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# THERE IS NO POLITICS WITHOUT SACRIFICE.

## JERZY GIEDROYC'S POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

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The paper seeks to provide an overview and assessment of the political thought espoused by Jerzy Giedroyc and the "Kultura" monthly under his editorship, with a particular focus on his Eastern policy. The point of departure is Giedroyc's roots in Piłsudski's school of thought; while guided by considerations of the state and independence, he rejected both political dogmatism and the need to adhere to previously adopted notions. For Giedroyc, "Kultura" was not merely a journal but mostly a political tool and an intellectual hub capable of sparking debate, advancing new ideas, and preparing Poles for the reclamation of independence. One of the most important tasks of his milieu was to "translate Polish politics into the language of the post-Second World War era," that is, to adapt it to the new geopolitical reality and to overcome historical grievances that hindered the normalization of relations with neighbors. In this context, of particular note was the ULB+R concept (Ukraine, Lithuania, Belarus, and Russia), which envisaged the recognition of the independence of Ukraine, Lithuania, and Belarus, and the normalization of relations with Russia. The paper attempts to explain the role of the politics of sacrifice and concession in Giedroyc's thought, viewed not only through the lens of territorial disputes (Lwów/Lviv and Wilno/Vilnius), but also as an element of a broader political strategy and a pragmatic assessment of national interests.

Jerzy Giedroyc (1906–2000) ranks among those figures of Polish political, intellectual, and cultural life who, in their lifetimes, became both vital points of reference and creators of the public debate, defining its course on fundamental, often controversial matters, and initiating the most significant disputes. Born in Mińsk Litewski, he descended from an old Lithuanian princely family, some of whose members had become Polonized during the period of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. He attended schools in Moscow, among other places, and lived in Russia when the Tsarist regime collapsed and the Bolsheviks swept to power. To the very end of his days, he kept saying that he was obviously a Pole but that he "would feel well in Russia, Lithuania, or Belarus, where I was actually born; actually, in a broader sense, my homeland is Eastern Europe". During the Second Polish Republic, he found himself in the intellectual orbit of Józef Piłsudski. While he never left the broadly understood Piłsudski camp, he was guided first and foremost by the state imperative, and as such transcended rigid ideological divisions, never shrinking from revising his own views. Before 1939, he worked as a state official while also helming "Bunt Młodych" and "Polityka" – two influential journals with political ambitions. After the Second World War, Giedroyc established the most important center of Polish émigré political thought. The Literary Institute, which he founded in 1946, and the "Kultura" monthly, which he began publishing in 1947 under a title coined by Gustaw Herling-Grudziński, became a space for independent reflection and a tool for influencing Polish politics both in Poland and abroad.

## GIEDROYC'S POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

Much ink has been spilled on attempts at analyzing and describing the political thought of Jerzy Giedroyc and his "Kultura", and thus new books, articles, and contributions on the subject may almost seem like a waste of paper. However, nothing could be further from the truth, and for several reasons. Firstly, I use the word "attempts" deliberately: not a single person has thus far succeeded in fully capturing Giedroyc's political philosophy, even though numerous scholars and journalists have undertaken this task. Contrary to what is often claimed today, the Editor did not possess any concrete, let alone written, political "doctrine". He staunchly believed what he expressed in 1989: "Politics is not a marriage; you have to adapt to circumstances. The only criterion is what, in a given situation, can advance the Polish or Eastern European cause". When discussing the Editor's Eastern policy, we still tend to lapse into dogmatism and the belief that there are no alternatives, thereby completely contradicting the philosophy espoused in "Kultura". In other words, we perceive Giedroyc's policy as an idea reasoned out from A to Z, a doctrine brought to its intellectual conclusion and not subject to criticism – it must either be accepted or rejected in its entirety. Secondly, the challenge lies in looking beneath the surface of Giedroyc's tactical moves, including the seemingly obvious ones. Thirdly and finally, hundreds of files containing Giedroyc's letters have yet to be examined, awaiting researchers in the archives. I know from experience that sometimes the Editor's single letter – or even a single sentence – can shed new light on an issue that seemed to have already been thoroughly explored. I am convinced, therefore, that every new perspective on Giedroyc's political philosophy and the legacy of "Kultura" constitutes a valuable contribution to, and continuation of, the much-needed discussion about Giedroyc, "Kultura", and political thought on Poland. This discussion is all the more vital today, because when it comes to Giedroyc's Eastern policy, his image – not only that perpetuated in journalism – tends to be larger than life. He is portrayed as an almost infallible strategist of Eastern policy, the architect of the ULB concept, and a mentor of successive generations of Polish politicians.

