

# Institute of National Remembrance

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## The Katyn Massacre - Basic Facts

Katyń is a symbol of the criminal policy of the Soviet system against the Polish nation. The present study aims to demonstrate the basic facts of Katyn massacre – the execution of almost 22,000 people: Polish prisoners of war in Katyn, Kharkov, Kalinin (Tver) and also other Polish prisoners (soldiers and civilians), which took place in the spring of 1940 in different places of the Soviet Ukraine and Belarus republics based on the decision of the Soviet authorities.

# 1. THE ORIGINS OF THE KATYN MASSACRE

In September 1939, the Third Reich and the Soviet Union invaded Poland following the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact they concluded on 23 August 1939 and amended on 28 September 1939. 51.6% of the territories of the 2nd Polish Republic came under Stalin's control, and their population, especially Poles, fell victim to Soviet repressions. Polish intellectual elites – career soldiers and army reserve officers who played prominent roles in the society before WWII – were sent to camps and prisons. They were joined by teachers, doctors, engineers, lawyers, scientists, landowners, clergy of various denominations, and civil servants.

## THE FOURTH PARTITION OF POLAND

TERRITORIES OCCUPIED BY THE USSR  
AFTER BORDER CORRECTION  
OF 28 SEPTEMBER 1939

ARRESTED IN THE EASTERN  
BORDERLANDS

## ENSLAVED BY THE SOVIETS

Some 250,000 Polish officers and soldiers became Soviet prisoners-of-war. Almost 125,000 of rank and file servicemen were soon released. The POWs were detained in the NKVD detention facilities in the cities of the eastern 2nd Polish Republic.

Between the autumn of 1939 and the spring of 1940, the NKVD set up several detention camps and prisons in the cities of the eastern part of the 2nd Polish Republic. In all, they held 18,632 POWs, including officers, policemen, members of political parties and resistance organizations, land- and factory owners, civil servants and refugees. 10,685 of them were identified by Lavrentiy Beria as Poles.

TERRITORIES OCCUPIED  
BY THE THIRD REICH

51,6%

48,4%

### FORCED LABOUR POW CAMPS

Ca. 25,000 privates and NCOs were put to work in inhuman conditions in the camps in Rovne and Lvov districts, and the mines of the Ukrainian Soviet Republic...

### INTERNMENT, TRANSIT AND COLLECTION CAMPS

There were about 10 of them, located mainly in the European part of the USSR; from them, the POWs were transferred to 3 special camps...

## SPECIAL NKVD CAMPS

In late 1939 – early 1940, the camps held about 15,000 Polish officers and intelligentsia. They were tricked into believing they would soon be evacuated to Germany or a neutral country.

2. STAROBELSK  
3,893 POWs\*

3. OSTASHKOV  
6,364 POWs\*

1. KOZELSK  
4,594 POWs\*

2,900 lieutenant and 2nd lieutenants  
700 captains and cavalry captains  
500 officer cadets  
258 majors  
79 lieutenant colonels  
24 colonels  
4 generals  
1 rear admiral

2,450 lieutenant and 2nd lieutenants  
1,000 captains and cavalry captains  
230 majors  
127 lieutenant colonels  
55 colonels  
9 generals

4,924 rank and file policemen  
775 police NCOs  
240 police and military police officers  
198 Prison Guard officers  
72 NCOs and privates of the Polish Army and Border Protection Corps  
48 officers  
9 intelligence service officers

\*as for March 1940



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## **Abstract**

Katyn is a symbol of the criminal policy of the Soviet system against the Polish nation. The present study aims to demonstrate the basic facts of Katyn massacre – the execution of almost 22,000 people: Polish prisoners of war in Katyn, Kharkov, Kalinin (Tver) and also other Polish prisoners (soldiers and civilians), which took place in the spring of 1940 in different places of the Soviet Ukraine and Belarus republics based on the decision of the Soviet authorities, that is the Political Bureau of All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks) of March 5, 1940. This article refers not only to the massacre itself, but also its origin, historical processes and the lies accompanying Katyn massacre.

## **Keywords**

Katyn massacre, Soviet policy, All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks).

The term 'Katyn massacre' refers to the execution in the spring of 1940 of almost 22,000 people: Polish prisoners of war in Katyn, Kharkov, Kalinin (Tver) and also prisoners (soldiers and civilians), in different places of the Soviet Ukraine and Belarus republics based on the decision of the Soviet authorities, that is the Political Bureau of All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks) of March 5, 1940. The commonly used expression referring to the simultaneous murders at many locations includes only the name of one of them, where the bodies of

the officers were buried. This is connected with the fact that, for almost half the century after these tragic events, the knowledge about people taken into captivity, or arrested and finally murdered based on the resolution of the Political Bureau of All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks), was limited to the information of the executions in Katyn<sup>1</sup>.

The widely understood term 'Katyn massacre' refers not only to the massacre itself, but also its origin, the lies accompanying it and attempts to judge those responsible for it.

## **1. The Soviet policy towards Poland and the Poles until 1939**

The Katyn massacre committed by the People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs (the NKVD) in 1940 shows how the USSR policy aimed at destroying Poland's statehood since it gained independence after World War I<sup>2</sup>. The Treaty of Riga, which was signed in 1921 by Poland, the Soviet Russia and Ukrainian People's Republic of Soviets, ended the Polish-Soviet war of 1919-1920. Under this treaty, the Polish eastern border was established along the following line:

Dzisna-Dokszycze-Slucz-Korzec-Ostrog-Zbrucz. The parties dismissed mutual territorial claims. However, the Bolsheviks, who treated the peace agreement as a concession which was forced by the military situation, did not give up their expansion plans to the West and maintained a hostile attitude towards Warsaw<sup>3</sup>.

