



## **Attitudes towards Russian ambitions and the Russian-Georgian conflict**

### **Research report of the Institute of Public Affairs**

Russia and Germany have always been the neighbours raising most concerns among Poles. The Russian-Georgian war and the headway made in the building of the Northern Gas Pipeline – the Russian-German initiative overlooking Poland – are likely to have contributed towards changes in the way these two countries are perceived among Poles. For these reasons it is important to learn what fears and threats the Polish public opinion associates with the neighbours as well as how it evaluates the Caucasian conflict. The attitudes towards the installation of elements of the defence missile system in Poland have changed in the past months. They have been influenced by the progress in the negotiations with the USA as well as the outbreak of the Georgian conflict.

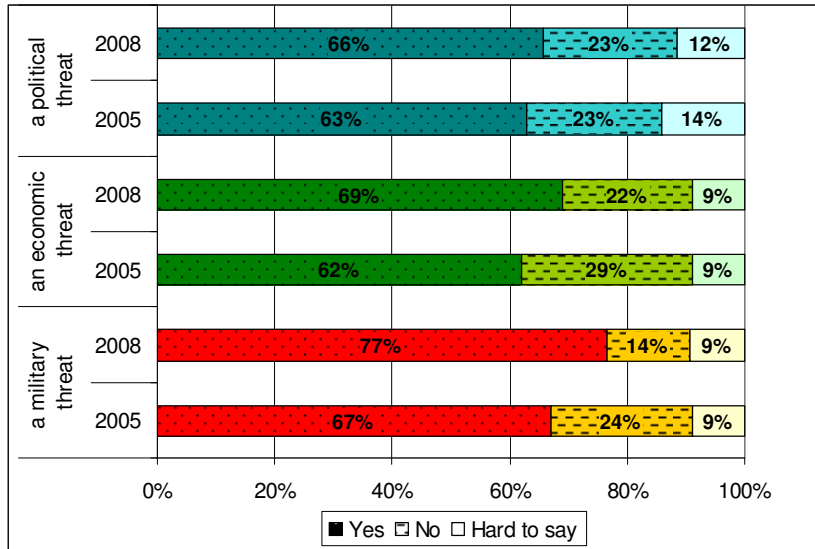
### **Fears of Russian and German political, economical and military threats**

The instability in the Caucasus region and the Russian-Georgian war have influenced the perception of Russia and its intentions towards neighbours. The headway made in the building of the Northern Gas Pipeline has also had its impact on the way that the Russian economic and political threats are evaluated. Fears of the Russian monopoly of oil and gas supply cause the fear of political and economic threats from Russia to be much greater than those anticipated from Poland's Western neighbour.

The popularity of the conviction that Germany constitutes a threat to Poland has been falling for the past few years. In the case of Russia, however, this attitude is rising. Most Poles think that Russia constitutes a political, economic and military threat to Poland. These fears have risen in the past three years. In 2005 the military threat was feared the most – such a response was indicated by 67% of those polled. Today these fears prevail as well. Since 2005 they have risen by 10 percentage points – reaching 77%.

An increase can be observed in the economic sphere as well. In 2005 it was mentioned by 62% of respondents. Nowadays this number has risen to 67%. Fears in the political sphere have risen as well, even if very little – from 63% to 66%.

**Are you concerned that in the future Russia could constitute for Poland...:**

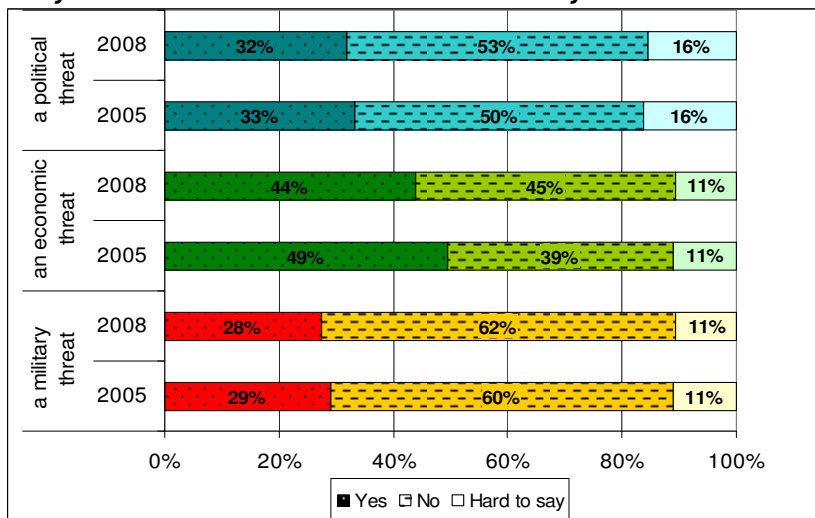


Source: Institute of Public Affairs 2008

The attitudes towards Germany are visibly different. The fears of German threats have alleviated in each of the studied fields. Much like in 2005, Poles above all indicate the economic threat posed by Germany. These fears, however, have decreased in the past years. In a 2005 study carried out soon after Poland’s accession to the European Union, when many feared the expansion of the German capital and the competition from the German market, the threat posed by Germany in the economic sphere was indicated by 49% of respondents. In 2008, when the above-mentioned premises proved to be unfounded, the number has fallen to 44%.

