

***Emmanuelle Hébert***

University of Louvain  
Paris Nanterre University  
ORCID 0000-0003-2275-5490  
emmanuelle.hebert@coleurope.eu

**1989: A (Non-)Turning Point for the Polish-German  
Schoolbook Commission?<sup>1</sup>**

*After every war  
someone has to clean up.  
Things won't  
straighten themselves up, after all.  
[...]  
Those who knew  
what was going on here  
must make way for  
those who know little.  
And less than little.  
And finally as little as nothing.<sup>2</sup>*

So does the great poetess Wisława Szymborska describe the situation after the war and all the work people have to do in order to start a new life again. She clearly shows

---

<sup>1</sup> This contribution is based on my PhD, defended in April 2018 between the Université catholique de Louvain and the Université Paris Nanterre (*co-tutelle*) and funded by a Research fellow mandate from the FRS-FNRS. The data collection was made possible by several research stays abroad, especially at the Georg Eckert Institute and the Polish Academy of Sciences.

<sup>2</sup> W. Szymborska, “The End and the Beginning”, transl. by J. Trzeciak. The full poem is available in English on the website “Poetry Foundation”: <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/52955/the-end-and-the-beginning> (consulted on 19 June 2020).

the role of different generations, expressed in the last paragraph presented here: from one generation to the other, less information is known and disseminated, and even less to the next one. The role of historians is typically the one to transmit such knowledge and, to some extent, the memory linked to it. Historical commissions and dialogues of historians have been charged of dealing with this work of “cleaning up” and creating “bridges” between former enemies. In particular, they have been created in order to foster *rapprochement*, if not reconciliation. The principle is to create a dialogue about history, and, in a spirit of “reconstructive ethics”<sup>3</sup>, to listen to the other’s viewpoints and therefore to put these visions into perspective in a “[common] effort of plural reading,” to “tell [them] in another way.”<sup>4</sup> That is exactly what the Polish-West-German Textbook Commission<sup>5</sup>, created in 1972, has been trying to do after WWII, such as all the other historical commissions that “have grown like mushrooms after the rain after the end of World War II.”<sup>6</sup> In particular, the 1970’s constituted a period of growth for such commissions. The Polish-German Commission emerged in a favourable context, after several bilateral initiatives. The Polish Episcopate sent in 1965 a famous letter to its German counterpart, commonly summed up as “we forgive and ask for forgiveness”, Willy Brandt started his *Ostpolitik*, which allowed *inter alia* for a re-establishment of Polish-West-German diplomatic relations in 1970, the Evangelic Academy of Berlin organised dialogues on textbooks with the Western Institute in Poznań as from 1969. The task for the Textbook commission was especially complicated, while the two countries still belonged to two different blocs during the Cold War. It however reached its peak in the 1970’s–1980’s, when the commission was one of the only Polish-German, East-West platform for dialogue. Despite the 1989 revolution, the commission still exists today. But how have the 1989 events affected the commission’s work? Have they constituted a turning-point<sup>7</sup> toward a completely new reality? My hypothesis is twofold: 1989 implicated few little changes on the short-run, but brought some deeper ones on the long-run. The structure of this article will follow this reasoning. First, I will present the limited changes on the short-run. Second, I will explain the bigger changes that could emerge after 1989.

### 1989–1990: Mostly Little Changes for the Polish-German Textbook Commission

In 1989, despite the deep geopolitical changes in Europe, the Polish-German Textbook commission continues to work as usual. It applies the same procedures and principles. Some changes start to appear for example in the membership of the commission<sup>8</sup>.

<sup>3</sup> J.-M. Ferry, *L'éthique reconstructive*, Cerf, Paris 1996.

<sup>4</sup> P. Ricoeur, “Quel éthos nouveau pour l’Europe?”, in: P. Kosłowski (ed.), *Imaginer l’Europe. Le marché intérieur européen, tâche culturelle et économique*, Cerf, Paris 1992, p. 111.

<sup>5</sup> The commission will then be simplified as “Polish-German (Textbook) Commission” to facilitate reading.

<sup>6</sup> W. Markiewicz, *Sto lat przeciw głupocie. Rozmowa z przyjaciółmi Pawłem Kozłowskim i Jerzym Ślabickim*, Universitas, Kraków 2016, p. 194.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. S. Laurens, “‘1974’ et la fermeture des frontières. Analyse critique d’une décision érigée en turning-point”, *Politix* 2008, Vol. 82, No. 2, pp. 69–94.

<sup>8</sup> The commission has no membership in itself. However, the presidency is composed of a certain number of actors, nowadays around fourteen from each side. In the article, I will simplify

### “Business as Usual”

While the two countries are experiencing a strong transformation – a democratic transition in Poland and East-Germany, coupled with the German Reunification and the fundamental signature of the Treaty Between the Republic of Poland and the Federal Republic of Germany on the Confirmation of the Existing Border in 1990 –, the commission continues to work according to its plan. After the establishment of the martial law in Poland in 1981, the German side of the commission suspends its work. The conference planned for Spring 1982 is cancelled after a long discussion within the Georg Eckert Institute’s Board. As J. Smyt, the Polish cultural *Attaché* confirmed it, it is not possible to organise the conference on the planned topic (resistance movements) or on another one for Spring 1982 due to the political situation. The geography conference planned in Stuttgart is also cancelled.<sup>9</sup> Karl-Ernst Jeismann, from the Georg Eckert Institute (GEI), informs the German actors of the cancellation in February, and the Polish ones in April only. Władysław Markiewicz, the Polish co-President of the commission, is very surprised and lets his German colleagues know about it.<sup>10</sup> He had shared his optimism for the continuity of the common work in January.<sup>11</sup> The German side tries to reassure him: they want to continue the dialogue and propose, during an enlarged session of the presidency, to assess all the work done in ten years and to think about future geography seminars and the 15<sup>th</sup> conference.<sup>12</sup> During the session, in June 1982, Walter Mertineit explains the motivations of the GEI in the cancellation of the conference.<sup>13</sup> Three reasons pushed for the decision. First, the GEI has no guarantee over a totally free preparation. Second, they doubt on the acceptance of the themes and structure of the conference as initially planned. Third, they face the danger of seeing people cancelling their participation. They want to find new perspectives for a conference. Markiewicz explains that after having dealt with the most difficult issues, they should not cut the dialogue again. During this session, it is decided that the 15<sup>th</sup> conference will still take place in 1982, if the situation in Poland does not worsen. It takes place in November 1982 – together with a session of the presidency – and deals with “National history as a problem for writing history in Poland and in Germany”.<sup>14</sup> This period is the only one when the commission suspends its work.

