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The Flu Pandemic of 1918 in Košice

The so-called Spanish Flu that ravaged the world more than a hundred years ago was one of the most devastating diseases in the history of humanity. It killed more people than World War I. What was the experience of the epidemic in Kassa (Košice) like and how did officeholders respond?

During the autumn of 1918, the political-administrative leaders of Kassa were busy with trying to tackle conflicts that arose from soldiers returning from the frontline and from the shortage of supplies. In the meantime, the spread of the flu epidemic was also becoming worrisome. „everyone gets it and everyone suffers from it except for those that die within the first 24 hours" – wrote one of the correspondents of the daily called Kassai Hírlap. When the medical officer, Géza Nagy (1869–1922) reported nearly 2000 illnesses on 30 September, the mayor, Béla Blanár, declared that there was an epidemic and formed a committee for tackling it on the same day.

Measures

The measures that the town leaders introduced sound familiar today. The mayor ordered all schools to close already in September. (Elementary schools and high schools only opened in the new state in early 1919) In the second half of October, film theatres, theatres, sports events, and dance parties were banned. The dance schools had to stop, too. Regulations regarding restaurants and cafes were less rigid than they are in the current epidemic. These could stay open, but between 11 a.m.

and 1 p.m. and between 4 p.m. to 6 p.m. they had to carry out disinfection, and during these hours customers were not allowed in. Factories had to disinfect and airing between noon and 2 p.m. The windows of streetcars had to be kept open. Residents were advised to stay away from strolling and mass visits to cemeteries, churches and other sites of prayer. Those houses where a sick person stayed had to be designated with red tags.

Based on decrees of the Ministry of the Interior, the town hall also ordered that pharmacies should stay open until 10 pm and supply medicine to those that needed it even beyond that hour. The Ministry of Defence ordered army surgeons to provide care to civilians. On 19 October there were only 13 cases of death caused by the epidemic, however, ten days later this number went up to 40. Political meetings and celebrations held in the wake of the Aster Revolution, as well as the gathering groups of customers in front of bakeries and butchers, certainly facilitated the spread of the flu.

Numbers

Although there have not been systematic research into the number of victims, based on the official papers of the medical officer of the town and the dailies that regularly published reports about the sessions of the committee trying to deal with the epidemic, one may quote a few figures. We learn from the reports of Géza Nagy medical officer that in September and October 1918 there were 47 deaths caused by the virus and between 20 November and 28 November, there were a further 15, therefore, a total of 62. He put the number of illnesses at 2000 on 30 September, 1584 in October and 604 between 20 and 28 November. From other statements of his, we also know that on average there were 40-50 new cases daily in November. If we accept these, then we reach a total of 4200 cases in autumn 1918 that is about 7% of the residents when we add up the 40-44 000 citizens and the army stationed.

Remarkably, the virus was most deadly for those aged between 14 and 35 and it

killed quickly. This feature frightened the people. According to date from late November, 70% of the citizens were under 40 years old. Since the epidemic quickly spread among the soldiers, the town and the army command signed an agreement according to which those that fall ill from the virus were to be treated and isolated in the army hospital on Raktár Street (today: Skladná, Kasarne Kulturpark). Contemporary experts said that the epidemic was lighter in Kassa than in other parts of Hungary. According to these opinions, the first wave of the disease, which started in early 1918, killed relatively few people compared to the second wave of October and November. The third wave killed more than the first, but far less than the second one, in Spring 1919. If the general trends applied to Kassa, we should put the number of dead at as high as 120-150 and the number of illnesses at 5-6000.

Contemporary fake-news

It was a widespread belief that brothels were responsible for spreading the disease among soldiers. Those involved in the sale of liquor advocated that alcohol was the best protection against the virus.

Celebrity victims

We can count the King of Hungary, Margit Kaffka, the Hungarian writer (and her little son), Guillaume Apollinaire the French poet, and Max Weber (1864–1920) among the victims. Looking at the local scale, we need to mention Pál Halmi, a member of the renowned family of lawyers from Kassa, who died at the age of 38 and was a war veteran in Budapest.

According to historian Harald Salfellner the number of the victims of the Spanish flu epidemic was between 46 000 and 77 000 in the territory of Czechia. We may

accept the estimate that the number of those that died from the virus in the territory of present-day Slovakia was half of that number, yet we must stress that there have been no systematic research projects on the question.

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Katyn and its prelude

Stalin's Polish policy

On 3 December 1941, Władysław Sikorski, the Prime Minister of the Polish government-in-exile, Władysław Anders Polish general and Stanisław Kot, the Polish ambassador in Moscow visited Stalin. The theme for the discussion was the ways to set up a Polish army that would be made up of the Polish prisoners of war kept in the territory of the Soviet Union. Sikorski presented a list of 4000 names to Stalin and asked about the whereabouts of the persons on the list. The conversation that followed was something like:

> Sikorski: These people must be here [in the Soviet Union] because none of them has returned.
>
> Stalin: That's impossible. They must have escaped.
>
> Anders: Where could they have gone?
>
> Stalin: Well, perhaps to Manchuria.

When the Polish visitors pointed out that it was an impossible explanation Stalin came up with the following theory:

> "In that case, we must have let them free, but they have not reached home yet."

Anders returned to talk about the Polish prisoners of war again on 18 March 1942 and stated that "the officers that were kept at Kozelsk, Starobelsk and Ostashkov" have not returned. Stalin responded calmly:

> "I have given my orders to let them free. They say that they are in Franz Josef Land, but there is nobody there. I do not know where they are. Why would we hold them back? Perhaps they are in lagers in the German-occupied territory. They ran away."

Stalin's cynicism had no limits. He knew that the prisoners they were talking about were executed following Lavrentiy Beria's initiative and Stalin's approval in the spring of 1940 and they were in mass graves.

On 13 April 1943, it came to light. German troops invading the Soviet Union excavated the first mass graves. On that day Radio Berlin reported that soldiers „found a 28-m-long and 16-m-wide hole with 3000 Polish officers in it, arranged in 12 layers. They were dressed in army uniforms and some of them were tied up. Everyone had a gunshot wound in the back of their skulls." The mass grave is in the Katyn Forest. It is likely that the prisoners kept at Kozelsk and transported to Smolensk were killed there. Two days later the world would learn the view of Stalin on the events: "The German fascist executioners did not hesitate to spread the meanest and most uninhibited lies and cover up the crime that – as it is obvious by now – they have committed." Indeed, the Wehrmacht committed countless crimes in Soviet territory, but the massacre at Katyn is not among these. Yet, the lie that Stalin pronounced was a dogma in the Soviet Union and the Socialist countries until 1990. Even the Western European public was misinformed.

The first deportations

According to the treaty of Riga signed on 18 March 1921, the border between Poland and the Soviet Union east of the Curzon-line, but this still meant that about 1 million ethnic Poles remained in the Soviet Union (the Soviet census of 1937 put this figure at 636 220). In the first half of the 1920s, the Kreml made a couple of apparently significant concessions to the nationalities of the empire. A number of autonomous areas were created. This is how the Polish District came into being

in 1925. It was named after Julian Marchlewski, the Polish communist revolutionary who died in that same year. Its centre, Dovbysh, also adopted Marchlewski's name.) Another Polish National District was created in the territory of the Belarussian Soviet Socialist Republic in 1932. It was named after Felix Edmundovich Dzerzhinsky (A Bolshevik revolutionary of Polish origin who had a pivotal role in setting up the Soviet political police, the Cheka. Its centre, Koydanava, was renamed Dzyarzhynsk and has kept this name ever since. However, the purpose of the Soviet leadership was to educate local propaganda personnel, spread the idea of communism among Poles and carry out collectivization. Yet, this plan failed to materialize because the Polish population resisted attempts of indoctrination and collectivization and also protested against the confiscation of their lands.

The Soviet leadership responded quickly. In the spring of 1935, they began the deportation of the Polish inhabitants of District Marchlewski to the mining zone of Ukraine and then to Kazakhstan. After the systemic change, it came to light that several Russian archives, such as that of the former KGB, the State Archives of the Russian Federation, Russian State Archives of Contemporary History and Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History, contain documents related to the deportation of Poles and other nationalities. These also showed that collectivization had an ethnic component. The People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs (NKVD) and the Main Administration of Camps (GULAG) accurately registered the nationality of so-called kulaks that were said to be anti-Soviet and anti-revolutionary. It was primarily Germans and Polish that were forced to leave their homes near the Western area of the Soviet Union.

