after the murder of opposition leader Boris Nemtsov, which came as a shock to the German public and made many people reflect on the need for a tougher stance against Russia. As was mentioned above, in Poland's case, the murder of the regime's leading critic only reinforced the view that Russia is a country in which there is little respect for the rule of law. Hence, the crime did not have such a great impact on Poles' attitudes, including with regard to the sanctions.

In Poland, support for tougher sanctions was stronger than average among people who said they were interested in politics, who assessed Polish-Russian relations as poor, who had a positive view of the Polish government's policy on the crisis, who believed that Russia was solely responsible for the crisis, and who regarded that country as a military threat.

In percentage terms, support among Germans for tougher sanctions was comparable in both the east and west of the country. When it came to the question of easing sanctions or keeping them as they are, the respondents were more polarised in their views. More respondents in the east of the country than in the west were in favour of easing sanctions (36% compared with 19%, respectively), and were less keen on maintaining the status quo (34% compared with 46%, respectively). Furthermore, among respondents who had a negative view of the German government's policy on the conflict in Ukraine, significant regional differences were also evident. More people in the east of the country support the idea of easing sanctions than in the west (54% compared with 31%, respectively). Moreover, fewer people in the east are favourably inclined towards keeping sanctions as they are (23% as opposed to 39% in the west).

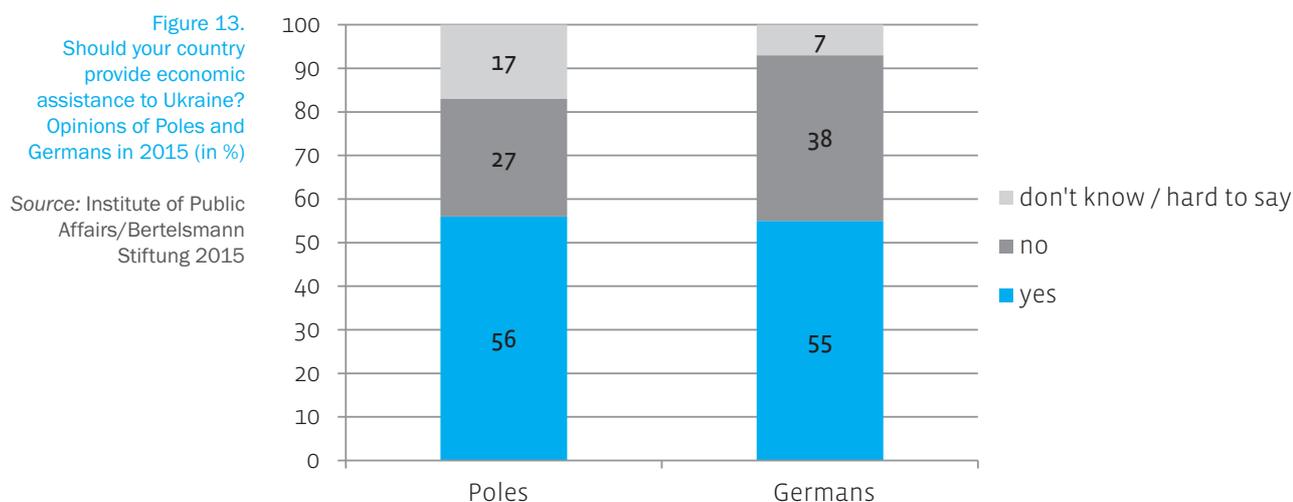
On the other hand, in the east of the country no correlation was observed between respondents' opinions on German-Russian relations and their views on the future of sanctions. However, the views of respondents living in the west of the country regarding the character of such relations was significant: while most respondents admittedly prefer to keep the status quo, a high percentage of those who viewed relations with Russia as bad want stiffer sanctions (27% compared with 13% of those who view relations with Russia positively).

Support for Ukraine

Poles and Germans expressed similar levels of support for providing economic aid to Ukraine

Besides actions against Russia, government policy on the conflict in Eastern Ukraine also includes measures aimed at providing support for Ukraine. This approach may take a variety of forms – ranging from economic and political steps to military action.

Poles and Germans are united in their belief that their countries should provide economic assistance to Ukraine (56% and 55%). Still, the percentage of Germans who are against such assistance is 11 percentage points higher than the percentage of Poles. There are twice as many Poles supporting the idea of economic aid as there are opposed to such assistance.



In view of the fact that Poles regard Russia as clearly to blame for the conflict, and that the public debate in Poland – in terms of statements made by politicians and experts in the media – very much leans towards Ukraine, with many expressing solidarity with it, the fact that 56% of respondents favour economic support should not come as a surprise. In this context, it is worth noting that the Polish public is generally conservative when it comes to helping others. Poles still perceive themselves as a developing country that cannot afford major financial commitments to countries in need. In addition, since Poles' knowledge of foreign policy is relatively limited, they are often unable to accurately assess how much aid is needed. People who in the survey admitted having little interest in politics were as a result unable to say whether Ukraine should receive support or not. In turn, when we compare the questions about Poles' support for their eastern neighbour and how they view the state of the Polish economy, a correlation can be seen between respondents' desire to provide Ukraine with help and their assessment of the country's economic situation. Those Poles who believe the Polish economy is growing are more willing to provide Ukraine with economic assistance. Also,

those respondents who have a positive view of both the government’s overall policy and its actions in relation to the Russia-Ukraine conflict are more inclined to support the idea of Polish economic aid for Ukraine. Respondents who blame Russia for the conflict and perceive that country as a military threat are relatively more likely to hold this view than respondents as a whole.

As the strongest economy in Europe, Germany is a country which often helps others in need. Germany provides a relatively high level of development aid and boasts a variety of advanced aid systems. On the one hand, aid for poor countries is regarded as a moral obligation, but on the other, it is seen as an ever increasing burden. The country’s current willingness to provide economic help also stems from the fact that in the context of the present financial crisis in the European Union, opinions voicing the need to help others have been heard very frequently in Germany. Just as in the case of the Poles, those Germans who believe that Russia is responsible for the crisis and who also support the federal government’s policy on the conflict are relatively more keen on providing aid than respondents as a whole. Those respondents who back the idea of stiffer sanctions or leaving them at their present level are also more in favour of supporting Ukraine (economically).

On the other hand, neither Poles (56%) nor Germans (82%) want to send military support to help Ukraine. Military assistance is backed by one in every four Poles surveyed (25%) and by only one in every ten German respondents (10%).

Neither Poles nor Germans want to provide Ukraine with military aid

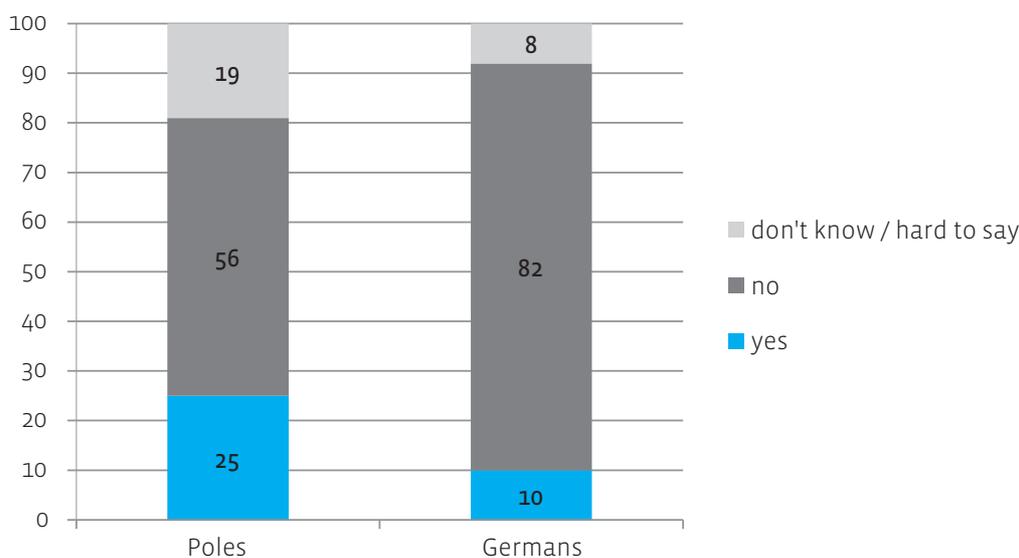


Figure 14. Should your country provide assistance to the Ukrainian army, for instance, by supplying equipment, weapons, or military training? Opinions of Poles and Germans in 2015 (in %)

Source: Institute of Public Affairs/Bertelsmann Stiftung 2015

The reasons for this response vary somewhat, depending on the country. Poles, fearing the military threat posed by Russia, do not want to aggravate the conflict and provoke Russia (“don’t poke the bear”). However, this attitude is also probably due to their reluctance to bear the financial costs of such an operation. Such support is opposed more often than not by those respondents who expressed an interest in politics, who have a negative view both of

Poland's relations with Russia and the Polish government's policy on the conflict, and also – which is important – perceive Russia as a military threat. Those who think both sides are responsible for the conflict also do not favour this form of support.

