

**Russian historical propaganda in 2004-2009**

**Warsaw, 16 September 2009**

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## **PREFACE TO THE ENGLISH AND RUSSIAN EDITION**

2 September 2009 I have decided to publicise the study on the Russian historical propaganda prepared in the National Security Bureau in the summer. For I have recognised that the debate, provoked outside the Polish borders on the eve of the 70th anniversary of WWII outbreak, deserves to be summoned up. I am convinced that historical propaganda carried out by today's Russia concerns security of all Europeans, hence, the English and Russian edition of the study.

This edition slightly differs from the original one. Some names and terms, self-evident to a Polish reader, required an explanation. Moreover, after the completion of the first edition events took place one cannot afford to ignore. Unfortunately, they prove that the Soviet directive of 3 November 1990 concerning use of the history in bilateral relations with Poland is still binding in today's Russia.

At this point, one usually tells the audience to enjoy reading. However, for the obvious reasons I can only hope that the below report will contribute to discussion on the future of the West's relations with Russian Federation. We need this discussion not only in the European Union and in NATO, but also – or maybe first and foremost – in Russia.

Aleksander Szczygło, Head of the National Security Bureau

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

Historical propaganda, which should not be confused with historical policy, is a significant aspect of Russia's aspirations for regaining the status of world power. It explains why high-ranking officials and state functionaries of modern Russia deny co-responsibility of Joseph Stalin for the outbreak of WWII, Soviet Union's occupation of the Baltic States or deliberate lack of support of the Red Army for the Warsaw Uprising<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Armed uprising of the Home Army, subjected to the authorities of the Underground State loyal to the emigration government of the Republic of Poland in London. It took place in Warsaw occupied at that time by Germans and lasted 63 days (from 1 August to 3 October 1944). The insurgents aimed not only at liberating the capital of Poland from the Third Reich's army but also at challenging the division of Europe

Moscow's claim to be part of the global concert of powers has been rooted in the conviction of "decisive contribution made by the Soviet Union into the victory over the Third Reich" 64 years ago<sup>2</sup> and several centuries of Moscow's leadership over Ruthenia. Russian authorities' stand on Katyn massacre<sup>3</sup> has a particular character. On the one hand, NKVD's perpetration has not been officially undermined, but on the other hand – the Military Prosecutor's Office of the Russian Federation refuses to conduct an inquiry against the parties guilty of this massacre. Moreover, governmental press and members of regional administration occasionally reject or relativise the responsibility of USSR for mass execution of Polish officers in 1940. Russian leaders speak of artificial character of Ukrainian state and claim the Kyiv Rus' heritage – which is supposed to justify Russia's right to co-own foreign policy of Ukraine and other countries of the western part of Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS).

In the context of erosion of the democratic liberties, state control over the mass media, and the cult of personality any statements made by the representatives of Russian authorities – in particular by Vladimir Putin – are instantly multiplied by the elites, press, television, artists and even scholars. During celebration of 60th anniversary of the end of WWII in 2005 and 70th anniversary of its outbreak in 2009 the statements by the Russian politicians, experts and the press, concerning history, took form of propaganda campaigns. They were directed at Poland among others. Even if they have not been a result of formal, political decisions taken by Kremlin, there is no doubt that one sentence only expressed by Vladimir Putin would put them to end.

Russian authorities' view on historical issues clearly stands in contradiction to the truth and most of the Russians are aware of the fact. However, in the conditions of legal

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agreed by USSR, USA and Great Britain in Tehran in 1943, which put Central and Eastern Europe within the Soviet zone after 1945. During the Uprising German troops were intentionally and systematically murdering civilians (ca. 120-130 thousands of victims) and levelled off the whole city. Meanwhile Joseph Stalin withheld offensive of the Red Army near Warsaw at the beginning of August and waited until half of September to support the Home Army troops and to allow allied aircrafts with help to the Polish fighters to use the airfields east of the Vistula river.

<sup>2</sup> In Soviet and Russian historiography and literature, an individual term has been established to define the war between USSR and Germany (1941-1945): Great Patriotic War (*Velikaya Otechestvennaya voyna*). Joseph Stalin used it for the first time in his radio speech 3 July 1941 to appeal to the patriotism of nations composing the USSR. The term does not refer to the conflicts USSR was engaged in with other countries in 1939-1945.

<sup>3</sup> 5 March 1940 Political Bureau of Central Committee of the VKP(b) (predecessor of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union) ordered NKVD troops to murder by shooting at the back of the head more than 20 thousand Polish Army officers. They were kept in Kozielsk, Starobielsk and Ostashkov camps as well as prisons in the Soviet Belarus and Ukraine. All of them were taken prisoners by the Red Army on the territory of pre-war Poland incorporated by the USSR in 1939 as a result of a secret protocol to the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact of 23 August 1939. Many of the murdered were reserve officers – outstanding artists, doctors, scientists. They were buried in Katyn (hence common massacre name) near Smolensk (Russia), Mednoye near Tver (Russia) and in Pyatikhatki near Kharkiv (present Ukraine).

and physical repressions towards persons who have the courage to oppose Kremlin's policy, only few people are challenging official interpretation of the past. Therefore, modern historical propaganda needs to be perceived also in the context of democratic transformation and progress of civic society in Russia. It is not by coincidence that dissident movement in USSR has been concentrated and developed around centres researching history of the 20th century, which resulted in originating "Memorial" society<sup>4</sup>.

Mass media campaigns relating to historical issues provoke aversion and contempt of the ordinary Russians, Ukrainians and Byelorussians towards the Central and Eastern European nations that rejected totalitarianism and successfully entered the community of democratic states. Deliberately or not – the campaigns result in rise of popular support for undemocratic form of government and disregard of human rights.

In no way the position of the Russian state concerning historical issues should be investigated separately from Moscow's assertiveness on the international arena, e.g. from unilateral suspension of the Treaty on Conventional Forces in Europe in December 2007, aggression on Georgia in August 2008 or gas supplies cut offs through the Ukrainian territory in January this year. Modern Russian historical propaganda is mobilising social support and favouring consent for aggressive behaviour of the state towards the neighbourhood.

Therefore, Russian historical propaganda should not be treated as a subject of scientific research only. NATO and its member states – in particular those in Central Europe – should address this phenomenon in a revised threat assessment. The below analysis focuses primarily on the Polish thread – one of many, but of special significance, since it was the conflict with Poland that augmented the modern Russian historical propaganda. Additionally, in the summer 2009 Russia has started new media campaign with a dominating anti-Polish tinge in an attempt to forestall international discussion on co-responsibility of USSR for the outbreak of WWII on the eve of celebration of 70th anniversary of the latter in Gdańsk – with officials from a dozen or so countries participating.

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<sup>4</sup> "Memorial" is engaged in the historical research and dissemination of knowledge of the Soviet repressions as well as protecting human rights in the former USSR republics. It was established 29 January 1989 by a.o. Andrei Sakharov, Yevgeniy Yevtushenko and Andrei Voznesenskiy. Apart from Russia, "Memorial" has branches in Ukraine, Latvia, Lithuania, Kazakhstan, Georgia, and Germany. "Memorial" has its own archive and library, organises exhibitions and conferences and publishes books and magazines. Studies on the history of repressions on the Polish citizens play important part in "Memorial" activity. Hence, Polish Commission was called, and it is coordinated by Alexandr Guryanov.

