TOPIC 3: Transformation processes

Teaching and learning aids

Germany and Poland
A long history of transformation

by: *Diethelm Blecking*

Preface

On 1st. May 2004 Poland became a member of the European Union and with this act it was for the first time in history united in a political union with its western neighbour Germany. After a thousand years of difficult, tension-filled existence next-door to one another, an equally long transformation process resulted in one single community. Bilateral agreements and Poland's entry into Nato preceded this act, but the most important condition was the People's Spring in 1989, the unification of the two German states and the victory of democracy and separation of powers in Poland and other states in central and eastern Europe. Not only Polish observers, however, are of the opinion that this all began in a shipyard in Gdansk/Danzig in the summer of 1980 with the Solidarnosc workers' strikes under the leadership of the future Polish President, Lech Walesa

In view of the death of John Paul II and the end of his long pontificate, then it must be added that without the Polish Pope on the throne of St. Peter this transformation would have been unimaginable. We should also remember at this time that "in 1997 the Pope gave the Polish bishops, who had shown themselves to be rather unreceptive to Europe under the indecisive Primate of Poland, Cardinal Jozef Glemp, a lecture and unequivocally spoke out for Poland joining the European Union. His verdict that it was a sin to storm against the European Union became a common saying in Poland", according to the respected editor of the Warsaw "Polityka", Adam Krzeminski.

The above-mentioned 1000 years' transformation preceding the partnership between Germany and Poland cannot adequately be dealt with chronologically and comprehensively: one would have to begin with spring in the year 1000 in Gniezo/Gnesen, when the German Emperor Otto III met the Polish ruler and later king Boleslaw Chrobry the Brave in friendship, and the ruler of the Poles was called "frater et cooperator imperii", brother and ally of the empire.

Then one would have to talk about the start of an estrangement in the course of which was born the Polish saying that as long as the world exists the German will never be brother to the Pole. One would have to talk about numerous wars, surrender of territories, changes in state structure and borders and certainly about the Second World War. Poland was the first victim of the war of extermination, and 5-6 million Polish citizens were killed, including 3 million Polish Jews. The country became the graveyard of eastern European Jewry. All this will not fit on one page, or in one hour. I shall therefore try to describe the structures of the transformation with the help of structural elements that I hope will give new insight to people who see Europe from a completely different perspective, for example that of the Mediterranean..

Structural element I: Territory

Strustural element II: Political structural changes

Structural element III: Conflict (Wars, uprisings)

Structurl element IV: Population (mixed cultures, minorities, migration)

Structural element V: Second World War, population displacements

Structural element VI: Stereotypes

Structural element VII: Partnership and prospects

I   Territory

Both states have seen great changes in the course of history in their political-geographical contours, both have lost territories, won and again lost new ones. Between 1795 and 1918 Poland even disappeared from the map of Europe for 123 years, divided among Prussia-Germany, Austria-Hungary and Russia.

(cf.maps in the collection of materials: Ci 302 Poland around the year 1000, Ci 304 Great Polish-Lithuanian Empire, Ci 305 Partitions, Ci307 Reemergence of Poland in 1918)

A sober look at the map Ci 307 already shows that after losing the First World War, Germany lost the territories that Prussia had partly acquired in the partitions: Poznan, Danzig, West Prussia, the Upper Silesian industrial region around Katowice. The greatest problem was the Polish Corridor. Polish euphoria at governing and administrating itself again after the long period of partition was counterchecked by the German frustration which ran from the very right to the very left as far as the communists: "From 1918 to 1933 Poland was for Germany a state that should not have been allowed to exist" (Heinrich August Winkler).

Map Ci 308: The 4th. Polish partition

After Germany's invasion of Poland under Hitler, which started the Second World War on 1st. September, 1939, large areas of Poland were annexed to the German Reich, and the rest was ruled as German-occupied territory from Cracow as a General-Gouvernement. The east of Poland was occupied by the Red Army (Hitler-Stalin –Pact 23.8.1939).

Map Ci 309: The east-west shifting of Poland

After the Second World War Poland was shifted from east to west (Potsdam Conference, Frontier treaty with the Soviet Union). In the west it acquired 103,000 sq.km. from Germany and in the east it lost 180,000 sq.km to the Soviet Union; Germany was divided.

Map Ci 310: The European Union

After the establishment of diplomatic relations between the Federal Republic of Germany and Poland in 1970, after the German-Polish Border Treaty and the reunification of Germany in 1990, the two countries have since 2004 belonged to the European Union with the aim of resolving a large part of their problems together in the future.

