

Polish-Russian relations articulated by émigré communities in the years 1939-56 have so far not received any academic attention from either Polish or Russian historians. Given how significant the literary output of émigré circles were for the political thought of both countries, it is important to finally address this issue. The starting point for my project is the year 1939. This will allow me to compare the different attempts of cooperation between Poles and the Russian emigration during the Second World War and in exile. The year 1956 will be the last considered in the project. The events of 1956 reinforced a perception of the permanence of the Eastern Block, as well as of a liberalisation of relations within it. This was a prevalent view among some members of the émigré community, and it had a significant impact on personal choices and opinions on both the Russian and Polish side. It was also a symbolic ending to a certain phase in the history of the Soviet Block but also of the emigration.

The project will focus on the analysis of three main sets of issues. First will focus on relations between Poles and Russian emigrants during the Second World War. Particular attention will be on initiatives aimed at undertaking political cooperation. Second will examine the main Polish and Russian émigré centres involved in the Polish-Russian dialogue. Finally, the study will provide detailed analysis of the views of those emigrants who were most active in the field of Polish-Russian relations. Addressing these sets of issues will serve as a basis for answering the main research question regarding the possibilities and limits of the Polish-Russian dialogue as well as a range of supplementary questions focusing, among others, on the reasons why given activists were involved in this dialogue and the impact of major political events on the development of the Polish-Russian relations (such events will certainly include the outbreak of the Second World War or the establishment of the Iron Curtain).

The main goal of the project is to establish around what issues the dialogue between the Polish and Russian emigrant communities was centred, in the years 1945-1956, and with what intensity was this dialogue conducted. The project will have a comparative nature – it will compare views on Polish-Russian relations, as well as other issues which were actively discussed by various important circles of Polish and Russian émigrés in Western Europe and the USA. A further goal will be to answer the question of how Polish-Russian discussions were expressed. Which groups took part in these discussions? Were these social gatherings, international platforms for cooperation, conferences, discussions in the press? How often did Russian journals publish articles written by Polish authors, and vice-versa, how often did Polish journals publish the articles of Russian authors? An important element of the project will be to compare the opinions and political stances of representatives of both emigrant communities. Furthermore, it will be important to check these stances were influenced by the Polish-Russian relations in the Second Polish Republic and in the time of the Second World War. Did views concerning the most problematic issues, such as question of borders or relations with other nations, evolve in comparison to the views held in the pre-war period? What sort of feeling dominated the mutual perception of Poles and Russians? Was it hostility, ignorance, indifference, sympathy? To what extent did the concepts of both emigrant communities come into conflict during their competition for influence on Western politicians and public opinion? What was the image of Central-Eastern Europe which they wanted to implant in the West? Analysis of these issues will be carried out while taking into account important political events which had an impact on the way emigrant communities functioned, and also influenced the activities of foreign secret services conducted in their midst.

In the project I will refer to studies of empires and postcolonial studies. While conducting the analysis of the Polish-Russian relations, one ought to look at them from the perspective of historic experiences and issues accumulated since the partitions of the First Polish Republic. Emigrants from the first wave of Russian emigration, who represented the elite of the Russian empire, radically lost their positions and influence. Some of them stayed on the territory of the reborn Polish state which created entirely new relations between these two nations. Bearing this in mind, the analysis will attempt to present and explain the Polish-Russian post-dependency discourse; after the fall of the Second Polish Republic and, above all, after the establishment of the Iron Curtain.

This project will trace the fascinating rivalry in the sphere of ideas and politics, between these two great émigré communities. It provides rare, comparative approach and proposed innovative use of sources, one that includes materials produced by both sides of the dialogue. In doing so, the analysis gives an opportunity to organize knowledge concerning this, hitherto poorly known, chapter of Polish-Russian relations. As such it will also serve as convenient starting point, giving incentive for future detailed studies of this subject.