With Poland assuming the European Union (EU) presidency, it has become important to attempt a quick review of the evolving relations between the two countries. Till the 1980s, the Indo-Polish relations in fact, displayed a degree of stability which ended in the post Cold War years. Cooperative exchanges in trade, culture and education took place between the two countries. One common stabilizing factor was of course the huge influence that the USSR exercised on both countries. After political changes in Poland between the 1980s and early 1990s, most of the existing agreements with India either expired or got cancelled. What are the prospects of at least, reviving a part of that relationship? How do people in Poland currently see India and what are their expectations from this emerging power? This article tries to provide brief answers to such questions.

The current area of Poland is 312,685 sq. km, population a little more than 38 million, GDP (nominal) 468.539 billion USD. On the other hand, the present area of India is 3,287,263 sq. km, population more than 1.2 billion, and GDP (nominal) $1.538 trillion USD. The distance from Warsaw (capital of Poland), to New Delhi is approximately 8500 km. So there are big differences and big distance between Poland and India but it doesn’t mean that the bilateral ties between these two countries cannot be taken to the pre-1990 level again. Since Poland joined the European Union (EU) in 2004, more and more investors from India are becoming interested in investing in Poland. Poland provides a good locality for Indian companies and investors. It is sometimes even cheaper than the West European countries. More importantly, the Polish economy is strong in those sectors which are crucial for India, such as: IT, hi-tech, BPO, steel and mining industry. Indicating a strong desire to improve ties a delegation from the Ministry of Economy of Poland visited India in 2008. The leader of the delegation, Adam Szejnfeld met with businessmen from India and talked about the possibilities of signing trade agreements between Poland and India. During his visit, Adam Szejnfeld also participated in the opening ceremony held at Kolkata, to create a new office for the honorary consul of Poland. The Indian President Pratibha Patil also visited Poland in April 2009. Mrs. Patil spent 4 days in Poland and then went to Spain. Poland and Spain were the only two countries that
Mrs. Patil visited during her journey to Europe. During her visit two agreements were signed (about cooperation in tourism and trade) between the two countries. An important part of the visit was setting up of the Polish-Indian Economic Forum. Mrs. Pratibha Patil said that she hoped businessmen who came with her will find a lot of new opportunities to invest in Poland. Mrs. Patil also talked about the possibilities of greater cooperation in the sphere of education.

In September 2010, the Prime Minister of Poland, Donald Tusk also visited India for 3 days. He was in fact, supposed to go to India earlier in May but the death of the Polish President and his delegation in a tragic plane crash in April 2010 delayed his visit. During his stay in India, Mr Tusk first went to Bangalore and he took part in Polish-Indian Invest Forum. The delegation included businessmen from Poland, who together with Mr. Tusk were encouraging Indian businessmen to invest in Poland. The Indian daily ‘The Hindu’ commented that India and Poland were getting closer. During the visit an agreement on Cultural Cooperation (2010 – 2013) was also signed. Mr. Vishnu Prakash (spokesmen of Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India) commented that Poland is recognized as one of important doors to enter into the EU market and the Commonwealth of Independent States. Mr Tusk said that Poland desires to be that kind of door for India and he also said that when Poland will have presidency in EU there will be EU-India Summit and he will do his best to end negotiations over the process of Free Trade Agreement between EU and India by the end of 2011. Poland assumed presidency in EU on 1st July 2011 and there is still a hope that FTA will be signed but due to latest economic recession in Europe, probably we will need to wait a little bit longer. If the EU-India FTA does get signed, the trade between the EU and India should rise in next few years to 100 m USD per year. The FTA was also one of the main issues which were discussed during the visit of the Polish Minister of Foreign Affairs Radoslaw Sikorski to India in July 2011. Mr. Sikorski met India’s Minister of External Affairs Mr. S.M. Krishna and the Minister of Trade Mr. Anand Sharma. The Polish minister once again confirmed his country’s support for India’s desired entry into the UN Security Council as permanent member. During the meeting with India’s Foreign Minister S.M. Krishna, Mr Krishna also declared his support for the Centre for Contemporary India Research and Studies at the Warsaw University.