In other two spheres – the military and the political – the concerns are at a low and stable level. The military threat is feared by 27% and the political threat by 32%, whilst in 2005 these responses were indicated by 29% and 33% of respondents respectively.

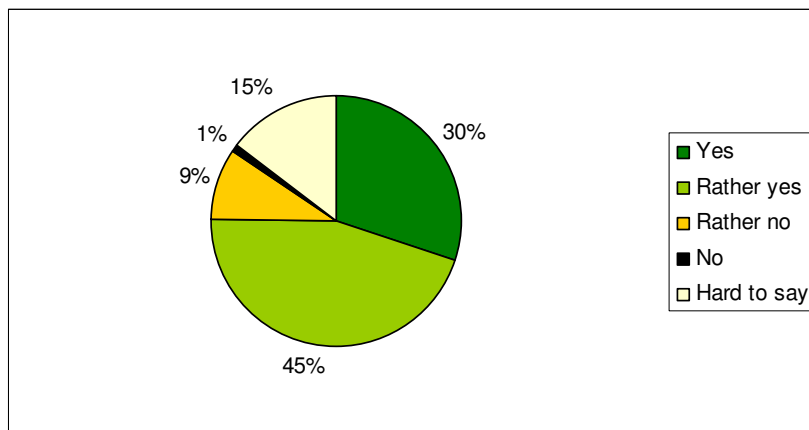
**Are you concerned that in the future Germany could constitute for Poland...:**



Source: Institute of Public Affairs 2008

The Georgian conflict caused the fears of Russia's imperial ambitions in its former sphere of influence to rise significantly. Currently, according to IPA's poll, 75% of Polish respondents suspect Russia to have such ambitions. A significant increase can be observed in the Polish public opinion when compared with the results from the previous years. In January 2004, according to a CBOS poll, such a response was indicated by 48% of those polled, while in December 2005 this number has risen to 60%<sup>1</sup>. Currently only 10% of those polled are of the contrary opinion – an increase from 26% in 2004 and 21% in 2005.

***Will Russia attempt to restore its influence in the Eastern European states in the near future?***



Source: Institute of Public Affairs 2008

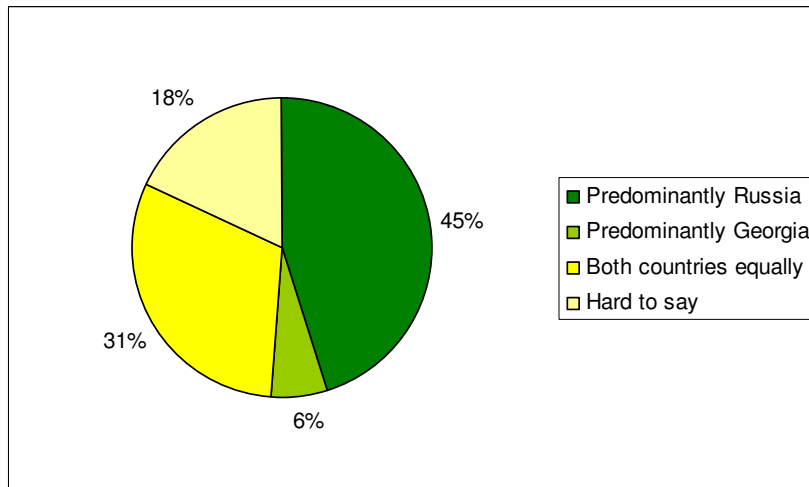
	VI '94	V '95	I '04	XII '05	VIII / IX '08
Yes	53	72	48	60	75
No	26	14	26	21	10
Hard to say	21	14	26	19	15

Source: Results 1993-2005 – CBOS, 2008 – Institute of Public Affairs

The imperial intentions perceived in Russian policy towards Eastern Europe are the reason why it is to Moscow that Poles attribute the responsibility for the Georgian conflict. Such a response is indicated by 45% of those polled. 31% of respondents claim that both countries bear the responsibility for the current situation. Georgia on its own is indicated by only 6%. The opinion of the respondents, besides the general negative perception of the Russian policy in our part of Europe, could have been also influenced by many commentaries of the Polish politicians, who place the blame for the outbreak of the conflict only on Russia.

