

This paper presents a preliminary analysis of the interpretations of the causes of World War II and events that occurred during the early stage of war (1939-1941). I attempt to analyse the relationship between historiography and propaganda. Different interpretations of historical events and the political usage of some interpretations are analysed within the project framework.

I am particularly interested in comparative study of different interpretations of the Treaty of Non-Aggression between Germany and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact) signed on 23 August 1939; consequences of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, i.e. the partition of Poland in September 1939 and annexation of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania by the USSR; the Katyn massacre; and the economic, technical and military cooperation between the USSR and Nazi Germany until the German invasion into the Soviet territory on 22 June 1941. My interest in this topic was stimulated by the recent tendency in Russia to justify the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact and annexations by security reasons, and the attempts to exonerate Joseph Stalin for cooperation with the Nazis, aggression and, more generally, for the repressions.

For comparative study of the interpretations of mentioned historical events I use mainly Polish, Soviet (before 1991) and Russian (since 1991) sources, as well as publications in the Western media. During the stay at the Open Society Archives I have used the Records of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Research Institute: collection HU OSA 300-50 (Polish Unit, 1951-1994); HU OSA 300-55 (Polish Underground Publications Unit, 1976-1992); collection HU OSA 300-80 (Soviet Red Archives, 1953-1994, series 1 – Old Code Subject Files, 1953-1994 and series 5 – Baltic Files, 1969-1994), as well as books from the CEU library (particularly, *Katyn: A Crime Without Punishment* edited by Anna M. Cienciala, Natalia S. Lebedeva and Wojciech Materski). Mainly, available materials in English and Russian languages have been used. However, some of the materials in Polish and a few documents in French have been studied as well.

Publication of the secret protocol of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact in the USSR and the following discussion concerning the Baltic States and Poland

The secret protocol of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact was published in the USSR in August 1988, following the demands of pro-democratic activists in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. The first publication appeared on 5 August in the *Sajudzio Zinios*, Lithuanian Restructuring Movement's samizdat bulletin; on 10-11 August, Estonian Communist Party's official paper *Rahva Haal* published the protocol with a historian's comments; the first publication in Russian appeared on 17 August in *Sovetskaya Estonia*; in Latvia, the Komsomol paper *Padomju Jaunatne* published excerpts from the protocol on 23 August.¹

In response, Soviet propaganda, which had denied the existence of the secret protocol for decades, insisted that the three Baltic States had elected the communists and joined the USSR in 1940 voluntarily. On 16 August a press conference was organised in Moscow, with six panellists, including director of the Novosti press agency Valentin Falin and historians from the Baltic republics. Falin admitted that the USSR and Germany had some kind of division of spheres of interest, but said that the secret protocol might be false.² *Moskovskie Novosti* correspondent Alexander Shavliuk, who covered the press conference, warned in his report that "lessons must be taken not only from history that was real, but also from the

¹ Milan Hauner, 'From the Nazi-Soviet pact to appeasement and back again', *Radio Liberty Research*, RL 455/88, 5 October 1988, p. 1. From the Open Society Archives fonds 300 subfonds 80 series 5 box 2 (HU OSA 300-80-5-2).

² *Ibid.*, p. 5.

consequences of falsifying history, when invented past turns from an object of learning into a political instrument” and made a bitter remark about the West viewing the Soviet Baltic republics as occupied territories. Referring to the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact secret protocols (‘so-called secret protocols’ as Shavliuk put it), Shavliuk quoted Falin: “Let me remind you that copies of copies have been published. No one has seen the original documents.”³

Another feature of the official Soviet attitude was the suggestion that the USSR had to conclude an agreement with Nazi Germany in order to avoid political and diplomatic isolation. Falin stated at the press conference that “since 1933 and 1934, the Soviet Union had been trying to set up a system of collective security in Europe”, but the Western powers preferred to lose Czechoslovakia rather than “save it at the hands of the Soviet Union.” Falin also claimed that the Poles and Germans were negotiating a possible joint action against the Soviet Union. He called the Polish government of pre-war period “bourgeois and semi-fascist”.⁴

Milan Hauner notes: “Falin seemed to be following the standard Soviet argument that justifies the Pact on the grounds that: it gave Stalin almost two years to prepare the Red Army; the Pact was purely defensive; the subsequent ‘additions’ to Soviet territory resulted from free elections, not annexation.”⁵ Another panellist, Lev Bezymensky, also invited attention to the Munich Agreement signed by Great Britain, France, Germany and Italy in September 1938.⁶ One of the panellists, E. Zhagar from Latvian Academy of Sciences, contested the Western point of view concerning Soviet occupation of the Baltic States, saying: “Soviet historians and our society consider that in 1940 socialist revolutions took place in the Baltics.”⁷ Other loyal historians from the Baltic republics also argued that there had been powerful popular movements in 1940, so a paradoxical situation had been created, when pro-German bourgeois governments had had to sign mutual help agreements with the USSR, letting the Red Army in, and then the Communists had come to power by means of popular vote.⁸ It may also be noted that on 20 July 1988 Zhagar published an article in *Pravda*, stating that the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact had prevented Hitler’s aggression against Latvia. Zhagar’s article was also full of Soviet propaganda stereotypes: Latvian government of pre-war period was labelled “fascist regime oriented towards Great Britain”, the repressions that had followed the communist takeover were denied, and there were numerous references to the “flourishing socialist economy”, internationalism, “brotherhood of Soviet republics”, and so on.

On 31 August Lev Bezymensky published an article in *Sovetskaya Moldavia* with the following argument: “The Soviet-German Pact of 23 August 1939, however we may judge it, compelled Germany to remove Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia, even if temporarily, from the list of its victims [...] The pact postponed the aggression against the Baltic republics and the USSR, although did not stop it.”⁹ However, following publication of the secret protocols, some Russian historians also began challenging the official line. For instance, Vasili M. Kulish wrote that the protocol was genuine and that “Stalin had actually helped Hitler to

³ Alexander Shavliuk, ‘Novye otvety na starye voprosy’ [‘New answers for old questions’], *Moskovskie novosti*, issue 34, 1988, p. 4. From HU OSA 300-80-5-2.

⁴ Associated Press report from the Radio Liberty Red Archive, item FF121, 16 August 1988. From HU OSA 300-80-5-2.

⁵ Hauner, p. 5.

⁶ TASS report published in *Investia*, ‘Istoriyu nelzia perekroit’ [‘History cannot be remodelled’], 18 August 1988. From HU OSA 300-80-5-2.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ USSR today: Soviet media actualities compiled by Radio Liberty monitoring, item A-40721, 20 August 1988. From HU OSA 300-80-5-2.

⁹ Lev Bezymensky, ‘Totalno onemechit’ [‘To germanise completely’], *Sovetskaya Moldavia*, 31 August 1988, p. 4. From HU OSA 300-80-5-2.

strengthen his military potential and had improved Germany's strategic position by removing a 'nightmare' of a two-front war, enabling Hitler to throw virtually all his troops against Western Europe in 1940."¹⁰ Remarkably, *Komsomol'skaya pravda* followed the policy of *glasnost* (open discussion) and published such point of view contradicting the official attitude, although censorship would officially be lifted only in 1990.

On 19 September 1988 Valentin Falin was the lead panellist of another press conference, titled "Fifty years since the Munich Agreement." It was stated again that the Western powers were liable for the outbreak of war. Three days later, USSR ministry of foreign affairs declared that it possessed archival documents proving with 'full confidence' that Great Britain and France had been interested in isolating the USSR and in a conflict between the USSR and Nazi Germany.¹¹

On 25 May 1989 *Pravda* published a statement of the joint commission of Soviet and Polish historians, which had been formed in May 1987. The statement did not mention the Katyn case. Concerning the secret protocol of the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact, it mentioned: "some form of an agreement about the spheres of interests of two states [...] was reached in August 1939. In other words, that was an agreed guarantee that the German troops should not cross a certain line, as was required for the security of the USSR." The statement also asserted: "The Soviet Union, undoubtedly, was interested in strong Polish resistance, but [...] considering the fast-changing situation and the increasing threat that German armies would reach the Soviet-Polish border, as well as the opportunities provided by the treaty concluded on 23 August 1939, the Soviet government decided to protect the population of Western Ukraine and Western Belarus." So, Stalin's intention to participate in the partition of Poland was not admitted. Moreover, according to the statement, after the beginning of war in September 1939 the USSR had offered material support for Poland, but providing it had become impossible because of rapid development of events.

The statement in *Pravda* mentioned the German-Soviet Treaty on Friendship and the Border between the USSR and Germany signed on 28 September 1939, which established the border between the USSR and Germany "on the territory of the former Polish state" and its secret protocols – one identifying spheres of interest and affirming agreements, and the other – establishing cooperation against "Polish agitation that affects the territory of the other country." It was admitted that the decisions of the Soviet government, such as the treaty of 28 September 1939, and their realisation violated the international law. The statement condemned the Soviet government's note to the Polish Ambassador in the USSR Wacław Grzybowski on 17 September 1939, in which it had been said that "the Polish state and its government have, in fact, ceased to exist." The statement also denounced Molotov's speech at the USSR Supreme Council session on 31 October 1939, when Molotov had said that "a fast blow from the German Army, followed by a blow from the Red Army, was enough to annihilate that wretched product of the Treaty of Versailles which was the Poland built on oppression of her minorities." Molotov's statement was called unlawful and offensive, but it was denounced, specifically, because it "made equal Hitler's aggression and the actions of the Red Army."

In the final part of the statement it was stated that Poland had rejected the possibility to join the Anti-Comintern Bloc and had declined offers made by the Germans about a joint action against the USSR, had fought a just war, but had been defeated as Great Britain and France had not supported her. The Soviet Union, in its turn, had become a victim of German aggression in June 1941.

¹⁰ Vasilii M. Kulish, 'U poroga voiny' ['At war's doorstep'], *Komsomol'skaya pravda*, 24 August 1988, p. 3. Quoted by Hauner, p. 6.

¹¹ Hauner, pp. 6-7.

So, the statement in *Pravda* was ambiguous. On one side, it admitted the unlawful nature of the Soviet-German pacts of 1939; on the other side, it criticised Molotov for the admission that the USSR had been an aggressor in 1939. On one side, it admitted that part of the Polish territory had been seized by the USSR; on the other side, the USSR was not called an aggressor, as it, supposedly, had stayed away from combat until June 1941.¹²

The discussion went on. On 2 June 1989 *Sovetskaya Litva* published a report about a conference organised by the Lithuanian Academy of Sciences on the topic “Domestic and foreign policy of the Baltic States before World War II and during the early stage of war.” Conference participants noted that the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact had to be considered together with the German-Soviet Treaty of 28 September 1939.¹³ Concerning the spheres of interest, the USSR and Germany agreed to supplement the secret supplementary protocol signed on 23 August 1939, so most of Lithuania would be included in the sphere of interests of the USSR, while the latter ceded a part of the occupied Polish territory to Germany.¹⁴

Historian from Moscow Sergei Sluch noted that the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact was different from non-aggression pacts that the USSR had concluded with other European states in the 1930s: Other pacts had included a clause providing that if one of contracting parties would begin aggression against a third state, the other party would have the right to terminate the pact. Therefore, argued Sluch, in the case of Nazi Germany Stalin had provided a guarantee of full neutrality, giving Hitler an opportunity to launch a war, so the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact had nothing to do with restraining the Nazi’s aggressive plans concerning Europe.¹⁵

The Soviet-Lithuanian non-aggression pact, one of those concluded before the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, had been in force since 1926. The foreign minister of Lithuania in pre-war time, Juozas Urbsys, told in 1990 that on 3 October 1939, during their first meeting, Stalin had announced about ceding Vilnius to Lithuania in exchange for a permission to station 35,000 Soviet troops. On 10 October 1939 the USSR and Lithuania signed a “friendship and mutual assistance pact” allowing Soviet troops to be stationed on Lithuanian territory. However, despite the non-aggression and friendship agreements, on 14 June 1940 Urbsys received an ultimatum demanding to allow unlimited numbers of Soviet troops into Lithuania. The Lithuanian government accepted the ultimatum to avoid bloodshed, and on 21 July the new parliament formed by means of manipulated elections voted to join the Soviet Union. Urbsys himself was arrested and spent 14 years in Soviet jails.¹⁶

On 2 June 1989 the Assembly of the People’s Deputies of the USSR formed a special commission for political and legal evaluation of the consequences of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact. Among the members of the commission were Vytautas Landsbergis (who would become the head of state of Lithuania and lead it to independence), Edgar Savisaar (future prime minister of Estonia), as well as a number of Russian reform-minded representatives.

