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THE POLISH–UKRAINIAN CONFLICT UNDER COMMUNIST RULE

Let us start with a truism: Polish–Ukrainian relations are encumbered with particular falsifications; this is a result of the political conditions in which historiography developed in the Polish People’s Republic, of a limited access to sources and also the state of consciousness of the two communities and deep–rooted mutual resentments. It is only recently that publications began to appear which consider the situation of the Ukrainian minority in post–war Poland in a scientifically reliable way, free of nationalistic encumbrances¹. Mention should be made first of all of the volumes of sources edited by Eugeniusz Miśiło; the first volume has already appeared²; it concerns Operation Vistula (*Wisła*) and is equipped with an extensive introduction; the next volume is waiting for a publisher. However, the subject is still taken up reluctantly by historians.

During the war the Polish political circles which formed the Polish Government–in–Exile and the Polish Underground State did not have a sensible realistic concept of how to arrange relations with the Ukrainians.

¹ A. Chojnowska, *Przesiedlenie ludności ukraińskiej na Ziemię Odzyskane w 1947 r.* (*The Transfer of the Ukrainian Population to the Recovered Territories in 1947*), “Przegląd Powszechny” 1991, № 12; eadem, *Przesiedlenie ludności ukraińskiej na ziemie zachodnie i północne w 1947 r.* (*The Transfer of the Ukrainian Population to the Western and Northern Territories in 1947*), “Zeszyty Historyczne”, vol. 102, Paryż 1992; E. Miśiło, *Deportacje, obóz w Jaworznie* (*Deportations, the Camp at Jaworzno*), “Tygodnik Powszechny” 1990, № 10; idem, *Polska polityka narodowościowa wobec Ukraińców 1944–1947* (*Poland’s Nationality Policy towards the Ukrainians 1944–1947*), in: *Polska — Polacy — mniejszości narodowe*, Ossolineum 1992; T. A. Olszański, *Konflikt polsko–ukraiński 1943–1947* (*The Polish–Ukrainian Conflicts 1943–1947*), “Więź” 1991, № 11–12; K. Podlaski, *Białorusini, Litwini, Ukraińcy. Nasi wrogowie czy bracia?* (*The Byelorussians, Lithuanians, Ukrainians. Our Enemies or Brothers?*), first published in “Słowo”, uncensored; R. Torzecki, *Polacy i Ukraińcy. Sprawa ukraińska w czasie II wojny światowej na terenie II Rzeczypospolitej* (*Poles and Ukrainians. The Ukrainian Question during World War II in the Territory of the Second Republic*), Warszawa 1993.

² E. Miśiło, Akcja “Wisła”. *Dokumenty* (*Operation Vistula. Documents*), Archiwum Ukraińskie, Warszawa 1993.

They could not possibly have it. Upholding as they did the principle of the inviolability of Poland's eastern frontier, they had to reckon with the presence of a several million strong Ukrainian minority, a large part of which was ill-disposed to the Polish state or held back, for it had its own national aspirations which were incompatible with the shape Poland was expected to assume. In March 1944 the Council of National Unity (*Rada Jedności Narodowej*) issued a declaration entitled *What the Polish Nation Is Fighting for* which outlined the vision of the Republic's future political system; the part concerning attitude to other nationalities read: "The Polish nation will fully take into consideration the interests of other nations living in the territory of the State. While demanding that they should be loyal and faithful to the Polish state and sympathetic to the rights and interests of the Polish nation, Poland will base its relation to these nationalities on the principle of equal political rights and will guarantee them conditions for a full cultural, economic and social development within the framework of state unity and common good of all citizens"³. This excluded in advance the granting of territorial or cultural autonomy to the national minorities and obligated the Ukrainians, Byelorussians and Lithuanians to recognize the state in which the Polish nation would be the ruling nation as common good.

The necessity of arranging relations with the Ukrainians was obvious, and so were the difficulties this would involve. Even before the outbreak of anti-Polish Ukrainian actions in Volhynia and eastern Galicia, General Stefan Rowecki, "Grot", commander-in-chief the Home Army (*Armia Krajowa*), held the view that the restoration of Polish statehood in the eastern borderland would lead to a conflict with the Ukrainians. In November 1942 he wrote to General Sikorski, Prime Minister of the Polish Government-in-Exile: "We must realize that when an uprising against the Germans breaks out and we start taking over the Republic's sovereign eastern territories, a struggle will break out for eastern Galicia, and perhaps also for Volhynia, in conditions which, on the whole, will be unfavourable for us. This struggle will be presented by hostile propaganda as an aggressive war". Rowecki was of the opinion that the Poles could make "the campaign connected with the take-over of our eastern territories easier for themselves or even escape it altogether if they at least pacified Volhynia by propaganda at the right time and if they weakened resistance in eastern Galicia by winning over a part of the Ukrainian community"⁴. This was the aim of his earlier instructions and

³ Declaration of the Council of National Unity (*Rada Jedności Narodowej*) *O co walczy Naród Polski* (*What the Polish Nation Is Fighting For*), 15 III 1944; *Armia Krajowa w dokumentach 1939-1945* (*The Home Army in Documents 1939-1945*), vol. III, April 1943 — July 1944, Londyn 1976, pp. 361 ff.

⁴ *Armia Krajowa w dokumentach, op. cit.*, vol. II, p. 142.

orders. However, the successive plans for a general uprising foresaw not only a fight against the Germans but also “resistance to the Ukrainians’ thirst for conquest”. One of the variants of the plan, worked out by Rowecki, said: “There is a possibility of a fight against Ukrainians in the base from the first day of the uprising. From the beginning we shall also be forced to fight against the Ukrainians in Lwów”⁵.

