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Conflict and Co-operation: Poland's Border Regions in the Cold War and After¹

Keywords: Polish-German border, Polish eastern border, border regime, perceptions of border

Using the example of Polish border regions, the article examines the phenomenon of borders and border regions in connection with neighbourhood relations from the end of the Second World War until 2011. At what point does a border become a border region? How did neighbourhood relations develop in the course of Polish history? How far have the respective neighbours progressed in overcoming prejudice and stereotypes? These questions will be discussed within the context of Poland's western border with Germany and her eastern borders with Russia and Ukraine. The article analyses different perceptions of the Polish western and eastern border regions by its inhabitants. How did the perceptions of the border change in the periods of a closed and open border? How did popular narratives of the border and border region develop amidst the contexts of the Cold War and the end of Communism?

Konflikt und Kooperation: Polens Grenzregionen im Kalten Krieg und danach

Schlüsselwörter: deutsch-polnische Grenze, Ostgrenze Polens, Grenzregime, Wahrnehmung von Grenzen

Am Beispiel der polnischen Grenzregionen untersucht der Artikel die Nachbarschaftsbeziehungen Polens in der Zeit zwischen dem Zweiten Weltkrieg und dem Jahr 2011. Folgende Fragen werden diskutiert: Wie entwickelten sich die polnischen Nachbarschaftsbeziehungen im angegebenen Zeitraum? Wie verliefen die Prozesse zur Überwindung von Stereotypen und Vorurteilen? Ab welchem Zeitpunkt wird eine Grenze zu einer Grenzregion? Der Artikel konzentriert sich dabei insbesondere auf die Wahrnehmung des „Anderen“ durch polnische EinwohnerInnen in den Grenzregionen. Deutlich wird, dass es große Unterschiede zwischen den östlichen und westlichen Grenzen gibt. Besonderen Einfluss hatten Grenzöffnungen bzw. -schließungen; das Narrativ der Grenze wandelte sich jedoch im Kontext des Kalten Krieges und der Zeit danach.

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1. Introduction

Border studies as a discipline lends itself to the investigation of various types of interdependence. The concept of “neighbourhood” expresses the nature of relations between different national groupings living in a shared area and the ways in which these relationships developed, i.e. “cognitive interdependence”. According to Siegwart Lindenberg, the relationships between individual members of different groups exhibit considerable difference to those maintained between individuals of the same group (1997, 297). Such interdependencies develop for a number of reasons; one advanced by Lindenberg involves the development of a “common predicament” (1997, 298). For the inhabitants of the border region, this can involve a shared situation and fate e.g. expulsion. The fact of living in a border region can often lead individuals drawn from different groups to share common aims. This invariably results in the initiation of cross-border contacts. The existence of cross-border dependencies – people need to cross the border to live, work or shop there – are advanced by border studies scholars as indicative of “functional interdependence”, best described as the dependence of one group on another (Kelley/Thibaut 1978). Cross-border visits paid to relatives, friends or acquaintances, or even leisure time spent on the other side of a border represent the development of “structural interdependence” between different groupings, and are not based on dependence (Cartwright/Harary 1956/1963).

Both functional and structural interdependence requires support from both sides of the divide. In applying the concept of neighbourhood relations to a border region, it is important to address the question as to the connection between cognitive, functional and structural interdependence. Indeed, the gradual change to its character over time often rules out any possibility of determining the exact nature of this interdependence. Thus functional interdependence can gradually develop into structural interdependence as “dependence” becomes ever less important. Such a change requires not only open borders, but a disinterested willingness on both sides to engage in this process. Border regions thus tend to lend themselves to the investigation of such transitions from one type of interdependence to another.² This article addresses the feelings and perceptions of those contemporaries forced since 1945 to deal with the border on a daily basis; it also considers the impact on their lives of the key events on Poland’s eastern and western borders.

2. Aims, methodology and sources

This treatment focuses on the experience of every-day life in the Polish border regions and traces the various attitudes held on the Polish side of the border area regarding their international neighbours. The overall aim of this article is to examine and compare different border regions within one country. It will become clear that the meaning of the term “border” not only changes with time, but that it comprises a specific spatial dimension. Appreciation of this aspect is of key importance to any attempt to understand the significance of a border – not least in political terms – especially in a country such as Poland.

Based on the data provided by a number of opinion polls conducted in Poland between 1998 and 2011 focussing on questions relating to life in the border area and relations between Poland and its neighbours, the article seeks to compare popular Polish attitudes and perceptions of the western and the eastern borders of Poland. These poll responses are supplemented by a thorough

analysis of printed primary sources, above all newspaper articles. This investigation also addresses the situation on the German-Polish border through an analysis of forty unstandardized biographical interviews conducted with a representative selection of the German and Polish population of the divided cities on the rivers Oder and Neisse. Held between 1998 and 2000, these interviews focussed on the experience of every-day life on both sides of the river and popular attitudes to their international neighbours. Furthermore, the article confronts the analysis of these interviews presented in previous research with hard data drawn from the Polish Eastern border regions, in order to effect a systematic analysis of the differences between the Polish western and eastern borders and cross-border attitudes.