---

to facilitate the reading and write “member of the commission”, which means “member of the presidency of the commission”.

<sup>9</sup> Dialogue with Prof. Mertineit on the conference of the Polish-German Textbook Commission planned in 1982, K.-E. Jeismann, 26 January 1982 in Brunswick. Archives of the Georg Eckert Institute (later noted as “Archives GEI”) in Brunswick.

<sup>10</sup> Letter from G. Rhode to K.-E. Jeismann and W. Mertineit, 22 April 1982. He writes about a letter from W. Markiewicz dated 5 April 1982. Archives GEI in Brunswick. Letters.

<sup>11</sup> Letter from G. Rhode to K.-E. Jeismann and W. Mertineit, 26 January 1982. Archives GEI in Brunswick. Letters.

<sup>12</sup> Letter from W. Mertineit to W. Markiewicz, 19 April 1982. Archives GEI in Brunswick. Letters.

<sup>13</sup> Protocol of the session of the Presidency of the Polish-German Textbook Commission, 2–5 June 1982 in Brunswick. Archives GEI in Brunswick.

<sup>14</sup> Protocol of the session of the Presidency of the Polish-German Textbook Commission, 18–19 November 1982 in Brunswick. Archives GEI in Brunswick.

In 1989 on the contrary, the commission decides to continue to work with no interruption. Based on 20 years of cooperation, the commission is considered as legitimate on the *rapprochement* between the two countries and is therefore not dissolved. It loses its exclusivity, some of its financial support, and a part of its initial relevance, because of the new possibilities to cooperate with the West, but keeps an authority on the dialogue, stemming especially from its long years of experience. Conferences are still organised, following the roadmap planned before the end of the communist regime in Poland. Nonetheless, two conferences take place one after the other in Germany: the 23<sup>rd</sup> conference, taking place in Eutin from 5 to 10 June 1990 and dealing with “Germany and Poland in the system of European states from the French revolution to the end of WWI” and the 24<sup>th</sup>, taking place in Brunswick from 10 to 14 June 1992, on the occasion of the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the commission and dealing with “Germany and Poland 1939–1949”.<sup>15</sup>

The commission continues therefore to work “as usual” during the transition. It continues furthermore to apply the same procedures and functioning principles.

### ***Same Procedures and Principles***

The procedures and functioning principles remain unchanged during and after the transition. Indeed, one of the only documents of reference remains the agreement signed by Georg Eckert and Władysław Markiewicz on 17 October 1972.<sup>16</sup> The document refers to five main points. The first one concerns the creation of the commission itself, whose role is to pursue the work that had already begun. In this aim, the national UNESCO committees are responsible for the members of their national delegation. The commission meets twice a year, in Poland and Germany. It can create sub-committees or invite experts. It must draft regular reports on the improvements and prepare an agenda for the future. The second point recommends to foster a systematic cooperation with textbook editors. The third one concerns the extension of the access to information. The next one underlines the necessity to support scientific trips for people drafting school textbooks. The last point concerns the expansion to civic education, literature and language textbooks.

The flexibility of the procedures is clearly deliberate within the commission. The rarity of written rules allows for a very adaptable functioning. The commission can therefore adapt to a more or less favourable context and evolve as freely as possible – even the denomination of the commission and of the presidency was not fixed until around 1978.<sup>17</sup> Moreover, the flexibility enables for a margin of manoeuvre from

<sup>15</sup> See the list of conferences presented on the Polish-German Textbook Commission’s website: <http://deutsch-polnische.schulbuchkommission.de/aufgaben/themenkonferenzen.html> (consulted on 1 November 2017).

<sup>16</sup> Porozumienie między Komitetami ds. UNESCO Polskiej Rzeczypospolitej Ludowej i Republiki Federalnej Niemiec w sprawie współdziałaniu na rzecz rewizji treści podręczników szkolnych, signed on 17 October 1972 in Brunswick. The agreement is available in various archives, for example those of the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 32/82 (3).

<sup>17</sup> For more information on this point, see E. Hébert, *Passé(s) recomposé(s). Les commissions d’historiens dans les processus de rapprochement (Pologne-Allemagne, Pologne-Russie)*,

politics: actors cannot be responsible for not respecting a rule that does not exist. This was particularly useful during the Cold War. It finally avoids procedural blockage. This flexibility has remained after 1989 and is still valid today, as Robert Traba puts it: it is a question of “creative continuation” (*kreacyjna kontynuacja*) in order to continue to work. While several attempts were made to propose more formal rules and regulations, the last one dating 2013–2016, all of them were rejected in the name of these principles.

Several customs are however in place to facilitate the work of the commission. The first one refers to the membership of the commission: each national UNESCO committee is responsible for its national delegation and nominates the co-president – at the beginning in accordance with the national authorities. The second one, still in line with the 1972 document, is regularity and alternance in the meetings: the commission meets regularly, once in Poland, once in Germany. Only a very few exceptions to this custom were made: in 1975, two successive meetings – the preparation of the session and the session itself – are organised in Poland.<sup>18</sup> The conference of 1982 is postponed to the autumn of the same year.<sup>19</sup> The conference of 1991 is cancelled due to a lack of time on the German side, and therefore the conferences of 1990 and 1992 are both organised in Germany.<sup>20</sup> In 1994, no meeting of the presidency is organised.<sup>21</sup> This shows that during such troubled times as the transition, some limited infringements to the rules and customs are made, on the short-run, thanks to the flexibility of the commission. Nonetheless, the same rules and procedures remain in place up to this day.

