

# POLAND–RUSSIA SOCIAL DIAGNOSIS 2015

How Poles see Russia, Russians  
and Polish-Russian relations

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and Russian-Polish relations



Warsaw 2015

Report on public opinion research in Poland and Russia



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CENTRE  
FOR POLISH-RUSSIAN DIALOGUE  
AND UNDERSTANDING

Report on public opinion research in Poland and Russia

#### **Polish part of the research**

Analyses and report: ARC Rynek i Opinia

Survey: TNS Polska

Commentary: Łukasz Mazurkiewicz, ARC Rynek i Opinia

#### **Russian part of the research**

Analyses, report and survey: Russian Public Opinion Research Center (VCIOM)

Commentary: Valery Fedorov, Russian Public Opinion Research Center (VCIOM)

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Centre for Polish-Russian Dialogue and Understanding

14/16A Jasna Street, 00-041 Warsaw

tel. + 48 22 295 00 30

fax + 48 22 295 00 31

e-mail: [cprdip@cprdip.pl](mailto:cprdip@cprdip.pl)

<http://www.cprdip.pl>

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# How Poles see Russia, Russians and Polish-Russian relations

Report from a Polish public opinion research poll commissioned by the Centre for Polish-Russian Dialogue and Understanding

## About the research

The first poll regarding Polish-Russian relations, commissioned by the Centre for Polish-Russian Dialogue and Understanding, was conducted in November and December 2012 (survey of a random sample of 1,036 adult Poles).

The second poll, aimed at monitoring the public perception of Polish-Russian relations, was conducted two years later, in November and December 2014. The Polish countrywide survey was carried out based on a random sample of

1,000 residents aged 15 and older which reflects the population in terms of the following characteristics: sex, age, level of education, size of city/town/village of residence and voivodship (region). Fieldwork was conducted by TNS Polska on 12-17 December 2014. ARC Rynek i Opinia analysed the results and compiled a report.

Where possible, the results of this survey are compared with the survey of two years ago.

## Commentary on the findings

Łukasz Mazurkiewicz

### Poland – Russia: deep regression against the backdrop of war

The results of the previous research – conducted in late 2012 – gave the impression of “minor stabilisation” in Polish-Russian relations, whereas the survey carried out in December 2014 produced entirely different results, which can be described as profound regression. Responses to all questions, relating directly to the assessment of Russia, Russians and Polish-Russian relations, were far more critical and negative this time around. Also, the views of Russians as regards Poland and Poles have taken a similar, negative turn, although somewhat less significantly. In fact, only opinions unrelated to current events, such as beliefs concerning cultural affinity, remained stable.

The investigation into the air-crash near Smolensk, in particular the issue of the return of wreckage of the presidential plane, was the topic which dominated the subject of relations with Russia two years ago. **Despite the negative assessment of the Russian authorities’ attitude regarding this matter, the overall view of Poles towards Russia and Russians could be described as fairly balanced.** Excessive enthusiasm and optimism was lacking, however, so were, in particular, extreme negative emotions. Also Russians, whose image of the world gives Poland and Poles incomparably less space, did not present excessively harsh or critical evaluations on this subject. What’s more, even some signs of positive social processes were observed, as confirmation was found in the rather spectacular success of local border traffic agreement with Kaliningrad. A separate study conducted on the subject showed how great the potential of mutual interest and interpersonal

kindness is. There were grounds to believe that the future of Polish-Russian relations would entail a process of gradual weakening stereotypes and the shedding of the heavy burden of history. This was in harmony with the Polish authorities’ policy focusing on pragmatic development of relations with the Russian Federation, despite frequent differences in the stances and interests of both countries.

Of course, it is the conflict in Ukraine – which dominated the agenda of Polish-Russian relations almost entirely – that had the biggest influence on the changes that have occurred since the first research study into the mutual perception of Poles and Russians. Because of the events in Ukraine, the perception of Russia shifted in the consciousness of Poles, occupying the place of a definitively unfriendly state, which poses a threat. They have also bolstered those elements of the Russia’s image which are associated with its authoritarian political system and civilizational differences. Besides, the associations with Russia, given by Poles in the open question, were almost entirely dominated by political and historical matters. Those associations are definitely negatively charged, whereas the social, cultural and nature-related (and therefore neutral or positive) matters, which were evident in the previous research study, have been displaced to the margins of the way Poles currently think about Russia.

What is significant, is the way that “ordinary people” are perceived has also changed. Traditionally Poles perceived people much more favorably than the state. Both Poles and

Russians have begun to evaluate each other more critically. This is a particularly important finding of this research, as the strong dissonance in the perception of the state and the Russian people used to be a popular and durable element of Polish societal consciousness. It can be said that the recent events have cast into doubt the widely held view that Russians and the Russian state are “two different things”. Certainly, media reports on widespread public support for the Russian authorities and negligible internal protests against their policy towards Ukraine had an impact on the evolution of those views.

Russians, however, are eager to see Poland as a country subordinate in its strategic choices and foreign policy, surrendering to the influence of Western countries and standing on the other side of the new “cold war” front. Those views were certainly influenced by Russian media coverage, broadcasting the events in Ukraine from the outset. Such media coverage served to strengthen and revive the belief that was already present in the Russian way of thinking: Poland is a country which is rather unfriendly towards Russia, often standing in the way of Russia’s plans and ambitions. One can get the impression that the differences in the perception of phenomena and intentions of the other side are now more deeply-rooted than ever before (at least, since it has been possible to independently measure the views of both societies). The ongoing conflict in Ukraine also involves information warfare which provides rich material for analysis in the fields of rhetoric and semiotics. It is already visible how different narratives concerning these events are nested in the consciousness of both societies, which is also indicated by the data from the research discussed here.

Deterioration of the mutual perceptions between the two nations (not only the state and the system, but also the “ordinary people”) and increasingly more visible discrepancy between the Polish and Russian narratives – all this has led to the crumbling of the already fragile “social capital” on which Polish-Russian relations were to be built over recent years. Belief in the possibility of a sincere Polish-Russian dialogue, a perhaps somewhat mythical communication channel, which Poland counted on, has significantly weakened recently; the channel that also allowed Russia the possibility to use its soft power in Poland. The only anchor point can still be found in the field of cultural cooperation – a significant percentage of Poles (and an even more significant proportion of Russians) think that such cooperation should continue, even in a limited way. A very interesting finding of this survey is the apparent change in Poles’ perception of Belarus. While in 2012, it was similar to the image of Russia, it has now become much more positive. It can be said that Poles began to consider Belarus to be a more self-reliant country, not so strongly and unconditionally politically connected to Russia, as had been thought previously. This is an unexpected side-effect of current events, worthy of further research and exploration. Surely this can be seen as a kind of PR success for a country which had not previously been the beneficiary of good press in Poland.

The results of future public opinion surveys on Polish-Russian relations are dependent on the turn of events, whose scale and dynamics are hard to predict. It seems, however, that the negative experiences settle for a long time in the public mind, and rarely do these thoughts give way to positive re-evaluations. A return to even a “minor stabilisation” in Polish-Russian relations will not be achievable easily or quickly.

## Detailed results of the research

### 1. The Ukrainian-Russian conflict becomes a key factor affecting the assessment of Poland's and Poles' relations with neighbouring countries and peoples

The phenomenon of Poles' attitudes towards Russia and Russians, also evident in the results of a 2012 survey, is a tendency to clearly distinguish between the Russian state and the Russian people. Poles used to feel and still harbor deeply-engrained mistrust, fear and resentment towards Russia in its various historical incarnations. Towards its inhabitants though – despite relatively rare face-to-face contact – Poles used to feel a relative cultural proximity, sympathy, resulting perhaps from a sense of common fate (as Russians and Poles were both victims of Nazi and Stalinist totalitarianism).

The results of this survey, conducted in a period of growing tension in terms of relations between the two countries in connection to the Ukrainian-Russian conflict, bring a definitive change in this regard. Now, not only is Russia seen as a country openly hostile to Poland, but Russians are also considered inimical. While in the survey of 2012 the percentage of people considering Russians to be friendly towards Poles clearly exceeded the percentage of people with opposing views (61% versus 39%), the study at the end of 2014 showed that more than half (54%) of Poles believe Russians to be inimical, while fewer people have opposing beliefs (46%). This is a fundamental change and a very important conclusion of this survey (see [Figure 6. ► p. 11](#)).

At the same time, a thesis can be formulated, which has it that the increase in negative attitudes towards Russia is followed by a small, but noticeable, tendency to improve the perception of other countries, attitudes about which the survey prompted participants to give. The significant

increase in sympathy for Ukraine going through difficult times (75% of respondents believed that Ukraine is a country which is friendly towards Poland, up from 61% two years ago) is quite apparent. But the improvement in the perception of Belarus, struggling to remain neutral towards the events in Ukraine, and Lithuania, can be explained, as it seems, as a sign of a tendency towards integration, "closing ranks" against the threat. Moreover, characteristically, the only European country of which perception showed no positive change was the Czech Republic: a country whose international orientation can be determined as pro-Russian from a Polish perspective. Perhaps, the attitude towards the events in Ukraine is now becoming one of the most important factors which influences the perception of neighbouring countries by Poles.

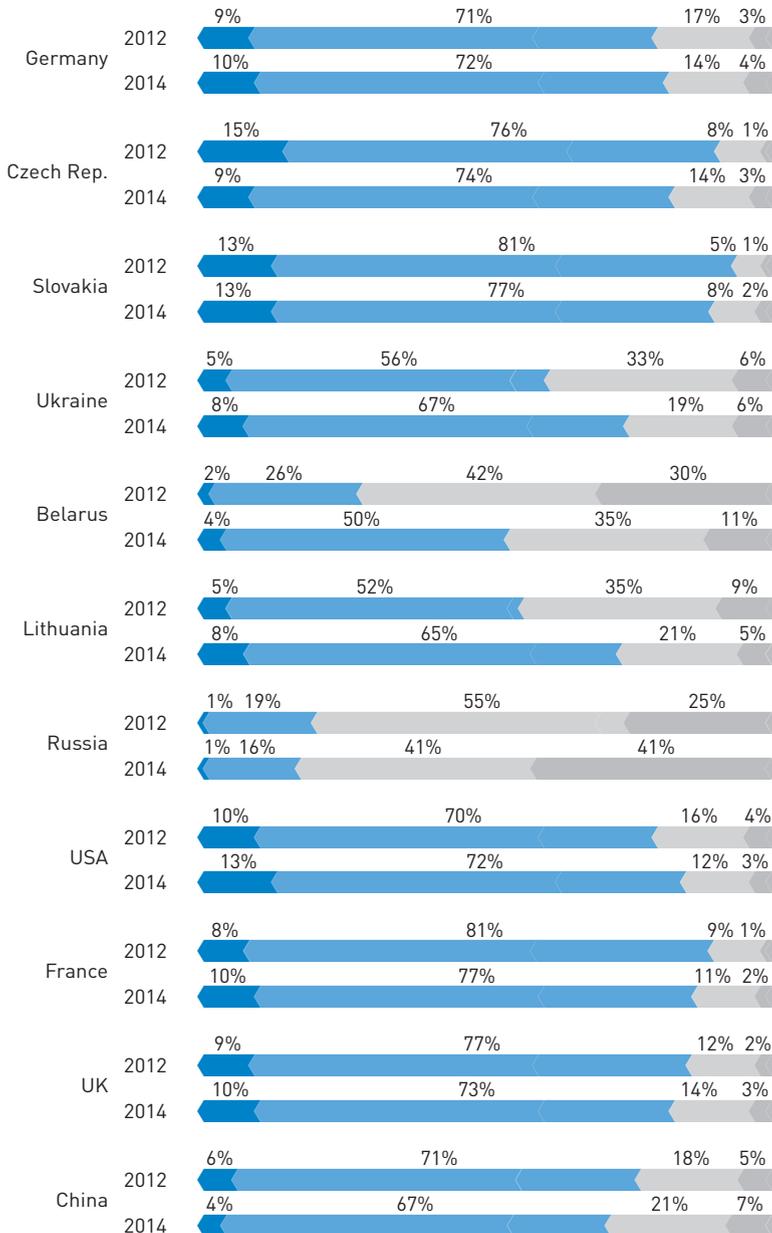
In the survey, respondents were asked to indicate which statements were the most and the least fitting for given countries. In terms of harbouring hostile intentions towards Poland, Russian indicators rose by nearly 30 percentage points (hereinafter p.p.) when compared to 2012. It should also be noted that no other state was mentioned here by more than 5% of the respondents. A decrease in negative indicators regarding Belarus (from 17% in 2012 to 4% now) is also of note.

