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1000 YEARS OF POLISH–GERMAN–RUSSIAN RELATIONS

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Over the wall. The letter of the Polish bishops in the context of the Eastern policy of Vatican

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The exchange of letters between the episcopates of Poland and Germany, which had initiated the process of reconciliation of these nations, had its roots in the spiritual inspiration of the Second Vatican Council. It seems that the activity of the Roman Curia, and most of all Pope Paul VI, was decisive for the encounters taking place during the final session of the council and concluded in the historical gesture of reconciliation. Documents collected by the security services of PRL (the People's Republic of Poland) might help to present the events having place backstage of the official meetings. The presumptions included in these documents referring to the role of Pope Paul VI in the work on Polish-German reconciliation should be verified by other sources, mainly the Vatican ones.

1. The hostages of history

Before the Polish bishops forwarded their millennium address to their confreres from the German Republic, there had been for years the meetings of the Primate of Poland cardinal Stefan Wyszyński with the President of the German Episcopal Conference archbishop Julius Döpfner. The latter one had been seeking the contact

with the Poles since late 1950s, being at that time the bishop of Berlin. It was from him that the Primate learnt that Chancellor Adenauer cares for settling the relations with Poland, and that the issue of borders, which at that time officially seemed to be an irremovable obstacle, in fact was not a problem¹. The dialogue between the two hierarchs was entangled into all most important arguments of the divided Europe². Poland and West Germany belonged to opposing groups, and had no diplomatic contacts. Bonn didn't recognize Polish borders in the West, and powerful and influential at that time compatriot circles raised the issues of, "the right for the homeland territories" any time they could as the superior rule of German policy. Both teams, Gomułka's one in Warsaw and Adenauer's in Bonn, were the hostages of history. There still lived the generation so much harmed by the war. The marks of destruction were still visible. The memory of the deceased and murdered was still so common.

¹ P. Raina, *Kardynał Wyszyński*, v. 6: *Orędzie biskupów a reakcja władz*, Warszawa 1994, p. 5–8.

² More on contacts between Wyszyński and Döpfner sf. K.-J. Hummel, *Der Heilige Stuhl, deutsche und polnische Katholiken 1945–1978*, "Archiv für Sozialgeschichte" 45, 2005, p. 183, 194.

Polish church in Western and Northern Territories was facing immense problems too. There still weren't functioning complete church structures. On the 15th August 1945 the Primate of Poland cardinal August Hlond established the new division of church administration in Western and Northern Territories. He set the apostle administration for the diocese of Warmia as well as for the one of Gdańsk, as well as in Gorzów, Wrocław (for the Lower Silesia) as well as in Śląsk Opolski. He also appointed five apostle administrators, who were granted broad authorization. Beforehand, during his visit in Rome, the primate had talked several times with pope Pius XII on the tasks awaiting him in Poland. He later on referred to these talks and "special authorization" that he had acquired, which were described in the document of Sacred Congregation for Extraordinary Ecclesiastical Affairs. The decision he had made, was in agreement with the Polish *raison d'Etat*, but it also originated from the concern of preserving the continuity of the church activity in this region taking into consideration post-war reality. For thousands of Poles coming to the Western Territories it was of great significance. The church was the only institution they trusted. At the same time, for numerous German clergymen the decision of the Polish primate meant the end of the historical division in the history of the church on these territories. The establishing of Polish administration structures, however, was rejected by the communist authorities. It was also widely questioned by the German clergymen. There were also doubts expressed by the Holy See, questioning the competences of the Polish Primate in this matter³. The changes hadn't been recorded in the Vatican year book "Annuario Pontificio" for long time. However, neither Pius XII nor his successors questioned the decision of cardinal Hlond, which established the foundations for the development of the church in this area.

The dialogue between Polish and German Catholic Church that had place throughout the 1960s, even though burdened with history, was the first attempt of getting closer and looking for an agreement. A part of German elites was aware of the responsibility for the crimes committed by the Germans during the WWII. In October 1960 cardinal Döpfner saying about the re-

sponsibility of his nation was emphasising, "woe unto the German nation if they stay blind to the reasons of this misery, if they would forget that we should atone for this injustice". He was the first to state in public that it was the task of the episcopates of Poland and Germany to bear witness by, "proclaiming the Christ's message of peace, to alter hearts"⁴.

The start of the Second Vatican Council was a lucky circumstance for the Polish-German dialogue. Apart from its ecclesial dimension, it was also a significant international initiative. One may say that to some extent it was a political project aiming at the attempt to redefine the mission of the church in the reality of that time⁵. Bishops from Poland and both German states could freely meet and exchange their views in Rome. In the autumn of 1963, during one of such meetings, cardinal Joseph Frings asked bishops of Poland and Germany to apply together for the beatification of Maksymilian Kolbe. All these gestures, meetings, and talks were building up the atmosphere of dialogue and were part of the new policy of Vatican towards the communist states initiated in the 1960s.

2. The conditioning of the eastern policy

The eastern policy of the Holy See was one of the elements of actions undertaken by the Church on international level to achieve both aims within the church, as well as particular results in the relations between The East and West, and most of all to create the instruments of security and detente in the world⁶. Granting the Church with the bigger space for independence of the Church was the main objective. The idea of athe-

⁴ Friede zwischen Polen und Deutschland, a surmon by bishop of Berlin, cardinal Julius Döpfner, 16X1960, quote from: *Begegnung der Konferenz des Polnischen Episkopats mit der Deutschen Bischofskonferenz in Deutschland im September 1978. Documentation der Predigten und Ansprachen*, Sekretariat der Deutschen Bischofskonferenz, Bonn 1978, p. 73.