Furthermore, a few fundamental principles guide the commission and continue to do so after the transition. First, expertise is one of the central aspects of the commission. Famous researchers in history and geography join the group. The current Polish co-President insists: “I do not have my friends there [...]. I look for people who can really, according to my intuitions, by the most sensitive understanding of the commission’s mission, bring something of value for the pursuit of its activity”.<sup>22</sup> Second, good will is essential to the functioning of the commission. It is a priority for the members of the commission, but also for political authorities involved in the processes of rapprochement. A third guiding principle is mutual trust: all co-presidents insist on this point. The relational aspect of negotiation is highlighted: they look for mutually acceptable solutions. In the commission, real friendships, especially among co-presidents, have strengthened this trust.<sup>23</sup> It was true between Władysław Markiewicz and Walter

---

Peter Lang, Brussels 2020, pp. 181–183, or T. Strobel, *Transnationale Wissenschafts- und Verhandlungskultur. Die Gemeinsame Deutsch-Polnische Schulbuchkommission 1972–1990*, V&R unipress, Göttingen 2015, pp. 255–256.

<sup>18</sup> “Protokoll. Sitzung zur Vorbereitung der VIII. Deutsch-polnischen Schulbuchkonferenz”, 18 June 1975, Cologne. Archives GEI in Brunswick. Cf. Communiqué of the GEI dated 6 October 1975 about the 8th conference. Archives GEI in Brunswick.

<sup>19</sup> Protocol of the session of the Presidency of the Polish-German Textbook Commission, 18–19 November 1982 in Brunswick. Archives GEI in Brunswick.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. *Supra*.

<sup>21</sup> Protocol of the session of the Presidency of the Polish-German Textbook Commission, 27 May 1994 in Bautzen.

<sup>22</sup> Interview with R. Traba, 4 July 2016, Berlin.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. E. Hébert, *Passé(s) recomposé(s)...*, pp. 172–175.

Mertineit, but also for Włodzimierz Borodziej or Robert Traba and Michael G. Müller for example.<sup>24</sup> The last fundamental principle is the authority of the co-Presidents. No matter where their authority comes from – their political engagement, their personal trajectory or their expertise – each co-president is well-respected by his colleagues.

To sum up, the procedures, customs and principles remain the same before and after 1989. However, some slight changes appear in the membership of the commission.

### *Little Changes Around the Membership of the Commission*

After 1989, the composition of the commission remains very similar: the same members continue to participate in its work. However, some slight – but with a strong significance – changes appear. First, two new members are co-opted on the Polish side: Jerzy Holzer and Henryk Olszewski. Both dissidents, they could not join the commission before 1989.<sup>25</sup> The central role remains however in the hands of historical members such as Marian Wojciechowski, Hans-Henning Hahn, a German member since the 1970's, was not allowed to travel to Poland in the 1980's for political reasons.<sup>26</sup> After 1989, he can come back to the meetings taking place in both countries. Second, Klaus Zernack on the German side proposes to invite an expert from the German Democratic Republic (GDR).<sup>27</sup> It is only in 1992 that the commission invites Johannes Kalisch, who actively participated in the GDR-Polish historical commission.<sup>28</sup> He is nonetheless invited only once. This GDR-Polish commission had indeed remained quite unknown, while its members had not much informed the public about their work<sup>29</sup>.

In parallel to the transition, the interest of the media decreases strongly with the opening of various platforms for dialogue. Before 1989 the media were regularly discussing the commission's work and especially the recommendations that were drafted mainly until 1976. This is not the case after 1989 anymore. The commission used to draft a *communiqué* at the end of each session, in order to inform the public on their work – as well as to prepare a written proof of what was agreed upon. Markiewicz explains that a few journalists were supporting the commission's work and the *rapprochement* process in general.<sup>30</sup> The co-presidents and some members would themselves draft articles for the press. On the contrary, some newspapers and magazines would regularly publish

<sup>24</sup> Fieldwork's notes, 2016–2018.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Z. Kulak, "Notatka służbowa z posiedzenia polskiej części Prezydium Wspólnej Komisji Polska-RFN", 9 November 1990. Archives of the Instytut Zachodni (IZ) in Poznań. Z. Kulak's documents, 47.

<sup>26</sup> Informal discussion with H.-H. Hahn, 8–9 June 2017, Frankfurt (Oder).

<sup>27</sup> Protocol of the session of the Presidency of the Polish-German Textbook Commission, 7 June 1990, Eutin. Archives IZ in Poznań. Z. Kulak's documents.

<sup>28</sup> Protocol of the session of the Presidency of the Polish-German Textbook Commission, 12 June 1992, Brunswick. Archives GEI in Brunswick.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. S. Guth, *Geschichte als Politik. Der deutsch-polnische Historikerdialog im 20. Jahrhundert*, De Gruyter Oldenburg, Berlin 2015.

<sup>30</sup> B. Machalica, "Dwa okresy PRL", *Tygodnik Przegląd*, 14 March 2010; Cf. Gewerkschaft Erziehung und Wissenschaft, "Lehrbücher ohne Haß" and "Vereinbarung zwischen den UNESCO-Kommissionen der Bundesrepublik Deutschland und der Volkrepublik Polen über die

articles strongly against the commission. It was especially the case of *Rzeczywistość* in Poland – also attacking personally Markiewicz – and of the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* in Germany.<sup>31</sup> However, since 1989 the interest of the media and for the media has deeply decreased, with a few noteworthy exceptions, such as the period around the launching of the common history textbook project in 2008, when the co-president Robert Traba lives a “moment of glory”, while being interviewed by the magazine *Nasz Dziennik*, broadcasted on *China TV* or criticised by *Radio Maryja*.<sup>32</sup>

Summing-up, some little changes begin to appear already in 1989-1990, some of them might have a strong impact. One of the biggest transformations coming with the transition is the end of the direct link to politics.