This rich and complementary material, derived from both quantitative and qualitative sources, offers a unique data pool for the comparison of three border regions within a single country. The analysis of each region follows the three categories of cognitive, functional and structural interdependencies outlined above. Not surprisingly, the past and present of relations between neighbouring countries has generated a number of very different meanings of borders within one nation. As will become clear however, perceptions and attitudes also exercise an important influence on contemporary “border politics” and the evolving form of the borders.

3. Cross-border relations in the memory of the inhabitants of the Polish-German border region

The product of Great Power diplomacy at Potsdam, the Polish-German border hindered good relations between Poland and Germany for many years (Stokłosa 2009, 44). The USSR wished to keep the eastern territories of Poland it had annexed in 1939; therefore, it suggested to shift Poland westward at the expense of Germany and to expel the German population from the respective territories. This meant a considerable upheaval for both Germany and Poland, involving a radical break with their previous national histories. Both nations lost their long-held eastern territories and were forced to endure mass deportations and expulsions (Ther 1998, 44). The former German towns straddling the newly drawn border were forcibly partitioned, producing a number of “divided towns” including Görlitz-Zgorzelec, Guben-Gubin, Frankfurt an der Oder-Słubice, Bad Muskau-Łęknica and many others (Jajeśniak-Quast/Stokłosa 2000, 34–38). The inhabitants of such towns experienced the immediate post-war years in an environment of mutual hatred and fear. The German expellees were forbidden to visit their former homelands and meet the new inhabitants (Stokłosa 2001, 132); the newly arrived Polish population was similarly also not allowed to travel westwards (Stokłosa 2012, 245).

Such experience remained and indeed remains a constitutive part of the collective memory on both sides of the border. Of considerable importance for the later reconciliation between Germans and Poles in the border area, was the common awareness and even understanding present on both sides of the border regarding shared recent experiences. Polish interview partners for example, knew that many of their former German neighbours had been expelled from the (now Polish) half of the divided towns. On the other side of the border, the Germans understood that the Poles replacing them had arrived as part of an involuntary process, and that they had themselves suffered expulsion from their homes. Nevertheless, the overwhelming feeling of grievance militated against any potential for reconciliation posed by this understanding and permitted the development of the mutual atmosphere of hatred prevalent either side of the border. (Jajeśniak-Quast/Stokłosa 2000, 50).

The majority of the German and Polish interview partners were aware of the changes effected in 1950 by the Treaty of Zgorzelec. Official confirmation by the GDR and PRP of the border along the Oder-Neisse line resulted in widespread popular acceptance of the new border. Coming to terms with the loss of territory, the expellees on the German side of the border began to establish a home in their new surrounding. For their part, the inhabitants of western and northern Poland were now able to develop a sense of security, no longer fearing that they would ever again be required to move (Stokłosa 2003a, 141–144).

The period between 1945 and 1972 was characterized by the development of a limited degree of functional interdependence between the inhabitants on the German and Polish sides of the divided cities. The only consideration leading to the establishment of cross-border contacts was that of joint necessity and practicality. Both sides realized that their mutual existence depended upon their providing at least basic assistance to each other. Such considerations were manifested in infrastructure agreements relating to public utilities such as gas and water provision. The once-united cities had concentrated such services on one side or the other; in order to remain viable, both sides had to co-operate closely (Jajeśniak-Quast/Stokłosa 2000, 118–125). Averse as they were to each other, the members of both nations were prepared to accept only functional interdependence.

The first opening of the German-Polish border in January 1972 was a special experience for those on both sides of the border, German and Polish alike. All interview partners living in the border region in 1972 can remember the event and the majority could remember the exact day – New Year’s Eve (a Friday). In particular, a number of the German interview partners mentioned the Sunday spent walking around the Polish part of the town (Stokłosa 2003a, 173–175).

Having lived in Guben for thirty years, the Polish Alojza M. was the first person to cross the border. Arriving in Poland with her husband and a friend, she made the spontaneous decision to attend a Polish dance festival, where she received a warm reception. As she emphasized (with no little pride) *we wanted to be the first to cross the border*. Józef and Marianna C. remembered celebrating the opening of the border on the bridge with a bottle of sparkling wine. *There was such a large firework display – it was very interesting* – said Marianna C. with great enthusiasm. Mirosław P., a Polish railway worker and Zbigniew D., a barber from Gubin, also recounted their experience of the event with great enthusiasm. Mirosław P. concluded: *the whole thing was fantastic*. Some inhabitants of Guben did not dare to cross the border and watched everything from the bridge. Helgard M., who has lived in Guben for many years, told us:

We went to the border at midnight. We just watched and watched. A number crossed straight away, but we didn't dare. Why aren't the Poles coming over; we asked ourselves. I couldn't understand it. Why weren't they coming? I must have misunderstood what they wrote in the newspapers, as they [the Poles] were only allowed to come across three or four or even five days later. They just stood on their side and watched. They looked just as confused and afraid as us.