⁵ A. Mellonni, *L'Altra Roma. Politica e S.Sede durante il Coniclio Vaticano II (1959–1965)*. Institute per le scienze religios, Bologna 2000.

⁶ Lecture of abp. Agostino Casaroli in Georgetown University, 26 I 1979, sf. Agostino Kardinal Casaroli, *Der Heilige Stuhl und die Volkergemeinschaft*, Berlin 1986, p. 167. See also *idem*, *Der Heilige Stuhl zwischen Spannung und Entspannung* and *idem*, *Der Heilige Stuhl und die Ostblockstaaten*, (in:) *idem*, *Der Heilige Stuhl und die Volkergemeinschaft. Reden und Aufsätze*, H. Schambeck (ed.), Berlin 1981 p. 38–64, 164–169.

³ According to Robert Żurek after 1945 the Holy See wasn't ready to adjust the church jurisdiction to political transformations. Political solutions were looked forward to that would sanction the decisions of the Potsdam Conference, particularly the peace treaty, finally settling the issue of borders between Poland and the German state.

ism forced upon the societies of the Eastern Europe was perceived by the Holy See as a significant cause of tensions and divisions both in Europe and in the world. Acting for the increase of tolerance and the freedom of denomination, the attempts were made to get rid from the international atmosphere of a flashpoint, causing continual tension and the atmosphere of religious war⁷. Supporting the initiatives aiming at detente and establishing a new international order constructed in the perspective of the long-lasting communist system originated from this process.

There is no doubt that actions undertaken by the diplomacy of the Holy See towards communist states had minimal objectives. As it was referred to by cardinal Jean Villot, who was the secretary of the state in the Holy See between 1969 and 1979, the talks were not about achieving *modus vivendi*, but more about *modus non moriendi*, i.e. the way not to die. It was assumed that communism was the system that which would be permanently and for long present in the history of the world. In addition, there was the disillusionment with the western democracy, undergoing the first phase of strong anti-religious phase. All of these caused that the real socialism in the Eastern Europe observed from the distant perspective of the West might have seemed an interesting social experiment.

In Paul VI's concept of eastern policy Poland was a significant point of reference due to the strength of local Church as well as its position towards communist authorities. There was also the way for the dialogue with Moscow through Warsaw, which was of particular significance for Vatican since, also in the context of plans concerning the ecumenical dialogue. Paul VI was aware of the fact that normalization of political relations between Bonn and Warsaw would let solve the burning issue of the status of the Church in the Western and Northern Territories. Moreover, its diplomats were deeply convinced that there couldn't be a permanent peace in Europe without reconciliation between the Germans and the Poles⁸. Even more important, many of them believed that the Church in Poland would play a crucial role in the history of Europe. The former leader of Bundestag, previously a diplomat Philipp Jenninger remembered the talk he had with the nuncio in Bonn

archbishop Konrad Bafil, who was convincing him in the 1960s, "It is not NATO that will defeat communists, but Holy Virgin of Częstochowa"⁹.

3. The problem of the Western Territories

The beginning of the 1960s, however, wasn't promising the rapid normalization. The conflict over the border on the Oder and Nysa Rivers divided not only two nations but also two Churches. In the 1960s there were continuous arguments between the episcopates of Germany and Poland concerning the church status of the Western Territories. German bishops were submitting the protest, when in the Vatican year book "Annuario Pontificio" there appeared any information which could imply that Polish church administration established in these territories was of some other than temporary character. Cardinal Joseph Frings would intervene when it came to commas or particular words. There were also protests of the representative of the government in Bonn at Vatican. The edition of texts to "Annuario Pontificio" concerning this issue required from Vatican numerous diplomatic actions, not to offend either the Poles or the Germans. The ambiance and dilemmas of Vatican officials at that time are well illustrated in a note made at the beginning of January 1963 by the ambassador of the Polish government in exile in the Holy See Kazimierz Papée after the conversation he had had with archbishop Angelo Dell'Acqua, who showed him the latest issue of the year book "Anuario Pontificio":

"Having opened on the page where the diocese of Wrocław is, he pointed out gladly at the fact that it was clearly marked at the bishops of the Recovered Territories that they are residing in Wrocław, Gorzów and Olsztyn. – I hope they will be happy (Polish bishops) I also hope that there soon will come the German ambassador to protest"¹⁰.

At the same time some Polish bishops, and to some extent also cardinal Wyszyński, thought that keeping the temporary character of the church administration in the Western and Northern Territories results not

⁷ A. Riccardi, *Il Vaticano e Mosca. 1940–1990*, Bari 1992, p. 305

⁸ Archives of the IPN in Warsaw (AIPN), 0648/33, Vatican City and socialist states in recent years, the document was created ca. V 1970 and was signed by initials A.M. (maybe Aleksander Merker?).

⁹ K.-J. Hummel, *Vatikanische Ostpolitik und Johannes XXII und Paul VI 1958–1978*, Paderborn 1993, p. 166.

