

Institute of National Remembrance

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Statement on the crimes committed by the German Reich in occupied Poland and on the false information appearing in public

Public dissemination of counter-factual information on the number of Jews killed by Polish people outside the ghettos between 1942–1945, alongside with false generalisations regarding the perpetrators of those crimes is an increasingly frequent phenomenon.

A large proportion of such information is supported in a dishonest way by the authority of Simon Datner – one of the initiators of Holocaust studies. In a manner far from scientific scrupulousness, certain numeric data on Jews murdered outside the ghettos is attributed to his works, whereas in reality he never included such data in them. Furthermore, Datner – like any responsible researcher – understood perfectly well that the territory of the Polish lands, both within the ghettos organised by the Germans and outside those ghettos, was under German occupation and was subjected to the absolute terror of the German Reich. Therefore, Datner did not treat the areas under German occupation outside the ghettos as places where the Polish population could act freely. Quite the opposite – as someone who

experienced this period personally, he understood the realities of German occupation perfectly well, and described them with due sensitivity.

In the often-cited article “Nazi crimes against ghetto escapees”, S. Datner wrote: “In one of the studies, I estimated the number of surviving Jews, saved primarily thanks to the help of the Polish population, at around 100,000 people. We equally tentatively estimate that at least the same number of victims were captured by the occupying authorities and fell victim to the atrocities” (“Nazi crimes against ghetto escapees”, Jewish Historical Institute Bulletin, 1970 no. 75, p. 29).

Never, in any of his works, did Simon Datner mention any number of 200,000 murdered Jews, nor did he ever describe such a number of victims as the result of crimes perpetrated by Polish people in the occupied territories. Imputing these statements to Datner amounts to falsifying the scholarly record of this undisputed authority on Holocaust studies. Datner differentiated between the actions of German State officers and armed German services and the attitudes of civilian people in all occupied areas. Some of the participants of the current debate ignore such distinctions, either due to lack of knowledge or intentionally.

During the Second World War, the entire area of the occupied Polish lands was affected by the operations of the German military and police. Their officers, carrying out the orders of the German Reich,

enforced German ordinances with full severity, which stipulated the death penalty not only for hiding Jews outside the ghettos, but also for any form of contact with them. Harsh penalties were applied for even being aware of Jews being hidden and failing to report this to the German police authorities. There were undoubtedly individuals who complied with such regulations.

The effective implementation of such ordinances and the crimes committed against Jews captured outside the ghettos were the responsibility of the officers of the German Reich state services. They were members of various kinds of German services, including the Gestapo, Kripo, SS, military police, Wehrmacht, as well as the new police services established by the German Reich from the citizens of the conquered countries. The officers of each and every German police formation participated in carrying out the criminal orders of the Reich. Just like in the ghettos, the Germans employed the “ghetto” police to conduct criminal activity – the Jewish Order Enforcement Service (Jüdischer Ordnungsdienst) consisting of Jews and established by the German Reich. Outside the ghettos in a similar capacity they employed the so-called “blue” police (Polnische Polizei im Generalgouvernement), also established by the German Reich and consisting primarily of Poles, and to a smaller extent of Ukrainians and Volksdeutsch. This police force (contrary to certain similar formations in occupied Europe) was under the direct orders of both the civilian and military German authorities. The Reich also employed the Ukrainian Auxiliary Police and other formations comprised of various nationalities for participation in various crimes.

The German police services (including the “blue” police) were a tool also used by the German Reich for fighting undercover organisations and the Polish Underground State, including cells established specifically for helping Jews in hiding. The authorities of the Republic of Poland and their representatives repeatedly warned the “blue” policemen and other collaborators of the Reich that they would face criminal prosecution for participating in German atrocities against their fellow citizens – regardless of their nationality. Despite the conditions prevailing during the occupation and the very difficult situation faced by civilians, the representatives of the Polish State engaged in underground opposition unequivocally opposed all kinds of collaboration, including participation in the German Holocaust plan. In their rulings issued on behalf of the Republic of Poland, underground courts sentenced those who supported the occupiers in their anti-Semitic policy. In the ghettos, sentences on voluntary German collaborators were carried out by the Jewish resistance movement.

