

After the *Wende*:
The German-Polish Textbook Project in Retrospect

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In the course of the peaceful revolutions that took place in 1989 in the eastern part of Europe and the epochal transformations that followed in their wake, a new era also came to dawn in German-Polish relations. Previously, the conflict between the two countries over Poland's borders as demarcated by the rivers Oder and Neisse had long been brooding under the surface. Furthermore, this geographical reality had been accepted only with judicial reservations by the West German side. In 1990/91, however, the two countries signed a binding contract on the matter. Following the international legal agreement to German unification, the third German republic agreed to recognize Poland's western borders. A contract of friendship sealed this new relationship. The state border was thus secured by contractual means so as to become permeable for the people of both countries.

In this process, the formerly tight restrictions on the work of the *German-Polish Textbook Commission* on revising antagonistic historical conceptions in school textbooks and teaching practice were also lifted. The academic dialogue that West German and Polish historians and geographers sustained in this Commission since 1972 had already created a certain amount of trust. However, this did nothing do dissipate their respective governments' acting solely on reasons of state. These are the conditions under which the "Recommendations on History and Geography Textbooks in the Federal Republic of Germany and the People's Republic of Poland", which were discussed fervently in the public spheres of both countries upon their publication in 1975, came into being. The Commission today believes that its Recommendations served their purpose well despite their inadequacies, which must be credited to the political situation prior to 1991.

Since the political turn in Eastern Europe, the *German-Polish Textbook Commission* has been facing different possibilities, but also new challenges in its work. It is today no longer constrained by the political antagonism it previously had to accommodate. However, the transformation processes in the formerly Socialist countries also raised new questions in German-Polish relations. The open societies of Germany and Poland, two geographical neighbors steering towards a common European future, are marked by a significant age gap in their respective structures. Additionally, in light of the significant divergences in the living standards of these two historically deeply interconnected countries, historical consciousness

and notions of history are currently being reactivated, potentially even instrumentalized and deformed, in a new context. The new circumstances thus created new working conditions for the Textbook Commission. Therefore, it deems a new edition of the Recommendations, which are currently out of print, to be sensible. This would provide the interested audience with testimony of its past contributions in an undoubtedly difficult era.

The contemporary significance of a document from the times of the East-West-confrontation is, now that this era has come to an end, first and foremost a problem surrounding our historical classification of this document. Not only are the Recommendations one of the few texts that bear witnesses to ideological coexistence during a time when, according to Leninist theory, such coexistence was supposedly impossible. Today, after 1991, the Recommendations have furthermore gained significance as a primary source on textbook research in a specific historical era of German-Polish relations. The uniqueness of this document becomes evident if we regard the dynamics in the history of relations between the two countries between 1970 (or 1945) and 1991. Thus, revisiting the history of the Recommendations' conception and the responses this text elicited should be quite illuminating. We shall endeavor on this in the following recapitulation, wherein I specifically address these four points:

1. The epochal character of the post-war era from 1945 to 1991 in the history of German-Polish relations,
2. the uniqueness of the attempt to foster understanding between the two nations through *historiography*,
3. the genesis and significance of the Recommendations, and
4. the academic character of the Recommendations and the tasks the Commission faces today.

Thus contextualized, the significance of this document as a piece of evidence towards the history of bilateral relations between the two countries can be clarified. When consigned to history, the text can moreover provide valuable impulses for the *German-Polish Textbook Commission's* further work under today's more favorable conditions.

I

The Recommendations are a product of the post-war times, which ended in 1991. In the forty-five years since the end of World War II, a Polish "negative German policy" largely determined German-Polish relations. This term appropriately describes the epochal systemic

change in power politics in Central and Eastern Europe, which came about as a consequence of World War II. In the course of his war for “*Lebensraum*” in Eastern Europe, Hitler deprived the traditional system of “negative Polish policy”, which had provided Russia and the “half-German super powers” Prussia and Austria with ground for cooperation for nearly 250 years, of its basis.