### ***Big News However: End of the Direct Link to Politics***

Before 1989, the commission was strongly linked to politics and to the authorities. This was especially true in Poland, where censorship would limit the freedom of speech. Many members of the commission were also part of the official party – the Polish United Workers’ Party (PUWP). Władysław Markiewicz insists that the belonging to the party was not an important element and that the majority of the members involved were not part of the PUWP.<sup>33</sup> Robert Traba explains however that “it is a Pulcinella secret that the commission [...] was politically [...] controlled, it was not possible to talk about certain things, because there was censorship”.<sup>34</sup> In the pre-1989 reality, it is not conceivable that the Polish co-President would not be a member of the party. Markiewicz even benefited from high-ranking supporters<sup>35</sup> – at least until 1984 when he was “dismissed” from the presidency. His active vice-president Wojciechowski was also a member of the party, the chief editor of the party’s historical magazine *Z pola walki*. Several other important professors were members or sympathisers to the party: Maria Wawrykowa, Antoni Czubiński, Janusz Tazbir.

Polish authorities were also getting informed via their observers. Usually, at least one member from the ministry of education or the ministry of foreign affairs would be present during the commission’s debates. One of them, Marek Rzeszotarski, was even considered as a member *per se* of the commission, quoted as such in the list of former members of the commission on its website.<sup>36</sup> He participates in the presidency’s

---

Zusammenarbeit auf dem Gebiet der Schulbuchrevision”, *Zeitung Erziehung und Wissenschaft* 12/72, p. 6. Archives GEI in Brunswick.

<sup>31</sup> Interview with W. Markiewicz, 8 July 2016, Konstancin-Jeziorna; W. Markiewicz, *Sto lat przeciw głupocie...*, p. 215. See for example H. Hupka, “Deutsch-polnische Geschichtsklitterung”, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 24 June 1985, Archives GEI in Brunswick.

<sup>32</sup> Interview with R. Traba, 4 July 2016 and 11 January 2017, Berlin.

<sup>33</sup> Interview with W. Markiewicz, 8 July 2016, Konstancin-Jeziorna.

<sup>34</sup> Interview with R. Traba, 4 July 2016, Berlin.

<sup>35</sup> For more details, see E. Hébert, *Passé(s) recomposé(s)...*, pp. 287–288 and W. Markiewicz, *Sto lat przeciw głupocie...*, pp. 216, 253–254, 266–267.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. website of the Polish-German Textbook commission, page on former members: <http://deutsch-polnische.schulbuchkommission.de/pl/czlonkowie/byli-czlonkowie.html> (consulted on 23 November 2017).

sessions and even drafts some of its protocols from 1981 to 1990 in Eutin.<sup>37</sup> When the Polish delegation meets with the minister of education, he seats on the side of the commission, not of the ministry.<sup>38</sup> He would however pay for his own travel expenses and accommodation.<sup>39</sup> Already in 1990 in Poznań, he is not part of the Polish delegation anymore.<sup>40</sup> His successor, Peter Unger, participates in a few sessions, but not on a regular basis – in 2000, 2001, 2006, 2007, as a “guest” or a “member”.<sup>41</sup> Włodzimierz Gierłowski, from the ministry of foreign affairs, is systematically present as from 1979. He drafts reports for the ministry.<sup>42</sup> His successor Ryszard Król participates only to one session in 1982.<sup>43</sup> At the same period, Zbigniew Kulak – considered more or less officially as the secretary of the commission – would write memorandums [*notatka służbowa*] for the ministry.<sup>44</sup> Slowly – and radically after 1989 –, the commission takes its autonomy and is freed from ministries’ supervision. The financial support to the commission drops considerably in the 1990’s, in the context of the severe economic transition. Some links might however remain, for example in the funding of specific projects such as the common textbook.

Polish authorities were also regularly spying upon the commission.<sup>45</sup> As a high-level, quasi diplomatic platform, the commission is kept under surveillance. Several people cooperate with security services. Bilateral sessions are especially “observed”. The 1977 conference in Łańcut, dealing with resistance movements, concentrates such surveillance: more than six observers are present: phones are tapped, rooms are secretly checked, letters are controlled, participants are also spied upon before and after official debates. After this peak in surveillance, the observation is concentrated on a few members, including Władysław Markiewicz as from April 1981 and even more after 1984, when the “Olymp Plan” is launched in order to “prevent destructive actions from

<sup>37</sup> Protocol of the session of the Presidency of the Polish-German Textbook Commission, 7 June 1990, Eutin. Archives IZ in Poznań. Z. Kulak’s documents.

<sup>38</sup> Protocol of the meeting with the ministry of education prof. H. Bednarski. Archives IZ in Poznań. Z. Kulak’s documents. The document is not dated, but the meeting takes place between October 1987 and October 1988, when H. Bednarski is minister.

<sup>39</sup> W. Jacobmeyer, “Aktenvermerk für Herrn Prof. Jeismann, Dr. Jacobmeyer und Frau Hillers. Anruf von Prof. Wojciechowski am 6.5.1980”. Archives GEI in Brunswick.