According to the documents of the NKVD, between 1 and 9 February 1935 nearly two thousand families were deported from the Marchlewski District, out of which 681 families were labelled Polish „Kulak and anti-Soviet". In the next stage, between 20 February and 15 March, 8329 Polish families (cc. 38892 persons) Soviets deported from their homes. As far as researchers could calculate, 21041 „Kulak" families were deported during the first four months of 1935. This means that Polish families constituted nearly 50% of the deported families in those four months. A note sent to Stalin and dated 31 July 1935 said the following: „In the Kiev territory

the Marchlewski District, which is said to be ethnically Polish, is the most anti-Soviet zone and it is full of anti-revolutionary elements" including former members of the Polish army and nationalists that had been de-kulakized (meaning farmers that have been stripped of their land)". However, leadership was not completely satisfied with deportations. On 27 October, Genrikh Yagoda – who was the leader of the NKVD by then – reported to Molotov that „we managed to clean the borderland of anti-revolutionary nationalist and anti-Soviet elements", but on 5 March 1936 the same Yagoda ordered the deportation of 15 000 families to Kazakhstan, The operation took place in two stages. Until June 5535 and between June and September another 9465 families, a total of 69283 persons were deported to Kazakh lands.

The Marchlewski District was abolished in August 1935. Its centre was first re-baptized Schorsk and later regained its old name of Dovbysh. As we shall see below, Polish inhabitants of the Dzerzhinsky District did not fare better.

The "Polish Operation" of the NKVD (1937–1938)

Deportation of Polish peasants resisting collectivization was only the first one of a series of violent measures against the Polish inhabitants of the Soviet Union. "Polish Operation" of the NKVD is a subchapter of the Great Terror (1935–1940). A report prepared for Khruschev summarized the terror during Stalin's era on 9 February 1956. According to this document, between 1935 and 1940 1 980 635 persons were convicted for anti-Soviet activities, and 688 503 of these were killed. For the period of 1937-38 there were 1 548 366 convictions and 681 692 executions. During the "Polish Operation" that lasted from 20 August 1937 until 1 august 1938 (until 1 September in Belarus) 139 835 ethnically Polish people were convicted and 111 091 of them were shot dead. Thus, while 44% of all convicted persons were killed during the terror, in the case of Polish people this ratio was 77.25%. Also, 16% of all people executed in 1937-38 were Polish.

The anti-Polish operation began with order no. 00485 that Nikolai Yezhov issued

on 11 August 1937. This document did not mention Polish as a target group, but the 30-pages-long confidential letter attached to it revealed the real objectives. The letter established six categories for those that were seen as spies or anti-Soviet Poles that NKVD personnel had to capture and execute. (This „secret letter" is located at: RGANI, F. 6. Op. 13. T. 6. L. 8–51. N.V. Petrov – A.B. Roginski discuss it in detail).

The letter classified the entire Polish population as anti-Soviet.

1. It stated that former members of the Polish Military Organization (POW), which operated during World War I in the area under Russian occupation, were the most dangerous for the Soviet Union as they have infiltrated everywhere. Allegedly, they might be found in the Polish Communist Party, in the Polish section of the Comintern and even in the NKVD and Red Army. As a result of this view, nearly the entire membership of the Polish Communist Party was killed, and the party dissolved. However, in reality, the former POW had no influence by that time and the network of intelligence that NKVD painted was mere fantasy.

2. Prisoners of war captured during the Polish-Bolshevik war constituted the second category. Their number was approximately 1500-3000. Later on, the terror reached those that spent too much time as prisoners of war in Poland.

3. The third sub-group within the targeted population were those that escaped to the Soviet Union that were emigrants that opted for Soviet communism. According to Yezhov, these could number several hundred thousand.

4. The fourth category was that of political emigres and the so-called exchanged people. These were those that the two countries exchanged between 1923 and 1932 – it mostly meant the exchange of political prisoners kept in Poland for Catholic priests and prisoners of war held in the Soviet Union. Their count was 425.

5. The fifth group partially overlapped with the fourth one. Those former Po-

lish socialist and members of other parties were grouped here that ended up in the Soviet Union in some way or their home fell on that side after the borders were drawn in 1921

6. Finally, there were whose inhabitants of Polish districts (practically only the Dzerzhinsky District by that time) that were labelled anti-Soviet and nationalist. It could be applied to anyone.

In the autumn of 1937, Yezhov further expanded the scope of the operation to family members of the people that had been arrested by then. Women were mostly sentenced to 5-7 years of imprisonment or sent to one of the camps for a similar time period and children below 15 years of age were taken to orphanages.

Order no. 00485 was a model for the „struggle" against other nationalities. Yet, based on the number of those that were killed Polish ranked first as enemies. As we have shown in another post, Stalin planned the annihilation of Poland ever since the treaty of Riga. He found German partners for this plan both during the Weimar era and after 1933. This culminated in the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact signed 23 August 1939, however, it did not end violent actions against Polish people.

Attack against Poland and new deportations

After Germany had launched its campaign against Poland on 1 September 1939, it asked the Soviet Union to take control of the zone that belonged to them according to the secret clause of the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact. On 5 September Molotov told via the Germans via their ambassador that the Soviet Union needed some time. He posited that excessive eagerness would harm the cause of the Soviets. Also, he asked the Germans not to cross the designated boundary in case they reach it before the Red Army. On 10 September, Molotov told Ambassador Schulenburg that the Soviet Union would cross the border under the pretext of defending Belarusians and Ukrainians living in Poland. Finally, on 16 September, he said that the following day would be the time to start the invasion. On 17 September 1939, the soviet go-

vernment presented the Polish ambassador to Moscow with a memorandum that stated that the "the Polish state and its government actually ceased to exist." […] The Soviet government cannot be indifferent to the situation that Ukrainian and Belorussian that are ethnically related to people of the Soviet Union and that live in Poland have become helpless and subject to an uncertain fate."

The next day TASS released a communication with similar content. The argument was cynical as usual: Stalin gave the defence of Ukrainians and Belorussia's as reasons while he ordered the deportation and murder of several tens of thousands of Ukrainians and Belarusians in the previous years. On 31 October, Molotov summarized the success of Soviet policy in the following terms: „A rapid punch from the German army and then another from the Red Army was enough to raze Poland that was founded on the persecution of national minorities and was a monster of the treaty of Versailles. The entire world is aware that there is no way to resurrect the old Poland." The occupied territories were annexed to the Soviet Republic of Belarus and Ukraine (Wilno/Vilnius was attached to Lithuania then it was Sovietized) and the inhabitants were declared Soviet citizens. Thus, Stalin did not create a security zone or puffer area. He simply enlarged the area of the Soviet Union.

The Polish army did not launch a counterattack. The commander-in-chief called on the army to avoid engagement whenever possible. This is what probably happened since G. Kulik deputy commissioner for defence reported the following to the Soviet political leaders on 21 September: „The Polish army, apart from some clashes with border guards, settlers and retreating units, did not fire at us. We have captured large numbers of privates and officers. […] We cannot feed them."

The Soviet Union did not ratify the Geneva Convention of 1929 about the treatment of prisoners of war. Thus, it did not see humane treatment obligatory. It was the so-called Directorate of Prisoners of Wars that dealt with them and it was under the NKVD. Lavrentiy Beria approved of the rules regulating the working of the directorate but it did not say anything about provisions. On 3 October order no. 001177 regulated the release and classification of prisoners. This talked about the release of Ukrainian, Belarus and Czech prisoners and had much to say about the Polish ones, too. This order designated camps to the classes and separated officers from privates.

Although the Soviet institutions were struggling with providing food to Polish prisoners, they embarked on large-scale deportations from the newly occupied territory. They continued the policy that had been in place since 1935 against Poles living in the Soviet Union. The area of the territories occupied on 17 September was about 200 000 km^2 and the number of inhabitants was 11.5 million. The two largest ethnic groups were Ukrainians (4.4 million) and Poles (4.14 million). Mass deportations took place in four stages. Molotov, the chair of the Committee of Commissioners gave the orders and Beria worked out the details for each stage.

