

Institute of National Remembrance

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17.04.2024, 19:52

21.10.2019

The winners of the new IPN "Semper Fidelis" Prize honouring the custodians of national memory of the Eastern Borderlands of the Republic of Poland have been chosen.

On 22 October 2019, the Institute of National Remembrance awarded the "Semper Fidelis" Prize for the first time as a means of honouring persons, institutions and organizations commemorating the heritage of the Polish Eastern Borderlands both at home and abroad. The award was presented by the President of the Institute of National Remembrance, Dr Jarosław Szarek.

















The winners of the Semper Fidelis Prize were selected by the Prize Committee, headed by the President of the Institute of National Remembrance, Dr Jarosław Szarek. The deputy chairs are the Director of the IPN Office for Commemorating the Struggle and Martyrdom, Adam Siwek and the Director of the IPN National Education Office, Adam Hlebowicz. The members of the Prize Committee are: Ewa Siemaszko - researcher of the Borderlands genocide, Maciej Wojciechowski - director, screenwriter and producer, creator of films about the Borderlands, Dariusz Piotr Bonisławski - the President of the "Polish Community" Association, Bogusław Nizieński - a lawyer, judge, social activist strongly associated with the Borderlands, Dr Leon Popek - guardian of Polish memorials in Volhynia, acting Deputy Director of

the IPN Office for Commemorating the Struggle and Martyrdom, Marzena Kruk, the Director of the IPN Archive.

The Semper Fidelis Prize was awarded under the patronage of the Speaker of the Polish Senate, Stanisław Karczewski.

This year the laureates of the Semper Fidelis Prize were:

- **fr. Roman Dzwonkowski**
- **Weronika Sebastianowicz**
- **Stefan Adamski**
- **„Wołanie z Wołynia” [Calling from Volhynia]- a bimonthly on the Polish presence in the east**
- **Polish Scouting Organization in Lithuania**
- **Distinction – Wiesław Helak**

As the years go by, the last generation of those who remember the world of the Eastern Borderlands is passing away; with time, individual

memories of Polish Lwów, Stanisławów and Wilno are becoming somewhat blurred. These memories were condemned to nonexistence during the times of communist rule in Poland. The mass displacement of citizens of the Second Polish Republic, forced to leave their fatherland and settle in the territories in most cases belonging to the German state before the war, was called "repatriation", semantically identical to "returning to one's fatherland", for almost half a century. The justification of this lay in politics and propaganda, but did not correspond to the actual situation of the displaced. On the most part, they came to new and unknown lands.

The memory of their "small homeland" left behind in the Borderlands was cultivated in new places and surroundings. Social structures and institutions were often spontaneously reconstructed. The liquidation of the opposition after 1947 and the adaptation of Soviet models by the communists erased the chance of the presence of the memory of the Borderlands in public space. Street signs having any connotations with the Borderlands disappeared from city streets. "Hairdressing master from Lwów" was replaced by an undefined "Hairdresser", and the cafe "Lwowianka" was renamed "Warszawianka". For those born in the Borderlands, their place of birth in official documents was listed as the "USSR". People were not only deprived of their homes, land and graves. Attempts at taking away the memory of their "small homeland" were also made. All forms of its cultivation were banned or limited to meanings taken out of context. Poles in the Borderlands, especially their war and post-war fate were mentioned only as far as censorship allowed.

Paradoxically, the absence of the Borderlands in public discourse was accompanied by their strong mythologization. It wasn't until the late 1980s, in the face of the erosion of communist dictatorship, that the authorities agreed to the creation of the first societies and organizations of former inhabitants of the lands east of the river Bug. They tried to make up for lost time.

Today, the Borderlands are once again a significant part of Polish national awareness, the memories of those lands however, seem to range between the myth of lost Arkadia and the trauma of war scars: exile to labor camps, the Katyn Massacre and Volhynia Massacre. The sentimental context inevitably clashes with the experience of a great tragedy.

In the times of the Polish People's Republic, the millions of Poles who were banished from their own homes in the Eastern Borderlands, were forced by the communist authorities to enter the USSR as their formal birthplace into their documents. After the Bolshevik frenzy of destruction, German executions, murders committed by Ukrainian nationalists, the Soviet liquidation of the population along with the material heritage of many generations, which marked the eastern border of the Latin civilization, this may seem to have been a minor act. Small, but very meaningful. Not only did it humiliate the people who were terrorized, imprisoned and placed in labor camps under Soviet rule - this insulted them with an open, insolent lie, it was also meant to annihilate the world from which these Poles came. With this single act it was simply stated that it no longer exists - and that it had

never existed.

President Jarosław Szarek in an article for the IPN Journal “Kresy są wszędzie”. [The Eastern Borderlands are Everywhere”.

In the Eastern Borderlands the dream of greatness was coming true; not the greatness brought by military conquests- though this aspect was also significant to an extent – but the greatness resulting from an invitation to become part of a culture that offered freedom and the opportunity to draw from a rich civilizational heritage. One of many examples of such greatness was the Union of Lublin.

Are we capable of understanding ourselves without this heritage which has shaped us over the centuries, without the memory of places far away from today’s borders of the Republic of Poland?... It is obvious that cutting ourselves off the Eastern Borderlands inheritance, we cripple and impoverish ourselves dramatically. Jarosław Szarek, President of the IPN concludes.

The winners were selected by the Prize Committee, headed by the President of the Institute of National Remembrance. This year, during an official gala, the prize will be awarded to, among others, representatives of youth social organizations, the Veterans Corps of the Fight for the Independence of the Republic of Poland and the Catholic Church.

The honorary distinction will annually be awarded to individuals, institutions and social organizations whose public activity coincides with the statutory objectives of the IPN, for their particularly active

participation in commemorating the heritage of the Polish Eastern Borderlands both in the Republic of Poland and abroad. The committee may also award one post-mortem prize each year.

It is also worth mentioning the educational value of the prize. It will help to disseminate knowledge about what Poland lost after 1945. And, undoubtedly, the loss was enormous. The relics of the former Republic of Poland, the source of our identity, tradition and culture, remained on the Borderlands. Persons devoted to saving these mementos, restoring and preserving the memory of the history of these lands, deserve special recognition and gratitude on the part of not only present but also future generations of Poles.





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