

Institute of National Remembrance

<https://ipn.gov.pl/en/for-the-media/statements/2484,Statement-by-the-IPN-on-the-article-published-by-Der-Tagesspiegel.html>

03.05.2024, 11:23

16.10.2019

Statement by the IPN on the article published by Der Tagesspiegel

Polemic against the article by Grzegorz Rossolinski-Liebe: Research on collaboration. Obedient officials and gangs of murderers (Forschung zu Kollaborateuren. Willfährige Beamte und Mörderbanden, „Der Tagesspiegel“, 20 VIII 2019)

Tomasz Domański, Ph.D.

Kielce, 18.09.2019

The Branch Historical Research Office in Kraków – the Kielce Delegacy

Grzegorz Rossolinski-Liebe in his text published in a popular version in the journal “Der Tagesspiegel” undertook an analysis of collaboration in Europe during German occupation. He also tried to identify the term which would best describe this phenomenon.

The article addresses important issues related to historical memory. However, it contains quite far-reaching simplifications. Furthermore, it is difficult not to notice potentially misleading factual errors.

The basic allegation that arises after reading the article concerns the view of German occupation in Europe presented in it. Following other researchers, the author duly defines the Holocaust as a universal crime of German occupation that ran a complex and complicated course. At the same time he willfully ignores significant differences in the occupational policy conducted by German authorities in certain European countries. The text does not capture the complexity even to a minimal extent.

Citing Saul Friedländer, Rossolinski-Liebe lists various anti-Jewish activities and structures involved in their implementation. He writes, inter alia: "According to Friedländer, on the entire continent the German authorities could rely on collaborators, partly determined by 'rational' considerations and partly willingly or even enthusiastically recognising the supremacy of Germany. Authorities as well as national and regional institutions, auxiliary departments of all levels, politicians, e.g. administrative employees, the police, railway administration, journalists, industrialists, youth organisations, farmers' associations, the clergy, university employees as well as organised or spontaneously established gangs of murderers were involved in such a cooperation."

However, Rossolinski-Liebe does not indicate which elements of collaborative activities exactly supporting the Holocaust carried out by Germans in practice were present in certain European countries. On the basis of the above, a reader living several decades after the war may imagine that German occupation across the entire continent looked similar or almost identical. This leads to a remarkably

ahistorical phenomenon of special harmonisation of the perception of German occupation in Europe. Such a way of thinking is also presented by Rossolinski-Liebe in the following fragment: "Without the cooperation of the local police and administration the occupants would not have been able to carry out the Holocaust in such a comprehensive way either in Eastern or Western Europe." However, the author did not attempt to indicate the differences between the occupational reality of the East and West of Europe. The phrase about greater terror in the east of Europe does not reflect this at all. Rossolinski-Liebe does not explain how and to what extent "the local police and local administration" in various countries participated in the implementation of the occupational policy, including the anti-Jewish one. Although in France the French administration and services, including the police subjected to the French authorities, operated during the war, such a situation was unthinkable in Poland. The Polish state did not follow the path of collaboration – despite defeat the Poles still fought alongside the Allies. Germans were not authorised in any way to use the citizens of the Republic of Poland in their criminal policy. They used the "law of force" to form their own police unit composed of Polish citizens, which was incorporated into the *Ordnungspolizei* and subject to the German command. Can both these situations be painted with the same brush? The author did not even try to indicate the radically different situation in the West and East of Europe.

The occupational conditions were completely different in Western and Eastern Europe. No wonder that Rossolinski-Liebe did not indicate which national authorities in the Polish lands incorporated into the

Third Reich or the General Government or which employees of local universities were involved in the cooperation with the occupational authorities in the implementation of the Holocaust. The Polish lands accommodated Germans (including representatives of the German minority living in Poland before the war) or *Volksdeutsche*. After all, no Polish university operated on Polish soil (but German research institutions for Germans functioned). In Poland, a Polish national administration did not exist, only the German administration under the leadership of: Hans Frank, Arthur Greiser, Albert Forster, among others, operated. The local administration consisted of German high-level staff. The low-level staff, apart from the temporary form which was the General Government (GG) was also composed of Germans. Due to practical reasons, in GG offices Germans temporarily used Poles who earlier performed these functions on a forced basis, but they were strictly subordinated to German officials, liquidating any forms of self-government and even then some of the positions of mayors and commune leaders were filled by *Volksdeutsche*. In practice, since that time village leaders were the Third Reich officials implementing – under the pain of penal liability – German orders^[i]. In the documents of the Polish Underground State, an administration filled with Poles was simply regarded as an auxiliary body of the German administration^[ii]. The same applies to, for example, the railway. In the occupied Polish lands the Polish State Railways (PKP) were liquidated. Their tangible assets and some of the employees were incorporated into the German railway (Deutsche Reichsbahn and Ostbahn). Thus, nowadays there are no grounds to hold anyone to account for cooperation with the Third Reich – including in terms of organising transports to concentration

camps, because such cooperation did not exist – contrary to the West of the continent. Here the Third Reich organised the killing machine on its own and without the infrastructure of another state collaborating with it. These are very important elements of the description of the occupational reality – they cannot be ignored and the entire occupied Europe cannot be treated as a homogeneous area.

