

# Institute of National Remembrance

<https://ipn.gov.pl/en/news/1294,European-Day-of-Remembrance-for-the-Victims-of-Totalitarian-Regimes-23-August-20.html>

20.03.2024, 13:28

23.08.2018









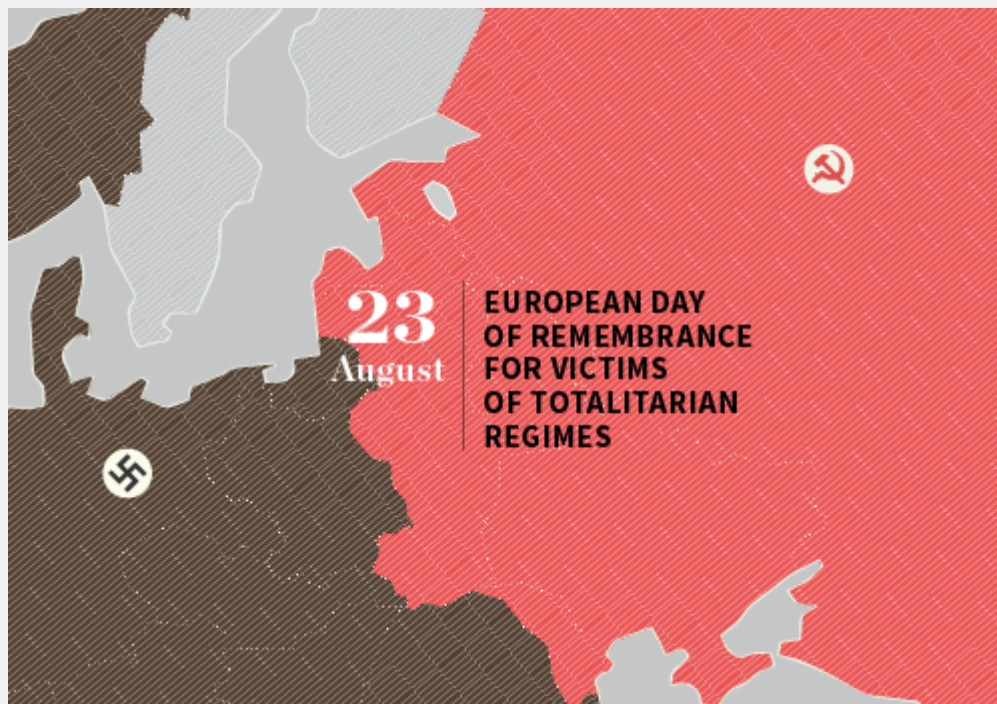












On 23 August 1939, Germany and the Soviet Union signed an agreement that opened the way to World War II along with all its consequences, including concentration camps, crematoria, gulags, and in its aftermath the long years of "Cold War" – which entailed further oppression for many societies of Central and Eastern Europe. The European Day of Remembrance for the Victims of Totalitarian Regimes is celebrated on the anniversary of the signing of the Molotov - Ribbentrop Pact.

On 23 August, we pay tribute to the victims of totalitarian oppression. On this occasion Dr Mateusz Szpytma, Deputy President of the Institute of National Remembrance, and Prosecutor Andrzej Pozorski, Director of the Chief Commission for the Prosecution of Crimes against the Polish Nation, Head of the Department of Supervision over Investigations of the Chief Commission, Prosecutor Dorota Cebrat and Jacek Pawłowicz, Director of the Museum of Cursed Soldiers and Political Prisoners of the Polish People's Republic laid flowers at the

Mokotow Prison in Warsaw - a place marked by the blood of Poles, victims of nazism and communism.

This day, 23 August, is a moment to reflect on what can happen when two dictatorships and two regimes are allied – said Deputy President of the IPN, Dr Mateusz Szpytma during the ceremony. He recalled the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact, which resulted in "the time of genocide, the time of crimes, the time of the Holocaust, and later the elimination of the Polish elites." He pointed out that we should speak out on the alliance of two totalitarian regimes today, when the memory of who was the victim and who was the perpetrator is disappearing in the world.

The Deputy President of the Institute of National Remembrance quoted further cases of foreign media using the false term "Polish death camps" - this time in the context of the deportation of Jakiw Palij, a guard of the Trawniki camp in the Lublin region, from the USA to Germany. He informed that in the case of Palij, the IPN has issued a statement in which we read: *Jakiw Palij was a member of the criminal SS corps of the Third Reich. The SS corps was part of the military forces of the Third Reich used, among others, to commit mass crimes against citizens of the Republic of Poland including Jews and Poles. It is common historical knowledge that no Polish SS unit ever existed. We will never allow Poles, who were in fact a nation of victims, to be portrayed as the perpetrators.* – Dr Mateusz Szpytma stated.

Jacek Pawłowicz, Director of the Museum of Cursed Soldiers and Political Prisoners of the Polish People's Republic which is under

construction at the former Mokotów prison, presented the history of the institution, stressing that the former detention centre in Mokotów is a special place where the two great totalitarianisms - Soviet communism and German fascism which affected Poland in the 20th century are clearly visible. "

This year, the main celebrations of the European Day of Remembrance for the Victims of Totalitarian Regimes will take place in Tallinn, Estonia under the auspices of the Estonian Institute of Historical Memory and the Ministry of Justice of Estonia, during which the Memorial for the Victims of Communism will be opened. An international conference entitled "Utopia unachieved despite millions victimised? Communist crimes and European remembrance " will accompany the event. The IPN will be represented by Dr Władysław Bułhak from the Historical Research Office of the IPN.

For years, the Institute of National Remembrance has been carrying out its statutory mission of researching and documenting totalitarian crimes as well as commemorating their victims. The IPN is one of the 21 founding members of the Platform of European Memory and Conscience established in 2011, whose aim is to cooperate in spreading knowledge on totalitarian systems.

The most important tasks of the organization include the creation of a free and fully accessible documentation database on communist crimes, and work for education on totalitarianism in Europe. Every year, the Platform of European Memory and Conscience awards its prize to those fighting today against totalitarianism, for the ideals of



democracy, fundamental human rights and freedoms and the rule of law.

One of the Platform's projects in which the IPN has been actively participating is JUSTICE 2.0 - regarding the establishment of an international mechanism for the settlement of communist crimes. The Board of the Platform unanimously agreed to the Polish proposal to create an international tribunal that would deal with this problem.

\* \* \*

The European Day of Remembrance for the Victims of Totalitarian Regimes was proclaimed by the European Parliament in 2008. The ceremonial celebrations of that day were organized for the first time in 2011 in Warsaw. The signatories of the "Warsaw Declaration" drew public attention to the necessity of cultivating the memory of totalitarian regimes and called on the European Union to collect documentation and investigate matters related to these crimes.

Anyone who would like to commemorate the victims of totalitarian regimes can do so by attaching a special badge with a black ribbon and the date of 23 August, prepared by the European Network Remembrance and Solidarity (ENRS). This gesture is meant to commemorate the millions of victims of totalitarian regimes, primarily prisoners of concentration and extermination camps, labour camps, Soviet gulags and Stalinist torture chambers. There is a possibility to order a pin via e-mail at the following address: [office@enrs.eu](mailto:office@enrs.eu). The

electronic version can be downloaded from:

[www.enrs.eu/august-23-join-us](http://www.enrs.eu/august-23-join-us). Symbolic stamps can also be picked up at the "History Point" Educational Centre of the Institute of National Remembrance. (Marszałkowska 21/25 in Warsaw).



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