After Hitler’s defeat, it was convenient for Poland to regard the dissolution of Prussia and the expulsion of the German population from Prussia’s eastern provinces as a reversal of history. Its own partition was healed by the *Finis Borussiae* and secured by the partition of Germany. These circumstances help to elucidate the way in which “negative German policy” shaped German-Polish relations after 1945. Andreas Lawaty, who analyzed Polish attitudes towards the dissolution of Prussia, contends:

From a Polish perspective, German-Polish relations during post-war times were not solely determined by reconciliation or forgiving, but at least equally so by the desire to either bring about a non-Prussian solution to the German question, or, if this should prove impossible, to leave this question unresolved entirely. The ultimate aim was to prevent attempts at resolving the German question based on – either territorially or politically – the Prussian model¹

From a Polish point of view, this depended primarily on the security of the new western border at the Oder and Neisse. However, as long as West Germany did not recognize the border, this fatal reverse logic - from the partition of Poland to the partition of Germany - weighed heavily on German-Polish relations in the post-war period. This state of affairs also facilitated the ruling Polish Communists’ construction and instrumentalization of a German (specifically a West German) *Feindbild*. The country could be conveniently placed in one line with a threatening Prussian continuity, expressed in West Germany’s refusal to recognize the Oder-Neisse-border. Certainly, West German politicians in Bonn were rather hypocritical in this regard. On the one hand, they seemed to accept as an unalterable stroke of fate the fact that northern East Prussia (today’s Kaliningrad District) had fallen under Soviet rule, and established diplomatic ties with Moscow in 1956. On the other hand, they insisted on the temporary character of Poland’s current western border.

In the 1970s, these rigid fronts began to soften somewhat in the course of the “new

¹ [“Das deutsch-polnische Verhältnis der Nachkriegszeit ist aus der polnischen Perspektive nicht allein durch das Problem der Versöhnung oder Vergebung bestimmt, sondern zumindest ebenso durch das Bedürfnis, entweder eine nichtpreußische Lösung der Deutschlandfrage herbeizuführen, oder, wenn dies nicht ging, diese überhaupt ungelöst zu lassen. Es galt, jedem Bestreben entgegenzuwirken, die Deutsche Frage in Anlehnung an das preußische Modell – ob territorial oder politisch gesehen – zu lösen.”] Andreas Lawaty, *Das Ende Preußens in polnischer Sicht. Zur Kontinuität negativer Wirkungen der preußischen Geschichte auf die deutsch-polnischen Beziehungen* [The End of Prussia in Polish perspective. On the continuity of the negative influences the history of Prussia exerted on German-Polish relations], Berlin, New York 1986, p. 239.

eastern policy” (*Neue Ostpolitik*) of the Brandt-Scheel administration in West Germany. The widely spread fear of German “revisionism” began to lose ground in Poland. However, whenever politicians, journalists, or courts in the Federal Republic of Germany indulged in political reverie based on abstract judicial positions, this fear periodically flared up again. Thereby, the Communist regime was continually provided with persuasive arguments for strictly clinging to its “negative German policy”. Even Poland’s largely anti-Communist society was, with few exceptions, convinced of the necessity of the protection that the pact with the Soviet Union provided. Only in 1989 did the lifespan of this system of “negative German policy” finally come to an end.

These circumstances provide the general background picture concerning the era in which the *German-Polish Textbook Commission*, brought to life by the UNESCO-Commissions of both countries in 1972, commenced its work. Without the Warsaw Contract of December 1970, this would not have been possible. However, even at later points in time, the negotiations of these two dissimilar partners often added up to attempts at squaring the circle.² In light of the reciprocal influences of Poland’s partition and Germany’s partition on the historical relations between the two countries, Gotthold Rhode’s response to the Commission’s critics in 1997 seems justified:

Whoever would have predicted in 1945 that Polish and German historians and geographers belonging to the war generation would meet in Warsaw to negotiate toughly, but cordially and collegially in German the possibility of devising more objective school textbooks and teaching methods would have been declared mad. Thus, in retrospect it is not appropriate to regard the work on such a project solely with skepticism.³

II

The Commission’s work was noteworthy and valuable not least of all as an attempt by German and Polish scholars to sustain a dialogue over many years on possibilities for improving textbooks and teaching methods under - even after 1972, due to the East-West confrontation - politically quite strenuous conditions. The uniqueness of this accomplishment also becomes apparent if we acknowledge it as an attempt to counter the common public

² Klaus Zernack, “Historische Bildung – Geschichtsbewußtsein – Nationalbewußtsein und die deutsch-polnischen Beziehungen” [Historical education – historical consciousness – national consciousness and German-Polish relations]. In: *Politik und Kultur* [Politics and Culture] 5, 1976, pp. 39-45.