Interestingly, Poles are inclined to believe that the Ukrainian conflict rather does not contribute towards Russia's increased importance in the world. While in 2012 only 5% of respondents listed Russia as a country to which the statement of growing importance in the world does not fit, in the results of the current survey, this

percentage increased to 20%. Although slightly more frequently (7%, while in 2012 - 3%) Russia was mentioned among the countries with growing international importance, the difference is

within the limits of statistical error, and moreover does not change Russia's position in the rankings of countries with increasing international importance.

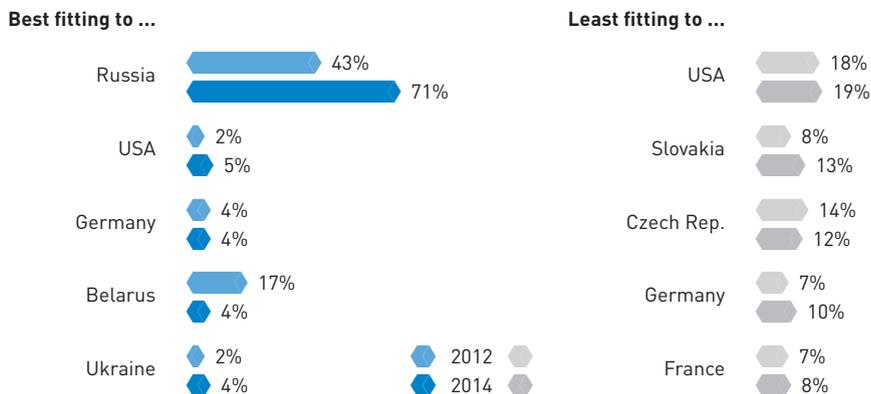
**Figure 1. States, by attitude towards Poland**



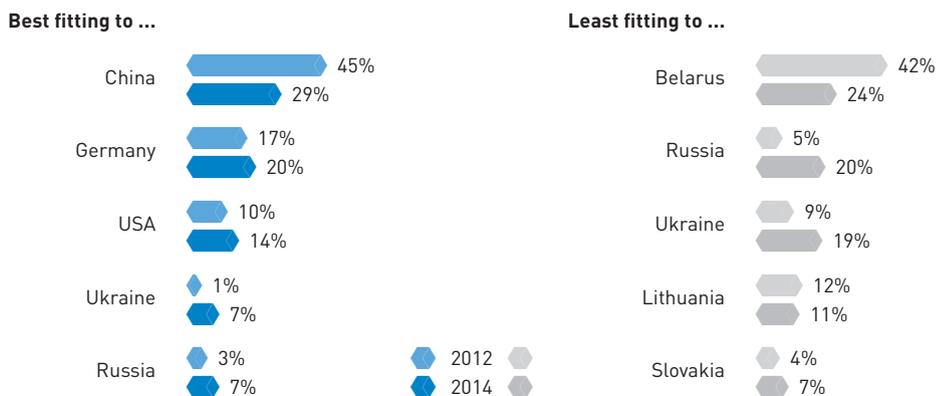
In order to maintain consistency with a report compiled using data from a poll conducted in Russia, the "do not know / hard to say" choice has been omitted.

- ◆ definitely friendly to Poland
- ◆ rather friendly to Poland
- ◆ rather unfriendly to Poland
- ◆ definitely unfriendly to Poland

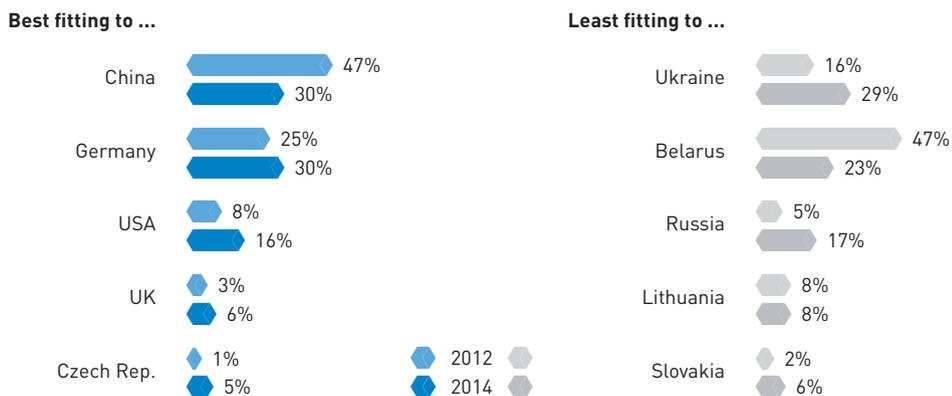
**Figure 2. Opinions about countries: This country has unfriendly intentions towards Poland**



**Figure 3. The importance of this country in the world is increasing?**



**Figure 4. The economy of this country is growing fast**

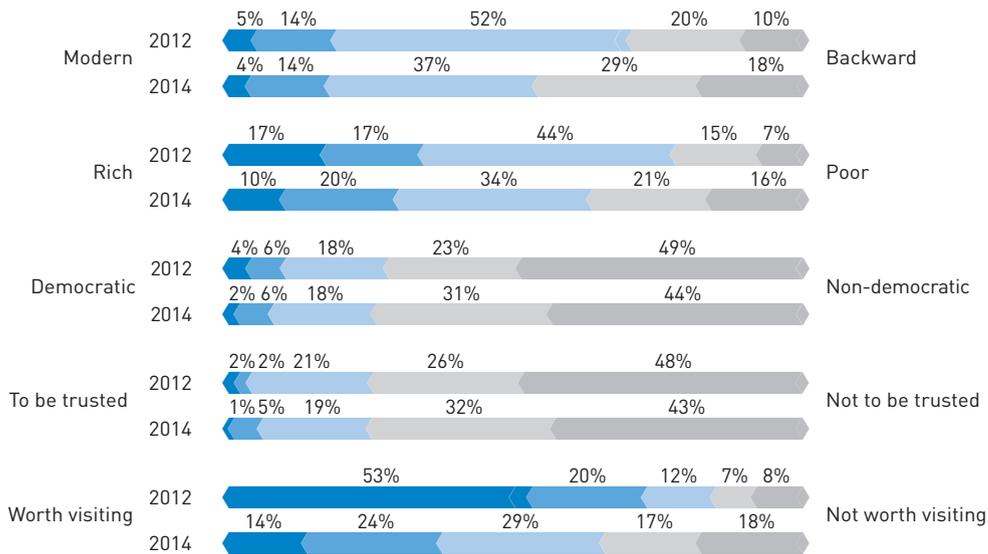


Poles suppose then, that the increase in aggression by Russia in the international arena and the ease with which it took the decision to enter into conflict with Ukraine, and indirectly with the western world, does not serve to support the real strengthening of Russia as a global power.

Poles are also more likely to believe that Russia is a country whose economy is not growing rapidly (the percentage of indicators increased by 12 p.p. from 5% in 2012 to 17% in 2014). Media reports on the Ruble crisis and the subsequent consequences for the Russian economy due to the decline in world oil prices and economic sanctions resonate in this belief.

To summarise, given the above mentioned opinions regarding Russia as a state, in order to assess the country's current image, it is worthwhile to make a comparison with the same rankings from two years ago. It is clear that Poles are less likely to perceive Russia as a modern and rich country. They see it slightly more often than previously as an undemocratic country which does not inspire trust. Above all, Poles have absolutely no will to visit Russia. It can even be said that this country's tourist attractiveness in Poland has plummeted (ratings "worth a visit" decreased from 53% in 2012 to 14% today).

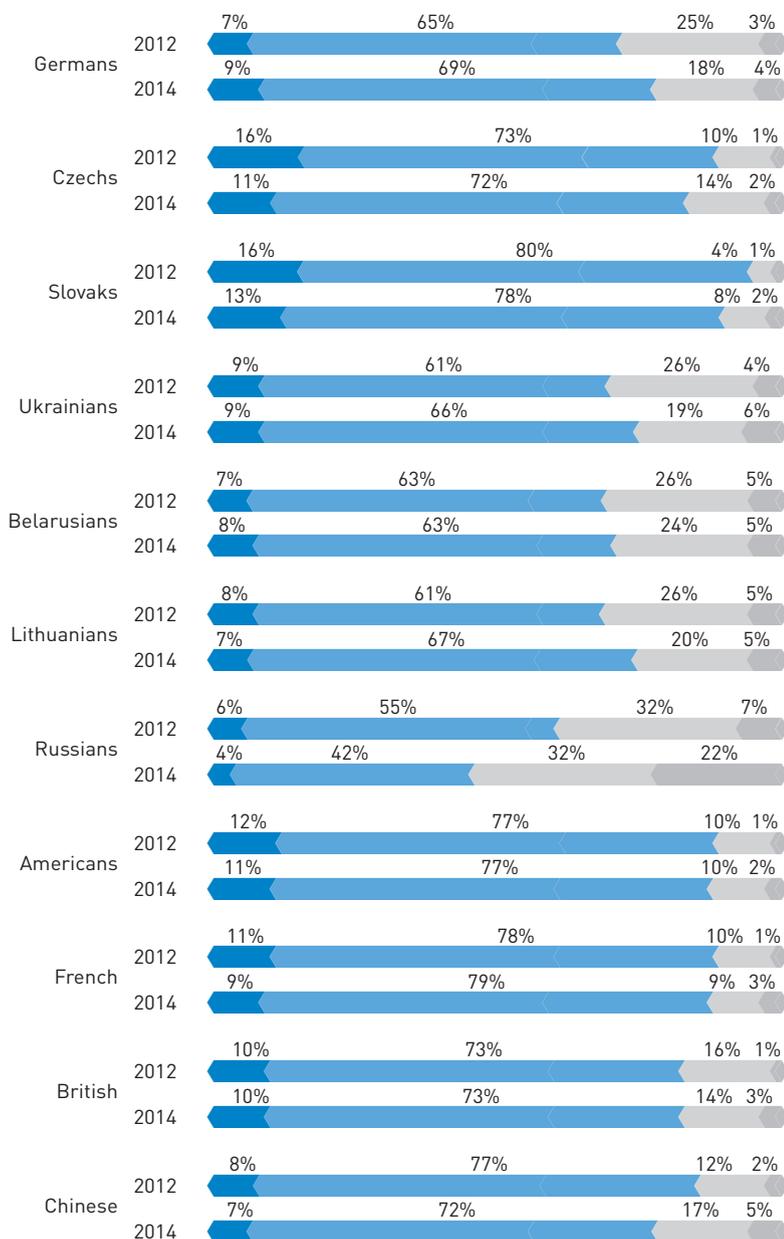
**Figure 5. Russia's image among Poles**



As mentioned above, compared with the previous survey, the map depicting countries favourably and unfavourably oriented towards Poland in the opinion of Poles has changed. A similar conclusion can also be drawn given the results presented below, related to the perception of individual nations as friendly or unfriendly towards

Poland. A noticeable improvement can be seen in the perception of Ukrainians and Lithuanians as nations which are friendly towards Poles and the – perhaps less spectacular, but perceptible – changes in the perception of other nations, with the exception of Czechs and Slovaks.

Figure 6. Peoples, by attitude towards Poles



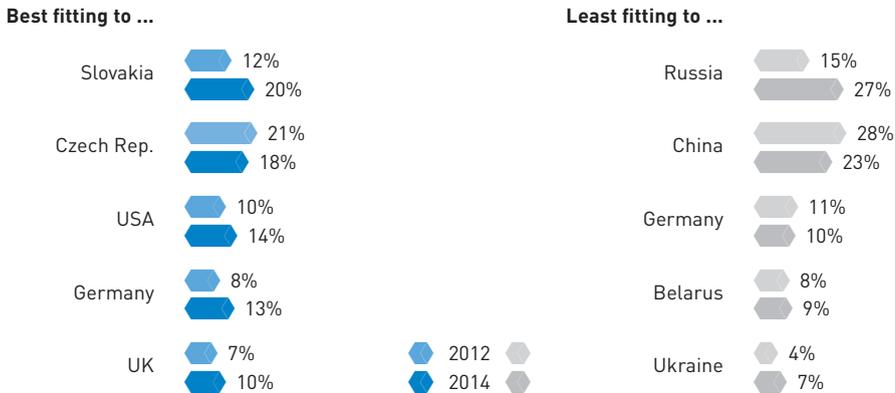
In order to maintain consistency with a report compiled using data from a poll conducted in Russia, the "do not know / hard to say" choice has been omitted.