Though they knew that a return to the eastern frontiers established at Riga (Treaty of 1921) would lead to an armed conflict with the Ukrainians (and perhaps also with the Lithuanians), to say nothing of Soviet attitude, Polish political circles did not bring themselves to work out any solutions, apart from declarations on respect for the rights of national minorities. Meanwhile, as Andrzej Friszke says, “proposals to base relations on these principles stood no chance of being accepted, for the Ukrainian revolt was spreading in eastern Galicia and Volhynia. Without a programme of territorial autonomy it was impossible to reach an agreement even with the most moderate Ukrainian groups”⁶. It is not surprising therefore that the Home Delegate of the Government-in-Exile informed the Polish authorities in London in February 1944 that “all endeavors to come to an agreement with leading circles of the Ukrainian population have until recently been thwarted by the Ukrainians’ strong aversion to any binding talks [...] Authoritative Ukrainian circles, with a political shortsightedness so characteristic of them, have resolved to create *faits accomplis*, as was manifested by the events in Volhynia last year” (in 1943 — K. K.)⁷. In these conditions the steps taken by the Polish side, such as the Home Political Representation’s (*Krajowa Reprezentacja Polityczna*) proclamation to the Ukrainian of July 30, 1943 which guaranteed Ukrainians free and full development in the Republic on the basis of equal right and civic duties and called on them to stop co-operating with the occupier and take up, together with Poles, a fight against the common enemy, Germany, were of no avail. The proclamation said: “We understand and appreciate the Ukrainian nation’s aspirations to create an independent Ukraine”, but it added: “We declare, however, that we do not renounce the Republic’s eastern territories, in the southern part of which Poles have for centuries been living side by side with Ukrainians, territories to the civilization and economy of which the Polish Nation has made an enormous contribution”⁸. The Ukrainians

⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 334.

⁶ A. Friszke, *O kształt niepodległej Polski (For the Shape of Independent Poland)*, Warszawa 1989, Biblioteka “Wieżi”, pp. 500 ff.

⁷ Archives of the General Sikorski Institute and Museum in London, A 11.85/G/9, Report of the Nationality Office of the Polish Government’s Home Delegate, 10 II 1944.

⁸ *Ibidem*, Report of the Nationality Office, 8 V 1944.

made no response to this appeal. Polish policy was evidently lagging behind developments, Poles failed to notice and understand the Ukrainians' national aspirations. The Polish horizon was restricted to equality of right. In a resolution of November 15, 1943, the Nationality Council (*Rada Narodowościowa*), the Home Delegate's advisory body presided over by the Delegate's Deputy and composed of representatives of the main political parties, proposed Polish-Ukrainian negotiations with a view to obtaining a declaration that the Ukrainians living in the Polish Republic wanted to retain Polish citizenship. In a resolution of January 17, 1944 the Council stated that "the Polish state should guarantee to its citizens of Ukrainian nationality full and free national, economic and cultural development, in particular: a) full participation in communal, district and voivodship self-government based on democratic elections; b) national primary and secondary schools and a Ukrainian university in Lwów...; c) equal right for the Ukrainian language in public administration and courts of law; d) unrestricted admission of Ukrainians to service in public administration and the armed forces; economic development of the Ukrainian population on equal terms with Poles and an equitable participation of the Ukrainian population in land reform"⁹. This programme went quite far, undoubtedly further than the abovementioned declaration of the Council of National Unity. But it also met with no response. Prospects of an agreement arose in the autumn of 1943; in talks started by Ukrainian circles with the Command of the Home Army (*Armia Krajowa*) in the Lwów region, the Ukrainians agreed with the following principles: "1. Ukrainians are the object of a Polish-Soviet conflict; 2. in this conflict the Ukrainians maintain a pro-Polish attitude; 3. the south-eastern territories are an integral part of the Polish state; 4. they are a nationally-mixed territory; 5. consequently, Poland has the right and duty to defend these territories in the international forum"¹⁰. However, difficulties arose when the Polish side tried to persuade the Ukrainians to define their stance in an official declaration. The Ukrainian national movement was in the process of consolidation, an expression of which was the planned establishment of the *Holovna Rada* (Chief Council). It was agreed that after its establishment to Council would issue a declaration in reply to the appeal of the Home Political Representation (*Krajowa Reprezentacja Polityczna*) of July 30, 1943, that it would proclaim a pro-Polish stand in the Polish-Soviet dispute and recognize the south-eastern territories as an integral part of the Polish state. The plan fell through, and soon the question of the eastern

⁹ *Ibidem*.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*.

territories was solved without the participation of Poles and Ukrainians, if we exclude the communists.