After 1921, small, specially trained groups of Ukrainian and Belarusian

Bolsheviks and the Red Army soldiers slipped across the border from the Soviet Russia. They attacked police stations, civilians, clerks and set fire to forests.

The Creation of the Border Protection Corps in 1924 gradually restricted the penetration of these agents and terrorists<sup>4</sup>.

Despite the fact that talks on the Polish-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact had been taking place since 1926, Moscow still expressed a hostile attitude towards the Second Polish Republic in the second half of the twenties, by supporting Lithuanian territorial claims towards Poland and considering Pilsudski's government 'fascist'. After the assassination of the USSR deputy, Piotr Wojkow, in 1927 by a Russian emigrant, the negotiations collapsed, and the Bolsheviks accused the Polish government of supporting Russian emigrant organizations<sup>5</sup>.

In 1932, a pact was signed in which parties rejected the idea of war as an international policy tool, accepted one another's obligations and declared that if any party was attacked, no help would be offered to the aggressor. The pact was to be in force for three years, but in 1934 both the Bolsheviks and the Polish government decided to prolong this period to ten years in the face of the danger from Germany ruled by the Nazi party<sup>6</sup>.

One of the crucial factors which influenced the relations between Moscow and Warsaw was the situation of about one million Poles who, after the Treaty of Riga was signed, remained beyond the eastern border<sup>7</sup>. The USSR government created two ethnic regions for them:

Julian Marchlewski Polish Autonomous District (Marchlewszczyzna) in Ukraine in 1925, and Feliks Dzierzynski Polish Autonomous District (Dzierzynszczyzna) in Belarus in 1932. The aim of the Bolsheviks' policy in these districts was to form units which were to participate in the aggression against the Second Polish Republic in the future. The 'national experiment' was a failure because the inhabitants of both districts preserved national and Catholic traditions and in the 1930's strongly opposed collectivization. In 1935 the decision to dissolve Marchlewszczyzna was announced. Based on the act of the Council of People's Commissars of 28 April 1936, the deportation of masses of Marchlewszczyzna citizens to Siberia and Kazakhstan started<sup>8</sup>. According to final reports prepared by the NKVD, about 50,000 people were forced to leave their country. In 1938 Dzierzynszczyzna met with the same fate and it is estimated that about 20,000 people were deported.

During the years of the great terror 1937-1938, which affected the inhabitants of the whole USSR, an attack on the Poles who lived in the Soviet Ukraine and Belarus occurred. Based on the order issued on 11 August, 1937 by Nikolai Yezhov, an internal affairs commissar, the so-called Polish Operation of the NKVD began<sup>9</sup>. This meant arrests, and executions based on false accusations of spy and sabotage activities. From August 1937 till September 1938, 144,000 Poles were judged, among whom 111,000 were shot by the NKVD, and almost 30,000 were sent to labour camps or prisons after receiving five to fifteen year sentences<sup>10</sup>.

The hostility of the USSR authorities towards the Poles during the period between the wars originated, among other things, from the desire to take revenge for the defeat of the Red Army at the Polish-Bolshevik War in 1920 and preventing the army from advancing towards the west<sup>11</sup>.

## **2. The Soviet invasion of Poland on 17 September 1939**

In the morning of 17 September, 1939, between 600–650,000 soldiers and over 5,000 thousand Red Army tanks invaded the Second Polish Republic, which had been fighting against German aggression since 1 September<sup>12</sup>. On 23 August, 1939, the USSR and the Third Reich signed a pact, which was named the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact after its signatories, the ministers of foreign affairs of both countries. According to the confidential protocol of this non-aggression pact, the USSR's sphere of influence was to extend approximately to the Narew, Vistula and San rivers. This state of affairs was confirmed in the treaty of 28 September and another protocol accompanying it, according to which German and Soviet parties committed themselves to fighting 'Polish agitation'<sup>13</sup>.

The invasion of the Red Army took place at the time when the Polish forces were retreating eastwards before the Germans, after an unsuccessful attempt to maintain the territory to the Narew, Vistula nad San rivers. According to Edward Rydz-Smigly's military plan, the remaining units were to gather at the so-called Romanian Bridgehead and continue defence until France and Great Britain launched an offensive in the West. They declared war on Germany on 3 September

under their obligations towards Poland from before 1 September. As a result of the decision of 12 September, which was taken by the French-English Supreme Council of War, the allies did not take any military action, and the Red Army invaded Poland on the pretext that 'the Polish country and its government ceased to exist'. Consequently, 'the USSR had to take care of the people who lived in Western Ukraine and Western Belarus and their possessions' as the Soviet propaganda referred to the eastern regions of the Second Polish Republic<sup>14</sup>.

The commander-in-chief of the Polish Army, Marshal Smigly-Rydz ordered the army to abstain from provocative operations against the Soviets and allowed the possibility of war in case 'they invaded Poland or tried to disarm the detachments'<sup>15</sup>. Those instructions were issued in Kutu, where politicians, commanders, soldiers and civilians escaped across the bridge in Czeremosz to the Romanian bank.