<sup>1</sup> CBOS. Public opinion on the Polish-German relations. Research report. Warsaw, December 2005. The question posed then was: *Will Russia attempt to restore its influence in our part of Europe in the near future?*

***Which country bears the most responsibility for the outbreak of the war in Georgia?***



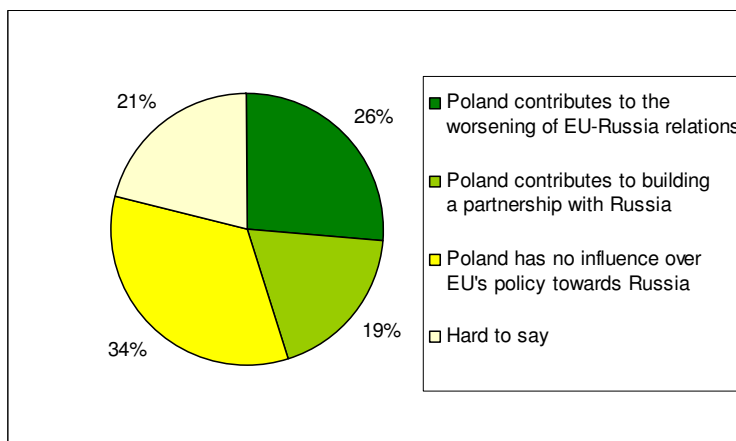
Source: Institute of Public Affairs 2008

**The role of Poland in the relations between EU and Russia**

The promotion of EU's Eastern dimension is considered a goal of Polish foreign policy and a field in which the country is increasingly active. The Eastern Partnership project and the actions of the government and president Lech Kaczyński are aimed at focusing the Community's attention on the need to develop new relations with Russia and other EU neighbours. There are many Western voices, however, claiming that Poland contributes to the worsening of the relations between Brussels and Moscow. Others claim that Warsaw's opinion helps the Western countries to better understand the situation and to evaluate Russia's behaviour.

Among the Polish respondents 34% - the largest group – claim that Poland does not have any influence over the relations between the European Union and Russia. 26% of those polled claim that Warsaw is contributing to the worsening of the relations between Moscow and Brussels, whilst 19% see the positive Polish contribution towards the building of an EU-Russia partnership. 21% of respondents are unable to assess the Polish role in these relations. As can be observed, the public opinion is divided on this matter.

***What role is played by Poland in the EU-Russia relations?***

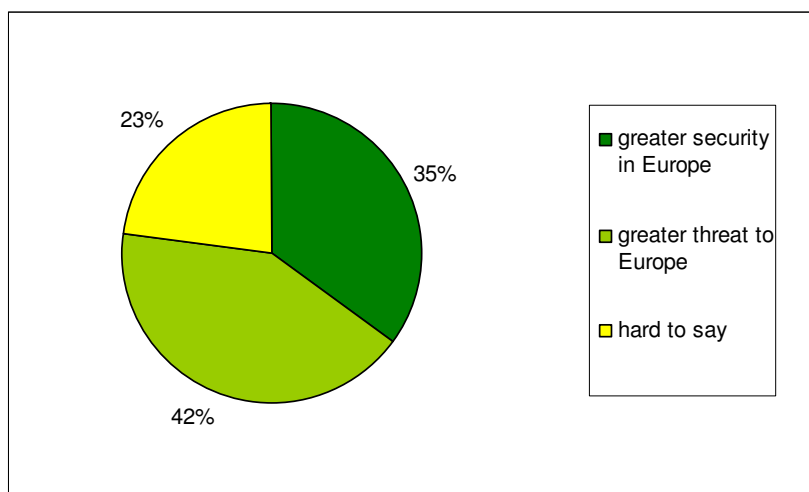


Source: Institute of Public Affairs 2008

### **Attitudes towards the installation of the defence missile system in Poland**

In the past months the opinion on building elements of the missile defence system in Poland has developed from the rather reluctant to a more positive one. This was influenced by the Georgian conflict and the negotiations concerning the conditions of the planned agreement. Even in spite of the fears of the threat posed by Russia and a negative assessment of its ambitions in Eastern Europe, the largest group of the respondents – 42% - is of the opinion that the agreement with the USA will result in a greater threats to Europe. 35% of those polled claim that it will contribute towards strengthening the security of the continent. 23% of those polled have no opinion on the matter. Poles generally fear wars and conflicts and they perceive the installation of the missile defence system within such context.

#### ***The Polish-American agreement on the defence missile system will result in...:***



Source: Institute of Public Affairs 2008

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*The Institute of Public Affairs' research poll was carried out in the field by CBOS on a representative group of 1069 adult Poles between 29<sup>th</sup> August and 1<sup>st</sup> September 2008.*

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