Among Polish respondents who expressed an opinion on possible economic and military support for Ukraine (760 out of 1000 respondents), 30% were in favour of both types of aid and 32% were against providing any form of assistance, while 36% were positively inclined towards the idea of economic help, but were against any military aid. Two percent of respondents support the idea of military aid alone.

In turn, Germans are for the most part against the idea of sending military personnel or weapons outside the country. Bearing in mind the pacifism of the Germans (as was mentioned earlier), their perception of the conflict as a local problem, and their focussing to a similar extent on other threats, they do not see a need to commit any resources of their country to operations that are – even only partly – military in character. Their reluctance to provoke Russia, however, certainly plays an important role in their answers to this question. On the other hand, differences between the east and west of the country are also evident here.

However, those German respondents who mainly blame Russia for the conflict are more often inclined than respondents in general to support the idea of sending military aid to Ukraine (18%, compared to 10% overall).

Among German respondents who express an opinion on both economic and military aid (854 out of 1000 respondents), 10% support both types of action, 41% are against either form, 47% are in favour of economic aid, but opposed to military assistance, and 2% favour providing purely military aid.

Any support given to Ukraine, regardless of whether it is economic or military in nature, can be perceived by Russia in different ways, so we can expect mainly critical or even downright aggressive reactions. In particular, support for the Ukrainian army may be seen as a provocation. Respondents are aware of this risk. When asked about whether their country should still support Ukraine even at the risk of worsening relations with Russia, a little over

As many Poles (37%) as Germans (36%) are in favour of helping Ukraine, even if it is at the cost of damaging relations with Russia

one-third of the respondents in each country were decidedly in favour of such an idea. The percentages are very similar in both countries. More than one-third of both Poles (37%) and Germans (36%) share the opinion that their country should support Ukraine even if this results in a deterioration in relations with Russia. However, half of all the German respondents are against such support (51%), while in Poland both groups – supporters and opponents – are of comparable size. Poles are somewhat divided in this respect, and it is noteworthy that every fourth Pole has no opinion on this issue.

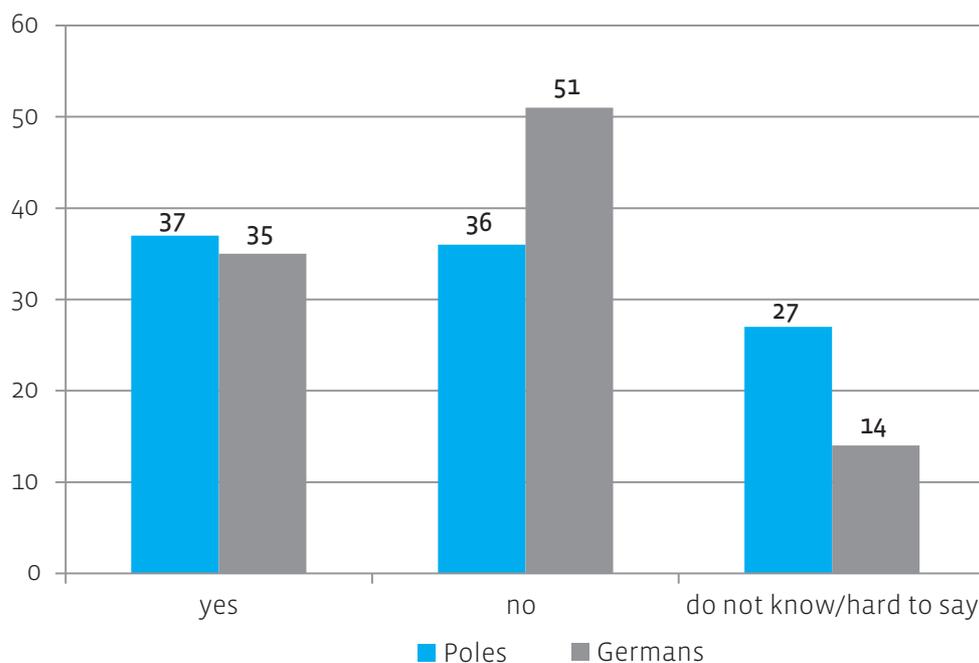


Figure 15. Should your country support Ukraine during the Russian-Ukrainian conflict even if it leads to a deterioration in relations between your country and Russia? Opinions of Poles and Germans in 2015 (in %)

Source: Institute of Public Affairs/Bertelsmann Stiftung 2015

Poles who feel that Russia poses a military threat are more willing to help Ukraine even at the price of worsening relations with Moscow (42%, compared to 24% of those who do not feel that Russia poses a military threat). Also, those who regard Russia as primarily responsible for the conflict look favourably upon the idea of providing aid even if it risks further damaging relations with Russia – most probably because they see relations between the countries as already being very poor. And indeed, respondents with negative perceptions of Polish-Russian relations are on average more willing to support Ukraine. Such support is expressed relatively more frequently by those who have a positive view of the Polish government’s actions in relation to the conflict.

Just as in Poland, those Germans who blame Russia for the conflict are more willing to risk further damaging relations with Russia by lending assistance to Ukraine. Also, those who feel Russia poses a military threat are more frequently willing to support Ukraine, even at the cost of worsening relations with Russia (43%, compared to 34% of those who feel that Russia poses no military threat).

In both countries, a positive correlation exists between supporting Ukraine despite the negative consequences it could have for relations with Russia and support for sanctions and economic or military aid. Those people who support the idea of providing aid in general are more inclined to support stiffer sanctions, economic help, and providing the Ukrainian army with aid than those people who are against assisting Ukraine.

When considering why so many Poles and Germans are against providing Ukraine with assistance if it provokes Russia, it is crucial to bear in mind the general debate going on in both countries on how Ukraine should be helped.

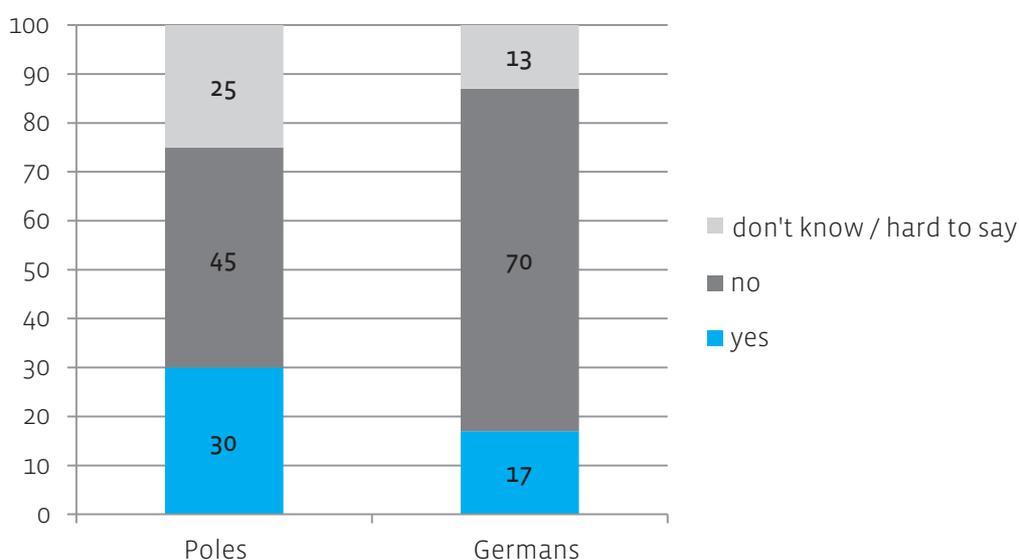
Some respondents may have understood “support” to mean direct military support, which is rejected by the majority (see the question above).

