Willfried SPOHN

European East-West Integration, Nation-Building and National Identities -
The Reconstruction of German-Polish Relations

PD Dr. Willfried Spohn is member of the Frankfurt Institute for Transformation Studies and head of the research project *Representations of Europe and the Nation in Current and Prospective EU Member States*. The project is supported by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG).
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Introduction

Since the collapse of the Soviet Empire and the communist regimes in Central and Eastern Europe the German-Polish relations have experienced an enormous improvement and represent a cornerstone of the progressing process of European East-West integration and the evolving eastern enlargement of the European Union.¹ The recognition of the western Polish Odra-Neisse border by the German government, initiated by the new Ostpolitik of the West German Chancellor Willy Brandt and followed and finalized by Helmut Kohl, was one of the crucial preconditions for German unification in 1990 and conversely opened the door for the support of German unification by the new democratic government of independent Poland under Lech Wałęsa. On this basis, a 'special partnership' between Germany and Poland has developed. United Germany has promoted itself to the first advocate for Poland’s accession to the European Union, whereas Poland has learned to accept Germany as the most important gateway in its ‘return to Europe’. The planned accession of Poland to the European Union in 2004 will finally complete the common integration of both Germany and Poland in a uniting Europe.

From the perspective of the long-term asymmetric, conflictive and finally destructive history between both nations, this change in German-Polish relations can be seen as an almost miraculous achievement. But after the particularly ruinous destruction of Poland by Nazi Germany and the following loss of the eastern German territories through the western relocation of Poland, coming to terms with this traumatic history on both sides was one of the main moral forces to renew German-Polish relations.² The reconciliation between both nations was initiated by small circles of German and Polish religious and cultural intellectuals. It found increasingly resonance within the political leaders and broader strata of the populations and had an important impact on the reconstruction of both countries as independent nation-states. However, it should not be overlooked that the preparation and building of new bilateral relations have been primarily promoted by parts of the elites, whereas other parts of the elites and still broader parts of the populations on both sides are still hesitant or even afraid of accepting the enormous geopolitical changes.

In Germany, only one third of the population supports the eastern enlargement whereas one half is concerned about increasing economic competition and immigration pressure particularly from Poland. Also in Poland, there is a rising tide

¹ As a political study see Bingen 1997, as a critical analysis Krzeminski 2001.
² As political-sociological studies see Hanson/ Spohn 1995; Katzenstein 1977 and 1997; Markovits/ Reich 1997.
against the accession to the European Union with declining support levels close to 50 percent and rising rejection levels close to one third based on fears of a new domination by Western Europe and particularly by a powerful Germany and a return of Germans to Polish lands. These concerns and fears on both sides reflect not only the traumas of the recent history between the two nations. They also reflect the reconstruction of traditional center-periphery relations between Western and Eastern Europe and also between Germany and Poland. Despite the successful reconstruction of the Polish postcommunist economy and consolidation of Polish democracy, the traditional economic and political asymmetries and inequalities between Western Europe, Germany and Poland persist. They correspond with a considerable growth of East-West migration of Polish migrant workers particularly to Germany reaching similar proportions like those at the turn to the last century. These political and economic hierarchies also go hand in hand with continuing cultural asymmetries of superiority feelings and inferiority complexes and related ethno-national stereotypes.

The eastern enlargement of the European Union is planned to counteract these structural and cultural asymmetries between Western and Eastern Europe and it should have an impact also on the future development of German-Polish relations. Thus, it can be expected that the eastern enlargement will diminish the socio-economic inequality between Germany and Poland, reduce the political power hierarchy between the two states and also promote a better cultural understanding between the two nations. However, it is far from clear to which degree the eastern enlargement will progress as planned or rather involve major economic and social disruptions with negative political and cultural repercussions. Under such unfavorable conditions, there is always the possibility of remobilizing traditional ethno-nationalist sentiments on the basis of still persisting center-periphery structures between the two nations - unless a conscious effort is made to transform the nationalistic sentiments and national identities on both sides in a more transnational and European direction.

In order to assess the actual and potential impact of the persisting center-periphery structures between Germany and Poland on the development of German-Polish relations in the context of the eastern enlargement of the EU, the following contribution will first outline the historical foundations of the two forms of unequal and conflictive types of nation-building and national identity formation until 1944/45 (section 1), then characterize the reconstruction of both the German and Polish nations and national identities after World War II until 1989/90 (section 2) and finally analyze the recurrent structural and cultural inequalities in German-Polish relations as challenges to and tasks for the Europeanization of both nations and national identities in the context of the enlargement of the EU (section 3).

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3 As an overview see Spohn 2000a.

Within a European typology of state formation and nation-building, Germany and Poland contrast not only to Western Europe but also represent quite opposite types.\(^4\) Whereas in Western Europe the processes of nation-building followed the early formation of states and thus early on enabled a basic congruency between both processes, in Germany and Poland nation-states were formed relatively late and only with considerable discrepancies between state formation and nation-building. In both cases, former empires predated the formation of nation-states. The first unified German nation-state in 1870/71 was built on the basis of the former Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation consisting of a polycentric form of German speaking ethnic groups, a fragmented and later centralized form of dynastical territorial states as well as an overarching high culture (see Conze 1992; Dann 1993). After its dissolution in 1803 under the impact of the French revolution and Napoleonic warfare, the formation of the German nation-state developed in a combination of the German Federation under the leadership of the rising Prussian state and an evolving unifying nationalism oscillating between a great German imperial and a small-German national solution. The then found ‘small-German’ solution of a nation-state materialized by Bismarck comprised however German speaking territories under the exclusion of Habsburg Germans and considerable national minorities such as Polish, French and Danish populations and thus still contained an imperial extension. The resulting tensions and conflicts between German imperial nationalism including Habsburg German irredentism and the separating nationalisms of the national minorities within Germany thus remained substantial during the Kaiserreich and contributed decisively to the destabilization of the Weimar Republic and the rise of the Nazi Third Reich.\(^5\)