- definitely friendly to Poles
- rather friendly to Poles
- rather unfriendly to Poles
- definitely unfriendly to Poles

As already mentioned, the perception of Russians has fundamentally changed. Poles are much more likely to assign Russians hostile intentions. Certainly, this can be attributed to the fact that the aggressive policy pursued by Russia seems to serve to increase rather than decrease the popularity of

state authorities in Russian society. The distinct change in the Poles' view of Russians is evidenced by the fact that Russians are not perceived today as potential partners for heart-to-heart conversations (they are, in fact, the last with whom Poles would like to have such a conversation).

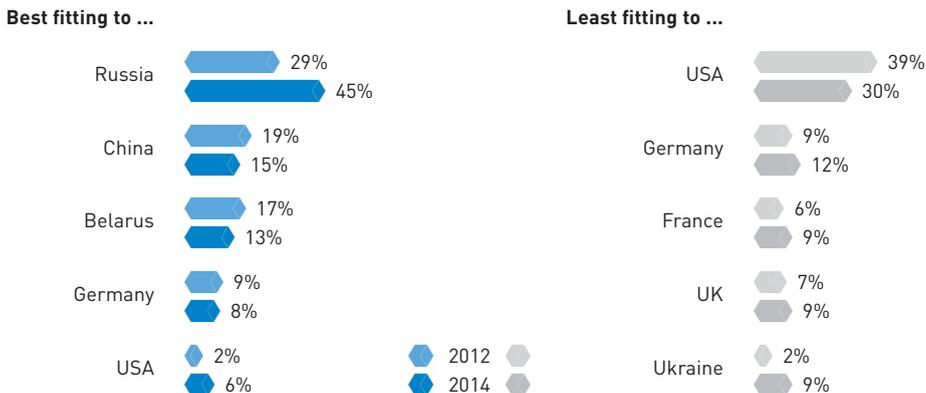
**Figure 7. Poles' opinions about countries: With people from this country you can have a heart-to-heart conversation**



The increase in negative attitudes towards Russians has been prompted by Poles' conviction that they fully support the international policy of President Vladimir Putin. Respondents tend to think that a part of Russian identity is to prefer a strongman's rule to freedom and democracy more so than in 2012. Opinions of this nature were to be heard re-

cently in, among others, the comments on the limited effectiveness of economic sanctions imposed on Russia: Russians are supposedly immune to problems arising from deterioration in standards of living but would refuse to tolerate a degradation in their country's international prestige or any renouncement of its superpower ambitions.

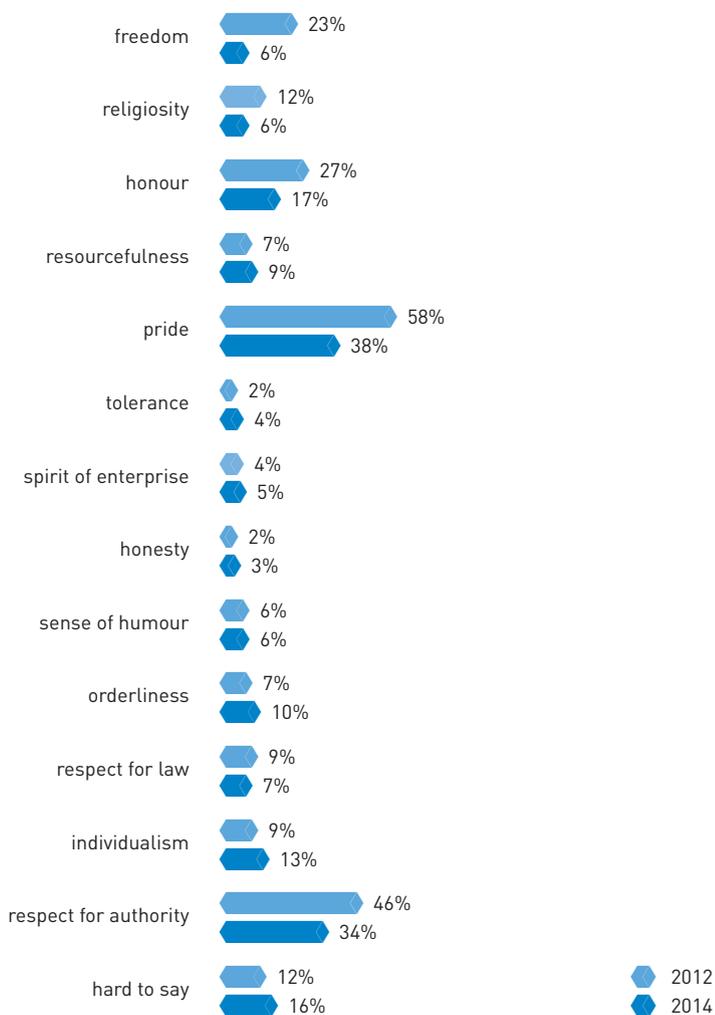
**Figure 8. Poles' opinions about countries: People in this country prefer a strongman's rule to freedom and democracy**



Distinct differences can also be observed when it comes to the responses to the question about Russians' intrinsic values. Still – as was the case in 2012 – Poles assign Russians pride, respect for authority and honour, though they do so less frequently than before. The entire list of values mentioned in the questionnaire could be regarded as positive; compared to 2012, the primary change is the fact that Poles are inclined to assign these positive traits far less frequently than before. It should be noted that the events

which transpired over the last two years, most strongly influenced the perception of Russians as free persons who care about freedom. While the love of freedom – though perhaps understood strictly personally, not politically and collectively – was the fourth most commonly assigned Russian trait in the survey of 2012, now these associations have changed completely, as “freedom” is at the bottom of the list of traits and values typically attributed to Russians in the rankings.

**Figure 9. Values of importance for Russians as seen by Poles**



Once again, one cannot help but notice that the Ukrainian-Russian conflict is integral to the way in which Poles perceive Russians. It seems that the sympathy of the majority of Poles has shifted towards Ukraine, as Russia is seen as the aggressor, guilty of provoking international tension and as a source of danger to Polish security, too. As a consequence of Russians' support for the authorities, they themselves are also seen today as far more hostile than they were two years ago. Moreover, the tendency to perceive Russia and Russians differently has clearly waned. The attitude of Poles towards Russians is now more

critical, which is reflected in the fact that they rarely assign them positive qualities (their place in the rankings remained unchanged from 2012) and are more likely to perceive them as people who prefer the rule of a strongman and who support imperial aspirations, disregarding personal freedom and posing a threat to the freedom of others. This is vastly different from the way Poles perceive themselves, given the myth constitutive of the Polish national community: "fight for our freedom and yours" and the Polish self-image as the oppressed, not the oppressors.

## 2. The conflict in Ukraine did not significantly affect the perception of the more fundamental, cultural similarities between the two nations. Poland and Russia are still “most distant among the close ones”

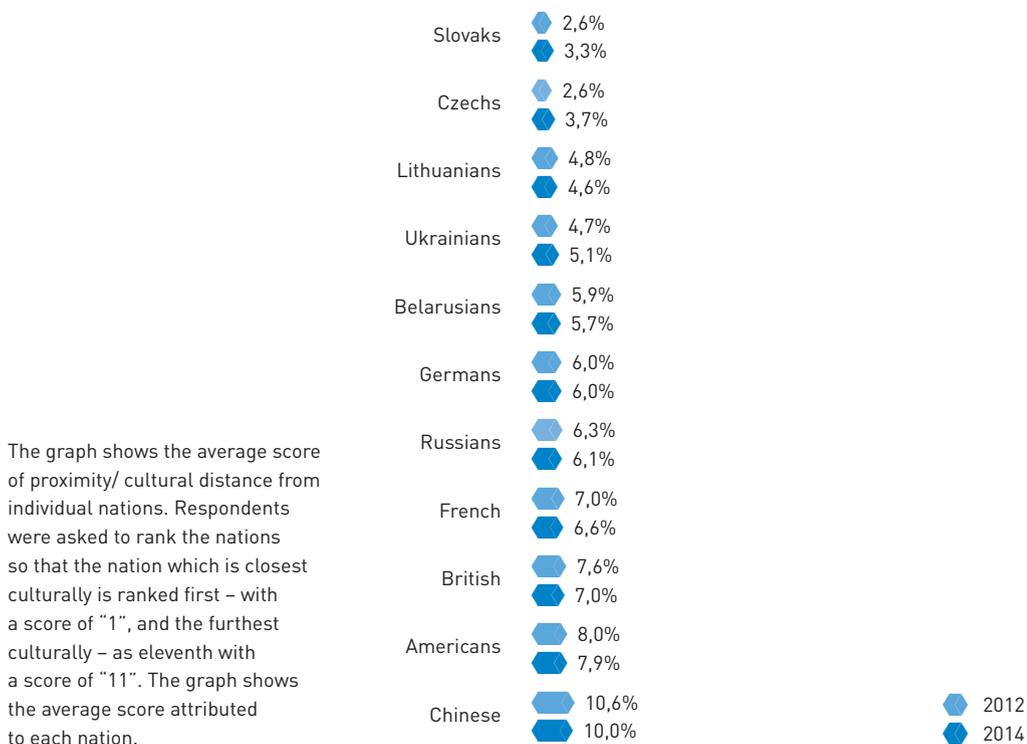
In the commentary section of the 2012 survey, the authors noted that both Poles and Russians perceive each other as “most distant among the close ones”. Despite some basic similarities resulting from common cultural foundations and being neighbours for centuries, both Poles and Russians have a fairly substantial sense of distinctiveness and draw maps depicting cultural communities differently.

The Ukrainian conflict has not had a fundamental influence on the perception of Russians’ cultural affinity. They can be defined, in terms of culture and customs, as “most distant among the close ones” for Poles. As Poles still see Czechs and Slovaks as the closest, although it is

worth noting that there were considerably fewer indicators pointing to these nations than there were in the previous study. It cannot be ruled out that the stances adopted by the Czech Republic and Slovakia regarding the Ukrainian conflict had an influence on this change.

A change in the perception of the cultural affinity with Ukrainians (to whom the cultural distance slightly increased) is also worth noting, although it is a phenomenon which is difficult to unambiguously explain. More often Poles perceive the French and the British to be close. Perhaps – again, given the perceived threat – Poles prefer to see themselves as part of the western, relatively safe and stable world.

**Figure 10. Rankings of nations in terms of cultural/lifestyle affinity to Poles**



### 3. Currently, associations made by Poles as regards Russia are dominated by political issues and those related to the conflict in Ukraine

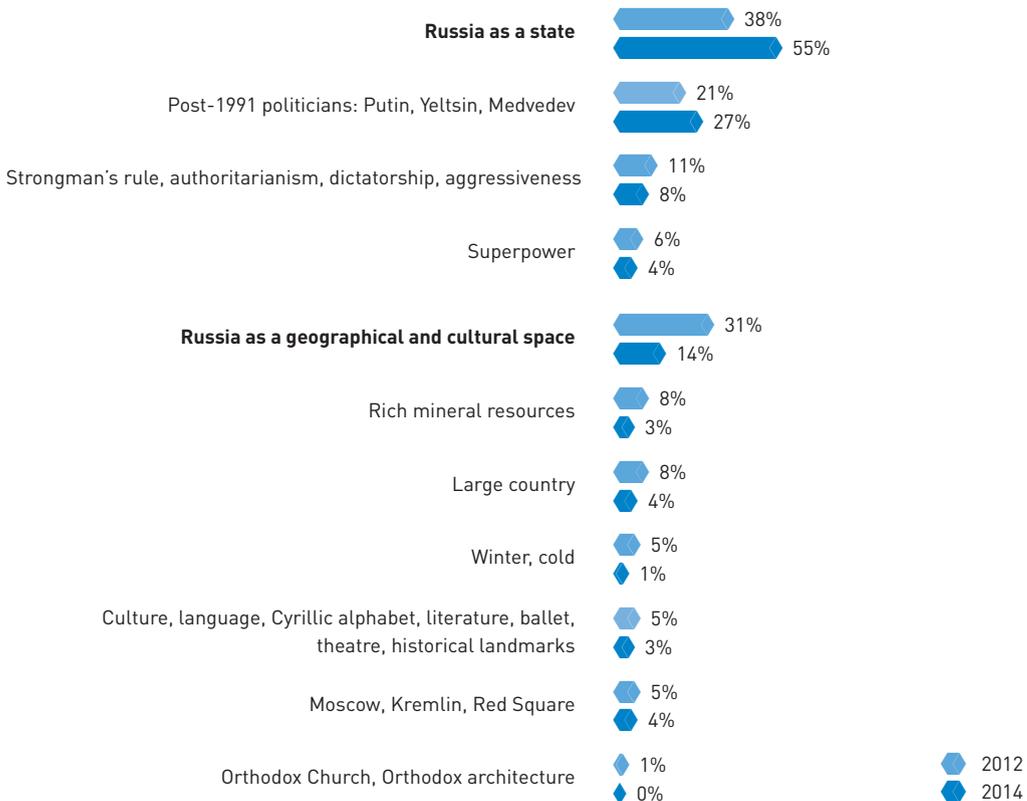
In the light of the results of the survey of 2 years ago it can be said that Poles perceive Russia primarily in political terms and as a state. Russia was perceived as a state unfriendly towards Poland, not trust-inspiring, governed in an authoritarian way, poorly organised and inefficient, and, blighted by inconsistencies and pathologies.