The interview partners did not provide a unitary account of the development of contacts between the divided towns on the Oder and Neisse during the period of the open border (1972–1980). Whilst a number of interview partners spoke of intensive collaboration between Guben and Gubin, others spoke of an imposed friendship. Personal experience was decisive in forming any judgement (Stokłosa 2003a, 184–227).

Much evidence points to the development of a certain level of structural interdependence between the two border regions following the opening of the German-Polish border in 1972. No longer a matter of bare necessity, contacts between the German and Polish inhabitants of the border region began to develop out of a dawning awareness of a set of common interests uniting Germans and Poles. In many cases, functional interdependence began to assume a structural form. For example, the official programmes of co-operation between East German and Polish institutions and schools which began after 1950 were clearly indicative of functional interdependence. Established under the aegis of the Eastern bloc, such top-down co-operation was soon supplemented by a number of informal, private contacts. Growing out of more than necessity, many of these emotionally-invested and entirely voluntary actions exhibited considerable longevity. A similar case was presented by the history of female Polish labourers employed in the GDR after 1966 (Anders 2000; Röhr 2001). Moved to commute to East Germany by economic pressures (predominantly unemployment), this phenomenon represents a clear-cut case of functional interdependence. However, with the growing number of German-Polish friendships and even marriages, the interdependence came to assume a structural character.

Both our German and Polish interview partners were aware of the background to the border closure in 1980: the development of the Polish opposition movement *Solidarność* and the economic problems in both states. Memories of the period of the closed border (1980–1991) all involve a complex system involving visas, invitations and long queues. The majority of cross-border contacts established in the mid-to-late 1970s were interrupted after 1980 (Jajeśniak-Quast/Stokłosa 2000, 95–100). Especially pertinent to the current analysis was the maintenance of these contacts over the period of enforced isolation. Whatever their original nature, this single fact establishes them unmistakably as indicative of structural interdependence. The interruption of official cross-border co-operation had removed all vestiges of functional interdependence from the region. Those few private contacts remaining had spawned something of a paradox – a region with little or no interdependence but all of it structural in nature.

Life in the German-Polish border region in the 1990s and the personal experiences made there also feature in the region's collective memory and thus the interviews made. Testimony on life in the divided towns provided by those on both sides of the border includes reports of phenomena typical to this period involving criminality, prostitution, smuggling or car thefts. Almost all those interviewed mention unemployment; the levels of which were higher than the respective national average on both sides of the border. Nevertheless, both groups have retained positive images of the period, involving the co-operation between the two international neighbours in a range of spheres, common meetings as well as cross-border acquaintanceships and friendships (Stokłosa 2003a, 337–359).

4. Perception of the German-Polish border in contemporary Poland

In a recent nation-wide poll, a majority of Poles (81 per cent) believe in the possibility of continued peaceful partnership relations with Germany. Only 12 per cent of Polish respondents advanced the impossibility of good relations between Germany and Poland (CBOS 2011, 1). This represents a clear improvement on previous years. In 2007 only 18 per cent of Polish respondents assessed German-Polish relations as being “good” (CBOS 2007, 7). One year later, answers reflecting this view increased to 38 per cent (CBOS 2008, 1). Pessimism remains widespread amongst those Poles old enough to remember the Second World War (CBOS 2011, 2), reflecting the continued

presence of the Second World War in the collective memory of those Poles old enough to remember its events. Its transmission to younger generations ensures its continued contemporary influence on both attitudes towards Germany and the nature of German-Polish relations. Voters for the liberal *Platforma Obywatelska* (Citizens platform) exhibit a more positive attitude towards Germany and Germans than do supporters of the Right-wing *Prawo i Sprawiedliwość* (Law and Justice). 50 per cent of Polish respondents were of the opinion that German-Polish relations are “not bad.” Only 3 per cent are of the opposite opinion (CBOS 2011, 2).

Despite the majority positive attitude towards Germany amongst Poles, prejudice and stereotypes retain a presence in the mental world on both sides of the border. German contributions to this area focus primarily on Polish car thieves, high levels of criminality and disorder (the traditional topos of “Polish slackers”). Stereotypical Polish conceptions of the Germans concentrate on their characterization as “Nazis”. Polish mistrust of Germany, focussing especially on her putative power-political intentions, continues to thrive. Almost 70 per cent of Poles reject a leading German role in either Europe or the world. More surprising than the existence of this traditional fear is the currency which it finds amongst Poles with a high level of education. Indeed, only 19 per cent of all opinion expressed noted the existence of common German-Polish interests. Almost 50 per cent of Polish respondents (especially educated city dwellers) expressed the opinion that Germany is interested in maintaining good relations with Russia at the expense of Poland (CBOS 2011, 7–8). Many also believe that German power is growing far too rapidly (2008a, 7). Such attitudes were only nourished by the signature in September 2005 of a German-Russian agreement to build a Baltic Sea gas pipeline bypassing Poland (CBOS 2006a, 1).