Originators of those campaigns intended to strengthen the divisions on Polish political arena by accusing Poland of e.g. alliance with Hitler and using simultaneous presence of Vladimir Putin in Gdańsk. If the President of the Republic of Poland or politicians of conservative opposition party Law and Justice reacted to the Russian campaign, it might be used to compromise the process of Euro-Atlantic integration in the post-Soviet area – promoted vividly by President Lech Kaczyński and the biggest opposition party in Poland. Particular European governments, traditionally sympathising with Moscow, and post-Soviet societies might be said that the concept of Euro-Atlantic integration to the East of Poland is driven by anti-Russian prejudices.

Therefore, the strive to convince Russians, Ukrainians, Byelorussians and Russian speakers in the Baltic states, that Central European nations are hostile towards everything Russian or East Slavic, should be acknowledged as the most dangerous consequence of Russia's historical propaganda. Mainly because the strive is potentially effective, as the Russian literature, press, television and schoolbooks are easily available and citizens of Belarus, eastern and southern Ukraine as well as Russian speakers in Latvia and Estonia place considerable confidence in them. Fuelling belief in the hostility of external world towards Russia and *Russiness* might bring powerful negative effect taking into account unprecedented popularity of the chauvinist and neo-fascist organisations in the Russian Federation<sup>5</sup>. Growth of aggressive Great Russian nationalism is the most dangerous – even if not intended – result of modern Russian historical propaganda, not only from the point of view of Poland, but also the whole Euro-Atlantic community. For it may influence the evolution of Russia's foreign and security policy within the next decades<sup>6</sup>.

## 2. ORIGINS

Historical propaganda is an important element of political doctrine of the Russian Federation. During Vladimir Putin's presidency (2000-2008) Mikhail Pokrovskiy's<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Number of Russian neo-fascists is estimated at ca. 70-90 thousands, which means that every second world neo-fascist lives now in Russia. For more information, see the Moscow Bureau on Human Rights: <http://antirasizm.ru>.

<sup>6</sup> M. A. Smith, "The Politicisation of History in the Russian Federation", "Russian Series" 08/16, May 2008, Defence Academy of the United Kingdom.

<sup>7</sup> Mikhail Pokrovskiy (1868-1932) – a historian, Marxist, member of the Soviet Academy of Sciences. In 1918-1932 he has been responsible for educational policy, he also headed the Soviet archives. Author of the classic Marxist historiography and history textbooks.

"history is the politics of the past" phrase became political credo of Russia's authorities. Sources of modern historical propaganda can be indirectly found in the economic crisis of the 1990s, and directly in 2004. After the collapse of USSR Russia has lost superpower status and multi-ethnic Russian society inhabiting the area spread over 11 time zones lost the sense of bond offered by communist ideology. Russia experience deep economic slump in the 1990s comparable to the Great Crisis of the end of the 1920s in Germany. With due respect to all the differences between both phenomena, they combine the universality of experience and the belief in external perpetration.

Vladimir Putin has come to power in 2000 playing with people's fear of the further disintegration of the country. Sense of existential threat in Russia had two aspects. An internal one was associated a.o. with Chechen separatism and sovereignisation process of the Russian regions. An external one was associated with alleged expansion of the West to the former USSR satellite area in 1999 (NATO enlargement), to the post-Soviet area in 2004 (UE and NATO enlargements) as well as the anticipated expansion into historic Ruthenia. Kremlin decided to oppose those challenges with the neo-imperial concept, which would help to unite people with the government and challenge integration of the former Soviet colonies with the Euro-Atlantic institutions. This is how reconstruction of international status of the country and national identity of Russians have gained aggressive and revisionist character<sup>8</sup>. Moscow confronted the post-cold war order also in relation to the interpretation of history. In extreme forms, Kremlin historical propaganda equalised with the Soviet reading of the past. Moscow feared, that questioning the latter would lead to "undermining all decisions taken with participation of USSR, undermining its signatures under key international documents", as Prof. Natalia Narochitskaya<sup>9</sup> once put it.

Two events in 2004 became a catalyst for modern historical propaganda in Russia. The first included international celebration of 60th anniversary of Warsaw Uprising in

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<sup>8</sup> For further details, see: report of the House of Commons Defence Committee, "Russia: a new confrontation?", 10 July 2009, pp. 5-9; E. Lucas, "The New Cold War", London 2008; J. Sherr, "Russia and the West: A Reassessment", "Shrivenham Papers" no 6, January 2008, Defence Academy of the United Kingdom; D. Trenin, "Russia's Threat Perception and Strategic Posture", [in:] "Russian Security Strategy under Putin: U.S. and Russian Perspectives", R. Craig Nation (ed.), Strategic Studies Institute of the U.S. Army War College, November 2007, pp. 35-47; A. Zagorski, "Moscow Seeks to Renegotiate Relations with the West", "Russian Analytical Digest" No. 26, 4 September 2007, pp. 2-5, Center for Security Studies, ETH Zurich – Forschungstelle Osteuropa, Bremen; E. Rumer, A. Stent, "Russia and the West", "Survival" vol. 51 no. 2, April-May 2009, pp. 91-104.

<sup>9</sup> Natalia Narochitskaya – a historian, political scientist, member of Duma in 2003-2007, representing the chauvinist Liberal Democratic Party of Russia, headed by Vladimir Zhirinovskiy. Director of the Russian Institute for Democracy and Cooperation. In May 2009 Narochitskaya was appointed to the presidential Commission to Counter Attempts to Falsify History to the Detriment of Russia's Interests.

Poland's capital<sup>10</sup>. The second was the orange revolution in Ukraine. Reaction of the Russian authorities and press to the discussions concerning the role of USSR during WWII and Russia's status in CIS area was enhanced by the preparations to the Moscow celebration of 60th anniversary of victory over the Nazis. The festivity was intended to demonstrate effectiveness of president Putin's rule, who strived to restore Russia as a world power. The Warsaw celebration was read in Moscow as a challenge to the founding myth of Putin's Russia.

60th anniversary of Warsaw Uprising and the role of Poland in preventing electoral fraud in Ukraine were not without effect on development of anti-Polish aspect of Russian historical propaganda, including the decision, taken in December 2004, to establish new Russian national holiday: National Unity Day "to commemorate liberation of Moscow from Polish invaders/occupants" 4 November 1612.

**The origins of modern Russian historical propaganda can be traced back to the period of deep political and economic crisis during the presidency of Boris Yeltsin. Principal aim of historical propaganda initiated by his successor is to base self-identity of the citizens of Russian Federation on superpower idea and to create convenient political climate in Kremlin's relations with the former communist bloc countries.**

### **3. METHODS AND FORMS OF COMPLETION**

Disinformation plays key role in historical propaganda – similarly to every other type of propaganda. The following techniques are applied: intoxication (denying, reversing facts); manipulation (true thesis used in such a way that leads to false conclusions); modification of motives or circumstances (describing motive or reason for particular action in a way that they become advantageous only to one party); and interpretation (particular selection of words that evoke positive or negative association among the recipients)<sup>11</sup>.