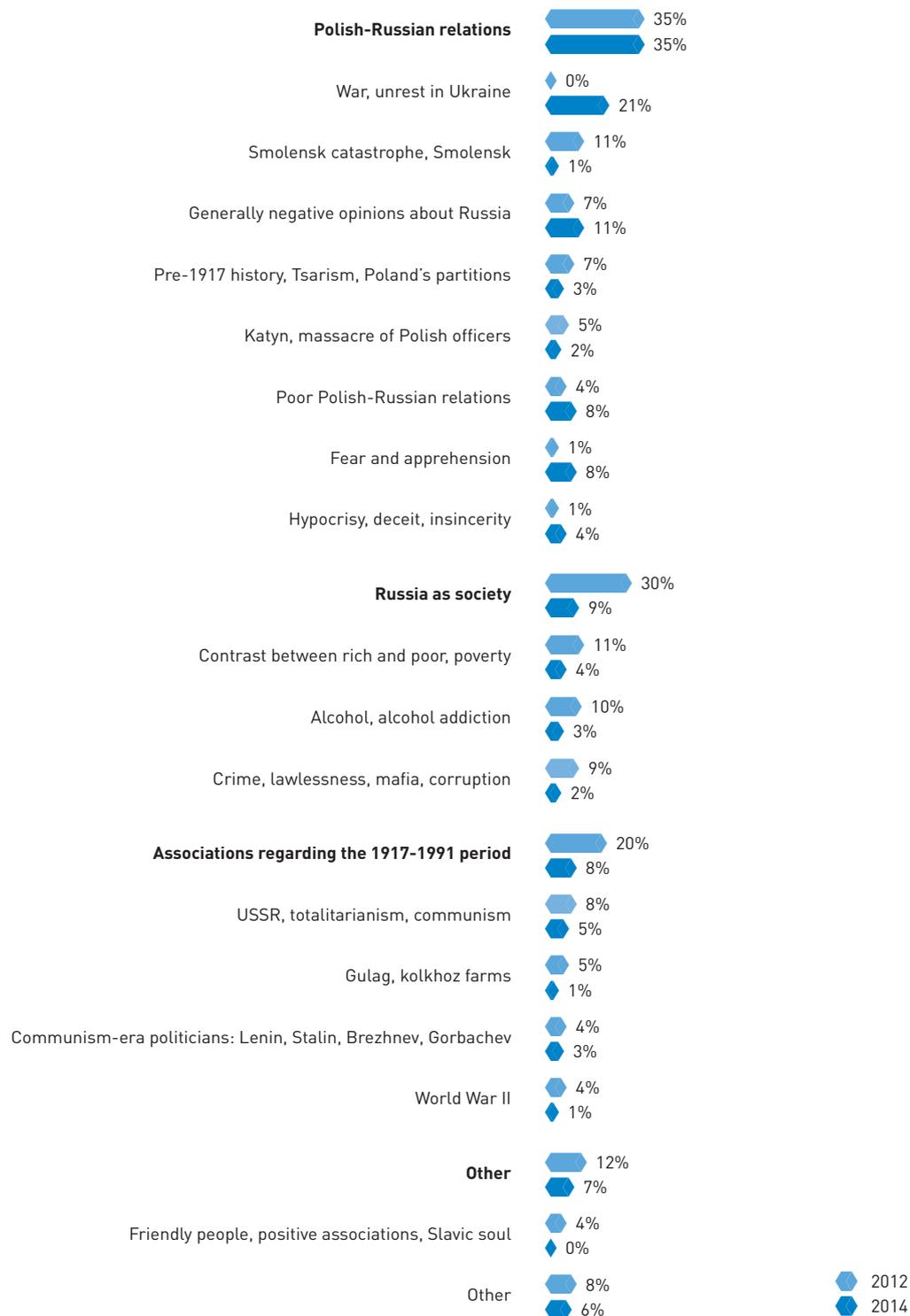
Today it can be stated that the war and the state-political outlook govern the associations of the average Pole to an even greater extent. When asked about associations with Russia, Poles mention the Russian state authorities and in particular,

President Vladimir Putin and his character traits in the first place. Almost as frequently, they mention the Ukrainian conflict and Russia's role in it; they generally share negative opinions about Russia and express concern at the poor state of Polish-Russian relations and the threat to Polish security.

The associations relating to other aspects – Russian society, culture, recent (the Smolensk catastrophe) and less recent (World War II, Katyn massacre, the Partitions of Poland) history in relations between the two countries are currently being overshadowed.

**Figure 11. Poles' spontaneous associations with Russia**





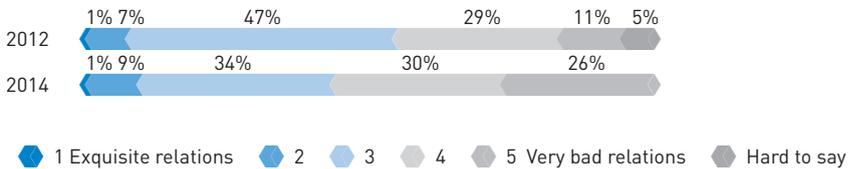
Frequency of associations which refer to Russia as a geographical and cultural space decreased. Also the number of references to modern Russian social problems fell. It is also noteworthy that in 2014, there were no associations related to Russians' affable character, friendliness or cultural proximity to Poles, while in the previous survey – although marginal, such sentiments were present.

The summary of the above considerations on changes in the perception of relations with Russia and Russians between the years 2012 and 2014 is the following graph, presenting responses about the assessment of Polish-Russian relations by Poles. In 2012, a total of 40% of the respondents defined these relations as bad (11% as very bad, and 29% as rather bad).

Negative ratings definitely outweighed positive ratings, and the largest group comprised people opting for the midpoint of the scale (47%). Two years later, Polish-Russian relations are seen as "bad" by 56% of Poles and as many as 26% of which describe them as "very bad". Also the percentage of respondents opting for the mid-point (34%) decreased – some people who had neutral views in 2012, are convinced of the bad nature of those relations today.

Thus, one can speak of a significant deterioration of the assessments of Polish-Russian relations, which can certainly be associated with the Ukrainian-Russian conflict, the negative changes in the international security system in Eastern Europe, Russia's role in these changes and their repercussions for Poland and Poles.

**Figure 12. Polish-Russian relations as seen by Poles**



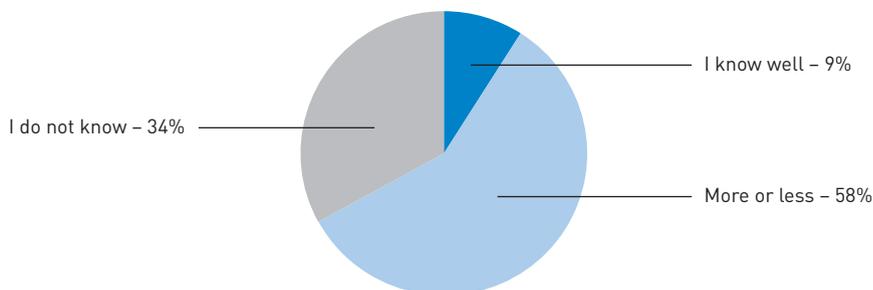
## 4. Significant polarisation of Polish public opinion in relation to Polish policy on the Ukrainian-Russian conflict

Since the Ukrainian conflict was the obvious context of the research on Polish-Russian relations two years after the first one, some of the survey questions were related to the events in Ukraine and their social interpretation.

Only 9% of Poles think that they are very familiar with the details of Poland's position as regards the Ukrainian crisis, a further 58% said they

were "more or less" familiar with the issue. This is quite surprising in the light of the significance of current events beyond Poland's eastern border. Every third respondent stated that they "did not even know" what the government's position on this issue was. It seems that there is a need to take steps to effectively communicate to society the way of thinking and measures taken by Poland in relation to the Ukrainian crisis.

**Figure 13. Do you know Poland's position on the Ukrainian crisis?**

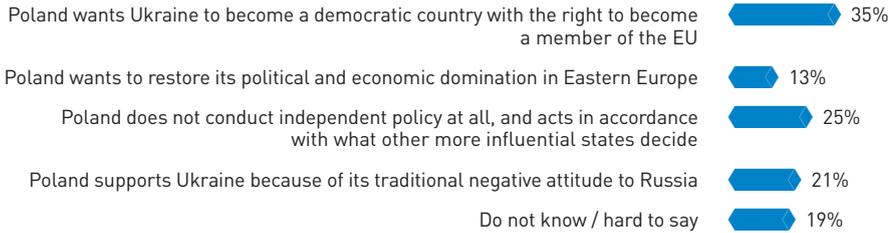


The need for such steps is clearly shown in **Figure 14**, **p. 20** which presents the responses to the question of interpretation of the Polish government's motives on the crisis since its outbreak. It is noteworthy that individual, alternative interpretations have attracted widespread support. Every third respondent defines the main motive underlying Polish policy towards Ukraine as the promotion of democracy in this country, the will to bring Ukraine closer to European structures. Every fifth respondent sees the cause of Polish policy in its supposed traditionally negative attitude towards Russia. Poland's actions are thus primarily anti-Russian, not pro-Ukrainian. Every fourth respondent thinks that Poland does not lead an independent policy at all and acts in accordance with the will and interests of the stronger countries. A fairly large percentage of

respondents (13%) see the actions of the Polish government as primarily motivated by Poland's pursuit of political and economic domination in Eastern Europe.

Of course, part of these motives can co-exist and, to some extent, determine the measures taken by the government as regards the conflict in Ukraine. However, if the objective of the government agencies involved in social communication and the media is to ensure that the average Pole is cognisant of the reason for Poland's engagement in the stabilisation of the situation in Ukraine and how it will do so, it should be stated that not only has this goal not yet been reached, but that there is also a great deal of work to be done in this regard.

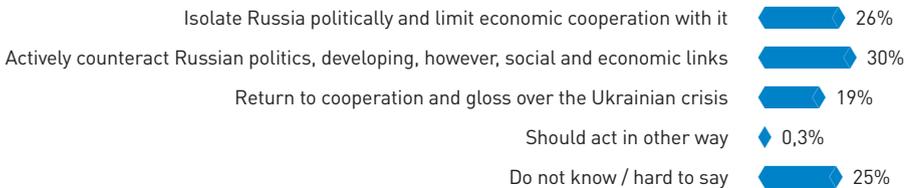
**Figure 14. Sympathy towards the protests in Ukraine and for Viktor Yanukovich's removal from power was evident in Polish public opinion and the Polish government has consistently supported Ukraine's membership in the EU. What motives underline such a position adopted by Poles and Poland in your opinion?**



The views of Polish society on how western countries should proceed towards Russia, in the light of the Ukrainian crisis, are equally diverse. The spectrum of attitudes extends from moderate (to counteract Russian politics, but without Russia's radical isolation, this attitude is the

most common – 30% of respondents), through a consistent opposition connected with Russia's isolation and limited cooperation with it (26% responses), a passive attitude and a return to cooperation with Russia (19%), to an indifferent attitude (25% responses).

**Figure 15. How should the West proceed as regards Russia in the light of the Ukrainian crisis?**



According to the majority of Poles, the change in Polish-Russian relations in the light of the conflict in Ukraine should also apply to the cultural aspect. Only 17% of respondents stated that this aspect should be excluded from the current pol-

icy. The largest group is in favour of developing cultural cooperation to a limited extent. Every fifth Pole thinks that cultural cooperation with Russia should be put on hold.

**Figure 16. Should Poland develop cultural and social cooperation with Russia despite the political differences? If so, to what extent?**



In the light of the results presented above, it can be said that Polish public opinion is relatively polarised in terms of how the Polish authorities should proceed given the crisis in Ukraine. Many respondents are not very familiar with Poland's position; the variance of interpretations of the motives behind Polish policy highlights some

problems in social communication. Moreover, the goals that, in the respondents' opinion, the government should seek to attain – are extremely varied. Also, opinions on whether cultural cooperation should develop independently of the current policy are not homogeneous.