II   Political structural changes

The German-Polish syndrome is due to the collision of two particular paths in Europe and different speeds of modernization.. The Polish path of division of powers in the aristocratic republic was the loser in competition with the centralistic and effective action of autocratic German absolutism. The militarily and economically stronger development of absolutist Prussia, the future German supremacy, meant the agreement in the 18th. century with absolutist Russia on the weakening and ruthless destruction of Poland, in an effusion of pure power politics (Ci 305).

After the foundation of the Reich through the „delayed nationhood" in 1871, the large German nation of 70 million strove towards very rapid economic and military modernization as well as ethnic homogenization, which was to be attained by a policy of brachial Germanification. Every tenth Prussian was of Polish descent, and there were also Danish, Alsation and a series of other ethnic minorities in the National Federation. This policy led to the birth of a Polish national movement that encompassed the broadest sections of the population. There gave rise to competition full of conflict between German integral nationalism, which soon assumed imperialistic characteristics, and separatist Polish nationalism.

The Treaty of Versailles,after the First World War, solved this problem in favour of a Polish national state (Ci 306), which in turn again awakened German desire for revenge, which was instrumentalized politically in particular by the National Socialists. The Third Reich planned the complete extinction of Poland and the reduction to slavery of its population. After the Second World War Western Germany belonged to the capitalist-organized West and to Nato, while Poland belonged to the area of state-based capitalism and to the Warsaw Pact under Soviet domination. This orientation in different camps further promoted political and cultural alienation.

The Ostpolitik practised by Germany from 1970 and the development of a Polish civilian society with the Polish Summer in the key year of 1980 (precedents in Poznan in 1956, Danzig in 1970) formed the counter-movement that found many sympathisers in both countries.

III Conflicts

These considerations so far on territory and politics make it clear that the transformation to partnership of competing national states such as Germany and Poland did not happen without violent conflicts. The Partitions had already been accompanied by Polish uprisings that lasted for the whole of the 19th. century. (1830/31, 1846, 1863/64).

On a cultural level there began a struggle for cultural domination, for language and religion. The cultural struggle in 1871 and the following years against the Catholic Church was carried on with an anti-Polish sting. The culmination of these disputes came to a head in the Second World War and the attempt by Nazi Germany to overcome and subjugate eastern Europe. This war began with terror strikes by German dive-bombers on Polish cities, including Warsaw.

Two uprisings in the occupied Polish capital have meanwhile become part of the legendary struggle for freedom, the Jewish Uprising in the Warsaw Ghetto in 1943 and the Warsaw Uprising of the AK, the Armia Krajowa, the Polish Home Army, in 1944. Uprisings and attempts at organization of the civilian society against the new totalitarianism were continued after the Second World War: in 1956, 1970 and 1980 with the Solidarity movement. These dates coincide with similar attempts in Hungary (1956) and in the German Democratic Republic (1953). The long tradition of Polish uprisings from the 18th. century onwards contributed to national stereotyping.

IV Population (Mixed cultures, minorities, migration)

At their foundation both states, Germany and Poland**,** were anything but ethnically "pure" national states. The German imperial Reich founded in 1871 had 4 million inhabitants from non-German population groups (6% of the population): Poles, Lithuanians, Cassubians, Mazovians, Sorbs, people originating from Alsace and Lorraine, Walloons and Danes. Nor is the reunified Germany of today an ethnically homogeneous state. The proportion of foreigners at the beginning of the year 2002 was about 7.3 million people (8.9%). The largest group today is the Turks with about 1.8 million.

The Second Polish Republic, founded after the Second World War, was **the** multi-cultural state in Europe. In 1931, 36% of the population belonged to national minorities: the largest groups were 5.1 million Ucrainians (16%), 3.1 million Jews (10%), 2 million White Russians (6%), 800,000 Germans (2.4%) (vd. Map Ci 306). The Second World War as a war of ethnic extermination with ethnic cleansing and the following transfers and expulsions of population made the Third Polish Republic an ethnically almost homogeneous state. The

strongest national minority is represented by around 350.000 Germans in the Opole and Katowice region (0.9%), ahead of the Ucrainians (0.7%) and White Russians (0.5%).

During the whole of the 19th. century Germany was a country of emigration, and 5 million Germans emigrated to the USA alone. At the end of the 19th. century, just as up to the present day, Germany became a land of immigrants. The climax of employment of foreigners was reached in the period of the Second World War, during which 7.7 million forced labourers were made to work in Germany, among them many Poles.