¹⁰ Pontifical Church Studies Institute (PISE), Files of the Embassy of Poland in Vatican (A. Amb. RP/S.A.), 122/5, file 87. Note from a conversation by ambassador K. Papee, 10 I 1963.

only from the objective international conditions but also from the actions of influential and strong German lobby in Vatican¹¹. In the 1960s cardinal Wyszyński as well as other Polish bishops had an opportunity to discuss Polish-German relations during the direct contacts with the representatives of the Roman Curia and personally with John XXIII and his successor Paul VI. Diplomatic solutions were necessary for the Church in Poland since the structure of church in the Western and Northern Territories was still of temporary character. At the same time on 26th March 1957 the Constitutional Tribunal of the West Germany decided that the concordat signed between the Third Reich and the Holy See on 20th July 1933 was still in power on the territory of West Germany. This situation was binding also for Vatican. The 11th point of concordat stated that without the agreement of the German authorities there couldn't be any administrative changes on the territories where the document was in power. In fact, it meant that until the peace treaty between PRL and West Germany was signed Vatican couldn't change the borders of dioceses on these territories¹².

One must admit that there was some misunderstanding of these issues on the side of the Polish bishops. It was still in 1967 that they forwarded a memorial, in which they demanded quick regulation of the status of the Church in the Western Territories. The Polish side claimed that since the Third Reich had ceased to exist, the concordat was no longer valid. Polish bishops didn't take into account, however, German legal positions which stated that West Germany remained legal successor of the Third Reich, which also bore consequences for the Holy See. Also the status of dioceses in the east of Poland, the remains of archdioceses which remained on the territories incorporated in 1944 to the Soviet Union, remained undecided. It was a difficult problem also for the Holy See, since on the one hand the episcopate of Poland was aiming at the rapid raising of the status of apostle administration on the western territories of Poland to the rank of a diocese, on the other the government of West Germany, as well as the great majority of bishops from this country wasn't ready at that time for the one-sided and final acceptance the outcome of the WWII. Especially, taking into

consideration the fact that this problem was overlapped with the issue of the division of Germany and Berlin, which itself had been one of the most difficult issues of the European politics.

From the documents of the intelligence of PRL, which already in the 1960s had well-developed and informed network of agents in Rome and Vatican (whom I managed to get in touch with) one may conclude that the Vatican diplomacy had been involved right from the start in the edition of the address. It was the main intention of the Church to prepare the grounds for the new opening for politicians, and at the same time, normalization of the church relations on the Northern and Western territories. In the 1960s such a standpoint was more and more comprehended by German bishops influenced by Vatican. They were aware of the fact for pastoral reasons there was the need for normalization of the church administration in the Western and Northern Territories. At the same time, however, they couldn't act against the official standpoint of their government and the majority of the public. Especially, due to the fact that this question was also associated with the issue of the right for the reunification of both German states, which was commonly accented by the Catholic Church in Germany. At the beginning of the 1960s the will for the concession towards the demands of the Polish church factor wasn't strong. Therefore, the only bishop who was officially residing on this territory, apart from Bolesław Kominek in Wrocław, was bishop Edmund Nowicki in Gdańsk¹³. In the middle of the 1960s for the majority of German bishops it wasn't important whether the issue of borders should be regulated but when it was going to happen¹⁴.

4. The Roman talks

The text of the documents which was to be passed to German bishops had been discussed for many months. Eventually, it was edited in Rome by archbishop Kominek in the German language. There has never existed the Polish version of this letter, which caused

¹¹ A. Dudek, R. Gryz, *Komuniści i Kościół w Polsce (1945–1989)*, Kraków 2003, p. 217.

¹² P. Raina, *Rozmowy biskupa Dąbrowskiego z władzami PRL. Stolica Apostolska reguluje organizację kościelną na Ziemiach Zachodnich i Północnych Polski*, Olsztyn 1998, p. 8.

¹³ It is worth mentioning that his appointment just after the death of bishop Karl Maria Spolett Vatican was trying to balance towards the Germans by appointing the apostle inspector for the former Gdańsk citizens staying on the territory of Germany.

¹⁴ K.-J. Hummel, *Der Heilige Stuhl, die katholische Kirche in Deutschland und die deutsche Einheit*, (in:) *idem, Vatikanische Ostpolitik...*, s. 79–106.

numerous problems and manipulations when the communist media were presenting to the Polish public fairly arbitrary, if not fake, version of this document. Shortly before its final edition two events of importance had place. On 1st September 1965 there was the celebration in Wrocław of the 20 years of the presence of the Polish Church on the Western and Northern Territories, in which the whole Polish episcopate took part. In the speech prepared on this occasion historical tradition of the presence of Polish church structures on these area was emphasised. Although, a different sort of rhetoric was being used, these words well matched the official propaganda, proclaimed the thesis on the historical return to the lands of the Piast dynasty, called the “regained” ones since 1945. The celebrations were not perceived positively in Germany. Cardinal Döpfner pointed out that the actions of the German church as well as the input of the German culture in the development of these territories had been entirely neglected¹⁵. It seems that the celebrations of Wrocław weren't positively acknowledged in Vatican either. There was the need to complete the words that had been expressed in Wrocław. The memorandum of the evangelic church in Germany, exhorting to the agreement and recognition of the borders existing in Europe¹⁶, was an additional impulse for the initiative.