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<sup>10</sup> "Antypolska kampania historyczna jako element nowej ideologii państwowej i technologia polityczna", [Anti-Polish historical campaign as an element of the new state ideology and political technology] Center for Eastern Studies Report, Warsaw, April 2005, pp. 3-4.

<sup>11</sup> See: R. Brzeski, "Wojna informacyjna" [Information Warfare], Warsaw 2006.



In practice, Russian historical propaganda is carried out through inspiring a particular theme or reversing it in case when such theme was previously provoked in public. This way media campaign with clearly specified assumptions and political aims is triggered off. Subject of such a campaign is never a matter of coincidence. Often, it is tied to the current problems in Russia's relations with its neighbours.

Scheme of such campaigns includes three principle phases. The first phase includes triggering the campaign off with the publication in specialised press, usually in one associated with special services or army. The publication presents an interpretation of the past events or historical commentary. The second phase includes information agencies, popular Russian newspapers (including tabloids) and magazines, websites and television. This way, initially inconspicuous incidents become public discussion. At this stage, Russian columnists, politicians, artists join the discussion and it turns out that initially controversial or marginal historical interpretation finds wide support in the Russian public. Interestingly enough, on this or the following phase relevant commentaries show up in western press, usually left wing or liberal. As a rule, such discussions avoid referring to archival sources or findings of the modern research. The third phase of historical campaign engages representatives of Russian authorities or institutions. Their role is to offer official stand on the debate carried out for several months, pointing that the state cannot skip "the objective historical truth" and demonstrate incomprehension for the results of "scholarly" discussion.

When the aim of campaign is to reverse the main topic of historical discussion, a substitute topic (counter-subject) – indirectly only or completely not connected to the original thread – is being promoted. E.g. Russian media are trying to counter the responsibility of USSR for the mass murder of Polish officers in 1940 with accusations towards Poland for alleged extermination of Red Army prisoners of 1919-1920 Polish-Bolshevik war or for the participation of Poles in Holocaust. Similarly, Russian press attempts to diminish the significance of the Soviet-Nazi pact of 23 August 1939 by exposing allegations of alliance between pre-war Poland and the Third Reich targeted at USSR and Poland's Home Army subversion of Stalin's military offensive on Berlin. If the original subject is supported by archival documents, reliability of the latter is questioned or denied at the very beginning – which happened both during discussion on Katyn massacre and on Ribbentrop-Molotov pact.

Russian historical campaigns are also exposing those periods in Polish history that relate to Polish-Ukrainian or Polish-Lithuanian controversies. The aim is to attribute Poland an image of eternal "invader" and "nations' oppressor", whose intention is to

spread Catholicism throughout the "canonical territory of Orthodox Church" by force or deceit. The fact that Poland (including the Diaspora) has rejected its imperial paradigm and after 1991 unanimously backed independence of Lithuania, Ukraine and Belarus is skipped. Long-term assumption of Russian historical campaigns is to compromise Poland's eastern policy and hinder its relations with partners to the east of River Bug.

Historical propaganda is supposed to support Russian diplomacy. The latter is vulnerable to past controversies in Polish-Russian relations. Russia's refusal to address these controversies honestly demonstrates an attempt to evade moral and legal responsibility for the communist crimes. At the same time, Moscow is more and more openly claiming political and historical heritage of USSR.

**Russian historical propaganda embraces broad spectrum of disinformation techniques. In practice, it is accomplished by thematic campaigns with participation of the Russian (as well as selected – western) mass media, including the Internet. Russian officials play active role in those campaigns.**

#### **4. THE FIRST RUSSIAN HISTORICAL CAMPAIGN: 2004-2005**

The second part of 2004 and the first part of 2005 deserve separate chapter. Themes and techniques introduced then by the Russian propaganda serve as a model for the 2009 campaign.

During the summer of 2004 publications in the Russian press on historical issues as well as official statements became more and more frequent. They reached campaign intensity and lasted for almost a year. The campaign was catalysed by three different events. Firstly, international celebration of 60th anniversary of Warsaw Uprising held in the capital of Poland. President Putin refused to participate – probably provoked by the then Prime Minister Marek Belka and Minister of Foreign Affairs Włodzimierz Cimoszewicz, who expressed publicly their expectation to receive apologies for the partial blame of the Red Army for the defeat of Warsaw Uprising<sup>12</sup>. Simultaneously, Russian head of the state addressed a letter to the Home Army veterans in honour of

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<sup>12</sup> P. Wroński, "Powstanie Warszawskie częścią europejskiej historii" [Warsaw Uprising as a Part of European History], 1 August 2008, [www.miasta.gazeta.pl/warszawa/](http://www.miasta.gazeta.pl/warszawa/).

the Warsaw heroes. Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs' entered the discussion with a statement published 4 August, that recognised the request for apologies as "sacrilegious"<sup>13</sup>.

Second event that inflamed Russian media campaign was the political crisis in Ukraine after the second round of presidential voting 21 November 2004. Because of mass protest against the attempt of electoral fraud as well as international mediation, repeated voting was carried out, and the winner was Viktor Yushchenko – competitor of Viktor Yanukovich, whom Kremlin publicly favoured.

The third event was celebration of 60th anniversary of the victory over the Nazis 9 May 2005, which the Russian propaganda campaign was subordinated to from the very beginning in mid-2004. Since that time, the number of press publications and TV documentaries reinterpreting the history of individual stages of WWII and directed at the EU newcomers or aspirants, successively grew. Campaign was inspired by the round table of the veterans of WWII, organised and reported in July by the official newspaper of the Ministry of Defence of the Russian Federation "Krasnaya Zvezda". The other inspiration came from the August issue of "Spetsnaz Rossii" monthly magazine of the retired officers of antiterrorist unit Alfa. The publications were meant to counter the discussion on Joseph Stalin's policy in the final stages of WWII, provoked by the 60th anniversary of the Warsaw Uprising. The campaigners' attempt was to expose genuinely liberating character of the Red Army offensive of 1944-1945 and to compromise Polish WWII military effort<sup>14</sup>.

"Who set back the Victory" by Natalia Yeliseyeva (Strana.ru<sup>15</sup>, 17 January 2005) can serve as an illustration of the subject matter and methodology used on this stage of the campaign. The author stated that Soviet forces encountered unexpected resistance by Polish nationalists during front operation "Vistula-Oder"<sup>16</sup>. According to Yeliseyeva,

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<sup>13</sup> A. Wawrzycka, "Ludobójstwa nie było, przeprosin nie będzie" [No genocide, no apologies], "Tydzień na Wschodzie" [Weekly Bulletin of the Center for Eastern Studies] 27(361), 12 August 2004.