¹² ‘Kanun i nachalo vtoroy mirovoy voiny. Tezisy, podgotovlennyye Komissiei uchenykh SSSR i PNR po istorii otnosheniy mezhdru dvumia stranami’ [‘The eve and beginning of World War II. The theses on the history of relations between two countries elaborated by the commission of Soviet and Polish scientists’], *Pravda*, 25 May 1989, p. 4. From HU OSA 300-80-1-685.

¹³ Lithuanian state news agency report published in *Sovetskaya Litva*, ‘Chto predopredelilo sudbu Pribaltiki’ [‘What shaped the Baltic States’ destiny’], 2 June 1989, pp. 2-3. From HU OSA 300-80-5-2.

¹⁴ Anna M. Cienciala, Natalia S. Lebedeva and Wojciech Materski (eds), *Katyn: A Crime Without Punishment*, Yale University Press, New Haven, c2007, p. 61.

¹⁵ Lithuanian state news agency report published in *Sovetskaya Litva*, ‘Chto predopredelilo sudbu Pribaltiki’ [‘What shaped the Baltic States’ destiny’], 2 June 1989, pp. 2-3. From HU OSA 300-80-5-2.

¹⁶ Michael Dobbs, ‘The last witness to Lithuania’s betrayal’, *International Herald Tribune*, 30 May 1990, p. 24. From HU OSA 300-80-5-2.

The commission was chaired by member of the Central Committee of the Communist Party Alexander Yakovlev.

On 14 December 1989 a brief prepared by the special commission for evaluation of the consequences of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact was presented to the Assembly of the People's Deputies of the USSR. The commission stated that there had been a clash of opinions:

Some of the specialists have been insisting that conclusion of the Pact was an act of self-defence that let to postpone the armed conflict with the Nazis by two years; there is a contrary opinion that conclusion of the Pact was one of Stalin's gaffes, as a result of which at the moment of German invasion the Soviet Union was prepared worse than before. The thesis about creating discord within the "Anti-Comintern Bloc" and seriously weakening it has been contested by the argument that Stalin's "camaraderie" with Hitler made it easier for the latter to start the war. Some experts have pointed out that the agreements of August 1939 set a limit for eastward movement of the Nazi troops and compelled Germany to take Soviet interests into account; the same fact has been interpreted by others as an indicator of Stalin's wish to seize territories, dominate regions and states bordering the USSR and interfere in their internal affairs.¹⁷

The commission also noted that although original protocol had not been found, the documents that had been studied proved indisputably that the protocol really existed and its available copy was authentic. It was stated that setting a 'division of interests' between the USSR and Germany had been legally dubious and had contradicted the principle of sovereignty and independence of third countries.¹⁸ The commission recommended the Assembly of the People's Deputies to condemn the signing of secret protocols to the treaties of 23 August and 28 September 1939, to declare the protocols null and void, and to state that the protocols had not created a legal basis for USSR's relations with third countries but had been used by pre-war Soviet leadership for sending ultimatums and exercising pressure on other countries.¹⁹

After a discussion in the Assembly of the People's Deputies, the commission amended its recommendation. Among other amendments, it was proposed to mention that although the original protocol had not been found, graphological, phototechnical and lexical tests of the available copies and other documents had proven the fact of signing of the protocol; the words "pre-war Soviet leadership" were replaced with "Stalin and his entourage".²⁰ The amended proposal was adopted by the Assembly of the People's Deputies on 24 December 1989.

One of the consequences of the declaration adopted by the Assembly of the People's Deputies was strengthening of the Baltic republics' struggle for independence, since the declaration stated that the USSR had violated the non-aggression treaties with Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, and division of spheres of influence between the USSR and Nazi Germany was not officially denied anymore. Yakovlev later wrote in his memoirs: "I realised that [the Assembly's] statement was a critical phase of the Baltic [republics] way towards independence."²¹

Soviet propaganda tried to use some of the old stereotypical formulas to contain the Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian urge for independence. For instance, on 21 July 1990, on

¹⁷ Vladimir Volkov, Ruzanna Ilyukhina, Anatoly Koshkin et al., *1939 god: uroki istorii [1939: The Historical Lessons]*, Mysl, Moscow, 1990, pp. 470-1.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 472.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 473.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 494. Cf. Alexander Yakovlev's address to the Assembly of the People's Deputies on 24 December 1989, *Izvestia*, 25 December 1989.

²¹ Andrei Kolesnikov, 'Skelet iz shkafa' ['Skeleton from the closet'], *New Times* issue 29, 24 August 2009, viewed on 16 January 2011, <<http://www.newtimes.ru/articles/detail/4848>>.

the 50th anniversary of establishment of Soviet regime in the Baltic States, the Presidium of the USSR Supreme Council addressed the peoples of the Baltic republics. According to it, “half a century ago, representatives elected by the working people decided to join the USSR as Soviet Socialist Republics. [...] The workers of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia experienced all horrors of occupation and the cruelty of Hitler’s regime and its predecessors”²² (thus, Soviet propaganda continued rebuking the authorities of independent Baltic States, as in old times). ‘Voluntary’ entrance into the USSR and ‘blossoming’ were trumpeted, as it had been for the previous fifty years, as if the discussions about the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact and its consequences had not occurred.

Together with the Presidium’s address, *Rabochaya tribuna* published a reader’s letter and a large, four-column article as a response to it (such scheme – voicing ‘worker’s concern’ about certain issue and then preaching and moralising about it – was used by the Soviet press quite often). The line of argument of the ‘concerned reader’ went: “Let’s suppose that the ‘occupation’ by the Red Army in 1940 did not occur. Germany would for sure subjugate Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia. [...] At the moment of German attack, the distance to strategic Soviet points would be shorter.” The logic implied in the letter was that the Baltic States would not have sustained their independence anyway, so Soviet occupation and annexation had not mattered for them, but the Soviet Union had gained an important strategic advantage in the anticipated war by moving its border westward, so its actions had been justified. A similar view was expressed by official Soviet historians as well. For example, Vilnis Sipols argued that conclusion of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact by the USSR was an act of self-defence:

When the mutual assistance agreements concluded by the Soviet Union with Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania are considered, looking at their meaning in the conditions that existed in the autumn of 1939 is not sufficient. When in June 1941 Germany launched the war against the USSR, the distance that the fascist troops had to cover to reach Moscow and Leningrad was longer for some hundreds of kilometres. I suppose there is no need to explain the meaning of that factor.²³

It is noticeable that holders of such opinions seem to not consider the logical sequence: If independent Baltic States were occupied by Germany, after the war the USSR would have to let them to decide upon their fate, rather than reinstate Soviet regime as if it had previously been legitimate. Of course, the post-war developments in Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Poland and other states where communist takeovers by means of rigged elections took place show that the Baltic States were doomed to become parts of the victorious Soviet empire. But in 1990, when the fact of the illegitimate origins of the Soviet regime was already officially acknowledged by the Assembly of the People’s Deputies, denying the right of the Baltic republics to secede from the USSR was futile, whatever efforts by propaganda were made.

L. Shlimonov, *Rabochaya tribuna*’s correspondent replying to the reader’s letter, in fact, accepted that the 1940 elections in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, which resulted in parliaments’ unanimous decisions to join the USSR, had not been free: “Yes, the parties considered reactionary were not allowed to stand for election, and there was no referendum [...] so what?” Despite the statement adopted by the Assembly of the People’s Deputies and his own admission of manipulation of the election processes, Shlimonov denied that the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact with its secret protocol had opened the way for occupation of the Baltic States, and that the ‘voluntary’ decisions to join the USSR had been fabricated.

²² *Rabochaya tribuna*, 21 July 1990, p. 2. From HU OSA 300-80-5-2.

²³ Vilnis Sipols, ‘Vybor, proverennyi istoriey’ [‘The choice verified by history’], *Krasnaya Zvezda*, 13 October 1989, p. 3. From HU OSA 300-80-5-2.

Shlimonov also argued: “Undoubtedly Stalin would have it in his own way, but it is also very important that the people wanted it [...] the absolute majority did not consider the elections and joining the USSR violation of the people’s choice.”²⁴ One may just ask, if the absolute majority had determined so, why it was needed to exclude the ‘reactionary’ political parties from the elections?

The post-war debate about the murder of Polish officers

For decades, the Soviet Union asserted consistently that the Special State Commission for Ascertaining and Investigating the Circumstances of the Shooting of the Polish Prisoners of War by the German Fascist Invaders in the Katyn Forest, which had been established on 13 January 1944 and published its report on 24 January 1944, had found the truth and said the final word on the Katyn massacre. As the commission’s name shows, the Soviet authorities knew who would be found guilty even before appointing the commission.

In his foreword to Joseph Mackiewicz’s book *The Katyn Wood Murders*, former U.S. ambassador to Poland Arthur Bliss Lane noted: “Unfortunately, it must now be admitted, the fear of Soviet displeasure prevented the United States and British Governments from assuming a stronger stand in protecting the interests of their other ally Poland.”²⁵ Lane had resigned after the rigged elections in January 1947 that led the Polish communists to power.²⁶ A detailed account of suppressing media coverage of the Katyn case in 1943-1945 by the British and American governments in the interest of Allied unity has been published.²⁷

Publications calling for an investigation of the massacre appeared in 1948 in the Polish-American newspaper *Nowy Świat*, then in the *New York Herald Tribune* in 1949.²⁸ In late 1949 the American Committee for the Investigation of the Katyn Massacre was established, and Lane became its president. The U.S. administration was uncooperative.²⁹

After the beginning of the Korean War in June 1950, cases of American prisoners killed by a shot at the base of the skull were documented; the method of killing resembled the method used at Katyn. On 18 September 1951 the U.S. Congress voted to form a committee for investigation of the Katyn case, presided by Congressman Ray J. Madden.

On 5 March 1952 Congressman Madden requested from the Congress an approval for hearings in Europe in April. He noted that two days earlier *Pravda* devoted two and a half of its four pages for reprinting the Soviet version of the Katyn case.³⁰ Indeed, the Soviet government had denied any possibility of cooperation with the Madden Committee and launched a propaganda campaign: the Committee was attacked for “repeating Nazi lies” and Communist propaganda accused the U.S. of committing war crimes in Korea.³¹

²⁴ L. Shlimonov, ‘Sotvorenie mifov’ [‘Creation of myths’], *Rabochaya tribuna*, 21 July 1990, p. 2. From HU OSA 300-80-5-2.