The simplified model of analysis was also highlighted in one of the subtitles: *Occupied nations were both victims and perpetrators*. The author presented further details of this: “Styling them [nations] only as victims of national socialism is insufficient and it ignores the complexity of the Holocaust.” In the light of the facts and historical knowledge such narration is incomplete and thus erroneous. Obviously, the author is right when he writes that the Holocaust was an extremely complex phenomenon and, during many of its stages and to a various extent, collaboration was present and subordination to German orders was imposed by force. Such an identification of the problem does not justify a light judgement that entire nations were victims and perpetrators at the same time. One can agree with Rossolinski-Liebe that entire nations were victims of the German occupation and the national socialist ideology. It mostly concerns those nations which were treated as racially inferior directly in ideological terms – as such, during this period they were subject to the merciless policy subordinated to the priorities of creating Lebensraum. Jews were not the first nation sentenced to annihilation. Poles as a nation were treated as sub-human and after their military victory, the Germans would decide about their fate according to their own ideological criteria. This attitude

of the Third Reich towards the Jews and Poles was not affected by any cases of complaisance – and this did indeed occur – presented by various members of these nations towards the occupant. This was not even influenced by the participation of particular people in German crimes – against the Polish state, against Jewish and fellow Polish citizens. Scientific research, memoirs and numerous archival sources provide convincing evidence of this phenomenon^[iii].

A little bit further in his article, Rossolinski-Liebe advances another general thesis. It concerns the attitude of the Organisation of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN) towards Jews. For unknown reasons, in the same part of the article entitled *Hidden cooperation in Ukraine*, he cites texts by Jan Grabowski, Barbara Engelking and Jan Tomasz Gross which involves the central and eastern (Jedwabne) lands of contemporary Poland and not Ukraine. He writes: “In their research on the last phase of the Holocaust Barbara Engelking and Jan Grabowski proved that the specific dynamics between occupants and the occupied led to ‘hunts for Jews’ and other forms of persecutions carried out by village heads, Polish policemen, fire fighters or ‘ordinary Poles’.” Similarly to these authors (two of them are sociologists and not historians), the author does not appear to understand that no village head, “blue” policeman or fire fighter from among those who participated in anti-Jewish activities acted as a Polish state official but as someone incorporated into the operating modes of the Third Reich. They surrendered to German orders in various circumstances under pressure reinforced by pain of liability. Village heads were integrated into the GG administration structure, “blue” policemen as German *Ordnungspolizei*

officials, and fire fighters as members of the uniformed services militarised by the Germans. How many, to what extent and in which circumstances, participated in the criminal actions of the Third Reich is a separate problem. However, this was not the collaboration of the Polish state with the Germans – this was a participation in actions implemented by the Third Reich against the Polish state. Contrary to, for example, France where policemen – officials of the French state collaborating with the Third Reich – assisted in the apprehension of Jews for the death transports.

In such an important point of his text the author did not define what these dynamics between the occupants and the occupied involved. Dealing with the term “cooperation” slightly above in the text which, according to him, should be replaced by the expression “collaboration”, he introduced vague and ambiguous terms. Does he mean that there was a kind of equilibrium between the occupants and the occupied? Rossolinski-Liebe’s simplifications and generalisations are difficult to accept even in a popular press article. The author completely omitted the occupational context of events (e.g. overwhelming terror and its impact on the perception of the German threat ^[iv] as well as the introduction of the death penalty for failure to reveal information on Jews in hiding) and the direct and organisational role of German occupants in hunting for Jews. In a reliable text, a situation should be described precisely enough to reflect the entire complexity of problematic aspects and not – as in this case – blur it.

It is worth recalling that in villages located in the General Government

the police and civil administration held special briefings during which village heads were reminded of their duty to capture Jews under pain of serious consequences. This fact is mentioned by Jan Grabowski^[v] as well. The question of how submitting such declarations influenced village heads (and the remaining population) in the occupational reality of Eastern Europe is answered all by itself. The so-called village guards were also included into the system of hunting for Jews. Its members, local peasants, were not recruited voluntarily – their membership was forced and managed by the German authorities^[vi].