The political circles of the governmental camp which grouped a wide range of political orientations, from socialists to the nationalists, saw Poland as a state of the Polish nation, a state which would guarantee rights and national freedoms to citizens of other nationalities; the communists, on the other hand, declared, to cite Alfred Lampe's words, that: "The rebuilt Polish state will be a nation–state". In an article which appeared in April 1943 in "Wolna Polska", a paper published in the USSR, this leading politician and ideologist of the Communist Party of Poland, said: "We demand the right of full national unification within our own state and recognize the right of the Ukrainians, Byelorussians and Lithuanians to a similar national unification"¹¹. Similarly, the declaration issued by the Polish Workers' Party *PPR* (*Polska Partia Robotnicza*) in November 1942 said that: "all Polish territories must be incorporated in the Polish state. 1. In the west and in the Baltic region we must regain Polish ethnic territories ... 2. In the east, in the territories which for centuries have been inhabited by ethnic Ukrainian and Byelorussian majorities, the Polish nation ..., recognizing the right of nations to self–determination, cannot deny the fraternal Ukrainian and Byelorussian nations the right to define their national status in accordance with the will of the population". It also stated: "All citizens of the state shall be treated on equal terms, irrespective of their nationality. The fact of belonging to the Polish nation cannot give Poles preference over the national minorities living in the Polish state"¹². In time, this element disappeared from the communists' programmatic documents; it was absent in the Manifesto of democratic socio–political and military organizations of December 15, 1943, in the declaration of the National Home Council (*Krajowa Rada Narodowa — KRN*) of January 1, 1944, and the manifesto of the Polish Committee of National Liberation (*Polski Komitet Wyzwolenia Narodowego — PKWN*) of July 22, 1944. In a New Year speech in 1946, Bolesław Bierut, chairman of the National Home Council (*KRN*), said: "As a result of the war and territorial changes, Poland is changing from a multinational state into into a one–nation state"¹³.

In their enunciations the communists did not mention mass transfers of population, but these were implicit in their programme to create a nationally homogeneous state. In Europe, in particular in the territories of the old

¹¹ A. Lampe, *O nową Polskę* (*For a New Poland*), Warszawa 1954, p. 24, *O miejsce Polski w Europie* (*For Poland's Place in Europe*).

¹² *Polska Partia Robotnicza. Dokumenty programowe 1942–1948* (*The Polish Workers' Party. Programmatic Documents 1942–1948*), Warszawa 1984, pp. 148 ff.

¹³ "Głos Ludu", 1 I 1946.

multinational states, it was impossible to mark out ethnic frontiers. Implemented consistently, the principle of nation states, which triumphed in Versailles in 1918, led to the sanctioning of population transfers. But after World War I, this radical measure, incompatible with a humanistic moral order, was applied only in the Balkans, in regions of fiercest ethnic conflicts. On the basis of a convention signed at Neuilly on November 27, 1919, an exchange of population took place between Greece and Bulgaria; 30,000 Bulgarian Greeks were transferred to Greece and 120,000 Bulgarians left Greece for Bulgaria. The largest post-World War I population transfer took place between Greece and Turkey (Lausanne Convention of 1923). In this case the law lagged behind life, for more than one million Greeks had fled from Turkey and the Turkish government forbade them to return, demanding that the remaining 200,000 Greeks leave Turkey too. The idea that minorities, whether national or religious, should be protected predominated in post-Versailles Europe, but the totalitarian regimes broke this rule, each in its own way. Germany engaged in a *Zurück nach Reich* operation while Stalin transferred entire nations within the USSR. During the war Bulgaria and Romania as well as Romania and Hungary carried out population transfers.

As a result of the experiences of the Second World War, mass transfers of national minorities, rejected when the Versailles order was being shaped, were sanctioned even by democratic governments and a large part of public opinion. Nationalism triumphed. Eduard Beneš demanded the resettlement of the Sudeten Germans; Roosevelt and Churchill announced that Germans would be transferred from the territories which were to be assigned to Poland. The idea of mass population transfers was supported by politicians and prominent scholars. Some people opposed it, but they, too, admitted that in certain situations this was a necessary evil. I am mentioning this to avoid simplifications: Polish-Ukrainian (Byelorussian, Lithuanian) transfers, though decided and carried out by Stalin, were part of larger processes, of currents predominant in Poland and in the West¹⁴.

There is no doubt that the attitude of Polish public opinion to the transfer of the Ukrainian population living west of the Soviet-imposed Polish-Soviet frontier was partly a result of the fratricidal Polish-Ukrainian fighting which flared up during the war and was not yet extinguished. What was going on in Volhynia and eastern Galicia cannot be called by any other name. As a result of deep-rooted resentment, made use of by leaders deluded by

¹⁴ Cf. K. Kersten, *Polska — państwo narodowe. Dylematy i rzeczywistość (Poland — A Nation State. Dilemmas and Reality)*, in: *Narody. Jak powstały i wybijały się na niepodległość*, Warszawa 1969, pp. 442 ff.

the mirage of a free Ukraine, the communities which had been living not only side by side but in unison became hostile to each other¹⁵. The danger which had been threatening the Poles on the part of Ukrainians from the beginning of Soviet rule, September 17, 1939, until the German occupation, survived in Polish documents and people's minds. It is a fact that Poles fled en masse from villages to towns and from Volhynia and Podolia to central Poland; it is estimated that over 300,000 Poles sought refuge in central Poland¹⁶. It is also a fact that some 50,000 Poles died at the hands of Ukrainians¹⁷. It is not yet possible to establish the exact number. This tragic gory page of Polish-Ukrainian history is subject of vehement disputes between Polish and Ukrainian historians; according to the Ukrainians, the armed actions of the Ukrainian population were a response to the activities of "Polish chauvinists", inclusive of soldiers of the 27th Volhynian Home Army division¹⁸.