²⁵ Joseph Mackiewicz, *The Katyn Wood Murders*, World Affairs Book Club, London, 1951, p. V.

²⁶ Cienciala, Lebedeva and Materski, p. 236.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 232-5.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 235.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 236.

³⁰ ‘House inquiry into Katyn case may move to Europe in April’, *New York Herald Tribune*, 6 March 1952. From HU OSA 300-50-1-933.

³¹ Cienciala, Lebedeva and Materski, pp. 237-8.

Examples of Communist propaganda available at the OSA collection include a communication from the RFE/RL archives, which reproduces an article from *Literaturnaya gazeta* published in Moscow,³² and several clippings from Polish newspapers of that time.

The author of the article in *Literaturnaya gazeta* declared that the conclusions of the Madden committee “were prepared nine years ago by Goebbels, beginning an anti-Soviet provocation” (it is worth mentioning that the article was published in March 1952 when the committee had just started working, and even the preliminary conclusions would be published almost four months later, but the Communists already knew for sure what the conclusions would be). The article consisted mostly of insults against the committee members, “people who are well known not only as obsequious executors of the orders of the American warmongers but also as close flunkeys of Hitlerism.”

Most of the committee members were also mentioned personally. Alvin E. O’Konski was called “half-Irish and half-Polish but wholly – a downright scoundrel” who “since 1938 [...] has been working for the Nazis.” Timothy P. Sheehan, “owner of many factories [...] harbours warm sympathy for the Hitlerites”, the story was told. George A. Dondero was “one of the most reactionary Congressmen in Washington,” Thaddeus M. Machrowicz – “agent of the bankrupt Polish fascist clique,” and all the committee members were labelled “agents of the German and Polish fascists.”³³

Polish communist press also repeated the phrases about “Goebbels propaganda”. On 5 March 1952 *Życie Warszawy* published an article accompanied by a caricature showing Goebbels speaking via The Voice of America (figure 1, p. 26).³⁴ The next day, 6 March, the same newspaper published fragments from articles in newspapers such as *Pravda* (USSR), *Prace* (Czechoslovakia) and *Robotnichesko delo* (Bulgaria). The latter was especially caustic, calling the Americans “heirs of Hitlerite criminals, American murderers, who with bestial cruelty kill thousands of Korean and Chinese prisoners of war, use bacteriological weapons and shoot innocent children, women and old people en masse.”³⁵ Similar accusations were made by another Polish newspaper on 15 March: “No provocation can work as a smoke screen to hide such a crime as the bacteriological war launched by the aggressors in Korea, which extended also to the territory of the People’s Republic of China.”³⁶

The Madden Committee published a preliminary report in July 1952. It noted a “striking similarity between what happened to the Polish officers in Katyn and events now taking place in Korea,” indicting the USSR for the massacre.³⁷

One of responses by Communist propaganda was a book published in Poland, *Prawda o Katyniu* (The Truth about Katyn).³⁸ A book review in a Communist newspaper claimed that the book was valuable as it “contains more than just truth about Katyn itself”, that “Hitlerite murderers and American murderers are just two sorts of the same sort” and that mass graves in Katyn, Oświęcim (Auschwitz), Warsaw and Pyongyang were on the same path of “criminal imperialism”. The Madden Committee was called “circus”.³⁹

³² The communication does not show the original title *Literaturnaya gazeta*, just Literary Gazette. However, the tone of the article, as well as the transliteration of the name of Congressman Thaddeus M. Machrowicz (Tadeush Makhrovich in the text) indicates that the text was translated from Russian.

³³ Henrich Podolsky, ‘Producers of the “Katyn Committee”’, *Literary Gazette*, 4 March 1952. From HU OSA 300-50-1-933.

³⁴ ‘Kłapa’ [‘A flop’], *Życie Warszawy*, 5 March 1952. From HU OSA 300-50-1-933.

³⁵ ‘Prasa światowa o “sprawie katyńskiej” [‘World press about the “Katyn case”’], *Życie Warszawy*, 6 March 1952. From HU OSA 300-50-1-933.

³⁶ *Trybuna ludu*, 15 March 1952. From HU OSA 300-50-1-933.

³⁷ ‘House group charges Russia with massacre’, *New York Herald Tribune*, 3 July 1952. From HU OSA 300-50-1-933.

³⁸ Bolesław Wójcicki, *Prawda o Katyniu* [*The Truth about Katyn*], Czytelnik, Warsaw, 1952.

³⁹ ‘Prawda... nie tylko o Katyniu’ [‘The Truth... Not only about Katyn’], *Życie Warszawy*, 25 August 1952. From HU OSA 300-50-1-933.

The same book was also reviewed in 1980 in a special issue of Polish samizdat magazine *Biuletyn Dolnoslaski* dedicated to the 37th anniversary of the Warsaw ghetto uprising and the 40th anniversary of the Katyn massacre. The review author defined it “a typical example of ‘popular science’ publication from the Stalinist era.” In this review it was also mentioned that the book called the pre-war Polish government “a gang of robbers”, insulted the commander of the Polish army loyal to the government-in-exile General Władysław Anders and other statesmen, and contained other typical labels from communist era. The chapter about the Madden Commission was titled “Goebbels plus Ku-Klux-Klan...”; the Commission itself was called “American heirs of Goebbels” and nine of 34 photos included in the book illustrated “American criminal actions against humanity”, while most of the other photos related to ‘revisionist’ West Germany.⁴⁰

The Madden Committee presented its final conclusions on 22 December 1952. It accused the USSR for the crime and mentioned the deliberate withholding of information by the U.S. government.⁴¹ The main goal of the committee – a trial of the Katyn case by the United Nations or another international tribunal – was not achieved. Although Dwight D. Eisenhower’s administration delivered the committee’s final report to the United Nations on 10 February 1953, it did not push for a hearing, as peace negotiations with North Korea were stalled and Soviet cooperation was needed. In addition, the committee was unpopular in Democratic circles, as many members of the Roosevelt and Truman administrations were charged with suppressing information on Katyn. The commission’s findings received little attention in mainstream American media.⁴²

Propaganda battles sometimes took rather absurd form. Polish emigrant daily *Dziennik Polski* published in Great Britain reported that in late July 1968 the Chinese consulate in Gdansk-Wrzeszcz showed a film about Katyn on a large screen installed in its garden. As Maoist China was at odds with the USSR at the time, the Chinese film blamed the USSR for the massacre, causing an “unprecedented sensation”.⁴³ The film was shown also on the premises of the Chinese embassy in Warsaw, and to the protest note of the Polish ministry of foreign affairs the Chinese responded that the film was intended for the embassy personnel, in order to improve their knowledge of Polish language.⁴⁴ There was also information that at one occasion, when the demonstrators sent by the government to rally in front of the Chinese embassy started chanting slogans, a few Chinese stood in a row and sang the Polish anthem – “Poland has not yet perished, so long as we live”.⁴⁵

The 30th anniversary of the murder of Polish prisoners of war was commemorated by Polish emigrants in a number of places: between April and June 1970 memorial events took place in Rome, London, Manchester, Leicester, New York, Philadelphia (this event was attended by Congressman Ray Madden) and other cities.⁴⁶ Anglo-American media, which had mostly been silent on Katyn, started changing their attitude in January 1971, when Janusz K. Zawodny’s book *Death in the Forest* was published in England (the American publication of Zawodny’s book in 1962 had not led to action). Soon afterwards, a book titled *Katyn: A*

⁴⁰ Katyn, special issue of *Biuletyn Dolnoslaski*, March-April 1980, pp. 14-15. From HU OSA 300-55-1-3.

⁴¹ Cienciala, Lebedeva and Materski, pp. 236-8.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 239.

⁴³ ‘Chiński film o Katyniu wyświetlono we Wrzeszczu’ [‘A Chinese film about Katyn shown in Wrzeszcz’], *Dziennik Polski*, 27 August 1968. From HU OSA 300-50-1-860.

⁴⁴ ‘Echa filmu o Katyniu pokazanego przez Chińczyków w Warszawie’ [‘Reverberations of the film about Katyn shown by the Chinese in Warsaw’], *Dziennik Polski*, 8 January 1969. From HU OSA 300-50-1-860.

⁴⁵ ‘Kłopoty s chińczykami w Warszawie’ [‘Trouble with the Chinese in Warsaw’], *Dziennik Polski*, 4 February 1969. From HU OSA 300-50-1-860.

⁴⁶ Reports published in *Dziennik Polski*. From HU OSA 300-50-1-860.

Crime without Parallel by Louis FitzGibbon was published, and it was announced that a film titled *The Issue to Be Avoided* would be shown by the BBC.⁴⁷

Publication of a review of Zawodny's book in the *Times* on 29 January 1971 provoked Soviet anger. On 8 February the *Times* published a letter from Felix Alexeyev, London correspondent of Novosti press agency. Alexeyev called Zawodny's book "malicious old Nazi invention", and the review – "intent on continuing Dr. Goebbels's efforts to bedevil East-West relations." Alexeyev also claimed that the Nuremberg tribunal "established conclusively that the Polish officers [...] had been brutally murdered by Nazis" and "after the liberation of Smolensk in 1943, a Soviet special commission [...] established beyond doubt that the Polish soldiers had been shot in the autumn of 1941 by a German murder squad".⁴⁸ On 10 and 16 February the discussion between Alexeyev and British researchers was continued in *The Times*.

On 15 April 1971 the Politburo instructed the Soviet ambassador in London to point out that the Nuremberg tribunal had found the German war criminals guilty of shooting the Polish prisoners of war at Katyn. The ambassador also conveyed the Soviet expectation that the British Foreign Office would prevent the spread of 'slandorous materials' on Katyn, whose authors "wished to worsen British-Soviet relations". However, *The Issue to Be Avoided* was shown on 19 April 1971.⁴⁹

In January 1972 the British Foreign Office archives for 1943-1944 were published, including the letters of Sir Owen O'Malley, British ambassador to the Polish government-in-exile, to Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden. O'Malley "wrote a devastating critique of the Burdenko Commission report in February 1944."⁵⁰ The *Chicago Tribune* editorial published on 10 July 1972 noted that the letters "had been placed under a 30-year secrecy seal during World War II when the Soviet Union was an ally." The editorial stated that the wartime British and American governments covered up their Soviet ally although they knew that Stalin's NKVD had perpetuated the crime.⁵¹ On 17 August 1972 the *Daily Telegraph* also published an article about the wartime cover up. Author of that article, Ian Colvin, described how the British government tried to 'keep the balance'. He quoted the words of Sir Alexander Cadogan, Undersecretary at the Foreign Office, who had stated that members of both investigation commissions – German and Soviet – had been "simply instructed to manufacture a case, or find themselves in another mass grave" and "all evidence from both sides is faked." As Colvin noted, "clearly only one side could have needed to fake its evidence."⁵² The British government would maintain its 'balanced' position until the Soviet Union admitted its guilt. As late as July 1989, Foreign Office Minister Lord Brabazon said: "None of the historical studies to date has produced conclusive evidence of responsibility."⁵³

For the next few years, the Soviet government protested every attempt to erect Katyn monuments in England. Meanwhile, a memorial to people murdered by the Germans in a village in Belarus named Khatyn was erected. Khatyn was chosen among dozens of burnt down villages because its name resembled Katyn, so it could be misleading. There was an instance, when American authors writing about President Richard Nixon's state visit to the

⁴⁷ Cienciala, Lebedeva and Materski, p. 242.