Also in the Polish case the imperial framework of the early modern Jagellonian Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth predated the formation of a Polish nation-state (Davies 1981, 1984). As a multi-national empire under the leadership of the Polish-speaking aristocracy it included considerable ethnic-national minorities such as Germans, Jews, White Russians, Ruthenians and Ukrainians. However, through the three partitions in 1772, 1793 and 1795 by the surrounding imperial powers of Prussia, Habsburg and Russia, the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth was dissolved and lost its state sovereignty with the short exception of the Warsaw principality in the Napoleonic era between 1806 and 1815. Under imperial domination and deprived of any state institutions, the Polish nation formed on the ruins of the Jagellonian Empire and in emulation of the Western European nation-states, but due the suppression of the risings in 1831 and 1863 was unable to regain national

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\(^5\) See with extensive literature: Spohn 1995a.
sovereignty. The foundation of an independent Polish nation-state then in 1918 became only possible with the collapse of the three partition powers in World War I. But also in the Polish case, the imperial legacies renewed in the victory over Soviet Russia in 1920 resulted in a territorial extension beyond a politically limited ‘small-Polish’ solution and the resulting ethnic-cultural diversity stood in sharp tension with a culturally more homogeneous and politically more stable nation-state (Krzeminski 1991; Tomaszewski 1993).

As neighboring countries and with considerably overlapping populations, the construction of culturally homogenous nation-states in Germany as well as Poland included structural problems that became manifest in constant German-Polish tensions and conflicts throughout the 19th century and finally culminated in the catastrophe of the 20th century (Kobylińska et al. 1992). These tensions and conflicts, however, did not develop on equal terms but were characterized by growing structural asymmetries between the two evolving nations. The annexation of Polish lands by Prussia and Habsburg Austria was the crucial starting point of these asymmetries. But in addition, these asymmetries sharpened over time by the growing East-Western European socio-economic and political unevenness. This was particularly true for the relationship between Prussia and Polish lands. After the dissolution of the German-Roman Empire, it was precisely Prussia that evolved as the most powerful territorial state in the German regions and became the new political leader for German unification by replacing the traditional Habsburg center. This political leadership was based not only on the western extension of Prussia into Germany with the Vienna peace order in 1815, but also on the specific modernity of the Prussian state combining an enlightened absolutism, a centralized state bureaucracy and a modernizing reform policy that promoted economic development and capitalist industrialization and on this basis was able to increase its military and political power (Nickeldey 1987-1991; Wehler 1987-1995). This growing power of the Prussian state, on the one hand, enabled the unification of Germany. But on the other, the Polish regions were thus dominated and confronted with an increasingly powerful center that made any political resistance to it increasingly impossible.

One of the crucial factors of this evolving military and political power hierarchy between German and Polish lands was the economic development of Germany from a moderately backward economy to a leading economic core in Europe during the 19th century. Again, it was the mercantilist developmental policy of the Prussian state – created under the conditions of the particular backwardness of the Prussian lands – that served as a major mechanism of German catching-up modernization (see Spohn 1995a). Germany then even overtook first France with the won war in 1870/71 and the annexation of Alsace-Lorraine, but later also Great Britain at the turn of the century on the basis of a growing economic potential of the new big industries. The Polish lands, particularly in the Prussian zone, participated to a certain degree in this German-Prussian growth dynamics, but more in traditional textile and agrarian than in modern industrial production. As a consequence, the
Polish regions – not much less developed at the times of their partition than the Prussian lands – became more and more a backyard of the European and particularly German economy (Berend 1995; Berend/ Ranki 1982). The economic asymmetry between Germany and Polish lands grew continuously throughout the long 19th century and diminished only slightly in the inter-war period in the first half in the 20th century.

In addition to these political and economic asymmetries, the religious and cultural differences and oppositions between Prussian-German and Polish societies have to be considered (Spohn: forthcoming). Of particular importance were the diverging religious developments of both countries with the Protestant Reformation and the Catholic (Counter)Reformation. In Germany, after the forces of the Protestant Reformation and the counter-forces of the Catholic Reformation had eventually found an equilibrium in the Westphalian peace order in 1648, a confessional dualism roughly equal in size was established (Evans 1982; Nowak 1995). Following the principle *cuius regio eius religio*, Northern and Eastern Germany became predominantly Protestant, primarily Lutheran and secondarily Calvinist-Reform, whereas Southern and Western Germany remained predominantly Catholic. Many regions were still mixed and became more homogenized only with the rise of regional absolutism. However, Brandenburg/Prussia as well as Saxony as the two adjacent states to Poland turned into almost homogenous Lutheran-Protestant regions. Also in Poland the Protestant Reformation made first some inroads insofar as parts of the aristocracy converted to Calvinism and the German minority to Lutheranism (Tazbir 1994). But with the escalating conflicts and wars with Protestant Sweden and Brandenburg/Prussia, the partial conversion of the Polish aristocracy to Protestantism came to a halt and the Protestant aristocratic elite reconverted to Catholicism. Thus, at the time of the first partition in 1772, the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth consisted of 43 percent Roman Catholics, 33 percent Greek Catholics, 10 percent Christian Orthodox, 9 percent Jews and 4 percent Protestants—roughly identical with ethnic divisions (Davies 1981: 162). As a consequence of the partition, however, the multi-religious Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth was reduced to a primarily Catholic Polish society.

