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**THE WESTERN LANDS  
OF THE SECOND REPUBLIC OF POLAND INCORPORATED INTO THE THIRD  
REICH**

Based on a secret protocol of the German-Soviet treaty of 23 August 1939, the territory of the Republic of Poland was divided between the Third Reich and the Soviet Union. According to that secret protocol, commonly known as the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, the border between the two aggressors was supposed to run *along the rivers Vistula, Narew and San*. The German-Soviet Frontier Treaty of 28 September 1939, also known as the 2nd Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, constituted an amendment to the prior treaty. In return for handing Lithuania over to the Soviets, the Germans were given Lublin Province and part of Warsaw Province.

While the Polish territories occupied by the Soviets (52% of the area of Poland) were targeted for immediate Russification and Sovietisation (some were also incorporated into the Ukrainian and Byelorussian SSRs as a result of “elections” as early as in the autumn of 1939), the German-occupied territory was diverse with regard to its legal status. Part of it was considered to be the “vestiges of Poland” and a source of cheap labour. There, Adolf Hitler established the General Government for the Occupied Polish Territories (GG). The Germans did not even attempt to Germanise the local population (Polish majority, large percentage of Jews, minimal representation of Germans), and the area was also where they “deported” Poles from the lands incorporated to the Third Reich.

Half of the territory occupied by Germany (94,000 km<sup>2</sup>) was incorporated into the *Deutsches Reich* by decree of Adolf Hitler of 8 October 1939. It included Pomeranian, Silesian and Poznań Provinces, part of Łódź Province (including the city of Łódź), Suwałki Province, as well as parts of Mazowsze and Lesser Poland, carved out from Kraków and Kielce Provinces. Two large German administrative units were formed on these annexed territories: *Wartheland* (the Warta Land) and *Danzig-Westpreussen* (Gdansk-West Prussia). East Prussia (Ostpreussen)

incorporated the Ciechanów and Gąbin areas, as well as Suwałki. The Opole and Katowice regions were merged with Silesian Province and parts of Lesser Poland Province.

The German policies enacted in these lands differed from the policies of the GG. The main goal was to fully and irreversibly Germanise them and eradicate all vestiges of Polishness. Polish was abolished as a language of instruction in schools and the language used in churches and public spaces. It was even prohibited to use Polish in private! The territories in question were treated as originally German territories “liberated” by the Wehrmacht [!] in 1939, and those considered immigrants (i.e. those who arrived there after the Treaty of Versailles) and ineligible to be re-Germanised were deported to the GG or exterminated on site, as early as during the first months of the occupation. Approximately 60,000 Poles who were deemed “enemies of Germany” were murdered in this way in Gdańsk Pomerania. Participants in these killings frequently included their German neighbours who were members of the criminal Self-defence organisation (*Selbstschutz*), which operated until the end of 1939.

Germany’s treatment of the Poles living in the territories incorporated into the Third Reich (in the initial, most drastic period between the autumn of 1939 and early 1940) is best illustrated by the “guidelines” issued by Gauleiter Albert Forster to a small group of high-ranking German officials from Pomerania. Considering Forster’s closeness with Hitler, their personal relations and frequent conversations, these directives can be considered as an example of the principles outlined above. These principles applied not only in Pomerania, but also in Greater Poland, Silesia and other Polish territories annexed by Germany.

Even the first sentence of these “guidelines” is very telling: *The cities* [located in the region] *must once again be made German as soon as possible*. Also mentioned is the need to search Polish houses and confiscate all weaponry. Forster warned not to be lenient with the local Poles (*keine Milde zeigen!*) or take into account any of their wishes. The Poles were not supposed to be able to associate, and all Polish organisations were to be abolished. Forster ordered all financial assets stored in Polish banks to be seized. He appointed his representative as the person responsible for the entire operation. Polish newspapers were made illegal. Letters sent by the residents of local cities and towns were controlled. If a registered resident made their way to Poland, they were banned from returning. All “unwanted” Poles were to be turned in to the relevant authorities and punished. Closed Polish shops were to be taken over – similar to bank assets; the Gauleiter’s representative was responsible for the process. All places where petroleum

and other flammables were sold or stored were to be seized, as well as cars belonging to Poles. Forster ordered the occupiers to work together with trustworthy German teachers and priests in the annexed areas. Schools were to adopt German as their language of instruction as soon as possible. *If possible* (initially, and eventually with no exception), masses were to be held in German. Forster warned against the “enemy propaganda” of Polish priests and ordered swift action to be taken against such occurrences. Polish printeries were to be taken over. In his “guidelines”, Forster also wrote, “*When subjugating cities and other areas, do not forget about the Jews.*” Considering Germany’s anti-Jewish policies at the time, these words sounded particularly ominous.

As part of the re-Germanisation efforts, it was analysed how many Germans had left the annexed territories during the previous 20 years (during the period of the Second Republic of Poland), and they were subsequently brought back. Whenever specialists in any field were needed, the guidelines recommended having them brought over from Gdańsk.

Forster’s “guidelines” may appear as an attempt at introducing order during the transition period caused by the war. However, they were in truth a sign of things to come – of stripping all non-German citizens of the Republic of their civic rights and legalising robbing and violating them, *without showing leniency*, provided that it served the interests of the Reich and Germans. Therefore, they reflected the terror that reigned at the time, a state of affairs that apparently was to remain unchanged. The following sentence of the first amendment to the “guidelines” is the most important one: *It is important to capture and intern the intellectual leaders of the Poles, i.e. teachers, priests, those with university degrees, optionally also merchants.* In his interview with the *Deutsche Rundschau*, Forster referred to Poles as “rabble” and “a bunch of thieves”. The “guidelines” also tackle the issue of *intellectual leaders*, which are to be exterminated. The murder of 324 hostages from Gdynia in Piaśnik Forest near Wejherowo, carried out in Katyń-like fashion with shots to the back of the head over open graves, and which took place on the Polish Independence Day (11 November 1939), can be seen as a symbol of the extermination of the Polish intelligentsia on the annexed territories. The date of the crime was not chosen randomly.