⁴⁸ RFE Polish Research unit, item 1140/71, 8 February 1971. From HU OSA 300-50-1-860.

⁴⁹ Cienciala, Lebedeva and Materski, p. 242.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 232.

⁵¹ 'The forest that won't die', *Chicago Tribune*, 10 July 1972. From HU OSA 300-50-1-860.

⁵² 'Russian guilt for Katyn massacre reaffirmed', *Daily Telegraph*, 17 August 1972. From HU OSA 300-50-1-860.

⁵³ 'The Katyn cover-up', *The Observer*, 6 October 1991. From HU OSA 300-50-1-863.

USSR in May 1972 stated: “He visited Katyn, where 149 Russians had been forced into a barn and burned alive by Nazi troops on 22 March 1943.”⁵⁴

The Katyn case in Poland

Some sources indicated that after the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in 1956, when for the first time some of Stalin’s actions had been condemned, Nikita Khrushchev had proposed admitting Soviet guilt for the murder of Polish prisoners of war but Polish communist leader Władysław Gomułka had rejected it. An article published in the Belgian newspaper *Libre Belgique* referred to the Radio Free Europe broadcast, noting that RFE “have revealed that Khrushchev two times offered Gomułka [...] to disclose the truth about the massacre in the Katyn forest and to blame Stalin for that crime among the others.” According to the article, Gomułka declined Khrushchev’s offer.⁵⁵ In May 1969 Lucienne Rey also mentioned in an article published in magazine *Est et Ouest* that after the 20th Congress, Khrushchev had wanted to reveal the truth but Gomułka had opposed publication of the documents. Rey’s information was quoted by a Russian emigrant journalist in a review of Henri de Montfort’s book *Le massacre de Katyn*.⁵⁶ Years later, in 1977, the *Daily Telegraph* wrote: “After his fall from power Gomułka spent many long hours reminiscing about his political career with one of his old comrades, identified only as M.S. who is now in the West. A record of their conversations has appeared [...] Gomułka regretted that he did not follow Khrushchev’s advice and confirm Russian responsibility for the crime.”⁵⁷ In a recent publication, it is noted: “There were rumors in Poland that Khrushchev had proposed admitting Soviet guilt for Katyn to Polish communist leader Władysław Gomułka [...] Though undocumented, these rumors cannot be dismissed out of hand. [...] In fact, Gomułka ordered the Polish media to be silent on Katyn, a silence maintained until 1989.”⁵⁸

In 1977 the *Daily Telegraph* published excerpts from the secret instructions of the Polish Central Office of Censorship. Concerning the Katyn case, the instruction was: “You are not allowed to let through any attempt to put the blame [...] on the Soviet Union” and “[i]n scholarly works, memoirs and biographical writings you may pass formulations such as ‘Shot by the Germans at Katyn,’ ‘Died at Katyn’ or ‘Perished at Katyn.’ But when [...] the date of death is given, only dates later than July, 1941, are allowed.”⁵⁹

On 17 September 1979, on the 40th anniversary of Soviet invasion of eastern Poland, the United Press International published an account of the coverage in the Polish media:

The official press was almost apologetic in its coverage of the anniversary.

The newspaper *Zycie Warszawy* said Sept. 17, 1939 was the day “the Soviet army moved the line of its future confrontation with Germany by 300 km (180 miles).”

⁵⁴ Cienciala, Lebedeva and Materski, p. 241. Cf. Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein, *The Final Days*, Simon & Schuster, New York, 1976, p. 227.

⁵⁵ ‘Le massacre de Katyn. M. Gomułka admettra-t-il officiellement la vérité sur ce drame ?’ [‘The Katyn massacre: Will Mr. Gomułka admit the truth about that tragedy officially?’], *Libre Belgique*, marked “received 27 September 1965”. From HU OSA 300-50-1-860.

⁵⁶ Boris Souvarine, ‘Le massacre de Katyn’ [‘The Katyn massacre’], *Est et Ouest* issue 499, 1-15 December 1972, p. 23. From HU OSA 300-50-1-860.

⁵⁷ RFE/RL feature file FF008, 6 January 1977. From HU OSA 300-50-1-860.

⁵⁸ Cienciala, Lebedeva and Materski, p. 240.

⁵⁹ David Floyd, ‘How Poland censors Katyn’, *Daily Telegraph*, 30 September 1977. From HU OSA 300-50-1-861.

Zygie Warszawy said it had been a “difficult decision” for the late Soviet dictator Josef Stalin to attack Poland but that the decision had resulted in “Soviet and Polish flags hoisted over Berlin.”⁶⁰

The next day, 18 September, the Associated Press transmitted:

The September 17, 1939, Soviet invasion [...] has long been a taboo topic for public discussion. [...]

This year the invasion was discussed in the state-controlled media, even though the panelists still defended the Russians.

Previously Polish officials had reiterated the Soviet line that the move was necessary to protect the Ukraine and Byelorussia.

This year the panelists said the Russians had to go into Poland to win more breathing space before the imminent armed conflict with the Nazis.⁶¹

Despite all the official prohibitions and oppression, Polish society did not trust the official version. Several samizdat publications wrote about Katyn. One of such publications was *Biuletyn katyński* [The Katyn Bulletin] published by the non-official Katyn Institute. Open Society Archives collection includes a few issues of *Biuletyn katyński*, dated 1979-1981.⁶² Each issue consists of eight pages of typewritten text in A6 format (probably, typewritten A4 originals were reproduced by a photocopy machine). Contents of each issue include the chronology of the Katyn case, alphabetical list of victims, fragments of publications about Katyn and bibliography. For example, the bibliography in the first issue, dated April 1979, included, among other materials, Ambassador O'Malley's letters, a German publication in Polish language dated 1943, *Katyński las śmierci* [The Katyn Forest of Death], as well as books of professor Stanisław Swianiewicz published in London and Paris. Swianiewicz had been a prisoner at the Kozelsk camp and had been spared from execution at the last moment.

In 1980 there were special issues of different samizdat magazines dedicated to the 40th anniversary of Katyn. One of such magazines, *Biuletyn Dolnoslaski*, opened with an editorial about the 37th anniversary of Warsaw ghetto uprising, and included a poem; a comparison of inscriptions on two monuments – one erected by the Soviet Union, and the other – by Polish emigrants in London; the history of Soviet-Polish relations, beginning with 1923 Soviet-Polish peace treaty and 1932 non-aggression pact; an interview with a Russian emigrant; references about Katyn in Grand Larousse issue of 1962, Encyclopaedia Britannica, Encyclopedia Americana, Soviet encyclopaedias of 1955 and 1973, and so forth; review of the book *Prawda o Katyniu* [The Truth about Katyn] by Bolesław Wójcicki (see page 8); and fragments of *Biuletyn katyński*.⁶³

The special issue of *Bratniak*, newsletter of the Polish Youth Union, contained mostly literary works, including The Kolyma Stories by Varlam Shalamov, Russian prisoner of Soviet concentration camps in the North.⁶⁴ It may be noted that in the USSR at that time possession of Shalamov's texts led to prosecution and imprisonment; Shalamov's books would be published legally only under the *glasnost* policy in the late 1980s.

On 31 July 1981 activists of the Komitet Katyński (Katyn Committee) built a cross on the symbolic Katyn grave in the military section of Old Powązki Cemetery in Warsaw. That cross was taken down by the authorities; so was another cross built in December 1981. The

⁶⁰ RFE/RL feature file FF117, 17 September 1979. From HU OSA 300-50-1-861.

⁶¹ RFE/RL feature file FF537, 18 September 1979. From HU OSA 300-50-1-861.

⁶² *Biuletyn katyński*. From HU OSA 300-55-1-6.

⁶³ Katyn, special issue of *Biuletyn Dolnoslaski*, March-April 1980. From HU OSA 300-55-1-3.

⁶⁴ *Bratniak*, issue 22, March-April 1980. From HU OSA 300-55-1-7.

Katyn Committee organised ceremonies on such dates as 13 April (the anniversary of the German radio communiqué about the discovery of the Katyn graves in 1943) and 17 September – the anniversary of the Soviet invasion of Poland in 1939. Four underground leaders were tried in October 1982 for slandering the USSR and advocating an ‘anti-national policy’, and were sentenced to prison for three to seven years.⁶⁵

In 1985 Polish authorities erected a cross on the same site where two crosses had been built and then removed in 1981. The inscription on the new monument read: “To the Polish soldiers – victims of the Hitlerite fascism that arose on the soil of Katyn,” without a date. The monument was built shortly before the visit of Soviet defence minister Sergei Sokolov and commemoration of the 40th anniversary of liberation of Poland from the Nazis.⁶⁶

Examples of Soviet propaganda depicted by the Soviet Analyst

Shortly before the beginning of *glasnost* policy, Soviet propaganda was working as usual. Examples of propaganda were studied, for instance, by *The Soviet Analyst*, a British fortnightly commentary, in May 1985. *The Soviet Analyst* article is rather short but informative, and includes a few quotations and caricatures from Soviet newspapers. One of the caricatures, from *Krokodil* weekly dated March 1985, shows American generals and CIA agents toasting SS generals. All those partying bear skull-shaped medals with inscriptions such as “Hiroshima”, “Song My”, “Chile” and “Grenada” (Americans) or “Auschwitz” and “Khatyn” (Germans). The caption reads “Here’s to our mutual understanding and cooperation, colleagues!” (Figure 2, page 26).

On 25 April 1985 *Izvestia* published an article by General Pavel Zhilin of the USSR Academy of Sciences. Zhilin denounced ‘bourgeois reactionary historians’, as well as the U.S. government (‘Reagan-Bush-Weinberger’) as they “distorted the ‘liberation mission of the Soviet Armed Forces’ by alleging that socialism was imposed on Eastern Europe by Soviet bayonets.” Zhilin also wrote:

In the tense international situation of today, when militarism, fascism and revanchism are trying to gather strength, when Washington has declared a new crusade against the Land of the Soviets, we turn again and again to past experience in order to bar the road to a new world war.

On 26 April 1985 *Izvestia* published an article attacking the U.S. President Ronald Reagan, who during a visit to West Germany visited the military cemetery at Bitburg and laid a wreath. The article claimed that Reagan’s “official policy is state terrorism” and that Reagan was “planning to construct his own concentration camps in the USA for hundreds of thousands”; then, a rhetorical question was asked: “Should one be surprised that the builder of an American Dachau does not wish to visit the Hitlerite Dachau?” On 6 May *Izvestia* elaborated on the topic by a caricature showing resurrected SS men welcoming Reagan (Figure 3, page 27). The trend was continued by *Pravda* on 7 May (Figure 4, page 27).

In his speech on 8 May dedicated to the Victory Day, Mikhail Gorbachev, who had recently become the Secretary General of the Communist Party, argued that “having defeated the fascist German shock forces of imperialism” the USSR was threatened by the “bellicose policy of American imperialism”, and included the “undeclared war” in Afghanistan in the list

⁶⁵ Cienciala, Lebedeva and Materski, p. 245.