Interwoven with nation-building during the 19th century, the resulting religious divergence between Protestant Prussia and Catholic Poland developed into increasing religious and cultural oppositions. In Germany, as a result of national unification under the leadership of Protestant Prussia and the exclusion of Catholic Austria, the previously balanced Catholic-Protestant dualism in German society turned into a Protestant-Lutheran hegemony over minority Catholicism (Spohn 1995a). This implied, on the one hand, a shifting confessional relation: taking the numbers in 1913, almost two thirds of the German society was Protestant (62 percent), slightly more than one third was Catholic (35 percent) and a small minority was Jewish (1 percent) (Spohn 1995a: 181). This meant, on the other, a predominantly Protestant, religious as well as secularized, shape of the German
nation-state with a corresponding discrimination of the less secularized Catholic minority. On the other side, in the Prussian Polish regions the lack of independent statehood reduced the forces of religious differentiation and secularization and instead strengthened Catholic integralism (Kriedte 1997). In addition, the aristocracy as the carrier of a state-led and rather secular-enlightened and liberal nationalism became weakened and the Catholic church as a carrier of a more organic nationalism became strengthened. The result was a sharp structural as well as cultural opposition between the predominantly Protestant-secular German state-nation and the state-aspiring Catholic-integralist nation.

The German-Polish ethno-national opposition on the basis of the overlapping settlement structure was thus aggravated by three structural asymmetries between the emerging German and Polish nations: the growing power imbalance between the Prussian-German state and Polish society, the increasing core-periphery relation between the German and Polish economy and the religious divergence between Protestant Prussia and Catholic Poland. These structural asymmetries also shaped the formation of national identities as well as the self-perception and construction of the other on both sides. From the German perspective, the growing social power and political superiority was based on virtues such as discipline, work and order combined with loyal obedience, cultural education and rational enlightenment. These German self-images corresponded with images of the Polish Other such as lack of discipline, laziness, chaos, cultural barbarity and superstitious irrationalism. From the Polish perspective, the Germans represented lack of freedom, personal repression and bureaucratic regulation, blind obedience, cultural arrogance and amoral rationalism – German images that contrasted to the Polish virtues of freedom, heroism, sacrifice as well as a culture of the heart and religiosity. These cultural binary construction reflected particularly the Protestant-Catholic oppositions. The German Prussian values represented variations of a Lutheran-pietist ethic centering on an inward-directed world piety combining a sense of duty and obedience toward the spheres of work and state. Through these lenses, Polish Catholicism represented a clerical, papist, emotional and superstitious popular religion. On the other side, the Polish values formed a variation of a Catholic ethic combining a pragmatic work ethos with marianic expressive symbolism and church-oriented piety. In Polish eyes, German Protestantism appeared heartless, secular and individualistic.

Yet, these religious and cultural perceptions and identities became only mobilized with nation-building and national identity formation (Hoffmann 1997). In the period from the partition to the French revolution, they were only shared by few members of the aristocratic and middle class elites, but did not yet have any wider or even nationalistic meaning. In the Napoleonic era, the reorganization of Germany and the

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6 This is my central thesis in Spohn (forthcoming).
short-lived foundation of the duchy of Warsaw interrupted the crystallizing asymmetries. In the restoration era, the religious and cultural oppositions revived, but at the same time, the emerging liberal national movements on both sides strengthened also a sense of equality between the two people. The Polish up-rising in 1830/31 was accompanied by wide-spread sympathies on the German side, the spring of peoples and the 1848 revolution renewed the mutual support. At the same time, it also revealed the first tensions between the German and Polish and other Slavic national movements and aspirations regarding the future boundaries of the imagined democratic nation-states. But the Polish uprising in 1863 despite the anti-Polish cooperation between Bismarck and Russia was still followed with positive German sentiments. However, with the foundation of the German Empire, these pro-Polish sentiments changed decisively. Now, the Catholics in Germany and the Polish Catholics in particular were increasingly perceived as an internal threat to the newly founded German nation-state. The discrimination of Catholics hit the Polish population in particular and soon became complemented by an intensifying missionizing Germanization policy which, on the other side, fuelled rising anti-German Polish national sentiments (Hagen 1982; Smith 1995). After the failure of Polish heroic-romantic aristocratic nationalism, however, these Polish national sentiments were increasingly shaped by an organic conception of nation-building in which the Catholic church and Catholic religiosity played a constitutive role.

The defeat of Imperial Germany and the Habsburg Empire in World War I changed decisively the geopolitical conditions in East Central Europe by (re-)creating an independent Polish nation-state. However, on the basis of the formed ethnic-national oppositions and out-breaking territorial conflicts, the geopolitical changes remained fragile (Winkler 1992). On the German side, independent Poland was now primarily seen in pure strategic terms as a buffer zone against the newly founded Soviet Union. But at the same time, the loss of former German, though predominantly Polish settled, territories particularly contributed to the sense of national humiliation and fuelled feelings of national resentment against Poland.7 On the other side, the newly independent Polish nation-state used the occasion to claim - as in the cases of Gdansk/Danzig or Pomerania - ancient Polish territories even with a majority of German speaking or feeling populations. Thus, although most of the territorial disputes were finally solved by referenda, the dominating nationalisms on both sides were not able to compromise. With it, despite the geopolitical changes, the structural and cultural asymmetries between Germany and Poland contributed to the radicalization of two forms of integral nationalism. On the German side, the rise of national-socialism was accompanied by the change of the traditional cultural asymmetries into racist conceptions of German superiority against Slavic and Polish inferiority. On the Polish side, the rise of an integral cultural nationalism aimed at homogenizing the Polish nation and with it polonizing ethnic minorities also

7 For the Eastern German border regions see Baranowski 1995.
contributed to the rise of ethno-national conflicts in the German-Polish border regions (Davies 1981: 393-434). In the end, the Hitler-Stalin pact sealed the fate of independent Poland, aiming at recreating the *status quo ante* by annihilating the Polish nation.