People from Wilno (Vilnius) and Grodno and the group of Border Protection Corps resisted the enemy attack. The corps under Wilhelm Orlik-Rückemann's command fought the battle of Szack against the 52 Rifle Division of the Red Army. By 25 September, as a result of Belarusian Front attack, the Soviets had gained possession of Wilno (Vilnius), Grodno, Brześć (Brest) on the River Bug and Suwalki. By 28 September, the soldiers of Belarusian Front had occupied Tarnopol, Dubno, Stanislawow, Lwów (Lviv) and Zamosc. The USSR gained control of over half of the territory of the Second Polish Republic<sup>16</sup>.

As soon as the Red Army crossed the border, it started to commit crimes: the massacre in Grodno and the assassination of General Jozef



Olszyna-Wilczynski, the execution of marines of the Pinsk Flotilla in Mokransy, murders in Nowogrodek, Tarnopol and other places, the execution of the soldiers taken captive near Wilno (Vilnius), and also the arrest of defenders of Lwów (Lviv). This happened despite the agreement which guaranteed defenders of Lwów (Lviv) safe conduct towards the Romanian border<sup>17</sup>. Behind the army, operational-chekist groups of the NKVD followed, which murdered and arrested Polish people. These units formed the security apparatus in occupied places, gained control over the state archives, radio and telephone communications and they disarmed civilians. The units acted in accordance with the directive issued by the NKVD on 'The Organisation of Work in Liberated Regions of Western Districts of Ukraine and Belarus' of 15 September, 1939<sup>18</sup>. About 230,000 soldiers and officers and thousands of military service representatives were taken captive by the Bolsheviks. In the majority of cases soldiers and officers did not oppose it. Privates were separated from officers who were transported to Kozelsk and Starobelsk. Policemen were transported mainly to Ostashkov<sup>19</sup>.

### **3. Camps**

#### **Kozelsk**

Kozelsk camp was created in the buildings of a former monastery, the so-called Optina Hermitage. There were 4,594 captives there, about

half of whom were reserve officers. There were also over 300 doctors, several hundred lawyers, engineers, teachers, 21 university lecturers, a lot of men of letters, journalists and feature writers. There was one woman among them: Second Lieutenant Pilot Janina Lewandowska, General Jozef-Dowbor-Musnicki's daughter. The following people were kept there: Rear-admiral Ksawery Czernicki – chief of services of Naval Forces management; General Henryk Odrowaz-Minkiewicz

- the former commander of Border Protection Corps; General Mieczyslaw Smorawinski – commander of Corps District No 2 in Lublin; retired Generals Bronislaw Bohaterewicz and Jerzy Wolkowicki, and Professor Stanislaw Swianiewicz, who avoided death and played a significant role in uncovering Katyn massacre, its initiators and executors<sup>20</sup>.

## **Starobelsk**

In Starobelsk the prisoners of war were kept in a former nunnery at 8 Kirov Street, in the buildings at 32 Kirov Street and 19 Wolodarski Street. There were 3,894 people there: a lot of scholars, priests, about 100 teachers and 400 doctors, several hundred lawyers and engineers, several dozen of men of letters and journalists, and also 8 generals: the defender of Lwów (Lviv) Franciszek Sikorski, Konstanty Plisowski, Stanisław Haller, Leonard Skierski, Leon Billewicz, Aleksander Kowalewski, Kazimierz Orlik-Lukoski and Piotr Skuratowicz<sup>21</sup>.

## **Ostashkov**

The prisoners were kept in a former monastery on Stolobny Island on Seliger Lake, 11 kilometres from Ostashkov. Among the prisoners were the following: the State Police and Military Police officials, secret service and counter-espionage officials, the soldiers of the Border Protection Corps and the employees of the Prison Guard. There were also almost the whole staff of the Military Police Education Centre, among whom was Colonel Stanislaw Sitek. Ostashkov camp was the biggest of the three camps – there were about 6,570 prisoners of war just before it was disbanded in April 1940<sup>22</sup>.

### **4. The massacre**

Preparations for the massacre

From October 1939, the delegated NKVD officials from Moscow heard the prisoners, encouraged them to cooperate and collected data. Only a few of the prisoners agreed to collaborate. The commanding officers' reports included opinions about hostile attitudes of the Poles and a minimal chance of them being useful to the USSR authorities<sup>23</sup>.

The decision to shoot the prisoners from Kozelsk, Starobelsk and Ostashkov was signed on 5 March, 1940 by seven members of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks) authorities: Joseph Stalin, Lavrentiy Beria (proposer), Kliment Voroshilov, Vyacheslav Molotov, Anastas Mikoyan, Mikhail Kalinin and Lazar Kaganovich<sup>24</sup>. On 22

March, Beria issued an order 'to empty the NKVD prisons in USSR and BSSR, that is in Western Ukraine and Western Belarus. The majority of those arrested Poles were officers and policemen<sup>25</sup>.

The lists of those sent to death were to be prepared and signed by Piotr Soprunienko, commander-in-chief of the Prisoners of War Board of People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs, which was created by the order of Beria in September 1939<sup>26</sup>.

On 1 April, the first three lists of the 343 names were sent from Moscow to Ostaskhov camp. Later Soprunienko phoned the following commanding officers: Wasilij Korolew in Kozelsk, Aleksander Bierezkow in Starobelsk and Pawel Borisowiec in Ostaskhov in order to submit further lists of victims<sup>27</sup>.

## **5. Places of torture - cemeteries**

### **Smolensk-Katyn**

On 3 April, the first prisoners from Kozelsk were transported in cattle trucks through Smolensk to Gniezdovo, where smaller groups were transported by prison cars commonly called 'czornyje worony' ('black ravens') to the wilderness called Kozie Gory in Katyn Forest. The functionaries of the NKVD killed each person by shooting in the back of the head. By 11 May, 1940, 4,421 Polish citizens had been killed and buried in Katyn death pits. There is an assumption that some officers had been killed in Smolensk<sup>28</sup>.