³ [”Wer 1945 vorausgesagt hätte, daß polnische und deutsche Historiker und Geographen der Kriegsgeneration zwar hart, aber sachlich und höflich kollegial in Warschau in deutscher Sprache über die Möglichkeit der Versachlichung der Schulbücher und des Geschichtsunterrichts verhandeln würden, wäre für geistesgestört erklärt worden. Derartige Rückblicke zeigen, dass es nicht nötig ist, die Arbeit an einem solchen Werk nur mit Skepsis zu betrachten.”] *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 31.1.1977.

(mis)use of history, which had been widespread in the tradition of the German-Polish antagonism among earlier generations: The histories of the two countries had, with a few honorable exceptions, continually been juxtaposed in academics, literature, and journalism. In a less reflected and therefore even more striking manner, this was also the case in the school textbooks of both countries. Professor Wiesław Chrzanowski, a former *Sejm*-Marshall, memorably emphasized this in his speech in Braunschweig in 1992:

The depiction of history in Polish school textbooks continued to serve the political goals of the era as late as the 1960s and 70s: It justified the subjugation of Poland by the Soviet Union by evoking the threat Germany posed to our borders. This propaganda fell on the fertile soil of mutual prejudices that had existed for generations. The relatively recent memory of the War, followed by Poland's occupation, lent it further credibility.⁴

This keenly observed axiom of political instrumentalization on the Polish side was matched in Germany by the fundamental failing of complete disregard, even contempt, for Polish history. The inexplicable *Polonica-non-leguntur*-attitude that had persisted for generations in German academics, and the educated classes more generally, resulted in ignorant and amateurish depictions of Poland in German history textbooks. The Polish side, in contrast, could certainly not be accused of a lack of familiarity with German history.

This “asymmetry of knowledge” about one another (Chrzanowski) was a seemingly unalterable reality at the outset of the Commission's work. If the involved historians and geographers succeeded in their task nonetheless, it was because - despite all professional and methodological skepticism - there existed sufficient intellectual creativity and optimism concerning the possibility of altering outdated historical conceptions through the creation of a new historical consciousness. This idea gained the upper hand in time over pessimists who maintained the impossibility of bridging the gaps in historical assessment between the two parties as dictated by their respective governments' agendas.

This discrepancy was never entirely dispelled by the Commission's work, which is, however, in the nature of the problem itself. For a long time there was significant disagreement within the Commission itself as to whether a parallel presentation of the so-called self-conceptions of both sides was not the preferable solution for the text of the Recommendations. In the end, agreement on a common text was reached after all. It is not

⁴ [”Das Bild der Geschichte in polnischen Schulbüchern diente noch in den sechziger und siebziger Jahren tagespolitischen Zielen: Der Rechtfertigung unserer Unterdrückung durch die Sowjetunion mittels der Herausstellung der Bedrohung unserer Grenzen durch Deutschland. Diese Propaganda fiel auf den fruchtbaren Boden von beiderseitigen, über Generationen währenden Vorurteilen, und die verhältnismäßig frischen Erinnerungen an den Krieg und die Besetzung Polens ließ sie an Glaubwürdigkeit gewinnen.”] *Zwanzig Jahre Gemeinsame deutsch-polnische Schulbuchkommission. Reden aus Anlaß der Festveranstaltung in Braunschweig am 10. Juni 1992* [Twenty-year anniversary of the *German-Polish Textbook Commission*. Talks held at the festivities in Braunschweig on June 10th, 1992], Braunschweig 1993, p. 11.

surprising, however, that demands for separate portrayals became more pressing the closer the negotiations got to the post-1945 era. At first glance, certain passages of the Recommendations on contemporary history still read like contrasting representations of German and Polish viewpoints. This shows that despite basic agreement on the text's conception as a whole, compromises had to be reached in many details. However, this was the only possible road ahead – either to compromise or, as Gotthold Rhode has observed, to recommend nothing at all.

III

Since we are addressing a text from the early 1970s, which contains many compromises, as a historical source, a brief discussion of its difficult genesis and its contested significance is essential.