I have used the term "transfer", even though the agreement concluded by the Polish Committee of National Liberation (*PKWN*) and the Soviet government on September 9, 1944 spoke of a voluntary "evacuation" of Poles and Jews living in the territories which had belonged to the Polish state on September 1, 1939 and were now incorporated into the USSR, and the "evacuation" of the Ukrainian population from the territories which were to be assigned to Poland¹⁹. As regards Ukrainians, preparation for the transfer were preceded by an agreement; the transfer was to be carried out quickly and radically. It was expected that the operation would take a few months and would be concluded by February 1, 1945. According to records from the end of 1944, 505,647 Ukrainians remained within the new frontiers (280,153 in the Rzeszów voivodship, 201,247 in the Lublin voivodship, and 24,247 in the Cracow voivodship). The Soviet side cited a lower figure: 483,826. All these figures are incomplete; the Ukrainian minority in Poland is estimated to have numbered about 700,000 persons in 1944; the transfers, first to the USSR and then to Poland's western regions, embraced some 620,000 persons²⁰.

¹⁵ For more details see R. Torzecki, *op. cit.*

¹⁶ Cf. R. Torzecki, *op. cit.*, pp. 286 and 289. According to the author higher estimates are unsubstantiated.

¹⁷ Cf. the Polish-Ukrainian communiqué signed at a conference organized by the "Karta" centre in June 1944. Torzecki, *op. cit.*, p. 267 estimates the number of victims at 30,000-40,000.

¹⁸ The communiqué. Cf. also K. P. Smijan, *Szowiniści z AK (The Chauvinists from the Home Army)*, "Gazeta Wyborcza", 14 VII 1995.

¹⁹ Archiwum Akt Nowych (Central Archives of Modern Records), henceforward referred to as AAN, set *PKWN*, Minutes of meetings f. 99-100, 9 IX 1944 (agreement with the Byelorussia Soviet Socialist Republic), f. 122-126, 21 IX 1944 (agreement with the Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republic).

²⁰ K. Kersten, *Przemiany ludnościowe (Population Changes)* in: *Polska Ludowa 1944-1950. Dzieje społeczne*, Ossolineum 1974, pp. 121 ff.

If Lublin, Kiev and Moscow hoped for a voluntary transfer of the Ukrainians, reality soon disappointed them. Unlike the Polish population in Volhynia and eastern Galicia which, with but a few exceptions, felt endangered and wanted to depart, the Ukrainians did not want to leave their “little homeland” of their own will. By January 1, 1945, when direct pressure was not yet applied, fewer than 40,000 persons had left, and by the end of March — 81,000²¹. The motives for departure varied; as in the case of Poles in western Ukraine, situational pressure, the prevailing climate of discrimination made itself felt; e.g. Ukrainians had no right to obtain land under the land reform, economic pressure was exerted on them to sign the declaration on “evacuation”, Ukrainian schools in the Lublin voivodship were closed down. The attitude to Ukrainians is reflected in statements made by members of the *PKWN* camp, activists of the Polish Workers’ Party (*PPR*) and the Polish Party (*PPS*). In a paper read at a symposium at Sobótka in 1991, E. Miśiło cited an opinion expressed at the voivodship congress of the Polish Socialist Party in Lublin (August 18–20, 1944): “If this goes on, we shall again leave a compact group of Ukrainians in these districts, instead of building a national Polish state. If we leave Ukrainians in these four districts (Włodawa, Hrubieszów, Chełm, Tomaszów Lubelski — K. K.) we may live to see a frontier correction on ethnic principles”. The attitude of *PPR* activists was more varied; this was understandable, for many local party organizations and bodies were composed mainly of Ukrainians, who disliked the idea of transfers. This applies first and foremost to Ukrainian communists.

Another question is the activity of the Polish and Ukrainian underground. This is a complex question, for in view of the present state of research it is impossible to determine which actions were really carried out by underground groups and detachments and which were the result of provocation or were imputed to the underground though in fact they were carried out by a military unit (e.g. the burning of the village of Lublinieć Stary in March 1945 and the murder of 540 Ukrainians; the killing of 400 persons in the village of Gorajec by an operational battalion of the internal security forces in April 1945, the raid carried out by *NKVD* men dressed as Ukrainian partisans on the village of Dynów)²². It is a fact that from the spring of 1945 terrorist activities increased; this intensified Polish–Ukrainian antagonism and led to an increase in the number of Ukrainians leaving Poland, contrary to the assertions of M. Romashenko, the Ukrainian deputy plenipotentiary for evacuation, who complained that terrorism was ham-

²¹ *Ibidem*.

²² Cf. E. Miśiło, *Akcja “Wisła” (Operation Vistula)*, p. 13.

pering "the evacuation of the Ukrainian population"²³. Between April 1 and June 15, 1945, 95,000 persons applied for evacuation, but the expected mass exodus of the Ukrainian population did not materialise; on the contrary, many of those who had applied for departure decided to stay.

The majority of the Ukrainian population, clergyman as well as politicians from communists to conspiratorial nationalistic groupings, endeavoured to stay in Poland and demanded equal rights and national freedoms. Such was the proposal put forward by Ukrainian delegates during a conference held at the Ministry of Public Administration on July 24, 1945. They demanded strict observance of the voluntary character of population transfers, the re-activation of Ukrainian schools, the inclusion of Ukrainians in the land reform, amnesty for members of the underground and political prisoners, religious freedom, equal rights in public administration and the right to set up a Ukrainian political party. In reply, a representative of the government said that democratic Poland would not tolerate national oppression and promised amnesty, but he added that the Ukrainian demands would be met only after the conclusion of population transfers. He also mentioned transfers to the western territories which, on the whole, were to be voluntary, but compulsory in the case of persons assisting the underground²⁴.