The Second World War had catastrophic consequences particularly for Poland. After the war, the eastern German regions were transferred to Poland and the eastern Polish regions occupied by the Soviet Union were annexed. Thus, the war resulted in enormous territorial shifts. The western relocation of Poland included the loss of about one third of its former territory to the East, i.e. to the Soviet Union (Ukraine, Belarus and Lithuania), compensated by about one third of its territory from the former eastern German regions. With this compensation, also Germany lost almost one third of its former pre-war territory. At the same time, the war resulted in monstrous population losses and movements. During the war, about 6 million Poles, 3 million ethnic Poles and 3 million Polish Jews lost their lives. The death toll concerned disproportionally the Polish elites, because Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union especially aimed at erasing the leadership of the Polish nation. After the war, almost 2 million Poles were expelled from the eastern territories and resettled in the western Polish, former eastern German, regions. According to German and Polish (still diverging) numbers, of the 10 million former German inhabitants of these regions about 7 million fled or were expelled, thereof about one half refugees escaping the Red Army and the other half expelled by the Polish administration; 2 million were killed, thereof about 1.6 million during expulsion; and about 1 million (though then diminishing) stayed as ‘autochthonous’ citizens within post-war Poland.8

These enormous territorial and demographic changes had two major interrelated structural implications for the post-war reconstruction of both nations. The first implication was that two nations historically overlapping in their ethnic settlement structures and conflictively entangled in the process of nation-building became finally separated. Though this national disentanglement included enormous suffering and caused lasting traumas on both sides, the separation opened also the long-term possibility to reconstruct both nations and the relations between them in new ways.9

At the same time, the emerging bloc confrontation between the victorious allies over defeated Nazi-Germany defined specific international conditions under which the reconstructions of both nations and their mutual relations took place. Both nations did not develop in the form of two independent states, but under the respective

8 The numbers are based on Benz 1992 and Dimitrow 1992.
9 On post-WW II German-Polish relations see Rosenthal 1976.
hegemony of the Western and Eastern bloc. Germany deprived of its independent nationhood became divided in two parts, West Germany in close international integration with and under more indirect supervision by the Western allies and East Germany under direct military control by the Soviet Union. Poland, despite its belonging to the victorious alliance, lost its independent nationhood as well, became subjected to the Soviet Union and enforced as a partner of East Germany into the Soviet interstate system. Under these international conditions, West Germany defining itself as the legal successor state of the Third Reich and the major recipient of the Eastern refugees and expellees did not officially recognize and only gradually accepted the loss of its eastern territories. By contrast, East Germany was forced by the Soviet Union to recognize the Odra-Neisse border but was reluctant to accept it. Poland, as a re-compensation for the enormous losses, took possession of the former eastern German regions, but at the same time remained basically insecure in its national territory as long as West Germany did not recognize its international legality. This national insecurity made Poland inversely dependent on the ‘protection’ by the Soviet Union.

The second implication of these territorial and demographic changes was that each nation became basically congruent with the emerging political state structures. In the case of Germany, the loss of the eastern territories as well as the flight and expulsion of the German populations from their Eastern German and Eastern European homelands, implied a decisive break with its former pattern of nation-building. For the first time in German history, the settlement structure of the German speaking population found itself in a basic congruence with territorial-political boundaries. Through the resettlement of most Germans form Eastern Europe to the West and their integration into the three successor states of the Nazi German Empire, the Federal Republic, the GDR and Austria, any extraterritorial lands with potentially irredentist German populations were gone. As a consequence, the past imperial oscillations of a German nation-state between a political-territorial limitation and an imperial extension had lost its social basis. This implied also the solution of the past contradictions between the German Kulturnation aiming at a political inclusion of all German speaking populations and a German political nation restrained to a civic-political inclusion within the limitations of a German state. Also in the Polish case, the shift of the Polish settlement space to the West, the loss of the Eastern Polish mixed areas and the expulsion of Germans in the western regions, resulted in a basic congruence between nation and state. As in the German case, a final break with the imperial legacies through the outcomes of World War II had materialized, even though some problem zones of ethno-national conflicts still affected Polish post-war history (Davies 1981: 556-633). So the Polish minority in Lithuania created some irritations between Poland and Lithuania. More troublesome were the post-war ethnic cleansing and repression of Ukrainians in South-Eastern Poland. And also the

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10 As a recent interpretation of German history after 1945 see Winkler 2001.
remaining German minority faced continuing discrimination and assimilation pressure.

Separated by the population resettlements, cut off by the Iron Curtain between East and West, and in addition with a tightly controlled border between East Germany and Poland, the two nations underwent their reconstruction on two isolated paths. The reconstruction of the German nation-state proceeded for over forty years in a divided form of two states, two asymmetric democratization processes and two partial collective identities without however dissolving the inherited common nation. In West Germany, a democratic-constitutional political system became institutionalized, overcoming the past authoritarian and totalitarian forms of state centralism by a pluralistic, federal and increasingly participatory structure. With it, the authoritarian and collectivist nationalism of the past was transformed into a civic and pluralist form of political identity and the inherited cultural nationalism became increasingly replaced by a moral consciousness to come to terms with the past. In East Germany, by contrast, the Soviet communist system reproduced the authoritarian and totalitarian state structures of the past in a new form (Childs 1988; Glaßner 1989; Kaelble/ Kocka 1994). With it, also authoritarian and collectivist forms of nationalism and political identity were reproduced, but at the same time, dissident-socialist and liberal-democratic attitudes oriented to West Germany developed as a *niche* counterculture. In a parallel movement, the inherited cultural nationalism became divided between the predominant affirmative antifascist claim to have overcome the past and the subterranean critical consciousness that the socialist system has only partially fulfilled that claim. The democratic-national revolution of the GDR made the socialist system finally collapse and the unification of Germany replaced it by the West German constitutional and federal democratic institutions. On this basis, the two political identities started to fuse with each other in a more pluralist national identity, even though still marked by remaining East-West distinctions.

