

# Institute of National Remembrance

<https://ipn.gov.pl/en/news/9244,77-Years-From-the-Yalta-Conference.html>

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## 77 Years From the Yalta Conference

The conference in Yalta, Crimea, led by the leaders of the so-called "Big Three": U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt, British Prime Minister Winston Churchill and Soviet Premier Joseph Stalin, started on 4 February 1945. The talks were also attended by foreign ministers, chiefs of staff, and numerous advisors and experts representing the three largest countries of the anti-Hitler coalition. No representative of the Polish government in exile in London was invited to the meeting, and all decisions were taken without the participation of Poles.





The conference decided on the future of the Third German Reich. The

German territory was divided into four occupation zones: American, British, French and Soviet. An important part of the arrangements concerning Germany was also the matter of post-war reparations, and forced repatriation of the German population from the lands that were about to come to Poland and other countries.

Putting aside the German issues, the matter of Poland was the second most important topic to be discussed during the meeting. The decisions made about our homeland had multiple consequences on a political, social and economic level. The "Big Three" confirmed that the border of the Polish state would be shifted to the west. The Soviet Union seized the lands east of the so-called Curzon Line, which constituted about 50% of the territory of the Second Polish Republic before 1939. As a result, Poland was to lose Lviv and Vilnius, the two most important centers of Polish national life in the so-called Eastern Borderlands. The losses were to be compensated with the so-called "Recovered Territories": Western and Gdansk Pomerania, the Lubusz and Kłodzko lands, Lusatia, Lower Silesia and the Opole region, and part of East Prussia. In accordance with the arrangements established at the conference, a large group of Poles found themselves outside the country. Some of them did it consciously, staying in exile in the West and unwilling to live under the communist rule. Others, against their will, found themselves on the Polish territories taken away by the Soviet Union.

The Western Allies lived up to the expectations of Stalin and officially approved the Provisional Government of National Unity (TRJN), thus

refusing to recognize the Polish Government in Exile in London, until then the only legitimate and universally accepted authority of the Polish nation.

The Yalta agreements were rejected by the Polish government led by Prime Minister Tomasz Arciszewski. On 13 February 1945, the it issued a statement in which ephasized:

*"(...) the decisions made by the "Big Three" were prepared and taken not only without the involvement of the Polish Government, but also without its knowing. This kind of behavior in relation to Poland is not only a denial of elementary principles which apply to allies, but it is an unquestionable violation of the letter and spirit of the Atlantic Charter and the right of everyone to defend his own interests. For this reason, the decisions taken at the Conference cannot be recognized by the Polish Government and cannot be binding upon the Polish Nation. The Polish Nation sees the detachment of the eastern lands by imposing the so-called Curzon Line as the Polish-Soviet border as a new partition of Poland, this time by Polish allies".*

To this day, the Yalta Conference remains for Poles as a symbol of the Western betrayal and the consent of the Allies to the subordination of Eastern Europe to the USSR. The decisions made in Yalta divided Europe into East and West, which in the future led to the Cold War rivalry between the USA and the Soviet Union.

Yalta was also an important element in legitimizing the power of the communist party and at the same time an all-purpose justification for

the violation of fundamental human rights committed in its name. It was an important point of reference for the emerging opposition movements in Central and Eastern Europe (e.g. Solidarity trade union in Poland). The struggle for independence was often seen as taking efforts to overcome the legacy of Yalta.

The Institute of National Remembrance, in the course of its statutory tasks, also spreads knowledge about the tragic decisions made during the Yalta Conference. In recent years, the IPN employees have organized several conferences, published a number of articles and released books on the subject.

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