It is impossible to say unequivocally today whether the authorities in Warsaw already had a plan of action with regard to the Ukrainian population at that time; it is more probable that differing views vying for supremacy. What is known is that soon after this conference, in circumstances which are not fully known, a decision was taken to employ troops in the transfers, abandon the principle of voluntariness which until then had only been restricted by situational pressure, and transfer the entire Ukrainian minority. Most of the Ukrainian delegates who took part in the Warsaw conference were arrested.

Polish troops began to evict Ukrainians at the beginning of September 1945. Contrary to what asserted in propaganda, which tried to justify the use of troops by the terrorism unleashed by Ukrainian Insurrectionary Army (*Ukraińska Powstańcza Armia — UPA*) and its endeavours to hamper the departure of Ukrainians. Polish soldiers were breaking the resistance of the Ukrainian population and were expelling it at the point of the sword, frequently in an extremely inhuman brutal way, as is testified to even by

²³ AAN, set of the General Plenipotentiary for Repatriation (henceforward referred to as *Plen.*), 12, f. 5, M. Romashenko's letter to W. Wolski, 23 V 1945.

²⁴ AAN, Department VI, set Central Committee of the *PPR* 295/VII-158, k. 1-7, Minutes of the conference.

Polish sources, military reports, etc. Józef Bednarz, the Polish Plenipotentiary for Evacuation, wrote about lawless activities of troops, chaos, abuses²⁵. The report of a commission of the General Staff of the Polish Army of January 30, 1946 speaks of revenge-motivated murders of Ukrainians; units of the eight and ninth infantry divisions formed in Volhynia took part in the expulsions²⁶. The activities of the army were disapproved by a part of the Polish population because — as Bednarz maintained — they implied devastation. The Ukrainian Plenipotentiary intervened, accusing some starosts, among them the starost of Sanok, of issuing certificates protecting some individuals from evacuation²⁷. He asserted that representatives of political parties and the District People's Council in Sanok wanted to prevent Ukrainians from leaving. In March 1946 the Ukrainian Plenipotentiary lodged a complaint that the starost of Lubaczów “did not co-operate in the evacuation”, for the use of force was, in his opinion, turning Ukrainians against Poland; starost demanded a prolongation of the operation to prevent an economic breakdown. Complaints were also lodged against the Gorlice and Nowy Sącz district authorities which held the view that not all Ukrainians were liable to forced evacuation, but only those who were unloyal to the Polish state. The chief Polish Plenipotentiary for Repatriation Władysław Wolski asked the Minister of Public Administration to forbid starosts to protect people trying to avoid expulsion²⁸. The attitude of the Ministry of Public Administration was reflected in an earlier reply to a petition in which the population of the Lesko and Sanok district asked not to be transferred to the USSR; in a letter to the voivode of Rzeszów of October 1, 1945, the Ministry stated that “the repatriation of the Ukrainian population should be carried out consistently, in view of the interests of the Polish state”²⁹. The Rzeszów voivode shared this view and was against excluding Ukrainians converted to Roman Catholicism from evacuation, for “the smallest breach in this respect will thwart the entire operation of transferring Ukrainians”³⁰. In Order to prevent the return of the transferees, who were coming back in

²⁵ Cf. *AAN, Plen.*, vol. 42, letter from the Central Board of the State Repatriation Office (*Państwowy Urząd Repatriacyjny* — *PUR*) to W. Wolski of 11 IV 1945; *ibidem*, vol. 10, W. Wolski to J. Bednarz, 13 III 1946; *ibidem*, vol. 9, Ukrainian leaflets. Cf. also *AAN set PUR* (State Repatriation Office), *Ewidencja i statystyka*, vol. 117. Final report.

²⁶ E. Miśiło, *Akcja “Wisła”*, p. 15.

²⁷ Cf. also *AAN, Plen.* 9, batch correspondence concerning the illegal issuing of “verification” certificates by the starost of Przemyśl, September 1945.

²⁸ *AAN*, set of the Ministry of Public Administration (henceforward referred to as *MAP*) 784, f. 28, J. Bednarz's letter to the Ministry of Public Administration, 8 II 1946.

²⁹ *AAN, MAP* 784, f. 12.; *AAN, Plen.* 9–10, correspondence concerning suspension of the eviction of Lemks.

³⁰ Quoted after E. Miśiło, *op. cit.*, p. 402. Letter from the Voivodship Office in Rzeszów to the Ministry of Public Administration, 13 III 1946.

large numbers, the Polish and Ukrainian plenipotentiaries agreed that a person liable to evacuation would be deprived of Polish citizenship on receiving repatriation documents.

The use of troops and the application of frequently brutal pressure exacerbated the situation. Villages were set on fire, people were fleeing to forests, some were running away from the army, others from UPA. Brute force was revenged by brute force, hatred bred hatred, a spiral of terror reigned supreme. Reliable impartial research will undoubtedly verify the still predominant stereotypes and establish the scope of Ukrainian detachments' terroristic activities on the one hand, and of the Polish armed underground's activities against the Ukrainian population on the other. It is known that the existing estimates are unreliable, both as regards the strength of the Polish and Ukrainian conspiratorial armed forces and the number of victims. According to Antoni Szcześniak, at least 2,000 Ukrainians lost their lives between March and June 1945 as a result of armed operations of the Polish underground but, as we have said above, these calculations are not reliable (e.g. a detachment of *Wolność i Niezawisłość* — *WiN*, a secret organization "Freedom and Independence", is said to have murdered 365 inhabitants of the village of Pawłokoma in the Brzozów district in March 1945, but *WiN* was not set up until September 1945). The same Szcześniak says that 599 persons were killed by UPA in 1944–47³¹. These figures, were it not for their small reliability — a characteristic trait of all documents of the Security Office and the army concerning the underground — would radically change the picture of the Polish–Ukrainian fratricidal fighting and the Polish army's operations against the armed Ukrainian underground. The operations were an integral part of activities directed against the entire underground, also Polish. In an order of May 24, 1945 the Supreme Command of the Polish Army set aside four infantry divisions (1st, 3rd, 8th, 9th) and the Warsaw Armoured Brigade. These forces, subordinated directly to General Żymierski, were "in the shortest possible time to liquidate diversionary bands determinedly and energetically, and secure normal working conditions to the local authorities and population"³². This was done by various methods; most often infantry and armoured units carried out searches in villages and forests. On June 6, 1945, the government took a formal decision to pacify the Lublin, Rzeszów, Kielce and Białystok voivodships³³.