One way of expressing political support for Ukraine, which at the same time would send a very real and concrete signal to the Ukrainian people, is for the EU to abolish visas for Ukrainians. Poles and Germans generally share similar views on abolishing visas for Ukrainian citizens. Large numbers of respondents in both countries are against the idea. However, while in the German case there is a clear majority against doing away with visa requirements (70%), in Poland only 45% are opposed to this proposal. Although fewer Poles support a visa-free regime for Ukrainians (30%) than oppose this idea, the percentage is still higher than in the case of Germans who would like the visa requirement lifted (17%).

The majority of Germans and the largest group of Polish respondents are against abolishing visas for Ukrainians

Figure 16. Should the European Union abolish visa requirements for Ukrainians? Opinions of Poles and Germans in 2015 (in %)

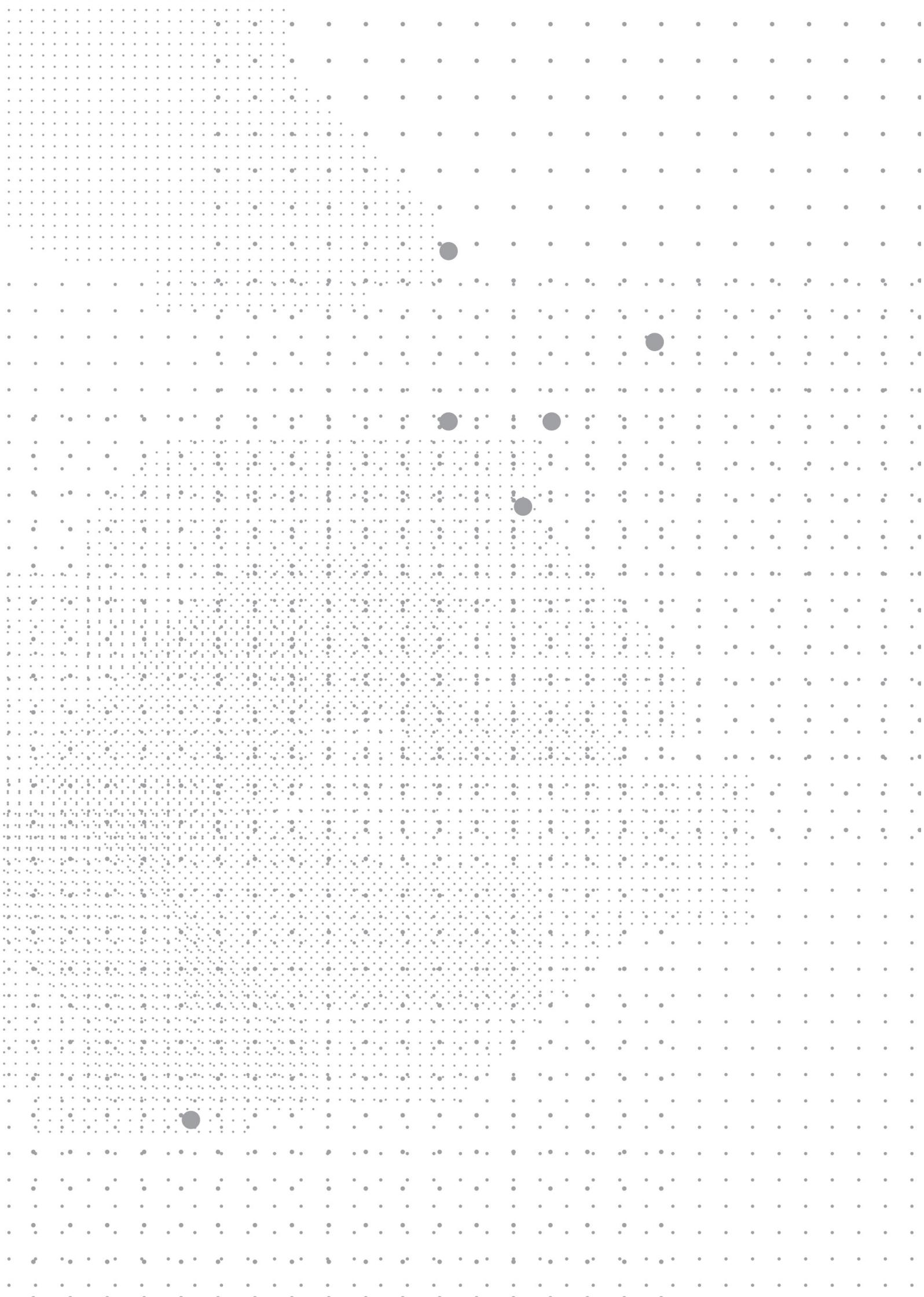
Source: Institute of Public Affairs/Bertelsmann Stiftung 2015



The negative views in both countries towards abolishing visas are surely largely due to ignorance in both societies as to what is meant by visa-free travel (confirmed, in particular, in the case of the Polish respondents by the fact that one in every four was unable to give an opinion on this subject). In reality, it ensures Ukrainians easier entry into the European Union as tourists or on business for short stays of up to three months. Permission to settle in the country or seek employment is an entirely different matter. We can assume that the fears of Poles and Germans are due to the possible influx of large numbers of Ukrainians demanding asylum (the number of internal refugees from regions affected by the conflict in Ukraine stands at over a million). Added to this are fears of large numbers of economic migrants on Poland’s and Germany’s labour markets. It is surely because of all these factors that so many Poles and Germans are opposed to the idea of eliminating visas for Ukrainians.

The idea of doing away with visas is favoured in Poland by those who regard Russia as responsible for the conflict as well as by those respondents who have a positive view of the Polish government's policy on the crisis in Ukraine. In addition, the idea of abolishing visas is backed decidedly more frequently (than by other respondents) by those who consider that Ukraine should receive aid even at the cost of worsening relations with Russia.

The attitude of Germans is probably influenced by the many debates in that country on the subject of immigrants (currently these debates focus particularly on immigrants from Kosovo, who do not need a visa, and refugees coming from the Southern Mediterranean due to the conflicts in this region), the settlement of foreigners in Germany, and their taking up of work there. The average German citizen is currently faced with the largest number of refugees coming to the country since the war in the Balkans at the beginning of the 1990s. Allowing Ukrainians visa-free travel is something that thus greatly alarms ordinary Germans. Hence, there are no differences in this case among Germans regardless of who they believe is guilty of the conflict, their general desire to provide help for Ukraine (even at the cost of making relations with Russia worse), or whether they are from the east or the west of the country.



Russians on relations with Poland and Germany and the Russia-Ukraine conflict



Introduction

Russia's policy towards Ukraine – the annexation of Crimea and the role of the Kremlin in the conflict in the east of Ukraine – has rendered null and void the Polish-German-Russian rapprochement, which had been taking place, for example, through the Kaliningrad Triangle initiative. The Polish and German governments have defied the Kremlin by supporting Ukraine in the process of reforms as well as Ukraine's right to preserve its territorial integrity. Both the Polish and German governments have played a leading role in the imposition of EU sanctions to punish the Putin administration for its actions in Ukraine.

Surveys carried out by Moscow's Levada Center, for example, show that the current Russian authorities (especially President Putin personally) and their conduct in the international arena enjoy the support of a large part of Russian society. The extent to which the citizens identify with the Kremlin's current policy has an influence on how Russians perceive the nature of Russia's relations with other countries, especially the current and future policy towards Ukraine. At the same time, the Kremlin propaganda, which misrepresents the nature of the conflict and conceals Russian direct military involvement, remains crucial for maintaining social support for the government.