1. According to the decision taken on 29 December 1939, the first one was to take place in February 1940. This impacted 140 000 people 70 % of which were Poles.

2. The second wave began in April. This time it involved the deportation of 61 000 people. 80% of the transports comprised of women as this order was about family members, refugees and prostitutes.

3. After this, in May-July 1940, during the third wave of deportations approximately 80 000 people were deported to the interior of the Soviet Union. They were mostly Jews.

4. The last wave of mass deportations took place in May–June 1941, thus, immediately before the German invasion. Some historians believe that Stalin believed it was necessary to deport these 85 000 people in order to vacate the frontier zone in anticipation of the attack.

According to Western and Polish historians, the archival documents produced by the NKVD are incomplete, thus the figure of 320 000 must be a very conservative estimate. Roger Moorhouse and Norman Davies believe that the number of deported people well exceeded 1-1.5 million. Historians of the Polish Institute of National Remembrance estimate that the Soviets deported between 700 000 and 1 million Polish citizens in four stages.

Katyn, Kharkov, Kalinin, Kiev, Minsk

In the Kreml, the issue of prisoners of war also awaited resolution. The Soviet leadership had to motives for annihilating the Polish prisoners of war. On the one hand, the Soviets had difficulties providing food to them. On the other hand, they did not consider Poland to be an actor in future, thus, the Soviets thought of them as quasi stateless soldiers from a non-existing state. Soviet leaders did not believe they could integrate the prisoners to the ordinary life of the Soviet Union. Beria's proposal dated 5 March 1940 attests this latter point:

"At present, a large number of former officers of the Polish army, Polish police and intelligence, unveiled members of Polish nationalist parties, refugees and others are kept in camps of the NKVD in Ukraine and in the western part of Belarus. All of them are enemies of the Soviet power and filled with hatred for the Soviet system. Officers and police officers attempt to engage in anti-revolutionary activities and anti-Soviet agitation even at the camps. They await their release only to take part in the fight against Soviet power."

Beria asked for permission to execute them and he received it. The first point of the decision of the Politburo said that:

„Order for the NKVD of the Soviet Union: Investigate the cases of 1. The 14700 former army officers, bureaucrat, landowner, police officer, intelligence agent, gendarme, settler, prison guard, prosecutor; 2. and 11 000 persons arrested and held in the prisons of Western Ukraine and Belarus a members of various counter-revolutionary and intelligence organizations, former landowners, factory owners, bureaucrats and deserters in an extraordinary manner and apply the most severe punishment that is execution by shooting."

Stalin, Voroshilov, Mikoyan, Kalinin and Kaganovich signed the proposal, thus they approved of it. The mass murder was committed between 3 April and 16 May 1940 at several sites. 4 410 prisoners were brought to the Katyn Forest near Smolensk from three camps (Kozelsk, Starobelsk and Ostashkov), 3739 prisoners were taken to the Piatykhatky homestead near Kharkov, and 6 314 were taken to Mednoye near

Kalinin (Tver). They were shot in the back of their head. Apart from the Polish victims, NKVD personnel killed 4181 Ukrainian in Kiev and 4465 Belarussian prisoners were murdered in Minsk.

On 22 June 1941, when the Germans attacked the Soviet Union, the British insisted that Stalin should establish diplomatic relations with the Polish émigré government, and he eventually agreed. This was officially realized with the Sikorski–Mayski agreement signed on 30 July 1941. After this date, the Polish government and military leadership made efforts to recruit an army made up of Polish prisoners living in the Soviet Union. That was when they started looking or the missing, murdered, prisoners of war. Eventually, it was the Anders army that was formed of those that were still alive. They were evacuated to Palestine via Iran in 1942. Subsequently, Polish soldiers took place in operations of the anti-Hitler coalition. Among other deeds, they were the ones that liberated Monte Cassino in Italy.

In 1943, when the Germans discovered the mass graves, the Sikorski government turned to the Red Cross asking for a proper investigation of the graves. In response, Stalin broke diplomatic relations with the Polish government.

Aftermarth

At Stalin's order, the deportations and the murder had to be kept secret. Nikita Khruschev's so-called „secret speech" that he gave on 25 February 1956, on the last day of the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, was an exception. However, Khruschev did not give details about the ethnic background of victims and he did not say anything about Katyn. It was only on 13 April 1990 that the Soviet news agency, TASS, published an official press release saying that „On the basis of archival documents, we shall conclude that Beria, Myerlukov and their associates are directly responsible for the crimes committed in the Katyn Forest." This communication did not say much, but this confession was gratifying for Polish society as Poles have always believed that it was the Soviets that committed the

murder. On the same day, at the meeting of Wojciech Jaruzelski and Mihail Gorbachev, the latter handed over hundreds of pages of documents to his Polish peer. The following day, Jaruzelski paid respect to the memory of victims at Katyn Forest. In October 1992, Boris Yeltsin handed over more documents to Lech Wałęsa, the President of Poland. This package included the infamous decision of 5 March 1940. These were published in four Polish and one Russian language volume. This meant a new beginning for memory politics.

The Poles asked the Russians to excavate all mass graves and to erect a monument above these. Graves at Katyn and Kharkov opened in 2000 to visitors. In 2002, after Vladimir Putin had visited Poland, a „Committee of Polish-Russian Difficult Cases" that consisted of historians, archivists and diplomats and had its first session in 2005. However, the process abruptly ended when Lech Kaczyńskit was elected president. The Kaczyński brothers were not open to Polish-Russian reconciliation and there were other political and economic issues that prevented rapprochement. The Polish government started insisting that Russia should recognize the murders at Katyn Forest as crimes against humanity. However, Russia is not willing to do so. In 2005, the Chief Prosecutor's Office of the Russian Federation closed the case without inculpation. The prosecutors did not disclose the material collected during the investigation and did not allow Poland to consult the material. Yet, Polish and Russian historians continued their work. There is plenty of literature on the Polish side while in Russia V.S. Iazhborovskaia, I.S Iablokov and A. Iu. Parsadanova produced a collective monograph that is an excellent synthesis that uses all accessible archival material from both Russia and Poland.

The Committee of Polish-Russian Difficult Cases restarted its operation in 2007 when the Civic Platform won the election in Poland. This gained momentum following a meeting between the two ministers of Foreign Affairs, Radosław Sikorski and Sergey Lavrov. In 2010, the committee summarized its findings in a large, 900-page-long volume entitled „White spots, black spots. difficult cases in Russian-Polish relations". It discussed 16 problematic events in a way that a Polish and a Russian historian wrote a study about each issue, thus, the book consists of 32 studies.

In Poland, 13 April is the memorial day of the victims of the massacre at Katyn Forest. This time we also remember all the Polish victims of Stalin's terror.

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Background to the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact

Legends and Facts

The Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact was signed on 23 August 1939. Today, eighty years on, it still stirs up controversy in public life and among academics. One side still voices the Stalinist argument, according to which the Soviet Union had no alternative: prioritizing its own security interests, it had to sign the agreement. According to the advocates of this view, the Soviet Union was forced into the situation as it was on the defensive and wanted nothing but peace. However, the archival sources that have become accessible in Germany, Poland and Russia contradict the view that paints Stalin as a passive victim. In these documents, expansionist imperial policies surface, moreover, one may find abundant cases for military, economic and political cooperation between the two totalitarian dictatorship. This study presents the Stalinist arguments, their sources, then, turns to the documentary evidence contradicting these.

The old debate about the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact, which was signed in Moscow on 23 August 1939, has resurfaced. The alliance between Nazi Germany and Communist Soviet Union has been a matter for controversy since the time of signing. Even contemporaries had difficulties comprehending how two countries with such diametrically opposing ideologies could come to an agreement. Surely, these contemporaries did not know about the secret clause attached to the pact of non-aggression, which divided Central Europe between the two powers. It was in the context of this agreement that the Wehrmacht attacked Poland on 1 September 1939, and the World War II began. Then, on 17 September, the Red Army attacked Poland, too. On 28 September the two totalitarian dictatorships negotiated and fixed the

exact boundaries of occupied territories.