# How Russians see Poland, Poles and Russian-Polish relations

Report on public opinion research in Russia  
commissioned by the Centre for Polish-Russian  
Dialogue and Understanding

## About the research

### Tasks and purposes

- To study the dynamics of the attitudes of Russians towards Poland and Poles.

### Purposes:

- To define changes in public perceptions of Russia-Poland relations at the national and inter-ethnic (between people/communities) levels.
- To reveal changes in the Polish image in Russia.
- To define stereotypes describing both countries and its people.
- To define the evolution in perceptions of the cultural similarity/distance between the two nations.

- To reveal the public perception of the current developments regarding Russia-Poland relations.

### Methodology: Annual monitoring

- Conducting the annual public opinion monitoring allows not only recording the state of Russian-Polish relations but keeping track of the trajectory of its development. Monitoring studies are a source of reliable information helping to assess the effectiveness of the governmental policies.
- Quantitative survey, all-Russian representative sample. 1600 interviews in 132 regions of Russia. Statistical error does not exceed 3.5%.
- Timing: December 2014.

## Commentary on the findings

Valery Fedorov

The 2014 tragic events in Ukraine have led to a fundamentally different information backdrop in terms of Russian-Polish relations. The two countries are on opposite sides of the barricades and signs of mutual discontent, criticism, accusations, confrontation – in other words, a general aura of mutual repulsion, as was observable in abundance in relations between Russia and Poland in the past - has now come to the forefront. On the other hand, forces of mutual attraction have weakened so dramatically that prospects of cordial relations are now lacking entirely. The conflict between Russia and the West on the Ukrainian issue – and Poland sees itself as an integral part of this – has overshadowed and undermined the attempts aimed at reaching mutual rapprochement undertaken in 2011-2013 by leaders of both countries.

Political cold spells could not but affect public opinion in Russia and Poland. The research conducted by VCIOM and our Polish colleagues in December 2014 enables quite accurate assessment of both the vector and the scale of changes; the vector being negative and the scale ranging from insignificant (as regards fundamental cultural characteristics) to substantial (when speaking of rapidly changing, transient political issues).

The image of Poland's authorities has suffered the most as out of the top ten countries unfriendly towards Russia, Poland ranked third behind only Ukraine and the US. Moreover, the proportion of Russians who believed that the Polish authorities harbour friendly feelings for Russia halved (a fall from 40% to 20%) within two years (2012-2014). At the same time, attitudes towards the US, Ukraine, Germany and France also deteriorated. On the other hand, China and Belarus registered significant gains in terms of their approval ratings.

Every second Russian respondent admitted to being familiar with Poland's stance over the Ukrainian crisis. It was therefore no coincidence that their level of optimism when assessing Russian-Polish relations deteriorated significantly between 2012-2014. The number of respondents who described relations as 'poor' rose from 12% to 26% and the number of those who described relations as 'good' fell from 25% to 10%. There were two factors underlying Warsaw's uncompromising stance towards Moscow in the eyes of Russians: 1) Poland's dependence on EU common policy (i.e. Poland's lack of independence, lack of subjectivity, its status as an insignificant satellite of Western European countries) and 2) the deeply-entrenched negative attitude it had towards Russia as reflected in each measure Poland adopted with respect to Russia and the Ukrainian crisis. Poland's official explanation of the motivation behind its actions (respect for international law; the necessity to 'punish the aggressor'; to help preserve Ukraine's territorial integrity; support for processes of reform in the country) was seen as lacking in credibility by Russian society. The majority of Russian respondents were inclined to believe that Russia should simply ignore Poland's stance when developing and implementing its policy towards Ukraine.

The image of Poles as a people suffered to a lesser extent against the backdrop of the 2014 political upheavals: the proportion of Russians who believed that the average Pole had an unfriendly attitude towards them did not rise significantly (40%-43%) and the proportion of respondents who thought otherwise fell slightly (from 49% to 41%). The extent of cultural distance between Poles and Russians remained unchanged (a score of 5.5 on an 11-point scale) as the relationship between them could be

chartered precisely on the mid-point between culturally and mentally close countries and distant strangers. Hence, the conclusion drawn by Lukasz Mazurkiewicz two years ago in which he stated that these two countries saw each other as ‘the most distant among close ones’ was seemingly borne out by facts.

It is noteworthy that the cultural distance between Russians and Poles, as perceived by Russians, did not increase as the distance between Russians and Ukrainians has (an increase of almost one point within barely two years, the British; an increase of half a point, and Americans; an increase of one-third of a point) despite the conflicting attitudes held in Moscow and Warsaw regarding the Ukrainian issue.

The content of the image of Poles as a people in the eyes of Russians did not change significantly although typical Polish traits such as religiosity, pride and respect for law and order were mentioned by Russians less frequently. At the same time, the cultural and value-based gap between Poles and Russians was not breached: the greatest discrepancy is identified between Russians’ perception of Poles and the Russian auto-stereotype related to three traits which feature prominently in the latter: tolerance, strong family values and a sense of humour.

Unfortunately, the majority of Russians remained oblivious to recent Polish cultural and social developments. Russians still formed their perception of this country via the prism of three contexts: historical; related primarily to the socialist period when Poland was part of the Soviet camp, consumption; Polish goods imported to Russia, and political; Warsaw policy as regards Moscow.

Tourism, literature, cinema and mutual intellectual communication had virtually no effect on Russian public opinion about Poland. The proportion of Russians who had never visited Poland remained unchanged since 2012 and comprised 92% of respondents. Moreover, half of all respondents stated that they had no desire to visit Poland at all while 7% admitted that they would have had no misgivings about visiting Poland were it not for the tense relations between the two countries.

The changes in Russian public opinion can be attributed to what has become known as the ‘Eurasian shift’ – a term used to describe the overall drop in sympathy levels of Russians for Western countries accompanied by a rise in sympathy towards Russian allies which belong to the Eurasian Union and China, increasingly seen as a more attractive alternative to the West. Poland is no exception to this general, negative trend as it was seen as being no different than the West, unlike those EU member states which were still perceived positively by Russians due to the exceptional, more approving stances they have towards Russia (Hungary, Greece or Cyprus).

We can only hope that forces of mutual repulsion in Russian-Polish relations will exhaust their potential before negative political assessments begin to shape the more fundamental – cultural preferences. This would mar mutual relations permanently and effectively render a thaw in relations impossible even from a long-term perspective, let alone in the short-term.

## Key findings

Current international tensions resulted in strained relations between Russia and Poland which in turn affected public opinions. The survey conducted in December 2014 revealed a number of specific perceptions of Poland, Poles and the Polish position on the current political situation by Russians.

**1.** First, Russian perceptions of Poland have changed in many ways: perceptions of transnational relations grew cold; Polish authorities and people's position regarding Russia is perceived in a different way. Thus, whereas the survey conducted in 2012 showed that the attitudes of Poles towards Russians were soft, and the attitudes of the Polish government towards Russia were tougher, now there is almost no difference between the assessments at the national level and the assessment of the ordinary people.

**2.** One more important thing is that no matter if respondent has or does not have relatives or friends living in Poland, it does not influence the assessments.

**3.** Third, there has been a negative shift not only in attitudes toward Poland but also towards the USA (countries who actively took part in the Ukrainian crisis) as well as certain Western European countries (Germany, France). Against this background, the favourable attitudes towards China and Belarus have significantly increased in many ways (both the attitudes of the authorities of these countries and the ordinary citizens' attitudes).

**4.** In terms of key cultural ideas, the image of Poles has not changed: religiosity is mentioned much more rarely compared to other characteristics. Poles are rarely described as having pride, respect for law and power. There is a disjuncture in the key socio-cultural values between the two peoples (assessed by Russians); the major

discord between Russians and Poles is seen in values which are very important for Russians - tolerance, family and sense of humour.

**5.** The associative field analysis shows that the problem concerning the food sanctions imposed by Russia and the growing disfavour is of vital importance. What come to the mind of respondents first are products, cloths and cosmetics (12% name different categories of goods). There were also negative associations (meanness, hypocrisy, aggressiveness, hostility) which were almost absent in 2012.

**6.** Russians highlight cultural affinity with the East Slavic peoples (Belarusians and Ukrainians), though these opinions wavered compared to 2012. Amidst European nations, Slovaks, Czechs and Poles are perceived as the closest nations to Russia. Remarkably, the position of Poles in the cultural affinity to the Russian people has not changed much which means that political assessments do not have any direct impact on the perception of cultural affinity. This is also proved by the data collected in Western Europe.

**7.** The share of those who have never been to Poland has not changed, too (92% respondents). Half of respondents do not have any desire to go to Poland. Only 7% recognise that they would like to go there, if the relations between the two countries were not tense. Small share of travellers is basically represented by tourists.

**8.** According to the all-Russian survey, half of respondents are aware of the Poland's position on Ukraine; they think that Polish officials and the public support Ukrainian protests and its integration into the EU because they do not have any strict political line and are influenced by more powerful countries (34%). Another one-quarter of respondents think it is related to the

negative attitudes towards Russia, this is why a relative majority of respondents tend to think that Russia should ignore Poland's position in tackling the Ukrainian crisis.

9. According to respondents, Western countries should develop cooperation with Russia despite controversy over Ukraine.

## Detailed results of the research

### 1. Assessment of Russian-Polish relations

The dynamics of the changing public attitudes in Russia concerning the attitudes of the authorities of different countries towards Russia showed a negative trend. The most unfavourable attitudes are marked among such countries as the USA, Ukraine and Poland. The most significant dynamics was revealed in countries such as France (twofold), Germany and Ukraine (almost threefold).

As to Russia and Poland, it should be noted that in 2012, forty percent of respondents reported that the attitudes of the Polish leaders towards Russia were friendly; in 2014 only 20% of respondents thought so. At the same time, the share of those who assessed the relations as unfriendly was 47% in 2012, compared to 67% now. As to the United States and Ukraine, the assessments of the attitudes of these countries toward Russia have become much more negative (American attitudes – threefold; Ukrainian attitudes – almost twofold). German negative perceptions of Russia have also considerably increased (from 21% to 59%, respectively).

As to several positive trends, Russians say that Chinese leaders have started to perceive Russia more positively (in 2012 the share of Russians who treated China as a friendly state was 66%, in 2014 – 81%). The same thing can be said of Belarus (71% of Russians thought that the leaders of this country had favourable perception of Russia in 2012; currently – 78%).

The survey showed that over the recent two years the attitudes of Russians concerning the way how ordinary people living in different countries perceive Russia have deteriorated; however it is not so important as to assess the perceptions of the leaders of the countries. According

to respondents, the only country where ordinary citizens have had a more unfavourable opinion of Russia is Ukraine. In 2012 the share of Russians who believed that the attitudes of Ukrainians towards Russia were unfavourable was 28%; in 2014 the share of them made up 53%.

Russians believe that the most negative views of Russia are expressed by residents of the USA (58% in 2014 and 48% in 2012), Ukraine, Lithuania (48%) and Poland (43%). Remarkably, respondents' assessments of the attitudes of Poles towards Russia have not changed much since 2012 (40%).

China is ranked first among countries which are friendly towards Russia (78% of its residents have favourable opinion of Russia, according to respondents); this is followed by Belarusians on the second place (77%) and Slovaks on the third place (61%).