<sup>40</sup> Protocol of the session of the Presidency of the Polish-German Textbook Commission, 9 November 1990, Poznań. Archives GEI in Brunswick.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. Protocols of the sessions of the Presidency of the Polish-German Textbook Commission, 6 June 2001, Hannover; 5 June 2002, Lutherstadt-Wittenberg; 26–27 May 2006, Poznań; 1 June 2007, Berlin. Archives GEI in Brunswick.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. Protocols of the sessions of the Presidency of the Polish-German Textbook Commission. Archives GEI in Brunswick. See the archives of the Polish ministry of foreign affairs, Department IV (Europe) and Department for cultural and scientific cooperation.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. Protocols of the sessions of the Presidency of the Polish-German Textbook Commission, in particular 18 November 1982 in Brunswick. Archives GEI in Brunswick.

<sup>44</sup> Archives IZ in Poznań. Z. Kulak’s documents. For example: “Notatka służbowa” about the meeting on 24 October 1989 in W. Markiewicz’s office.

<sup>45</sup> For more details about the surveillance of the commission, cf. T. Strobel, *Transnationale Wissenschafts- und Verhandlungskultur...*, pp. 205–217.



the target-person”.<sup>46</sup> Such control will continue until 1989. The observation is well-known for most members, it seems it did not prevent them from discussing – especially as German actors were informed by their Polish colleagues.<sup>47</sup> In 1989, the context changes and security services in Poland are reformed and become less present in the public sphere. The period since 1989 is too recent to access to archives, but one can imagine that the Polish-German Textbook Commission – which also lost some of its importance as one of the only East-West platform – is much less spied upon by the authorities.

On the German side, the link to the Social-Democratic Party of Germany (SPD) is quite clear: Georg Eckert and Walter Mertineit are themselves members of the party and benefit from many contacts within it. The Georg Eckert Institute (GEI) is also linked to the SPD from the beginning: its board is composed of representatives of social-democratic *Länder*. The letters exchanged show at least a sympathetic link to the party for other employees of the GEI and members of the commission. Some exceptions are however noteworthy: Wilhelm Wöhlke and Gotthold Rhode, two members deeply engaged in the dialogue, are conservative. Since 1989, this link has severely decreased, if not disappeared. The GEI has lost its link to SPD, members are rather linked by liberal values.<sup>48</sup>

The link to UNESCO, very strong until 1989 is also limited after the transition. According to the protocol of the Presidency session in 2007, Robert Traba’s nomination is confirmed by a letter from the Polish national UNESCO committee.<sup>49</sup> The UNESCO still keeps a formal role of nomination of the co-president, but all the organisational part of the commission lies in the president’s and secretary’s hands.

Summing-up, the link to politics is radically more limited after 1989. The commission is less observed and more independent. This represents the most important change in 1989, while the commission continues to work as usual with some more limited changes *inter alia* in the membership of the commission. On the long-run however, the transformation of the commission is considerable.

## Post-1989: Deep Changes on the Long-run

On the long-run, the commission sees a series of metamorphoses, in the presidency, the actors involved or the methods and topics of interest for further cooperation.

### *Change in the Presidency*

In 1990, Antoni Czubiński, who had replaced Władysław Markiewicz after his “resignation” is removed from his position. Although he accepted the position only if Markiewicz would remain in the commission with a significant role, he was considered

---

<sup>46</sup> Ibidem, p. 215.

<sup>47</sup> Letter from G. Rhode to W. Mertineit, 21 April 1975. Federal Archives of Koblenz, N1445, G. Rhode’s documents. Quoted in: ibidem, p. 217.

<sup>48</sup> Interview with M.G. Müller, 12 January 2017, Halle.

<sup>49</sup> Protocol of the session of the Presidency of the Polish-German Textbook Commission 1 June 2007, Berlin.

as a “concrete socialist” [*betonowy*].<sup>50</sup> The members are happy to get rid of a zealous communist whose actions would sometimes restrain the cooperation.<sup>51</sup> A new co-president is nominated: Janusz Tazbir. First choice of the authorities in 1971, they had finally preferred Markiewicz in 1972. It seems however that the vice-president Marian Wojciechowski would take care of all the organisation.<sup>52</sup>

The replacement of Antoni Czubiński also marks the end of the close cooperation of the commission to the *Instytut Zachodni* in Poznań. The institute had played a special role. The organisation, especially during Czubiński’s time – as Markiewicz left Poznań for the Polish Academy of Sciences – was all prepared by the institute on the Polish side, in cooperation with the ministries. After Czubiński, no more director or employee of the institute actively participates in the commission’s work.

The first huge change after 1989 is therefore the replacement of Antoni Czubiński as co-President – and of Zbigniew Kulak as secretary – on the Polish side. This also means the end of the cooperation with the Western Institute in Poznań. Another important change is the renewal of the commission, with a new generation joining its work.

### *A New Generation of Actors, and New Rules*

On the long-run, one of the transformations is the co-optation of a new generation of actors. In the commission, three generations of actors can be distinguished. The first one, present from the beginning of the cooperation – with the exception of Jerzy Holzer – has lived through one or even two wars. Some are enrolled as soldiers, some get close to the Nazis, while some can be considered as “victims” of the war: prisoners – Władysław Markiewicz and Maria Wawrykowa being former concentration camp prisoners, respectively in Mauthausen-Gusen and Auschwitz, – victims of forced labour – already as children, as Zbigniew Kulak or Antoni Czubiński –, or so-called expellees after WWII, be they Poles – such as Maria Wawrykowa, Józef Barbag – or Germans – as Walter Mertineit, Herbert Ludat and many others. The second generation is born after WWII. Some start to cooperate with the commission already at the end of the 1970’s – as Michael G. Müller, Hans-Henning Hahn or Włodzimierz Borodziej – or later on, around the 2000’s – as Robert Traba, who becomes Polish co-President a year after his co-optation as a member of the commission in 2007. The third generation is born as from 1960 and joins the commission in the 2000’s.

Depending on the generation, the opinion differs on the objectives of the commission, and reconciliation in particular. Markiewicz explains that his deep and strong engagement is a way to “take [his] revenge on those who wanted to destroy [him] in the concentration camp”<sup>53</sup>: “it is directly against Mauthausen-Gusen that I got

<sup>50</sup> Interview with T. Strobel, 18 March 2017, Brunswick.