<sup>14</sup> After Poland was defeated by Germany and USSR in 1939, there were five Polish armies founded, four of them outside of the country. One in France in 1939, second in Great Britain in 1940, third in the USSR in 1941 (under the command of General Władysław Anders, it then left USSR and fought in Italy) and again in the USSR in 1943 (under command of Zygmunt Berling, it fought along the Red Army). The fifth Polish army comprised of armed resistance on the occupied territory. From 1 September 1939 until 8 May 1945 ca. 2 million Poles served in all military formations (regular, partisan, and underground). In the final stages of the war 600 thousand Polish soldiers of all armed forces fought on every European front line. In the summer of 1944, Polish resistance counted more than 300 thousand sworn in soldiers. On this ground Poland claims to have the fourth greatest allied army in WWII. For more information, see [www.ww2.pl](http://www.ww2.pl).

<sup>15</sup> Website, run by the advisor to the president of the Russian Federation, Gleb Pavlovskiy.

<sup>16</sup> Operation "Vistula-Oder" started 14 January 1945 and engaged 1<sup>st</sup> Ukrainian Front, commanded by the Marshall Ivan Konev. It was part of winter offensive by Red Army. Its main aim was to break the German defence in the 500 km line from Warsaw to Jasło and to reach Oder river in order to accomplish attack on Berlin.

Soviet troops in 1944 “crushed with the armed and active adversary – the so called Home Army”, which remained in “passive resistance” during the German occupation in Poland. Combat actions of the Home Army prolonged in post-war period, argued Yeliseyeva. The journalist referred to documents, supposedly proving that Red Army was attacked by terrorists on the Polish territory. In conclusion, the author noted that currently in Poland, western Ukraine and Belarus the Home Army is blazed in glory of patriots and Polish heroes fighting the occupants. Meanwhile: “Home Army, acting under the Poland’s independence banners, used criminal methods, resorted to terror, murders, and plunder. Moreover, nationalists’ actions targeted not only the Soviet army – Polish citizens have also suffered”.

Along with the date of international celebration of 9 May in Moscow, the number of publications was growing and their themes evolving. In the autumn, attention of campaign participants began to focus on the Katyn massacre. Characteristically, this thread did not arouse broader interest at the beginning of August 2004, when delegation of the Institute of National Remembrance (IPN)<sup>17</sup> headed by its president Leon Kieres came to Moscow to discuss the results of investigation conducted for 14 years by the Military Prosecutor’s Office of the Russian Federation<sup>18</sup>. In November, influential Russian politicians, including those occupying high posts, started to express their opinions regarding the mass murder on Poles in 1940. For example Mikhail Margelov, Chairman of the Committee on Foreign Affairs of the Federation Council (the upper house of Russian parliament), relativised responsibility of Stalin for Katyn in an article published in the daily newspaper “Izvestia” 10 November 2004. He requested that Poles should apologise first for Józef Piłsudski and his alleged decision to extinguish ca. 80 thousand Red Army prisoners kept in Polish camps in 1920. In fact 16-17 thousand of Soviet soldiers and officers lost their lives in Polish war camps then, because of hunger and epidemics of contiguous diseases. Definitely they were not executed by an order approved on the highest state level. Many of the Red Army prisoners when let out before and after signing the Polish-Soviet Treaty of Riga (1921), which included a paragraph on exchange of war prisoners, decided not to go back to USSR. Some of them even fought the Bolsheviks<sup>19</sup>.

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<sup>17</sup> Research institute founded by act of parliament of 18 December 1998 in order to collect documents of the Polish communist security services. IPN is also empowered to investigate Nazi and communist crimes and to conduct educational activity.

<sup>18</sup> A. Wawrzycka, op. cit.

<sup>19</sup> Z. Karpus, “Plennye zabytoy voyny”, “Nezavisimaya Gazeta”, 19 October 2000. Drawing comparisons between Katyn massacre and the faith of Red Army prisoners in Polish war camps of 1919-1920 is missing

Controversies in Russia's relations with its neighbours were used by state officials to accuse EU newcomers of emotional, anti-Russian attitude, leading to deterioration in Moscow-Brussels co-operation. One example may be an interview given by Sergey Yastrzhembskiy, the then Russian president's special representative for developing relations with the EU, to the daily newspaper "Nezavisimaya Gazeta" 17 November 2004.

In late 2004 middle rank politicians, without direct link to the presidential or government administration, began to present "anti-Katyn" in a developed form. Governor of Kemerovo Oblast Aman Tuleyev was among those particularly active (several articles in "Nezavisimaya Gazeta", including on 22 December 2004). In January 2005 "Dossier" journal of FSB veterans published an interview with Duma deputy Viktor Ilyukhin<sup>20</sup>, entitled: "Katyn according to Goebbels". According to Ilyukhin, merely "particular anti-Soviet and anti-Russian circles" in Poland associate USSR with Katyn crime. In his opinion, documents on which the accusations are based, i.e. Lavrentiy Beria's note and CC VKP(b) decisions of 5 March 1940, raise doubts as far as their authenticity is concerned. Ilyukhin argued that it was British intelligence specialty during WWII to produce false documents and secretly insert them to the Soviet archives.

Few days after the above-mentioned interview was published, Duma deputies Viktor Ilyuchin, Yuliy Kvitsinskiy<sup>21</sup> and Andrey Savelyev<sup>22</sup> called press conference and required the official Russian position on Katyn massacre to be revised. During the conference, alleged Polish crimes on Soviet prisoners of war of 1920 were recalled and the number of 80 thousand victims repeated.

This thread of Russian historical campaign of 2004-2005 climaxed with the decision of Military Prosecutor's Office of the Russian Federation of 11 March 2005 to

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the point also because Poland has never restricted access to its archives. Moreover, Polish national archives co-financed bilingual edition of an extensive collection of articles and documents on the issue: "Krasnoarmeytsy v polskom plenu 1919-1922 g. Sbornik dokumentov i materialov", Moscow 2004. Meanwhile access to the archives of the Russian investigation of Katyn massacre remains limited.

<sup>20</sup> Viktor Ivanovich Ilyukhin (b. 1949) – high ranking Soviet and early Russian prosecutor; deputy of Duma since 1993, member of the Communist Party of the Russian Federation fraction. Long-time chairman or deputy chairman of the Security Committee of Duma. Associated with the defence industry lobby. Known for his anti-Semitic views.

<sup>21</sup> Yuliy Alexandrovich Kvitsinskiy (b. 1936) – experienced Soviet diplomat, deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Soviet Union in 1990-1991, participated in disarmament negotiations with the U.S. and Germany reunification talks. Kvitsinskiy supported Yanayev's communist putsch in 1991. Served as ambassador to the Kingdom of Norway in 1997-2003. Member of Duma since 2003; represents KPRF, deputy Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee.