The Polish sociologist and historian Elżbieta Opilowska notes that despite the existence of daily contacts between the two populations in terms of shopping and walks, the level of negative conceptions and mistrust remains considerable (Opilowska 2011, 275). A survey of the inhabitants of the towns in immediate proximity to the border conducted in 2010 revealed that a majority of the citizens of the divided city on the Oder and Neisse display a high level of identification with only their part of the city and consider European integration as a project best left to municipal worthies. Although the level of cross-border contacts maintained by the inhabitants of the border area is far greater than the respective national averages, it is not possible to speak of a common identity or even identification with the border region as a whole. The mental border still acts as a considerable impediment to daily contacts (*ibid.*, 276).

Which direction has regional interdependence in the German-Polish border area taken in the last twenty-one years? The second opening of the German-Polish border in April 1991 ushered in an age of both forms of interdependences. Labour migration and measures of official co-operation between German and Polish institutions, schools and companies are all forms of functional interdependence. On the other hand, the entirely voluntary nature of private contacts and cross-border friendships which have grown over the last few years remove such cross-border links from this structural context. Based as they are, on sentiment and not dependence, they represent indisputable evidence of the growth in recent years of a high and flourishing level of structural interdependence. Especially positive is the opinion expressed in 2008 by over 50 per cent of Polish respondents focussing on the possibility and indeed desirability of a joint German-Polish interpretation of recent history (CBOS 2008, 8).

5. Perceptions of the border amongst the inhabitants of Poland's eastern border region

The border has also left a deep impression in the memories of the inhabitants of the eastern border region. Indeed, the “mental border” found in the heads of the inhabitants of this region is probably far stronger than that present in the German-Polish border area, as the border with the Soviet Union was even more strictly sealed and guarded. Directly after its establishment in the aftermath of the Second World War, the Polish-Soviet border was transformed into a hermetically sealed and exceptionally well-guarded frontier, a state which changed little until 1985 (Chandler 1998, 83; Stokłosa 2003b, 55; Stępień 2001, 265). The Kaliningrad district was transformed into a military base (Kennard 2010, 138). The Polish border with the Soviet Union was the most impermeable of the Polish borders; indeed, the first border crossing point was established only in 1955 (Komornicki 1999, 163; Sakson 2001, 37; Trojanowska-Strzęboszewska 2005, 320). For ten years, the populations either side of the Soviet-Polish border were entirely cut off from each other, unable to establish any form of contact. The economic effects of this separation – many Poles wanted to cross the border to reach their former possessions – brought dissent and a considerable level of protest. The paranoia of this Stalinist atmosphere precluded all forms of cross-border contact and family and social bonds were the first to suffer under such conditions. Indeed, only a privileged minority of military and party officials were permitted to cross the border. Levels of control were not equal on both sides of the frontier and a strict Soviet border regime contrasted to more lax controls on the Polish side. Indeed, border crossings were not the only activities subject to official regulation: all gatherings and visits to the border-region required prior registration as did the possession of a number of articles including cameras, telephones and radios. Even lighting practices in private residences was subject to restriction (Trojanowska-Strzęboszewska 2005, 324–325). As in other regions in East Central Europe, the artificial and arbitrary manner in which the border had been drawn also led to the division of towns, villages, estates and forests.

With de-Stalinization and after the Polish October and the Soviet crackdown on the Hungarian uprising of 1956, a slow relaxation of the strict controls on the Soviet-Polish border followed. Cross-border co-operation between settlements in the immediate vicinity of the frontier developed exclusively between the two Communist parties; ordinary citizens were unable to cross the frontier. Cross-border travel was also facilitated on the basis of school and university exchanges and between cultural and sporting associations (Żukowski 2002, 332; Wojnowski 2001, 201). The 1970s saw the establishment of regular border crossings within the framework of the so-called “friendship busses” travelling above all between the Kaliningrad district and the Voivodship Olsztyn. Such official excursions provided Polish citizens with the opportunity to purchase articles which in Poland were either non-existent or over-priced. Such “journeys of friendship” were also often used as a source of additional income; to buy coveted or cheaper Soviet goods to be sold in Poland (Morzycki-Markowski 2010, 61; Wojnowski 1999, 255).

Despite such cross-border contacts, the Soviet-Polish border remained a closed and closely controlled zone right up into the mid-1980s (Trojanowska-Strzęboszewska 2005, 326). Those limited contacts which existed were always kept to a tightly-controlled minimum. Indeed, after the introduction of a liberalized passport system in the 1970s, it was easier to travel to the capitalist west than to cross the border to the Soviet “brother state”. This situation only began to change in the mid-1980s, within the framework of Gorbachev's *Perestroika*. 1987 saw the signing of an agreement between the USSR and Poland regulating simplified border crossing for

inhabitants of the common border region. The restricted level of cross-border traffic introduced in December 1979 and then revoked only ten months later was now reassumed with full effect (Stokłosa 2003a, 61–63).