It is not necessary at this point, however, to recount in detail the long prehistory of international textbook research before and after World War II, and especially since the foundation of the *Institute for International Textbook Research* in Braunschweig by Georg Eckert in 1952, as much detailed research has already surveyed this material.⁵ Nonetheless, the German scholar Enno Meyer should be mentioned in this context. Meyer's initiative for the improvement of history textbooks in Germany and Poland based on his experience in the educational field, as well as his familiarity with Poland dating from the war-generation, must be included in our discussion of the early stages of the Commission's work. In 1956, he published his forty-seven theses on school textbooks.⁶ In a later publication, the author remarkably recounted his work and the echo it received in Poland and in Germany with great theoretical reflection as well as personal modesty.⁷ There can be no doubt that Meyer's method of pointing out the most contested questions in the thousand-year history of German-Polish relations (Gotthold Rhode was later to term these questions "neuralgic points") and to

⁵ Otto Ernst Schüddekopf, *Zwanzig Jahre westeuropäische Schulgeschichtsbuchrevision 1945-1965, Tatsachen und Probleme* [Twenty years of Western European textbook revision in the subject of history 1945-1965. Facts and problems], Braunschweig 1966; *Ibid.*, "Vom Sinn und von der Bedeutung internationaler Schulbucharbeit in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland im Rahmen ihrer Kulturarbeit im Ausland. Betrachtung zu einem fünfundzwanzigjährigen Bemühen" [On the significance and meaning of international textbook research in the Federal Republic of Germany within the framework of its cultural projects abroad]. In: E. Horst Schallenberger (ed.), *Studien zur Methodenproblematik wissenschaftlicher Schulbucharbeit* [Studies on methodological problems of scientific textbook research], Kastellaun 1976, pp. 109-120.

⁶ Enno Meyer, *Über die Darstellung der deutsch-polnischen Beziehungen im Geschichtsunterricht* [On the depiction of German-Polish relations in the teaching of history], Braunschweig 1956 (pre-publication in: *Internationales Jahrbuch für Geschichtsunterricht* [International almanac on the teaching of history]); final publication in: *Ibid.*, Vol. V, 1956 (published 1957), pp. 225-243.

⁷ Enno Meyer, *Wie ich dazu gekommen bin. Die Vorgeschichte der deutsch-polnischen Schulbuchgespräche 1948-1971* [My motivations. The prehistory of the German-Polish textbook project], Braunschweig 1988.

call for their controversial discussion by historians of both countries served as a model for the work of the *German-Polish Textbook Commission*. At any rate, most of the German and Polish historians who came together to form the Commission in 1972 were familiar with Meyer's work. This shows that the momentum generated by the forty-seven theses, which in 1956 immediately became apparent in German and Polish academic circles, was not decelerated by the cooling of the Polish spring in the 1960s.

Enno Meyer himself, however, contends a fundamental difference between his "theses" – of which he rightfully assumes that they can coexist with the Recommendations – and the Commission's work on the whole. He argues, for example, that the school hardly played any role in the German-Polish textbook project. It is difficult to agree with this standpoint. The Textbook Commission, called into being by the UNESCO-Commissions of both countries, largely adhered to Meyer's proposal of discussing the controversial issues of a thousand years Polish-German history. Now, however, the experts could benefit from the growing approximation of Polish and German positions (which they had achieved themselves), and could find a methodological way to transcend the mere contrasting of divergent viewpoints. Both sides were aware of the structural differences in the shortcomings of the two countries' respective school textbooks: While the insufficiencies on the German side were a results of ignorance and dilettantism, those of the Polish side could be attributed to a politically motivated strategy of persuasion pedagogy. Therefore, the Commission's work, as Wolfgang Jacobmeyer pointed out in his methodological analysis, did not revolve around "...historical questions in the classical sense. Rather, it is about control over historiographic self-depictions, as well as depictions of others - in short about raising the level of objectivity in the identity concepts on both sides. Such an increase in objectivity can serve as an indicator of historical enlightenment."⁸ This standard of objectivity must certainly also serve as a benchmark in the teaching of history in schools.