<sup>22</sup> Andrey Nikolayevich Savelyev (b. 1962) – activist of nationalist parties of Dmitriy Rogozin (current Ambassador of the Russian Federation to NATO), member of Duma since 2003; represents "Rodina". Deputy Chairman of the CIS Committee.

close Katyn investigation<sup>23</sup>. Russian prosecutors did not find any evidence of genocide in the 1940 massacre (despite the fact that they were Soviet prosecutors during the Nuremberg Trial, who defined Katyn precisely as the Nazi Germany genocide). They also decided to classify 116 out of 183 volumes of acts. The number of Polish officers interned and murdered in USSR, given by the chief military prosecutor Alexander Savenkov, was heavily underestimated. The most spectacular was, however, decision to classify names of persons responsible for the massacre under the pretext of their death. Justification of the decision to close the investigation was also classified. Major Russian information agencies (Interfaks, RIA Novosti) and few dailies and websites commented the verdict (e.g. Strana.ru) with considerable acceptance. Criticism came from independent newspapers and magazines (mainly online) with marginal influence on the public opinion. Moscow's "Memorial" pursued formal actions, demanding the case to be re-opened. The decision by the Russian Military Prosecutor's Office resulted in separate investigation by IPN. This step, in its turn, escalated Russian propaganda campaign and "anti-Katyn" thread.

Since the beginning of 2005 Russian mass media focused more attention on Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact. Discussion over its significance began at the end of August 2004 and developed with varying intensity. Undoubtedly, the statement made by the then president Vladimir Putin 22 February 2005 in Slovakian media, on the eve of Russia-U.S. summit in Bratislava, contributed to escalation of that thread of campaign. When asked about Soviet-Nazi agreement of 23 August 1939, Russian head of state said: "I would ask you to return to the events of September 1938, when agreements were made between Nazi Germany and western European countries, which later went down in history as the *Munich pact*. (...) The Soviet-German document was signed on a much lower level – on the level of foreign ministers – one year later, in response to the (...) *Munich pact*. (...) To protect its interests and security on its western borders, the Soviet Union signed the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact with Germany". Since that moment, Russian media used consequently the Munich agreement of 1938 as counter-subject for Stalin's alliance with Hitler in 1939-1941.

A statement made by Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the RF 12 February 2005 was yet another example of engagement of the Russian state in historical campaign 2004-2005. It recognised the criticism of Yalta conference of 1945, raised in Polish mass media, as a "unscrupulous" attempt to "rewrite the history" of WWII. Which is

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<sup>23</sup> For more information, see: A. Wilk, "Rosyjska kampania historyczna" [Russian historical campaign], "Tydzień na Wschodzie" 7(385), 17 February 2005.

particularly regrettable taking into regard, that the allied powers, gathered in Crimea, "shared desire to see Poland strong, free, independent and democratic".

Along with the political crisis increasing in Ukraine and the role of Poland in solving it becoming visible, the number started to grow of stories on Polish-Ukrainian conflicts on the one hand, and on tradition of East Slavic nations brotherhood on the other hand. The climax of that thread of propaganda campaign in Russia was a statement by Vladimir Putin during the Moscow celebration of 9<sup>th</sup> May 2005. The then president referred to "historic kinship" of the CIS nations, sealed by the alleged joint fight with the Nazis, and the group of artists, performing in national costumes of the CIS countries, danced on the Red Square<sup>24</sup>.

In general, in the summer 2004, ca. 40 articles on historical themes were published in Russian paper and electronic press, in September – 20, in October – ca. 30, in November and December – about 40 each month (these are online publications; one should also take into account coverage in professional and local press)<sup>25</sup>. Numerous and exceptionally offensive publications were written by Yuriy Mukhin, most prominent Russian author denying the Soviet perpetration of Katyn massacre. It is difficult to establish the number of dedicated TV broadcasts: quasi-documental films, documentaries, and reports in information services.

**Russian historical campaign 2004-2005 targeted discussion on motives and consequences of the Red Army offensive in 1944-1945 and partial blame of the USSR for the outbreak of WWII. Russian propaganda campaigners relativised guilt of NKVD for the massacre of Polish officers in 1940, and neglected Polish military effort in 1939-1945. The orange revolution provoked separate thread of this campaign, namely East European kinship as opposed to imperial legacy of Poland in the East. Russian special services and state officials, including President Putin, actively participated in and inspired the campaign.**

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<sup>24</sup> J. Rogoża, "Święto zwycięstwa w Moskwie: Rosja wśród wielkich tego świata" [Celebrating the victory in Moscow: Russia among the greatest of the world], "Tydzień na Wschodzie" 18(396), 12 May 2005.

<sup>25</sup> "Anti-Polish campaign...", p. 4.

## 5. INSTITUTIONAL AND LEGAL ASPECT OF RUSSIAN HISTORICAL PROPAGANDA

Institutional and legal decisions following the above-described media campaign are especially disturbing. They would petrify temporary effects of press publications and official statements. Decision taken in December 2004 to celebrate 4th November as National Unity Day was first in a row. This day refers to the capitulation of Polish garrison in Kremlin in 1612 before the joint forces of Prince Dmitry Pozharskiy and merchant Kuzma Minin. The initiators and propagators of the holiday missed the fact, that Polish (and other foreign) army was at that time participating in Russian civil war and not invading the country. Secondly, in its Moscow camp there were members of the Romanov family, including Mikhail Fedorovich, who soon after sat on the throne, which ended the Time of Trouble (*Smuta*)<sup>26</sup>. Unification of Russian nobles, burgesses, and peasants against the external threat is central to the holiday, which may be understood taking into consideration the crisis of statehood, decentralization, and financial property stratification in Russia after the collapse of USSR and communism.

It is worth noticing that decision to establish new national day has abolished the national rank of 7th November – the anniversary of October Revolution of 1917. It is true that President Boris Yeltsin has changed the character of that celebration by substituting Bolshevik coup d'état with Day of Accord and Reconciliation. Most Russians, however, missed that change and 7th November remained its communist character in the public opinion. Putin's decision to abolish it came as an exception rather than a rule in the government's approach to the communist tradition. The latter is not renounced in Russia in any kind of systematic way, which is best demonstrated by the Lenin's Mausoleum on the Red Square and the monuments of the Bolshevik leader in the centres of most of the capitals of the Russian regions. Moreover, the consistent justification of the alliance with Hitler in 1939-1941 and refusal to acknowledge that Red Army brought communist rule to the countries liberated from the Nazis in 1945 contribute to Stalin's traditionally high public opinion rating in nowadays Russia<sup>27</sup>.

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<sup>26</sup> I. Karatsuba and others, "Vybiraya svoyu istoriyu", Moscow 2006, pp. 140-141.

<sup>27</sup> Moreover, from time to time Russia encounters seemingly small but echoing in the country cases of rehabilitation of the Soviet *Generalissimus*. E.g. at the end of August 2009 a Moscow subway station Kurskaya was opened after completion of the conservation works. An original decor was brought back including verse of the Soviet anthem cut in the hall in its 1943 version: "Stalin brought us up – on loyalty to the people, He inspired us to labor and to heroism!".



It is no doubt that the officials have been examining dates as close as possible to 7th November, when searching for new national day. Almost 90 years of tradition made Russians accustomed to days off around that time. E.g. if the battle of Berezina (25-29 November 1812) took place few weeks earlier, Russians would be celebrating every year a commemoration of victory over Napoleon. Finally, Poles are not the reference point for contemporary Russians. It is proved by the fact that National Unity Day, celebrated for the first time in 2005, next year already witnessed massive demonstrations of the Russian chauvinists and neo-fascists, campaigning against immigrants from South Caucasus and Central Asia<sup>28</sup>. If the decision on 4th November was an isolated case of Polish accent in Russian historical propaganda, it could be recognised as deprived of any anti-Polish character. However, in connection with numerous and simultaneous actions, undertaken by Russian state and press, addressed at the Republic of Poland, the National Unity Day has established and preserved in the minds of Russians prejudice about Poles as stereotypic invaders and enemies of Orthodox church.