<sup>51</sup> See descriptions of A. Czubiński as not facilitating the commission’s work in letters. Cf. Letter of Engemann (German ministry of foreign affairs) to E. Hinrichs (GEI), 10 January 1985. Archives GEI.

<sup>52</sup> Interview with R. Maier, 28 March 2017, Brunswick. Cf. J. Tazbir is absent from the sessions of 27 May 1994 and 5–7 June 1995. Archives GEI in Brunswick.

<sup>53</sup> Exposé of W. Markiewicz at the conference “Das Konzentrationslager Mauthausen”, Vienna, 2 December 1995, quoted in: *GEI Informationen*, nr30, 1995. I take it from T. Strobel, *Transnationale Wissenschafts- und Verhandlungskultur...*, p. 196.

engaged in our work. Such things must not be repeated again”.<sup>54</sup> Maria Wawrykowa evokes similar reasons to Thomas Strobel: “so that nobody would never have to suffer from what I have survived to”.<sup>55</sup>

For the first generation, the commission was “obviously, obviously” a matter of reconciliation between the two countries.<sup>56</sup> On the contrary, for the third generation this discourse is less audible. Because of the overuse of the concept, reconciliation has been considered as *kitsch*.<sup>57</sup> Such qualification is also used by several members of the commission, including the German co-President Hans-Jürgen Bömelburg.<sup>58</sup> Hans-Henning Hahn even edited a book on the issue.<sup>59</sup> Beyond such discourse against the kitsch and dramatization of reconciliation, this generation seems less attracted by this challenge. Krzysztof Ruchniewicz asks “Who should (re)concile? Myself I do not have any problem toward the Germans [...] can only reconcile those who wish to (re)concile, that is those who indeed lost members of their families, who have been themselves victims”<sup>60</sup>, while Włodzimierz Borodziej insists: “to reconcile is possible between people and not nations and to reconcile can only people who have suffered damages or who have caused damages themselves, however how their children, or their grandchildren want to reconcile, I do not know myself what is the matter”.<sup>61</sup> Several members add that they “do not know”<sup>62</sup> or “do not believe”<sup>63</sup> in reconciliation. Many prefer the word “cooperation” [*współpraca*] – used 13 times by Thomas Strobel and 18 times by Roman Czaja during my interviews.<sup>64</sup> The word “dialogue” is however the favourite one for most actors: Bartosz Dziewanowski-Stefańczyk and Hans-Jürgen Bömelburg refer to it in the first sentences of the interview.<sup>65</sup> Robert Traba uses the word “reconciliation” only once – on the interest of Chinese and Koreans toward

<sup>54</sup> J. Schmidt, “Auf Giftsuche in Büchern. Deutsche und polnische Historiker sichten den Lehrstoff gemeinsam”, *Kölner Stadtzeiger*, 15/16 April 1972, quoted in: *GEI Informationen*, 1995, nr 30. I also take it from T. Strobel, *Transnationale Wissenschafts- und Verhandlungskultur...*, p. 196.

<sup>55</sup> Interview of T. Strobel with M. Wawrykowa, 27 October 2005. Quoted in: T. Strobel, *Transnationale Wissenschafts- und Verhandlungskultur...*, p. 196.

<sup>56</sup> Interview with W. Markiewicz, 8 July 2016, Konstancin-Jeziorna. This objective is underlined in many contributions of the actors as well as in most political discourses on the commission at that time.

<sup>57</sup> K. Bachmann, “Die Versöhnung muß von Polen ausgehen”, *Die Tageszeitung*, 5 August 1994. The text is available in the book: H.-H. Hahn, H. Hein-Kircher, A. Kochanowska-Nieborak (eds), *Erinnerungskultur und Versöhnungskitsch*, Verlag Herder-Institut, Marburg 2008, pp. 17–20. See also K. Bachmann, “Niemieccy rewanżyści i polski antysemityzm, czyli kicz pojednania. Marnowane szanse dialogu”, *Rzeczpospolita*, 22 November 1994.

<sup>58</sup> Interview with H.-J. Bömelburg, 9 June 2017, Frankfurt (Oder).

<sup>59</sup> H.-H. Hahn, H. Hein-Kircher, A. Kochanowska-Nieborak (eds), *Erinnerungskultur...*

<sup>60</sup> Interview with K. Ruchniewicz, 16 November 2015, Warsaw.

<sup>61</sup> Interview with W. Borodziej, 21 July 2015, Warsaw.

<sup>62</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>63</sup> Interview with W. Kriegseisen, 2 October 2015, Warsaw.

<sup>64</sup> Interview with T. Strobel, 18 March 2017, Brunswick; Interview with R. Czaja, 22 October 2015, Warsaw.

<sup>65</sup> Interview with H.-J. Bömelburg, 9 June 2017, Frankfurt (Oder).

the French-German and Polish-German reconciliation – while he quotes “dialogue” 15 times – and three times in the first interview.<sup>66</sup> Marcin Wiatr, the German scientific secretary since 2017 uses the term “dialogue” under all possibilities: “*dialog*”, “*dialogiczność*”, “*dialogiczny*”, “*dialogizować*”: 39 occurrences of the word appear in the interview, while “reconciliation” [*pojednanie*] does not appear even once in the conversation. Reconciliation is not the priority for the most recent generations of actors.

Deriving from the integration of new members, the language tradition changes as well. Whereas the dialogue used to take place in German only – as a custom, reaffirmed at each meeting by Władysław Markiewicz – in the 2000’s during a short period all the members were bilingual. The debates could then take place in both languages.<sup>67</sup> Later on, with the extension of the membership to colleagues with different specialisations, the commission began to need interpreters for its meetings. This has been the rule for the last decade at least.