The reconstruction of the Polish nation-state under the communist regime imposed by the Soviet Union renewed, in a sense, the peripheral and dependent situation of the Polish nation before World War I. But this time, the Polish nation was not partitioned, the Soviet Union acknowledged the existence of Polish nationhood, and the communist regime allowed for the construction of a Polish state with its own administrative bureaucracy, legal system as well as police and army forces (Davies 1981: 556ff.; Hoensch 1990; Krzeminski 1991). Still, the Polish communist regime came only into existence by Soviet military occupation, the non-recognition of the Polish exile government, the repression of the independent Polish national movement and resistance army and the instrumentalization of the Polish communist party. As a consequence, the Polish state developed in a deep rift and estrangement.

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11 Among others see particularly Berghahn 1987; Conze/ Lepsius 1984; Dahrendorf 1965; Thränhard 1987.
to Polish society and nation, even though the communists alarmed by continuing resistance and upheaval accommodated to the Polish nation and Polish nationalism. The most important counter-power to the communist regime became the Polish Catholic Church forcing the ruling communists to make important concessions in economic, social and religious matters and thus preserving a certain, even though, limited social space for an independent civil society (Morawska 1987). Under its protection, there developed also the Social Catholic Solidarność movement combining an independent workers’ movement and organization with dissident and liberal currents of intellectuals. As an uncontrollable and widening mass movement, it substantially contributed to the erosion of the downfall of the Soviet communist bloc as well as to the transition to democracy in Poland itself. At the same time, it contributed also to the specific shape of the postcommunist Polish democratic system: a still wide-spread identification with the Polish nation and civil society and a continuing distrust in the Polish state and political establishment.

The separated reconstruction of both nation-states included also a separated development of the German and Polish economies. On the one hand, West Germany with its post-war ‘economic miracle’ very quickly resumed the former German position of relative economic dominance as compared to other West European economies. To this contributed particularly that the major part of the former German, relatively intact, industrial economy belonged to West Germany, that most of the refugees and expellees settled in West Germany and that the West German economy could develop in competitive interconnection with European and world markets. By contrast, the East German economy cut off from its former markets and drained off by continuing labor emigration started with considerable disadvantages. After closing its borders, however, the GDR state centralized economy advanced to one of the most developed economies within the Soviet bloc (Berghahn 1987; Spohn 1995b). On the other hand, the Polish economy had suffered most by the destruction of World War II and its economic reconstruction and development lagged behind the East German economy. At the same time, Poland experienced a leap forward in industrialization and urbanization supported by the state’s centralized economic policy (Hoensch 1990: 300ff.). With the collapse of Soviet communism, also the East German and Polish state centralized economies collapsed as they proved unable to compete with the developed Western post-industrial economies. The East German economy became now a highly subsidized neo-mercantilist annex of the West German and European economy, whereas Poland managed a rather neo-liberal transformation to a capitalist market economy (Poznanski 1993).

Moreover, the separated courses of both nations implied a considerable change in their religious-cultural structures. In West Germany, on the one hand, the former Protestant hegemony over the Catholic minority became transformed to a balanced dualism between Protestantism and Catholicism. To this contributed not only the separation from East Germany with its overwhelming Protestant regions but also the
progressing secularization process weakening the former religious oppositions within German society, and in addition, as a reaction to the Nazi catastrophe, a strengthening ecumenical orientation of both confessions to overcome the former ideological and religious conflicts (Daiber 1995). In East Germany, by contrast, there remained primarily Protestant regions reducing the former opposition to Catholicism to irrelevance. At the same time, the secularization process was particularly strong, due not only to the enforced secularization from above but also to the pronounced proclivity of German Protestantism to secular state socialism (Pollack 1994). On the other hand, in Poland Catholicism became even strengthened due to the national resistance of the Catholic Church to the imposed atheistic secularism (Luks 1997; Morawska 1995). As a consequence, the secularization process as characteristic for industrializing Catholic countries in Europe remained extremely weak. As a result, with the collapse of communism, unified Germany had turned into a rather secular and ecumenical society with a considerably weakened anti-Catholicism, whereas Poland remained a Catholic country with high religiosity, but at the same time with less virulent anti-Protestantism.

After the traumatic separation of the German and Polish nations, and with their isolated reconstruction as nation-states, economies and cultures, the German-Polish post-war relations re-emerged rather in hesitant and ambiguous ways (Jakobsen 1992; Rosenthal 1976). The first post-war decades until the 1960s were still overshadowed by the ethnic-nationalistic conflicts of World War II and its aftermath. The West German Christian-Democratic led governments under Adenauer, Erhard and Kiesinger still upheld the borders of the German Reich of 1937, nourished German claims to the lost Eastern German territories and defined their legal status against the Western and Soviet views as under provisional and temporary Polish administration. They were influenced particularly by the vocal expellee organizations and their declared aim to regain their lost homelands. Also in East Germany, despite the official recognition of the Odra-Neisse border, these attitudes remained influential and were supported by continuing border conflicts. On the Polish side, the official West German position enhanced fears to loose the former Eastern German territories, invigorated the legitimacy claims to have regained its Western ancient Piast territories and inflamed the accusations of German imperialist revanchism.