State of relations with Poland, Germany, and Ukraine

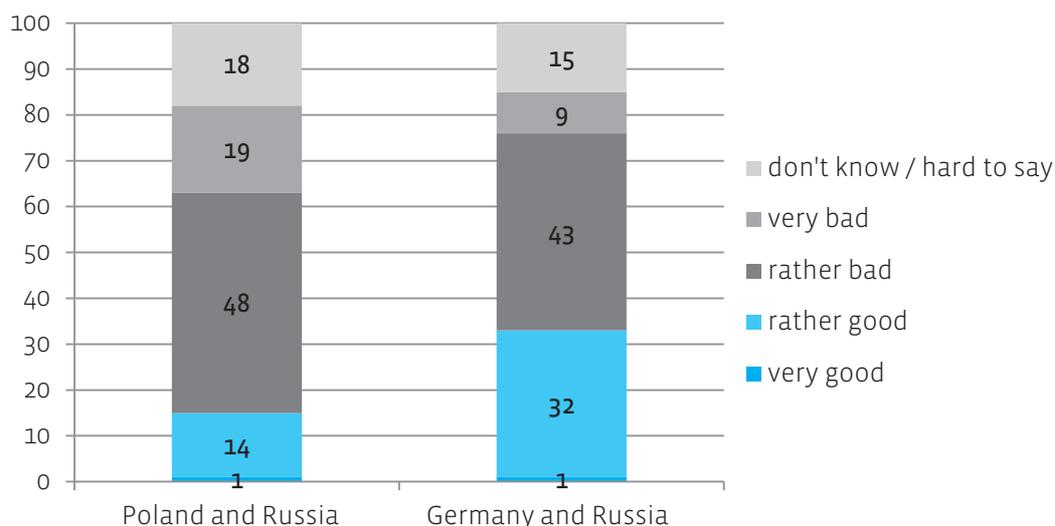
Most Russians negatively assess the current state of relations with Poland and Germany. The percentage of respondents rating relations with Poland as bad or very bad is, however, clearly greater than in the case of relations with Germany. Two-thirds of respondents (67%) hold this opinion regarding the relations with Poland, whereas relations with Germany are perceived as bad by only 52% of Russians.

A clear difference in the assessment of relations between Russia and Poland and between Russia and Germany can also be seen among respondents who perceive these relations as good or very good. One in three (33%) respondents still believes that relations between Russia and Germany are positive. In the case of Poland, this percentage is only 15%.

More than half of Russians assess relations with Germany (52%) and Poland (67%) as bad

Figure 17. How would you describe the current relations between Poland, Germany, and Russia? Opinions of Russians in 2015 (in %)

Source: Institute of Public Affairs/ Bertelsmann Stiftung 2015



Regarding the assessment of Russia's relations with Poland and Germany, the views expressed by residents of Moscow stand out. When assessing relations with Germany, residents of Moscow are evenly divided (48% each) into those who consider relations as good and those who perceive relations with Germany as bad. When it comes to relations with Poland, a quarter of the residents in Moscow consider them to be good, and as many as 70% of respondents think the opposite. The difference in the responses noted in Moscow and the rest of the country are caused by, inter alia, the fact that amongst the Muscovites there was a decidedly smaller percentage of people who were not able to answer the question about the state of relations between Russia and Germany/Poland. In the case of relations with Germany, this percentage was 4% (in comparison with 15% of the general population); in the case of Poland, it was 5% (in comparison with 18% of the general population).

A comparison of the results of this survey with results of earlier surveys shows how significantly the perception of Poland, and even more so of Germany, has changed in the eyes of Russians. In the case of the assessment of Poland, a comparison with an IPA study published in 2011¹³ is indicative. The comparison is not exact because in the 2011 study, respondents – when assessing relations with Poland – could also choose to respond that relations were “neutral” (“neither good nor bad”). It was precisely this answer that was chosen by the majority at the time: 63% of respondents. However, what is particularly significant is that in this study, positive answers were indicated more often than negative answers. In 2011, the IPA survey revealed that Polish-Russian relations were regarded as good by 21% of Russians and as bad by 16%. Changes concerning the perceptions of Russian-German relations stand out even more. In 2011, Russian respondents mostly indicated that relations

¹³ G. Gromadzki, J. Kucharczyk, A. Łada, C. Ochmann, Y. Taran, Ł. Wenerski, *Ludzie – historia – polityka / Menschen – Geschichte – Politik*. Op.cit.

with Germany were good. Two-thirds of Russians surveyed (66%) chose such a reply, even though it was also possible to choose the answer “neutral”.

It is obvious that in the eyes of Russians the deterioration of relations with Poland and Germany was brought about by the countries’ strong opposition to the Russian annexation of Crimea and their strong opposition to the current Russian policy regarding the armed conflict in Eastern Ukraine. Other factors may also have had an impact on the negative assessment of Polish-Russian relations, such as the active presence of Poles (including Polish politicians) at the *Euromaidan*, which the Kremlin propaganda presented as an externally created movement that led to the fall of the legitimate president and government of Ukraine. It can also be noticed that sharp anti-Polish rhetoric is omnipresent in the Russian media, where the Poles are often described as key allies of the United States in Europe, performing tasks entrusted to them by the USA.

Negative assessment regarding relations with Germany may be rooted in the awareness of the critical role of Germany in the ongoing debate about how Europe should react to Russian policy towards Ukraine. They also reflect a general feeling that the events of the last year have undone the many years spent building good relations with German partners.

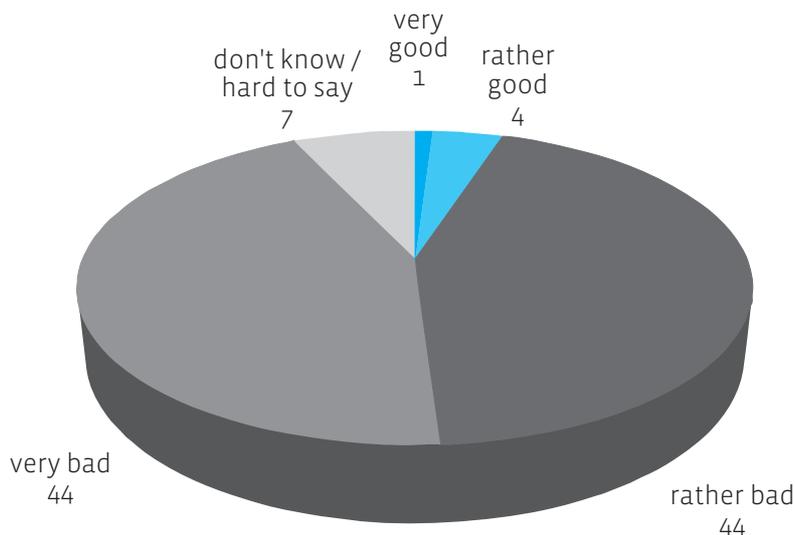
One-third of Russians, as already mentioned, still positively perceive Russian-German relations. This group probably includes those who perceive Germany as having a significant role not only as a leader in the EU, but also as the main mediator on the part of Western countries. In this sense, for some Russians Germany seems to be for some Russians a reliable partner with whom a compromise can be reached, which cannot be said, for example, about such countries as the United States or Poland. What is more, the still strong economic ties between many German and Russian business entities probably affect this perception of Germany for a part of Russian society. In these business relations, politics is often sidelined.

The *Euromaidan* revolution, the annexation of Crimea, the conflict which is now taking place in Eastern Ukraine, and the accompanying tensions between the authorities in Kiev and Moscow have a huge influence on how Russians perceive their country’s relations with Ukraine. Russian society is almost unanimous in its assessment of relations with its neighbour – 88% assess Russian-Ukrainian relations as bad. Half of those in this group consider these relations to be rather bad, and the remainder see them as very bad. Only 5% of respondents are of the opposite view (good or very good relations), and 7% were unable to give an opinion as to whether relations between Russia and Ukraine are good or bad.