Several generations have succeeded one another in the commission. Their vision on the objectives of the commission, especially regarding reconciliation, differ. They have also brought some new rules. The generation active since 1989 has focussed on new themes for its conferences.

### *New Topics for Conferences*

During the 1970’s, the commission drafts recommendations for textbooks in the two countries. Quickly, the actors realise that some topics would need further analysis and discussion. Therefore, in 1974, they organise a conference on the Order of the Teutonic Knights (*Zakon Krzyżacki / Deutscher Orden*) in Toruń. This issue, although dating from the Middle-Ages, is amongst the most difficult ones. While the Germans insist on the judiciary and economical – if not civilizational – role of these knights, the Poles consider them as colonisers. Other difficult issues are discussed already during the first meetings of the commission, such as the expulsions. In the two languages, the word is different: the Germans use the word “*Vertreibung*” (“expulsion”), *wypędzenie*” in Polish, while the Poles say “*wysiedlenie*” (“displacement”), “*Ausschiebung*” in German.<sup>68</sup> The Poles reject the word “*wypędzenie*”, as it is too strong and would mean that Germans were victims of the war. For the Germans, the word is fundamental, in order to describe the reality many of them had to live through. The debates on this issue are so difficult that no protocol is written and the commission almost collapses.<sup>69</sup> W. Markiewicz finds a solution after a long night of intense discussion: the events will

<sup>66</sup> Interviews with R. Traba, 11 January 2017 and 4 July 2016, Berlin.

<sup>67</sup> Interview with M. G. Müller, 12 January 2017, Halle; Interview with W. Borodziej, 21 July 2015, Warsaw.

<sup>68</sup> Interview with W. Markiewicz, 8 July 2016, Konstancin-Jeziorna.

<sup>69</sup> W. Borodziej, “The German-Polish Textbook Dialogue”, in: A. Horvat, G. Hielscher, (eds), *Sharing the Burden of the Past: Legacies of War in Europe, America, and Asia*, The Asia Foundation, Japan Office, Tokyo 2003, p. 40; Interviews of T. Strobel with J. Tazbir, 28 November 2007 and W. Markiewicz, 25 October 2005. Quoted in: T. Strobel, *Transnationale Wissenschafts- und Verhandlungskultur...*, p. 280.

be called “forced transfers” (“*przymusowe przesiedlenia*”, “*Zwangsaussiedlung*”).<sup>70</sup> The commission does not come back to this topic until 2005.<sup>71</sup> While huge polemics mark the Polish-German relationship at that time, no controversy appears in the commission.<sup>72</sup> The third fundamental disagreement concerns Silesia. Several conferences touch upon this region: the 12<sup>th</sup> conference organised in Olsztyn in June 1979 concerns the role of Silesia and Pomerania in the history of Polish-German relations; the 14<sup>th</sup> conference, organised in Zamość in June 1981 is entitled “Silesia and Pomerania in the Polish-German relations from the 16<sup>th</sup> to the 18<sup>th</sup> centuries”.

Thematical conferences on difficult issues continue until after the end of communism. Some elements could not be discussed beforehand, linked to the USSR or the history of Jews.<sup>73</sup> This chapter is closed at the 1994 conference on the long after-war period. The changes in the focus of conferences start at that time. That is when the commission decides to organise a conference every second year only.<sup>74</sup> The topics begin to be more open, consensual. They follow the development of the historiography, especially linked to the *culture turn*. Some misunderstanding can emerge, according to Włodzimierz Borodziej, from the fact that the “different trends are adopted faster in Germany”, but they do not bring “any controversy”.<sup>75</sup> As from 1994, conferences focus on “themes of the future: Europe, environment, interculturality, regions, landscapes, communication, the Reformation”.<sup>76</sup> Geographers organise for example a conference on the *Euroregions*.<sup>77</sup> The commission tries to organise conferences on innovative topics. These attempts sometimes launch new research projects, but are not always a success. The Lutherstadt Wittenberg conference, organised in June 2002 around *lieux de mémoire* seems to fit in this category: nobody was interested in this topic in Poland at that time, according to Michael G. Müller.<sup>78</sup> Since then, this research field has exploded.<sup>79</sup> Following conferences concern for example “cultural landscapes” (Ciężań, 2014) or “communication spaces” (Halle, 2016).

In parallel to new topics for the conferences, the commission starts to focus (again) on didactics.

<sup>70</sup> Interview of T. Strobel with W. Markiewicz, 25 October 2005. Quoted in: *ibidem*, p. 278.

<sup>71</sup> 31st conference of the Polish-German Textbook Commission, Szczecin, 30 May – 1 June 2005.

<sup>72</sup> Interview with R. Maier, 28 March 2017, Brunswick.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>74</sup> Protocol of the session of the Presidency of the Polish-German Textbook Commission, 27 May 1994 in Bautzen. Archives GEI in Brunswick.

<sup>75</sup> Interview with W. Borodziej, 21 July 2015, Warsaw.

<sup>76</sup> Interview with R. Maier, 28 March 2017, Brunswick.

<sup>77</sup> Interview with T. Strykiewicz, 30 September 2015, Warsaw.

<sup>78</sup> Interview with M. G. Müller, 12 January 2017, Halle.

<sup>79</sup> Cf. R. Traba, H.-H. Hahn (eds with M. Górny and K. Kończal), *Polsko-niemieckie miejsca pamięci*, tom 4: *Refleksje metodologiczne*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe Scholar Warszawa 2013; R. Traba, H.-H. Hahn (eds with M. Górny and K. Kończal), *Deutsch-polnische Erinnerungsorte*, 4 vol., Ferdinand Schöningh, Paderborn 2012–2015. On this project, cf. T. Serrier, “Allemagne-Pologne: partager les mémoires. L’entreprise des *Lieux de mémoire* germano-polonais (2012–2015)”, *L’Allemagne d’aujourd’hui*, No. 228, April–June 2019, pp. 93–106.