On 4th October 1965 there was the meeting between a group of Polish bishops staying in Rome with a few German bishops. The talks were about the need for Christian agreement and reconciliation. Surely, the atmosphere of that meeting had prompted the work on the document¹⁷. The church party made attempts to let the authorities in Warsaw know about the prepared document. Archbishop Kominek sent to “Tygodnik Powszechny” an article *Dialog z Niemcami* (The dialogue with the Germans), which said about the need of the dialogue from the title. Whereas the secretary of the archbishop, rev. Zdzisław Seremak, following the order of the archbishop, sent the original of the letter to Ignacy Krasicki, a correspondent of “Trybuna Ludu” in Rome, asking him to deliver it to Władysław Gomułka.

Looking back, it seems strange that bishops used such contacts in relations with the authorities, however in the situation when all official contacts were practically frozen, both parties tolerated such informal channels¹⁸. The authorities in Warsaw were also up-to-date when it comes to the information about the progress of work on the address due to the intelligence, which was thoroughly recording all the contacts between Polish and German bishops in Rome. Krasicki, however, didn't deliver the document to Gomułka. Now we know that it was delivered to the circles around Mieczysław Moczar, one of the most important men in the state, controlling the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MSW), special services, and having independent contacts with Moscow¹⁹. This circle came up with a pretty evil concept of using the address both to attack the Church, as well as involve Gomułka in another conflict with cardinal Wyszyński, which aimed at weakening both the primate and the first secretary.

Original, i.e. the German version of the letter was published by the German agency DPA. Polish media attacked immediately. The whole idea was that bishops were at first attacked not by the party newspapers but the one of Stowarzyszenie PAX (PAX Society) “Słowo Powszechne”. The bishops were almost accused of high treason, no sense of Polish national interests, selling themselves to the German imperialists. The biggest outrage was caused by the piece, which was translated, “we forbid and are asking for forbiddance”, although it was taken out of context and distorted. The real version was as follows, “In this very Christian, but at the same time human spirit, we are reaching out to You, sitting at this Council which is coming to an end, our hands and granting you our forbiddance asking for the same.”

In response to these words an enormous, hysterical campaign was initiated under the slogan, “We do not forbid”. All over Poland, especially on the Western and Northern Territories hundreds of rallies, mass assemblies were organised, letters of protest were signed, in which bishops were accused of treason. At that time communists monopolised the mass media. Bishops could only defend themselves from pulpits, therefore in the middle of December a special communiqué was issued explaining the pastoral and moral background of the letter.

¹⁵ J. Zaryn, *Dzieje Kościoła katolickiego w Polsce (1944–1989)*, Warszawa 2003, p. 234.

¹⁶ AIPN, 0648/162, Info no. 189/IV/65 on tactics of archbishop Kominek concerning 20th anniversary of the Church in the Recovered Territories and on the dialog with the Germans.

¹⁷ A bit different view from the perspective of German bishops see E. Heller, *Macht – Kirche – Politik. Der Briefwechsel zwischen den polnischen und deutschen Bischöfen im Jahre 1965*, Köln 1992, p. 90.

¹⁸ A. Dudek, R. Gryz, op. cit., p. 218.

¹⁹ The information on passing the text of the address by Ignacy Krasicki to Mieczysław Moczar was confirmed to the author by Aleksander Merker, at that time the head of Urząd ds. Wyznań (Office of Denominations) in the letter from 5th Dec. 2005; the author's archive.

The primate of Poland was defending the address with determination, even though numerous clergymen had various doubts and worries, whether the bishops had made the mistake or not.

5. The authors of the letter

It was already at the beginning of 1965 in the Polish Ministry of Internal Affairs that a comprehensive document was created analysing the course of the events in Vatican basing on the materials from agents. All Polish hierarchs involved in the edition of the address were described in detail, as well as who they were meeting and what their aims were²⁰.

Formally the letter was the work of all Polish bishops present at the 4th session of the Second Vatican Council, who had signed it. Later on, the whole episcopate decided to take the responsibility for it. Certainly, the primate of Poland cardinal Stefan Wyszyński played a crucial part at creating the document. It was him who initiated the dialogue with the Germans at the end of the 1950s, and his authority was decisive for all the Polish bishops at that time. He was also the fierce defender of the letter when the communist propaganda decided to take advantage of the letter to discredit bishops in the eyes of the Polish public.

It wasn't, however, cardinal Wyszyński who was the author of the address. The document was written by archbishop Bolesław Kominek, the archbishop of Wrocław, participating in the talks with German bishops for a long time²¹. Also other Polish bishops present in Vatican took part in editing it. Church sources mention most of all the bishop of Chełmno Kazimierz Kowalski, who had been an active participant of the Polish-German dialogue for a long time²². One may conclude from the materials collected by the intelligence of PRL that also bishop Bernard Czapliński, the Suffragan Bishop of Chełmno, took part in preliminary talks²³. It is worth mentioning that it was bishop Czapliński who

played a significant role in the first, now completely forgotten negotiations between the episcopates of both countries in the autumn of 1963. They regarded the preparation of a mutual Polish-German address of bishops concerning the beatification of Maksymilian Kolbe, the martyr of Auschwitz.

It seems that the role of the late archbishop of Poznań archbishop Jerzy Stroba at the edition of the letter and the talks is underestimated. At that time he was the Auxiliary bishop of Gniezno, however he was residing in Gorzów Wielkopolski. According to the sources of intelligence, born in Upper Silesia, fluent in German and knowing German mentality, the bishop had a significant influence on the form of the letter, and played an important part during the negotiations over its content with the German party²⁴. Also some church sources confirm his active participation in the edition of the letter, even though his name hadn't been mentioned amongst the ones doing the final edition.