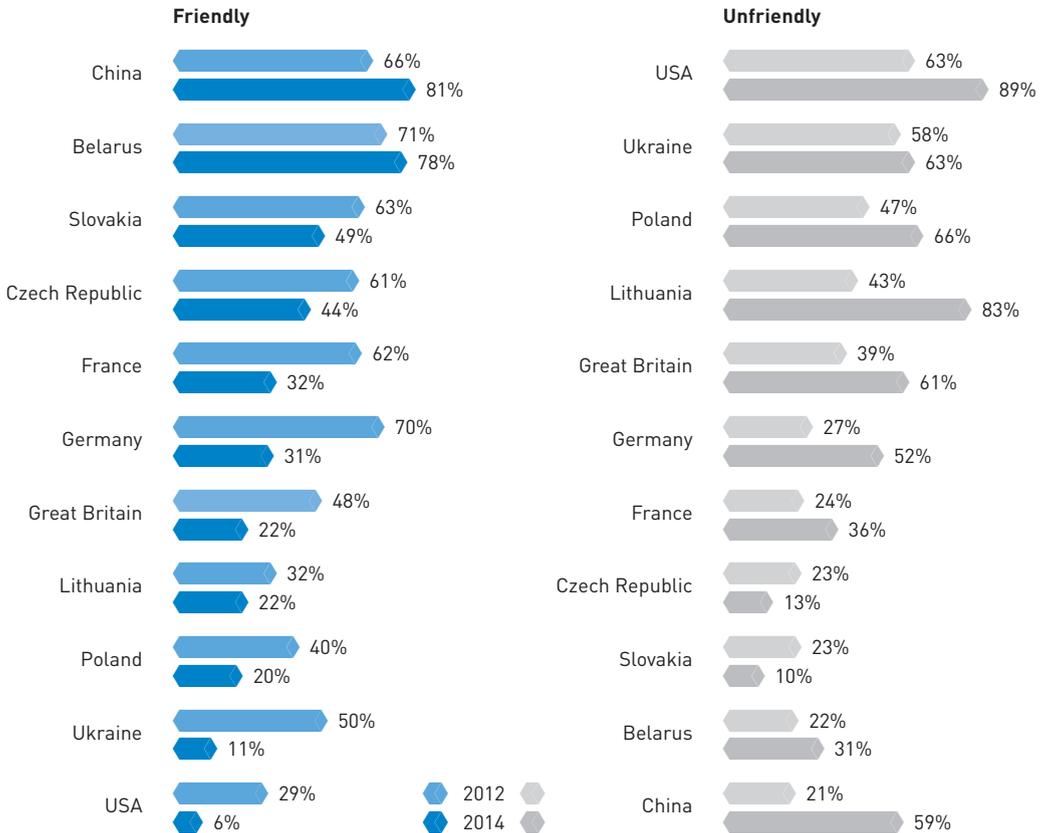
When considering the dynamics of the attitudes toward Russia from different points of view (administrative or inter-personal), it is worth noting the following thing: up until now we have recorded different positions (assessments at the individual level were mainly positive; assessments at the national level were more negative), but today these different positions are approaching each other. This is due to the fact that political reality for the residents of the frontier countries started to shape their everyday life changing the way things were.

According to respondents, the general character of Russia-Poland relations has become chillier: where in 2012 the share of respondents who assessed the relations as chill was only 14%, currently the negative assessments are expressed

by 38%. Only 12% assess the relations as good (29% in 2012). On a five-point scale the relations are scored 2.6 points; in 2012 the average score was 3.2. These slight changes resulted from

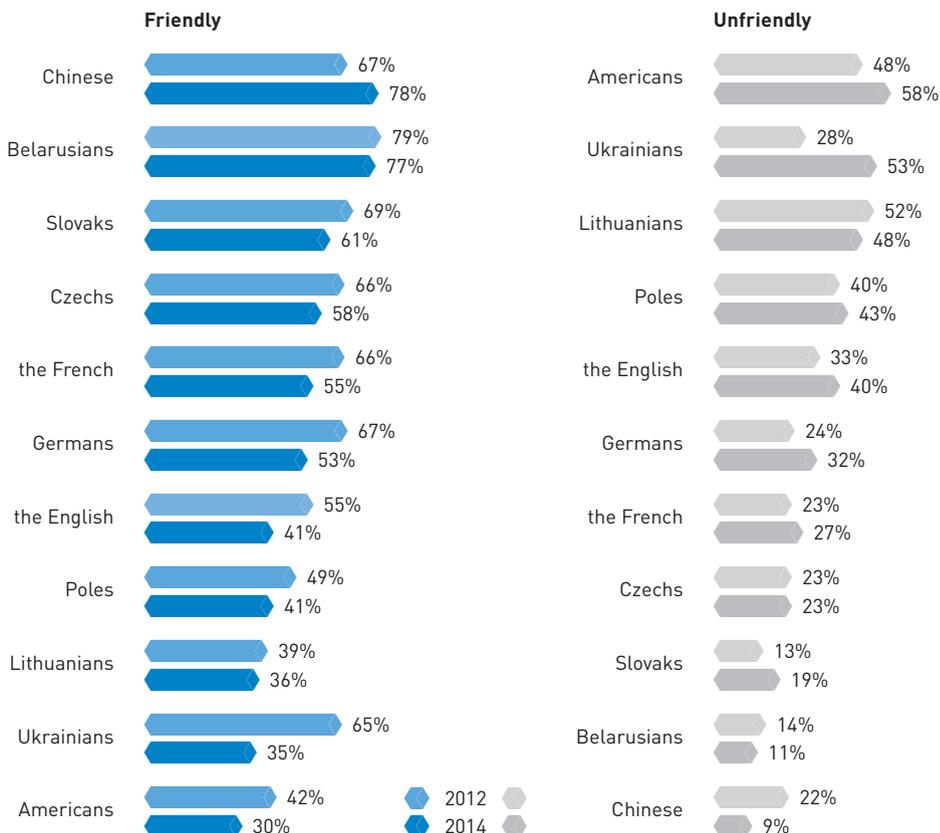
the current political tensions between Western countries and Russia due to Russia's position on the Ukrainian issue.

**Diagram 17. Could you assess the attitudes of the leadership of these countries towards Russia: rather friendly or unfriendly?**



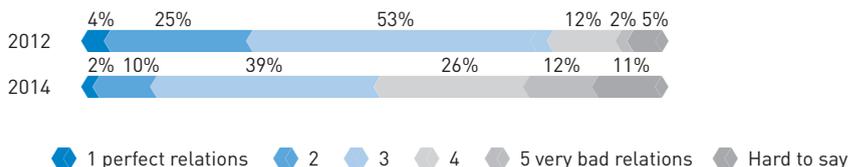
"Don't know" answer is not presented.

**Diagram 18. Now could you assess the attitudes of the ordinary citizens of these countries towards Russia: rather friendly or unfriendly?**



"Don't know" answer is not presented.

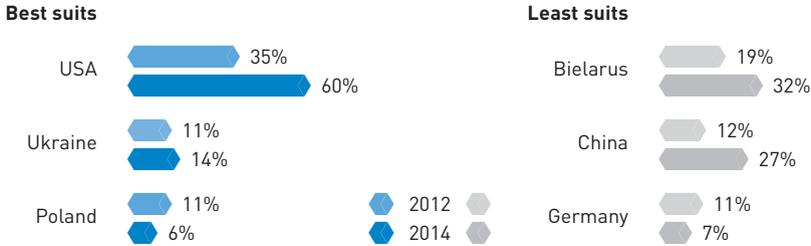
**Diagram 19. Could you assess the relations between Russia and Poland**



Respondents believe that the statement “this country is unfriendly towards Russia” best suits the USA (the proportion of those who share this stance has increased from 35% to 60% over two years), Ukraine (14%; this share is almost the

same), Poland (less Russians think so – from 11% to 6% in 2014). Countries that least suits this statement are Belarus (32% of respondents think that it is not typical for Belarus), China (27%), and Germany (7%).

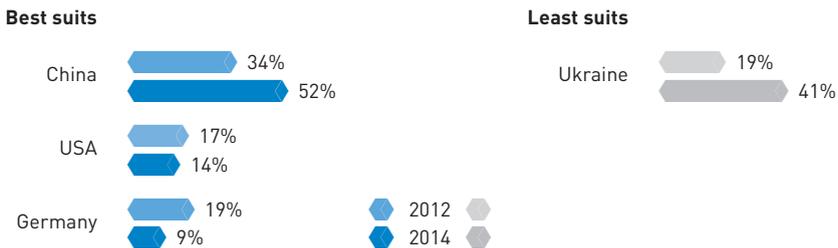
**Diagram 20. This country is unfriendly towards Russia**



When asked to name the country which role in the international area is growing, most of respondents mention China (52%), the USA (12%) and Germany (9%). Compared to 2012, much

more respondents mention Ukraine among countries that do not suit this statement (19% in 2012 versus 41% in 2014).

**Diagram 21. The role of this country in the world is growing of respondents**



## 2. Dominant cultural images of Poles and Russians

According to Russians, the dominant ideas shaping socio-cultural image of Poles involve enterprise (23%), respect for traditions (20%) and individualism (18%). Compared to the survey conducted in 2012, such trait as "religiosity" was assessed differently: two years ago this cultural feature was the second mentioned by Russians (24%); now only 13% of Russians cite this trait.

Russians believe that the key cultural characteristics describing Poles are tolerance 36% (because Poland is a multinational state), family (29%) as one of the most important values for Russians, and a sense of humour (27%) as a defensive response to reality. These values are permanently regarded by Russians as peculiar features of the Russian character; simultaneously, the same values reflect cultural differences between the two nations (here the disjuncture between Russians and Poles is manifested most strongly).

The values that bring Poles and Russians together are respect for traditions (20% and 23, respectively), order (14% and 11%), respect for law (5% and 4%) and power (6% and 5%). Most of all cultural differences manifest themselves in tolerance which is assessed to be typical for Poles only in 9% of cases. Asked about cultural affinity, most of Russians cite East Slavs such as Belarusians and Ukrainians. Despite the fact that the positions of these nations have slightly weakened over two years, they still remain to be the backbone of cultural closeness. On an affinity scale respondents give 3.36 points for Ukrainians (2.34 p. in 2012), and 2.62 points for Belarusians (2.29 in 2012).

It should be noted that among European nations, West Slavic peoples are perceived as nations which are closest to Russia: Slovaks (4.54),

Czechs (5.33) and Poles (5.54). Remarkably, the position of Poles in cultural affinity with Russians has almost stayed at the same level which proves that the general public is not affected by negative political effects to feel cultural affinity with European people. It is also proved by figures across Western European countries.

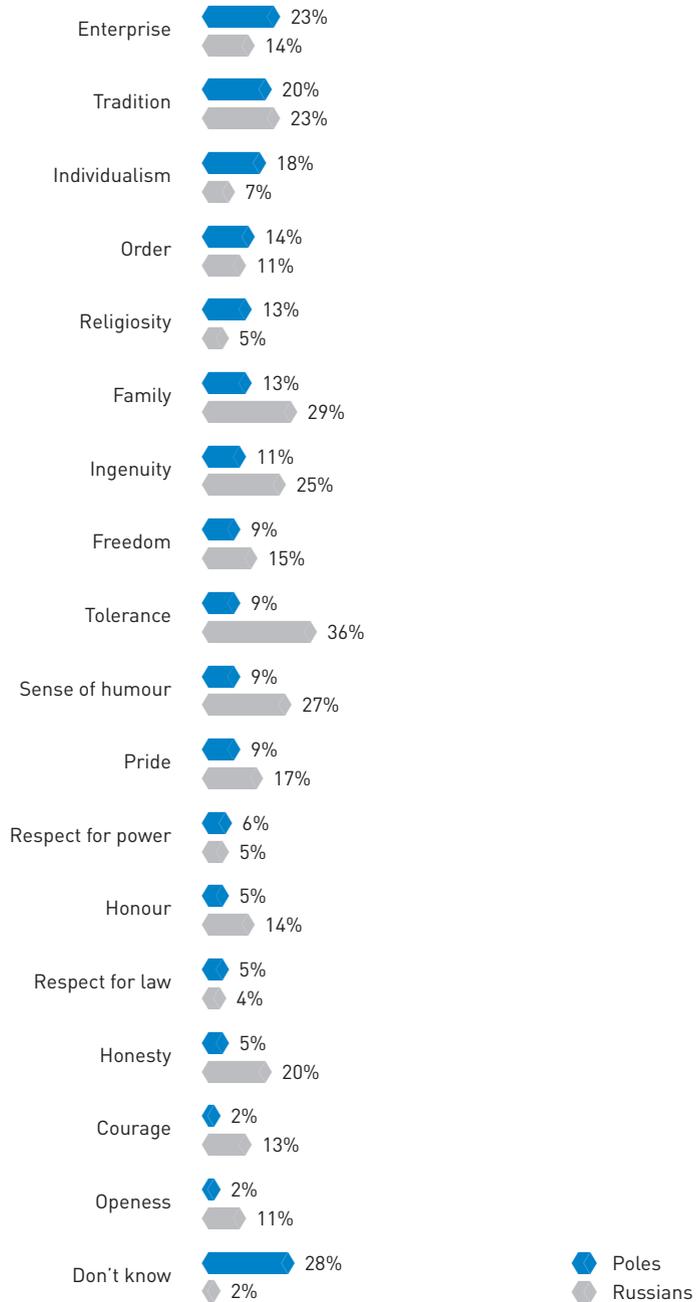
The closest nation among Western European ones is German culture (6.85 points). At the same time, other Western European cultures are also strengthening their positions: in 2014 French people got closer to Russians; and British people are not perceived as a distant nation anymore.

