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Securitization of Past:

Analysis of the Katyń Issue in the Context of EU Integration

Abstract: This paper provides a theoretical explanation of what causes historical issues to impact bilateral relations between two states. The case which was chosen for analysis – popularly known as the Katyń issue – involves changes in Polish foreign policy towards the Russian Federation due to the remembrance of the Katyń Massacre. The main assumptions are based on the concept of securitization and its analytical framework, particularly the societal portion, which is proposed by the Copenhagen School of security study. The process of European integration can be seen as the main causal factor leading to a complex of vertical and horizontal competition between Poland, the EU, and Russia over the construction of their historical identities with a referent object of securitization in Poland. The main conclusion of this paper suggests that significant differences in the understanding of various nations' roles in WW2 between the EU and Russia have led to the securitization of the Polish historical image of WW2. The Polish audience considered it important to accept the historical truth. The Katyń issue in Polish-Russian relations has become a case that reflects the process which leads to securitization of disputes between historical victims and victimizers on a state-to-state level.

Keywords: *securitization; the Katyń issue; Polish foreign policy*

Introduction

By the end of the Cold War, the ideological competition between capitalist and communist ideologies was replaced by a tendency to revive historical disputes around the world. As a result, we have seen a multitude of controversial demands which have impacted contemporary official and public ties between former aggressors and their

victims. The idea for this research was inspired by the wide spectrum of cases in which interpretations of historical events have become an element of deteriorating relations such as: Germany-Greece relations (the issue of reparation), China-Japan relations (the Nanking Massacre issue), Russia-Baltic States relations (Soviets military memorials issue) etc.

Methodology

A case study based on qualitative analyses was found to be a better option for studying links between issue of historical remembrance and state-to-state relations based on recommendations from the book *Regions and Powers: The Structure of International Security* by Barry Buzan and Ole Wæver. The authors contend that the process of securitization is carried out different ways in different countries. If we are interested in understanding the origins of the process in a particular case we can use the meta concept of security on the societal level of analysis as a functional frame (Buzan & Wæver, 2003, p. 73, 353).

Case selection

Among all states involved in historical disputes, the Polish-Russian dispute over its historical memory issues is particularly noteworthy between 2005 and 2010, during the crisis of bilateral relations (Bieleń, 2012; 2014). According to analysis of political discourse, within this period Poland's official attitude towards Russia over the Katyń issue became more radical in comparison with previous period of relations (Senate Rzeczypospolitej Poliskij, 2000; Senate Rzeczypospolitej Poliskij, 2005). This fact makes the Katyń case a preferable case in comparison with other cases of historical disputes. Some of the existing cases have not reached a point of crisis sufficient to impact bilateral relations at an official level or have still remained at the level of bilateral disputes without the prospect of resolution. The Katyń issue, the Polish meat production ban, the competition on energy security between Poland and Russia took place, showing in what way a securitization of national interests can lead to crisis of bilateral relations (Rotfeld, 2005; Fotyga, 2008).

The Katyń case has been a long-standing problem in Poland since 1943. The specific circumstances of its historical origin lie in the classification of information by Soviets officials which persisted until 1990 (Sejm Rzeczypospolitej Poliskij, 1995). A brief historical overview shows that political relations between Poland and Russia were usually described as chronically bad. Since 1993, cold relations were primarily caused by Poland's increasingly close cooperation and integration with NATO