## **Kharkov-Piatykhatky**

The first group of prisoners from Starobelsk camp was transported to the headquarters of the Board of Kharkov NKVD district on 5 April 1940. Every night in the basement of the building in Dscherschinski Street executioners killed prisoners by shooting in the neck. The trucks carried the bodies to the pits in Forest Park in Kharkov, a kilometer and a half to Piatykhatky village. By 12 May 3,820 Polish citizens had been killed in Kharkov<sup>29</sup>.

## **Kalinin (Tver)-Miednoye**

On 4 April, 1940, the NKVD started to send prisoners from Ostashkov to the headquarters of the Board of Kalinin NKVD district (today's Tver) at 6 Soviet Street. The executions took place in the basements. The same method of killing was used: a shot to the neck. In the mornings trucks carried the bodies to the pits in Miednoye village, 30 kilometers further away. By 22 May, 1940, 6,311 Polish citizens had been killed in Kalinin. What is worth mentioning when it comes to the Katyn lie, is that the territory of Miednoye cemetery has never belonged to Germany<sup>30</sup>.

Polish authorities built war cemeteries at the places where the officers' bodies had been buried. The cemeteries were officially opened in the year 2000. (in Kharkov on 17 June, in Katyn on 28 July and on 2 September in Miednoye)<sup>31</sup>.

## **Survivors**

Only 395 people from the three camps survived. Some of them owed their rescue to pure chance. Several people were willing to fight on the Soviet side in case of German invasion. There were also agents among them, the same ones as the NKVD had in the camps. The officers who were arrested in the camps and transported to NKVD Lubyanka prison in Moscow also managed to escape death in the summer of 1940<sup>32</sup>.

## **6. Ukrainian list, Belorussian list**

The NKVD kept several thousand arrested officers, clerks, judges, prosecutors, political and social activists in prisons in the so-called Western Ukraine and Western Belarussia. 7,300 of them were put to death. There were 3,435 names of people on the so-called Ukrainian list, which was given to Poland by the Security Service of Ukraine in 1994. The people were killed after being transported, among others, from Lwów (Lviv), Rowne, Luck, Tarnopol, Stanislawow and Drohobycz to Kiev, Kharkov and Cherson. The data of the victims – about 3,870 prisoners transported from Pinsk, Brest, Baranowicze and Wilejka to Minsk – from the so-called Belorussian list have never been revealed and attempts by the Polish authorities to make the archives available have been unsuccessful so far<sup>33</sup>.

## **Ukraine - Bykivnia**

At least 1,980 people from the Ukrainian list were killed and buried in Bykivnia village near Kiev, where about 150 thousand NKVD victims of various nationalities were buried. When the Ukrainian authorities passed the information about Bykivnia cemetery to Warsaw in 2006, both countries started to study it<sup>34</sup>. The dog tag found in 2007 is considered to be the most important piece of evidence concerning the burial of Polish officers. The dog tag, which was a small piece of metal with soldiers' personal data, was worn around the neck by them so that they could be identified in case they were injured or killed. The dog tag which was found in the grave in Bykivina had been made according to the standard from the year 1939, and belonged to Company Sergeant Jozef Naglik. On the comb unearthed were the names of the four soldiers, among whom was the name of Lieutenant-Colonel Bronislaw Szczyradlowski. The names Naglik and Szczyradlowski are on the so-called Ukrainian list. The Polish War Cemetery in Bykivnia was opened on 21 September, 2012<sup>35</sup>.

## **Belarus - Kuropaty**

In 1988, mass graves were discovered in Kuropaty Forest, in the suburbs of Minsk, where the NKVD buried between 100–200,000 Belarusians, Jews and people of various nationalities, including the Poles. The things found in the three mass graves indicate that they must have come from Poland or Western Europe<sup>36</sup>, for example a comb on which a prisoner had scratched Polish words: 'Difficult prisoner's moments. Minsk, 25.4.1940. Thinking about you drives me

crazy. I have started to cry - a difficult day.' This shows that, firstly, the Poles were buried there, and, secondly, they were in Minsk prison at the time when the NKVD carried out Katyn massacre<sup>37</sup>. However, it is impossible to find out the personal data of the owner of the comb and even if it were possible, one cannot compare them with the Belarusian list, which is still unknown to the Polish side. The Belarusian authorities claim that those who are buried there were murdered by the Germans, and make careful research difficult. In the year 2013, the Centre for Polish-Russian Dialogue and Understanding made a reconstruction of part of the so-called Belarusian Katyn list and created a list of 98 names. This was done by comparing the list of the people missing in the north-east districts of the Second Polish Republic in 1939 and 1940 with the NKVD convoy list of the people transported to Minsk prison in the years 1939-1940<sup>38</sup>.

## **7. To exterminate Polish elites**

There are mass graves in the whole area of the former Soviet Union. Stalin and other leading Bolshevik activists before him ordered the elimination of whole social classes - Russian intelligence and rich farmers, the so-called kulaks; superior servicemen and workers; aristocrats and their servants. They sentenced members of different professions to death, for example, doctors and generals and exterminated people of various nationalities: Russians, Poles, Ukrainians, Belarusians, Volga Germans, Crimean Tatars, Finns, Estonians, Latvians, Chinese - the list is endless<sup>39</sup>.