³¹ A. B. Szcześniak, W. Z. Szota, *Droga do nikąd (A Road to Nowhere)*, Warszawa 1974, p. 529.

³² Cf. L. Grot, *Udział Ludowego Wojska Polskiego w walce z reakcyjnym podziemiem (The Participating of the Polish People's Army in the Struggle against the Reactionary Underground)*, in: *O utrwalenie władzy ludowej w Polsce 1944–1965*, Warszawa 1982, p. 248.

³³ *Ibidem*.

A major role in the pacification operation was played at that by the *NKWD*, especially in eastern voivodships, those of Białystok, Lublin and Rzeszów. The Polish Army's actions against the Ukrainian underground began at the end of June an operation of the 9th infantry division in three districts of the Rzeszów voivodship; they intensified gradually; from September on their aim was said to be protection of the population, in practice the troops evicted the Ukrainian population³⁴. In December Bednarz demanded that the army increase its activity in the districts of Jarosław, Lesko and Sanok. Co-operation between the apparatus of the plenipotentiary and that of the army did not run smoothly, there were many mutual accusations and grudges³⁵.

The real scope of *UPA*'s actions against the transfer of Ukrainians is an open question, for the data contained in sources should be subjected to a critical analysis. Bednarz wrote that bridges were being blown up or burnt, that railway tracks were being loosened and culverts blown up in order to make evacuation impossible. There is no doubt that the Ukrainians did their best to evade evacuation. They wrote petitions to the Polish authorities and sought assistance from ambassadors of Western states. In a cable of September 11, 1945 Arthur Bliss Lane communicated that two representatives of the Ukrainian minority in Poland had called on him to complain that Russians were beginning to forcibly transfer the remaining Ukrainian population (estimated at about a million) from Poland to Russia. Presenting themselves as emissaries of the Greek Catholic bishop of Przemyśl, Jozafat Kocyłowski, they demanded U.S. intercession³⁶. The bishop did not expect that it would be possible to prevent a mass transfer, but he wanted to protect the Ukrainian intelligentsia and enable it to remain in Poland. A week later, on September 19, Bishop Kocyłowski was arrested; he was asked to issue a pastoral letter which would call on the Ukrainians to leave. Repressive measures were also applied against other Greek Catholic clergymen. In the middle of 1946 the Greek Catholic Church was formally abolished in Poland.

It was the Ukrainian intelligentsia that the main target of persecutions. In the autumn of 1945 Ukrainian schools in the Rzeszów voivodship were closed down and Ukrainian cultural, educational and economic organizations were prevented from developing any activity. What was the aim of

³⁴ Cf. E. Misiło, *Akcja "Wisła"*, p. 15; A. B. Szcześniak, *Walka przeciw ukraińskiemu nacjonalistycznemu podziemiu w Polsce w latach 1944–1947 (The Struggle against the Nationalistic Ukrainian Underground in Poland in the Years 1944–1947)*, in: *W walce o utrwalenie, op. cit.*, p. 297.

³⁵ Cf. *AAN, Plen.* 9, J. Bednarz's report of 24 X 1945.

³⁶ Foreign Relations of the United States, Diplomatic Papers, 1945, vol. V, Washington DC 1967, p. 37L, A. Bliss Lane of the Secretary of State 11 IX 1945, vol. 36.

these repressive measures? Were they applied in order to break the Ukrainian community's opposition to evacuation or, what is more probable, to annihilate a nationally-inspired elite by Polish hands in accordance with Moscow's wishes? This has not yet been explained.

Terror and coercion yielded results. The number of transferees increased from 95,000 in June to 174,669 in October 1945. A further 136,335 people were transferred in November and December. In the first three months of 1946 the intensity of the transfer operation dropped slightly (34,029 persons) to increase in the following months: 133,589 up to July, and 2,561 in July.

In July 1946, Bednarz informed Władysław Wolski, that "the agreement of September 9, 1944 (has been) fully implemented. The evacuation (has been) definitely completed in all regions. 480,305 persons have been evacuated"³⁷. The Polish authorities acknowledged that 97.8 per cent of those concerned had been transferred, although they knew that the figures they had were unreliable. This was reflected in the disparity of individual calculations. However, the view prevailed that not much more than ten thousand Ukrainians had remained in Poland. As time went on, this figure began to increase. This was attributed to the return of people who had hidden in forests or Polish villages to avoid being transferred, people who had escaped from transports or managed to get out of the USSR. In February 1947 the Polish Army General Staff estimated the number of Ukrainians in the Rzeszów voivodship at 20,306, and many were believed to remain in the Lublin voivodship³⁸. Let us emphasise that during the voluntary and compulsory transfers to the USSR and later during Operation Vistula it was not an individual's national identity that decided whether he was entitled, or strictly speaking forced, to leave, but his descent, religion and most frequently the letter "U" in his German *Kennkarte*. There was a tendency to interpret the term "Ukrainian" broadly; for instance, mixed families were frequently forced to leave.