At first, the Commission was quite successful in its attempts at formulating joint statements on controversial issues in the history of German-Polish relations. As early as during the first year of cooperation, it was able to devise fourteen recommendations (soon to be enhanced to seventeen). The contentious issues up to the era of contemporary history were thus resolved. However, it came as a surprise to neither of the two partners that discussions of

⁸ ["...historische Forschung im klassischen Sinne. Vielmehr geht es dabei um die Kontrolle der historiographischen Selbstdarstellung und Fremddarstellung, also um einen Objektivitätszuwachs eigener und fremder Identität. Ein solcher Objektivitätszuwachs darf als Gradmesser für historische Aufklärung gelten."] Wolfgang Jacobmeyer (ed.), *Die deutsch-polnischen Schulbuchempfehlungen in der öffentlichen Diskussion der Bundesrepublik Deutschland. Dokumentation* [Public Discussions on the German-Polish Textbook Recommendations in the Federal Republic of Germany. A documentation], Braunschweig 1979, p. 9.

the post-war era proved to be more difficult. Hence, several conferences followed in 1973 and 1974, which were marked by tough disputes and even pointed crises that almost brought the negotiations to an early end. For a certain time, the only prospect of resolution seemed to lie in abandoning the governing principle of striving to find a joint formulation for the Recommendations. The involved parties believed that it would be possible to adequately address contemporary history by merely presenting the divergent viewpoints. As previously mentioned, even certain passages in the final joint formulation (which was agreed upon in the end after all) read like a juxtaposition of incompatible standpoints at first glance. However, upon closer scrutiny one is able to recognize the historiographically appropriate explanation of a specific German-Polish context in the *history of relations* even in these passages. In the introduction to the Recommendations' final text, the Commission explicitly addresses its appreciation of this point.⁹

In October 1975, the German UNESCO-Commission separately published the "Recommendations on Contemporary History in the Federal Republic of Germany". This text immediately sparked intense public debate.¹⁰ In spring of 1976, the Commission edited the entire text of the Recommendations and prepared a bilingual manuscript, the first edition of which was published a year later, in spring of 1977.¹¹ Subsequently, it had to be reprinted several times and reached an overall circulation of approximately 300,000 by the early 1990s.

The availability of the text in its entirety and the Commission's appeal to assess it as such - as an interpretation of German-Polish history over the course of a thousand years - did not elicit much of a response from critics in both countries (who were more numerous in Germany). Only the authors of the "Alternative Recommendations"¹² adhered to the framework laid out by this appeal. The authors of this document frustrated their own efforts, however, by ignoring the dialogical character of the Commission's work and by simply substituting the previous, outdated German positions at points of disagreement with the

⁹ *Empfehlungen für Schulbücher der Geschichte und Geographie in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland und in der Volksrepublik Polen* [Recommendations for school textbooks in the subjects of history and geography in the Federal Republic of Germany and in the People's Republic of Poland], Braunschweig 1977, p. 6 f.

¹⁰ Deutsche UNESCO-Kommission, "Empfehlungen zur Darstellung der Nachkriegsgeschichte in den Schulbüchern der Volksrepublik Polen und der Bundesrepublik Deutschland. Empfehlungen der 6. und 8. deutsch-polnischen Schulbuchkonferenz" [Recommendations for the depiction of the post-war era in the school textbooks in the People's Republic of Poland and the Federal Republic of Germany. Recommendations agreed upon at the 6th and 8th German-Polish textbook conferences]. In: *Geschichte in Wissenschaft und Unterricht* [History in academics and school teaching] 27, 1976, pp. 699-703.

¹¹ See footnote 9.

¹² Josef Joachim Menzel, Wolfgang Stribny, Eberhard Völker, *Alternativ-Empfehlungen zur Behandlung der deutsch-polnischen Geschichte in den Schulbüchern* [Alternative Recommendations for the treatment of German-Polish history in school textbooks], Als Manuskript vervielfältigt (Kulturstiftung der deutschen Vertriebenen) [Reproduced in manuscript-form (German deportees' cultural foundation)], Bonn 1978.