The collapse of the Soviet Union presented Poland with four new eastern neighbours: Lithuania, Russia, Ukraine and Belorussia. Polish eastern policy after 1989 established itself as an attempt to open its borders and increase cross-border co-operation (Szul 2002, 382). Since May 2004, the Polish-Russian (Kaliningrad district), Polish-Belarusian and Polish-Ukrainian border-areas now see direct contact between the newly extended European Union and their neighbours. The character of both the physical and mental borders have undergone considerable change. The following section analyses the perceptions and attitudes of the inhabitants of the Polish-Ukrainian and the Polish-Russian border region.

6. Contemporary perceptions of the Polish-Ukrainian border

The 526-km long Polish-Ukrainian border is the longest section of Poland's eastern border. The population in the border region of over 8 million people is distributed almost equally, with 4,361,700 inhabitants on the Polish and 3,769,400 on the Ukrainian side (Miszczuk 2002, 265). Post-war relations between the two communist "brother states" were anything but fraternal, characterized as they were, by a distinct level of conflict. This conflict is still present in the memory of the inhabitants of both sides of the border. Changed borders and the westwards displacement of Poland involved a massive and forced population exchange involving 810,415 Poles and 482,880 Ukrainians. Marking not only the end of a centuries-long Polish presence in Ukraine it also saw the genesis of a dispute over Galicia, the intractability of which was matched only by its violent nature. There is no reliable information regarding the casualty levels of a number of battles between the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA) and the forces of the Soviet Ministry of the Interior, but one episode will suffice to illustrate the brutal nature of this internecine conflict. Responding to the assassination of the Polish Minister of Defence General Karol Świerczewski in 1947, the Polish government launched Operation "Wisła" (Vistula), in which a combined body of Polish, Soviet and Czechoslovakian troops broke UPA resistance in eastern Poland, expelling the remnants of the Ukrainian population (Pisuliński 2003, 87–93).

This campaign has been subject to a range of different and indeed irreconcilable interpretations in Ukraine and Poland. Whilst a number Poles view the UPA, founded in 1942, as nothing short of a "gang" of criminal elements, they shroud the activities of the opposing Polish "Armia Krajowa" (AK) in national mythology, stylizing their members as heroes. Official Ukrainian policy on the other hand, refuses to acknowledge the existence of a number of episodes of UPA violence against the Polish civil population. Members of certain Ukrainian circles even portray the UPA partisans as the best examples of noble and selfless soldiery. The cult surrounding the Ukrainian politician Stepan Andrijoyvyč Bandera and his Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN) from which the UPA grew, is still very much alive and the collective view of the "national campaign of liberation" which his present-day supporters seek to propagate enjoys wide popular credence. Within this context, it is no surprise that historians maintain strict silence around what amounts to a national taboo – the collaboration of the OUN groups with Nazi Germany during the Second World War and the involvement of a number of Ukrainian militias in Pogroms within the context of the Holocaust. The Polish-Ukrainian historical discourse remains

dominated by these two extreme positions within the two strongly nationalist historiographies. As a result, judgements on the nature and character of the OUN, UPA and AK remain the key questions within the public controversies surrounding the historical assessment of World War Two and the conduct of both nations within it (Chudzik et al. 2006, 55–57).

After the breakdown of State Communism and the disintegration of the USSR, Ukraine was the first of Poland's eastern neighbours with whom she concluded a mutual co-operation treaty (May 1992) regulating a common approach to political, economic and cultural policies. Both sides recognized the existing Polish-Ukrainian border and recorded that neither side levelled any territorial claims against the other (Ziemer 2001, 60). This partnership enjoys almost unanimous support within the Polish population. Surveys by the Polish opinion pollsters CBOS showed that 77 per cent of respondents were of the opinion that Poland should work within the framework of the European Union to intensify relations with the countries of the former Soviet Union (CBOS 2009, 6). Indeed, the support for the Polish-Ukrainian partnership continues to increase. In 2006, over three-quarters (77 per cent) of Poles questioned supported the Polish-Ukrainian rapprochement (CBOS 2006, 5). An important factor influencing this nature of public opinion was the "Orange Revolution" of the autumn of 2004 (CBOS 2009, 8). Polish-Ukrainian relations are regarded positively by the great majority of the younger generation (CBOS 2009, 8); nevertheless, the interesting aspect of opinion polls is the support registered for this partnership by the majority of the older generation of over 65, who remember the Polish-Ukrainian conflicts of the Second World War. 68 per cent of respondents over 65 are optimistic in this question; only 24 per cent do not support moves to establish Polish-Ukrainian friendship (CBOS 2006, 6). The positive attitude of the war-time generation can be explained by a widespread resolve to prevent the recurrence of such a conflict. Optimism in this matter increases with the level of education. Politically interested individuals, regardless of their convictions, are also more optimistic than their apolitical counterparts (CBOS 2006, 6). Religion also plays a part in shaping attitudes – non-religious respondents judged Polish-Ukrainian relations more positively than those with religious convictions (CBOS 2009, 8). One very positive finding of the census was that only 5 per cent of Poles actually feel threatened by Ukraine (CBOS 2006, 8). The absence of such fears is most likely rooted in the wide-spread belief (84 per cent of all respondents) in the possibility of good relations with Ukraine. Indeed, only 7 per cent of respondents expressed a different opinion (CBOS 2009, 8).