In the Lublin district in November 1942 peasants were obliged to write the following declaration under pain of full liability (i.e. death penalty): I hereby declare that: 1. There is no Jew within my authority. 2. I shall order that in the future all Jews appearing within my authority be captured and led to a lower gendarmerie station, police or SS-Stützpunkt. 3. I am aware that I am responsible for fulfilling this obligation in full and I am entirely responsible for failure to do so”^[vii].

The author does not know or deliberately does not inform the reader that this “Polish police” is in fact some of the German Order Police (*Ordnungspolizei*) and that the Voluntary Fire Service was incorporated into the German police forces in 1941^[viii]. Obviously, as part of this system there were actions taken by over-zealous, greedy people or those who openly served the Germans to the detriment of the Jews (denunciations, murders). Nevertheless, it must be clearly emphasized that the system of persecuting Jews (as well as people of other nationalities) was created by the occupational German authorities.

In another fragment Rossolinski-Liebe wrote: "Earlier Jan Tomasz Gross revealed in his research concerning the pogrom in Jedwabne that these were not Germans but Poles who in specific circumstances created by the occupants murdered their Jewish neighbours themselves." The comparison of the crime in Jedwabne with the crimes against Jews in a later period of the German occupation is unjustified. It is true that some of the residents of this town took advantage of the circumstances related to the occupation of these lands by Germans in order to participate in the crime. This took place in 1941 after the German invasion of the Soviet Union. Even according to Gross, several dozen of the residents of the town with a population of 1,500 people took part in these activities. They took advantage of the impunity provided by the Third Reich, committing the crime contrary to the obligations of citizens of Poland fighting against the Germans. Can this infamous crime be compared to the systemic organisation of the Holocaust by the Third Reich? Does this event take the odium of owning copyright to the Holocaust – mass murders against the Jewish nation on thousands of square kilometres of the territory dominated by German armed forces managed by the German administration and terrorised by police units – from the German state?

Only may additionally cite a fragment of the conclusion from the Polish investigation of the crime in Jedwabne at the beginning of the 21st century. Public prosecutor Radosław Ignatiew wrote: "It may be assumed that the crime in Jedwabne was committed because it was inspired by the Germans. The presence of at least passively behaving German gendarmes from the station in Jedwabne as well as other

uniformed Germans (assuming that they were present on the spot) was equivalent to the acceptance and tolerance of the crime against the Jewish residents of this locality. In such circumstances, one should state that in criminal-law assessment it is appropriate to assign the sensu largo perpetration of this crime to the Germans. The executioners of the crime, as sensu stricto perpetrators, were Polish residents of Jedwabne and the neighbouring area – at least about 40 men.”^[ix] _

The specific language used by Rossolinski-Liebe is also of note. When he presents the general information on the Holocaust, he does not use large linguistic quantifiers as in the case of Ukrainians or Poles. He writes that Ukrainian nationalists murdered Jews and “Poles murdered their Jewish neighbours themselves in special circumstances created by the occupants”. No sensible person in Poland defends criminals murdering either Jews or other fellow citizens. However, in the description by Rossolinski-Liebe the linguistic symmetry is missing^[x]_. When the Poles were hosts in their own country the destruction of any nation did not and could not have taken place. The Holocaust was a campaign of mass murder against the Jews, planned and implemented by the German state authorities and officials of various levels and institutions.

Furthermore, the author writes that in the east of Europe the occupants treated the population as “worse” and committed many “offences” against it. In the light of facts and historical knowledge it would be better to write that Germans treated this population as “sub-

human” and committed not offences but rather crimes against it estimated at millions of victims.

Lastly, it is worth writing a few sentences concerning the story which opens the article by Rossolinski-Liebe. It can be presumed that this is *corpus delicti* of the collaboration. According to the author, Adam Ciepiński^[xi] as a “wachtmeister” of the Pilzno town magistrate in Dębicki Powiat captured, together with two other persons, a Jew with the surname Kupfeld who was apprehended by mayor Jan Kramarczyk. He imprisoned Kupfeld and next he informed the Polnische Polizei^[xii] who took him to Dębica where he was shot by German policemen. If Rossolinski-Liebe had taken into account the occupational realities on the Polish lands which I described above, maybe he would have tried to further probe the circumstances of the event. From Rossolinski-Liebe’s article we do not learn anything about either these people or their motifs or about the “dynamics” which led to Kupfeld’s detention and, as a result, to his death. The presented case was used by the author to make the following statement: “All people who captured Jews, led them to the custody, imprisoned and passed them to the German police, even if they cooperated with the German occupant for various reasons, were aware of what would happen with Jews. Anti-Semitism was its cause to the same extent as the specific local dynamics of groups, fear and moral changes which occurred during the occupation and many more factors.”