Giedroyc first became interested in politics as a secondary school student in Warsaw, after the Polish president Gabriel Narutowicz was murdered in December 1922. Four years later, in May 1926, Józef Piłsudski carried out his coup d'état, which had the following effect on the Editor: "completely cured me of parliamentarism, solidified my pro-Piłsudski leanings, and reinforced my conviction regarding the necessity of authoritarian rule". In subsequent years, Giedroyc believed that "a return to the pre-May type of parliamentarism" would be a "disaster for Poland", and thus he was ready to accept a lot of "unpleasant things" – as he himself called them – in order to avoid it.

Beginning in the mid-1920s, if Giedroyc had any fixed point of reference in his political thought, it was not any given system, but Józef Piłsudski – or, to be exact, his diagnoses, sayings and maxims, which he would collect, verify, and trace to their sources to his dying day. "The Marshal's aphorisms are my guiding principles," declared Giedroyc. He most frequently cited the one about marble – that when it is unavailable, "monuments are molded out of shit". It means that a politician cannot wait for perfect collaborators, perfect circumstances, and perfect allies, but has to "sound out every possibility" here and now, "cling to reality", and work with whatever he has at hand. His second favorite maxim was that independence does not come easily and at little cost, as Poles commonly believe; on the contrary, it has to be won with sacrifice and blood.

What was deeply Piłsudski-like about Giedroyc's political thought was his rejection of dogmas in tactics coupled with his insistence on imponderables in strategy. This was the so-called "line" of "Kultura", which remained largely unchanged throughout the journal's run of over 50 years and was, as the Editor firmly believed, correct. What did it mean in practice? As Giedroyc explained: "The main issues for us have always been, firstly, Poland's independence – a matter of primary importance – and, secondly, the normalization of relations with our neighbors". He repeated that political views were not gospel and "there is nothing worse than the imposition of some rigid ideology or concept. Discussion, exchange of opinions, is the only way to shape political thought". As early as 1950, he claimed that the notions of right and left required redefinition in the Polish context, and that "Kultura" was not an ideological camp, but both a journal providing direction for independent thinking and a political center. Giedroyc was even more precise in his letter to Norbert Żaba from 1972: "With all my anti-Soviet sentiment, I seek to steer the journal closer to the left side, or the radical side, if you please, for it facilitates contact with the country, especially as my own personal evolution has also proceeded in that direction". Echoing Mieroszewski, he believed that liberalism was not "a political view, but a culture of understanding political views", and therefore an attitude. Over time, he concluded that in the Polish context, the division between right and left was largely obscure, and that he situated himself closer to the center.

**"KULTURA" AS A POLITICAL CENTER**

As the editor-in-chief of "Kultura", Giedroyc refused to serve as a "make-up man who merely prints the sent-in material". "I strive to be as liberal as possible," he would add, "but the role of the NCO's wife who was said to have flogged herself doesn't really sit well with me". He published works by various authors, but only when he saw a political interest in doing so and the texts aligned with the editorial line of "Kultura" and were "tactically relevant". Even when he published something he disagreed with, it was to create an opportunity to present his own stance or to use the piece as an illustration of what he considered to be an erroneous view. "I want to run your article together with our response, hoping that we will thoroughly debunk your harmful opinions," wrote Giedroyc to Adam

Bromke. He made no secret of his "totalistic methods" of editorial management. He wrote as early as 1946: "I'm a fascist, as Jerzy Wraga says, and I like to call the shots". Years later, he remarked that when it came to his work, "democracy is not my greatest passion". Looking back on the history of "Kultura", he said: "every editorial office is a kind of dictatorship, and I do not believe in collaborative editorship". The Editor referred to Gustaw Herling-Grudziński, who coined the title "Kultura" and remained a very important figure for the journal for years, as a "consultant".