The massacre committed in the spring of 1940 was carefully considered and organized. The aim of the communist party was the extermination of those social groups which had been building the bases of the modern Polish nation since the mid-nineteenth century<sup>40</sup>.

A modern collective national consciousness was developed. This was possible thanks to the intellectual elite's work on improving the conditions of life among peasantry, industrial workers or craftsmen and educated people's attempts to involve those from lower classes of society in social life. Owing to the landed gentry's and intellectual elite's care and effort to continue Polish traditions and culture were of interest to more and more social layers of Poles. The burghers, which was becoming richer and richer, developed modern industry by creating economic structures, on which - Poland reborn after the partition - built its economy<sup>41</sup>.

The social classes which remained passive during the uprisings in the 19th century took an active part in the fight for independence. After Poland gained independence in 1918, subsequent generations of intellectual elite created structures of an independent country, which was developing in all spheres of life<sup>42</sup>.

By carrying out the Katyn massacre, the Soviets got rid of large numbers of teachers, doctors, industrialists, engineers, humanists, writers, scholars, and also a lot of professional officers: the elites capable of rebuilding the country. Polish people who were a threat to the plans of the conquest of Poland, because they were determined to oppose the annexation of their country by Moscow and suspected in

being involved in any anti-Soviet conspiracy found themselves in the hands of the NKVD. Mobilized reserve officers, not only the Poles, but also Ukrainians, Belarusians, Jews, Tatars and people of various nationalities living in the Second Polish Republic constituted over half of the victims<sup>43</sup>.

The plan of the destruction of people in the eastern part of the Polish Republic also included forced deportations, which were organized by the NKVD to faraway places in the USSR. The first of them took place from 9 to 11 February, 1940 and included, among others, military settlers, civil servants, workers of the forest services and Polish State Railways. The second deportation took place from 12 to 14 April, 1940. It included family members of those considered to be enemies of communism: office workers, police and prison officers, teachers, social activists, captives' families and those repressed by the NKVD and killed in Katyn massacre. On 28 and 29 June, 1940, war refugees from central Poland were deported. The fourth deportation took place in May and June 1941. It included intellectuals, captives, labourers, craftsmen, families of railway workers and of those arrested since autumn 1940. The captives were deported to different republics of the USSR: Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Tajik, Turkmen, Uzbek, and also Russian (for example to Siberia). According to the Soviet documents that have been published so far, the number of Polish people deported in the years 1940–1941 is at least 309–327,000 citizens<sup>44</sup>.

## **8. Search for Polish officers and Stalin's lies**

The last pieces of news that the families received from the prisoners

were from the beginnings of March 1940. Later, the NKVD denied any information. At the same time, the post started to return the letters to the officers sent by their families from the General Government<sup>45</sup>.

After the German invasion of the USSR, the Polish-Soviet relations were re-established, after they had been broken off on 17 September, 1939. On 30 July, 1941, Sikorski-Majski Pact was signed by the prime minister of the Polish government-in-exile and Moscow ambassador in London. Under this pact an army was to be formed, which would consist of the Poles staying in the USSR. It also provided – as it was called – the amnesty for all citizens of the Republic of Poland, who were, at that time, ‘deprived of freedom in the USSR, either as prisoners of war or according to any other corresponding rules’<sup>46</sup>.

The commander-in-chief in exile appointed General Wladyslaw Anders, who was released from Lubyanka prison in Moscow, the commander of Polish Armed Forces in the USSR. The former prisoners of gulags and also the Poles living in the Soviet Union traversed long distances in very difficult conditions in order to reach Tatiszczew near Saratow, Buzuluk and Totskoye (Orenburg district), where those ready to join Anders’ Army gathered<sup>47</sup>. All the people who arrived, both from the distant north and Siberia and from the European part of the empire asked about their commanders. Cavalry Captain, Jozef Czapski, the survivor of Starobelsk camp, a writer and painter and also a representative on the matter of the missing people, had gathered information about the Poles staying in the USSR and interceded with the Soviets. In the autumn of 1941, General Anders passed the

authorities in Moscow a list of officers who were taken captive by the Red Army in 1939 and could be in gulags. A high number of the missing people, which was estimated to be about 15,000 at that time, excluded their accidental arrest in labour camps. Anders mentioned this during the conversation with Jozef Stalin and received the following reply: 'They fled to Manchuria'<sup>48</sup>

## **9. The Germans discover the graves in Katyn**

After the German invasion of the Soviet Union, the Germans occupied Smolensk area from July 1941 to September 1943. On 13 April, 1943, the radio in Berlin announced that mass Polish graves had been discovered in Katyn<sup>49</sup>. Since the end of March the Germans had been carrying out exhumations under the direction of Professor Gerhard Buhtz, the director of Forensic Medicine and Criminology Institute in Breslau (Wroclaw after the war). Further lists containing the names of the identified victims started to appear in the Polish-language German newspapers which were published in the General Government. Immediately, Stalin accused the Germans of this mass murder<sup>50</sup>.

The Germans tried to make use of the facts revealed, and on 16 April they invited the International Red Cross and chose inhabitants of the General Government to participate in the exhumations and examinations<sup>51</sup>.

The next day, General Sikorski's government asked the International Red Cross for help with the examination; they did this independently of

the German appeal, but Stalin used this as an excuse to accuse the Polish government-in-exile of collaboration with the Third Reich. This was the way in which the official Soviet newspaper Pravda (Truth) described the attitude of the Polish authorities. On 25 April, 1943, the Soviet Minister of Foreign Affairs, Molotov, gave the Polish ambassador in Moscow a note saying that the USSR government had decided to 'break off the relations with the Polish government'<sup>52</sup>.