Certainly, the role of archbishop Karol Wojtyła, the archdiocese of Kraków, was of significance during the preparation work of the letter. Although, he was mainly in charge of contacts of the Polish delegation with French bishops, but also he participated in the final stage of the edition of the letter to German bishops. It was him that cardinal Wyszyński appointed for a particularly assignment, namely consulting the content of the letter with the representatives of the Roman Curia. Archbishop Giovanni Benelli, Cardinal Secretary of State and one of the closest associates of Paul VI's²⁵, was Wojtyła's partner in this talks.

6. The Papal inspiration

One of the most important issues still left unsettled by historians is the role Paul VI played at the creation of this document. Just after the letter had been published the communist propaganda was proving that this document had been created under the influence of German loving circles in the Roman Curia, which put the pressure on cardinal Wyszyński through the pope himself. The texts, doctored by the security office, which appeared e.g. in "Polityka", were supposed to raise the aversion of the Polish public towards both the letter and its authors. The intention was to present the whole initiative as forced upon Polish bishops, also when it

²⁰ AIPN, 0445/12, v. 1, file 3, *Klimat polityczny w jakim został opracowany list biskupów polskich do niemieckich*.

²¹ R. Żurek, *Bolesław Kominek – autor orędzia pojednania biskupów polskich*, (in:) *Pojednanie i polityka: polsko-niemieckie inicjatywy pojednania w latach sześćdziesiątych XX wieku a polityka odprężenia*, F. Boll, W.J. Wysocki, K. Ziemierny (eds.), Warszawa 2010.

²² P. Madajczyk, *Przebaczymy i prosimy o przebaczenie* ..., „Więź” 1990, nr 9, p. 112–124.

²³ AIPN, 0445/12, v. 1, file 3, loc. cit.

²⁴ Ibidem.

²⁵ Ibidem.

concerned the formal side, the act that was completely non-sovereign, contrary to the Polish national interest²⁶. Such a thesis was promoted in the party apparatus by two circles: Mieczysław Moczar's, at that time greatly influential minister of internal affairs and the leader of veterans' circles, and Stefan Olszowski's, having influence in media and good contact with Moscow²⁷.

While rejecting the lies of the communist propaganda one still may ask to what extent the Roman Curia was being informed about the progress of the Polish-German talks. From the documents in possession of the Polish Ministry of Internal Affairs it can be concluded that cardinal Wyszyński was to discuss the final content of the letter with archbishop Antonio Samoré from the Sacred Congregation for Extraordinary Ecclesiastical Affairs, responsible e.g. for the contacts with the eastern block countries. As it can be concluded from the Ministry of Internal Affairs materials, the intention of Vatican diplomacy was that the exchange of the letters was to contribute to the recognition of border on the Oder and Nysa rivers by the government in Bonn, which would open the way for the establishment of a normal diocese structure in the Western and Northern Territories²⁸. According to informers of PRL intelligence it was Paul VI who was to suggest to Polish bishops that their gesture should have the character of a public act of reconciliation and the exchange of the letters. It is also worth mentioning that the lines by Horace, "we forgive and are asking for forgiveness" (*Veniam damus petimusque vicissim*) was firstly used in the context of the church on 17th October 1963 by Paul VI himself, who used it to describe the attitude of dialogue in ecumenical relations between feuding Christian Churches²⁹. In November 1965 archbishop Kominek referred to this papal document and the words of forgiveness used in it in his publication which was to prepare Polish public for the address of Polish bishops³⁰. Piotr Madajczyk mentions

the participation of Paul VI in the creation of the letter of Polish bishops, yet he states that his role "remains unclear"³¹. The pope had already started preparations for the visit in Poland planned in 1966. Perhaps he wanted the gestures of reconciliation between bishops of two countries to prepare a suitable international atmosphere before the Polish journey. Several weeks before the exchange of the letters, on 5th October 1965, Paul VI made an important speech at the UN forum. He called for the construction of solidarity structures and emphasised the need for cooperation for, "the welfare of all together and each one". He also pronounced significant words, "You know that peace is not only founded on politics, the balance of powers and interests. It is also constructed with the power of spirit, ideas and peace works."³² As one can see, the exchange of letters between bishops of Poland and Germany was an element the pope's vision of the modern international order.

Quite recently rev. professor Jerzy Myszor inscribed the two letters in the longer tradition of the Church. It appears that in the times of first Christians (3rd, 4th cent. AD.) sending letters referring to disputable issues by the episcopate of one region to the neighboring one was a common practice³³. Should we perceive the letter of Polish bishops as the reference to it? If so, it is highly unlikely for such a deep historical awareness to function among Polish bishops, yet the officials of Vatican Curia must have realized that.

The inspiring role of Paul VI in the creation of the letter is presented in the events before it was made public. On 13th November 1965 he granted Polish bishops the audience, and on 17th November the delegation of German organizations of the expelled. In his speeches he emphasised the need for establishing a new order in Europe through reconciliation and mutual forgiveness. On 15th November the whole comprehensive document was presented to Paul VI, who was to read it personally. Three days later it was delivered to the German party³⁴.

²⁶ AIPN, 0648/21, v. 2, A response of Ignacy Krasicki to the letter of cardinal Wyszyński sent to the „Polityka”, Rome, 27 IV 1966 r.

