

MICHAŁ NOWOSIELSKI
Poznań

ABOUT THE STRATEGY OF PROMOTING POLAND

Acting on the invitation to join the discussion about Polish foreign policy, which will take place on the pages of “Przeгляд Zachodni” (Western Review), I would like to take up a topic which is relatively not very popular, at least in academic discourse. Promoting a country is for many academics either an issue of little importance or even of a slightly unserious nature. At the same time however, its role is becoming more and more valued in today’s globalised world. Beyond doubt, this is related to the increasing density of relations between politics and the economy. The state is no longer perceived as a political institution only but also as an economic entity. Thanks to the opening of financial markets a large flow of capital among countries has been observed. The key element of the strategy aimed at attracting foreign capital is then the capacity to create an image of the country which is amiable towards foreign investment. The situation is similar in the exchange of goods where countries/producers which have a good reliable brand draw substantial economic benefits. Furthermore, tourism which has become a very important branch of the economy relies on the positive image of the place where one can enjoy spending time. It seems therefore that the more frequent task of creating foreign policy is to consciously create the image of the country. This of course does not imply a crisis within traditional diplomacy (although it is as well undergoing continuous changes), nevertheless it should be emphasized that promotion is gaining importance in foreign policy.

When talking about promoting a country most often several not always interchangeable terms are used. The first most general term is undoubtedly ‘promoting a country’ which occurs more frequently in journalistic discussions than in academic literature. Broadly speaking it encompasses a range of activities aimed at informing the general public about the country and its characteristics, objectives and the opportunities it can offer. Another term frequently used is *nation branding* which means creating images of countries or nations as brands. The broadest term is ‘marketing’ which in the context I explore in this paper appears in sub-disciplines such as ‘region marketing’, ‘place marketing’, or finally as most interesting here ‘nation marketing’ comprising the processes of planning and implementing the concept of the state and its nation as well as promoting them in international markets.

From the perspective of *nation branding* Poland is a country with a poor image. This is caused on the one hand, by our location on the semi-peripheries of Europe

and on the other hand, by the lack of clearly recognizable brands of products and symbols which are straightforwardly present in the consciousness of other societies. The attempts to make Poland a strong contender in the international arena (at least on the regional scale) have not as yet brought the expected positive effects. There is a lack of recognizably made-in-Poland products which could contribute to the building of a positive and clear image. Similarly, what the Polish tourism industry offers although interesting still remains little known.

All the image related problems are reflected in the results of the Anholt-GfK Roper Nation Brands Index¹ described as a typical consumer survey with ca. 20 thousand respondents from 20 countries. The respondents are asked to evaluate each country in five categories: consumer goods exports, governance, culture, people, tourism, attracting foreign capital in terms of investment and human capital.

Individual data add up for the overall grade on the basis of which a country is being ranked. In 2008 in the general ranking Poland was ranked at 30.

		Export of consumer goods	Governance	Culture	People	Tourism	Immigration and foreign investment
1	Germany	3	4	4	7	10	5
2	France	5	10	1	11	2	6
3	Great Britain	4	9	3	6	4	2
4	Canada	6	2	12	1	7	1
5	Japan	1	17	8	8	8	10
6	Italy	9	18	2	3	1	9
7	The United States of America	2	22	5	13	6	2
8	Switzerland	7	1	18	5	8	4
9	Australia	10	5	11	2	5	7
10	Sweden	8	3	13	4	14	8
11	Spain	12	16	6	8	3	12
12	The Netherlands	11	7	14	12	18	11
13	Norway	13	6	23	14	20	14
13	Austria	16	13	15	18	15	15
15	Denmark	14	7	24	16	23	13
16	Scotland	22	14	16	15	12	17
17	New Zealand	20	12	25	10	16	15
18	Finland	15	11	27	18	27	18
19	Ireland	24	20	22	17	19	20
20	Belgium	19	15	26	21	28	19
21	Brazil	27	26	10	20	13	23
22	Russia	17	43	7	31	22	25

¹ For more information see the webpage <http://www.gfkamerica.com>.

23	Iceland	28	19	38	22	32	21
24	Singapore	23	23	40	25	30	22
24	Argentina	31	28	17	23	26	28
26	Mexico	35	33	21	24	17	31
27	India	26	41	20	26	24	34
28	Hungary	32	21	32	27	33	24
28	China	21	48	9	41	21	33
30	Poland	29	23	30	28	36	26
31	Czech Republic	30	25	29	29	35	27
31	Egypt	39	36	18	32	10	43
33	South Korea	18	31	33	39	43	41
34	Thailand	36	39	37	29	25	39
35	Taiwan	25	31	43	33	41	32
36	Turkey	38	37	28	37	31	36

Source: The Anholt-GfK Roper Nation Brands IndexSM 2008 Report, http://www.presence.ch/d/800/pdf/800b_Switzerland_2008_NBI_Report.pdf.