The high level of official Polish-Ukrainian co-operation on the state level is in many cases replicated on the regional level and a number of bilateral educational, cultural, academic and economic initiatives have been launched in border regions (Kiiskinen 2012; Mrinska 2006; Krok/Smętkowski 2006). Relations of a functional nature are especially close between Ukrainian and Polish schools, cultural institutions, museums and even small and medium businesses in the Przemyśl and Mościska regions. The cultural centre in Przemyśl maintains close and active relations with the concert hall, philharmonic orchestra and theatre in Lviv (Wojakowski 2001, 372; Bojar 2001, 460). The majority of initiatives were initiated within the framework of the numerous Euroregions which developed during the 1990s.³ Young Poles and Ukrainians cross the border for educational purposes (Gawlewicz/Yndigejn 2012, 179–180).

Nevertheless, cross-border contacts have often restricted themselves to those occurring within the framework of trade and smuggling. Such activities, also clearly indicative of functional interdependence, represented the most important source of income for many border settlements. The main reason for both Poles and Ukrainians to cross the border was a shopping trip (Polese 2012, 29–32; Mischczuk 2002, 268; Mikułowski-Pomorski 2002, 361). Despite the in-

volvement of the inhabitants of both nations within this illegal trade, Ukrainians remain unwelcome guests to Poland (Kowalczyk 1997, 327–328). This already low level of cross-border contact was further reduced by the introduction in October 2003 of a visa system (PAP [Polish Press Agency] 2003a; PAP 2003b; *Rzeczpospolita* 2003; PAP 2003c; *Gazeta Wyborcza* 2003). Ukrainians view the one-sided nature of this requirement (Ukrainians require a visa, Poles do not) as being unfair and organized a protest on the day of its introduction by trying to prevent Polish traders from crossing the border (PAP 2003d). 45 per cent of Polish respondents viewed the visa system positively even before its introduction (CBOS 2002, 2). Prevailing opinion focuses on the negative effects of visa-free movement across the Polish eastern border (CBOS 2001, 1). This situation was not reproduced in Poland's eastern border region: in 2002, 38 per cent of its inhabitants expressed the opinion that neither Poland nor the EU will profit from the visa system (CBOS 2002, 2).

Smuggling persists in the border region. The so-called “ants” cross the border repeatedly on a daily basis (queues permitting) to buy cigarettes, alcohol, petrol and amber on the Ukrainian side of the border which they sell in Poland. Only one (that in Medyka) of the six border crossings between Poland and Ukraine is open to pedestrians. A significant point of interest is that both the Ukrainian and Polish populations exhibit solidarity with and provide mutual support to the smugglers. The great majority of “ants” are middle-aged woman (Byrska-Szklarczyk 2012, 100). Smuggling meets with a high level of popular acceptance. The ants justify their activities thus: *were the state to give us work, we would not need to smuggle any cigarettes or vodka* (Loginow 2011, 49).

A survey of 2000 Ukrainians conducted in 2010 showed that the level of Ukrainian interest in Poland is not as great as it was in 1990. A similar lack of interest is to be found in the media. Ten years ago, many Ukrainian journalists had at least a reading knowledge of Polish and were well-informed about events in Poland. They viewed Poland as being a model of a successful transformation from Communism. Today, many young Ukrainians take Poland as being only a second class western nation. Nevertheless, many of those living on the Ukrainian side of the Polish-Ukrainian border still find the Polish-Ukrainian border region attractive. 35 per cent of the Ukrainian inhabitants of the border classify relations with Poland as being very important and 92 per cent even believe that these bilateral relations are very good (Kucharczyk et al. 2010). The popular Ukrainian perception of Poland and Poles is more favourable, with 89 per cent of those questioned responding in a positive or at least neutral fashion; only 11 per cent are negative in their attitude (Jawornicka 2001, 467).

7. Contemporary perceptions of the Polish-Russian border

Only 209 km in length, the Polish border with Russia has a political and economic significance which far outweighs its size. Polish foreign policy makers view the Kaliningrad area principally from the standpoint of relations with Russia, international co-operation in the Baltic area, and in conjunction with their responsibilities within NATO and the EU (Kennard 2010, 142–161). Nevertheless, distracted by the priority of realizing her integration into the enlarged EU, Polish foreign policy makers neglected to develop the situation on their eastern borders, especially that in the Kaliningrad district (Żukowski 2002, 329). This is reflected in the economic fortunes of the region: the city of greatest economic importance in Poland is Bartoszyce, itself located 15 kilometres from the crossing point in Bezledy (Gorzelać/Jałowiecki 1996, 89–90).