(Eberhardt, 2006, p. 115; Zięba, 2004; Stemplowski, 2001, p. 108).But analysis of public opinion shows that until 2005, perceptions of Russia in Poland became more neutral than bad. In 2004, thirty-nine percent of respondents in Poland had a good memory about the Soviet past.
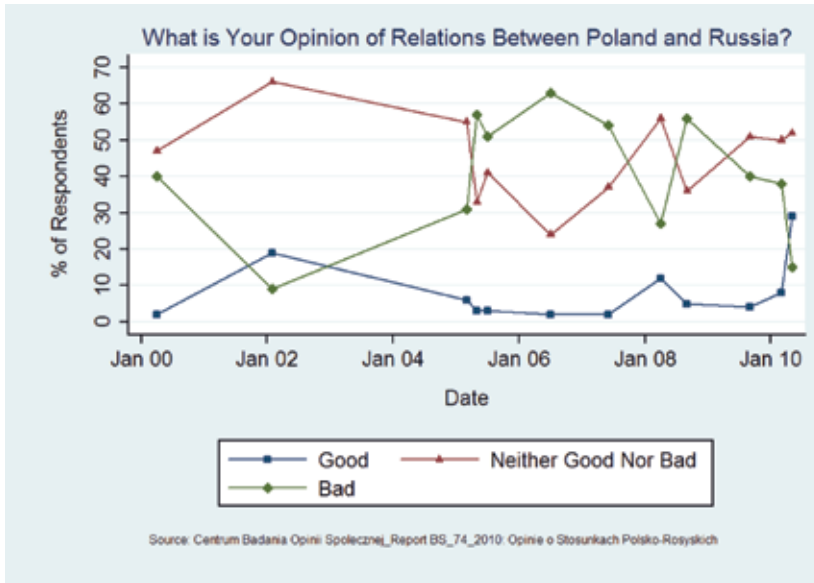
Graph 1. Polish Public Opinion towards Russia

Source: (Tucker, 2010, p. 4).

The situation was changed in the spring of 2005 when Polish-Russian relations reached a state of visible crisis. It started in the context of the sixty-fifth anniversary of the Katyń massacre when the Polish Parliament demanded Russia to recognize the Katyń massacre as a genocide of the Polish nation (Sejm Rzeczypospolitej Poliskij, 2005; Senate Rzeczypospolitej Poliskij, 2005). The Katyń issue can be understood as a long-lasting discussion between Poland and Russia about the responsibility of the USSR for the series of executions made by the Soviet Special Forces in April-March, 1940. Russian officials in the period from 1943 until 2010 didn't want to discuss the Katyń topic at the official level. The main political line was to forget this black spot of the history of WW2 and to not allow the past to impact the international and domestic image of contemporary Russia. But until 2005 Russian's attitude towards its historical responsibility for Stalinist crimes was not an object of activity within the Polish Sejm and Senate (Торкунов & Ротфельд, 2010).

This study explored reasons: Why did Poland change its attitude towards Russia over the Katyń issue in 2005? Accordingly, this paper formally explores the following hypothesis: If the process of Polish integration into the EU led to securitization of the Polish historical remembrance in terms of understanding the role of the Polish nation in the Second World War in the memory of European states, then the same process towards Russia appeared and changed Polish attitudes towards Russia.

Developments and problems of theoretical explanations for the issue of historical remembrance

Analysis of existing literature shows that the chosen topic has not been strictly discussed as a subject of academic study. Despite a poor base of secondary sources, some connections with the chosen topic, such as possible ways to explain the causation mechanisms, were found in several papers on Polish-Russian relations and Polish foreign policy analysis. Significant contributions to the research on Polish politics of memory have been made by J. Kubik, S. Bieleń, and K. B. Janowski. They suggest that changes in Polish policy toward Russia were caused by the personalities of the Kaczynski brothers (Kubik, 2012; Bieleń, 2012, 2014; Janowski, 2014). L. Chappell and K. Bobiński assumed that Poland changed its perception of self-security, and then changed its behaviour towards international partners (Chappell, 2010; Bobiński, 2007). Recent research on the political discourse of memories of the Katyń massacre based on analysis of polish newspapers was provided by Rolf Fredheim. His research suggested there were multiple causes; he defined Polish right-radical, national identity and the character of Polish-Russian relations as the main variables determining historical discourse in politics (Fredheim, 2012).

Now we continue a state of art and then come to a brief account of some theoretical approaches which were applied to issues of historical remembrance. John Bodnar developed the agenda of the politics of memory by distinguishing between "official memory" – state-sponsored commemorations of familiar national events and "vernacular memory" – ethnic, local, and regional communities' recollections of sub national pasts (Schwartz, 2011, p. 243–244). V. Volkan introduced a popular framework based on specific traumas that are often appealing in the study of historical controversies in contemporary international relations. He emphasized that when the memory of a particular trauma is chosen it consolidates the national identity and affects certain international relations with particular nations (Volkan & Vamik, 2001, p. 80). Jeffrey C. Alexander, constructed theory of cultural trauma and defined collective agents of the trauma process as carriers who have particular interests related to cultural trauma construction (Alexander, 2012, p. 16).