In the second amendment to the “guidelines”, Forster demands that his representatives *take it to heart* [!] and that they *do not even think about showing leniency to those Poles who carry out acts of sabotage, refuse to perform mandatory labour, have kept their weapons or radios, etc. They are to be shot.* In light of this guideline, calling Hitler’s viceroy as someone

who had power over the lives of the non-Germans living in Gdańsk Pomerania was not a metaphor, but a factual description of the entire territory of the Republic incorporated into the German Reich.

The people living on the territories incorporated into the Third Reich were strictly segregated according to their factual or declared nationality. Farms owned by Poles were seized, the people were deported, prohibited from performing their professions, socially demoted and humiliated by being forbidden from using their mother tongue, or even confessing in Polish!

Draconian penal laws were implemented, targeting non-Germans. These laws were a tool of political and nationality-based repression. They also facilitated the policies of terror and extermination of people ineligible for Germanisation. The status of Poles who were in these territories “temporarily” was defined by the Germans as *the Reich’s charges with limited rights of the locals* (by decree of Heinrich Himmler, Reich Commissioner for the Consolidation of German Nationhood in the East, issued on 12 September 1940). It was an act of blatant discrimination dressed as a legal act.

Offences against the German occupiers were settled by Special Courts (*Sondergerichte*) and the so-called people’s tribunals (*Volksgerichte*). In 1941, Summary Courts (*Standgerichte*) were also introduced as part of a special law (*lex specialis*), targeting Poles and Jews who committed “violations” against the Germans, where a “violation” could be broadly interpreted as any instance of insubordination, e.g. tearing down German posters, fleeing from a German employer, broadly-interpreted sabotage, damage to property or illegally slaughtering pigs in the countryside. The punishment for all of the above was death – not always ordered by a court, sometimes it was the policeman who decided that the “convict” was to be brought to the border of the nearest forest. This special “law” was later expanded to involve “crimes” committed before the implementation of the Draconian provisions.

Some German “provisions” targeting Poles were simply supposed to humiliate them, strip them of their national pride and human dignity. In Greater Poland Province, the administration issued ordinances which obliged Poles to bow to Germans and take off their hats. Letters addressed to Poles could not contain salutations such as *Frau, Herrn*. Poles were not allowed to own cars, radios or phones. They had no free access to the post office or the right to move around the country freely.

It is estimated that, starting in early 1940, more than 800,000 Poles were deported from (or driven out of) the annexed territories to the GG, before being robbed of their belongings, with only 25 kg of personal luggage allowed per person to be taken. The people were transported to Radom, Częstochowa and Siedlce, and were offered no accommodation after reaching their destination. Deportations from Gdynia were particularly drastic. The city was built from the ground up during the Second Republic of Poland. Gdynia was inhabited by people from all over Poland, who were the pioneers who built the city referred to as “Polish California”. The Germans deported approximately 80,000 people from Gdynia alone! According to police orders, they were prohibited from taking anything with them, and had to leave their keys in the door.

German colonists were brought in their place – both Germans from the Reich and repatriates from Soviet-occupied territories – eastern Polish territories, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia and Bessarabia.

There was also a biological aspect of the German policy of ruining the Poles living in the annexed territories. Due to the drastically decreased food rations (wartime rationing of food), the quality of life of Poles declined, and young people had more difficulty starting families. In Greater Poland Province, the growth of the Polish population in 1942 was four times lower than that of the German.

Violating the 4th Hague convention, the Germans forced the Poles who had lived in the annexed territories before 1920 to declare their nationality to be German and humiliated them with “racial examinations”. Refusing to sign the *Volkliste* meant one’s property being taken away and being deported to the GG or interred in a transit camp, whose rules were virtually similar to the rules of concentration camps. Based on these circumstances, all *Volkliste*-related declarations from the territories annexed by the Reich must be treated differently than similar declarations made in the GG. The former were often required to protect one’s family, or even guarantee its elementary existence. However, as a result, many young men from Polish families were conscripted into the Wehrmacht and died wearing German uniforms. According to the as-of-yet unpublished research conducted by Professor Włodzimierz Jastrzębski, an average of 500 young Poles per county died this way in Pomerania.

By the end of 1941, the situation of the Polish population on the annexed territories became more varied – depending on the policies pursued by particular representatives and according to the needs of the Reich and the shifting situation on the front lines. In Pomerania and

Silesia, the German administration strove to acquire for the Reich as many new “Germans” as possible from among the Poles deemed eligible for Germanisation. This resulted in mass signings of the 3rd and 4th groups of the *Volksliste*. They were German citizens “until further notice”, but could be conscripted into the Wehrmacht as a result.

Regardless of the changes in German policies, one thing remained constant: the extermination of active Poles who were aware of their Polishness, and who could form pockets of resistance capable of jeopardising the “interests of Germany in the east”. Considering the above, the fact that Polish underground networks existed not only in the GG, but also in the western territories of the Second Republic annexed by the Reich (which had a large German population), is remarkable in and of itself. After all, that was the territory of the *Deutsches Reich*! This applies to both the Polish Underground State (UAS-HA) and regional organisations, especially the Pomeranian Griffin Secret Military Organisation which, as estimated by the Gestapo, numbered approx. 8000 soldiers and field operatives.