In an interview with Mirosław Supruniuk, Giedroyc emphasized that for him, "Kultura" was always a political tool rather than an end in itself, as "Wiadomości" was for Mieczysław Grydzewski. In 1949, two years after the release of the first issue of "Kultura", Giedroyc wrote: "When it comes to political work, there is more and more of it to be done in exile, if only because no one is doing it and there is virtually no political center to speak of. What we have would be amusing had it not been so deeply tragic. Such a center simply must be established, and this is my present idée fixe". As a matter of fact, "Kultura" served as such a center from its very inception, even as Giedroyc grew increasingly critical of the internal dynamics within the Polish émigré community, epitomized for him by "Polish London". As early as 1944, he wrote to Żaba that he refused to abandon political work merely because no existing party appealed to him, nor did he intend to form a new one. He rejected the view that "only parties can do politics" and did not mean to reduce himself to the role of a "pitiful clerk". Therefore, the Literary Institute, the "Kultura" Library, "Zeszyty Historyczne", and the journal itself became vehicles for the political ambitions of one man – not the editorial board of "Kultura" or its wider circle of supporters. "Kultura," Giedroyc said, "expresses nothing more than my own views and dreams". There was no exaggeration in that statement. As Giedroyc wrote to Aleksander Hertz: "While my associates ensure the smooth running of the administrative side (which is very difficult), I am utterly alone in my editorial, publishing, and political work". Andrzej Bobkowski quipped that if you were to ask how many people make up the team of "Kultura", the answer would be: Giedroyc in three persons. Indeed, Giedroyc was "Kultura", but "Kultura" was not only Giedroyc. That is to say, when Czesław Miłosz, Witold Gombrowicz, Jerzy Stempowski or Leszek Kołakowski wrote for "Kultura", Giedroyc used their work to advance his "line". Outside of "Kultura", however, they held different views, which were often at odds with his own. It is therefore incorrect to refer to Juliusz Mieroszewski as porte-parole of "Kultura" as a whole. He was the voice of Giedroyc, but not that of Miłosz, Gombrowicz, Stempowski or Kołakowski.

In 1949, Giedroyc wrote to Melchior Wańkowicz that the "trial period" of "Kultura" had come to an end and that he would proceed to edit a journal "formulating constructive positions on a number of important issues that others omit out of cowardice". His ambition, which, according to his own words, he had no intention of hiding, was to "midwife various attempts and endeavors". Giedroyc further explained to Leszek Kołakowski that "Kultura" did not aim to "preach a new gospel", but to "prompt people to think politically and to clarify the meaning behind the platitudes they use". He added a sentence that, in a sense, could be taken as the credo of "Kultura": "It is high time to translate Polish politics into the language of the post-Second World War era". In practice, this amounted to a painful lesson – if we may use a word that Giedroyc himself tended to avoid – in realism, arising from the collapse of the reborn Polish state and global changes after 1945.

According to Giedroyc, Poles had to understand that another world war was unlikely, and that the 19th-century era of national self-determination and sovereignty was gone for good. They had to accept that neither Germany nor Russia could be eliminated from Europe and that Polish relations with these powers required normalization. They also had to come to terms with the fact that their eastern neighbors were Lithuanians, Belarusians, and Ukrainians – nations that would one day achieve the statehood to which they had a right, while a return to the Riga border was a pipe dream; consequently, Lviv and Vilnius had to be sacrificed on the altar of relations with Lithuanians and Ukrainians. Giedroyc insisted that there could be "no great, long-term policy without sacrifice". Poland could still play a tremendous role, but it had to realize its huge potential and make use of its position "in the crosswinds" between East and West. Far from being any kind of "bulwark", it could serve as an intermediary, preparing simultaneously for the fall of communism and the restoration of its independence. Giedroyc held up as a model the pre-1918 Polish elites, who were by no means taken by surprise by the rebirth of the Polish state. He argued: "We are poor, but we are not pariahs. We have a history and a historical consciousness; we have a robust culture and art, and a sense of community. This is important. We have our own repository. Culture is more enduring than poverty or wealth". Accordingly, Giedroyc never intended to issue "Kultura" "for the uplifting of hearts". He called himself "a disciple of Żeromski" and believed that wounds had to be reopened "lest they be covered by a film of baseness" – and that instead of merely exposing the dark sides, one had to offer proposals on what was to be done and how to improve the situation.

**ULB – UKRAINE, LITHUANIA, BELARUS**

Alongside his faith in independence, the main foundation of Giedroyc's political thought was his Eastern policy – particularly the concept most frequently referred to by the acronym ULB, meaning Ukraine, Lithuania, and Belarus. The acronym became so famous that it almost obscured the underlying concept. It is therefore worth recalling that Giedroyc himself attributed the doctrine to Mieroszewski, although it was forged through their extensive correspondence. It differed "fundamentally" from Piłsudski's concept, as it envisioned the independence of Ukraine, Lithuania, and Belarus, without making it contingent on any federative or other ties to Poland. Giedroyc admitted that "Piłsudski's federative politics undoubtedly fertilized my thinking", but at the same time explained: "My concepts differ from Piłsudski's in that I do not advocate for any federations. To my mind, the independence of Eastern European nations is entirely sufficient".