27 May 2005 Duma has unanimously accepted resolution condemning the attempts to "rehabilitate fascism and revise the history". A committee has been called with the task monitor human rights protection around the world – and particularly in Latvia, Ukraine, and Georgia. In the course of parliamentary debate on the resolution Duma deputies accused the parliaments of Poland, Baltic states and United States of falsifying history. Duma's act was a reaction to the international discussion, preceding 60th anniversary of the end of WWII and exposing co-responsibility of the USSR for its outbreak. US Congress and the European Parliament also raised their points in that discussion. 26 May 2005 the European Parliament accepted a resolution, demanding that Moscow acknowledged the sufferings of the Baltic states and other countries occupied by USSR.

Institutional actions included also new history textbooks, prepared by the RF Ministry of Education. In December 2007 the ministry has approved for trial use in selected regions of the country a schoolbook on Russian history in 1945-2007, edited by Alexandr Filippov. It defended Stalinism and glorified undemocratic concept of Vladimir Putin's regime. In August 2008 Ministry provided the teachers with guidelines<sup>29</sup> on Russian history 1900-1945 textbook – edited by the same author. It explained the Katyn

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<sup>28</sup> "Dzień Jedności Narodowej świętem rosyjskich nacjonalistów" [National Unity Day a celebration for Russian nationalists]" (adu), "Tydzień na Wschodzie" 37(458), 9 November 2006 r.

<sup>29</sup> Full version is available on the webpage of "Prosveshcheniye" publishing company: <http://prosv.ru/>.

crime as an understandable punishment for the fate of Red Army prisoners of war in Polish camps in 1920 and justified Stalin's ethnic cleansing, which triggered both in Russia and in other places a wave of criticism.

In May 2009 president Dmitri Medvedev has established Commission to Counter Attempts to Falsify History to the Detriment of Russia's Interests. This 28 people group chaired by the head of presidential administration Sergey Naryshkin includes representatives of the Ministry of National Defence, Federal Security Service, Duma, Russian Academy of Science, non-governmental organizations and journalists. The Commission embraces both people of conservative (e.g. Natalia Narochnitskaya) and democratic backgrounds (Nikolay Svanidze). As described in the presidential decree, the Commission is supposed to "collect and analyse information concerning forging historical facts and events with the aim to damage international prestige of Russian Federation". The body will report to the president cases of history forging and recommend ways of preventing them. Within the framework of its activities, the Commission will pay particular attention to "neutralise negative consequences" of historical publications, particularly those published abroad. The effectiveness of the presidential Commission's will be ensured by its right, bequeathed in the presidential decree, to request any of the governing bodies access to the relevant materials.

According to the opposition politician, Vladimir Ryzhkov, president Medvedev's decree is connected with the 70th anniversary of the outbreak of WWII 1 September 2009. The Commission was allegedly intended "to silence those, who would dare to write about the crimes of Stalin's regime. Using the pretext that people desire the truth, they are going to be deprived of the truth".

Establishment of the Commission coincided with the legislative initiative of a group of Duma members, who submitted a draft amendment to the penal code of Russian Federation, which provided for the punishment for belittling the role of USSR in the victory over Germany during WWII. The amendment draft provides for the penalty of 3 to 5 years imprisonment and high penalty for negating historical truth and "rehabilitation of Nazism" – not only in relation to the RF citizens but also to citizens of other countries. Members of the parliament would also like to punish countries, whose public institutions are found guilty of forging history, by breaking diplomatic relations<sup>30</sup>.

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<sup>30</sup> See: A. Smarina, R. Tsvetkova, "Patriotizm po ukazu", "Nezavisimaya Gazeta" 22 May 2009.

12 May 2009 president Medvedev approved "National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation until 2020". Attempts to rewrite the role and place of Russia in the history have been recognised as a threat to the national security of RF.

**National Unity Day, new textbooks on Russian contemporary history and the presidential Commission to Counter Attempts to Falsify History demonstrate an attempt to institutionalise historical propaganda in Russia. The initiatives of Duma deputies to toughen the existing legislature may result in creating an instrument of repression towards the historians and journalists challenging official interpretation of history. There is every indication that further administrative and legal actions will be taken in this sphere.**

## **6. STATE REPRESSIONS AGAINST INDEPENDENT RESEARCH CENTRES**

State repressions against independent research centres have been noticed in Russia at the end of 2008 and at the beginning of 2009. Then, ordered by the General Prosecutor's Office, police conducted several searches in the office of Saint Petersburg's branch of "Memorial", they confiscated archives, memoirs, and photo collections related to the victims of USSR repressions. At the beginning of 2009, the authorities increased their interest in publishing houses, particularly the ones specialising in history.

Among others, "Attikus" publishing house underwent the pressure, and called off publication of "The Whisperers. Private life in Stalin's Russia" by British historian Orlando Figes at the beginning of March 2009. Figes work is a result of a broad research conducted in cooperation with the historians of "Memorial". The book was a bestseller in the West.

30 June 2009, hrono.info website was shut down by the decision of Russian Ministry of Interior. It was appreciated by the historians both in Russia and abroad for presenting previously unknown or rare sources, biographies and the most recent studies. The website played particular role in Russia – where independent researchers have limited possibility to publish their works.

Officially, the website was shut down, because it published excerpts of "Mein Kampf" by Adolph Hitler. But according to the founder and chief editor of the website, Vyacheslav Rumyantsev, it was only a pretext – "Mein Kampf" is available in full on many Russian websites and hrono.info posted just an in-depth review. The real reason

for shutting down the website, Rumyantsev argued, was an article criticising decision by the governor of Saint Petersburg Valentina Matviyenko to cut down on the benefits to the Leningrad's siege survivors. The article discredited an important element of Kremlin's policy, which consist of particular attention paid to the veterans of Great Patriotic War. The latter is central to the Russian modern historical propaganda.

**In 2009, Russian authorities repressed independent historians. "Memorial", internationally renowned for its research on Stalin's terror, and dynamically developing website hrono.info, specialising in history, were among the targets of state actions. Public administration put also informal pressure on publishing houses, such as "Attikus", and its plans to issue a book on Stalinism by Orlando Figes. One can expect the Russian government to continue this policy.**

## **7. FILM IN SERVICE OF THE HISTORICAL PROPAGANDA**

During Putin's presidency, cinema art – and broadly speaking, feature films – became an important instrument of Russian historical propaganda. Film art influences mostly the young generation of Russians, who already lack any sentiments for Soviet times, but still search for historical identity. Russian authorities promote and support production of so-called patriotic movies genre. Monumental and pompous character of narration became a priority compared to the historical truth. Having direct patronage of Kremlin, Russian filmmakers started to take on the subject of the past more often. It resulted in historical blockbuster movies. Russian patriotic cinema art is supposed both to contribute to the new identity of Russians and to shape bilateral relations with other countries.