Officers of the “blue” police, similarly to the officers of the ghetto police, who eagerly participated in seeking out anyone hiding from the occupying forces as well as combatting any “illegal” activity in and outside the ghettos, participated in the crimes of the German Reich. Transferring the responsibility for the participation of these formations, established by the Germans and carrying out German orders, to the Polish nation or the Jewish nation as a whole, while at the same time disregarding the German Reich, would thereby undermine the responsibility of the German Reich for their crimes, including the Holocaust.

The Germans made extensive use of secret informers, denunciators and blackmailers, who denounced their fellow citizens and fellow brethren. Such groups operated both in the ghettos, where the Jews were gathered, and outside the ghettos, where the majority of citizens were Polish. The motives for such actions were varied: hatred or material gain. Sometimes, this was a cruel price to pay for saving one's own life. Everyone who contributed to the death of a fellow citizen (denunciation, murder) participated in German crimes. The German Reich employed such people to combat any illegal activities under its rule: to destroy the Jews in hiding, underground independence organizations and anyone offering clandestine help to their persecuted fellow citizens.

At the same time, this does not change the fact that only the imposition of the inhuman legal system of the German Reich on the citizens of the Republic of Poland (of Polish, Jewish and other nationalities) could have ever resulted in making information on the place of residence of an ordinary person – whether that be a Jew, a Pole of Jewish descent or a member of an underground independence organization – synonymous with a death sentence. After all, such situations were simply unimaginable in the free Poland prior to 1939.

All the criminals who lurked among the civilians enjoyed impunity ensured by the German Reich. The Republic of Poland announced the full future criminal liability for every such person – regardless of their motivation.

Every illegal (in the light of the imposed German regulations) activity,

including giving assistance to Jews in hiding (carried out at risk of the helper's own life and the life of their families) was heroic by the mere fact that such actions were perceived as criminal by the German Reich. In another work, Simon Datner recapitulated: "The rescue of Jews in Poland is among the most beautiful acts of the humanitarian and brotherly relationship between the Poles and their persecuted fellow citizens. By providing help, hiding and rescuing Jews from the Holocaust, Poles were put at risk of inhumane persecution and death at the hands of the occupier. Despite that, many Poles manifested unparalleled heroism by saving the lives of Jewish victims of Nazi racism and terror. Many Poles, including a significant number of heroes so far unknown by their first and last names, paid for their noble attitude, worthy of the highest respect, with their lives. Many were brutally murdered for their heroic and deeply humane reaction, oftentimes together with their entire families and children by the occupier who was inflicting ruthless terror" (Materials on Poles rescuing Jews; "JHI Bulletin " 1970 no. 76, p. 86).

In every social group and every nation, both heroes and traitors manifested themselves. In every nation, the majority were just people who simply wanted to survive the years of wartime atrocities together with their families. The issue of the attitudes of both the various groups of Poles and the various groups of Jews during the German occupation is a complex one that eludes simple schemas and generalisations. It does, however, require an acceptance of the criminal role of the German Reich that wielded its authority over the day to day reality of the occupation. The Reich was the causative factor, determining the

most important points of reference in the system of occupation, wielding power and using widespread terror and violence. It was the Reich that made what had been impossible in the free Poland prior to 1939 a fact under the rule of the German invaders.

The scale on which civilians were employed by the German Reich should be the subject of reliable studies free of political pressure. Equal measure should be applied to all national groups within the occupied society. The description of social events and behaviours should take into account the proportions, the background of events, the individual attitudes and motivations, as well as the conditions created by the occupier's policy. Use of the existing body of scientific studies should take into consideration respect for reliable researchers on the subject, and avoid manipulation and abuse when using their names.

Discussions on the scale of the victims' tragedy should not obscure the responsibility held by the totalitarian state that the German Reich was. It is an important and universal challenge for the memory of the victims and future safety of the world: every country in the modern world should understand that country-level decisions on genocide, even if they are successfully carried out under the protection of a national power, will be challenged by the world. They will not be forgotten and will not be subject to any policy of blurring the lines of responsibility.

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