While talking about Indo-Polish contemporary relations, it is important to mention about two chambers of commerce which support Polish-Indian trade relations, and were founded after 2000. Main goals of the Polish Indian Chamber of Commerce (PICC) which is based in Poznan are to: develop business co-operation, strengthen and intensify the economic relations, to emerge as a bilateral cultural exchange platform. Second chamber, based in Warsaw, is the Indo Polish Chamber of Commerce and Industry (IPPCI). The main goals of this organization are: to develop Indian and Polish industry, to become a catalyst in bringing about the growth and development of Indian and Polish industry, work towards the globalization of Indian industry and integration into the world economy. Thanks to the efforts of these two organizations, there are already many Polish companies operating in India and Indian companies in Poland. Prominent Polish companies currently operating in India include: ZZM Kopex Group (mining industry), BELLA INDIA (cosmetics), Inglot (cosmetics), OBRAM
(production line for paneer), Can-Pack (can business), Bumar Group (military equipment), Cenzin (military equipment), Geofizyka Toruń (oil, gas industry). Recently, the Polish Minister of Defence Bogdan Klich and the then Ambassador of India to Poland Deepak Vohra signed an agreement on military cooperation. One of the results of this agreement will involve the biggest deal for Polish arm industry for more than 300 m USD involving the sale of the Polish armoured vehicle "Rosomak" to India.

The top Indian companies which currently invest in Poland include: ArcelorMittal (own 70% of Polish steel industry), Tata: Tata Worldwide Beverages, Tata Motors, Infosys, Irevna, Arista Tubes, Videocon, Intelenet Global, WIPRO, HCL Technologies, TCS, EssarGlobal Ltd, Reliance Industries Ltd, Raheja Corporation, UFLEX and Rishabh Instruments.

One of the top priorities in improving cultural and educational exchanges should involve greater interactions between the educational institutions in both countries. What can be surprising for some of those who will read this article is that in Poland there are many scholars who are interested in ancient India, culture and religion. The most important departments of Indology are in Warsaw (founded in 1932), Krakow and Poznan. These departments offer courses in Hindi, Sanskrit, Urdu, Tamil, Bengali and Malayalam. But there is still scope to develop academic exchange programmes particularly related to contemporary India. One of the most important organizations which is spreading knowledge about contemporary India in Poland is the Centre for Contemporary India Research and Studies, which belong to the Institute of International Relations, University of Warsaw. From October 2012 the Institute would offer a new MA course on Contemporary India Politics and Business.

In last part of my article in order to indicate the current level of awareness about in India in contemporary Poland, I would like to show what kind of information about India are given in the three most popular Polish web sites (June 2011), where people look for information. The most popular was www.onet.pl, which had 1920 topics which included the word India. The most common news from 100 matches: India’s international relations:12, cooperation with Poland:7, Indian economy:7, relations with US:7, relations with EU:4, military business:4, space industry:3, indie-rock:3. Then second most popular website is www.wp.pl, which had 1000 matches: rapes:15, family kills daughter:5, sexual harassment:5, attacks of wild animals:3. And the last one www.gazeta.pl, 2023 matches: bus, train, plane accident:6, culture and religion:5, relations with Pakistan:4, bad situation of women and children:3, India and global warming:3, Indian economy:2, relations with EU:2, indie-rock:7. It is very easy to see that different web sites present very different images of India, varying from realistic to sensational. It is to be hoped with greater interaction at all levels, the Polish people will stop looking at India through media generated ‘stereotypes’ and will be able to see real India – a country which still have a lot of problems but is also developing very fast.

Useful links:

1) Centre for Contemporary India Research and Studies, http://ccirs.ism.uw.edu.pl/,
2) Institute of International Relations University of Warsaw: http://www.en.ism.uw.edu.pl/.

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