⁶⁶ Michael T. Kaufman, ‘Poland erects ambiguous memorial to victims of Katyn massacre’, *The New York Times*, 10 April 1985. From HU OSA 300-50-1-861.

of US crimes. *Pravda* editorial on 12 May again attacked the “ruling imperialist circles of the West, in the first place the USA”.

The Soviet Analyst notes: “Soviet citizens have been subjected to a constant vilification of the US administration as part of the commemoration of victory over Nazi Germany.” It also reminds:

In fact it was Stalin, not the Americans, who cooperated with the Nazis from 1939 to June 1941, the USSR not the USA which signed a pact with Berlin distributing between them the territory of Poland and the Baltic states. Khatyn was a village wiped out by the German invaders; the Katyn massacre was at another place, another time.

The Soviet Analyst mentions the German-Soviet Treaty on Friendship and the Border between the USSR and Germany, signed on 28 September 1939, which also provided for cooperation against Polish resistance. In conclusion, it is noted that the Soviet minister of internal affairs in 1985 was Vitaly Fedorchuk, who had served with Soviet counter-intelligence SMERSH in Hungary when Raoul Wallenberg had been abducted. So, notes *The Soviet Analyst*, besides Nazi crimes, “there are other crimes which should also be remembered.”⁶⁷

The joint commission of Soviet and Polish historians and the discussion about the ‘blank spots’ in history

During his visit to Moscow in 1987, Polish head of state General Wojciech Jaruzelski proposed Gorbachev to establish a commission to resolve the Katyn case. The joint commission of Soviet and Polish historians was established in May 1987. It has been noted that “Jaruzelski and his advisers believed that Soviet admission of the truth about Katyn [...] would lead to broader public acceptance of close relations with the USSR, while also making the government more popular at home” and Jaruzelski told later that “he had proposed the resolution of the Katyn problem to Gorbachev on the latter’s first state visit to Poland in April 1985, but Gorbachev said that while he understood the need, he had just taken up his duties and needed time to study the matter.”⁶⁸

Soviet archives were still closed, and the Soviet members of the joint commission could not give up their support for the Burdenko Commission report, while most of the Politburo members were against changing the official line.⁶⁹ On 25 May 1988 *Pravda* reported about the unveiling of the renovated memorial in Katyn near Smolensk with an inscription: “To the Polish officers shot by the fascists in 1941.” General Grzegorz Lipowski, governor of the Polish province of Częstochowa, laid a wreath and stated that the officers had been murdered by the Germans.⁷⁰

On 10 June 1988 *Le Figaro* reported that during a visit to Paris, Nathan Edelman, “very official and very eminent Soviet historian”, stated: “All the details of that case have not been known yet, but we know that from summer 1940 those thousands of Polish officers suddenly stopped writing to their families.” So, “[f]or the first time, a Soviet representative explicitly admitted the Soviet Union’s responsibility for the massacre at Katyn.”⁷¹

⁶⁷ *The Soviet Analyst*, 15 May 1985. From HU OSA 300-50-1-861.

⁶⁸ Cienciala, Lebedeva and Materski, p. 245.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 246.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 246-7.

⁷¹ Communication signed by Arielle Thedrel, *Le Figaro*, 10 June 1988. From HU OSA 300-50-1-862.

On 7 July British historian Norman Davies published an article in *The Independent*, which was subsequently reprinted by *Dziennik Polski*. Davies brought up the issue of adopting the Soviet line of argument by the British government during the war and calling the Polish demand for an investigation of the Katyn case by the International Red Cross ‘irresponsible’. In April 1943, wrote Davies, “it became clear that Stalin’s armies were playing the decisive role in defeating Germany – and hard evidence was emerging of Stalin’s mass murders. [...] between truth and expediency, the Allied leaders chose expediency and deliberately set out to suppress information about crimes against humanity”. So, argued Davies, the Anglo-Saxon memories of the war needed some *glasnost* too.⁷²

Later in 1988, the Soviet government decided to build a larger memorial complex at Katyn. A chief inspector of the ministry of culture said in an interview with *Izvestia* that Polish and Soviet prisoners of war had been kept together in a concentration camp there and later had been shot by the Germans “as our army was advancing in 1943.”⁷³ Such statement was quite ridiculous as it contradicted even the official Soviet version, according to which the Polish officers had been shot in 1941. The RFE/RL review of the Soviet press paid attention to such an obvious blunder, noted *Izvestia*’s failure to correct the mistake and suggested that as the role of censorship was reduced, fact checking might be undermined as well.⁷⁴ The official’s mistake was also noted by Zdzisław Rurarz, former Polish ambassador to Japan who had been granted asylum in the U.S. in 1981. In his commentary to the *Wall Street Journal* Rurarz was more critical of the Soviet official’s statement than the RFE/RL analysts and suggested that the Soviets were again trying to “murder the truth”.⁷⁵

On 7 March 1989 spokesman of the Polish government Jerzy Urban told a press conference that Polish members of the Soviet-Polish commission believed that the NKVD was the perpetrator of the Katyn massacre.⁷⁶

On 28 May 1989 *Komsomol’skaya pravda* published an interview with famous Polish actor, director of the Polish Information and Culture Centre in Moscow Stanisław Mikulski. In the interview, Mikulski said: “The absolute majority of Poles believes that the Katyn [crime] was committed by the NKVD.”⁷⁷ The same day, Moscow Radio English-language broadcast stated that although the accepted view in the USSR had considered the Germans guilty, the Katyn case was now “a blank spot in history”. *The Sunday Times* reported about that broadcast on 29 May and, quoting unidentified Polish sources, also noted that the Soviet side privately admitted that Stalin and Beria had been guilty.⁷⁸

In June 1989 weekly magazine *Ekho planety* dedicated eight pages for publication of materials about Katyn. In the introduction, the Katyn case was called a ‘blank spot’ in history, but the largest part of the publication disproved the official Soviet version. Vyacheslav Molotov’s statement made in September 1939, “the Polish state and its government have, in fact, ceased to exist”, was called unacceptable, offensive and profoundly dishonest.⁷⁹ The

⁷² Norman Davies, ‘Britain’s guilty secret about Katyn’, *Dziennik Polski*, 13 July 1988, cf. *The Independent*, 7 July 1988. From HU OSA 300-50-1-862.

⁷³ S. Taranov, ‘Po dolgu pamiati’ [‘By the duty of remembrance’], *Izvestia*, 6 November 1988, p. 6. From HU OSA 300-50-1-862.

⁷⁴ The USSR this week, RFE/RL F-569, 11 November 1988. From HU OSA 300-50-1-862.

⁷⁵ RFE/RL FF109, 6 January 1989. From HU OSA 300-50-1-862.

⁷⁶ Cienciala, Lebedeva and Materski, p. 248.

⁷⁷ M. Botian, ‘Druzhit ne po ukazu’ [‘To be friends without order’], *Komsomol’skaya pravda*, 28 May 1989, p. 3. From HU OSA 300-80-1-685.

⁷⁸ Nicholas Bethell, ‘Katyn killings: ‘Stalin guilty’, *The Sunday Times*, 29 May 1988. From HU OSA 300-50-1-862.

⁷⁹ Grigory Polegayev, ‘Simvol obshei bedy’ [‘The symbol of common tragedy’], *Ekho planety* issue 24, June 1989, p. 27. From HU OSA 300-50-1-862.

letters exchanged between Stalin and Churchill in 1943 were quoted, including Churchill's letter of 24 April, which said: "Of course, we will oppose energetically any 'investigation' by the International Red Cross or any other body on the territories under the German rule."⁸⁰

Several quotations from Polish newspapers also let the readers to learn about previously concealed facts. The statement of Jarema Maciszewski, Polish chairman of the Soviet-Polish commission, was quoted from *Trybuna ludu*: Maciszewski criticised the Burdenko commission report, said that although the commission had not got an access to the Soviet archival documents yet, the investigation based on the Polish and Western materials proved that the NKVD perpetuated the crime.⁸¹ It was also mentioned, with a reference to the Polish weekly *Polityka*, that all correspondence with the officers' camps had stopped in April 1940.⁸²

Ekho planety also published fragments of the article of Polish historian Włodzimierz Kowalski in *Życie Warszawy*. In that article Kowalski criticised the views of Romuald Świątek, author of the book *The Katyn Forest* published in London in 1988. Świątek argued that the USSR had handed over the Polish officers to the Germans, who subsequently had committed the mass murder. Kowalski noted that in 1941 none of the Soviet officials had spoken about handing the Polish prisoners of war from Kozelsk, Starobelsk and Ostashkov camps over to the Germans – according to the Soviet version of that time, the Poles had been released.⁸³

In fragments of the interview of the director of Poland's state archive Marian Wojciechowski to *Sztandar Młodych* attention was invited to the fact that the Burdenko report had mentioned two dates of killings: August-September and August-December 1941. December could be mentioned because an American journalist had noted that the corpses were clad in winter uniform. Wojciechowski also mentioned that an American officer, who had been brought to Katyn by the Germans with a group of Allied prisoners of war, had noted that the boots of the dead officers found at Katyn was in a good condition, so the Soviet version that the Poles had been working on road construction and had been captured by the Germans in 1941 was probably not true. Besides, noted Wojciechowski, if the prisoners had been working in the vicinity of Smolensk, why Soviet officials had told about that only when the graves in Katyn had been found, and not in 1941, when, in accordance with the agreement between the USSR and Polish government-in-exile, the formation of Polish army units had begun?⁸⁴

Ekho planety, however, published other opinions as well, probably in order to 'keep the balance', as censorship still was not lifted officially. So, there was a testimony of a former Yugoslav intelligence officer, who said in an interview that one of the members of the International Medical Commission invited to Katyn by the Germans, Dr. Ferenc Orsós from Hungary, had told him in 1947 that he had been sure the Germans committed the crime but had signed the ready report under pressure.⁸⁵ Another statement blaming the Germans was made by a historian from Czechoslovakia.⁸⁶

On 19 August 1989 *Polityka* published a critique of the Burdenko commission report by Polish historians and a statement by Jarema Maciszewski, who said that the USSR was responsible, with no doubt.⁸⁷

⁸⁰ Polegayev, p. 31 (translation from Russian, original quotation not found).

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 28.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 31.

⁸⁶ Valery Rzhnevsky, 'Tochka zrenia istorika' [Historian's point of view], *Ekho planety* issue 24, June 1989, p.

33. From HU OSA 300-50-1-862.

⁸⁷ RFE/RL FF110, 21 August 1989. From HU OSA 300-50-1-862.

Concerning Swiątek's book mentioned above, I suppose that it was published with concealed Soviet financial support, and it is even possible that it was written not by Swiątek but by someone habitually dealing with propaganda. Swiątek's book, in fact, looks more like propaganda material than scientific work. It was published by a small printing house, not by some well-known publisher, at author's expense. The book does not contain any indication if it was written in Polish and then translated. The large number of grammatical and stylistic errors hints that the book was not edited or perhaps even proofread. Several Polish names are also misspelt, for instance, Juzef Czapski (instead of Polish Józef) and Smorowinski instead of Smorawiński.⁸⁸ The arguments used in the book resemble Soviet propaganda. For instance, the Burdenko commission report is mentioned as the final word on Katyn investigation:

The report of the Special Commission to establish and investigate the circumstances of the shooting by German-Fascist invaders of Polish prisoners of war in the Katyn Forest completely disspeled [*sic*] any doubts that the vile propaganda of the Nazi swindlers might have instilled into the minds of the Poles. [...] Everybody realised it was nothing but an attempt to sow dissention between the peoples of Poland and Russia.⁸⁹

The Polish government-in-exile and personally General Anders are vilified in Swiątek's book:

[T]he accusations of the Polish Government in London had wholly political motives. I have to say the same of General Anders who, on hearing the news about the Katyn Massacre, started to display unhealthy psychic symptoms – ordering to form at the headquarters of the Polish Army in Russia an Office of Documentation and searching party for the missing Polish officers. He also ordered Captain J. Czapski to gather slanderous material against the Soviet Union.⁹⁰

Swiątek's conclusion is also rather characteristic:

To end this sad story I would like to advise Poles that they should once and for all, stop nursing grievance towards their Eastern neighbour because of Poland's changed geography and frontiers after the war.