Analysis of literature provides clues suggesting that there are multi-causal mechanism memory factors at play on the international and domestic levels. Scholars of social science starting from Maurice Halbwachs have emphasized that demographic change is one of the factors that impacts memory construction and activation (Halbwachs, 1980). This tendency is explained by the fact that wartime generations appear to have a very different set of political and psychological needs than the generations that follow (Lebow, 2006, p. 42–44).

The domestic factor of using activation memories of the past as a policy tool also depends on national decision-making logic. Political elites can reactivate the group's chosen traumas and glories, which become fuel for stirring nationalism and further exacerbating the existing conflicts between the group and other nations. A memory of past can also be activated by external factors, such as the hostile behaviour of foreign countries. Factors such as globalization and the acceleration of technological changes which facilitate the distribution information have been shown to "increase misunderstanding and misperception among peoples and countries" (Gong, 2000, p.44).

Nowadays, scholars have come to some understanding of functions of historical memory in contemporary societies but still face the problem of clearly defining the mechanisms involved in the awakening of historical memories and the politics of memory. That problem has a theoretical root because existing theories still lack a proper causal and measuring mechanism for national identities. This has left research on issues of remembrance on the bilateral level to descriptive methods (Nets-Zehngut & Bar-Tal, 2014).

This research chooses the societal securitization approach in order to provide a better explanation for the research question. Barry Buzan and Ole Wæver defined societal security as one of the security levels which refer to collective's identities and actions taken to defend it. Securitization is a situation when "the issue [is] presented as an existential threat" (Buzan et al., 1997, p. 23–24). They also describe the main processes which created the source of threat to a particular society. There are two situations were defined as significant components of the causation mechanism in the explored case. First, is vertical competition – one of the situations which can be recognized as a societal security threat when people understand that they will change their identity because of participation in integration or secessionist projects. Second, is the situation of horizontal competition – recognized as a threat when a group of people living on a particular territory, "will change their ways because of the overriding cultural and linguistic influence from neighbouring culture" (Buzan et al., 1997, p.126–127). Horizontal competition present state-to-state levels of contradiction and belong to the traditional understanding of security. Situations recognized as a threat

can be combined and lead to the growth of a complex of interconnected links that impact foreign policy behaviour. Barry Buzan and Ole Wæver assumed that the main criterion for successful securitization is an acceptance of securitization move by an audience (Buzan et al., 1997, p. 30).

National history particularly may be viewed as referent objects of the securitization process. These referent objects are understood to be "things that are seen to be existentially threatened and that have a legitimate claim to survival" (Buzan &Wæver, 2003, p. 62). An important element of securitization are "actors who securitize issues by declaring […] a referent object-existentially threatened" – defined as a securitizing actors, who in same time indirectly point to the party responsible for the threat. Security concept named this party a functional actor. A functional actor could be, for example, a neighbouring country which was pointed to as a source of the threatening influence. It is assumed that functional actors do not play a significant role in the process of securitization. Another important term is a de-securitization, meaning the "process by which a political community downgrades or ceases to treat something as an existential threat to a valued referent object, and reduces or stops calling for urgent and exceptional measures to deal with the threat" (Buzan & Wæver, 2003, p. 62, 489). De-securitization means to come back to "normal" state/community behaviour but it does not mean that securitization should be recognized as a deviant turn of states, some cases have shown positive tendencies in order to resolve issues posing a real threat.

The implications of security analysis with regards to the problem of historical remembrance in bilateral relations seems as a main component which reflect significant of this research as a new contribution to the existing literature.

Role of Securitization in the Changing Polish Attitude towards Russia in the Context of EU Integration: Analysis of the Katyń Issue

The main argument of this research is quite straightforward: once Poland as a country that broke its ties with the Soviet bloc started the process of EU accession, it has not had enough time to properly recover its own historical remembrance system which was under foreign influence from 1945 till 1989 (Shepherd, 2007; Bebenek, 2007,p.157–158). This paper argues that the process of EU integration led to a feeling of insecurity in terms of representativeness and national understanding of the role of the Polish nation in WW2. In other words, after Poland's accession to the EU in 2004, the Polish nation recognized a threat to its identity going in two directions: the first one is its new direction—its EU's the common European Remembrance norms (Larrabee,2006, p.118), because it does not include memory about the fate of Poland during WW2, especially the story of repression under Stalinism (Wilkiewicz, 2003,

p. 99, 102).The second is the old one which comes from the Russian understanding of its role in WW2 as a liberator of the Europe from Nazi invaders (Fredheim, 2014, p. 1165).