The second act of "the final solution of the Ukrainian problem in Poland" took place in the spring of 1947. "Final solution" was the name given to it in the draft plan of a special operation known under the cryptonym "East" (*Wschód*), later changed to "Vistula" (*Wisła*); the plan was signed by Marshal Michał Żymierski, commander-in-chief of the Polish Armed Forces and Minister of National Defence, and Stanisław Radkiewicz, Min-

³⁷ AAN, *Plen.* 9, unpag. Bednarz to Wolski, 10 X 1946.

³⁸ Report by General S. Mossor, Deputy Chief of the General Staff, on his inspections at the voivodship security committees in Katowice, Cracow and Lublin, in: E. Miśiło, *Akcja "Wisła"*, p. 53.

ister of Public Security. It was presented at a meeting of the Political Bureau of the PPR Central Committee and the State Security Commission (*Komitet Bezpieczeństwa Państwowego*) on April 16, 1947³⁹. An analysis of documents shows that the real of the deportations carried out within the framework of Operation Vistula was to get rid of the Ukrainian minority and not “to liquidate the nationalistic Ukrainian armed underground”, as was asserted officially; those who had escaped “repatriation” to the USSR were to be deported to the western territories and “scattered there far and wide”, as this was put in an ordinance of the State Security Commission (*Komitet Bezpieczeństwa Państwowego*) for the Vistula (*Wisła*) Operation Group (17 IV 1947)⁴⁰. All Ukrainians, including the Lemks, mixed families and the entire population of the Sanok region, were to be evicted, irrespective of their occupation and social status. The area was to be settled by soldiers. The danger allegedly threatening the country on the part of the Ukrainian Insurrectionary Army was artificially exaggerated, as was the danger of the Polish underground; military reports show that the Ukrainian Insurrectionary Army (*UPA*) was then in a state of disintegration and confined its activity mainly to securing supplies, self-defence and revenge actions. The following is the appraisal of the situation by the command of the 9th infantry division stationed in the Rzeszów region: “For the last few weeks *UPA* bands have not undertaken actions in large groups; they are scattered and evidently avoid encounters with the army [...] The bands are experiencing a crisis because of the increasingly obvious hopelessness of their two-year long struggle. This is testified to not only by desertions but also by the confinement of their activity to small-scale robberies; the moral weakness of the *UPA* bands is reflected in the fact that in the pre-election period as well as on election day they did not carry out any attack on electoral commissions, did not disturb the process of elections and did not prevent the electors’ mass participation in the vote” (January 27, 1947)⁴¹. A similar opinion was expressed at that time by the commander of 8th infantry division, whose task was to “cleanse” the district of Jasło, Krosno, Gorlice, Sanok, Brzozów and Lesko. After stating that three *UPA* units composed of some 265 men were active in that region at end of December, the commandor wrote in his report: “There is relative peace in the region. Motorcar and vehicular traffic, which in the first half of 1946 had to be escorted by special army units, is now proceeding normally without any fear of being attacked by bandits. The areas is under the control of armed forces and security authorities, and the

³⁹ *Ibidem*, pp. 92 ff.

⁴⁰ *Ibidem*, pp. 98 ff.

⁴¹ *Ibidem*, p. 39.

groups of bandits who appear sporadically in the southern and south–eastern frontier belt continue to be hunted by our units and destroyed”. According to Szcześniak, *UPA* had 2,500 men in Poland in the spring of 1947. Army data show that the number of casualties was declining (368 civilians were killed by the Ukrainian underground in 1945, 98 in 1946, 10 from January to March 1947. In the same months 15 militiamen and Security Office (*UB*) functionaries as well as 30 soldiers were killed. According to Szcześniak, of the 599 civilians killed, at least a half were Ukrainians suspected of collaborating with the *NKVD*, Security Office or armed forces)⁴².

There was a striking similarity between the scenario implemented with regard to the Ukrainians, their armed underground and alleged adherents among those who had eluded “repatriation” to the USSR, and the provocation which took place in October 1944, when the Russian special service procured information on an alleged putsch, any by shrewdly magnifying the activity of the Polish underground, gave a signal for increased terror⁴³. Stalin used method repeatedly, only to recall the murder of Kirov and the great purge. However, in my opinion, the genesis of Operation Vistula (*Wista*) was more complex. It was General Stanisław Mossor, deputy chief of staff of the Polish armed forces, who was the first to propose the transfer of the Ukrainians remaining in Poland to the Western Territories on February 20, 1947. After stating that a certain number of Ukrainian families had escaped evictions and returned to their abodes, “providing a base for *UPA* bands and posing the danger of strong irredentism in the future”, he demanded: “Since the Soviet Union does not accept these people any more, it seems necessary to carry out an energetic transfer operation in the spring and disperse these families throughout the Western Territories, where they will soon become assimilated”. A similar opinion was expressed at that time by the starost of Nowy Targ⁴⁴. The idea of Poland being a one–nation state, an idea proclaimed and implemented by the communist authorities at that time, met with response many Polish circles, in particular when it was directed against the Ukrainians. At a meeting on February 25, 1947, the Rzeszów Voivodship Security Commission pointed out that it was necessary to terminate the transfer operation started in 1945, and demanded that if there was no possibility of transferring these Ukrainians to the USSR, they should be sent west and scattered there, so as to prevent them undertaking harmful activities⁴⁵. The voivode was to lodge a relevant proposal with the Ministry of

⁴² A. B. Szcześniak, *Walka*, p. 426.

