

Institute of National Remembrance

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Statement of Janusz Kurtyka, Ph.D. the President of the Institute of National Remembrance

In recent days, we have witnessed an unprecedented attempt made by media and certain institutions in Russia to challenge the results of scientific research based on reliable sources. Particular concern is caused by the fact that the representatives of state authorities, led by the Russian Foreign Intelligence Service and members of President's Commission to Counteract Attempts at Falsifying History to Damage the Interests of Russia, take part in that campaign. Insisting on clearly false and lying statements in the name of current political interests does not serve the historical truth and dialogue, and it does not serve either Russia or Poland – states and nations with historical relations which provoke many emotional responses. The Institute of National Remembrance cannot be indifferent to such campaign as the Institute's basic mission is to preserve the memory of the heritage of Polish twentieth century history, including the most tragic time of II World War, the costs of German and Soviet occupations to civilisation, the fight for freedom and consequences of the communist regime.

1. The fate of Soviet prisoners of war who died in prison camps in

Poland in 1919-1921, which has been fully explained some years earlier, is yet again used for propaganda purposes. Unfortunately, this issue is raised every time when the subject of Soviet responsibility for Katyn Crime is brought up. That has happened since 1989, when Mikhail Gorbachev ordered "the USSR Science Academy, the USSR Prosecution Service, the USSR Ministry of Defence, and the USSR State Security Committee, in cooperation with other institutions and organizations, to finish by 1 April 1991 scientific research and disclose archival materials concerning events and facts from the history of Soviet-Polish relations which caused damage to interests of the Soviet Union". Such conduct should be regarded as an unacceptable attempt to equate the conscious, meticulously planned crime committed on the order of the highest authorities of the Soviet Union to a tragic fate of prisoners of war who died due to various causes, mostly the typhoid outbreak and poor living conditions. At that time also Polish people were severely afflicted by the outbreak. The numbers of Soviet prisoners of war who died, constantly brought to attention and overestimated for propaganda purposes, have nothing in common with findings based on scientific sources. Results of scientific research show that the number did not exceed 17 000 people. These issues were thoroughly explained in monographs by Z. Karpus, which are known in Poland and Russia. Polish documents concerning the case are fully accessible to Russian researchers, which unfortunately cannot be said about documents on Katyn Crime, in particular concerning findings of Russian investigation in that case.

2. Conscious attempts at misinformation related to the German-Polish

Non-Aggression Pact signed on 26 January 1934 are similar in nature. This Declaration was a diplomatic supplement to the Polish-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact signed two years before and extended in 1934 to 1945. These two documents were an expression of Polish foreign policy at the time based on the principle of preservation of distance equally from Germany and the Soviet Union, including refusal to participate in alliances against the other neighbour. Recent statements that there was a secret protocol to the Declaration are false. This lie refers to a falsified document, which was “planted” in 1935 by the Soviet Intelligence on the French press. It should be reminded here that on several occasions Poland refused to join the Anti-Comintern Pact or Anti-Soviet alliance, which was proposed by Germany. Poland was invaded by Germany in 1939 because it had refused to join Germany in the march on Moscow. In that context Russian accusations are particularly grotesque.

3. In recent days attempts have been made to justify the Ribbentrop-Molotov pact (which should rather be called the Hitler-Stalin pact). Arguments are raised that by that agreement the Soviet Union gained more time to prepare for the war, or even prevented German occupation of certain territories. These theses are ahistoric. The Soviet documentation made accessible in recent years clearly shows that entering into the pact (and fulfilling its provisions until the last hours before the outbreak of German-Soviet war) Stalin expected his strategic plans to be accomplished. Such theses, which appeared in diplomatic talks after the attack of Germany on the USSR on 22 June 1941, first came out in print in 1948 propaganda publication “Falsifiers

of History". The passage concerning Ribbentrop-Molotov pact was hand-written on the typescript by Stalin himself, similarly like the accusation that Poland entered the Anti-Soviet alliance with Germans.

4. The Russian Foreign Intelligence Service has accused the Polish Minister of Foreign Affairs (in the years 1932-1939) Józef Beck of alleged cooperation with Germans. It is unacceptable slander of the author of the historic speech in the Polish Sejm on 5 May 1939. I would like to remind that in response to German demands threatening the independence of the Polish state Józef Beck said: "We in Poland do not know the concept of peace at any price. There is only one thing in the lives of men, nations and countries that is without price. That thing is honour!". Józef Beck, as the Foreign Affairs Minister, coordinated a number of Polish diplomatic activities, which resulted in 1939 in British guarantees to Poland and assurance that France will fulfil its ally obligations, and consequently in the declaration of war to Germany by France and Great Britain on 3 September 1939. Thus Hitler's plan to make the war with Poland a local and isolated conflict failed (it was one of the most important motives behind Ribbentrop-Molotov pact). After the defeat, Józef Beck was interned in Romania, from where he planned to escape further to the West. German pressures exerted on Romanian authorities made it impossible until the end of the war. Minister Józef Beck in his actions was guided solely by Polish *raison d'etat*.

5. To these days in Russian archives there are dozens of archival documents on the most important Polish State institutions, social and

political organisations, including i.a. the Main Staff of Polish Armed Forces (in particular concerning its II Division), the Ministry of Military Affairs, the Border Protection Corps and the Border Guard, the Polish State Police Forces, the Inspection Bureau of the General Inspectorate of Armed Forces, the General Commissioner of the Polish Republic in Gdańsk, the Józef Piłsudski Institute, the Polish Army Organisation, the Polish Legions, the Riflemen Association, the Supreme National Committee, the Regency Council, and the Provisional Council of State. These documents were seized during the war by the Red Army. They are fundamentally significant to research on the history of the Second Republic of Poland and the Polish fight for independence. This year's 70th anniversary of the outbreak of World War II is a perfect opportunity to solve that issue and raise the subject of returning of plundered archives.

Most hopeful is the fact that not all Russian people support the above described campaign and many Russian historians are ready to an open debate on difficult subjects in our history. The Institute of National Remembrance, as the largest Polish research agency created to address issues concerning the contemporary history, is ready to participate in such debate. However, the debate must be based on free access to preserved archives as well as on truth and respect for historical facts.

Janusz Kurtyka, Ph.D.

The President of the Institute of National Remembrance

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