

Poles' View of Russia Turns Negative Again

September 26, 2010



Relatives looking at a wall with the names of the Katyn dead during a ceremony in Kharkiv, Ukraine, on Saturday. **Gleb Garanich**

WARSAW — Poles' view of Russia-Poland relations have turned negative again after a thaw following the airplane crash that killed Poland's president and 95 others in Smolensk in April, a survey showed Friday.

The death of President Lech Kaczynski, his wife Maria and 94 others, mostly senior state officials, in Smolensk sparked a wave of sympathy in Poland and Russia.

Warsaw's efforts to improve relations — traditionally strained over history, energy and security issues — with its communist-era overlord Moscow have gathered pace since.

But a series of hiccups has reversed the trend, and a new CBOS poll showed 28 percent of Poles are now negative about Warsaw-Moscow ties, while 26 are positive. The remainder said they could not say either way.

A CBOS survey in May showed that twice as many Poles assessed Polish-Russian ties as positive than held the opposite view.

"The actions of the Russian side aimed at establishing the reason of the plane crash are viewed negatively by more than half of Poles (56 percent), compared with less than one-third (31 percent) who think they are good," CBOS said in a statement.

A recent Polish-Russian gas spat, controversy over extraditing Chechen insurgent Akhmed Zakayev and issues related to the crash investigation are to be blamed for the change, analysts said.

Most Poles now believe Russia is not informing their country properly on the crash investigation and think Moscow has no genuine interest in clarifying the matter, the survey indicated.

Since taking over in 2007, Prime Minister Donald Tusk has been seeking to mend ties with Russia, which is a major gas provider to Poland as well as an important trading partner.

"Several months after the Smolensk crash, Poles view Polish-Russian relations worse than they did shortly after the crash. Their views have changed sharply," the CBOS statement read. "The crash created a sense of community, both domestic as well as international. Now these emotions are dying out."

The Polish president and other officials were flying to Smolensk for a ceremony in the Katyn forest to commemorate the 70th anniversary of the killing of thousands of Polish officers by the Soviet secret police.

On Saturday, Poland's new president, Bronislaw Komorowski, and Ukrainian Prime Minister Mykola Azarov laid wreaths at a former prison building in the Ukrainian city of Kharkiv, close to the Russian border, where many of the officers were murdered.

Other officers were shot in the Katyn forest. An estimated 22,000 Polish officers, taken prisoner by the Soviets after the September 1939 invasion of Poland, were shot in the killings that began in April 1940.

"I would like very much for us to have the possibility here in Kharkiv, as well as in other places, to retain both personal and collective memory of those killed by this totalitarian regime," Komorowski said.

Some 400 relatives of the Polish victims joined the commemoration, which included visiting a cemetery where about 3,800 of the victims are buried.

(Reuters, AP)

Original url:

<https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2010/09/26/poles-view-of-russia-turns-negative-again-a1705>