The first to recognize the necessity of developing Polish-Russian contacts on the regional level following the collapse of the Soviet Union were the respective Presidents Boris Yeltsin and Lech Wałęsa. A Polish-Russian conference held in May 1992 resulted in an agreement regulating co-operation between Poland's north-easterly Voivodships and the Kaliningrad district. This came one year after the establishment of Kaliningrad as a Free Economic Zone undertaken within a wider programme of economic development. (Kennard 2010, 139). The signatories of the treaty sought to improve and intensify mutual relations in the areas of culture, education and the economy (Kennard 2010, 143; 157–160; Wojnowski 1999, 260–262). Despite such progress, the first concrete steps taken towards concrete cross-border co-operation between Poland and Russia took eight years to realize with the establishment of the Baltic Euroregion in February 1998 (Trojanowska-Strzęboszewska 2005, 335). Poles and Russians have good memories of the cross-border trade relations which achieved a particular intensity in the first half of the 1990s. The inhabitants of both sides profited from the various activities – both legal and illegal – despite the existence of only three border crossings: Gronowo-Mamonovo, Bezledy-Bagratiowski and Gołdap-Gusiev (Trojanowska-Strzęboszewska 2005, 330, 327). As with the situation in the Polish-Ukrainian border region, the reluctant acceptance of the necessity of such activities meant that they belonged to the sphere of functional interdependence.

In contrast to the positive expectations of good and improving relations with Germany, the majority of Polish opinion expresses a negative assessment of the prospects for the future development of Polish-Russian relations (CBOS 2009a, 16). In 2005, only 9 per cent of Polish respondents expressed the view that Russia should be counted as a friend of Poland (CBOS 2005b, 3). Four years later, only a very few Poles believe in the possibility of a rapprochement with their Russian neighbour (CBOS 2009, 1). Attitudes towards Russia exhibit a direct relationship to the level of politicization and political affiliation: those declaring an interest in politics are more optimistic than those who are not (CBOS 2009, 2). As for the comparable figures for German-Polish relations, voters for the liberal *Platforma Obywatelska* exhibit a more positive attitude towards Russia than do supporters of the Right-wing *Prawo i Sprawiedliwość*. Indeed, attitudes towards Russia are dependent to a great extent on the level of education and material status: those with a university education and a higher standard of living have a more positive appreciation of relations with Russia than those with a low income and lower standard of living (CBOS 2009, 2). A further factor is religion: the fear that Russia seeks to regain its lost influence is held above all by practising Catholics (CBOS 2009, 5). The predominantly negative Polish attitude towards Russia is fed by fear and prejudice. In 2008, 54 per cent of the Poles questioned were of the opinion that Russia actively seeks a strong and growing influence in central-eastern Europe. One year later, 59 per cent conceded that they were afraid of an over-powerful Russia (CBOS 2009, 9).

Cross-border contacts were increased in 2012 by the introduction of a visa-free small traffic between Königsberg and Poland. Compared to the German-Polish border region, the situation in the Polish-Russian border area amounts to a residual level of “co-existence”. This is to be explained by a number of factors, the first being sheer distance. With the two closest Russian and Polish settlements (Bezledy and Kaliningrad) lying some 45 km apart, even if pedestrians were able to cross the border (which they cannot), contact between Russians and Poles would be difficult to bring about. This situation of physical (and thus mental distance) is maintained by the sheer difficulty of crossing the border. Those actually wishing to travel to the other side are forced to spend many hours waiting at the crossing point, unless of course they are ready to bribe officials in return for a swifter passage (Wagner 2011, 176–179; Kawczyńska-Butrym 2001,

344). Such conditions serve to reinforce negative attitudes: the humiliating nature of such treatment, meted out to both legal travellers and smugglers alike, is such that once experienced, many are deterred from crossing the border again (Trojanowska-Strzęboszewska 2005, 329). For many Poles, the border serves a scapegoat function for a variety of problems involving smuggling, drug-trafficking and even alcoholism amongst the younger inhabitants of the border-region. The inhabitants of Braniewo blame the border for the genesis of a number of criminal gangs and the feeling of insecurity which their presence engenders (Trojanowska-Strzęboszewska 2005, 333).

Despite these difficulties, cross-border traffic registered a steady increase since the 1990s. The greatest increase took place during the period of visa-free travel: whilst a mere 5,000 people crossed the border in 1980, the statistics for 1991 registered over 232,000 such travellers. Following the opening of an additional border crossing in Bezledy and the resumption of cross-border rail traffic via Branevo (both in 1993), the figures reached 1.1 million travellers. 1996 saw this figure increase to 4.2 million (Sakson 2001, 34). 2003 saw not only the introduction of a visa requirement, but a fall in the number of border crossings to 3.2 million. This reduction of some 20 per cent in comparison to the previous year was a direct consequence of the new restrictions (Trojanowska-Strzęboszewska 2005, 328.). Before Poland's accession to the EU in 2004, the main reason for border crossings for Poles and Russians alike was economic in nature – either to trade or to smuggle goods. Indeed, the area was to a large extent economically dependent on cross-border trade (Müntel 2003, 250). The many border markets represented a significant source of income for the inhabitants of Poland's north-eastern regions which themselves exhibit the highest levels of unemployment in the country. Indeed, many thousands of people on both sides of the border survived thanks to a number of small businesses, shops and market stands. Poland's accession to the EU changed this situation, something which did not go unnoticed by the inhabitants of this border region. In addition to large-scale traders, a further factor in the cross-border economy is the “ants” (Wojnowski 2001, 211–212). Smuggling concentrates on the transport of alcohol, cigarettes, petrol, gold, electronic devices, clothes and foodstuffs (Wagner 2011, 153–156; Sakson 2001, 39). These trading activities, both legal and illegal, represent almost the only form of Polish-Russian contact in the border area. The only form of migration occurring in this region is that for the purposes of illegal trade undertaken by the otherwise unemployed.