### *New Focus on Didactics*

Since the 1990's, the commission returns to its pedagogical objectives. It works on the publication of sources prepared for teachers, with comments and didactical advice. These books, welcomed by academia, remain rather unknown, judged later on as unsuitable for the targeted public: many sources were for example presented in Latin.<sup>80</sup> The last volume, the longest one, is published in 2001 and concerns the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>81</sup> It is “a bigger success”: more than 20,000 books are sold and they can reach more schools.<sup>82</sup> At the same time, the conferences focus again, at least partially, on didactics. The meeting in Zamość in 2018 concerns even only “didactics of the Second World War in Germany and Poland”. As from 2007–2008, it is not a question of adding didactical material anymore, but the commission starts a project of drafting a common history textbook itself. The last volume of the series is published in September 2020.<sup>83</sup>

### **Conclusion**

To conclude, let me recall my research question and my hypothesis: how have the 1989 events affected the commission's work? Have they constituted a turning-point toward a completely new reality? My hypothesis was twofold: 1989 implicated few little changes on the short-run, but brought some deeper ones on the long-run. At the end of the reasoning, I can confirm my hypothesis – and nuance it: few changes appeared on the short-run within the commission and most of these changes were limited. The procedures and customs remain the same, the commission continues to work as usual. Most of the deep changes appeared progressively. They are visible on the long-run: a new generation of actors joins the commission; the commission focuses on innovative topics and comes back to its pedagogical objectives, even starting to draft a common history textbook. However, some fundamental changes appear already in 1989–1990: former dissidents Jerzy Holzer and Henryk Olszewski could join the commission and – even more importantly – the direct link to politics and the observation from secret services stopped, while financial support dropped.

<sup>80</sup> Interview with R. Maier, 28 March 2017, Brunswick. See for example M. G. Müller, B. Schönemann, M. Wawrykowa, *Die “Polen-Debatte” in der Frankfurter Paulskirche. Darstellung, Lernziele, Materialien*, Verlag Moritz Diesterweg, Frankfurt 1995 [Studien zur Internationalen Schulbuchforschung. Schriftenreihe des Georg-Eckert-Instituts, Band 82/BII].

<sup>81</sup> U.A.J. Becher, W. Borodziej, K. Ruchniewicz (eds), *Polska i Niemcy w XX wieku. Wskazówki i materiały do nauczania historii*, Wydawnictwo Poznańskie, Poznań 2001; U.A.J. Becher, W. Borodziej, R. Maier (eds), *Deutschland und Polen im zwanzigsten Jahrhundert. Analysen-Quellen- didaktische Hinweise*, Verlag Hahnsche Buchhandlung, Hannover 2001 [Studien zur Internationalen Schulbuchforschung. Schriftenreihe des Georg-Eckert-Instituts, Band 82/C].

<sup>82</sup> Interview with R. Maier, 28 March 2017, Brunswick.

<sup>83</sup> For more information on this project, see E. Hébert, “La commission polono-allemande d'historiens, version XXIe siècle: problématiques anciennes, défis nouveaux”, *L'Allemagne d'aujourd'hui*, No. 228, April–June 2019 – special issue “Allemagne-Pologne au XXIe siècle: une normalisation inachevée?”, ed. by T. Serrier and P.F. Weber, 2019, pp. 70–81; E. Hébert, *Passé(s) recomposé(s)...*, pp. 425–481.

The commission has changed its perspective in the 21<sup>st</sup> century: it is not a question of discussing various viewpoints anymore, but to draft a unique, common narrative through the textbook project, which has focused all of its attention since 2007. The debates become less Polish-German oriented and tend to appeal to Europe: the textbook is even entitled “Europe, our history”.

In this perspective, one can say that 1989 was not a “turning-point”, but rather a kind of “velvet revolution”, a change in the long-run. The question now is whether the commission will be able to adapt to new situations again, as it did to changes in governments, the regime changes in 1989–1990 or even the martial law. After the end of the common textbook project, how will the commission keep busy? Some would even ask whether the commission will still have any sense.<sup>84</sup> I would suggest that with the historical policy dominating the political agenda, in addition to a strong politicisation of the past in Poland, the relevance of the commission can only be confirmed. It might be difficult for the commission to continue to work in this context, but its role as a platform for dialogue will be even more important in the coming years.

## Abstract

### *1989: A (Non-)Turning Point for the Polish-German Schoolbook Commission?*

Historical commissions and the dialogues of historians have been created in order to foster rapprochement, if not reconciliation. The principle is to create a dialogue about history, and, in the spirit of ‘reconstructive ethics’ (Ferry), to listen to other viewpoints and take them into account. This is exactly what the Polish-German Textbook Commission, created in 1972, has been trying to do for post-World War II history. Such bilateral commissions developed well in the 1970s. The task for the Textbook Commission was particularly complicated as the two countries belonged to two different blocs during the Cold War. Most active and well-known in the 1970s and 1980s, the commission was almost the only Polish-German platform for dialogue between the East and the West. Despite the 1989 revolution, it continues to exist today. But how have the events of 1989 affected the commission’s work? Have they been a turning point towards a completely new reality? My hypothesis is twofold: 1989 brought about several little short-term and some deep long-term changes. The structure of this article follows this reasoning. Firstly, I describe the limited short-term changes. Secondly, I explain the long-term changes that occurred after 1989. This article is based on data collected for my doctoral dissertation from interviews, archives, participant observations, discourses and the media.

**Keywords:** historical commissions, Polish-German Textbook Commission, reconciliation, history, memory, 1989.

---

<sup>84</sup> Cf. K. Ruchniewicz, “Why We Still Need Textbook Commissions? Wozu noch Schulbuchkommissionen? Czy komisje podręcznikowe są jeszcze potrzebne?”, *Public History Weekly* 2015, Vol. 12, No. 3, 16 April 2015.