Meanwhile, the International Red Cross replied that it would explain the circumstances of the executions on condition that all the parties concerned asked it to discover the truth. Moscow refused to participate. Thus, the Germans invited an independent committee consisting of 12 leading specialists in forensic medicine from the whole of Europe to the place of the massacre. The experts were in Katyn from 28 to 30 April. The statement that the experts issued dispelled all the doubts as to who was responsible for the massacre, namely, the executions took place at the time when Smolensk area was under the Soviet rule<sup>53</sup>.

At the same time the Technical Committee of the Polish Red Cross worked under the leadership of general secretary of the Polish Red Cross executive board Kazimierz Skarzynski. The committee consisted, among others, of the following people: Dr Marian Wodzinski, an expert in forensic medicine from Jagiellonian University, and priest Stanislaw Jasinski, the representative of Metropolitan Bishop of Krakow sent by the Church. The Polish government and secret authorities allowed another group of Polish people to go to Katyn. Among them were the

writers: Ferdynand Goetel and Jozef Mackiewicz.

The German version of the events was supported by different circumstances, for instance the age of the trees planted on the graves before 1941, so the massacre must have been carried out by the Soviets, and also specific changes in the state of the corpses due to which it was possible to say that they had been there since 1940.

By 3 June, 1943 over 4,100 bodies had been removed, and Dr Wodzinski identified 2,800 of them. After the delegation arrived in the General Government, the Germans tried to force the Polish Red Cross to issue an announcement about Katyn, but the Poles did not want to be used for the purposes of German propaganda<sup>54</sup>.

## **10. Extermination and repressions of the Poles in the Third Reich**

While the NKVD was killing Polish captives, the Germans were putting their carefully prepared plan to destroy Polish intellectual elite into action. As early as during the September campaign in 1939, six special squads (Einsatzgruppen) of Security Police (SiPo) and Security Service (SD) and an independent operational office were to perform an action against the Polishness. The aim of the actions code-named Tannenberg was to garrison Polish territories captured by the Wehrmacht<sup>55</sup>. The purpose of Intelligenzaktion<sup>56</sup>, part of which was Tannenberg, was to exterminate or send to labour camps all the people around whom an opposition against German oppression could be formed. The action

was performed by Einsatzgruppen and, from November 1939, by permanent police outposts and Security service. As early as during the September campaign in 1939, they killed about 20,000 people considered enemies of the Third Reich, who were, among others, the participants of Silesian uprisings and Wielkopolska uprising.

On 6 November, 1939, a few days after the General Government was established from four districts: Warsaw, Radom, Lublin, Krakow (Galicia and Lwów (Lviv) were annexed in 1941), the Germans intensified the Intelligenzaktion operation. One of its parts was Sonderaktion Krakau (German: special action Krakow), which ended by arresting 183 people, for example, 144 academics from Jagiellonian University, 21 from AGH University of Science and Technology, 3 from Business Academy, 1 person from Catholic University of Lublin, and 1 person from Stefan Batory University in Wilno (Vilnius). The scholars were transported to Sachsenhausen concentration camp<sup>57</sup>.

One of the parts of Intelligenzaktion was also an action called Akcja AB (Außerordentliche Befriedungsaktion - German: extraordinary action of pacification; AB Action), which was carried out in the General Government especially intensively from April till July 1940. The aim of the action was to destroy the communities capable of organizing resistance: teachers, doctors, Catholic priests, judges, political and social activists and those suspected of participating in underground organisations. About 3,500 Polish people were killed then<sup>58</sup>. By July 1940, over 100,000 teachers, priests, landowners, lawyers, retired military men, political and social activists had become victims of

Intelligenzaktion.

The matters related to the exchange of people between the territories occupied by the Germans and the Soviets and presumably the destruction of Polish elites were discussed during mutual conferences organized by the Gestapo and NKVD in Zakopane and Krakow between February and April 1940<sup>59</sup>.

## **11. Katyn lie**

The situation on the eastern front made Germany try to reconcile with the Poles. The massacre discovered by the Germans was to be used for disgracing Stalin, and consequently, making the anti-German coalition break up or at least weaken. The governments of the USA and Great Britain knew the truth, but were not interested in giving it wide publicity because this threatened the alliance with Moscow against the war with Hitler<sup>60</sup>.

Stalin used Polish communists for his purposes: on 28 April, 1943, Wanda Wasilewska accused Germany of committing the crime. She did this in her speech, which was later published in Izvestia. Next the leadership of Polish Workers' Party did the same<sup>61</sup>.

In January 1944, the Soviets made another attempt to distort the truth: Special Committee under the leadership of Nikolay Burdenko went to Smolensk district, which was recaptured in September 1943. They carried out "re-assessment" for a few days in January 1944, and stated



that the Germans were responsible for the massacre. It was then that a documentary and a report for the communist propaganda were produced. Again, Polish communists supported the Soviets: Wanda Wasilewska and Jerzy Borejsza spread Burdenko's version in the Soviet press. Zygmunt Berling, the commander of the First Polish Army organized by Stalin, did the same<sup>62</sup>.

When the Germans left Krakow, retreating from the Red Army, the NKVD started to search for the people participating in the exhumation and examination of the evidence discovered in the death pits in Katyn. In March 1945, Dr Jan Robel and his co-workers were arrested. They had been examining the things dug up in Katyn and delivered to Krakow. In June public prosecution service accused, among others, writer, Ferdynand Goetel, and Dr Marian Wodzinski of collaborating with the Germans. Public prosecutor, Roman Martini, headed the investigation, and public prosecutor, Jerzy Sawicki, supervised it. Arrest warrants were issued for the witnesses, who first hid and then ran away abroad<sup>63</sup>.