Polish radicals believed that international participation during celebrations of Victory in Europe Day in Russia on May, 9 served to promote a distorted vision of the historical past. The image of Russia as a liberator of Europe did not reflect the sacrifice of the Polish Nation as a victim of two totalitarian regimes (Sejm Rzeczypospolitej Poliskij, 2000; Kalb, 2009, p.292). The Katyń massacre constitutes a significant historical event which occurred in Poland during WW2 and acts as a symbol representing the Poland's grieve and glory in the twenty-first century. From the Polish perspective, the Katyń Massacre is a case similar to the Holocaust which is a well-recognized symbol of Nazi crimes in Europe (Senate Rzeczypospolitej Poliskij, 1992; Fredheim, 2012, p.1165). So, Polish politics sought to provide a sense of historical similarity by defining the Katyń massacre as a genocide of the Polish nation. Polish right-wing parties promoted the Katyń issue as a part of its policy towards Russia as a case that reliably would gain full audience support (Kubik, 2012; Gniazdowski, 2006; Wawrzyński, 2012; Fredheim, 2012).

In the period from 2004 to 2009, Poland, in close collaboration with the Baltic States, successfully dealt with the problem of the EU identity renovation within the EU's institutions and norms. As a result, these states were able to reconstruct memories of WW2 with an understanding of themselves as victims of the Soviet regime (Onken, 2007, p. 38). One of the main achievements in the struggle to preserve the memory of the victims of Stalinist crimes was a declaration of the European Parliament proclaiming August, 23 as the European Day of Remembrance for Victims of Stalinism and Nazism (The European Parliament, 2008).This declaration was a great supportive element to the program "Europe for Citizens" established in the period from 2007 to 2013 with an aim to promote active European citizenship. This program created the framework for the action of "Active European Remembrance", proclaimed to preclude any recurrence of the crimes against humanity which appeared under the rule Nazi and Stalinist regimes (The European Parliament& the Council of Europe, 2006). On the contrary, at the same time, the second direction – in relation with Russia, didn`t show any progress in terms of recognition of Stalinist regime`s actions as a crime against the Polish nation until April of 2010 (Торкунов & Ротфельд, 2010). Thus, this paper assumed possibility whether connections between securitizing actions of Poland in order to defend its own understanding of history-referent object in both currents (towards the EU and Russia) was remembrance about events of WW2. Russia and the EU were seen as functional actors. At both levels actors of securitizations made great efforts to achieve its goal (Gniazdowski, 2006).
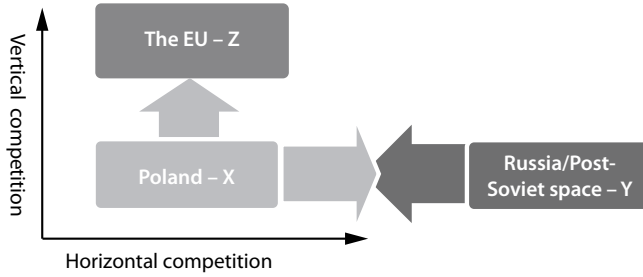
Schema 1. Vertical and horizontal competition: case of Polish societal securitization