In each of the listed categories we occupy a similar position. This seems to demonstrate quite well the specificity of Poland's image (as well as of similar countries in the region) as lacking a distinctive feature or an area in which we would be markedly recognizable. Such an assumption implies the need to point out areas which could provide grounds for promotion practices and which would allow to sustain positive associations with Poland in the social consciousness.

This idea however, requires a well-considered and deliberate promotional practice. Yet, observing the activities promoting 'Poland's brand', one can have an impression that these activities are not a result of implementing a coherent strategy. Quite on the contrary, it seems that they take place *ad hoc*. Undoubtedly, one of the reasons for this situation lies in the lack of coordination of individual activities. This stems from the fact that various institutions are involved in promoting Poland. Primarily the task of promoting Poland is in the hands of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs which includes the Department of Public and Cultural Diplomacy (formerly the Promotion Department). This Department "implements activities aiming at creating a positive image of Poland with the use of public diplomacy tools. It also exercises management over the internet websites of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs"². Until quite recently the basic promotional tools used by the Promotion Department were study visits by journalists and foreign experts in Poland. Additionally, the Department together with the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage has participated in organizing events highlighting Polish cultural heritage, including, for example conferences, competitions, exhibitions, or larger events such as, for instance 'A Polish-German Year', 'Polish Days' in selected countries, or 'The Year of Joseph Conrad'.

² Ministry of Foreign Affairs, <http://www.ms.gov.pl/>

Recently the Promotion Department has been engaged in projects undertaking the use of anniversaries of great importance for Poland for promotional purposes, for example the 25th anniversary of establishing 'Solidarity' or the 60th anniversary of the ending of WWII. Another event worth mentioning here, and co-financed by the Ministry, is the exhibition combined with a series of events 'We Berliners!' concerning the participation of Polish people in the life of Berlin's past and present.

Besides, the Ministry has been promoting Poland on the Internet, primarily using the Poland website³. There are also some publications which are being prepared including: brochures (general, e.g., "Poland in brief", and thematic, e.g., "German Nazi camps in occupied Poland during WW II"), as well as books, journals ("The Polish Voice", "Polish Culture"), calendars and others.

Polish Institutes serve as the Ministry's tool to promote Poland abroad. Their "main objective is to disseminate Polish culture, the knowledge of history and national heritage across the world, as well as to promote cooperation in the area of culture, education and social life. In many places Polish Institutes also fulfill the role of departments of Polish Embassies for culture and education"⁴. At present there are 22 Polish Institutes in various countries of the world.

The change of the name of the Department responsible for promoting Poland and some initiatives taken by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs suggest that there are plans to change promotional practice to enhance the so-called public diplomacy which includes shaping public opinion in individual countries. One of its interesting features is using well known people who have won recognition and high esteem to build the image of the country. It is too early as yet to evaluate the efficiency of this change.

The responsibility for promoting Poland, however, is also shared by other ministries within the scope of their competencies. The two whose role needs to be emphasized are the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage and the Ministry of Economy. Apart from that there are certain institutions which have been established to improve the image of Poland in very narrowly defined target groups. At least two such institutions can be mentioned here: the Polish Information and Foreign Investment Agency S.A. (in Polish abbreviated as PAIiIZ) and the Polish Tourist Organization (in Polish in brief POT). The main objective of the former (PAIiIZ) is the "growth of the flow of 'Foreign Direct Investment' (FDI) as a result of encouraging international corporate businesses to invest in Poland. The Agency provides assistance for foreign investors throughout all the necessary administrative and legal procedures which occur in the process of implementing an investment project. Another mission of the PAIiIZ is creating a positive image of Poland in the world as well as promoting Polish produce and services"⁵. On the other hand, the Polish Tourist Organization (POT) has as its aim:

³ Poland, www.poland.gov.pl.

⁴ Ibidem.

⁵ PAIiIZ, <http://www.paiz.gov.pl>.

- 1) "Promoting Poland as an attractive country for tourism,
- 2) Ensuring the operation of and improvement of the Polish system of tourist information in Poland and abroad,
- 3) Initiating, providing assessment and support for plans concerning the development and modernization of the tourist infrastructure"⁶.

The dispersion of the institutions responsible for promoting Poland is the reason for the lack of cohesive operation. It can create an impression of chaos but it also, if not above all, makes all the independently organized promotional campaigns less effective than if they were organized as an element of one cohesive promotional strategy. The lack of coordination makes the expenses on singular promotion activities higher and their results less effective. In a way we have got used to the fact that now and again public opinion is informed about CNN or BBC broadcasts of advertisements promoting Poland, either as a tourist destination or as an attractive place for investment. This kind of activity, however does not bring positive and long-lasting effects.