Americans and Chinese remain to be the most estranged nations in term of culture, Russians say. Though China (8.38 points) has got closer to Russia over the recent two years, and the USA has become slightly estranged on the scale of cultural affinity (8.76 points).

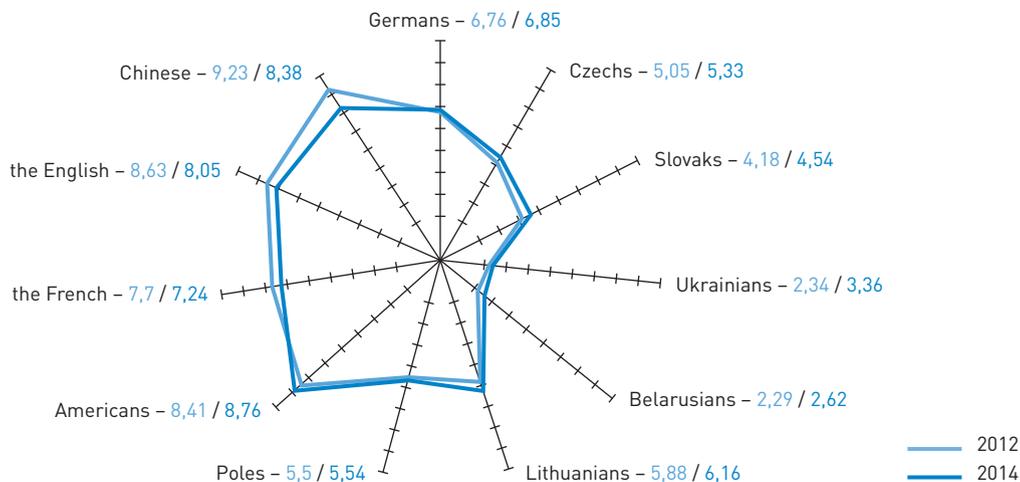
According to respondents, a single cultural space is shared by residents of Belarus (47% in 2014 vs 26% in 2012), Ukraine (27% in 2014 vs 16% in 2012), Poland (3% vs 8, respectively) and France (6%, per each). The most distant countries are the USA (30% in 2014 vs 18% in 2012) and China (despite improved positions, 23% in 2014).

Considering the cultural achievements across different countries, respondents cite France (32%), England (15%) and China (15%). These are the countries mentioned most often. The cultural achievements of Ukraine are much less important for Russians (threefold decrease). Poland is not perceived as a country with a massive cultural layer.

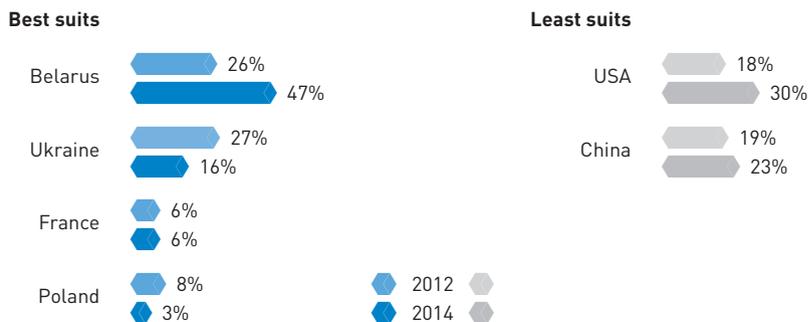
**Diagram 22. From the following list, choose three most important values that best describe Russians and Poles**



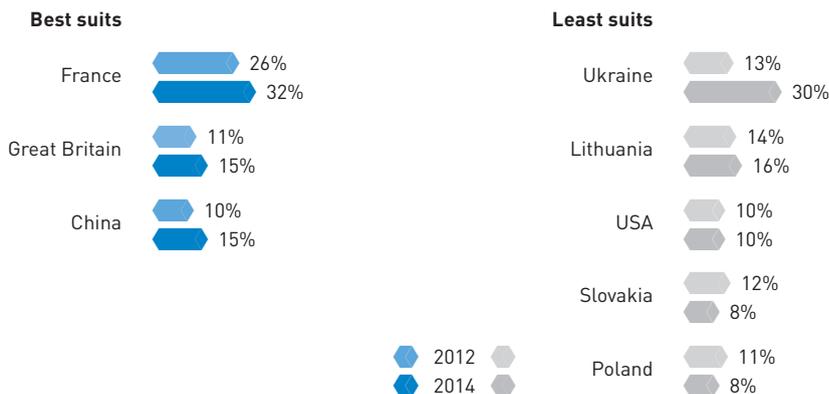
**Diagram 23. Countries' rating in terms of cultural / traditional affinity toward Russians in points, where 1 means closest, and 11 – most distant countries**



**Diagram 24. This country belongs to the same cultural space as Russia**



**Diagram 25. This country has many cultural achievements**



### 3. Russians' perception of Poland

Associative field regarding Poland has changed: what come first are market associations such as foods, cosmetics, cloths referring to the trade relations between the two countries (12% vs 5% in 2012). It is worth noting that for the time being many respondents mention apples and sausage. In 2012 these associations were cited rarely. This is due to the current economic situation where exchange of goods between Russia and Poland is restricted by sanctions.

Respondents still have many associations with Poland's geographical position (Europe – 3%, neighbouring country (3%), state – 3%).

More Russians cite negative words regarding Poland such as aggressiveness, hostility and unfriendliness (3%), as well as meanness, hypocrisy and venal practices – 2%. This is due to the current political situation and a deterioration in relations between Russia and Poland.

The Russian views concerning the way how people live in Poland have considerably changed: 5% of respondents believe that the statement «people living in this country are wealthy» does

not suit this country (9% in 2012). This phrase is appropriate for Germany, Great Britain and the USA but not suitable for Ukraine or China.

The opinion that the «residents of this country act broadly and use their imagination» was expressed with respect to China (31%), France (17%) and the USA (16%). Poland is ranked fourth in the list of countries that suit this statement (8%).

Those who agree with the statement «this is a country of contrasts where poverty of ordinary people lives side by side the splendor of the rich» do so with regard to the United States (41%), Ukraine (13%) and Great Britain. Those who express the opposite opinion mention Belarus (18%), China (16%), Germany (16%) and Poland (5%).

As to Ukraine, the USA and Poland, Russians could say that these countries are “affected by crime, hard drinking, corruption”. And vice versa, Russians would not cite China, Germany and Belarus.

**Diagram 26. People living in this country are wealthy**

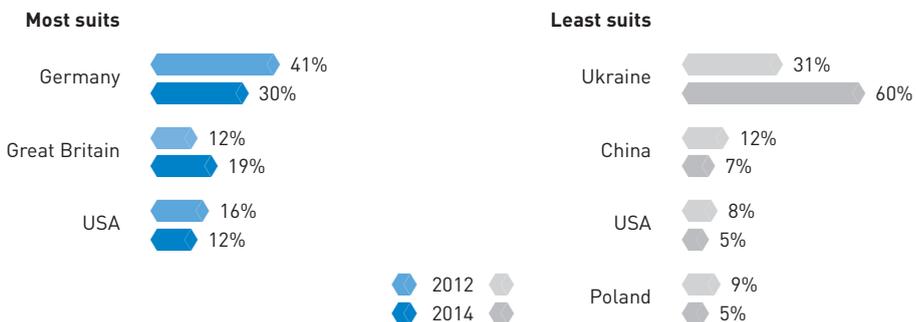
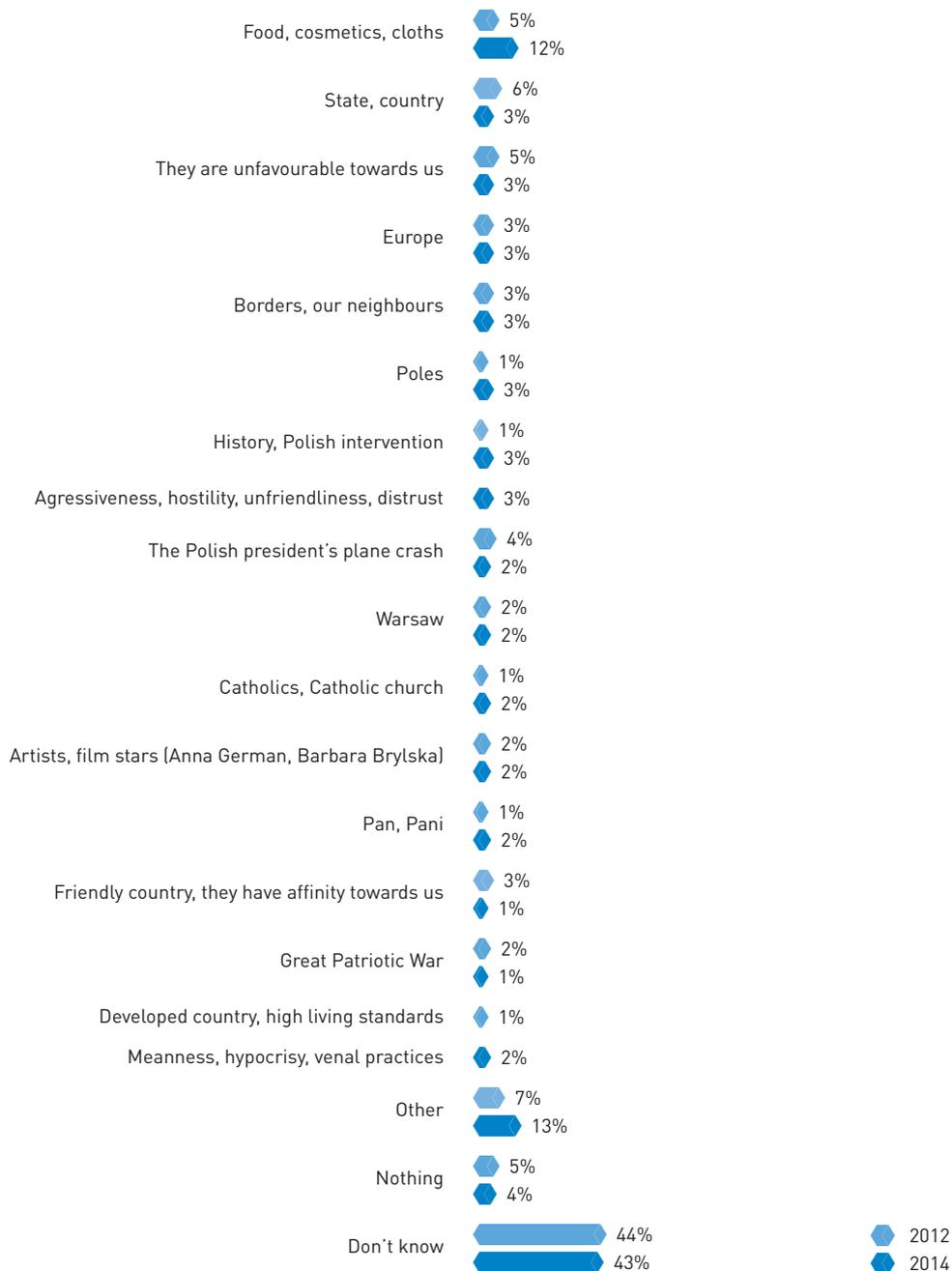
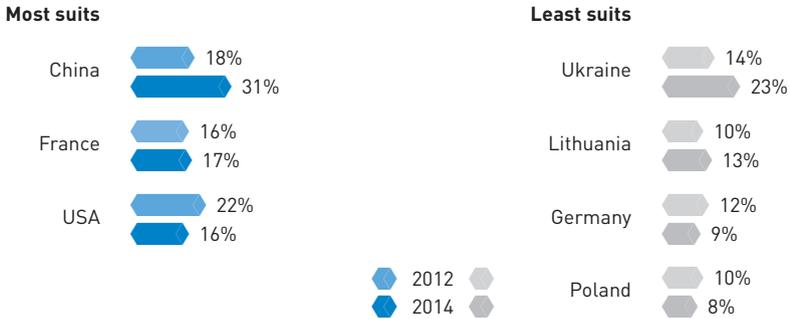
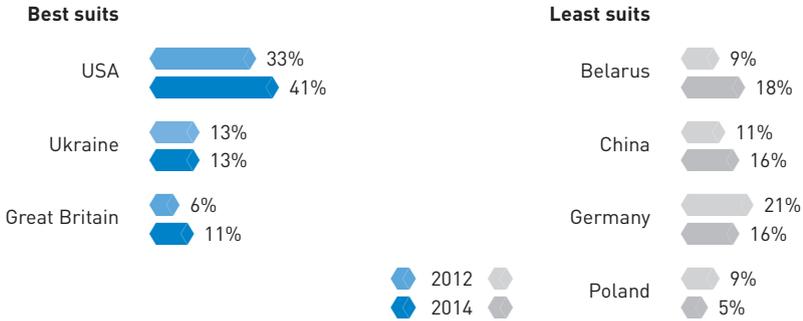


Diagram 27. What comes first to your mind when you hear the word “Poland”?