In fact every true Pole should not only be satisfied with the result but also be grateful to those who were its creators. When I returned from the labour camp in 1956 and visited our western territories, I realised the economic significance of the new Polish frontiers and, in my heart, even forgave Stalin for the suffering inflicted on me and my family as he had been the main force behind the creation of the Polish frontiers.

[...] the Soviet Union sacrificed [*sic*] many millions of Soviet soldiers so that Poles could have their own independent state, something which they would never have been able to achieve on their own.⁹¹

Admission of Soviet guilt for the partition of Poland and murdering Polish officers

Soon after the opening of some Soviet archives in 1989, historians Yuri Zoria, Valentina Parsadanova and Natalia Lebedeva found hitherto unknown documents. A comparison of the lists of Polish prisoners sent out of the camps in April-May 1940 with the lists compiled by the Germans in spring 1943 showed "numerous coincidences that appear to prove the relationship between the two." On 23 February 1990 director of the International

⁸⁸ Romuald Swiątek, *The Katyn Forest*, Panda Press, London, 1988, p. 100.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 90.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 102.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 104.

Department of the Communist Party's Central Committee Valentin Falin wrote a note for Gorbachev stating that the historians had found archival materials and would publish their articles in June or July. Falin proposed to inform Jaruzelski about the findings and to put the responsibility on the NKVD, and personally – on Beria and his deputy Merkulov. However, the Politburo decided not to allow publishing of the historians' findings.⁹²

On 22 March 1990 English-language weekly *Moscow News* published fragments of the archival documents and Natalia Lebedeva's comments; Russian-language publication in *Moskovskie Novosti* followed on 25 March. The publication was not agreed with any party official in advance and provoked anger of the party's Central Committee. Lebedeva noted that "Stalin, whose pride had been injured by the defeat in the war against Poland in 1920, particularly disliked the Polish Army high command. Having wiped out the Polish state [...] he apprehended those who might in future enter the struggle for their country's rebirth." She also noted that NKVD Smolensk department had executed 4,404 prisoners from the Kozelsk camp, Kalinin department – 6,287 prisoners from the Ostashkov camp, and Kharkov department – 3,891 prisoners from the Starobelsk camp.⁹³

In September 1989, Poland already had formed a non-communist government. Prior to the state visit to Moscow planned for April 1990, President Jaruzelski threatened to cancel the visit unless the Soviet government would admit the truth about Katyn.⁹⁴ So, during Jaruzelski's visit, on 13 April 1990, the fiftieth anniversary of the German radio communiqué on the Katyn graves, Gorbachev handed him the NKVD dispatch lists for the prisoners executed in spring 1940. On the same day, the Soviet news agency TASS stated that all but 394 prisoners from three camps had been handed over to the territorial departments of NKVD and did not appear again in NKVD records. Beria and Merkulov were named as personally responsible for the crime.⁹⁵

As the Soviet Union admitted the responsibility for the Katyn massacre, British newspapers strongly criticised the British government. *The Observer* reminded that the British Foreign Office had known the truth since 1943.⁹⁶ *The Times* also noted "officialdom's long refusal to acknowledge the facts of the Katyn massacre" and stated that as Gorbachev admitted the Soviet guilt, "the Foreign Office responded with words so brazen and so false that his, by comparison, shone like honour." The Foreign Office's statement had been: "We have long called for everyone to be open about this incident. We therefore now welcome the revelations from Moscow."⁹⁷

On 22 March 1990, when the publication in *Moscow News* appeared, prosecutor's office of Kharkov started an investigation concerning the mass graves discovered in the city's wooded park. In June 1990, *Moscow News* informed that the press officer of the Kharkov regional KGB department had reported: "More than 1,760 bodies of Soviet citizens [...] lie buried in Square No. 6 of the park, together with an as yet unknown number of Polish soldiers unlawfully executed in 1940." The *Moscow News* reporter, who travelled to Kharkov, wrote

⁹² Cienciala, Lebedeva and Materski, p. 250.

⁹³ Gennady Zhavoronkov, 'Katyn tragedy', *Moscow News* issue 12, March 1990, pp. 8-9. From HU OSA 300-50-1-863.

⁹⁴ Cienciala, Lebedeva and Materski, p. 251.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 252-3.

⁹⁶ Lawrence Marks, 'The great Katyn cover-up', *The Observer*, 15 April 1990. From HU OSA 300-50-1-863.

⁹⁷ Bernard Levin, 'Britain's complicity in a chronicle of shame', *The Times*, 23 April 1990. From HU OSA 300-50-1-863.

that local boys used to look for Polish coins, military insignia and decorations since long time ago. Already in the 1970s, human bones had been found on the surface after heavy rain.⁹⁸

The censorship in the USSR was already so relaxed that a journalist from *France Soir* got an opportunity to interview 72-year-old Ivan Titkov, who had worked for the NKVD as a driver. Titkov said that when Gorbachev had admitted Soviet responsibility, a KGB representative told he could tell the truth, but the next day, another KGB man with a higher rank reminded that he had been obliged to sign a pledge to remain silent. Titkov also told some details about the killings he had witnessed in 1940.⁹⁹ Three days later, Polish newspaper *Trybuna* mentioned the publication in *France Soir*. *Trybuna's* correspondent noted that according to Titkov's testimony, about 20 former NKVD employees who had participated in the killings or witnessed them were still alive.¹⁰⁰

The Politburo decision of 5 March 1940 to execute the Polish prisoners, signed by Stalin, Molotov and other Soviet leaders, as well as other documents, were published in 1992. Some observers suggest that internal Russian politics was one of reasons for publishing. President Boris Yeltsin banned the Communist Party by his decree and the issue would be examined by the Constitutional Court, so Yeltsin might have decided to present the Politburo decision of 5 March 1940 among other documents as evidence of the criminal nature of the Communist Party.¹⁰¹

Russia's chief archivist Rudolf Pikhov presented the Politburo decision of 5 March 1940 and other previously secret documents to Polish President Lech Wałęsa on 14 October 1992. A group of Polish historians headed by Marian Wojciechowski were also given access to the Russian archives.¹⁰²

In February 1993 editor of the Polish newspaper *Gazeta Wyborcza* Adam Michnik told that regardless of the suggestions about the influence of internal Russian politics on publication of documents, the publication had been essential, as "the Katyn issue ceased to be an open wound. It should have been summed up four years ago, but [Soviet officials] were dragging on, lying. [...] It is said sometimes that Yeltsin played that card in the political dispute, to get even with Gorbachev. But for the Poles, the main point is that Russian leadership acted decisively and sensibly."¹⁰³

The demands for legal remedy

On 2 August 1993 the Russian commission of experts on the Katyn case released a report, which suggested some legal proceedings. On 13 June 1994 Anatoly Yablokov, the military prosecutor in charge of the Katyn case, filed a motion following the suggestions in the report of 2 August 1993. He proposed to declare Stalin and other Politburo members guilty of crimes against peace and humanity, war crimes and the crime of genocide on the basis of Articles 6a and 6b of the Charter of the International Military Tribunal at Nuremberg.

⁹⁸ Gennady Zhavoronkov, 'The secret of the Black Road', *Moscow News* issue 24, June 1990, p. 16. From HU OSA 300-50-1-863.

⁹⁹ Communication of the Agence France Presse, RFE/RL F574, 31 August 1990. From HU OSA 300-50-1-863.

¹⁰⁰ Robert Bielecki, 'Kat mieszka w Moskwie' ['An executioner lives in Moscow'], *Trybuna*, 3 September 1990. From HU OSA 300-50-1-863.

¹⁰¹ Cieniala, Lebedeva and Materski, p. 256.

¹⁰² Nikolai Yermolovich, 'Polskaya spetsialnaya missia nachinaet rabotu v rossiyskikh arkhivakh' ['The special mission from Poland begins working with the Russian archives'], *Izvestia*, 4 November 1992. From HU OSA 300-80-1-685.

¹⁰³ Adam Michnik's interview with *Literaturnaya gazeta*, issue 5, 3 February 1993, p. 14. From HU OSA 300-80-1-685.

He also suggested that the members of the Burdenko commission and others who had committed perfidy by falsified testimony at Nuremberg, as well as those who had concealed the Katyn crime later, were guilty. Finally, Yablokov suggested convicting the NKVD employees who had committed murder. As the Russian law at that time did not recognise the crime of genocide or crimes against humanity, Yablokov suggested that the State Duma (parliament) could adopt the necessary legislation.¹⁰⁴

The Main Military Prosecutor's office rejected Yablokov's motion. As Katyn was becoming an unpopular issue in Russia, President Yeltsin in his letter of 22 May 1995 to President Wałęsa objected the demands for an apology and compensation for victims' families. Yeltsin probably considered he might lose support if compensations were paid.¹⁰⁵

The new criminal code was adopted in 1997. It included the concept of genocide and crimes against peace and humanity. However, the new code, as its predecessors, does not allow prosecution of criminals who have died. It has been noted that the Russian legal tradition contradicts Article 2 of the 1968 international convention on the inapplicability of the statute of limitations to war crimes and crimes against humanity.¹⁰⁶ Cienciala, Lebedeva and Materski note that there is also a psychological obstacle to condemnation of Soviet decision makers: "Russians [...] remember that [...] the Red Army liberated Eastern Europe from German occupation or domination. The fact that this liberation also meant the imposition of communism and Soviet control over most of the region generally goes unmentioned."¹⁰⁷

In September 2004 the head of the Main Military Prosecutor's office, Alexander Savenkov, announced that the investigation was closed, no one would be condemned because all members of the wartime Politburo were dead, and that there was no evidence that genocide had been committed against the Polish nation. In February 2006 the Russian Military Prosecutor General rejected rehabilitation of an officer whose widow had submitted a request on the grounds that there was lack of evidence that the officer had been sentenced to death for political reasons. So, the publication of the Politburo decision of 5 March 1940 and the destruction of the prisoners' files in 1959 were ignored.¹⁰⁸ It may be noted that 116 of 183 volumes of the investigation materials were classified as confidential.

Relatives of Katyn victims continued demanding recognition of the massacre as an act of genocide. On 22 May 2008 Russia's Prosecutor General's office denied handing classified materials of the investigation over to the court.¹⁰⁹ Successors of Katyn victims appealed the decision, but in October 2008 the Moscow court declined their appeal.¹¹⁰ The court's decision was upheld by the Supreme Court of Russia, which ruled that crimes committed in 1940 had to be judged on the basis of the criminal code of that time, which had forbidden criminal proceedings for crimes committed more than ten years ago.¹¹¹ By November 2010, four cases were awaiting hearing at the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg.¹¹² Russian

¹⁰⁴ Cienciala, Lebedeva and Materski, p. 260.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 260-1.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 261.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 262.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 259.