⁴³ Cf. K. Kersten, *Rok pierwszy (Year One)*, Warszawa 1993, p. 54.

⁴⁴ Report quoted above, cf. fn. 38.

⁴⁵ E. Misło, *Akcja “Wista”*, p. 55.

Public Administration. The gulf was deepening, mutual hatred was mounting. The harm done to people, the majority of whom wanted to stay in Poland as a national minority but retain their national and religious identity, was linked in Polish minds with the memory of Ukrainian violence and consolidated the stereotype that all Ukrainians were enemies.

When and in what circumstances was it decided to transfer the Ukrainians to the Western Territories? What role was played by the death of General Świerczewski? Was this a factor which prompted the decision or was it only a convenient argument justifying such drastic measures as mass deportations? For this is what the operation amounted to; it bore an evident resemblance to the deportations of Poles deep into the USSR in 1939–41. It was also obvious that the killing of Świerczewski was used instrumentally in order to launch draconian repressive measures against the Ukrainian population. It was stated at a meeting of the Rzeszów Voivodship Security Committee on March 30, 1947, that “in order to fully and quickly liquidate bands, it is necessary to evict Ukrainians, persons of mixed descent and Poles supporting *UPA* bands to the west; to set up concentration camps for Ukrainians who cause damage to the State; to introduce summary courts for persons caught with weapons; to confiscate post-Ukrainian property in settlements from which Ukrainians have been evicted [...] to assign the management of the transfer operation to the Voivodship Security Committee”⁴⁶.

Similar proposals were put forward by the command of the 9th infantry division. Stanisław Szot, First Secretary of the *PPR* Lublin Voivodship Committee, also demanded that the Ukrainians be immediately deported.

What is striking is the language of these documents. They speak of concentration camps; at a meeting of the *PPR* Central Committee on April 11, 1947, Radkiewicz said: “deportations are to start in two weeks’ time”. Nobody in the leading circles of the Polish Workers’ Party, the armed forces, to say nothing of the Ministry of Public Security or its regional offices, had any doubt the necessity of deporting all Ukrainians and mixed population, the argument that they were “supporting and supplementing *UPA* bands” providing an excuse. Several years later “the reactionary Polish element” was to be evicted from large Polish towns. Earlier, after the 1946 referendum, there was a plan to evict some Cracow inhabitants. However, as far as the Ukrainians were concerned, communist methods were intertwined with Polish nationalism.

Deportations started on April 24, 1947 and lasted until the end of July. The Vistula Operation Group commanded by General Mossor, which was

⁴⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 69.

set up on April 17 by the State Security Commission, was dissolved on July 31. A total of 95,848 people were deported from the Rzeszów voivodship and 44,728 from the Lublin voivodship. Several thousand people were sent to a concentration camp at Jaworzno. Set up by the Germans as a branch of the Auschwitz camp, the Jaworzno camp functioned after the war, as did other branch camps and a part of the Auschwitz camp; Germans, *Volksdeutsche* and Poles were sent there. In accordance with a decision taken by the Political Bureau of the PPR Central Committee on April 23, 1947, Ukrainians selected at Oświęcim (Auschwitz) station (officially at Katowice) were sent to the Jaworzno camp. From May 1947 to March 1949 mainly members of the Ukrainian intelligentsia were sent to the camp, but there were many peasants there too. The conditions in the camp and the methods of inquiry resembled those used against Polish prisoners in the prisons and torture chambers of the Security Office.

The attitude of Polish society to the ethnic cleansing carried out by the communists — in addition to Ukrainians the cleansing also embraced Germans — was ambivalent. This was a sphere the activity of the authorities was in harmony with the attitude of the majority of Poles. Can one say, as is often done, that although they violated man's elementary rights, the communists' inhuman measures, namely, the deportation of Ukrainians from their homeland first to the USSR and then to the Western Territories, were a lesser evil? Ukrainian irredentism and the prospect of Poland losing more territories were said to be the alternative. It is difficult to say what would have happened if ... While not belittling nationalisms and their results, we should realize that the communists' policy, which as a matter of fact was incompatible with their ideology, was at that time subordinated to Stalin and his tactics of creating inflaming conflicts; the Poles and the Ukrainians simply fell into this trap.

(Translated by Janina Dorosz)

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CONTENTS

STUDIES

- Ambroży B o g u c k i, The Administrative Structure of Poland in the Eleventh and Twelfth Century
- Stanisław R u s o c k i, La naissance du parlementarisme polonais vue dans une perspective comparative
- Jan H a r a s i m o w i c z, The Role of Cistercian Monasteries in the Shaping of the Cultural Identity of Silesia in Modern Times
- Włodzimierz M ę d r z e c k i, Ukrainische Arbeiter zwischen der nationalen und sozialen Revolution in den Jahren 1917–1921
- Elżbieta Z n a m i e r o w s k a – R a k k, The Policy of the Second Republic Towards the Balkan States
- Czesław M a d a j c z y k, En rang serré, les intellectuels d'Europe? La fonction des congrès mondiaux d'intellectuels
- Sylwester F e r t a c z, A Contribution to the Establishment and Activity of the American Slav Congress during World War II

RESEARCH IN PROGRESS

- Maria B o g u c k a, "Wunder" im Amsterdamer Zuchthaus. Zur Geschichte der Disziplinierung der Gesellschaft an der Schwelle zur Neuzeit

REVIEWS — ABSTRACTS — NEWS

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