A central part of the history of Germany as a land of immigration is the migration of many hundreds of thousands of people of Polish origin to the industrial centres of the Reich before 1914. The Ruhr district saw the growth of a Polish-speaking resident population of 300,000 to 350,000, which left its mark on the language itself of the region. In "Ruhr language" the Polish word "mottek" is still occasionally used for "hammer". Today about 300,000 people with a Polish passport live in Germany (0.3%). Migration experts, however, assume that in reality there are from 1 to 1.5 million Polish-speaking people in Germany, including descendants of the old "Polonia" in the Ruhr district and of the forced labourers.

V Second World War: Ethnic cleansing, displacement of population

To the process of transformation there belongs the displacement of the population,which has nothing to do with the migration in search of work we spoke about above: flight, expulsion and deportation.

According to Włodzimierz Borodziej ethnic cleansing and shifting of the population in the Second World War began with mass shootings and the transfer of 900,000 Poles from the "territories annexed to the Reich". As has already been mentioned above, millions of Polish men and women were deported to Germany for forced labour.

After the end of the war and the east-west shifting of Poland 200,000-300,0000 Germans were driven westwards by the Polish army as soon as June/July, 1945. This was accompanied by many acts of violence. At the Potsdam Conference in July/August, 1945 the allies decided to transfer the Germans from Poland among other things. Thereupon some 3.5 million Germans had been transferred by the end of 1947. Borodziej estimates that some 400,000 German civilians lost their lives owing to acts of violence by the Red Army, Polish acts of violence and epidemics in the camps in Polish territory.

VI Stereotypes

The Polish cultural expert, Hubert Orlowski, identified as a "stereotype of long duration" the more than 300-year-old expression "polnische Wirtschaft" (i.e. "Polish housekeeping" or "a shocking state of affairs") with a semantic area covering lack of cleanliness, order and discipline etc. Under this heading the victory of German modernity over Polish "disorder" and "anarchy" was celebrated in the Partitions and later in the 19th. century during "nation building" as well. The prejudice had a politically neutral stamp, i.e. it brought together right-wingers, enlighteners and left-wingers like Friedrich Engels or Karl Kautsky on one front; indeed it marked the GDR rulers' contempt for their colleagues in Warsaw, who were unable to keep in check the strike movement of 1980. In contrast, the stereotypes of the "noble Pole" and the "beautiful Polish woman", which emphasized the romantic, passionate-for-freedom aspects of the Polish "national character", were marginalized.

It is hardly surprising that for the Poles the spiked helmet of the Prussian soldier and policeman of the 19th. century became the symbol for force, fulfilment of duty and orderliness, ostensibly the attributes of the German "national character". It is here that the Poles – in contrast to the Germans – have no problem with federalism, whereas Bavarian-Catholic sensuality could hardly be reconciled to Protestant-Prussian secondary virtues and where poets and executioners replaced each other historically. The Polish author, Kazimierz Brandys, has summed up the problem in the idea "that this nation gives Europe by turns a Winckelmann and a Moltke, a Wölfflin and a Ludendorff, a Hamann and a Hitler".

VII Partnership and prospects

If we look at the thousand-year process of transformation, which went from friendship between rulers originally, from the 18th. century at the latest through bitter enmity and sacrifice, right up to reconciliation and community in a single union, then we must be amazed at the successful career of the European Union.

It is, however, the task of the critical historian to arouse scepticism. Stereotypes that have been used for a long time and historical traumas do not lose their effectiveness over night. In the discussion on the EU constitution German and British correspondents gave urgent warnings against the Polish "pan veto" from the times of the aristocratic republic, in other words the 18th. century. In the unfortunate discussion on the "Centre against Displacement of Persons" a Polish weekly evoked in a controversial caricature the power of the Displaced Persons' associations in Germany.

All the more important then are projects that generate practical cooperation and getting to know each other, as for example in the framework of COMENIUS networks and school exchanges. We are all looking with keen interest at the super election year of 2005, when Poland votes on the EU constitution, a new Parliament and a new President. Then we will know whether scepticism or optimism are to be our guide in the next few years.

Sources

The maps mentioned are to be found in the accompanying collection of materials.

The maps Ci 302, Ci 303, Ci 304 and Ci 305 were taken from:
INFORMATIONEN ZUR POLITISCHEN BILDUNG, Heft 142
Deutsche und Polen, 1. Nov. 1970, S. 3, 6 und 7
Hrsg.: Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, Bonn

Unfortunately permission to reproduce the Ci 306 and Ci 307 maps in the internet
was not granted by the publishers Georg Westermann Verlag, Braunschweig

_____
Translated from the original German by: Gillian Johnson