Nation marketing requires a long-term strategy which will first of all determine the objectives of the promotion, secondly it should define its recipients, thirdly the means which should be used, and fourthly the tools and indices of assessing its effectiveness. The Council for Promoting Poland has been in operation since 2004 as an opinion-making advisory body of the Polish Council of Ministers whose main aim is to draft the "Frame Strategy for Promoting Poland until 2015". According to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs the complete document will be submitted to the Council of Ministers most likely in the second half of 2009.

Although some information about the strategy has leaked to the press⁷ the Ministry has asked not to reveal its content. It is possible however to voice a few general remarks. What causes the most concern is the assumed time scale. Having assumed that the implementation of the strategy starts in 2010, it means that it has been calculated for only 5 years. However, a truly long-term strategy should be projected for the following 20-30 years. Its long-term nature requires a rather slogan-based and general (that is indeed frame-like) definition of its guidelines determining its most important objectives and directions, which then can become the basis for drafting more detailed strategies.

The second issue is the question of the starting point, that is a diagnosis of the present image of Poland. Building a strategy of promoting Poland one cannot rely only on the generally available results of the Simon Anholt survey mentioned earlier on as they are too general. It is necessary to conduct research aimed at describing the starting condition of Poland's image and carry out further surveys showing whether or not and what kind of changes have occurred as a result of planned activities.

⁶ Legal Act from 25 June 1999 about the Polish Tourist Organization, *Dziennik Ustaw* (Journal of Laws) from 23 July 1999.

⁷ Cf. P. Kula, A. Panuszko, *Sikorski wypromuje Polskę* [*Sikorski will promote Poland*], "Polska – The Times" 28.04.2009.

The research should comprise of opinion polls, attitudes of social leaders and the presence of Poland in political discourse. It is equally necessary to define who (which countries and which people) is the target of our promotional practice. Without a detailed definition of the target group it is impossible to talk about a strategy of action. Each target group is of a different nature and therefore it requires a different approach. We have to decide which communities, or otherwise which sections of these communities are especially important for us. It is possible to enumerate at least a few categories of target groups such as our neighbouring countries, countries of the region important from the point of view of our interests, more distant countries but with significant political and economic potential, etc. Each of these groups requires a different kind of message.

The third important issue is a lack of a clear vision of what we want to promote. What is needed here is the so-called key concept or idea which will become a guiding force of the entire strategy and its activities. This idea, on the one hand should stem from the research results and on the other hand, it should be a result of a reflective contribution from communication specialists. The lack of the central idea makes us again 'dangle' between various conceptions; once we want to come across as a strong country with a well-developed infrastructure and education, another time we want to be seen as an ideal place for ecotourism. We want our image to be modern and at the same time we emphasize our historical role⁸. The multitude of ideas can make our message incoherent and thus less effective.

There is another potentially significant gap in the strategy of Poland's promotion, namely lack of appreciation of an important factor which has an impact on the image of every country and which resides in the attitudes of its citizens. The way Polish people perceive Poland and its capabilities as well as the way they talk about it can have a very strong impact on the way Poland is perceived abroad. If we do not turn our attention to the so-called internal *nation branding*, and if we do not start to shape positive attitudes of Poles towards our country and its institutions many promotional activities that we undertake may not bring expected results.

The above four general reservations show the basic weaknesses of the strategy. They primarily are the effect of making the efforts put into developing the strategy a political issue. After all, the Council for Promoting Poland does consist of politicians and officials from individual ministries and not of communication and promotion experts. This has serious drawbacks as for the quality of the document. Additionally, implementing the strategy remains an open issue. So far the bodies established for the purpose of promoting Poland in various domains were state institutions. However, promoting Poland could be more effective if it was carried out

⁸ It is worth mentioning here that messages referring to historical events are sometimes overused in promotional practice. It should be remembered that various ceremonies commemorating important historical events should be organized within the scope of the so-called history policy and not within promoting Poland. The effectiveness of using anniversaries and celebrating them to promote a country is, as a matter of fact, problematic.

in cooperation with other entities including both business enterprises and non-governmental organizations. It seems that promoting Poland in many cases requires innovation and dynamic action which is frequently missing in state institutions. It is quite likely that a positive effect could be gained by opting for a partnership between public and private initiatives.

Summing up, it should be said that despite the fact that promoting Poland is gradually becoming an increasingly important element in politics the quality of suggested solutions leaves much to be desired. What is missing first of all is a long-term perspective exceeding the parliamentary term of office. The practices which are adopted are often characterized by glaring temporariness. What is more, there is a lack of coordination between individual institutions responsible for promotion. The recently drafted Frame Strategy for Promoting Poland may not be able to meet all the expectations. It remains to be hoped that its preparation and implementation will provide experience which then will contribute to the development of another frame strategy, not only by name, for promoting Poland.