¹⁰⁹ 'FSB ot dala Polshe "Katynskoe delo"' ['FSB handed the Katyn case over to Poland'], 18 December 2008, viewed on 11 January 2011, <<http://www.rosbalt.ru/2008/12/18/604261.html>>.

¹¹⁰ 'V peresmotre "Katynskogo dela" otkazano' ['Re-examination of the Katyn case has been denied'], 24 October 2008, viewed on 11 January 2011, <<http://www.rosbalt.ru/2008/10/24/535754.html>>.

¹¹¹ 'Verkhovnyi sud: 'Prekrashenie katynskogo dela zakonno'' ['The Supreme Court rules that the Katyn case had been closed lawfully'], 29 January 2009, viewed on 11 January 2011, <<http://www.rosbalt.ru/2009/01/29/613817.html>>.

¹¹² 'Gosduma priznala Katyn prestupleniem stalinskogo rezhima' ['The State Duma admitted that the Katyn crime had been perpetrated by Stalin's regime'], 26 November 2010, viewed on 11 January 2011, <http://www.gazeta.ru/news/lastnews/2010/11/26/n_1587117.shtml>.

human rights society Memorial demanded de-classifying of the investigation materials, but in November 2010 the Moscow court refused Memorial's appeal.¹¹³

On 26 November 2010 the State Duma adopted a statement claiming the USSR's responsibility for the massacre. Stalin and other Soviet leaders were named as persons directly responsible for the crime. The need to continue handing copies of archival documents over to Poland was also mentioned.

The communists in the Duma were against the statement proposed by the majority, using some of the old arguments: The graves had been discovered by the Germans, and the announcement made by Goebbels's ('PR genius' by MP Victor Ilyukhin's opinion) department could not be true; the Burdenko commission had found 'overwhelming' proof of German guilt (remarkably, Ilyukhin quoted the name of the head of the Soviet commission incorrectly – instead of Burdenko he mentioned another famous Soviet doctor, Botkin). According to Ilyukhin, Gorbachev and Yeltsin had admitted Soviet guilt 'under American pressure'. The death of a number of Soviet soldiers in Polish prisoner-of-war camps in 1920 was also mentioned by communist MPs.¹¹⁴ Communists also expressed their concern that adoption of the statement would result in huge compensation demands, but a majority representative replied that in two of four cases awaiting hearing at the European Court of Human Rights no financial compensation was demanded, and in one more case the demand was for a symbolic one euro.¹¹⁵

In February 2011 Russian ambassador in Poland Alexander Alexeyev told a news conference in Warsaw that a political decision about rehabilitation of Katyn victims was adopted, and Russia's high-level officials were keeping the process under control, there only was a need to elaborate the legal procedure. One of the lawyers representing the victims' relatives in the European Court of Human Rights, Ireneusz Kamiński, emphasised that all victims must be rehabilitated, not only relatives of the plaintiffs at the European Court of Human Rights. Polish lawyers representing the victims' relatives and their Russian partners also demand to publish all investigation materials that are presently classified.¹¹⁶

The attempts to deny the Soviet responsibility for Katyn

Communist MPs in the Russian parliament are not alone in their efforts to deny the guilt of the Stalinist regime. A number of books have been published, claiming that the accusations against the USSR were fabricated by Goebbels and the published documents on Soviet guilt are false, while the Burdenko commission report was true. Cienciala, Lebedeva and Materski mention two such books by the popular author Yuri Mukhin: *Katynskii Detektiv* [Katyn Detective], published in 1995 and *Antirossiiskaia Podlost: Nauchno-Istoricheskii Analiz* [An Anti-Russian Dirty Trick: A Scientific-Historical Analysis], published in 2003.¹¹⁷

¹¹³ 'Mosgorsud otkazalsia rassekrechivat "Katynskoe delo"' ['Moscow court refused de-classifying of the Katyn case'], 2 November 2010, viewed on 11 January 2011, <<http://www.rosbalt.ru/2010/11/02/786231.html>>.

¹¹⁴ Mikhail Vinogradov, 'Gosduma povinilas za Katyn' ['The State Duma admitted the guilt for Katyn'], 26 November 2010, viewed on 11 January 2011, <<http://www.gzt.ru/topnews/politics/-gosduma-povinilasj-za-katynj-/336562.html>>.

¹¹⁵ 'Gosduma priznala Katyn prestupleniem stalinskogo rezhima' ['The State Duma admitted that the Katyn crime had been perpetuated by Stalin's regime'], 26 November 2010, viewed on 11 January 2011, <http://www.gazeta.ru/news/lastnews/2010/11/26/n_1587117.shtml>.

¹¹⁶ Ewa Łosińska and Tatiana Serwetnyk, 'Przełom w sprawie Katynia?' ['A turn in the Katyn case?'], *Rzeczpospolita*, 11 February 2011, viewed on 13 February 2011, <http://www.rp.pl/artykul/610628_Przełom-w-sprawie-Katynia-.html>.

¹¹⁷ Cienciala, Lebedeva and Materski, endnote 138, p. 509.

The value of Mukhin's books as historical works is dubious: they better fit the definition of propaganda. Mukhin's books are somehow copying Lenin's style: countless invectives against opponents are used as arguments. The first book is mainly anti-Polish. Besides coarse language, Mukhin uses a paraphrase of Molotov's infamous expression about Poland being a 'product of the Treaty of Versailles': "Poland, as well as Czechoslovakia, Austria, Hungary and the Baltic States, was created by the Entente, which gave her pieces of land from defeated Germany, Austro-Hungary and Russia. So, the Poles received their state as a gift." Mukhin blames Poland for the beginning of war: "Polish dim-witted and villainous politicians [...] rejected the alliance with the only reliable ally of that time – the USSR, did not let to establish an anti-Hitlerite coalition and triggered the World War II." Mukhin also calls the historians who found the evidence of Soviet guilt in the archives and lawyers who investigated the case "the Goebbels brigade".¹¹⁸

In the second book, Mukhin concentrates mainly on the historians and investigators, and uses, in addition to "the Goebbels brigade", such invectives as "idiots", "half-wits", "scoundrels", as well as coarse slang words, also calls Gorbachev "a spotted cretin" (a reference to the large birthmark on Gorbachev's forehead) and Yeltsin – "a scoundrel".¹¹⁹

It is possible not to take Mukhin's hateful books seriously, especially considering his other beliefs: that the Americans did not land on the Moon, 11 September 2001 terrorist attack was organised by the CIA, Yeltsin died in 1996 and until 2007 was replaced by someone looking alike, and so on, ad absurdum. However, despite Mukhin's bizarre worldview, his books are very popular. He is also not the only one who denies Soviet responsibility for Katyn and attempts to blame Poland for World War II.

On 4 June 2009 an article written by the head of department of the Institute of Military History of Russian ministry of defence Sergei Kovalev was published on the ministry's website. Kovalev asserted that Poland had been responsible for the beginning of war, as she declined 'justified' German demands, and the USSR needed to sign a non-aggression pact with Germany and to deploy troops in the Baltic States in order to 'improve border security'.¹²⁰ The next day, Kovalev's article was removed from the website, after being quoted by a number of newspapers and electronic media.

Immediately after the recent statement of the Russian ambassador in Poland about possible rehabilitation of Katyn victims, the host of one of prime time talk shows on Russian television Maxim Shevchenko fervently criticised the official stance in a radio interview, arguing that rehabilitation of all victims is impossible unless the exhumed corpses are identified one by one by means of genetic tests. Shevchenko claimed that "the myth about 20,000 [...] Polish officers is the cornerstone of anti-Sovietism and inducing a feeling of historical guilt on Russia". To the interviewer's remark about the government's attitude, he argued:

[They] want to get a hold of the Polish gas distribution network, [...] that shale gas [business], so we are ready to admit something that has not been proven, has not been confirmed [...] Why Polish officers in Siberia were not shot, then? [...] in Siberia – shoot them all! Shoot, stomp on them, stab with bayonets, well, bury alive – nobody would move a finger. It would be possible to say that General Anders died while he was cutting trees.¹²¹

¹¹⁸ Yuri Mukhin, *Katynskii Detektiv* [Katyn Detective], available at <<http://lib.rus.ec/b/184675/read>>.

¹¹⁹ Yuri Mukhin, *Antirossiiskaia Podlost: Nauchno-Istoricheskii Analiz* [An Anti-Russian Dirty Trick: A Scientific-Historical Analysis], available at <<http://lib.rus.ec/b/192865/read>>.

¹²⁰ Communication of radio Ekho Moskvyy, 4 June 2009, accessed on 15 January 2011, <<http://www.echo.msk.ru/news/596671-echo.html>>.

¹²¹ Ekho Moskvyy, 10 February 2011, <<http://www.echo.msk.ru/programs/personalno/748660-echo>>.

It is quite obvious that an attempt to follow the suggestion to carry out genetic tests would postpone conclusion of the case indefinitely, or, more likely, the case could be dropped because of high cost of some thousands of tests. Notably, publication of the classified investigation materials would also be delayed indefinitely.

The struggle against ‘falsification of history’

On 15 May 2009 Russian President Dmitry Medvedev signed the decree No. 549, ordering establishment of the Presidential Commission for countering the attempts of falsification of history damaging Russia’s interests. Chairman of the commission, head of the President’s staff Sergei Naryshkin declared: “Presently, falsified history enters the offices of [...] heads of neighbouring states, who [...] attempt to raise different kinds of demands – territorial, political, financial – to Russia.”¹²²

Deputy editor of *Vremia novostey* Semyon Novoprudsky noted that the commission’s long name, translated into normal language, would mean “commission for falsification of history in Kremlin’s interests”.¹²³ Other observers also noted that the name of the commission and the definition of its mission suggest that falsifications serving the interests of the state might be even encouraged.

Former MP Vladimir Ryzhkov noted that “[t]he creation of this commission allows the state to impose its own idea of political will and ideology” and said that establishing the commission was “part of a continuing rehabilitation of Stalin as it will effectively outlaw criticism of many of the former Soviet dictator’s policies.”¹²⁴ *The Telegraph*’s reporter who quoted Ryzhkov also noted: “The legislation is thought to be primarily aimed at states like Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia, which maintain they were occupied rather than liberated by the Soviet Union. [...] A Russian MP yesterday said that the Baltic states deserved ‘to suffer punishment’ for holding such views.”¹²⁵

Director of the Russia and Eurasia Project at the World Security Institute Nikolai Zlobin observed: “Even if the obvious problems concerning academic freedom are put aside, still, in fact, an instrument aimed to formation of a state ideology has been created by the president, while it is forbidden by Russia’s constitution.” Zlobin also pointed out that only few historians would be included in the commission.¹²⁶

Historian Boris Sokolov suggested that one of results of creating such a commission would be growth of self-censorship. Sokolov supposed that there would be efforts to suppress some opinions: that Stalin had been planning an attack on Germany; that the USSR had occupied and annexed the Baltic States; or presentation of details of crimes committed by the Red Army. Sokolov noted that the commission was mostly composed of state officials, with few historians present.

¹²² Gazeta.ru, 31 May 2009, viewed on 15 January 2011, <http://www.gazeta.ru/news/lenta/2009/05/31/n_1367492.shtml>.