### **a) "Smersh" – directed by Zinoviy Royzman (2007)**

TV series in four parts "Smersh"<sup>31</sup>, directed by Russian filmmaker Zinoviy Royzman, is one example of the phenomenon. It was co-produced by Russian Favoritfilm

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<sup>31</sup> Smersh (Russian *smert' shpyonam*, Engl. *death to spies*, Glavnoye Upravleniye Kontrrazvedki Smersh Narodnogo Kommisaryata Oborony) – Soviet military counter-intelligence, operating 1943-1946. It was established in the course of reorganisation of special departments of NKVD. It was exempt of NKVD authority and subjected directly to the Chairman of the Committee for State Security (KGB).

studio and Byelorussian Belarusfilm studio and released first in Byelorussian state TV in January 2008 and then in Russian TV. The film tells a story of three officers of the Soviet military counter-intelligence, who come back from the front line back to the Hrodna raion in November 1945 to live a peaceful life of Soviet Union's citizens. Their plans are frustrated by "Home Army gang", which terrorises local people. The gang is headed by Józef – a villain of the story, "fanatical Pole", who never hesitates to shed blood of innocent women and children.

"Smersh" pictures a conflict between "Polish gang", striving to restore Poland's pre-war borders, and local people who want to live peacefully, supported by the Soviet authorities. The movie skips the problem of character and origins of Soviet rule, including security apparatus, in Hrodna raion. Director skilfully skips the pre-war history of the region, when it belonged to Poland.

#### **b) "1612" – directed by Vladimir Khotinenko (2007)**

Another example of contemporary Russian patriotic cinema is "1612" shot by Vladimir Khotinenko – an assistant of the most prominent Russian director and vivid supporter of Vladimir Putin, Nikita Mikhalkov. The film premiered 4 November 2007. Decision to shoot the movie was probably intended to promote original meaning of the National Unity Day, captured by chauvinist organisations soon after it was established in 2004. Meant to be blockbuster, the movie was financed mostly by the oligarch well known for his loyalty for Kremlin, Viktor Vekselberg<sup>32</sup>. "1612" is a story of the Time of Trouble, i.e. period of deep political crisis in Russia of late 16th and early 17th centuries. Main plot concentrates on expelling Polish military crew from Kremlin castle conducted by Russian levy in mass. Hetman (commander-in-chief) of the Polish army (starred by Polish actor Michał Żebrowski), who strives to overtake Russian throne, is portrayed as a villain, murderer of legitimate and rightful tsarist heirs and abductor of Russian princess Xenia Godunov. Polish hetman equates in this movie a man completely spoiled by the desire of power. He does not hesitate to commit worst crimes. Anti-Polish accents have been put very tactfully and subtly in the movie, which makes the overall message convincing. It is no by coincidence that filmmakers pointed to the weakness of power as

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<sup>32</sup> Viktor Vekselberg (b. 1957) – Russian businessman. He made his first money selling computers in the 1980s. At the beginning of 1990s, he invested in the Russian aluminium and bauxite steelworks. In 1996 created Sual Holding, which sells resources worth USD 1 bln annually. Shareholder and president of the board of Tyumen Petroleum Company (TNK), which ranks in the first three with regard to the output among Russian petroleum companies. According to "Forbes" magazine, Vekselberg's property was worth USD 1,8 bln in 2009 (USD 10 bln in 2006).

a source of Russia's crisis. Many critics found this work an artistic manifesto of new Russia and ideological bond of president Putin's superpower concept.

**c) "Taras Bulba" – directed by Vladimir Bortko (2009)**

Another blockbuster production was based on "Taras Bulba" novel by Nikolai Gogol. The movie was shot by Vladimir Bortko, a declared sympathiser of pro-Putin's party "United Russia". Production started in 2007 and used an enormous budget, which included resources of the RF Ministry of Culture and oligarchs close to Kremlin. According to the director, the movie intended to tell a story of "one nation, rooted in Kyiv Rus". Bortko emphasized, that "there are no two separate nations, there is one nation, part of which lives in another country"<sup>33</sup>. The film was released simultaneously in Russia and Ukraine.

"Taras Bulba" is a story of Cossack ataman, who incites an uprising on Sitch and heads against Poland. Besides the military motives, the movie includes a story of fatal love, which eventually leads to betrayal. A son of title character Andriy, falls in love with a beautiful, but vain Pole and persuaded by her, commits a treason. The movie story concentrates on Cossacks as the direct ancestors of Ukrainians – its message is a nation should unite around its leader for the common good. In the background of the main motive Poland plays negative hero role. It dashed Cossacks' hopes and turned out to be unworthy of alliances. Following the film character of Polish lady aristocrat, with whom Andriy fell in love, the audience bounds to think that the source of national treason is Poland itself. Similarly to "1612", "Taras Bulba" was subjected to the current internal and international interests of the governing group in Russia.

**d) "Agent's luck" – directed by Alexandr Sidorov, Stanislav Dovzhik (2009)**

10 February 2009 Russian national television, Channel 1 (previously ORT), broadcasted fiction documentary film entitled: "Agent's luck". It was announced as the first of 10 series, devoted to the "legendary" characters of Russian and Soviet intelligence. The series was to commemorate 90th anniversary of the Soviet intelligence in 2010. The movie was produced in cooperation with the Russian Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR). It was directed by Alexandr Sidorov and Stanislav Dovzhik.

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<sup>33</sup> Interview with V. Bortko, "Rzeczpospolita", 31 March 2009.

The storyline focuses on NKVD special operation, which was supposed to take place in January 1945 in the south of Poland. Main character is Alexei Botian, NKVD saboteur located in the Polish territory, and legendary agent of the Soviet intelligence after the war<sup>34</sup>. He was supposed to prevent German plans to blow up bridges on Dunajec river, a dam in Rożnów and Kraków's Old Town. Thus, the Soviet agent not only saved the lives of thousands of citizens living in Podkarpacie region, but also rescued Kraków – Poland's ancient capital.

In reality, Alexei Botian was born 1919 in Czertowica in Vilnius region (part of Poland 1922-1939) as Aleksander Bocian. In 1939 as a non-commissioned officer of Polish Army he was captured by the Soviets as a prisoner of war. He was let free and then recruited by NKVD. From autumn 1944 until spring 1945, he was working in the southern Poland as an officer of the Soviet military counter-intelligence having a pseudonym "Alesha". One of his tasks of that time was to penetrate the Home Army's cells. Paradoxically enough, in May 2007 president Putin awarded Botian with a title of Hero of Russian Federation "for courage and heroism shown during the operation to free Polish city of Kraków and for prevention of its destruction by the German-fascist aggressors in the Great Patriotic War of 1941-1945"<sup>35</sup>. Dr Maciej Korcuć from the IPN branch in Kraków described the movie as a "part of a broader strategy to emphasize Soviet special services' contribution to the liberation of Europe, when the Lithuanians, Poles and many other nations demand the communist and Soviet crimes to be punished"<sup>36</sup>.