These official positions were however gradually undermined by a moral reassessment of the past, the guilt feelings on both sides and the wish to overcome the past conflicts and atrocities. In Germany, the guilt declaration of both Churches made a beginning and the emerging Holocaust debate and re-compensation policy opened also the gate for a moral reassessment of the German relations to Eastern Europe and particularly Poland. In Poland, the request for forgiving by the Catholic Church broke the official silence. Bi-national networks like Aktion Sühnezeichen built bridges over the abyss between both peoples. On this basis, in the decades from 1970 to 1990 the new Ostpolitik of the Social Democratic government symbolized
in Brandt’s kneeling in front of the Warsaw ghetto memorial emerged, opened the official acknowledgment of the German-Polish Odra-Neisse border, and found its conclusion in Chancellor Kohl’s official recognition of this border with German unification. And inversely, the Polish governments under Giererek and Jaruzelski began new relations with the West German government, leading to intergovernmental contacts, trade and cultural agreements and so prepared the support for German unification with the collapse of communism.

3. European East-West Integration and the Transformation of German-Polish Relations, 1990-2002 and Beyond

The collapse of communism in Central and Eastern Europe did not only mean the reconstruction of independent nation-states, the transition to democratic regimes and the development of market societies. It also meant a geopolitical sea-change reconnecting and reintegrating Western and Eastern Europe through the progressive reconstitution of a common European market economy, a European pluralistic inter-state system and a multiple European culture. A major vehicle of this European East-West integration is and will be the extension of the West European integration project to the East. Within this geopolitical context, the isolated reconstruction of state and nation in Germany and Poland came to an end and a growing interconnection of both societies developed. At the same time, along with this growing inter-societal and inter-cultural interweaving, the critical question arises to which degree also the traditional structural and cultural asymmetries between the two societies have become reconstituted, to which extent they have been changed through the social and cultural developments in the second half of the 20th century and particularly in the last decade, and what potential impact the eastern enlargement of the European Union will have on the still existing asymmetries?

On the basis of the first mutual reconciliation moves and the final recognition between Germany and Poland, German Polish relations have developed during into a so called ‘special relationship’ (Bingen 1997) during the last decade. After the atrocities of the past, the evolution of this special German-Polish relationship is one of the miraculous twists in 20th century Europe. Since 1990, bi-lateral visits between the two governments have been made on a regular basis. They were accompanied by important symbolic gestures like the visit of President Herzog to the 50th anniversary of the Warsaw uprising or the invitation of foreign minister Bartoszewski to the German parliament at the 50th anniversary of the end of World War II. Military and police cooperation, common manoeuvres of the two armies and common training of police units from both sides were carried out. Economic cooperation, technical and financial aid as well as the creation of a special Odra-Neisse border region accompanied the growing economic liberalization and interconnection between the two countries. There evolved also a new cultural exchange in the forms of contacts between intellectuals and artists, cooperation between academic and cultural
institutions as well as expanding visits and tourism. On this basis, the German
government offered special support for Poland’s accession to the European Union
and conversely also the Polish government accepted Germany as its major partner
on its way to EU membership.

Underneath this governmental policy level, there evolved an increasing
interconnection between both societies through growing economic exchange in
commercial trade, capital flows and labor migration. One indicator for the growing
economic exchange between Germany and Poland is the evolving import/export
structure of the Polish economy. In 2000, Polish overall imports had a total of $48.9
billion concentrating primarily on machine tools, electrical goods and
automobiles (38.4 percent) as well as chemicals and chemical products (17.5
percent), whereas Polish exports consisted of $31.7 billion focussing also on
machine tools, electrical goods and automobiles (30.4 percent) as well as leather
goods and textiles (12.7 percent) and metal goods (12.7 percent), whereby the
import share from Germany with 23.9 percent and the export share to Germany with
34.9 percent was by far the highest as compared to other European countries
(Baratta 2002: 642). These figures show a certain asymmetry regarding the
export/import ratio as well as the composition of goods. This economic asymmetry
is even more marked regarding the flows of foreign capital investments with $10.8
billion, whereby US capital is leading in corporate firm investments and German
capital in medium sized firm investments. Foreign capital is particularly attracted
by qualified and less expensive labor as well as expanding Eastern European
markets. And inversely, Polish labor migration has resumed to pre-WW I levels of
about 1 million, thereof 200,000 in legal contracts and the rest undocumented,
attacted by considerably higher German wage levels (Morawska/ Spohn 1997).

Taken together, these economic asymmetries reconstitute the classical core-
periphery pattern. In 1992, with 24,400 US $ the average per-capita income in
united Germany was about 11 times as high as the Polish one with 2,200 US $ and
the wage level in Germany about 10 times higher than in Poland. These economic
differences were reduced until 1999 to a ratio of 6 in per-capita income between
Germany with 25,600 US $ and Poland with 4,070 US $ and to a ratio of 7 in wage
differences. This reduction reveals the relative success of Polish economic
transformation resulting in comparatively high growth rates; whereas from 1990 to
1998, Polish GDP increased by 4.7 percent per year, the average German growth
rate was 1.2 percent (Baratta 2002: 182, 642). However, since the Polish growth
rate is expected to decrease, the marked economic hierarchy between the Germany
and Poland will continue for the foreseeable future.