The world was already aware of Hitler's ambitions. The Anschluss had taken place by then and Czechoslovakia was no more. Therefore, it was not the interest driven attitude that surprised European public opinion but Stalin's response and approval. The anti-Fascist Left and supporters of the Soviet Union were and are still unwilling to face Stalin's real nature and his readiness to make a pact with Hitler and eradicate independent states. Hence their repeated efforts to blame powers of Western Europe or even, lately, Poland.

This takes place on each anniversary. For example, on 23 August 2009 the Russian state television screened a "documentary" that made an effort to convince spectators that Western Europe and Poland were responsible for the pact. In my essay Egy paktum furcsa évfordulója [Strange anniversary of a pact], I wrote about the phenomenon in the renown Hungarian weekly, Élet és Irodalom. The essay received a number of comments from experts such as Krisztián Ungváry, Gábor Székely, Zoltán Sz. Bíró és Tamás Krausz. However, the debate was eventually not about the pact itself, rather about whether Stalin planned the Sovietization of Central Europe in 1939. Thus, the debate was unfortunately twisted and it was not about the essential question.

At the end of 2019, President Vladimir Putin revived the argument of that documentary and triggered a number of responses, internationally. In a public statement, the Polish Prime Minister, Mateusz Morawiecki, renounced the Russian attempt at falsifying history. The German ambassador to Poland and of the United States of America supported the Polish point of view. A response from the Foreign Ministry of Russia soon followed.

Boundaries of German and Soviet spheres of interests as specified in the pact (Map designed by Béla Nagy)

Let us see the arguments politicians and historians (see: Dyukov, 2009 – in Russian; Krausz, 2016 – in Hungarian) wishing to defend Stalin's decision usually put on the table. Then, let's try to reconstruct the chain of actual events based on available documents.

I.

Their prime argument is that the pact was only one of many similar agreements and it was the consequence of the Munich Agreement. "The Soviet–German non-aggression pact was a response to the Munich Agreement." Those that do not see it this way "excuse Western European democracies, thus, the pact that they made with Hitler".

The Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact was indeed the last in a series of agreements. There is no debate about this. Germany and the Soviet Union signed their first agreement at Rapallo. Section no. 5 of the Treaty of Rapallo clearly referred to the military aspects: "The Government of Germany is ready to support cooperation that private companies wish to start in the Soviet Union." Secrecy and cover were required because the Treaties of Versailles did not permit Germany to develop its army. Subsequently, the two states – that were the German companies and the Soviet Union – signed a number of contracts. For Berlin, it was of importance that it could establish military facilities, shooting ranges, and military schools in the Soviet Union. They had an airbase and a fighter training centre in Lipetsk, a tank crew training centre at Kazan, while north of Moscow and in the Saratov area there were designated areas for practicing for combat gas attacks. For the Soviets, access to modern military technology was highly valuable, thus, they could launch a reform of the armed forces.

Antipathy towards Poland constituted a common denominator between German and Soviet politics. Berlin was not willing to accept that it lost Poznan as a result of the Polish uprising of December 1918, while Moscow never forgot that Józef Piłsudski's army defeated the Red Army in 1920. For the Soviets, it was not only about development of military equipment and training. Cooperation with the Germans was important for improving their preparedness in military theory, too. The commander of the army defeated in the Battle of Warsaw of 1920, Mikhail Tuhachevsky, gave lectures in Germany. Hans von Seeckt – the commander of the Reichswehr, who

proposed a German–Soviet military action against Poland in 1921 and argued for eradicating the Polish state in 1922 – lectured in the Soviet Union (Gorlov, 2001).

The cooperation that began at Rapallo continued with a trade agreement in 1925 and a neutrality pact in 1926. The latter was to last for a period of five years, and it was renewed in 1931 and 1933 (that is after Hitler's rise to power) and the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact referred to this latter agreement. It is true that when the terror reached those officers and commanders of the Red Army that took part in the cooperation with Germany to develop the Soviet army, German–Soviet relations became hostile. Stalin claimed that the reason for executing Tuhachevsky and his team was that they were spies of the Reichswehr, however, it was an argument used as a cover for getting rid of potential opposition in the army.

Let us now turn to the Soviet position towards the Munich Agreement! There is consensus among historians that the agreement of 30 September 1938 in which Daladier, Chamberlain and Mussolini agreed to annexing the Sudetenland, which had a German majority population, to Germany and, thus, cutting into Czechoslovakia was a morally unjustifiable act and did not bring about peace. Using Russian and Hungarian archival documents, Attila Kolontári proved that the Soviet Union was not worried about the territorial integrity of Czechoslovakia and was more anxious over the German expansion. Maxim Litvinov Soviet Foreign Minister for Foreign Affairs told Mihály Jungerth-Arnóthy, the Hungarian ambassador in Moscow that the Soviet Union would agree to a general revision that includes some amendments of international boundaries. The Hungarian ambassador put this to Prime Minister Kálmán Darányi in format according to which the Soviet Union will not come to the aid of Czechoslovakia. (Kolontári, 2009. 224–227.). The Soviets were both excluded and happy to stay away from the issue of the Czechoslovakia. As proof of their intentions, one might cite the article that appeared in the Pravda on 14 February 1938 in which Stalin argued that the Soviet Union expects that the conflict among capitalist countries will be so deep that it will become a war and that will the moment of the proletarian revolution.

Those that support the Soviet and Russian argument about the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact mention that Poland acted immoral and lost its right to judge similar acts

when it occupied the area of Teschen/Cieszyn, thus taking part in the partition of Czechoslovakia in the spring of 1939. However, the Polish move meant the recapture of the territory that Czechoslovakia occupied in 1920, at the time when the Bolshevik Army besieged Warsaw.

II.

Another argument that Russian revisionism puts forwards is that the Government of Poland was allegedly pro-German. This is something that the Soviet intelligence kept reporting to Stalin. The Polish stand was in the making for years and eventualy-ly – with astonishing short-sightedness – they decided to link the interests of Poland to Germany against the Soviet Union and Lituania.

In reality, German–Polish relations were tense after 1918. Germans did not resign themselves to losing their Eastern territories. Hans von Seeckt, the Chief-of-staff of the army argued several times that Poland must be eradicated. Radical anti-Polish propaganda was a feature of the Weimar Republic.

Polish leadership was worried about German revisionism to the extent that they signed a mutual non-aggression pact with the Soviet Union on 25 July 1932. Negotiations for these began in 1926 and then gained momentum with the ratification of the Litvinov Protocol in 1929. The Soviet Union, Poland, Estonia, Latvia and Romania declared that they would mutually forgo aggression and territorial claims. The treaty also stated that these states would resolve conflict in a peaceful way. Moscow also signed bilateral treaties with the countries of the treaty. When Herbert von Dirksen the German ambassador to Moscow, asked Kliment Voroshilov about the implications of the Polish–Soviet treaty on the German–Soviet relations, the Marshall replied that there were no implications. When Wilhelm Adam German general asked Voroshilov about the international boundary with Poland he clearly stated that „the Soviet Union does not accept the current boundaries with Poland." (Sovietsko–polskiye otnosheniye… 2004. 64.).

With Hitler's rise to power the German pressure on Warsaw eased as the Nazis needed time before starting a major war. The Polish diplomacy, led by Józef Beck, made use of this and managed to obtain German consent for issuing a declaration of mutual non-aggression on 26 January 1934. Thus, Poland did not form alliance with Hitler, it was only a declaration (deklaracja, Erklärung) of non-aggression.

The Soviets kept on eye on the Polish–German negotiations. Karol Radek (who was Stalin's advisor on international relations at that time) met Józef Piłsudski and Józef Beck in the Summer of 1933. The Polish leaders asked the Soviet Union to do their good offices on behalf of Poland regarding the Corridor of Gdańsk corridor and offered that the Polish troops would engage the German army if it was to advance towards Leningrad. Stalin, however, did not raise the issue of the corridor with Hitler. Despite this, Radke believed that Polish decision makers were afraid of German Nazism and there was no reason to fear a Polish attack against the Soviet Union. In his report dated 3 December, he noted that there is not even anti-Soviet propaganda in the country. He clearly stated that the Polish–German declaration that was in the making did not have anti-Soviet Union component. Probably it was due to this assessment that on 5 May 1934 the Polish–Soviet non-aggression pact was extended until 31 December 1945.