In 1946, the Soviets unsuccessfully tried to include German war criminals in Nuremberg in the arraignment concerning killing "about 11,000 Polish officers in Katyn in 1941". In the final document this matter was omitted. The reason was that it had unquestionably been established that the unit indicated by the Soviet prosecutor, the staff of the 537 Signal Regiment under the leadership of Colonel Ahrens, was stationed in the barracks a few kilometres from Katyn graves, but only from December 1941. Colonel Ahrens testified in Nuremberg as

a witness<sup>64</sup>.

The authorities in Moscow tried to hide the truth for many years. Aleksander Szelepin, the chief of the Committee for State Security (KGB), suggested destroying the captives' files to the Soviet leader, Nikita Khrushchev, in 1959. The files "were kept in a sealed chamber". According to the Russian sources, Khrushchev was to keep only the most important documents, which were hidden in a special file labelled number 165.

Katyn matter reappeared during the Cold War. In 1951, the US House of Representatives established a committee under the leadership of Ray John Madden. The investigation conducted by the committee met with strong opposition from the USSR and People's Republic of Poland authorities. The report issued in July 1952 placed the blame unambiguously on the Soviets<sup>66</sup>.

In 1969, Ukrainian children accidentally found graves in Piatykhvatky. The chief of KGB (Committee for State Security) and a future leader of the USSR, Jurij Andropov, ordered that the Poles' remains be covered by slaked lime and buried. The documents describing these facts were found in 2009 by the Security Service of Ukraine (SBU)<sup>67</sup>.

In the 1970s, Moscow propaganda gave considerable publicity to the massacre of Belarusian people conducted by Germans in Chatyn in 1941. The similarity between the names of the places and their close location were used in order to mislead the western public opinion. A lot of politicians put flowers at the monument during their official visits to

the USSR<sup>68</sup>.

After a short period of polemics with the Commission of the House of Representatives, silence followed – mentioning the word “Katyn” publicly was forbidden. It was not until the mid-seventies that the censorship in the People’s Republic of Poland allowed printing expressions like “shot by the Nazis in Katyn” or “was killed in Katyn”. The only date which could be given was the one after July 1941. At the same time, those who told the truth were punished. In the international area, the authorities of the USSR and People’s Republic of Poland opposed, among other things, the building of monuments reminding people of the Katyn massacre<sup>69</sup>.

Many years after the USSR officially accepted the responsibility for the Katyn crime, books denying the truth have been and still are being published in Russia. For example, *Antirossijskaja podłost* by Jurij Muchin was published in 2003. It spread the old lies about the Germans being to blame. Muchin also accused the Polish government in-exile of lengthening World War II and killing millions of people by revealing the crime. The consequence of the long-standing propaganda is the publication of the information about ‘the German crime in Katyn’ in the western press. One of the examples is the announcement of the film entitled *Katyn* by Andrzej Wajda, which appeared in a Swedish daily newspaper *Dagens Nyheter*. In 2008, the newspaper printed the information about ‘a Nazi massacre of the Polish officers in Katyn forest in 1940’<sup>70</sup>.

## **12. The guardians of memory**

Stanisław Swianiewicz was transported with other prisoners by train from Kozelsk to Gniezdovo, near Katyn forest on 29 April, 1940. Arrested in the carriage, he saw through the slit Soviet buses transporting the other officers in the unknown direction. He was kept in other prisons, and finally freed under the terms of Sikorski-Majski pact. He reached the place where the Polish Armed Forces in the USSR were being formed, and he presented a detailed report. In 1951, he testified before a special committee of the US House of Representatives. His book *In the Shadow of Katyn: Stalin's terror*<sup>71</sup>, which was published by the Literary Institute in Paris in 1976, contains his memories from the time when he was in gulags, prisons, and also the Embassy in Kuybyshev in 1942 when the Polish authorities were searching for traces of the 15,000 missing officers and policemen.

Jozef Czapski presented an account of his search for the missing officers in *Wspomnienia Starobielskie (Reminiscences of Starobyelsk (1945))*<sup>72</sup> and later in the book *In Inhuman Land*<sup>73</sup>(1949).

In the People's Republic of Poland, there were people who took a risk in order to preserve the memory of the NKVD victims. In 1978, Adam Macedonski, Andrzej Kostrzewski, Stanislaw Tor, Kazimierz Godlowski and Leszek Martini established a secret Katyn Institute in Poland<sup>74</sup>. In April 1979, just before the 39th anniversary of the tragedy, they revealed themselves. Until that time the members of the Institute had translated foreign language publications, among others, reports produced by ambassador O'Maley and by a special committee of the

US Congress. They had also prepared the first 15 issues of the magazine „Biuletyn Katynski” („Katyn Bulletin”)<sup>75</sup>. The founders and co-workers of the Institute faced prosecutions and reprisals from the Security Service. The Institute was officially registered as Katyn Institute in Poland in 1991<sup>76</sup>.

Priest Stefan Niedzielak and Wojciech Ziembinski started to create the Sanctuary of the Killed and Murdered in the East in Powazki Cemetery. Stefan Niedzielak was the chaplain of Home Army, a participant of the Warsaw Uprising and, from 1977, parish priest in Powazki Cemetery. He worked as the chaplain of families, which, in the 1980s, started to demand that the truth be revealed after half a century silence. On 31 July, 1981, the monument – Katyn cross – was erected on his initiative. The monument was destroyed on the same night by the Security Service. The Security Service threatened the priest in order to silence him. On the night of 19/20 January 1989, the priest died after receiving a blow to the head. His killers have still not been found<sup>77</sup>.