Commission's conclusions.¹³ Thus, the "Alternative Recommendations" merely returned to the starting point of the *German-Polish Textbook Commission's* work. Except for this respectable, but misguided attempt, criticism of, and opposition to the Recommendations remained rather uniform over the years. Among the main arguments, three specific ones were - not surprisingly - especially tenacious:

1. One rather evident and innumerably recounted accusation is that the Recommendations replace the term *expulsion* with *transfer*. The passage in question in recommendation nr. 22 should make clear to the impartial reader that the Commission was aiming at a more precise terminology for the various stages in a long process that is generally termed *expulsion (Vertreibung)* in the Federal Republic of Germany. In recommendation nr. 22, the process by which the German population had to leave the western part of today's Poland is classified into four distinct historical phases, namely ejection, forced relocation, resettlement, and emigration. Only the first two phases are instances of expulsion. It is, however, understandable that such a neutral and sober language - which, by the way, borrowed from the terminology of the UNHCR - was difficult for many readers to accept in a dispassionate way.
2. The accusation that the "wrong" experts on the subject matter and too few bilingual scholars had been called into the Commission on the German side did not receive a marked reply. The German constituency in the Commission was composed of a core team of experts on Poland, whose specific academic competence lay in the history of German-Polish relations and in Polish geography and social studies. However, even these eminent experts in the narrower field of focus often had to rely on the professional competence of individual specialists within the Commission, whose focus lay in particular time-periods or issues. However, the separate parts of the whole began to function smoothly in due time and all efforts paid off in the end. Incorporating the *Historical Commissions* for the former East German *Länder*, as some demanded, would hardly have been expedient for the Commission's *general* purpose - researching the history of relations.
3. The strongest criticism was aimed at the many compromises in the text of the Recommendations. However, this criticism only confirmed a circumstance that the involved individuals were aware of themselves, namely that under the conditions of the East-West confrontation, the Commission's work was restricted by certain political boundaries. Due to these limitations, the results were necessarily

¹³ Gottfried Schramm, "Deutsch-polnische Nachbarschaft im Schulbuch" [German-Polish neighborhood in the school textbook]. In: *Internationale Schulbuchforschung* 2 [International Textbook Research], 1979, S. 78-83.

unsatisfactory. The public debate on this point is well investigated and can be pursued in various documentations and critical analyses.¹⁴

It was interesting for the members of the Commission to observe that the nature of the criticism elicited by the Recommendations was rather similar in Germany and in Poland. In both countries, critics referred to a supposed “historical truth”, in the name of which the German members of the Commission were accused of having surrendered German claims to the Polish standpoint. On the Polish side, the Commission’s members were reproached for their supposed submissiveness and for having “sold out” vital Polish interests in their dealings with an untrustworthy, even deceitful partner. It is also noteworthy in this context that critics in the Federal Republic of Germany concentrated solely on the text of the Recommendations itself, completely ignoring the annual (later biannual) follow-up conferences on history that took place alternately in Germany and in Poland. In contrast, criticism in Poland circled around the so-called *implementation* of the Recommendations, the preferable route towards which some saw in political dictate. There was little understanding among these politically motivated critics for the measured and cautious approach to implementing the Recommendations by means of open discussion and dialogue, with which the Commission endeavored to influence everyday practice in the schools of both countries.

IV

Compared to the Recommendations on Contemporary History with their political implications on the one hand, and the specific problems pertaining to school textbooks on the other, the Commission’s academic intentions in the field of history have received little attention. However, it was always important for the Commission that its Recommendations be understood in historiographic terms.

In the development of historiography in general, as well as in specific research

¹⁴ Jacobmeyer, as in Footnote 8; Karl Ernst Jeismann, “Politische Determinanten der deutsch-polnischen Schulbuchempfehlungen und ihre Aufnahme in der Öffentlichkeit” [The political determinants of the German-Polish Textbook Recommendations and their discussion in the public sphere]. In: K. E. Jeismann and Siegfried Quandt (eds.), *Geschichtsdarstellung, Determinanten und Prinzipien* [Depictions of history, determinants and principles], Göttingen 1982, pp. 102-122; K. E. Jeismann, “Zur Problematik der Kritik internationaler Schulbuchempfehlungen” [On the problems of criticizing international textbook recommendations]. In: *Geschichte in Wissenschaft und Unterricht* [History in academics and in the classroom] 32, 1981, H. 3, pp. 147-161; *Ibid.*, “Zwanzig Jahre deutsch-polnische Schulbucharbeit. Experiment - Provokation - Modell” [Twenty years German-Polish textbook research. Experiment - provocation - model] In: *Zwanzig Jahre Gemeinsame deutsch-polnische Schulbuchkommission* [Twenty-year anniversary of the German-Polish Textbook Commission], as in Footnote 4, pp. 23-35.