Source: Own

A schema was chosen to visualize the origin of Polish attitude towards insecurity on the societal level. The chosen schema displays the principle of vertical and horizontal competitions as applied to understanding the mechanism of awaking of the Katyń issue in Polish-Russian relations on official level. Poland was understood as entity X, which desired to cut connections with entity Y – Post-Soviet region by way of full integration to entity Z – the EU. Entities Y and Z show significant differences with the Polish image of its role in WW2 – these differences were recognized as threats and securitization move towards entity Y. That process places the Katyń issue at the rank of bilateral dispute on the level of horizontal competition between Poland and Russia.
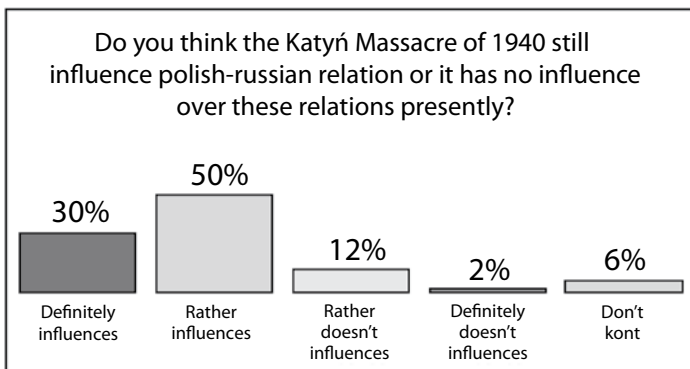
Graph 2. The Katyń Massacre and its impact on Polish-Russian relation, Polish Public Opinion
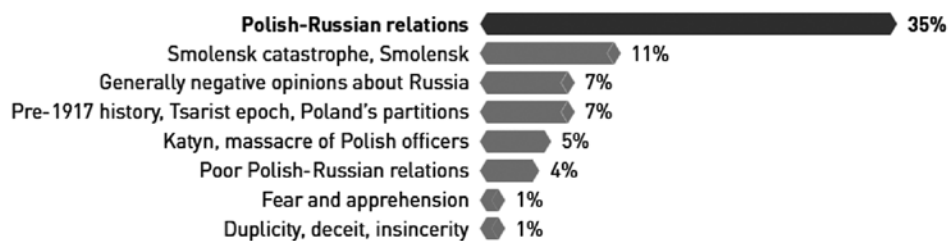
Source: (CBOS, 2010, p.1)

Political discourse during Poland accession to the EU firstly included the elements of securitization Poland's historical memory as a referent object of threatening from the EU (especially Germany) (Rotfeld, 2005, p.3; Bebenek, 2007). The same discourse happened to Russia in spring of 2005 (Sejm Rzeczypospolitej Poliskij, 2005; Senate Rzeczypospolitej Poliskij, 2005). According to security framework, the Polish nation became a very perceptive audience of the securitization move, because the threat of the disappearance of the nation`s history through a process of cultural integration was supported by a feeling of injustice towards the victims of Stalinist repressions and particularly towards the fate of executed Polish officers (Kula, M. 2003; Bajomi-Lázár, 2014). In Poland right-wing radical parties used that factor and promoted its own high patriotic image. They became the main actors of securitization (Fredheim, 2012). In 2005, the Katyń issue was successfully securitized by wide responses from Polish society (Kalb, 2009). In the process of reviving the historical issue, Polish politicians indirectly changed the image of Russia in Poland to the negative one and that visibly reversed official and public Polish attitude towards Russia. Even in 2007, when the main actors of securitization lost their power after parliamentary elections, the new government under the leadership of D. Tusk was unable to de-securitize the Katyń issue because the audience`s reaction to the Katyń massacre as a cornerstone of Polish–Russian relations was too strong (Sejm Rzeczypospolitej Poliskij,2007; Sikorski, 2009). The graph above shows that eighty percent of survey respondents in Poland are quite sure the past still plays a significant role in bilateral relations.

In exploration of possibility of absence such factor as EU integration in activation of two levels competition over Polish historical remembrance, firstly, we eliminate the role of fear of vanishing national history which raised during integration process (assumption formulated by the Copenhagen School) as a factor which caused domino effect in activization politics of memory in Poland towards Germany and Russia after the EU accession (Buzan et al., 1997, p.126–127). Secondly, exclude fact that the "old" EU members created a tool – the principle of common European Remembrance which Poland used for its own good. Finding it, if Poland has not became part of the entity where its fear was successfully de-securitize by promoting its image as a victim of two totalitarian regimes during WW2, which was recognized on regional level, therefore without regional support Poland possibly still have not a real chance to get attention of Russia (as a functional actor) to the problem of declassification volumes of criminal investigation over the Katyń massacre.

Why regional environment seems to be important in case of Polish-Russian relations? The Baltic states support within the EU system became significant in comparison with the previous period when Polish officials were able to discuss the

historical justifies problem with Russia only on two track level without any guarantee to be heard (Торкунов & Ротфельд, 2010). From beginning of the Polish EU accession Russia recognised a new ability of its old partner. Now Poland in association with the Baltic States have a power to ban Russian initiatives not only towards the EU, but also halted process of Russian accession to the WTO (Hill C., & Smith M., 2011, p.15; Keukeleire S., & Delreux T., 2014, p.125, 224,281–282). That's why the Poland EU integration seems as a significant factor in process of securitization of historical disputes on bilateral level between Poland and Russia.