**Diagram 28. Residents of this country act broadly and use their imagination****Diagram 29. This is a country of contrasts where poverty of ordinary people lives side by side with the splendor of the rich****Diagram 30. This country is affected by crime, hard drinking, corruption etc.**

## 4. Visits to Poland

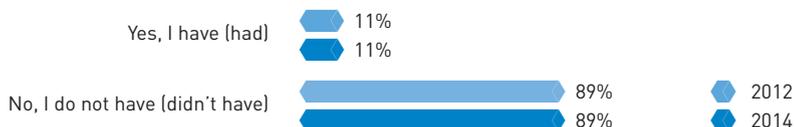
Over the recent two years, the number of Russians having friends or relatives among Poles has not changed: an overwhelming majority (89%) of Russians does not have them. Only every tenth mentioned to have/have had Polish relatives or friends.

The share of those who have never been to Poland has not changed, too (92%). The purposes of the visits of the remainder were touristic (5%). Few Russians mentioned that they went

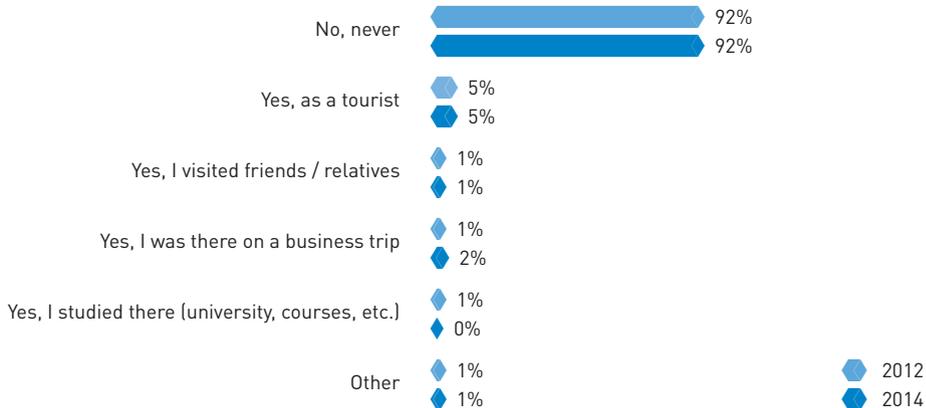
there for a business trip or to visit relatives (1% per each group).

Remarkably, 16% of Russians are interested in this country and would like to go there with pleasure. Twenty-two percent of respondents say they may go to Poland but they have never thought about it. Seven percent admit that they would go to Poland if there were no tensions between our countries. Every second respondent does not have desire to travel to Poland.

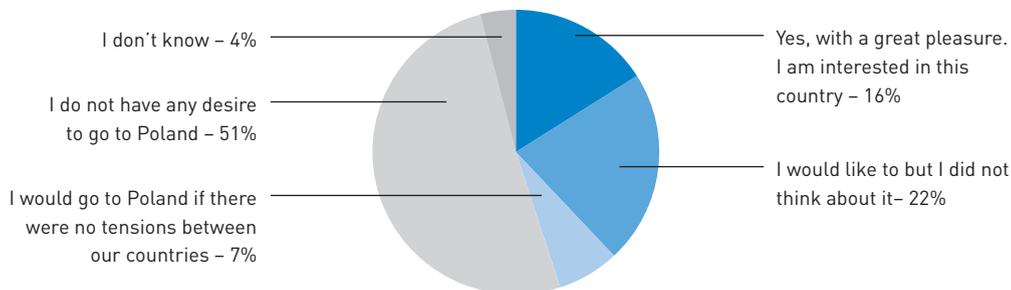
**Diagram 31. Do you have (did you have) any Polish relatives, friends, colleagues?**



**Diagram 32. Have you ever been to Poland? If yes, what did you do there? % of respondents**



**Diagram 33. Would you like to go to Poland as a tourist?**



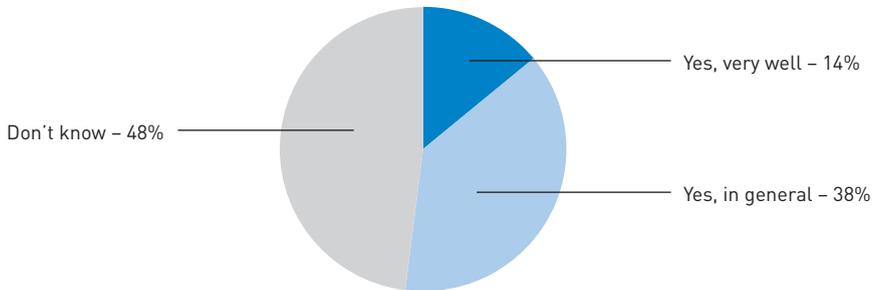
## 5. The Ukrainian crisis and its impact on relations between Russia and Poland

Throughout 2014 the entire world community kept tracking of the developments in Ukraine. Russia's position over Ukraine made certain countries impose political and economic sanctions; Russia, in its turn, reacted in the same manner. This situation led to the aggravation of relations between Russia and European countries.

As the results of the all-Russian opinion polls suggest, half of respondents are aware of the

Polish position on the Ukrainian crisis: 14% are well aware, 38% know about it in general. The remainder 48% are not aware of the Poland's position. The analysis of social and demographic groups shows that those who are most informed about it are men (57% vs 47% women), elderly respondents (60%), and residents of the North-Western Federal district of Russia (70%) who live closer to the border with Poland and who have visited this country.

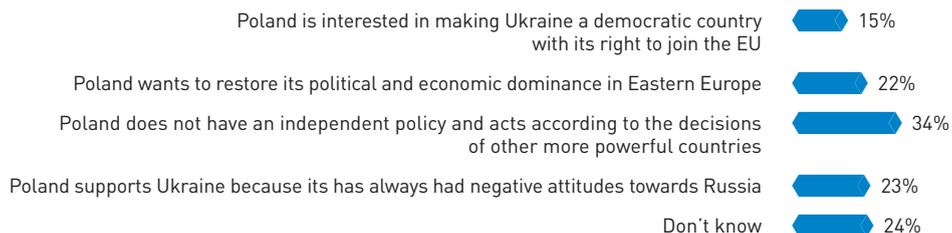
**Diagram 34. Do you know the position of Poland over the Ukrainian issue?**



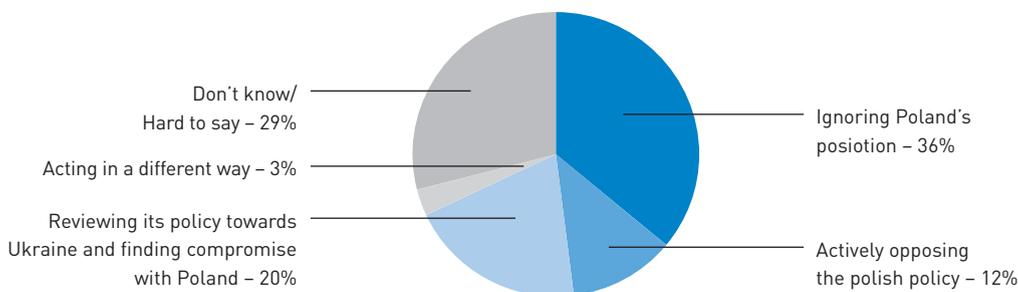
Russians consider that Polish government and Polish society support Ukrainian protests and Ukraine's integration into the EU because Poland acts according to the position of more powerful countries and does not have its own political stance (34%). One-quarter of respondents believe that it is due to the traditional dislike between Russia and Poland (23%); 22% say that Poland want to restore its political and economic influence across Eastern Europe. Only 15% believe that Poland defends the democratic right of Ukraine to join the EU.

More than one-third of respondents (36%) agree that Russia should ignore Poland's position on the Ukrainian crisis. This stance is supported by different groups of respondents regardless of their gender, age or education. Every fifth (20%) thinks that the policy regarding Ukraine should be reviewed, and Russia should find compromise with Poland. Other 12% propose to actively counteract Poland.

**Diagram 35. Polish public opinion supported protests in Ukraine and Yanukovich's overthrow; the Polish government constantly supports the integration of Ukraine into the European Union. In your opinion, why do Poland and the Poles have such a position over Ukraine?**



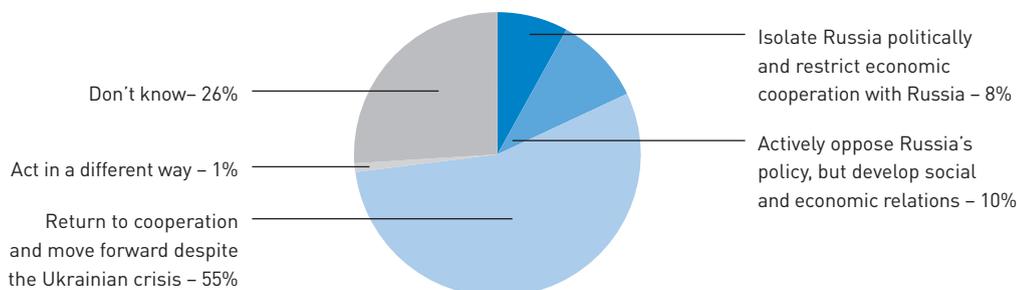
**Diagram 36. What policy should Russia conduct towards Poland regarding the Ukrainian crisis?**



Despite negative public attitudes concerning the Polish support for Ukraine, more than half of respondents (55%) believe that Western countries should restore cooperation with Russia and move forward without looking back at the Ukrainian crisis. Every tenth supports the idea

that any Western country can conduct active policy counteracting Russia but it is important to preserve cooperation in social and economic spheres. Eight percent of respondents support the idea that Russia should be isolated in all spheres.

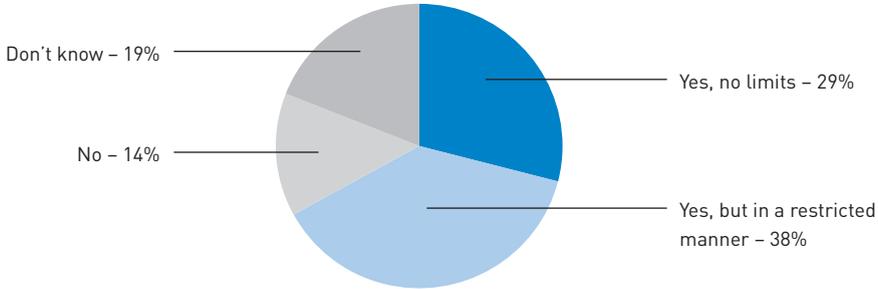
**Diagram 37. How should the Western countries act towards Russia regarding the Russia's position on Ukrainian crisis?**



A relative majority of Russians (38%) consider that despite political discrepancies Russia should develop cooperation with Poland in cultural and public spheres, though in a limited way. The share of those who support total co-

operation is 29%. Fourteen percent of Russians believe that the cooperation is not needed. Assessments given by representatives of different socio-demographic groups do not vary much.

**Diagram 38. Should Russia cooperate with Poland in the cultural and social spheres despite political discrepancies? If yes, to what extent?**





The results of the previous research – conducted in late 2012 – gave the impression of „minor stabilisation” in Polish-Russian relations, whereas the survey carried out in December 2014 produced entirely different results, which can be described as profound regression. Responses to all questions, relating directly to the assessment of Russia, Russians and Polish-Russian relations, were far more critical and negative this time

around. Also, the views of Russians as regards Poland and Poles have taken a similar, negative turn, although somewhat less significantly. In fact, only opinions unrelated to current events, such as beliefs concerning cultural affinity, remained stable.

*From the commentary  
by Łukasz Mazurkiewicz*



**Centre for Polish-Russian Dialogue and Understanding**

14/16A Jasna Street, 00-041 Warsaw

tel. + 48 22 295 00 30

fax + 48 22 295 00 31

e-mail: [cprdip@cprdip.pl](mailto:cprdip@cprdip.pl)

<http://www.cprdip.pl>