It is this context against which we need to evaluate the claim that the period between 1934 and 1938 was the time of German–Polish rapprochement. The thesis that the German–Polish declaration prevented the creation of a system of collective guarantees is a similarly unsubstantiated one. The French Minister for Foreign Affairs, Louis Barthou, kept working on creating the so-called "Eastern Locarno". The Polish were right in arguing that the only way to secure Central Europe is to involve the Germans since it was Hitler that had ambitions for Eastern expansion (Drang nach Osten). If Berlin does not guarantee it, an agreement would only be a piece of paper. Since Germans rejected the "Eastern Locarno" plan Poland could not take part of it as it would have terminated the recent German–Polish declaration.

Thus, the strategic direction of Polish foreign policy was to keep equal distance from Berlin and Moscow and avoid provoking either. Based on Piłsudski's ideas Beck came up with the concept of "Space between Seas" (Międzymorze) that re-

ferred to the cooperation of countries between the two totalitarian powers between the Baltic Sea, the Adriatic Sea and the Black Sea. Poland, Hungary, Yugoslavia, Romania and Italy would have constituted the core and Beck called this "Third Europe" (Kornat, 2007.).

Poland had to improve its army even as it did not want war. They had reasons for this. It suffices to quote the handwritten letter that deputy Commissioner Vladimir Potemkin sent to Jakow Suriz, the Soviet polpred in Berlin: „Germany has claims for Gdańsk and the Memel area, Polish Lithuania, Latgela and Liepā. It is highly likely that Hitler will induce Polish appetite for these areas. His calculations are fairly clear. Stalin talked about this to Laval while the latter was in Moscow the last time. [Pierre Laval French Prime Minister was in Moscow between 13 and 15 May 1935]. Hitler sees it unavoidable to destroy Poland with the help of our army. When we occupy a certain part of Poland, Germany will do the same from their side. Practically Poland will cook its fourth division and loss of their national independence for itself, executing Hitler's plan." Although this letter was confidential, shortly thereafter Potemkin talked about the fourth division of Poland in an article that he wrote using a pseudoname in the paper called Bolsevik. (Quoted in: Sovietsko–polskiye otnosheniye… 2004. 162–163.)

At the same time, the German–Polish alliance that Stalin calculated did not materialize. Hitler's policy towards Poland changed at the end of 1938. He began to exert pressure. On 24 October, Joachim von Ribbentrop Foreign Minister called for Józef Lipski ambassador and made the following proposal: If Poland sanctions the Corridor that is an extra-terrestrial autobahn and railway line and joins the anti-Comintern Pact, then the validity of the declaration of 1934 may be extended by 25 years. Hitler and Ribbentrop repeated these terms on 5 January 1939 to Józef Beck and added an offer about "expelling" Jews from Poland. However, Polish foreign policy gave evasive answers and did not join the anti-Comintern pact.

Beck knew that the corridor to Gdansk was only a pretext and the Germans would attack. This is just what Hitler also told military commanders on 23 May 1939. Yet, Germans kept the polish under pressure. On 25 January 1939, Ribbentrop went to Warsaw, however, he did not take home any result. The Polish response was that:

„if Germany wished to use violence to achieve its objectives that would mean war between the two countries" (Székely, 2020. 265.). Ribbentrop repeated his proposal once more for Lipski on 21 March. However, Hitler did not wait for yet another rejection and informed the German military leadership about his plans regarding the invasion of Poland. This was just a couple days after the partition of Czechoslovakia. (Geneza paktu… 2012. 16–19.)

Therefore, the argument that the Polish government considered a German alliance against the Soviet Union and, thus, deserved partition, is a false claim. On the other hand, Stalin could imagine the partition of Poland in cooperation with Germany. This was so despite the rapprochement between Poland and the Soviet Union that took place in those tense months. The trade agreement that the two countries signed on 19 February 1939 is a tangible evidence of this development.

III.

The third argument in defence of Stalin is the following: the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact was in the interest of the Germans and the Soviet leaders did not make any effort for rapprochement. In the final analysis, the government of the Soviet Union could only choose between the pact and war. Stalin bought one and a half year of peace by signing the pact. Supporters of this stand often add that the British and French delegations did not have a real mandate for making an anti-German alliance and that it was very unlikely to succeed because Poland and Romania opposed the idea.

On 31 March 1939, Chamberlain declared that if Poland were attacked the United Kingdom would step in if the Polish government asked for help. Three days later, France made a similar statement. By the time Józef Beck reached London the British government had the proposal ready. In the joint declaration issued on 6 April there were guarded statements without any reference to Germany. As it appeared, this was only a "temporary" agreement, but London was prepared to sign another

one of "permanent nature" in a way that it would also not be directed against "any country". Paris made a more overt undertaking: „France and Poland mutually come to each other's aid immediately if any direct or indirect threat arises". (Székely, 2020. 283–284.).

It became clear that the Government of the UK did not think it necessary to shut the door on Hitler even after the experience with the Munich Agreement. It hoped for new negotiations and that the UK could stay out of the war. József Beck made a mistake when he overrated the British guarantee. He did not realise that Chamberlain did not want to go to war with Germany over Czechoslovakia or Poland.

British–French–Soviet negotiations about military alliance began thereafter. There were several factors that made the viability the project uncertain. None of the parties were ready for war with Germany, thus, a preventive war was unthinkable. On the other hand, they were late in terms of strategic steps and planning. The Nazis have annexed the Rheinland, Austria, the Sudetenland, Memel, partitioned Czechoslovakia and have made the decision to attack Poland. The Munich Agreement made Hitler confidents and revealed that European countries were not efficient in coordinating their actions against him and that they rather make concessions than attack. Third, the Government of UK was unenthusiastic in its dealings with the Soviet Union and had difficulties giving up the policy of appeasement as they still preferred to stay out of the conflict in Europe. Four, it was difficult to convince Poles and Romanians that the Soviet Union would guarantee their safety against Germany. Finally, the attitude of the Soviet Union was also ambiguous. Despite their alliance with Prague they did not rush to save Czechoslovakia. Moreover, the military cooperation they started with the Germans in 1922 did not completely end in 1934. Stalin's speech of 10 March accused Paris and London of instigating Berlin against the Soviet Union and he sacked Litvinov, the commissioner responsible for foreign policy, who had good relations with the British and was in favour of creating a popular front. Importantly, Litvinov had Jewish roots. His successor, Molotov, was loyal to Stalin.

We cannot give a detailed account of the negotiations here. It suffices to note that

Hitler was aware that he did not risk a lot when he made a proposal that Stalin liked.

German–Soviet negotiations began early in 1939 but they gained momentum during the summer. The key moment was the report that Ivan Proskurov, the head of GRU sent to Voroshilov about the German plans on 9 July 1939. He stated that Hitler will not allow the British–French–Soviet negotiation to influence his plan to "solve the Polish problem in a radical manner". According to the German informant – Bruno Kleist, one of Ribbentrop's close collaborators – Hitler and Ribbentrop do not think that the Soviet Union would take part in a war against Germany on the side of the British and French. They also calculated that the Polish resistance would collapse before the French and British regained their senses. Proskurov reported that the attack was to be expected in August or September. (The documents is published in: Geneza paktu… 2012. 159–163.)

Following the report, events speeded up. Exchange of notes became more frequent and during the meetings the common standpoint started to form that the agreement should not only about trade, but it should also be political treaty. Molotov successfully negotiated for specific security guarantees. On the basis of available documents, one can even argue that the idea of the secret clause first appeared in Moscow.

The Soviets began to retreat from negotiations with French and British governments. It was not a difficult move. Stalin asked for a mandate for the Red Army to cross Poland. He knew the Polish would not give their consent. Hitler's offer reached on 7 August according to which – with the exception of Lithuania – the Baltic states, former Russian Poland and Bessarabia should go to the Soviet Union, while Gdańsk and the former Prussian Poland would belong to Germany. The decision about Galicia was postponed. On 12 August, Molotov sent a cable to Berlin saying that "we are interested". (Geneza paktu… 2012. 175–179.).