Russian society is almost unanimous in its assessment of relations with its neighbour – 88% rate Russian-Ukrainian relations as bad

Figure 18.
How would you describe today's relations between Ukraine and Russia? Opinions of Russians in 2015 (in %)

Source: Institute of Public Affairs / Bertelsmann Stiftung 2015



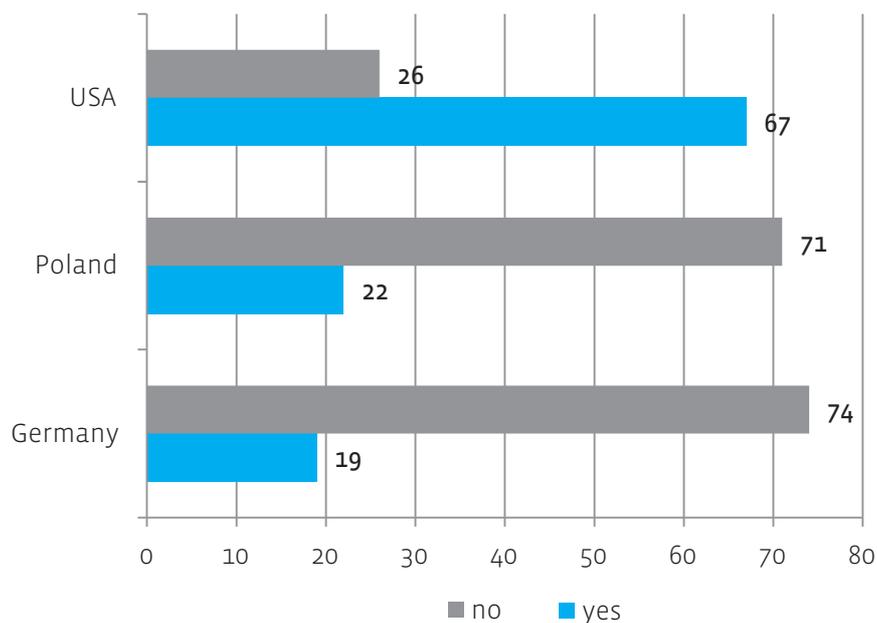
The vast majority of Russians consider that neither Poland (71%) nor Germany (74%) constitutes a threat to Russia

Although a majority of Russians rate relations with Poland and Germany negatively, this does not mean that the respondents believe these countries pose a potential threat to the security of Russia. Most Russians believe that neither Poland (71%) nor Germany (74%) constitutes a threat to Russia.

Amongst residents of Moscow, this percentage is significantly higher – 85% when it comes to Germany, and 79% in the case of Poland.

Figure 19.
Does the following country pose a threat to Russia? Opinions of Russians in 2015 (in %)

Source: Institute of Public Affairs / Bertelsmann Stiftung 2015



At this point, it is worth again citing the IPA survey from 2011 in which Russians were asked whether Poland or Germany could in the future pose a threat to Russia. In spite of the fact that relations between Russia and these countries were at the time perceived as being much better, the percentage of persons who perceived a threat was not lower, but very similar to that

measured in 2015, and amounted to 22% in the case of both countries. So this means that the fear of Poland or Germany has not increased over the last few years. In the case of both countries, Russian respondents seem to believe that these countries are neither willing to get involved in a direct conflict with Russia nor do they have the capacity to pose such a threat. Moreover, in the case of Germany, the perception of this country as a nation of pacifists, opposing their country's engagement in conflicts in the international arena, may also play a significant role.

Respondents who consider that Poland and Germany pose a threat to Russia see relations with these countries as being far worse. Amongst people who perceive a threat from Germany, only 14% consider that relations between Russia and Germany are good (compared to 33% of all respondents), while 77% are of the opposite view (compared to 52% of all respondents). In the case of persons who feel a threat from Poland, only 6% are of the opinion that Polish-Russian relations are good (compared to 15% of all respondents), and 88% perceive them as bad (compared to 68% of all respondents).

If there is a country that could pose a threat to Russia, then it certainly is not any of the individual countries of the EU, such as Poland or Germany, or even the EU as a whole. In the opinion of respondents, the real danger comes from the United States. Two-thirds of respondents (67%) are of the opinion that this country constitutes a real threat to Russia, whilst one-quarter (26%) of respondents are of the opposite view. The Russians' responses capture the atmosphere that has been created in Russia regarding relations with the United States. Kremlin propaganda accuses the United States of conducting an imperialistic policy which is in opposition to the strategic interests of Russia, and the events that have occurred in Ukraine are presented as a provocation both caused and financed by Washington.

Support for the separatists in Eastern Ukraine

The Russian authorities have been criticised by the European Union, the United States, and other countries for their involvement in the conflict currently being waged in Eastern Ukraine. The prevailing belief, backed by substantial evidence, is that the Russians, albeit unofficially, are sending military equipment and troops to territory occupied by the Ukrainian separatists. In accordance with the Kremlin's official line, Russia sees the actions of the separatists in Eastern Ukraine as a case of armed resistance against an "illegal" regime in Kiev and recognises the right of the people in that region to self-determination. At the same time, however, it does not admit to being militarily involved in the conflict.

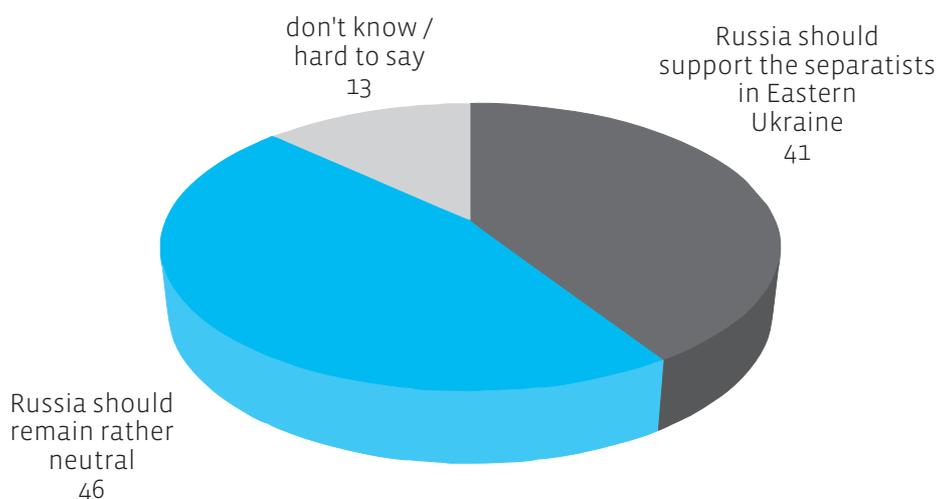
As the results of the research show, Russian opinion is divided on whether or not the country should support the separatists

The largest group of Russians (46%) believe that Russia should remain neutral in the conflict currently being waged in Eastern Ukraine

fighting in Eastern Ukraine. The largest group, i.e., almost half of the respondents (46%), believe that Russia should remain neutral in the conflict.

Figure 20.
Should Russia support the separatists in Eastern Ukraine, or should Russia remain neutral? Opinions of Russians in 2015 (in %)

Source: Institute of Public Affairs/Bertelsmann Stiftung 2015



Fewer people (41%) declared a willingness to support the separatists than those who favour neutrality (46%). Also, far more women than men are in favour of Russia remaining neutral in the conflict. Almost half of the female respondents (49%) believe that Russia should not be involved, while 39% are of the opinion that support should be given to the separatists. A total of 43% of men support neutrality, while 44% are willing to give aid to the separatists.

Those respondents who believed that Russia should support the separatists fighting in Eastern Ukraine were then asked what kind of aid they believe should be given. This group (41% of all respondents) are almost unanimous when it comes to the need for political support – 95% are in favour of such backing. More than two-thirds of the respondents in this group also believe that Russia should support the separatists by sending them military equipment. The older the respondents were, the more likely they were to favour these two options.

However, when all respondents are taken into consideration, less than half are in favour of providing aid for those fighting for “Novorossiya” – 39% of all respondents are in favour of providing political support, and 28% are willing to send military equipment.

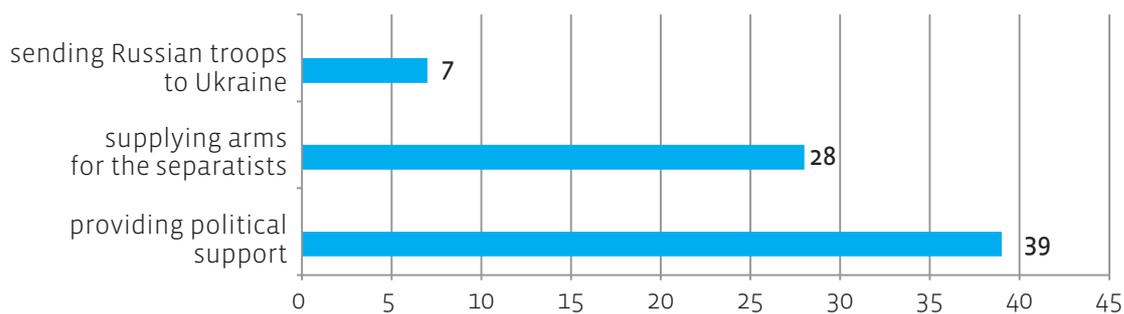
The most unpopular option among the respondents is the suggestion that the Russian army should directly intervene in Ukraine. Such a solution is backed by only 16% of those Russians respondents in favour of providing support to the separatists, which translates into just 7% of all respondents.