projects on German-Polish relations, the Recommendations indeed heralded a new quality.¹⁵ They were the first attempt at a collaborative compilation and depiction of the entire history of German-Polish relations that went beyond mere national representations. For the first time, the principle of synthesis was used constructively. It no longer aimed at interpreting the problems inherent in these relations for the sake of national history, respectively, but rather as potential for reciprocal constitution. The underlying assumption of this approach was that the national principle as a fundamental factor in European history is unthinkable without acknowledging the basic principle of the interrelatedness of the various national histories. The selectivity of the Commission's strategy, which circled around specific historical problems (or, as previously mentioned, long-contested "neuralgic points"), does not contradict this approach. The text of the Recommendations offers no more than *minima essentialia*, a dialogically developed German-Polish synthesis of history, which is understandable in light of the external circumstances that determined its genesis. Since the previously dominant national frames were insufficient for this task, the bilateral relations themselves had to serve as both object of, and basis for this synthesis. In this respect, challenges to the selection modes employed in the process or to the results reached on specific questions may be justified, but these do not discredit the findings in their entirety. As yet, there exists no methodologically founded refutation of the procedure employed in the conception of the Recommendations.

Thus, the efforts of the *German-Polish Textbook Commission* are recognizable in its members' determination to surmount the era of East-West confrontation, as well as in their many specific achievements. The Recommendations can thus be historically embedded.

However, this does not necessarily mean that the Commission's work had to come to an end with the epochal turn of 1990/91. An optimistic history of relations that positively influences people's consciousness can greatly contribute to the stabilization of friendly and neighborly relations between Germany and Poland in the processes of transformation in the former People's Republic. Today, Germany and Poland have bridged political gaps as never before in their thousand-year history. Poland has been freed from the pressure of the German striving for revisionism, and subsequently also from the long post-history of the tight German-Russian embrace. In Poland, the opening of society, the decline of political steering

¹⁵ For more detail, see Klaus Zernack, "Völkerbeziehungen als Problem der Geschichtswissenschaft. Methodologische Grundfragen der deutsch-polnischen Schulbucharbeit" [Ethnic relations as a historical problem. Methodological questions pertaining to German-Polish textbook research]. In: K. Zernack, *Preußen - Deutschland - Polen. Aufsätze zur Geschichte der deutsch-polnischen Beziehungen* [Prussia - Germany - Poland. On the history of German-Polish relations], Berlin 1991, p. 43-50.

power in the educational sphere, as well as the end of the suppression of schools and teachers have also, however, led to certain irritations. For example, there have been swing-backs of the pendulum in historical consciousness, noticeable in occasional returns to old forms of ethnocentric nationalism, or in the abandonment of history altogether.¹⁶ In Germany, internal unification - the return to the supposed normality of the nation state - is proving to be more difficult than expected. Already, the return of super power pretenses are noticeable here and there despite the fact that with the German-Polish contract of 1990/91, the structural coincidence of *Ostpolitik* with the super-power position, which had enabled Prussia to dominate German-Polish relations for such a long time, has finally come to an end. Nevertheless, we can also observe a marked increase in the interest of young academics, teachers, and journalists in historical, as well as contemporary facets of German-Polish relations. This new trend can be observed in the emergence of magazines such as “Borussia”, published in Allenstein, and “Inter finitimos”, published in Krakow and Osnabrück, or in organizations such as the “Society for Polish-German academic exchange” [*Gesellschaft für polnisch-deutschen akademischen Austausch*] in Krakow, and the “Society for the support of Polish university exchange students in Germany“ [*Gemeinschaft zur Förderung von Studienaufenthalten polnischer Studierender in Deutschland e.V.*] in Freiburg.

With the dawn of the new era in German-Polish relations, an experienced organ of dialogue such as the *German-Polish Textbook Commission*, which can now act free of the constraints formerly imposed by state institutions, will have many problems yet to address.

¹⁶ Zofia Kosłowska demonstrated this impressively in her presentation at the 26th German-Polish historical textbook conference in Bautzen in May 1994.