The parties agreed that first Friedrich Werner von der Schulenburg the German ambassador in Moscow would sign a trade agreement on behalf of Ribbentrop, then the latter would go to Moscow to sign the political treaty. The first act took place on 19 August, the latter on 23 August.

It was easy for Hitler to make an offer that would wreck negotiations among France, the UK and the Soviet Union. Just as Hitler, Stalin also did not hesitate much about terminating the non-aggression pact with Poland. It was easy for Stalin to make the partition of Poland sound desirable internally, too. On 7 September, Georgi Dimitrov noted the following about his talk with Stalin: "Currently, the annihilation of this state means that there is one less bourgeois Fascist state. What is wrong about crushing Poland if it results in spreading Socialism in new territories?" (The document is quoted in: Geneza paktu… 2012. 195.) Thus, Hitler and Stalin did not see the partition of Poland as a temporary solution, but they understood this as crushing Polish and Baltic statehood.

Stalin did not choose between war and peace when he signed the pact with Nazi Germany. As a result of the agreement, the Soviet Union attacked Poland and then Finland on 30 November, occupied and Sovietized the Baltic states and, finally, annexed Bessarabia from Romania on 28 June 1940.

IV.

Having proved that Stalin was not on the defence, let us now turn to examining his real motives for signing the pact. From available documents, there are two reasons that emerge. These, on the one hand, the trade agreement that should be evaluated as one that constitute a package together with the pact. On the other hand, the offer that Hitler made was serving objectives that Stalin had long been hoping to realize. He wanted to push the boundaries of the Soviet Union westwards to the River Bug and annex Bessarabia in the south.

On 29 March 1935, Anthony Eden British Minister of Foreign Affairs met Stalin in Moscow. While Eden was about to leave, they passed in front of a large map about which Eden noted that "What a beautiful country and what a large country!" Stalin's response was "Big country with big problems" and pointing at the British Isles added that "Small island but a lot depends on it. If this small island told Germany

that it would not give more money, raw materials and steel then the peace could be secured in Europe." (Quoted in: Székely, 2020. 171

Although with unfortunate delay but the British listened to Stalin's advice. When Hitler attacked Poland they placed Germany under blockade. They did not foresee that it would be Stalin who helps Hitler in terms of raw materials.

The literature on the pact rarely discusses the trade agreement. Hungarian historians Mária Ormos and István Majoros characterized the agreement in the following terms: "The supply of Germany and its position in terms of alliances improved significantly. The German–Soviet economic agreement (signed on 11 February 1940) secured huge amount of oil, metal and grain for Germany, and mostly, for the German army. The Soviet party met the deadlines with worrisome punctuality until the moment of German invasion, thus making it easier for Hitler to occupy the territories that were the sources of these shipments." (Majoros–Ormos, 2003. 412–413.). However, the authors do not discuss the details of the contracts and their impact on the war. Bogdan Musiał, a Polish historian living in Germany, is the only one who systematically analysed this problem. He did so on the basis of archival documents from Russia.

According to the trade agreement of 19 August, the Third Reich provided a 200 million Mark loan at 4.5 interest to the Soviet Union. Using 180 million Mark, the Soviets were obliged to of machinery from Germany. The Kreml was free to choose any German companies as partners. The Soviet Union mostly needed lathes, arms and technology. In return for the goods and the loan, the Soviet Union primarily shipped raw materials to Germany. This was much needed since due to the blockade that was imposed on Germany after the invasion of Poland, the balance of trade deteriorated by 40%. German reserves of crude oil, iron, zinc, copper, aluminium and other metals were only enough for 9-11 months.

The Soviets began to transport goods to Germany in December 1939. Until 11 February 1940 Stalin sent 22 400 tons of crude oil, 32 350 tons of grain and some thousand bales of cotton to Germany. These amounts could not make up for the losses incurred as the result of the blockade, thus, Germany initiated new talks

about stepping up these volumes. On 11 February the parties signed another trade agreement. Within this new framework the Soviets shipped 650 million Mark worth of raw materials to Germany until the Germans attacked the Soviet Union. Until 11 February 1941 410-420 million Mark 872 thousand tons of crude oil, 934 thousand tons of grain, 91 500 tons of cotton, 500 thousand tons of iron ore and 100 thousand tons of raw material for smelting reached Germany. The remaining goods should have been shipped until 11 August 1941, but the German invasion obviously interrupted this on 22 June. However, until that date Germany received 11 thousand tons of copper, 3 thousand tons of nickel 950 tons of zinc and 500 tons of molybdian and wolfram. Stalin even promised that if the Soviet Union did not have sufficient reserves of a raw material that Germans needed they would try to secure it from a third country.

In February 1940 the German press celebrated the pact with the Soviet Union. The National-Zeitung went as far as to state that "the new agreement meant more for Germany than winning a battle, this is a decisive victory". Army commanders agreed to this assessment. In his memoir published in 1953 Eduard Wagner stated that "the pact saved us".

Notwithstanding, the Soviet Union also profited from the deal: it gained access to modern military technology. According to the agreement signed on 11 February 1940, it received a Lützow class cruiser, large amount of material for ship building, boilers, pivots, and also equipment and materials for building submarines. Shipment of arms and military equipment were important too. Stalin personally supervised the arrival of lathes needed for producing ammunition. Of this the Soviet Union received 6430 that was worth 100 million Marks. Moreover, Germans assisted the Soviet Union in modernizing its chemical industry, too.

The deal did not come out of the blue when we consider that the Soviet–German military cooperation was continuous since the Rapallo Treaty and was only halted for some years of the Great Terror. We may state the Soviet Union was Hitler's main ally in his war against Western Europe. Italy, Japan and Hungary did not provide supplies, Swedish iron ore and Norwegian oil did not reach their destination due to the blockade.

V.

These facts damage Stalin's reputation as anti-fascist leader both internationally and internally. That is why some feel the need to subvert these. Having assessed the events and contexts, one cannot place Stalin at the head of anti-Fascist war as he did not only assist in attacking Poland, but he also provided the material supply base for the Western campaign. On the other hand, all these reveal the imperialist features of the Soviet Union.

Three years after the end of World War II, the Department of State of the USA published some of the German diplomatic papers that the USA army got hold of. The volume is called the Nazi–soviet relations, 1939–1941. Documents from the Archives of the German Foreign Office. It was obviously published with the intention of defaming the Soviet Union in the first phase of the Cold War. On 3 February 1948 Andrey Vyshinsky the deputy chair of the Committee of People's Commissioners, presented the first three chapters of the Soviet response to the volume. This latter publication bore the title "Response to the slanderers". After that point Stalin took over and personally corrected some parts editing out sections and inserting quotes. He also added a whole chapter to the book. He also changed the title that eventually became "Falsifiers of History (Historical Survey)." It first appeared in Russian on 9 February 1948 and the next day the Pravda began to publish it in sequels. Translators immediately started working on it. On 28 April Vyshinsky reported that the counter campaign was successful. In the people's republics it was published in millions of copies: In Romania 1.1 million, in Czechoslovakia 1 million, in Bulgaria 600 000, in Poland 500 000, in Hungary 165 000 copies were printed. In France there were 700 000 copies printed, but in England and the USA only 50-60 000 were possible. At the same time, it was published in Norway, Denmark, Canada, Iran, Turkey, Afghanistan, Venezuela, Columbia, Mexico, Australia, India, Sweden, Argentina, Belgium, Egypt etc. (Documents were published in Geneza paktu… 2012. 197–233.)

Therefore, one needs to be cautious and avoid repeating the arguments that Stalin himself crafted in his own defence.

