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German Reunification, Polish Vulnerability

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THE Polish Solidarity movement touched off the wave of events that toppled the Berlin Wall and made uniting the two Germanys possible. But today, the Polish people are increasingly apprehensive about reunification of the country that invaded Poland twice in this century.

The old fears have been exacerbated by new anti-Polish demonstrations, beatings, and burnings in both German countries. As a result, the Solidarity-led government, which previously fought for the reduction of the Polish military budget, now supports its increase. From the halls of parliament to the streets of cities and villages, anxiety is growing. Businessman Walter Chelstowski explains:

"My first reaction to these fantastic pictures from the Berlin Wall was almost tears in my eyes, because that was the visible sign of the end of the system in which I had been living for 40 years. Later came the reality - reunification. And then came the fear."

About 6 million Polish citizens, or one-sixth of the total population, perished during the German occupation of World War II. As a nation, Poland suffered more than any other. The biggest losses were due to mass extermination and deportation. Damage to industry, housing, and communication was nearly incalculable. The memory of those events 50 years ago still guides the thinking of many today.

Sen. Jan Jozef Lipski and journalist Marian Podkowinski were teenagers during the war. After the war, Jan Jozef Lipski became one of Poland's most influential anti-communist spokesmen; Marian Podkowinski, on the other hand, became known as a Communist Party journalist. But the earlier wartime experience overshadows the more recent adversities of communist rule. They remember losses that Poland suffered overall and that they suffered personally at the hands of the Germans.

Jan Jozef Lipski: "The Germans murdered many of my family members and friends. There were public executions of people picked up at random on the street. The Germans sealed their mouths with plaster of paris so the people couldn't cry out. Every Pole has seen such things."

Marian Podkowinski: "When I came from Germany liberated by the American army as a prisoner of war, I was looking for my family. Everybody was dead. My mother was dead ... Warsaw was annihilated. It was a desert with chimneys."

Members of the generations born after the war, while not eyewitnesses to Nazi atrocities, grew up hearing about them. And the memories that haunted their parents and grandparents have shaped their attitudes about a united

Germany. Businessman Walter Cheletowski belongs to the postwar generation:

"All our experiences are based on personal contacts with Germans. So we know that they don't wear uniforms, they don't carry machine guns and they don't shoot... But my grandfather was shot and killed by the Germans. My father was a soldier in the underground army. So I cannot speak about it without emotion."

The principal anxiety that Poles share is over the sanctity of Poland's border. After World War II, Stalin moved Poland's borders west, so that one-third of the current Polish nation now sits on land that once belonged to Germany. Following the war there was no peace treaty signed between Poland and Germany. The Oder and Neisse rivers became the de facto, recognized border between the two countries. Poland now wants assurances that the current borders will remain unchanged. As President Wojciech Jaruzelski has assessed: "The recognition of the Oder-Neisse is a matter of life and death for Poland."

Throughout history, Poland's geography has left it vulnerable to attacks, and Poles are extremely sensitive to that experience. Today there is a lingering fear that Poland would be left to fight alone against Germany in a dispute involving the Oder-Neisse border. Polish foreign minister Krzysztof Skubiszewski has repeatedly petitioned West German Chancellor Helmut Kohl to guarantee the inviolability of the current border, which Kohl has repeatedly failed to do explicitly.

The United States, the Soviet Union, and European countries all oppose a neutral Germany. Neutrality is especially unacceptable for many Poles who believe that a united Germany of 80 million people in the center of Europe cannot be left unchecked. As journalist Marian Podkowinski put it: "With such a prosperous economy, with such an industry and export - how could such a country really be neutral? Imagine 80 million people staying home and playing cards? impossible." The German government already has begun to buy large portions of the Polish debt, and many Poles fear the leverage this will give the German government over the Polish economy.

The Polish government and people alike argue that an unrestrained Germany is dangerous because of its potential to disrupt European integration - the melting of military and economic pacts into a pan-European system. Foreign minister Skubiszewski, a lawyer and expert on German affairs, cautions: "I foresee great dangers resulting from a mighty giant isolated from the rest of Europe... A unified Germany should be incorporated into European structures."

Since the unification of Germany became a real prospect, Poland has attempted to insert itself into talks on reunification between the four allied powers of World War II and the two Germanys. Prime Minister Tadeusz Mazowiecki, one of the initiators of Poland-German dialogue in the 1970s, has demanded a place for Poland at the talks when security matters of Germany's neighbors are discussed. Warsaw's demand to be included in the unification talks had been rebuffed by Bonn until the day the conference opened. The decision to include Poland in discussions that concern Poland's borders with Germany should help alleviate the tension between Germany and Poland that had been mounting. During the conference, Warsaw will insist on a treaty embracing guarantees for Polish borders before German unification is completed.

As a measure of their intense feelings about German reunification, many Poles have expressed a willingness to retain Soviet troops on their soil to guarantee security against any potential German threat. An article by Janusz Reiter published in the Solidarity daily, *Gazeta Wyborcza*, contends that "the presence of Soviet troops in Poland may be our trump card."

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