²⁷ Cardinal Wyszyński was convinced that it was Olszowski's initiative that the text of the letter was FAL-SZOPWAC, whose biased translation additionally strengthened the emotional context of the whole work. Sf. P. Raina, *Kardynał Wyszyński*, t. 12: *Czasy prymasowskie 1973*, Warszawa 2004, p. 92.

²⁸ AIPN, 0445/12, v. 1, file 3, loc. cit.

²⁹ P. Mazurkiewicz, *Przebaczenie jako kategoria polityczna w nauczaniu Jana Pawła II*, „Społeczeństwo” 2005, no. 2, p. 208.

³⁰ B. Kominek, *Propozycje dialogu z Niemcami*, (in:) *Kar-*

dynał Bolesław Kominek. Szkice do portretu, J. Krucina (ed.), Wrocław 2005, p. 254.

³¹ P. Madajczyk, *Na drodze do pojednania. Wokół orędzia biskupów polskich do biskupów niemieckich z 1965 roku*, Warszawa 1994, p. 73.

³² Przemówienie Pawła VI w ONZ, „Tygodnik Powszechny” nr 42 z 17 X 1965, p. 1–2.

³³ J. Myszor, *Orędzie biskupów polskich do niemieckich z 18 XI 1965 r. z perspektywy czasu*, „Śląskie Studia Teologiczno-Historyczne” 39, 2006, v. 1, p. 172–177.

³⁴ AIPN, sygn. 0648/21, v. 2, loc. cit.

Without judging the truthfulness of all details on the personal involvement of Paul VI in the Polish-German dialogue, it should rather be excluded that the bishops didn't inform Roman Curia about the preparations for such a fateful initiative. Surely, Paul VI was not only somehow informed about the initiative of Polish bishops, but also was its supporter. All of these circumstances imply the possibility of active participation of the representative of Roman Curia and Paul VI himself in making the decision to send the letter of Polish bishops to German ones³⁵. The pope knew that it would open the area for manouevering also for the Vatican diplomacy as well as the final settlement of the status of the Polish Church in the area, which after 1945 had become an inseparable part of the Polish state.

7. The consequences of the address

The anti-church campaign that started in Poland after the letter of the Polish episcopate to German bishops had been published in 1965, as well as following the later events related to the celebration of the Millennium of the Christening of Poland, made it impossible to accomplish a historical event, which the visit of Paul VI in Poland in December 1965 would have certainly been. Despite the efforts of Vatican diplomacy and the primate of Poland, the PRL authorities rejected such a possibility categorically, claiming that by their letter from November 1965 Polish bishops had made an attempt, "to pull Poland out of the orbit of the socialist system and re-orient it to cooperate with the imperialist states."³⁶

The unprecedented in its aggression reaction of Władysław Gomułka's team resulted from the fact that Polish bishops had actually suggested the agreement between the Poles and the Germans excluding the Soviet Union. This upended the fundamental plan of Stalin's, completed in Potsdam, according to which Poland would receive the Western and Northern Territories as the gift from the Soviet Union, and the Soviets would be the only guarantor of retaining these territories. Polish geopolitical location dooming Poland to the existence in the shadow of German revisionism was to dis-

pose them to the alliance with the Soviets. The witness of these events, ambassador Kazimierz Papée, wrote at the end of 1965, that the attack on the address turned out to be so fierce since the exchange of the letters broke the communist and Moscow monopoly concerning the Polish-German talks³⁷.

It should be added that Gomułka had fairly quickly came to his senses and ordered to withdraw the accusation of the treason from the official propaganda. Instead, bishops' disloyalty towards the state was being emphasised, as well as the statement that the Church had no right to apologize on victims' behalf, but most of all, ask the Germans for forgiveness. A lot of the Poles might have even forgiven, but just few comprehended why they would ask for forgiveness. Polish public focused then on the dramatic fate of the Poles during the WWII. Little was known about the fate of the Germans made to leave their homes. The official version of history claimed that after the centuries Poland had finally regained the Piast lands. But a few were aware of the fact that expelling was a vile deed which required a Christian apology. Amongst them there surely were the bishops, who were the authors of the letter.

8. Russian context

The bishops signing the letter about the difficult Polish-German past were aware that a lot of theses included in it were not presented in precise way, since they were taken out of the Russian context. This feeling must have been so strong that during one of the talks with cardinal Döpfner cardinal Wyszyński referred to the whole matter in a broader way. According to an intelligence informer Wyszyński was to say that for the sake of historical truth the letter should include also clear statements concerning the opinion of Polish bishops on the Russian and Soviet imperialism³⁸. This, however, was omitted. Therefore, the description of partitions without mentioning tsarina Catherine, analysis of the drama of the national uprisings without a word on Russians, or the considerations on the last war without the remark on Ribbentrop-Molotov pact, the aggression of 17th Sept. or Katyń, sound more than weird. Cardinal Wyszyński explained to his interlocutor that the Poles were limited by their political location. His

³⁵ In no way does it diminish merits of Polish bishops, who taking responsibility in the face of the Church and their own nation, undertook this historic deed.

³⁶ *Tezy Komitetu Centralnego PZPR na V Zjazd Partii*, Warszawa 1967, p. 26.