In 2010 situation over Katyn issue was changing after the tragic death of the Polish right-radical party "Law and Justice" leaders and President of Poland, Lech Kaczyński. According polls results case of the Katyń massacre was replaced by debates about the Russian role in Poland's national tragedy of April 10, 2010. The angle of audience perception in Poland has changed and now the issue of classification information about massacre was replaced by interest of the available data about the plane crash. In aim to understand what factors led to lowering level of historical remembrance issue in the Polish-Russian official discourse we should use security approach which argue that the main role in the process of securitization belongs to powerful actors. Thus, the process securitisation can be invalid in situation of absence one of the leading securitization actors accomplished by changing of audience's perception.

Polish-Russian relations	**35%**
Smolensk catastrophe, Smolensk	11%
Generally negative opinions about Russia	7%
Pre-1917 history, Tsarist epoch, Poland's partitions	7%
Katyn, massacre of Polish officers	5%
Poor Polish-Russian relations	4%
Fear and apprehension	1%
Duplicity, deceit, insincerity	1%

Graph 3. Poles association about Russia

Source: (Lukasz Mazurkiewicz, Valery Fedorov, 2013. p.24).

In case of the Katyń issue the Russian government activity as a functional actor also can be count as one of the crisis resolution factors over historical remembrance (Sejm Rzeczypospolitej Poliskij, 2010). During the period of 2010–2011 Russian President D. Medvedev understanding the attitude of the Polish side requesting to declassify volumes belonging to investigation of crime against citizens of Poland

and managed to transfer to the Poland 148 of 183 volumes of copies of the criminal case № 159 (materials on the executions of poles) (РИА Новости, 2011). On November 26, 2010 the Russian State Duma adopted a statement "About the Katyń tragedy". It was recognized that the mass extermination of Polish citizens in the Soviet Union during the WW2 was an act of the totalitarian state tyranny (Государственная Дума Федерального Собрания Российской Федерации, 2010). It's impossible to measure which factor was more significant to process of returning debates over the Katyń issue back from official to public level: activity of functional actor or absent of major securitization actor (securitization approach don't see functional actor as a significant variable), but the analytical frame of securitization provides understanding of the process when audience doesn't consider the activity of functional actor as a threat to chosen subject defined as a end of securitization process means back to 'normal' stage of relation around subject – de-securitization (Buzan & Wæver, 2003, p.489).

Evaluation of the role of the concept of securitization in the process of analysing the changing state attitudes towards historical issues

Analysis of the origin of the Katyń issue through the societal security framework brings elements of a clear structure of the causation mechanism. This was done in order to explore controversial subjects such as remembrance of a national past and its impact on contemporary state-to-state relations. The concept of securitization has linked three elements, which appeared on regional level during the EU integration process and on bilateral level, together these elements create a situation where an historical issue that had not been politicized for a long period was not only politicized during a short period but also became an actual object of state interest. First, it was of interest to the state actor of securitization – Poland, second it became an object of interest to a regional institution – the EU, which successfully prevented securitization of the issue over differences in WW2 image between its "old" and "new" members by incorporating Polish interest in preserving its own image of past as a component within the EU's common remembrance structure. And finally, it became an object of interest for Russia as the functional actor, which was interested in bringing about resolution of the dispute, but was unable to deal with that problem due to the necessity of defending its own construction of history which differed from the Polish image of WW2 (Onken, 2007). Such results bring some correlation with the concept of security which left limited space for functional actors in the process of reviving the past in bilateral relations.

Conclusion

In the case of Poland, the integration process became the main factor leading to the invoking of historical issues in bilateral relations by priming the audience to be prone to accept historical issues as an existential threat to the Polish national remembrance. Securitization of the Katyń issue revealed negative and positive effects. Negative effects included: damage to the international image of both participants and souring of public relations between Poland and Russia. Positive effects were shown to demonstrate that when all parties involved in a historical dispute are willing to mutually reduce negative attitudes, then a path towards resolution of the disputes follows.

The study of changing of the Polish attitude towards Russia over the Katyń issue on official level is one of the possible topics that reflect a variation of cases when the memory about past impacts bilateral relations. This study can be applied to the exploration of similar topics in the Russia-Baltic states' relations.

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