The introduction of visa controls in October 2003 did very little to combat the flourishing practices of Polish-Russian cross-border smuggling, which continued almost unchecked. One explanation for this failure is the considerable price differences either side of the border, which make even low-level smuggling practices highly profitable. Petrol smugglers for instance can make a sizeable profit with the most basic of methods – a car petrol tank and a single reserve canister filled at normal prices in Russia bring a considerable profit once emptied and sold on the Polish side of the border (Wagner 2011, 167–170). Other practices require a little more effort: cars bought or stolen in Germany, dismantled and transported across the border as spare parts (on which the duties are lower), are sold in Russia as re-assembled vehicles with brand new import papers. Cross-border smuggling has even attracted the attention of pensioners – buying cigarettes and vodka with borrowed money, they make repeated journeys to Poland with the officially permitted quantity of goods which are then sold on at a profit (Ludwig 2011).

Even before the introduction of the visa requirement, the Polish inhabitants of the Polish-Russian border area began to worry that these regulations would have a negative impact on the routine of their everyday life. In contrast to those Poles living away from the border area, those in closer proximity to their Russian neighbour opposed proposals to introduce a visa requirement

for visitors from Russia, Belarus or Ukraine. A CBOS survey from 2002 showed that 47 per cent of Poles living away from the border area viewed the introduction of a visa requirement as a positive step for Poland (CBOS 2002, 2). These findings are consistent with an earlier survey from 1998 (CBOS 1998, 3). When questioned, only 32 per cent of the inhabitants of the Polish eastern regions subscribed to this view, whilst 38 per cent saw that it would bring disadvantage (CBOS 2002, 2). In terms of the Polish-Russian border region and the Kaliningrad area in particular, 30 per cent of Poles questioned wanted to see lower visa requirements for Russians whereas 21 per cent opposed such a step (CBOS 2002, 4). The question of smuggling was regarded as a matter of common interest for the Polish, Russian and Ukrainian inhabitants of the border area. Many of its inhabitants see that reducing the opportunities for smuggling and the minimal income which it provides would result in an increase in theft and organized criminality (Trojanowska-Strzęboszewska 2005, 338–347).

A number of attempts have been made in recent times to open up the Polish-Russian border. Solomon Ginsburg, a member of the Kaliningrad regional parliament sitting on an independent ticket has campaigned for the facilitation of travel to Poland for his constituents. Hoping to use economic arguments to win the case, he maintains that an open border would attract foreign investment and an unparalleled economic upswing in the region. To this end, he has made a number of attempts to convince policy makers in Moscow that the region be granted the status of a special economic area. His efforts have so far not produced the expected results. Despite EU support for promoting cross-border trade on the Polish-Russian border (Ludwig 2011), Vladimir Putin sees that any such special provisions for the Kaliningrad area would undermine his attempts to achieve visa-free travel between Russia and the entire European Union.

Conclusions

The comparison of Poland's western and eastern border areas presented here shows that the development of neighbourhood relations is much more advanced in the former than the latter. The German-Polish border region has seen varying levels of cultural and economic co-operation across diverse periods of its neighbourhood relationship. Nevertheless, although characterized by communication and co-operation, the German-Polish border area still presents a high level of prejudice and a tendency to think in stereotypical categories. Poland's eastern border on the other hand, is characterized by a considerable variety of problems primarily connected to the unequal levels of economic development to be found either side of the border. With the exception of the very few initiatives taken in the cultural and economic area, smuggling still remains the primary form of cross-border co-operation. Even this residual level of contact was interrupted almost completely by the introduction in October 2003 of a visa requirement.

Both the western and eastern borders hold a central place in the memory of the inhabitants of the border area. As a result, phenomena such as the opening and closing of the border and the associated freedom or restriction of travel play a significant part in the memory of those living in the border area. Experiences of the hermetically sealed border maintained during under Communism featured heavily in accounts from the inhabitants of both sides of the border; however, they were more prominent in accounts from the Polish side.

NOTES

- 1 Translated from the German by Andrew Smith (info@as-uebersetzer.de).
- 2 Katarzyna Stokłosa has conducted considerable research into these processes on the Polish-German border (Stokłosa 2003a, 17–24). All interviews mentioned in this article were conducted in Guben at the Polish-German border between Nov. 1998 and April 2000.
- 3 The Euroregions have already generated a considerable literature. For a description of the development and function of the Euroregions on the Polish eastern border see Rościszewski (1997); Kowalewski (2001).

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