However, there is no evidence in the files for this kind of Ciepiński’s participation in this case. From the extended version of the article in

“Der Tagesspiegel” we find out that Rossolinski-Liebe has taken the case of Ciepiński and Mayor Kramarczyk from the case file no. AIPN Rz, 367/189, stored in the Archive of the Institute of National Remembrance in Rzeszów. In Rossolinski-Liebe view, the course of events was presented as obvious and beyond reasonable doubt. However, the author of the article depicted only his own interpretation of events and did not inform readers that in 1950 the court proceedings against Adam Ciepiński were discontinued and in the petition it was stated that: “In the course of the investigation no evidence has been gathered which would allow to establish whether and what was the participation of the suspect [Adam Ciepiński] in Kupfeld’s detention.”^[xiii] —

Writing general popular articles for a mass audience is undoubtedly a difficult challenge, certainly more difficult than is generally esteemed. An attempt at general reflection requires not only broad expertise knowledge and knowledge of the literature, but also the skill of emphasizing appropriately, in this case taking into account the occupational realities on the Polish lands. One should also correctly select examples proving the validity of advanced theses and conclusions drawn. In this particular story, a model case of collaboration was presented based on the example of individuals who were innocent under the law. The researcher should clearly indicate that he presents one of the possible interpretation of events or provide evidence that might challenge the formal court findings. I regret to say

that Grzegorz Rossolinski-Liebe, Ph.D., did not rise well to this task.

[i] C. Madajczyk, *Polityka III Rzeszy w okupowanej Polsce [The policy of the Third Reich in occupied Poland]*, vol. 1, Warsaw 1970, p. 215–216.

[ii] Archiwum Akt Nowych (AAN) [*the Archive of New Files*], AK, 203/X-67, Raport za okres 15 X – 30 XI 1943 r. [*the Report for the period of 15 X – 30 XI 1943*], b.d.m., k. 7.

[iii] K. Person, *Policjanci. Wizerunek Żydowskiej Służby Porządkowej w getcie warszawskim [Policemen. The image of the Jewish Ghetto Police]*, Warsaw 2018; T. Frydel, *Powiat dębicki [in:] Dalej jest noc. Losy Żydów w wybranych powiatach okupowanej Polski [Dębicki Powiat in: Night without an End: Fate of Jews in Selected Counties of Occupied Poland]*, B. Engelking, J. Grabowski (eds.), vol. 2, Warsaw 2018, p. 404–407, 499–511; D. Tausendfreund, *Erzwungener Verrat. Jüdische „Greifer” im Dienst der Gestapo 1943–1945*, Berlin 2006; Ch.I. Wohlgelernter, *Działoszyce [in:] Życie i zagłada Żydów polskich 1939–1945. Relacje świadków [The life and the Holocaust of the Polish Jews. Accounts of witnesses]*, oprac. M. Grynberg, M. Kotowska,

Warsaw 2003; M. Wierzbicki, *Polacy i Żydzi w zaborze sowieckim. Stosunki polsko-żydowskie na ziemiach północno-wschodnich II RP pod okupacją sowiecką (1939–1941)* [*Poles and Jews in the Soviet partition. Polish-Jewish relations on the north-eastern lands of the Second Polish Republic under the Soviet occupation (1939–1941)*], Warszawa 2007.

^[iv] _ In some elements the complexity of problematic aspects was quite precisely presented in: T. Frydel, *Powiat dębicki* [in:] *Dalej jest noc...* [*Dębicki Powiat in: Night without an End...*] , vol. 2, p. 470-477.

^[v] _ Cf. J. Grabowski, *Powiat węgrowski* [in:] *Dalej jest noc. Losy Żydów w wybranych powiatach okupowanej Polski* [*Węgrowski Powiat in: Night without an End: Fate of Jews in Selected Counties of Occupied Poland*] , B. Engelking, J. Grabowski (eds.), vol. 1, Warsaw 2018, p. 478.

^[vi] _ B. Musiał, *Kto dopomoże Żydowi...* [*Who will help the Jew ...*], Poznań 2019, p. 199.

^[vii] _ *Ibidem*, p. 196–197.