The opposite answer definitely prevails - 69% of Russians who do not want their country to stay neutral, i.e. 87% of all respondents, are not ready to support sending Russian troops to Ukraine. It means that four times more Russians who were asked about direct military engagement in Ukraine are against it (69%) than support it (16%). Support for direct involvement by

the Russian Federation in the Ukrainian conflict is slight, not only among Russians in general, but also among those who want to provide aid to the separatists. This is because officially sending Russian troops would represent a declaration of war against Ukraine, a step that Russians apparently find unacceptable.

The results of this survey thus show that the majority of Russians respond to the perceived threat from the outside through isolationism rather than willingness to intervene militarily in neighbouring countries. Understanding this fact helps explain why the Kremlin propaganda goes to such lengths to deny the fact of Russian military presence and participation in the fighting in Ukraine.

Support among Russians for direct military involvement by the Russian Federation in the conflict in Ukraine is very low at a mere 7%



Impact of sanctions on the Russian economy

The public has been aware of Russia’s worsening economy since the autumn of 2014. The main reason for such a state of affairs is believed to be the structure of the Russian economy and its growth model, both of which are based on exports of gas, petroleum, and coal – with economic growth being possible only when prices of these raw materials are suitably high. As a consequence, the current situation of international markets, in particular the falling prices of petroleum and gas, must have had a negative impact on Russia’s economic potential.

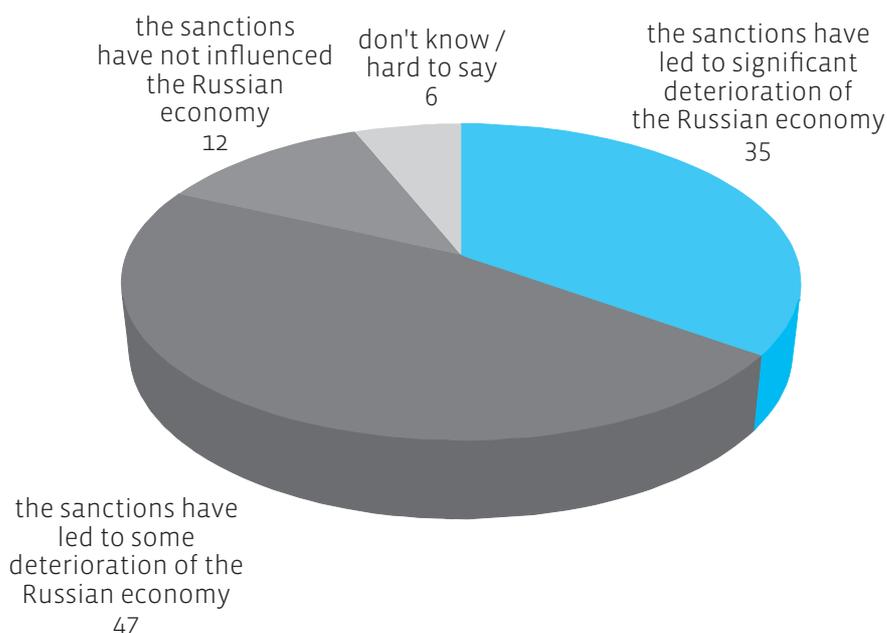
Russia’s current involvement in the conflict in Ukraine has caused the European Union, the United States, and several other countries to impose sanctions on Russia. Both experts and the governments of many states believe that this mechanism is also having a negative effect on Russia’s GDP (although it is difficult to estimate how damaging the effects of the sanctions are). Russians themselves have noted the negative effects of the sanctions – 82% of respondents expressed they have observed such a trend. More than one-third (35%) of the respondents believe that the sanctions have contributed to a significant deterioration of the situation in Russia. On the other hand, more respondents (47%) are convinced that the sanctions have only made things marginally worse in Russia. Only one in eight Russians (12%) believes that the sanctions have not influenced the Russian economy.

Figure 21. How should the separatists in Eastern Ukraine be supported? Opinions of Russians in 2015 (in %, only positive answers)

Source: Institute of Public Affairs/Bertelsmann Stiftung 2015

Figure 22.
How do the Western
sanctions affect the
Russian economy?
Opinions of Russians
in 2015 (in %)

Source: Institute of Public
Affairs/Bertelsmann
Stiftung 2015



Those living in Moscow have suffered in particular as a result of the sanctions. Half (51%) of the respondents living in the capital declared that the sanctions have made the situation significantly worse in Russia, while another 43% said that things are slightly worse.

The answers given by the Russian respondents show that regardless of how much Russian propaganda has tried to play down the negative effects of sanctions on the Russian economy, almost all believe that the imposition of these mechanisms has given rise to real problems that are affecting not only those in the upper echelons of government and society, but also – to a greater or lesser extent – the Russian economy as a whole, which in turn is affecting the financial wellbeing of Russian households.

In response to the sanctions imposed on Russia, the Kremlin decided to introduce “counter sanctions” against the European Union, USA, Canada, Australia, and Norway. The list of products covered by the sanctions is mainly made up of agricultural and food products. From the very beginning, experts predicted that such actions taken by the Russian authorities would not only have a negative impact on the economies of the countries against which the sanctions were directed, but would also hurt Russia, since national production in agricultural and food products is insufficiently developed to allow it to completely replace import.

More than 80% of Russians
feel that the sanctions
imposed on Russia have led
to a deterioration of the
situation in the country