(Translated by Róbert Balogh)

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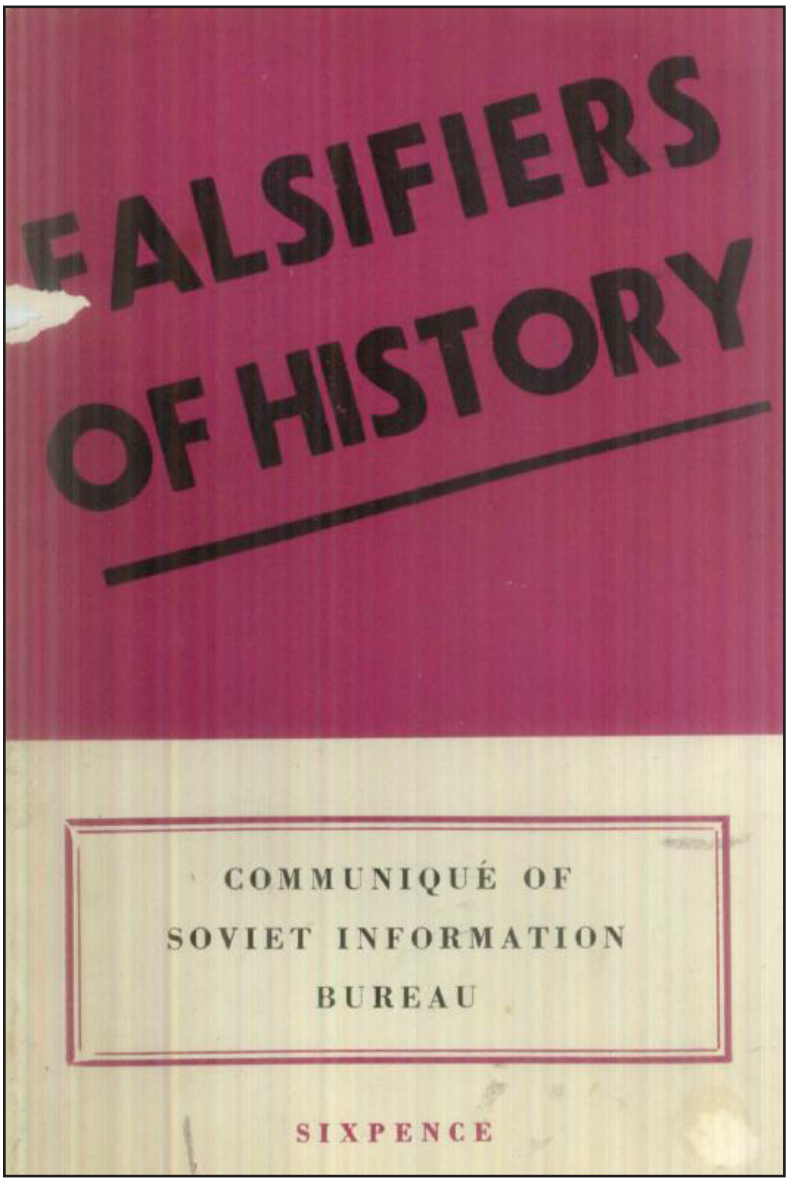

Ágnes Patakfalvi-Czirják – Csaba Zahorán

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Victims of Health Care

Lesson from the documentary Colectiv

On 30 October 2015, a deadly fire broke out at a club called Colectiv in Bucharest. It killed 60 people on the site and injured more than 160. The reason behind the high number of casualties were the crowd inside, the insulation made of inflammable material, the small number of extinguishers and emergency exits, thus disregard for safety regulations. Just like at Club West Balkan in Budapest four years earlier, this negligence claimed lives.

The incident at Colectiv triggered much stronger reactions in the Romanian public, however. Voices did not only demand punishment for the owners of the club but urged structural changes almost immediately. When the irregularities and the controversial role of authorities came to light, the initial shock turned into anger. Participants at protest demonstrations stressed the responsibility of public authorities and demanded measures against corruption that was omnipresent in Romania. Many people quickly made a link between factors such as misfunctioning institutions that did not ensure that safety regulations were adhered to, that victims received proper care, and the chaotic mode institutions functioned. As a result of protests, Victor Ponta, the Prime Minister who headed a coalition with waning popularity and was personally discredited in a plagiarism case, resigned in a couple of days. Dacian Ciolos's government replaced him, which was said to be one of non-political experts. However, the case did not end there. Although the minister for health care stated that there was no need to transport patients to hospitals in Western Europe because the quality of care in Romania was on par with what one could receive in Germany, a number of survivors passed away. With the passage of time even those

died who did not suffer life threatening injuries in the fire. This triggered the second wave of the scandal in the spring of 2016. A team of journalists working for a sports daily, Gazeta Sporturilor, found out that the reason for the infections that caused deaths was a chain of fraud with disinfectants.

The theme of Alexander Nanau's 109-minute-long documentary is the investigation and the interconnected cases of corruption. The film Colectiv was released in 2019. In the opening scenes, we see excerpts of newscasts and from videos recorded with mobile phone showing the fire, the panic and the rescue operation. After these shocking scenes, and beyond the drama of survivors and relatives, stories of investigation and of bureaucratic struggle unfold. Although the director does not neglect the memory of victims and the suffering of survivors, problems of Romanian health care system and the contradictory mode authorities operate occupy the centre stage.

The documentary runs along three parallel lines. The work of journalists of Gazeta Sporturilor – Cătălin Tolontan and his colleagues – constitute the first one. They were the ones that reconstructed the details of the circumstances of the death of those that suffered less than life threatening injuries. After an investigation that resembles a thriller, they established that a foreign vendor supplied diluted disinfectants to hospitals and that these significantly contributed to the spread of infection that eventually killed a several survivors of the fire.

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of those that suffered less than life threatening injuries. After an investigation that resembles a thriller, they established that a foreign vendor supplied diluted disinfectants to hospitals and that these significantly contributed to the spread of infection that eventually killed a several survivors of the fire.

The second line is made up of the personal stories of survivors and relatives: the pain and effort of a young woman who tries to continue her life and the way the family of a young male victim copes with grief. Nanau tells these in low key and reveals shocking details and emotions without exaggeration. Finally, the third line is about the struggles of two ministers of health of the Ciolos-government. The first one had to resign as a result of the scandal related to disinfectants. The second one had a background as activist and embarked on a hopeless battle against the rotting and corrupt structure of the health care system in a ministry where "90% of the staff was incompetent." The young minister wanted a thorough investigation into the causes of infection and improve conditions, but he quickly learned his boundaries. He had to realise that he was nearly unable to act against the groups that wished to maximize their profit and followed only their own interests, thus, robbing the state. The image that emerges from these parallel stories is rather frightening even if spectators can only deduce conclusions for themselves regarding some of the phenomena as these remain implicit in the documentary. It was the young victims that paid the price of lack of quality control of supplied material, corrupt hospital management, corruption at top level of the ministry, corruption among doctors and indifferent attitude of the staff of public authorities. Indeed, in Romania, anyone who is admitted to one of the units of health care system suffers from the consequences of these breaches. It is the omnipresent political sphere and businesspeople preying on public procurement and avoiding taxes via offshore operations that run the system. The journalists found out that secret services knew that disinfectants were diluted. It is characteristic that in that period one of the members received a phone call from an officer who advised him that "cornered and idiotic criminals" might be a threat to the personal safety and that of their families if the team went ahead with their investigation. The way one of the politicians tried to capitalize on patients receiving treatment abroad and from the equipment available at one of the hospitals in Bucharest is also a feature that may be seen typical.

These characteristics take us to the political context of the drama of Colectiv. On the one hand, perpetual struggle among political parties provide this context as this was the time of the political campaign for the elections that were to be held in December 2016. On the other hand, there is the prolonged struggle for the modernization and „Westernization" of the country against the corrupt post-communist structures and actors that somehow have always managed to persist. This struggle often seems hopeless. Indirectly, the documentary also makes a stand in the debate about the anti-corruption campaign that has been going on since the early 2010s. (Laura Codruța Kövesi, who was then the chief prosecutor of National Anticorruption Directorate and subsequently became the first European Public Prosecutor, even makes an appearance in the film.) The fight against omnipresent corruption has become politicized in the sense of party politics, and many suspects that the prosecutors' office and secret services are intertwined, thus, that it has become a parallel state. Some even argue that this structure is influenced by foreign influence and that it acts in order to replace the incumbent elite by force. One of the conclusions of the film is that given the lack of means that Romanian society can make use of, there is no alternative to radical solutions. There is no happy ending, and this makes the critique of misfunctioning state institutions even more staggering and also leaves the impression that the situation is hopeless.