Giedroyc equated federative conceptions with the Jagiellonian idea, which for him – following the war with Soviet Russia and the Treaty of Riga – was "done and buried, a fact that few realized at the time". He himself could not be counted among those few. As he wrote to Jerzy Stempowski, he adhered to the Jagiellonian idea "until the final prewar years". Looking back on the Treaty of Riga, he viewed it not merely as Piłsudski's failure, but as Poland's failure; for him, the reborn Polish state's "mortal sin" was that instead of harnessing the potential of national minorities, it sought to stifle them through administrative repression and attempts at assimilation. Had Poland chosen to grant autonomy to Eastern Lesser Poland and pursue the policy of a "Ukrainian Piedmont", such a move "would have been very disagreeable and dangerous for the Soviets". Giedroyc blamed the failure on the young, aggressive nationalisms of neighboring peoples and on the hostility of Poles – including some of Piłsudski's followers – towards federative and autonomous ideas, coupled with the short-sightedness of the ruling elite and the political immaturity of the intelligentsia. In the early 1980s, he said in an interview with Marek Zieliński that despite these experiences, Poland still had a huge role to play in the

East, albeit a different one from that in the Jagiellonian concept, which was "completely unrealistic today due to the nationalisms of Poland's eastern neighbors".

Reshaping relations with Ukrainians and Lithuanians – normalizing them and future cooperation once Poland and her neighbors regained independence – required sacrifices. In a letter to Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn from 1974, Giedroyc wrote: "Great goals cannot be attained without a readiness to make the necessary sacrifices. Demanding sacrifices from others is the easiest way out. I would like to assure you that in our fight, we make many sacrifices – and heavy ones at that. As you know, Lviv and Vilnius carry 600 years of Polish history and culture. We have long believed, however, that the normalization of relations with both Ukrainians (and there was a sea of blood between us) and Lithuanians requires us to come to terms with the loss of these territories". Two years later, in a letter to Vladimir Maksimov, Giedroyc added that "way before" his correspondent and Solzhenitsyn went into exile, "Kultura" had declared that Poles "must make heavy sacrifices" and that this declaration was "equally, if not more, difficult to make than a Russian patriot's stance on the Ukrainian problem". Let us emphasize what escapes almost everyone today: Giedroyc considered the renunciation of Vilnius and Lviv a sacrifice – a very heavy one – and hoped that Lithuanians and Ukrainians would appreciate the gesture.

**RUSSIA IN THE EASTERN POLICY OF "KULTURA"**

It tends to be overlooked today that besides ULB, the concept developed by Giedroyc and Mieroszewski also contained the letter "R" for Russia, which was just as important as the other three. This was not merely because, without Russia, ULB found itself in a geopolitical vacuum. Giedroyc wrote: "Our goals are to fight Soviet totalitarianism and imperialism, to facilitate the normalization of relations between Russians and Poles – on which, as we believe, hinges the future of Central and Eastern Europe – and to offer aid and support to the liberation struggles of the peoples within the USSR". He deliberately drew a distinction between Russia and Russians on the one hand, and the Soviet Union on the other hand: "Sovietism is not Russia". A serious approach to good-neighborly relations with Russians, and – following the collapse of the Soviet Union – the state of Russia, required "an objective and dispassionate analysis of the history of these relations", not only with regard to ties between Russia and Poland, but also between the empire and all its constituent nations. For this reason, Giedroyc attached great importance to dialogue with Russian dissidents, seeing them as partners in the cause of independence for the nations composing the empire. From his perspective, the principal achievement of "Kultura" in Eastern policy was to obtain declarations from prominent Russian dissidents in the 1970s that recognized the principle of independence for Ukraine and other non-Russian Soviet republics.

Giedroyc's gambit for the future of – and Poland's place within – Eastern Europe was well worth the effort. "For this reason," as he explained to Kołakowski, "I suffer the terrible Solzhenitsyn and Maksimov, and kiss up to Ukrainians and Lithuanians". For the same reason, in a declaration on the independence of Ukraine which was then published in "Kultura", Giedroyc agreed to include a reference to the wrongs inflicted on Ukrainians by "Polish imperialism", for which he was justly criticized by the émigré community, including Józef Łobodowski.