¹²³ Gazeta.ru, 22 May 2009, viewed on 15 January 2011, <<http://www.gazeta.ru/column/novoprudsky/3175336.shtml>>.

¹²⁴ Adrian Blomfield, ‘Russia threatens to bar Europeans who deny Red Army ‘liberated’ them’, *The Telegraph*, 19 May 2009, viewed on 16 January 2011, <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/russia/5350777/Russia-threatens-to-bar-Europeans-who-deny-Red-Army-liberated-them.html>>.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Nikolai Zlobin, ‘Strana, kotoruyu vozglavlyayet Medvedev, sama poyavilas v rezultate peresmotra itogov voiny’ [‘The very country led by Medvedev was established by reconsideration of the outcomes of war’], 19 May 2009, viewed on 15 January 2011, <<http://www.liberty.ru/groups/experts/Ctrana-kotoruyu-vozglavlyayet-Medvedev-sama-poyavilas-v-rezul-tate-peresmotra-itogov-vojny>>.

Sokolov also reminded that an official memorandum of the Soviet ministry of foreign affairs published in 1948 had been titled “The Falsifiers of History”. That memorandum had been published as a response to publication of the secret protocol of the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact in the U.S., denied the existence of such a protocol and asserted that the pact itself had been needed to secure the USSR after the Munich Agreement of September 1938. So, wondered Sokolov, should a return to the practice of denying the existence of the secret protocol be expected, as such practice might be considered useful for the state’s interests?¹²⁷

The 1948 memorandum, which had set the agenda for the next few decades, was also mentioned in an article published in *The New Times* magazine:

The meaning [...] was simple: all of the USSR’s attempts to form a framework for collective security were undermined by Great Britain and France, who attempted to provoke fighting between Germany and the Soviet Union. [The latter,] as a result, was compelled to accept the non-aggression pact proposed by Germany in order to achieve security. [...] The pact [...] let the USSR to win some time for better preparations for the unavoidable war.¹²⁸

The New Times also revealed some concepts from a history textbook for secondary school edited by Alexander Filippov. The textbook that would be published soon would cover the period between 1900 and 1945, and it described the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact in the following manner: “The document was valuable [...] it let the USSR to decide upon Europe’s fate together with other great European powers.”¹²⁹

As an example of the scope of work of the Commission for countering the attempts of falsification of history, a book recently published by Vladimir Medinsky, MP and member of the Commission may be used. The book, titled *Voina. Mify SSSR 1939-1945* [The War. The Myths of the USSR, 1939-1945], was published in early 2011 in 100,000 copies. Not having an opportunity to read it yet, I have to rely on a favourable digest published in *Literaturnaya gazeta*, which contains a number of quotations from the book.

Concerning the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact, Medinsky writes: “We do not deny [the existence of] the secret protocols of 1939. But we do not consider them shameful. [...] For us, the non-aggression pact became a means to postpone the unavoidable war. We [...] welcome that decision [of Stalin]. We do not consider the Winter War against Finland useless [...] We won it, because we got everything that we needed from that war.”¹³⁰

The reviews of Medinsky’s book are quite characteristic. One of them states: “Almost everything that liberal journalists write about nowadays was invented long ago by Dr. Goebbels [...] a reconsideration of the causes, events and outcomes of the war is a serious contemporary threat for us. [...] The famous writer and politician tries not to let a reconsideration of the outcomes of World War II, because that is a potential catastrophe for contemporary Russia.”¹³¹

Another review quoted by a bookshop chain says:

In 2009 there was the 70th anniversary of the beginning of World War II. [...] the European Union [...] became hysterical about the role of the USSR [...] By some pervert

¹²⁷ Boris Sokolov, ‘Istoriikov na zonu’ [‘Send historians to labour camps’], *Russkii zhurnal*, 29 May 2009, viewed on 15 January 2011, <<http://www.russ.ru/pole/Istoriikov-na-zonu>>.

¹²⁸ Irina Karatsuba, ‘Uroki i peremeny’ [‘Lessons and breaks’], *The New Times* issue 29, 24 August 2009, viewed on 16 January 2011, <<http://www.newtimes.ru/articles/detail/4846>>.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Sofia Andreeva, ‘Zhiyye i mertvye. Pobedu nuzhno zashishat’ [‘The dead and the alive. The victory must be protected’], *Literaturnaya gazeta* issue 4, 2 February 2011, <<http://www.lgz.ru/article/15205>>.

¹³¹ An annotation for Medinsky’s book, viewed on 27 February 2011, <<http://www.labirint.ru/books/259630>>.

logic, [they] started to blame Stalin together with Hitler for the beginning of war. [...] 2011 is the year of the 70th anniversary of the beginning of the Great Patriotic War. [...] This book attempts to prevent the upcoming hysteria.¹³²

Presenting the book on his website, Medinsky says: “If you graduated from school before 1985, [...] for you this book will still be useful [...] If [you graduated] later, [that means] you have mostly read Viktor Suvorov and Mark Solonin, and your perception of the Great Patriotic War is based on [...] such films as *Saving Private Ryan* and *Inglourious Basterds*, so you really need this book.”¹³³

The reference to *Inglourious Basterds* is a bit funny. However, Medinsky’s comment, as well as the book reviews available, reveals the set of values on which his work is based. The logic implied is that the perception of history based on the Soviet ideology was good. 1985 is mentioned, obviously, because that was the time when Gorbachev became the Secretary General (the textbooks were not changed at least till 1990). Medinsky also reveals the annoyance caused by authors who challenge the ‘approved’ version of history or ‘reconsider the outcomes of war’.

Another member of the Commission for countering the attempts of falsification of history, historian and former MP Natalia Narochnitskaya, insists that before the war the Baltic States were ruled by ‘fascists’ (and nowadays are ruled by their heirs), and their subjugation by the USSR was the only feasible solution. Narochnitskaya’s views are expressed in detail in *Za chto i s kem my voevali* [For What and against Whom We Fought], published in 2005 and *Velikie voiny XX stoletia* [The Great Wars of the 20th Century], published in 2007, as well as in journal articles and conference reports.

Presentation of the historical events in Russian textbooks

After lifting the censorship in early 1990s, school teachers got the right to choose a textbook instead of using the uniform books as it used to be in the Soviet period. Among textbook authors, as well as among historians in general, two main kinds of approach to explanation of historical events might be observed, usually defined in Russia as ‘patriotic’ and ‘liberal’.

One of the differences between two approaches is the evaluation of the events related to World War II. For instance, both approaches consider that the Baltic States did not join the USSR voluntarily. However, ‘patriotic’ authors show a tendency to justify Stalin’s actions by geopolitical interests and defence needs.

‘Liberal’ authors note that the USSR acted unlawfully, although in most cases they avoid usage of the term ‘annexation’, probably because it would suggest that Stalin’s and Hitler’s interests and methods were similar. Only two authors, Igor Kurukin and Igor Dolutsky used the embarrassing term. Dolutsky’s textbook for 10th and 11th grades was printed in seven editions between 1993 and 2003, before the ministry of education disapproved it. Dolutsky noted in an interview that the expression “the Baltic States were occupied by the Soviet Union for half of a century” and other criticisms of Soviet policies became the reason for de facto prohibition of using the book at schools.¹³⁴

I plan to do further research focusing specifically on textbooks, to analyse how the contents of textbooks have been changing depending on the political situation.

¹³² Viewed on 27 February 2011, <<http://www.dom-knigi.ru/book.asp?Art=342181&CatalogID=0>>.

¹³³ Vladimir Medinsky’s website, viewed on 9 February 2011, <<http://www.medinskiy.ru/cat/books/book5>>.

¹³⁴ *Novoye vremia*, 21 December 2003, viewed on 15 January 2011, <http://www.yabloko.ru/Publ/2003/2003_12/031217_novvr_history.html>.



Figure 1. The inscription on the loudspeaker reads “Voice of America”



Figure 2. “Here’s to our mutual understanding and cooperation, colleagues!”

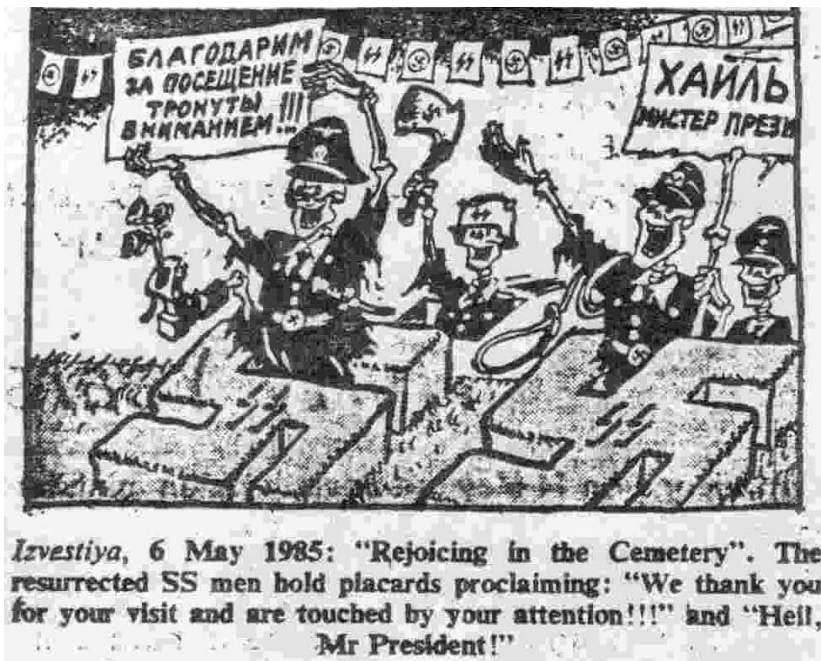


Figure 3.

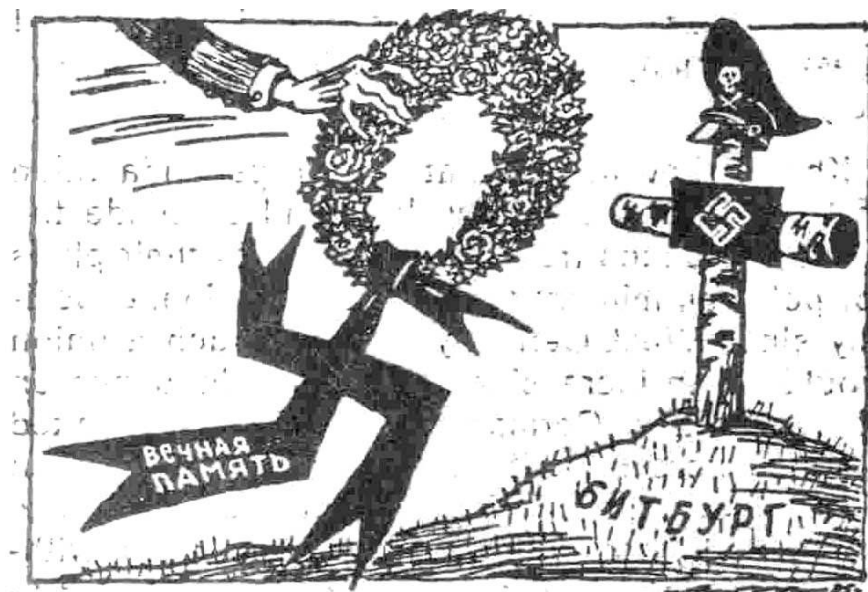


Figure 4.