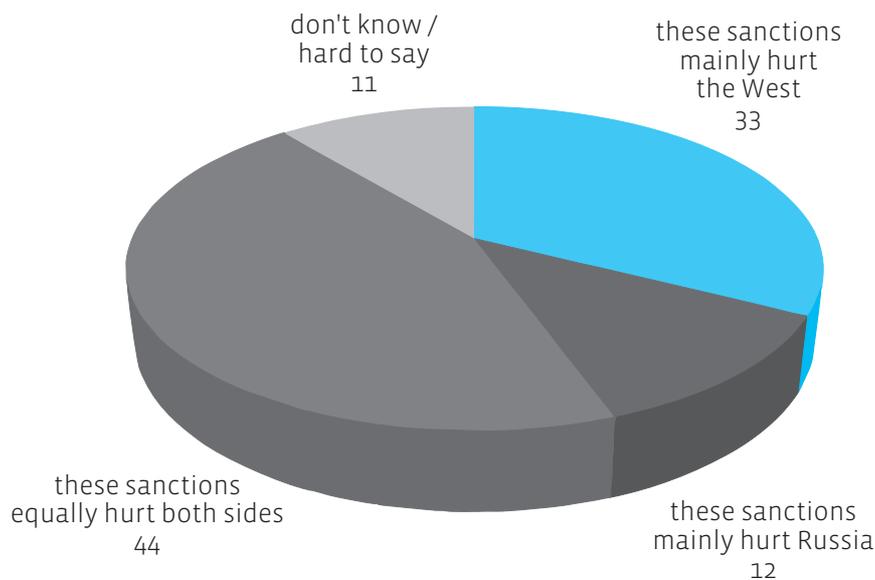


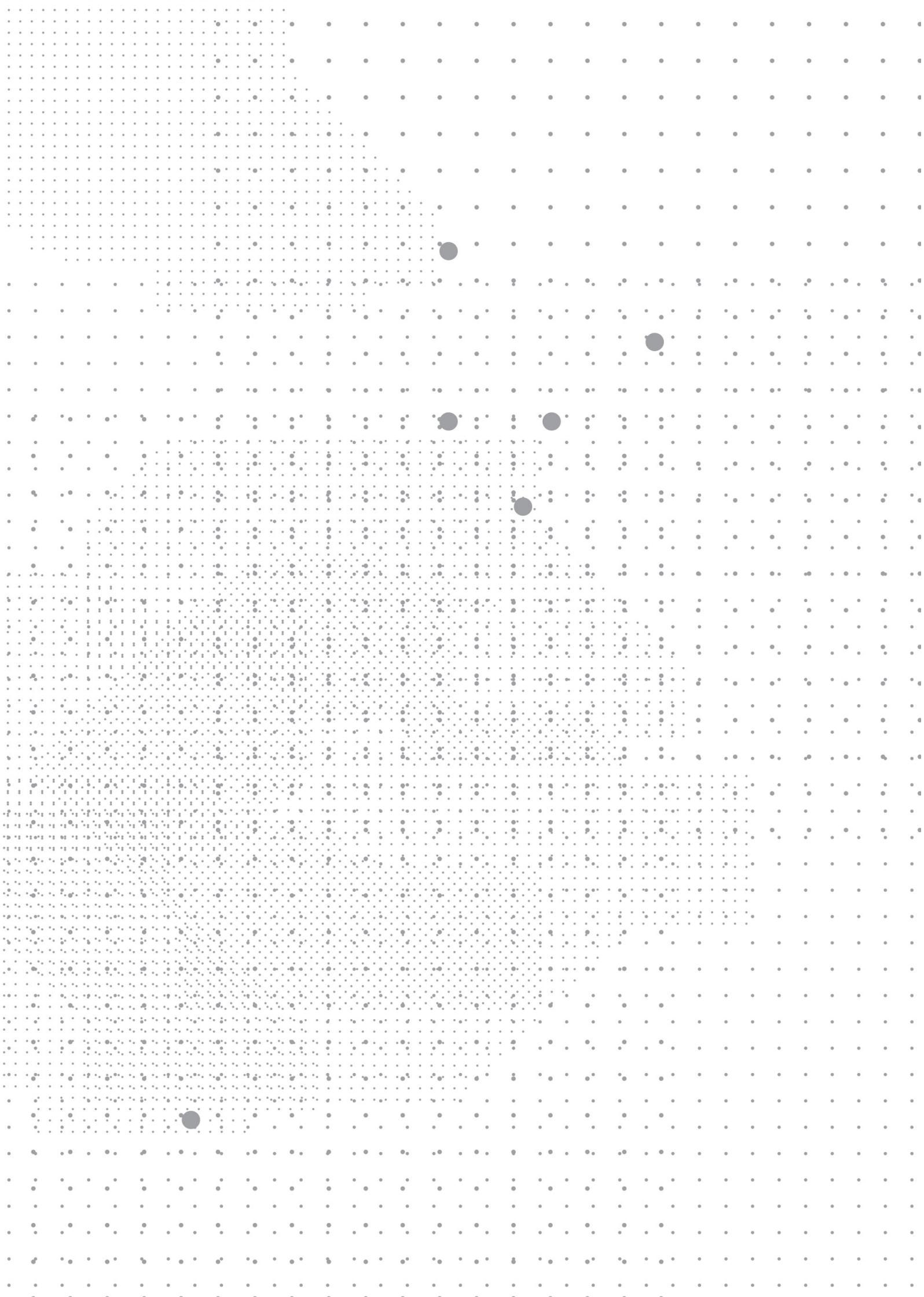
Figure 23. In response to the sanctions imposed on Russia by Western countries, Russia decided to impose counter-sanctions against the West. Who is predominantly hurt by these sanctions? Opinions of Russians in 2015 (in %)

Source: Institute of Public Affairs/Bertelsmann Stiftung 2015

Almost half of all Russians (44%) are convinced that the sanctions imposed by the Kremlin hurt both Russia and the countries they concern. On the other hand, one-third (33%) believe that sanctions hurt only the West, and 12% believe that the main victim of such a policy is Russia.

Moreover, there were significant differences between the answers given by Moscow residents and other respondents to this question. Muscovites are more critical of the effectiveness of the sanctions than Russians living in other regions – one-third of Muscovite respondents (33%) believe that these actions are primarily harming Russia itself. Thirty-six percent of Muscovites are of the opinion that sanctions are having an equally debilitating effect on both Russia and the target countries, while 30% believe that it is the Western countries that are mainly suffering as a result of this policy. All in all, Russians believe that not only Western sanctions but their own government’s retaliation for these sanctions, are hurting Russian economy.

Almost half of Russians (44%) believe that the sanctions imposed by the Kremlin on countries in the West are damaging to both Russia and the states that they target





In general, Germans and Poles see the problems and issues surrounding the Russia-Ukraine conflict similarly. Opinions on Russia in the two countries are closer than many Polish and German commentators might assume, even though the percentage breakdown of responses to specific questions is not always identical – and sometimes differs significantly. Nevertheless, deep internal divisions also exist among the residents of both countries and there are no unequivocal answers to these questions. The black-and-white stereotype of Poles and Germans (anti-Russian Poles and pro-Russian Germans) that tends to resurface in discussions on the conflict belies the actual diversity of opinion on both sides. This makes it even more difficult to find a single key to interpreting the results of the surveys of Polish and German public opinion presented here.

Poles and Germans hold similar views when it comes to the state of relations between their respective countries and Russia – i.e., they are deemed to be poor. Both societies are critical of Russia's role in the conflict and support sanctions against Russia as well as economic aid for Ukraine. In both countries there is considerable reluctance to provide Ukraine with military aid and there are similar fears of an influx of refugees should the visa requirement be waived for Ukrainian citizens.

Why then do we have this black-and-white presentation of Poles' and Germans' attitudes? The reason lies in the general differences in the ways in which such issues are presented and discussed. Germany and Poland have different cultures for resolving conflicts and for debating this issue. The atmosphere in discussing the conflict in Poland is far more emotional, while in Germany the political rhetoric is decidedly calmer. According to this logic, Poles react more vehemently and use more direct, less nuanced language, while in Germany, every statement is carefully considered. The same content is thus often expressed in different ways in the two countries. As a result, interpreting what politicians in Germany and Poland are saying often causes difficulties for people who are not following the debate in the neighbouring country and are not fully versed in its political culture. Ultimately, many a statement made in one or the other country may not entirely reflect reality and actual opinions. Myths develop, which in turn undermine trust and give rise to fears that we differ fundamentally from each other in our views and cannot find a way to work together on this matter.

This does not change the fact that even if the opinions or fears are more similar in the two societies than it would seem on the surface, fundamental differences are evident when the answers to certain questions are broken

down. The most significant discrepancies are evident in Poles' and Germans' perceptions of whether Russia poses a threat, which in turn lead to differing opinions on other policy issues regarding the Russia-Ukraine conflict.

The respondents' contrasting answers to the survey questions are due to a number of factors, the most important of which are the two countries' disparate histories, traditions, and current positions in Europe, as well as how the conflict is conveyed and presented in each society. And although these reasons may be regarded as obvious, they have negative consequences, and therefore they deserve a closer look and an explanation as regards the Polish-German and European dialogue on this issue. The two countries have contrasting historical perspectives of the territory beyond Poland's eastern border. When referring to Russia, Germans still use language that treats the former as if it was its neighbour, even though the two countries have no common border. This is because such a way of perceiving Russia was common in Germany for centuries in the not too remote past. In addition, Germany is convinced that Russia is a country that deserves special treatment because of the crimes Germany committed during the Second World War, and also because of the fact that the Russians (Soviets) gave permission for German reunification. What is not generally considered here is the fact that fighting also took place throughout all of present-day Ukraine during WWII and that an enormous number of victims of the war and occupation were Ukrainians, a fact that Timothy Snyder has pointed out in his writing on many occasions, calling modern day Russia's tendency to ascribe to itself all the losses of all the nations making up the former Soviet Union as an "imperialism of martyrdom."¹³

Russia has never constituted a serious threat to modern-day Germany. In turn, Ukraine, in German eyes, exists only as a state that was formed at the beginning of the 1990s. The fact that it is a sovereign state only dawned on the Germans during the "Orange Revolution" of 2004. For many Germans, Ukraine was until recently only a country of "the former Soviet Union" and thus – so they presumed – lying within the "Russian sphere of influence."