Giedroyc's Eastern policy, as he himself freely acknowledged, was driven by cold calculation. He claimed not to have "any special feelings for Ukraine or Ukrainians", and wrote as early as 1951: "We cannot close our eyes to the fact that the Belarusian and

Ukrainian nations also have the right to sovereignty within a future Europe, and it is in our vital interest to support them, so as not to face a Russian monolith on our borders". Ukraine – and here he drew on Piłsudski's thought – was to become a buffer state "separating us from future Russia". Before that could come to pass, any independence movements within the Soviet camp – labor-oriented in Poland, national in the Soviet republics, and dissident in the USSR itself – were expected to hasten the collapse of Communism and the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Giedroyc always maintained great faith in that ultimate downfall.

As early as 1950, Giedroyc wrote to Włodzimierz Bączkowski that he took comfort in the thought that nothing lasts forever and that one day Communism would "snap". After the transformative years of 1989–1991, in a new geopolitical reality, Giedroyc was convinced that "independent Ukraine is essential for our independence", and thus Poland should do everything it could to draw Kyiv closer to itself and, subsequently, the West, while simultaneously pulling it away from Russia. For the Editor, "strengthening cooperation with Ukraine" was more important than joining NATO. He did not forget about the importance of Lithuania and other Baltic states, but their situation was different from that of Ukraine and Belarus, especially since Minsk quickly returned to the Russian sphere of influence. As for Belarusians, Giedroyc envisioned Białystok as their Piedmont, striving to establish a Chair of Belarusian Culture and History at the local university, while the Białystok Voivodeship was to serve as a "showcase" to the East, just as Soviet Belarus had been a window to Poland in the 1920s.

**CONTEMPORARY CHALLENGES**

In free Poland, Giedroyc often complained that "we don't have an Eastern policy, and – worse still – we make egregious mistakes in this regard due to ignorance coupled with arrogance". He bemoaned that no one in Poland seemed interested in Russia, that the grasp of the Russian language was in decline, and that there was "a series of uncoordinated moves without a guiding thought", while Ukrainians were still treated "contemptuously, as something inferior". While newly independent Poland had been an interesting partner for Russia, over time it became quantité négligeable. "Poland has no Eastern policy," Giedroyc snapped, "there are only clichés and platitudes". He saw no one who could continue his work.

"I am by no means an uncritical Ukrainophile," declared Giedroyc, at the same time emphasizing two important issues. First, as a "state-forming nation", and therefore a historical one, Poles bear a greater responsibility for mutual relations than Ukrainians and should make greater concessions to a nation with a still fragile national consciousness and a young state. Second, Poland remains hostage to geopolitics: "Russia poses a mortal threat to us, and it is in our best interests to support the independence of Ukraine and Belarus". Any threat to Ukraine's independence directly imperils our own, while a Russian-Ukrainian conflict could prove to be "a real disaster for us and the whole of Europe". Such a policy requires sacrifices, as in the case of Lviv and Vilnius. "I am deeply convinced," said Giedroyc, "that in the long term, such a policy is correct". Amidst these considerations, Poland and its future remained at the center of his attention.

**GIEDROYC'S LEGACY**

Despite his growing bitterness and pessimism regarding the situation in Poland, he believed – as he confessed to Aleksander Gella in the 1970s – that "Poland is a grand thing. If only the Poles would realize it". For this very reason, as he repeated throughout

his life, for him there was no politics without sacrifice. Giedroyc's success was due to perseverance, patience, and years of work towards changing the way Poles think about the state, politics, and Poland's place in Europe. Giedroyc left behind neither a comprehensive political treatise nor a self-contained ideological system. His political philosophy was forged through editorial work, the selection of published books and authors, active participation in debates, as well as an incessant dialogue with the émigré community, the homeland, and Western public opinion. The balance sheet of his achievements remains positive not because all of his demands were fulfilled, but because he managed to create an autonomous political center – a milieu capable of independent thinking and intellectual freedom. Perhaps this constitutes the most important legacy of "Kultura": not ready answers, but a lasting conviction that politics requires constant reflection, intellectual courage, and a readiness to critically reevaluate one's own views. In this sense, the work conducted in Maisons-Laffitte did not end with the Editor's death, but remains one of the most enduring points of reference for Polish political thought in the 20th and 21st centuries.

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