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12 Bingen 1999: 175f. The Polish GDP/FDI ratio is however considerably lower than the
Hungarian one; see Greskovits/ Bohle 2001.
13 I have taken these numbers from Bingen 1999: 169.
14 See the tables in Barrata 2002: 31-34, 43-46.
Thus, though the developmental discrepancy between the German and Polish economies has been somewhat reduced, there is still a marked socioeconomic gap and core-periphery asymmetry between both countries. This economic asymmetry is also the social basis of a parallel asymmetry in the power balance between the two countries. Unified Germany with a population over 80 million, as compared to the other big states in Western Europe such as France, Italy and Great Britain with all over 50 million, has won not only more population weight but also more political weight within and outside the European Union. This grown German weight in international politics has been demonstrated in the new political and military role in the break-up process of Yugoslavia, the decisive support for enhancing European economic integration with the introduction of the Euro, the leading role in promoting the eastern enlargement of the EU, the integrative function in reforming the institutional structure of the European Union, the particular relation to post-Soviet Russia as well as the stronger activity in world politics. By contrast, Poland despite its population of almost 40 million and against its self-definition as a crucial nation for the new European architecture is counted rather as a small state. To be sure, Poland has played an active role towards Lithuania, Belarus, Ukraine and particularly Russia. But at the same time, the EU pressures Poland to comply with the Copenhagen criteria as a prerequisite for accession. In this situation, Germany’s special support for Poland in the European Union is crucial. But at the same time, it increases the dependence of Poland on Germany in its accession to the European Union. However, this renewed power asymmetry between Germany and Poland is not equivalent to the dependent and volatile buffer zone position of inter-war Poland between Weimar Germany and Soviet Russia. Contemporary Germany, even if relatively predominant in its economic and political weight, is tamed by its integration into the European institutional framework and Poland, even if economically still relatively backward and politically merely a small state, has gained its security as a part of the Euro-Atlantic bloc.

Despite the substantially changed European geopolitical structure, however, the reemerging economic and political power asymmetry between Germany and Poland contributes also to a renewed cultural asymmetry between both nations. On the German side, the reconstruction of its European core position of relative economic dominance went hand in hand with a cultural self-definition of Germany as the economic model for Europe and the economic locomotive of European integration. This self-image now merges with Germany’s special role for the economic modernization of Eastern Europe. In a parallel, the political integration into the European Community as first defined as a self-protection against Germany’s potential renewal as a nationalistic hegemonic power now changes into an increasing claim of a leadership function for modeling the EU and its enlargement to the East.

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15 Ivan Berend (1996) presents an excellent, though too pessimistic study of the general West-East European core-periphery relations.
These new aspirations for a European economic and political leadership role are intrinsically intertwined with a new self-conscious posture of having come to terms with the past and this moral reassurance supports also the specific reconciliatory mission towards Eastern Europe. With regard to Poland, these German self-images of a remoralized economic and political model for Europe revitalize the traditional counter-image of Poland as an economically rather backward, politically still unstable and culturally unenlightened society. On the basis of the increased Polish labor migration to Germany, in addition, these images are linked to renewed German stereotypes of the Poles as uncultured and cheap workers and sometimes even criminals and thieves. Due to the lack of an ethnic-nationalistic conflict situation as in the past, however, these revived images and stereotypes are less widespread, less powerful, more fluid and also counteracted by more sympathetic and egalitarian images and views.

On the Polish side, the successful role of the Solidarność movement, its sacrifice for the Polish nation and its contribution to the fall of communism in Poland and Eastern Europe was accompanied by a revival of Polish heroic-romantic nationalism and its core image of Poland’s special mission for Europe. But this important current within Polish national identity soon again eroded along with the crisis-prone economic transformation process, the desintegration of Solidarność, and the political come-back of the postcommunists on the road to consolidated democracy, the declining role of the intelligentsia and the rejection of the too powerful influence of the Catholic church. In addition, the imagined European mission soon conflicted with the requirements of the European Union to take over the acquis communautaire. Moreover, the highly emotional public debate on Jedwabne destroyed the self-image of a solely benign and victimized Polish nation. With all this, the heroic-romantic character traits of Polish identity with its imagined cultural superiority of the Polish nation were substituted by more pragmatic orientations but also a renewed sense of cultural inferiority. This swing of the social psychological pendulum affected also the changing attitudes towards Germany. On the one hand, Germany was accepted and also to a certain extent appreciated as the gate to Europe and with it became the model of an economically and politically modern Europe. On the other hand, this mobilized also traditional stereotypes of the conquering and dominating Germans aiming to return to their former lands, sell out Polish farmers, invade Poland by their economic power and using Brussels for these purposes (see Lang 2000). The revival of these traditional stereotypes were in addition supported by the rise of German neo-nationalist xenophobia and the often discriminating experience of Polish migrant workers in Germany. Still, taking together these positive and negative attitudes, the Polish sympathy levels for the

16 These images are revitalizing particularly in crisis situations like the Odra flood in 1997. On the evolution of German-Polish mutual perceptions and stereotypes, see also Grathoff/ Kloskowska 1994.
17 See the sensitive essays of Adam Krzeminski Deutsch-Polnische Verspiegelungen.
Germans have risen from marked antipathy in the early 1990s to medium sympathy at the end of this decade (CBOS 2000).

In summarizing this complex relational matrix between German and Polish society, it can be generally stated that the historical structural and cultural asymmetries between both societies have reappeared to a certain extent but, at the same time, they have been crystallizing in considerably changed forms. Firstly, the economic core-periphery relation has been revived, but the Europeanization of the German economy and the expanding dynamics of the Polish economy have changed and diminished the traditional socio-economic inequalities and dependencies. Secondly, the political power hierarchy has been reconstituted, but the ethnic-demographic separation of both societies, the mutual acknowledgment and again the European mediation of German political hegemony have considerably eroded the former hierarchical nationalistic oppositions. And thirdly, cultural asymmetries have reappeared, but the former religious Protestant-Catholic dualism interwoven with nationalistic missions has lost its force. As a corollary, also the revived traditional stereotypes remain limited in scope and in addition are counteracted by the political and cultural elites in both countries and their positive relationship to each other. Let us finally ask: How does this inter-societal matrix between Germany and Poland affect the extension of European integration to the East and how will the extending eastern enlargement of the European Union impact on the further development of this German-Polish relational matrix?