The film ends with the parliamentary election of late 2016 that resulted in the return of the Social Democratic Party to power, which meant that the post-communist elite and, specifically, the group that had to resign as a result of the Colectiv scandal came back. The most sensitive scene of Nanau's documentary is the conversation between the young minister who lost his post to the election and his father. The latter indignantly advises his son that there is no hope and that it would be better if he returned to Vienna where his efforts are appreciated.

The case of Colectiv is not an exception. News reports talk about similar conditions and scandals in the entire region of East Central Europe. The health care system has been in crisis for decades while private hospitals remain fruitful ventures. The system is wasteful and underfinanced at the same time, and reforms did not succeed. These, along with the Westward migration of badly paid medical doctors, nurses

and care givers, the miserable state of most hospitals and the normalcy of „gratuity", which is, corruption and the contradictory presence of private health care are typical issues in the region. The film Colectiv points out that such institutions and the state are not prepared for an emergency with a large number of victims. The only solution that the minister portrayed in the film could come up with is that people with serious injuries should be treated in Western Europe and Romania would cover part of the costs. This might even be viable in case of singular events but cannot be done in epidemics. The Colectiv becomes the symbol of corruption and irresponsible state behaviour that neglects the common good. The ongoing epidemic lent currency to the issues, thus the channel HBO has recently screened the documentary. It reminds that citizens face structural risks in those countries where the state is not able to run a health care system at acceptable standard, which would be one of its basic functions.

In an interview, Nanau recently told that the situation had not improved since the accident. In his opinion, as a result of corruption that is present at all levels and that came to light during the investigation that journalists carried out following the fire at Club Colectiv, the series of tragedies continues during the ongoing epidemic.

Forbidden Relationship

Opposition in Poland and Hungary 1976-1989

Based on available archival documents, contemporary samizdat literature and interviews with the actors of the time, Miklós Mitrovits's new book discusses the semi-legal and illegal forms of contact between the Polish and the Hungarian opposition movement. This volume sheds new light on the Hungarian opposition, moreover, it helps to understand the process of systemic change, thus, it fills a gap in historical knowledge.

"A Polish and a Hungarian are good friends" – goes the saying that also appeared in the lyrics of a song by Kontroll Csoport, the short-lived, but ground-breaking underground music band that voiced criticism in the early 1980s. Yet, the fact that it was the opposition movements of the two countries that cherished this traditional friendship starting from the second half of the 1970s has nearly faded into oblivion. The book posits that events in Poland constituted the most important external impact on the cultural and political opposition in Hungary. The Hungarian opposition looked at the brave Poles with admiration.

What were the experiences that enriched the activities of the Hungarians? How did the democratic opposition learn techniques for creating samizdat publications and content

How did they organize a summer camp for poor Polish children at Lake Balaton? How was the Solidarity movement received in Hungary? Why the satirical weekly called Ludas Matyi launch a defamatory campaign against the Poles in 1981? How did the objectives of the Hungarian opposition change after the military grabbed power in Poland? What consequences did Poles draw from the revolution of 1956? How did Polish examples influence the political parties in Hungary at the time of systemic change?

Major topics that the book covers

- Polish and Hungarian opposition established contact with each other in 1976 in Paris on the occasion of a conference organized for commemorating the 20th anniversary of the revolutionary events in Hungary and Poland. It was there that Adam Michnik, one of the leading figures of the Polish opposition put forward the program of the so-called new evolutionism that served as a compass for those that willed the end of the state socialist political system.

- In 1978, the Hungarian democratic opposition organized illegal free universities, based on the Polish blueprint. Discussing the way events unfolded in Poland were among the key elements of the syllabus. Along with three other Hungarians, Sándor Szilágyi, the person in charge of such courses, took part in the strikes at the shipyards of Gdansk and in the formation of the trade union called Solidarity.

- The first Hungarian samizdat journals appeared while Solidarity was active and mostly discussed the developments in Poland. In late 1981, Gábor Demszky used Polish institutions as a model when he founded the AB Independent Publishing, which was the first independent publishing house in Hungary.

- Sándor Csóri, the leading figure of the so-called „people's movement" participated at a mass rally in Cracow, where Lech Wałęsa gave a speech. Csoóri and his party asked a question about the 1956 revolution in Hungary. When the question was read out the crowd cheered loudly. Csoóri wrote a poem about this experience.

- In the summer of 1981, the Foundation Supporting Poor People hosted Polish children that came from underprivileged background at the location called Kékkő near Lake Balaton. Police kept harassing the holidaying children and „definitively" banned Wojciech Maziarski, the Polish student acting

as interpreter, from Hungary. In 1982 Hungarian authorities prevented the event from taking place again. Despite this, there were so many contributors that a railway wagon could be filled with goods and sent as aid to Poland.

- The emergency declared in Poland brought about a new situation for the Hungarian opposition, too. This triggered the first serious discussion about the future of the system. The forum for this was Beszélő, a samizdat journal.

- On the second anniversary of the formation of Solidarity, 30 August 1982, there was a protest demonstration at the statute of Bem. Organizers were arrested and the call to Polish could not be read out. Tibor Pákh improvised a speech in which he called on those present to pray in order to point out members of the secret service. They could be revealed because they did not pray.

- In June 1986, intellectuals including Csaba Gy. Kiss, István Kovács, Sándor Csoóri and Árpád Göncz prepared a Festschrift volume for the 70th birthday of professor Wacław Felczak. A year later, the Gábor Bethlen Foundation gave awarded its literary prize to Zbigniew Herbertnek. It was Sándor Csoóri who read out the praise.

- Within the Socialist Block, the first memorial stone dedicated to the revolution of 1956 in Hungary was unveiled in Podkowa Leśna, near Warsaw in October 1986. The events of the Hungarian revolution were widely commemorated in Poland and a dozen samizdat appeared and posters and stamps designed for the occasion.

- In 1987, it was his experience in Poland that motivated Zsolt Keszthelyi to refuse military service even at the cost of imprisonment. In Poland, there were a series of demonstrations of solidarity where participants demanded his release. In the autumn, there was a hunger strike at Bydgoszcz with the same purpose.

- During the same year, students of the István Bibó Student Mentorship Program, including Viktor Orbán and László Kövér, visited Poland several times. On their first visit, they took part in the pilgrimage of John Paul II in Gdańsk.

At that time the police arrested their hosts. During a later visit, they participated in a conference that the opposition organized about disarmament. Later, a follow-up event took place in Budapest.

- In February 1989, the Hungarian-Polish Solidarity group was established in Podkowa Leśna. The organization launched a bilingual journal and initiated several actions. Members celebrated national holidays of both nations and supported each other during the months of systemic change.

- During the year, Poles were present at national meetings of the Magyar Demokrata Fórum, at the reburial ceremony of Imre Nagy and at the first legal celebration of 23 October. Members of the Hungarian opposition eagerly followed the roundtable discussions that began in Poland and were intent on learning from these.

Author

Miklós Mitrovits (1978) is a Historian and Polonist. He is a senior research fellow at the Institute for Central European Studies, József Eötvös Centre at the University of Public Service and at the Centre for the Humanities in Budapest. His main fields of expertise are post-World War II Central Europe and the history of Hungarian-Polish relations. His key academic publications are A remény hónapjai… A lengyel Szolidaritás és a szovjet politika, 1980–1981 [Months of Hope….Polish Solidarity and Soviet Politics 1980-1981 (2010), Lengyel, magyar, két jó barát. A magyar–lengyel kapcsolatok dokumentumai, 1957–1987 [Poles and Hungarians are like friends. Documents of Polish-Hungarian Relations, 1957-1987] (2014). In recognition of his efforts, he received the Cross of Knights Honour of the Republic of Poland in 2014.


MITROVITS MIKLÓS
TILTOTT
KAPCSOLAT
A MAGYAR-LENGYEL
ELLENZÉKI EGYÜTTMŰKÖDÉS
1976-1989