Germans are decidedly less interested in the history and present-day affairs of their eastern neighbours than Poles are. Poles know more about this subject, although it is a knowledge burdened by history and interwoven with mythology – not only in relation to Russia, but also regarding Ukraine.¹⁴ Because of their own tragic experiences of Russian aggression and occupation, Poles do not trust Russia, and every step taken by the latter that recalls the events of the past conjures up negative associations and creates a climate of fear. On the one hand, Poles feel a bond with Ukraine – both as a country trying to achieve independence in the shadow of its Big Brother and through their

¹³ See, for example, T. Snyder, *Holocaust: The Ignored Reality*, <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/2009/jul/16/holocaust-the-ignored-reality/> [retrieved: 3.04.2015]

¹⁴ The main source of Polish anti-Ukrainian resentment is the so-called Volhynian Massacre of 1943-44 when at least 35,000 Poles were murdered by the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA) as part of a campaign of ethnic cleansing.

many personal contacts with it. On the other hand, the events of the last 20 years – and their many centuries of common history – have led to a situation where Poles sometimes look down on Ukrainians with feelings of superiority. And while the pro-democratic revolutionary uprising was close to Poland's heart, the lack of progress made in reforms has irritated many commentators. Some Poles also still hold strong anti-Ukrainian prejudices, which Russian propaganda is able to exploit. In turn, that fact that they are neighbours makes Poles interested in what is going on in Ukraine and motivates them to support the latter – although sometimes it is difficult to determine whether this is out of feelings of duty, solidarity, or fear that the Ukrainian crisis will spill over the border.

The debate in Poland and Germany on Russia, Ukraine, and the Russia-Ukraine conflict is also being shaped by experts who specialise in Eastern policy. There are considerably more of such experts in Poland. Numerous opinion-makers in Germany do admittedly express opinions on the subject of Russia, but in many cases these are people who are concerned with economic cooperation with Russian partners on a day-to-day basis. The Ukraine that is presented from a Russian perspective has thus from the outset been dealt a weaker hand. Russian propaganda is also paying dividends in Germany.

Fortunately, many experts – including diplomats and officials responsible for mutual relations – are aware of the disparities between Poles and Germans that may lead to tensions. This is already the first step towards avoiding Polish-German misunderstandings. However, the public do not necessarily share this awareness, and it is citizens who then put pressure on their political leaders.

Hence, the key to Polish-German dialogue is the need to be aware of the sensitivities, historical experiences, and way of thinking of the other side. It is important for Poland and Germany to acquire more in-depth knowledge, both about each other and about Russia and Ukraine. In particular, Germany must surely find out more about Poland and the countries on its eastern border, while Poles need to gain a better understanding of how Germans think.

It is worth analysing the conflict together, treating it as something far greater than a local clash between two states lying “in the post-Soviet zone.” One platform that could be used in both cases would be joint debates in the media. In particular, German experts could be invited to Polish media outlets and their Polish counterparts to the German media (language barriers should not be a problem here as a sufficiently large number of experts have mastered the language of their neighbour). In the German case, it is important to promote tendencies that are only now beginning to germinate, i.e., giving a voice not only to experts with affiliations with Russia, but also to those who understand both Russia and Ukraine. In the case of the Polish media, on the other hand, efforts should be made to increase the currently exceptionally small number of Polish correspondents in Germany, because otherwise it is difficult to report and comment on debates and opinions there which, after

all, do not only involve the Eastern policy. Journalists from both countries should be sent on joint study visits and the Eastern policy should be made a topic for meetings between young people. Moreover, Polish institutions should consider sending Polish experts to Berlin research institutions to foster continuous dialogue and make sure Poland has a voice there. Germans, in turn, could invite a Polish analyst to help them set up a new research centre for Eastern Europe – preliminary steps have already been taken to establish such a centre. Both sides should also consider together what actions can be taken to combat the ubiquitous Russian propaganda.

The politicians of both countries should also not neglect dialogue with their own populations, so that they understand and accept the political line being taken on the conflict. One example here would be the issue of waiving visas for Ukrainians. This process is very advanced, and liberalising the visa regime would send a clear signal to Ukrainians that the EU treats their European aspirations and commitment seriously. However, a sizeable portion of the Polish public and an even greater number of Germans need convincing on this issue.

The survey also sends out a clear signal that Poland and Germany are bound to work together on developing a European Eastern policy. Both capitals have an opportunity to obtain the support of other EU states for joint ideas and to act in the name and for the good of the European Union as a whole.

When considering such joint action in the west it is important to bear in mind the results of the survey in Russia, which shows that Russian society, despite the constant barrage of propaganda, is also conscious of at least some of the consequences of the conflict. Russians see how relations with Germany and Poland have deteriorated sharply and are feeling the burden of the sanctions imposed by the West as well as the counter-sanctions introduced by the Kremlin. The survey also shows that Germany and Poland are not perceived by Russians as a threat. Rather, they see the United States as the primary antagonist. Undoubtedly, the influence of the many years of intense anti-American propaganda can be seen here.

To be sure, the most important result of the survey concerns Russia's involvement in the conflict in East Ukraine. The largest group of respondents want Russia to remain neutral and not get involved in the war. Among those respondents who support the idea of Russia intervening to help the separatists, only a small minority were in favour of sending Russian soldiers to the Ukraine, which as we know has been going on for many months. Together, a mere 7% of respondents back the direct involvement of Russian armed forces in the fighting. This is a clear negation, even if only indirectly (officially, the Russian government denies that Russian armed forces are playing any part in the conflict in the Donbas region), of the Kremlin's aggressive policy. This fact casts the belief that Putin's policy enjoys the support of the vast majority of the Russian public in a different light, and thus may offer hope that Russia and the West are not on an inevitable path towards conflict.



Dr Jacek Kucharczyk, sociologist and think-tanker. Jacek Kucharczyk holds a Ph.D. in Sociology from the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology of the Polish Academy of Sciences. In 1994-1995 a fellow at the Graduate Faculty of the New School for Social Research in New York. Earlier studied at University of Kent at Canterbury (M.A. in Philosophy in 1992) and Warsaw University (MA in English Studies). He is a former board member of the European Partnership for Democracy (EDP) in Brussels, one of the founders and board member of Policy Association for an Open Society PASOS, an association of think-tanks from Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia and one of the founders and member of a board of Prague Civil Society Centre. Author and editor of numerous policy briefs, articles, reports and books on democratic governance, foreign policy, EU integration and transatlantic relations.

Dr Agnieszka Łada, political scientist, Head of the European Programme and Senior Analyst in the Institute of Public Affairs, PhD in political science. 2011 Visiting Fellow, European Policy Centre, Brussels, Belgium; 2012 Research Fellow, Sussex University, UK; 2013 Visiting Scholar, German Council on Foreign Relations, Germany. She is a Member of Team Europe – a group of experts at the Representation of the European Commission in Poland, Member of the Council of the Polish-German Youth Exchange, Member of the Supervisory Board of the Krzyżowa Foundation, member of the Scientific Board of the Western Institute in Poznań, Member of the Copernicus Group – a group of experts on Polish-German Relations and the Polish-German Expert Group Quiriten Kreis at the Konrad Adenauer Foundation in Poland as well as IPA's Representative in the European Policy Institutes Network. She specializes in the following issues: EU-Institutions (especially European Parliament), Polish-German relations and Germany, Polish foreign and European policy and the perception of Poles abroad and other nations in Poland.

Gabriele Schöler has been working with the German Bertelsmann Stiftung since 1994 in different fields of work and different positions. She is currently a senior project manager in the Future of Europe programme. Her focus is on Eastern Europe and EU neighbourhood relations. Before, she was a project manager in the competence centre Corporate Culture/Leadership (2005-2008); from 1994-2005 she worked in the department for Central and Eastern Europe. She obtained her MA in English and Slavic studies as well as business administration from the university of Bonn, with a study year in London. Before taking up university, she passed a professional training “middle management” in a medium sized enterprise in her home town Krefeld, Germany.

Łukasz Wenerski works as an analyst and project coordinator for the Institute of Public Affairs. His areas of expertise include: relations between the EU and the Eastern Partnership countries, especially Ukraine and Russia, and Polish Eastern Policy. He represents IPA in the EU-Russia Civil Society Forum and Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum.

List of joint publications by the Institute of Public Affairs and Bertelsmann Stiftung on Eastern policy and Polish-German issues

- ▶ A. Łada, *Ostpolitik 2014. Fünf Missverständnisse zwischen Deutschen und Polen / Polityka wschodnia 2014. Pięć nieporozumień między Polakami a Niemcami*, 2014 [PL, DE]
- ▶ G. Gromadzki, Ł. Wenerski, *A challenge for liberal democracy*, 2014 [EN]
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