The evolving eastern enlargement of the European Union is motivated by a variety of imperatives shared by the Western European and Eastern European elites (Spohn 2000a). It is supposed to accelerate the reconnection between the two parts of the continent; support an overarching pan-European peace and security zone; create a pan-European economy in order to level down the traditional socio-economic gap; extend the transnational political-legal institutional order of the European Union in order to stabilize the consolidation of the new democracies in Central and Eastern Europe; and improve the cultural understanding between the multiple ethnic and national cultures and identities in Europe. For the current development and shape of the eastern enlargement process, not only these guiding imperatives but also the complex structural conditions do come into play: the political and economic interests of each country; the reform capacity of the EU to take in potentially double as many member states; and the adaptation capacity of the Central and Eastern European accession candidates to comply with the entrance criteria to the European Union. In this overall context of the eastern enlargement, the German-Polish relations have played a crucial role. Germany as the country directly neighboring to Central and Eastern Europe has a vital geopolitical and economic interest to integrate these countries in the common European institutional framework. Poland as the biggest ECE7 country represents a sort of litmus test whether or not the eastern enlargement of the European Union will work.
These converging geopolitical interests determine also the attitudes of the elites to the eastern enlargement on both sides. A recent survey analysis of German and Polish elite attitudes towards the EU enlargement reveals a considerable degree of convergence with some characteristic differences (Eberwein/Ecker-Erhardt 2001). On the part of the German elite, 85 percent support the accession of Poland to the EU, 11.5 percent are undecided and only 3.5 percent are against it. On the part of the Polish elite, even 95.2 percent are for Poland’s integration into the EU, only 1.6 percent reject it and 3.2 percent are undecided (Eberwein/Ecker-Erhardt 2001).

Regarding the potential gains and losses for Poland resulting from the eastern enlargement, German and Polish elites share the expectation that Poland will be fully recognized as part of Europe and be protected from Russia. But the Polish side sets more hopes in influencing European culture and improving Polish living standards whereas the German side emphasizes more the considerable support for Poland by EU funds. Regarding the gains and losses for Germany, both sides agree that Germany will win new Eastern European markets, but the Polish side emphasizes more that Germany will win more security at its Eastern border and will gain more political influence in Eastern Europe. And regarding the evaluation of converging European policy domains, both sides support mainly a common security policy, a common currency, a common economic policy, a common immigration policy, a common environmental policy and even a common army, but less a common police force and common citizenship. Yet, the Polish side is more skeptical about a common foreign policy and a common financial policy whereas German support for a common social policy is comparatively weak. On the whole, this study reveals a high convergence of the German and Polish elites regarding their common support of the eastern enlargement in its general direction and in particular policy issues. The differences are characteristically related to the importance of national culture on the Polish side and its potential threat by West European and German secular culture, and to the importance of economic interests on the German side regarding the expected socio-economic and financial costs of the eastern enlargement.

These differences on the elite level reflect also considerable differences and divergencies in the attitudes towards the eastern enlargement on the public mass level (Spohn 2000b). On the German side, the general support for the eastern enlargement with 36 percent of the population in 2000 is rather low and the general rejection level with 43 percent rather high as compared to the EU average support of 44 percent and the rejection rate of 35 percent.\(^{18}\) These public attitudes reflect particularly the fear of rising immigration, higher unemployment rates, higher financial burdens and loss of EU subsidies. The German support for Poland follows the general support level for the eastern enlargement: in 2000, 37 percent of the German population were in favour of and 46 percent against Poland’s accession.\(^{19}\)


\(^{19}\) Eurobarometer 54, 2001.
But there is also a characteristic difference between West and East Germany: only 36 percent of West Germans, but 42 percent of East Germans support Poland’s accession to the EU whereas 49 percent of West Germans, but only 40 percent of East Germans reject it. This difference is related to the stronger persistence of traditional Polish stereotypes in West Germany and their stronger dissolution in East Germany by the common communist past. On the Polish side, throughout the 1990s general support for the eastern enlargement was very high - with levels above 70 percent of the population. But the more the actual accession has been approaching the support levels have been falling to the lower 50 percent, and the rejection levels have been rising into the upper 20 percent. The accession to the EU is particularly supported by the more well to do, the new middle class, the educated strata and the younger generation, whereas the peasants, the old working class, the less educated and the older generation have rising fears about the consequences. At the center of these public fears are the loss of national independence, the erosion of Catholic values by Western European secularism, the rising economic competition and its negative social consequences. Of importance in these public fears is also the imagined role of hegemonic Germany. So it is feared to re-conquer Polish lands, colonize Poland, sell out Polish business and to use Brussels for these purposes (Lang 2000).

The consequence of these stereotypical fears on both sides is that the accession of Poland to the European Union – in all probability in 2004 – will be accompanied, on request of the German and Polish government, by a transition period of about 4 to 7 years in which Poles will have only limited access to the Western European labor market and foreigners are restricted in buying Polish land. Yet, these delaying measures will hold only temporarily and the full accession of Poland will prove that the stereotypical fears on the German and the Polish sides are grossly exaggerated. Neither are the Poles, who will find growing opportunities in their own country motivated to emigrate in growing numbers to Germany nor are the Germans, who are only to a very small degree still farmers, particularly interested in Polish land. On the contrary, the eastern enlargement will accelerate the economic exchange and interconnection between both countries, though continuing but with a diminishing hierarchy a West-East German-Polish gradient. As well, the membership of the Eastern Central European countries in the European Union will even more than now counterbalance the political weight of the Western European big states by the many small states. With it, also the still existing power hierarchy between Germany and Poland will be further reduced. Finally, the accession of Poland to the EU will also offer more opportunities for an increased cultural exchange between the two countries. Even if these opportunities are taken up, this will probably not mean a complete reversal of the cultural hierarchy between the two countries: the strong interest of Poles in German and Western cultures and languages and the low interest

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20 Eurobarometer 50, 1999.
of Germans in Polish culture and language. But an increasing cultural exchange would be the only way to further reduce the still present and often unconscious national missionary overtones and stereotypical fears in both nations by a common participation in a multiple European culture.

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