³⁷ PISE, A. Amb. RP/S.A., 317/31, file 163, *Dlaczego ten hałas?*

³⁸ AIPN, 0445/12, v. 1, file 3, loc. cit.

attempts were most probably the response to the complaints forwarded by German bishops. It is known from the materials of PRL intelligence that during bilateral consultations over the content of the address the German party forced the change of the text about, e.g. the Teutonic Knights and Bismarck³⁹. At the same time the primate asked his interlocutor for understanding that it couldn't have been done for obvious political reasons. He also asked cardinal Döpfner to forward this remark to other German bishops, to avoid the impression that the Polish side was manipulating historical facts on purpose.

The Russian issue had another context as well. Polish bishops gathered in Vatican were aware of the fact that such an act of reconciliation should also be directed to the Russian nation. This issue was taken into consideration, however, there was the question of who such a letter should be addressed to⁴⁰. Bishops realized that there was no one they could send it to. The hierarchy of Catholic church was completely subordinated to the communist authority. On the other hand, addressing the letter to the Political Bureau of the Party (KC KPZR) was pointless. Eventually, the project was given up hoping that it could be resumed by the next generation.

9. The outcome of the address

The support of Vatican diplomacy for the letter of Polish bishops is proved by the fact that it was already in January 1966 that nuncio Konrad Bafle had appealed to the representatives of the federal government of Germany for the bold openness to the dialogue with Poland⁴¹. In February 1966 Polish bishops met with Agostino Casaroli, at that time the secretary of the Sacred Congregation for Extraordinary Ecclesiastical Affairs. In Poland the persecution against the Church had reached its peak, however Casaroli was asking not to take care of it. It seemed that SA had been aware something like that could happen. One may presume, that Paul VI and the Curia were being informed about the initiative. What is

more important, they were supporting the whole enterprise, which was in agreement with the broad policy of Vatican for the detente in Europe. Such an atmosphere was encourage for the first visit of the papal representative in Poland.

The lack of sure and sufficient information from behind the Iron Curtain was one of the problems that made it difficult for the Holy See to have the full knowledge on the real situation of the Church in these territories. Therefore, the long journey of the prelate Agostino Casaroli to Poland (February–April 1967) during which he was the personal guest of the primate, was the event of great significance. He visited, e.g. Wrocław, Opole, Gorzów, Szczecin. Everywhere he came he could see lively, young, and active Church, the organization and eagerness that impressed him a lot. Surely this visit had contributed to forming a view in the Roman Curia that the further pursuit for normalization of the situation in this area was necessary as soon as possible. “The inspection since that is how this journey should be referred to, of monsignore Agostino Casarole, was of significance for Poland, its Church and the faithful, in the way which we still are not able to fully comprehend“, as the ambassador Kazimierz Papée had written in his report after the talks with the representatives of the Roman Curia:

“The envoy of Vatican had an opportunity to see the force, which he hadn't been aware of: he became convinced that between the Oder River and Vladivostok there is a powerful and energetic Church, founded on the tightly-knit Catholic Polish nation. He understood that it was actually the only force that Church can be based on in the region. What firstly was just the intuition and the inner conviction of monsignore Montini, and later on Paul VI, was stated by not prejudiced, but qualified member of the SEKRETARIAT of the State, raised in a completely different school than the late cardinal Tardini. This Catholic nation is radiating further eastwards: all catholic clergymen, who are working currently in Russia, are either of Polish origin, or the WYCHOWANKOWIE of the same school and ideology. Materials brought by monsignore Casaroli are genuine and enormous: never before had Holy See had anything like that at its disposal since the last nuncio left Warsaw⁴².

It is most probable that the journey of Caseroli had strengthened the position of cardinal Wyszyński in the Roman Curia. However, still the representatives of the

³⁹ Ibidem

⁴⁰ It has recently been confirmed by Rev. Professor Jan Krucina, who was the secretary of archbishop Kominek in the 1960s.

⁴¹ R. Morsey, *Die Haltung der Bundesregierung zur vaticanischen Kirchenpolitik in den früheren Ostgebieten des Deutschen Reiches 1958–1978*, (in:) K.-J. Hummel, *Vatikanische Ostpolitik...*, p. 31–78.

⁴² PI SE, A. Amb. RP/S.A., file 93/122, A letter of amb. K. Papée to the minister of foreign affairs 15 IV 1967, copy.

Vatican diplomacy presented the view that in the longer perspective the Church in Poland needs an international arrangement with SA as its side⁴³. The German party didn't protest against Casaroli's visit. No German bishop criticized the fact that the journey had taken place without the consultations with the German episcopate, or that the prelate had visited the area temporarily under the Polish management. It soon bore further consequences for the church relations between Poland and Germany. Still in 1967 Paul VI nominated four apostle administrators for Wrocław, Gorzów, Opole and Olsztyn. In this way the territories of apostle administrations were taken out by SA from the old, historical diocese structures⁴⁴. It was, no doubt, an introduction for the final regulation of their status, which eventually took place in 1972.

The exchange of letters had also influenced the relations between the two German states. The situation of the Church in DDR was extremely complicated and the divided Berlin was a real puzzle for the experts of canonical law. On 5th December 1965 all German bishops, including the ones from the East, gathered in Rome and elected cardinal Julius Döpfner the head of the Conference of the Episcopate. It was the evidence of trust and approval of the exchange of letters with Polish bishops by the Church of divided Germany. There were also other effects. In numerous further documents of the German episcopate there appears a thought that since the status of the church in the Western Territories should be regulated on the grounds of reconciliation the issue of borders of dioceses in Eastern Germany should be dealt with in the same way. Bishops demanded for the pieces of dioceses that had been cut off by the iron curtain, e.g. Paderborn or Fulda, to be raised to the rank of apostle administrations⁴⁵.