On 21 March, 1980, Walenty Badylak, a 76-year-old retired baker living in Krakow, set himself on fire in protest against communism and concealing the truth about Katyn. According to „Biuletyn Katyński”<sup>78</sup>, the files of the investigation into ‘committing suicide by Walenty Badylak, who was suspected of the crime under article 152 of the penal code’ were kept in the archives in Krakow District Prosecution Service. Article 15 of the penal code at that time imposed a custodial sentence from 6 months to 5 years for ‘manslaughter’, which was the way the communist prosecution service classified self-immolation.

Walenty Badylak died from burns before the fire was extinguished. A metal plate with the word 'Katyn' was found with his body<sup>79</sup>.

### **13. Revealing the evidence about the crime by Moscow and reluctance to judge it**

Political changes after the year 1989 and the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 created – as it seemed then – an opportunity to begin a Polish investigation. However, the authorities in Warsaw decided that the investigation was within the jurisdiction of the law enforcement authorities of the country where the crime was committed. Public Prosecutor General, Jozef Zyto, applied to the USSR authorities to launch an investigation into the matter of Polish officers. After the initial refusal, the investigation was eventually undertaken in 1990<sup>80</sup>.

It was on 13 April that the Soviet Union admitted for the first time that the massacre in Katyn was committed by the NKVD. In October 1992, the director of the Russian Federation State Archives, Rudolf Pikhoya, submitted the copies of the documents from the special file on the crimes committed in Katyn, Kharkiv and Kalinin (Tver). The documents were submitted to President Lech Walesa by the order of Russian President, Boris Yeltsin<sup>81</sup>.

The public opinion could read the interrogation protocols of several participants of the massacre called by the Russian law enforcement agencies to testify as witnesses. However, after a few years, the Russian Federation hardened its position and on 5 March, 2005, the

Chief Military Prosecution Service announced that it had completed the investigation into the massacre on 21 September, 2004. On 11 March, 2005, the Chief Military Prosecution Service justified its decision by stating that killing Polish officers did not bear the stamps of genocide, but it was a common crime, so it expired. 116 out of 184 volumes of the investigation, including the decision of 21 September, 2004, were made confidential under the regulation of 21 December, 2004. Consequently, the files cannot be used, for example by Polish prosecutors<sup>82</sup>.

This met with a strong reaction from the family members of the victims, who having exhausted legal proceedings, lodged a few complaints to the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg in the years 2007–2010. They demanded, among other things, that the justification of discontinuation of the Russian investigation be available to them because they did not accept the conclusion announced publicly by Russian prosecutors. The Russian reply was that they were under no obligation to explain what had happened to the Polish citizens who, according to them, 'went missing' 'as a result of Katyn events'<sup>83</sup>.

Those complaints were handled together in the first instance by the European Court of Human Rights on 16 April, 2012. The judges decided that the crime in Katyn was a war crime, which does not expire. The Court also maintained that Russia treated the victims' family members, who wanted to gain access to the documents, 'inhumanely and humiliatingly' by making the documents classified or not showing where the killed officers had been buried. Russia was also accused of

making the documents unavailable to the European Court of Human Rights. Consequently, the Court was unable to decide whether the investigation was conducted thoroughly. The victims' family members appealed against the sentence to the Grand Chamber. Supported by the state they challenge the decision of the Court that it was not able to examine whether the Russian investigation into Katyn massacre had been effective. The verdict is expected to be announced by the end of 2013<sup>84</sup>.

On 30 November, 2004, the Institute of National Remembrance (the IPN) launched an investigation within its power to prosecute war crimes and crimes against mankind (including those committed by the communist regime) from the period between 1939 and 1990. The decision to launch the investigation was based on the assumption that Katyn Massacre was a war crime and a crime against mankind<sup>85</sup>.

By the end of 2012, 2,887 witnesses had been questioned, the majority of whom were the members of the victims' families. The documents from the archives and public prosecution services had been gathered. While the prosecutors of the IPN were in Moscow in 2005, only 67 out of 183 volumes of the files of the investigation conducted by the Chief Military Prosecution Service of the Russian Federation were available to them for inspection. Although some of the documents were gradually declassified in the following years, there were 35 volumes of files at the end of 2012, which were still classified. These are probably fragments of the investigation and the decision to discontinue it. The Polish investigation is still being conducted<sup>86</sup>.



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## Notes

The intention of the authors was to summarize the most important facts connected with Katyn Massacre, which they gathered, among other things, when preparing the IPN educational portfolio 'Katyn Massacre' for Polish students and teachers. Its co-author is also D. Gorajczyk (IPN Kraków), „Zbrodnia Katyńska”, Kraków-Warszawa 2010.

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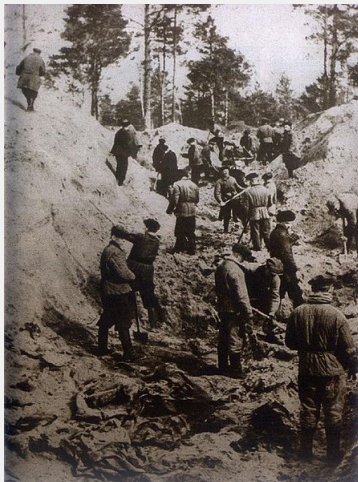
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See

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