^[viii] _ I discussed the unjustified phenomenon of the description of Polnische Polizei in the latest historical literature in detail in the review of the book *Dalej jest noc*: T. Domański, *Korekta obrazu? Refleksje źródłoznawcze wokół książki „Dalej jest noc. Losy Żydów w wybranych powiatach okupowanej Polski”*, vol. 1–2 [*The correction of the landscape? Source studies reflections concerning the book Night without an End: Fate of Jews in Selected Counties of Occupied Poland*,

vol. 1 and 2], eds Barbara Engelking, Jan Grabowski, Warszawa 2018, Warsaw 2019.

^[ix] _ The Institute of National Remembrance – the Branch Commission for the Prosecution of Crimes against the Polish Nation in Białystok, Decision on termination of the investigation S 1/00/Zn, Białystok, 30 VI 2003 r., p. 200.

^[x] _ This problem is also present in the scientific writing of other researchers.

^[xi] _ In the text by Rossolinski-Liebe the man is mentioned as Ciepliński but in all documents which I reached he appears as Ciepiński.

^[xii] _ The author used the expression “polnische Polizei” – the Polish police. In my view it would be better to use the term Polnische Polizei, which better reflects the German provenance of this service.

^[xiii] _ The archive of the Institute of National Remembrance (AIPN Rz), 367/189, Petition for the discontinuation of the investigation against Adam Ciepiński, Rzeszów, 18 IV 1950, k. 47.

^[xiv] _ It says so in reports (AIPN Rz, 367/189, the interview report of the suspect Adam Ciepiński, 14 XII 1949, time: 16.30, p. 4–5; *ibidem* the interview report of the suspect Adam Ciepiński, Pilzno, 14 XII 1949 r., time: 23.30, p. 6–7).

^[xvi]
__ In fact, the mayor's name was Jan.

^[xvii]
__ As in the original.

^[xviii]
__ *Ibidem*, the interview report of the suspect Adam Ciepiński, 14 XII 1949, time: 16.30, p. 5.

^[xix]
__ *Ibidem*, the interview report of the suspect Adam Ciepiński, 14 XII 1949, time: 23.30, p. 6-7.

^[xx]
__ Ciepiński would change the surname of the detained Jew. Once he claimed that he did not know his name, another time he claimed that this was the son-in-law of Korn from Pilzno, whereas during Kramarczyk's trial he spoke about a Jew with the surname Korn.

^[xxi]
__ AIPN Rz, 367/189, the interview report of the suspect Adam Ciepiński, 15 XII 1949, p. 11.

^[xxii]
__ *Ibidem*, the interview report of the suspect Adam Ciepiński, 18 XII 1949, p. 38-39.

^[xxiii]
__ *Ibidem*, the interview report of suspect Adam Ciepiński, 29 XII 1950, p. 31-32.

^[xxiv]
__ *Ibidem*, the interview report of witness Maria Pyrchla, Pilzno, 29 III 1950, p. 33-34.

^[xxiv] — *Ibidem*, the interview report of suspect Jan Kramarczyk, 1 IV 1950, p. 36-37.

^[xxv] — *Ibidem*, the interview report of witness Roman Pyrchla, 29 III 1950, p. 32.

^[xxvi] — AIPN Rz, 353/231, the interview report of witness Jan Kramarczyk, Dębica, 19 IV 1950, p. 24; *ibidem*, the Report of the final interview of the suspect Jan Kramarczyk Dębica, 24 VII 1950, p. 164; *ibidem*, Jan Kramarczyk's testimonies during the main hearing, Dębica, 30 X 1950, p. 280.

^[xxvii] — *Ibidem*, the the interview report of the suspect Jan Kramarczyk, 19 IV 1950, p. 24.

^[xxviii] — *Ibidem*, the judgement of the Appeal Court in Rzeszów, Rzeszów, 30 X 1950, p. 334-335.

^[xxix] — *Ibidem*, Adam Ciepiński's testimony on the main hearing, Dębica, 30 X 1950, p. 289-290.

^[xxx] — *Ibidem*, the judgement of the Appeal Court in Rzeszów, Rzeszów, 30 X 1950, p. 327-338; *ibidem*, the judgement of the Supreme Court, 31 X 1951, p. 382-385. Only the verdict concerning the confiscation of property was amended.

^[xxxi] — *Ibidem*, the judgement of the Poviát Court in Toruń, Toruń, 5 IX 1952, p. 396.

Opcje strony

- [Print this page](#)
- [Generate PDF of this page](#)
- [Notify about this page](#)

- Share this article

[Share on Facebook](#)

[Share on Twitter](#)