10. Towards the normalization

The change of the governing group in Poland in December 1970 opened the new perspective for the talks with the Holy See. There is no doubt Gierek, more than

his predecessor, cared about settling relations with the Church. It originated both from the pragmatic attitude of the new leader, who was not as orthodox a communist as Gomułka, and from the fact that he wasn't involved personally in the conflict with the primate. He was also aware of the fact that Catholicism was and would be a permanent element of Polish national identity, which meant that it had to be taken into consideration while building the entity of the whole nation, which was the main slogan of the governing team. It was also the element of constructing the international prestige of the whole team, which was one of the most significant motifs of shaping up the new image of PRL in the international arena⁴⁶.

Gierek could also count on the quick solving of the problem of temporary church administration in the Western and Northern Territories. The settlement between PRL and West Germany on the basis of the normalization and mutual relations, signed in Warsaw on 7th Dec., still by Gomułka's group, now opened the way for the solution of this extremely significant issue, since it meant the final recognition of Polish borders in the West by the government of Western Germany. What is important, these activities were correlated with the long-lasting attempts made by the primate Wyszyński, who on 15th Dec. 1969 handed in Vatican a broad memorandum prepared by the episcopate of Poland, justifying the need for rapid stabilization of the church organization in the western and northern areas of Poland⁴⁷. In January 1971 the Parliament of PRL passed the resolution granting the church in Poland the ownership of the possessions, which was passed to it after the WWII. On the other hand, on 28th June 1972, several weeks after the ratification of the settlement from December 1970 by the parliaments in Bonn and Warsaw, the apostle constitution *Episcoporum Poloniae Coetus* of Paul VI was published, granting the legal canonical status to the church organization in the Western and Northern Territories. With this document Paul VI was establishing four new dioceses: opolska, gorzowska, szczecińsko-kamieńska, and koszalińsko-kołobrzewska.

It was thanks to the activities of the primate Wyszyński that the normalization of the church relations in the Western and Northern Territories wasn't followed by a similar act in the east of Poland⁴⁸, despite

⁴³ Memo of MSW on A. Casaroli's visit 14.02–7.04.1967, (in:) *Tajne dokumenty Państwo – Kościół 1960–1980*, London 1996, p. 276.

⁴⁴ Z. Zieliński, *Kościół w Polsce 1944–2002*, Radom 2003, p. 192.

⁴⁵ K.-J. Hummel, *Der Heilige Stuhl, die katholische Kirche in Deutschland und die deutsche Einheit*, (in:) *idem, Vatikanische Ostpolitik...*, p. 91–94.

⁴⁶ A. Dudek, R. Gryz, op. cit., p. 257.

⁴⁷ P. Raina, *Rozmowy...*, p. 13–23.

⁴⁸ It concerned setting new borders of dioceses in the eastern territories which were incorporated to the Soviet Union.

the efforts of PRL authorities under the pressure from Moscow. Surely, this situation had significantly improved the atmosphere of the preliminary talks, which took place in Rome and Vatican between the representatives of the PRL government (led by Aleksander Skarżyński, the head of the Denomination Department) and the Holy See (archbishop Agostino Caseroli) from April to May 1971.

It remains unsettled how much the involvement of Gierek's team in the talks with Vatican had been inspired or positively judged by Moscow. As the influential representatives of Secretariat of the State assessed in July 1971 Warsaw didn't have independence in the negotiations with the Holy See. It was presumed then that Moscow would want to make the agreement with Vatican on its own, and that it would set the frames of similar acts involving other authorities of the Eastern block states. It would have been a logical consequence of the doctrine by Leonid Breżniew, which unofficially had been in power since 1968, which stated that it was Moscow that set the area of sovereignty of the Eastern Europe states, especially in the international and ideological fields⁴⁹.

Conclusion

The address of Polish bishops to the German ones, as well as the activity of the latter ones were in agreement with the particular moment in history, both in the history of the Church as well as the world. After the Berlin and Cuban crises, when the world got to the brink of the nuclear war, the church made exceptional effort to build up the space for dialogue between the hostile blocks. The services of John XXIII and Paul VI had contributed to the fact that in the East as well the Church started to be perceived not as the side of a conflict, but an arbiter, the witness of peace and reconciliation. Second Vatican Council pointed at the dialogue as the main instrument of the presence of the Church in the world divided between two hostile ideological and military blocks. No wonder then that in such an atmosphere there appeared the pursuit to reject the hostility, inherited along with the painful historical experience, and the need to shake hands in the gesture of reconciliation and forgiveness also amongst the Polish and German bishops. There

must have been present Paul VI behind this gesture, the spiritual patron not only of the address of Polish bishops but also keen supporter of dialogue over the walls that had been dividing Europe at that time.

The address of Polish bishops to German ones passed in Vatican on 18th November 1965 was one of the most significant public act in the times of PRL. It opened the door for normalization of the Polish-German relations, as well as influenced indirectly on numerous other events. The words on mutual forgiveness and reconciliation entered for good the way of thinking and acting of many Poles and Germans, inspiring them for getting to know each other better and cooperate. They were not only the gesture of Christian reconciliation, but a bold political act. The letter made the way for normalization of Polish-German relations and initiated the processes, which in 1990 contributed to the peaceful reunification of Germany.

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