**"1612", "Taras Bulba", "Smersh" and "Agent's luck" create a narrow image of the past based on manipulation of the facts or pure fiction. Movies of the genre are meant to complement education, but in practice they can have major influence on the Russians' identity. The films distribute roles of "victims" and "oppressors" with no respect what so ever to the truth and recent research. Russian historical film productions are supported financially by the public institutions and oligarchs, vying for Kremlin's favour.**

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<sup>34</sup> J. Prus, "Czy agent NKWD ocalił Kraków" [Did NKVD agent save Kraków?], "Rzeczpospolita", 9 February 2009.

<sup>35</sup> "Czy Kreml gra historią?" [Is Kremlin playing the history?] (ga, PAP), "Gazeta Wyborcza", 11 February 2009.

<sup>36</sup> PAP (Polish Press Agency) dispatch, 11 February 2009.

## 8. THE SECOND RUSSIAN HISTORICAL CAMPAIGN: 2009

Between May 2005 and summer 2009 Russian historical propaganda lost the intensity of a campaign. Apart from the above-described institutional and legal actions, three incidents deserve to be singled out in 2005-2009: president Putin's tour of Central Europe in February and of March 2006 and two pieces in the press – one on the subject of Poland's relations with its eastern neighbours and the other on Katyn massacre. They illustrate the most prominent features of Russian historical propaganda. They also prove, that the latter did not change its content, based on Stalinist historiography, during the period between campaigns of 2004-2005 and 2009.

From 28th February to 2nd March 2006 president of the Russian Federation travelled to Budapest and Prague. The talks with Hungarians and Czechs focused on energy co-operation<sup>37</sup>. Lured by the prospect of reaching agreements on strategic issues, Russian leader made few concessions in the sphere of history. He condemned suppression of the Hungarian Revolution of 1956 and "Prague spring" in 1968 by the armies of Warsaw Pact. President admitted that Russia is morally responsible for those invasions. In Budapest, he additionally announced the decision to return Sarospatak collection of medieval books, looted by the Soviet troops in 1945. 20 October Federation Council passed a resolution on the 50th anniversary of the Hungarian Revolution, where Moscow's moral responsibility was acknowledged again. One may conclude, that Kremlin is using the past to reward Central European governments, responding positively to Russian ideas in energy sector and not frustrating bilateral dialogue with Moscow with historic controversies.

Countries acting otherwise should not expect such gestures from Russia, as proven by an article by Anatoliy Shapovalov "IV Republic of Poland starts" published 11 June 2006 in Duma's journal "Rossiyskaya Federatsya Segodnya". A historical retrospect of Poland's history presented the country as a European troublemaker, megalomaniac, living a past life and dreaming of past greatness, and at the same time having a hostile approach towards the neighbours, particularly towards Russia. Shapovalov outlined contemporary Poland as Russo-phobic, ungrateful and unmoved by the signs of Russian friendliness. Author describes Poland as a "heretic" in Europe and blames Poland for all problems encountered by its neighbours. According to the journalist, the fact that in the past "Polish borders have stretched from the Baltic Sea to

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<sup>37</sup> For more information see M. Menkiszak, "Russia is stimulating the eastern policy", "Eastweek" 10(431), 9 March 2006, Centre for Eastern Studies.



the Black Sea, and Russia's throne was occupied by a Pole" results in Polish aspiration to remain regional superpower. Such publications undoubtedly aim at discrediting Poland as a promoter of EU and NATO eastern policy and actual or potential ally of Ukraine or Belarus.

Commentary by Alexandr Sabov to an article by Anatoliy Shapovalov and the Soviet Marshall Konstantin Rokossovskiy's granddaughter, Ariadna, "To remember in silence" was a particular manifestation of Russian historical propaganda in 2005-2009. It was published in the governmental daily "Rossiyskaya Gazeta" 18 September 2007. Referring to "Katyń", an Oscar-nominated movie directed by Andrzej Wajda, which premiered in Warsaw the previous day, Sabov questioned responsibility of USSR for the 1940 crime by stating, that "this case remains to be unclear". Sabov argued, that president Kaczyński's visit to the Katyn cemetery to commemorate anniversary of 17 September 1939 Soviet invasion as well as Wajda's movie "not only do not bring us closer to the truth, but further distance us from it".

In February 2009 Russian historical propaganda started to resemble a campaign. It took institutional and legal forms and its participants used sophisticated disinformation techniques. 10 February 2009 Russian national television, Channel 1, broadcasted the above-mentioned movie "Agent's luck" and in May 2009 president Medvedev established the Commission to Counter Attempts to Falsify History.

Political and economic factors stood behind an escalation of Russian historical propaganda against Poland. In August 2008 Poland condemned Russia's attack on Georgia. At the beginning of 2009 Warsaw intensified efforts to diversify from the Russian supplies of gas (LNG contract with Qatar). Yet another important factor was Kremlin's intention to forestall international discussion on WWII origins on the eve of celebration of 70th anniversary of 1 September 1939. Moscow feared that the Polish interpretation of the Ribbentrop-Molotov pact could gain support on the European forum.

Historical offensive of Kremlin in the first half of 2009 was diversified according to methods and forms of impact. Complementary to all other forms of historical expression, Kremlin applied repressions for the first time. In June 2009 hrono.info website was shut down. Earlier police confiscated archives of Saint Petersburg's branch of "Memorial".

At the beginning of June 2009, Russian Ministry of Defence posted on its website an article by colonel Sergey Kovalev, associated with the Military History Institute of the Ministry of Defence, entitled: "Fabrications and forging the assessment of the Soviet Union's role before and at the beginning of WWII". It focuses on the responsibility of Poland for unleashing the war in 1939. According to Kovalev, Warsaw is to be blamed for

the rejection of “moderate claims” made by the Third Reich: incorporation of Gdańsk to Germany and construction of an extraterritorial highway linking mainland Germany with Eastern Prussia. Kovalev concluded, that it was a reflection of Poland’s struggle to gain power status, based on irrational conviction in security guarantees provided by the Western countries. According to Kovalev, anti-Soviet policy of the pre-war Warsaw made Poland puppet on the world’s playground.

Reading of the 17 September 1939 Soviet aggression on Poland is yet another interesting thread of the article. Kovalev stated, that Stalin had no choice and must have concluded a non-aggression pact with Hitler in order to postpone the war with Germany. Author is not referring directly to the Ribbentrop-Molotov pact of 23 August 1939, which included a secret protocol providing for a division of Central Europe. Occupation of the Polish territory in 1939 came, according to Kovalev, as a consequence of Stalin’s defence strategy. In his concluding remarks author points out that both Poland and other small European countries are responsible for the fiasco of the efforts undertaken by Moscow, Paris, and London to counterbalance Germany.

21 June 2009 TV Rossiya’s news “Vesti nedeli” included a story on the origins of WWII. The program was broadcasted on the eve of 68th anniversary of the Nazi invasion on USSR in 1941 and was first of a series. The TV station informed that the story included excerpts from the “Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact” movie – to be broadcasted at the end of August 2009. The story accused Poland of adhering to a political alliance with Hitler’s Germany and Japan directed against Moscow. Poland was said to be among Hitler’s allies on 1930s and to plan attack on USSR. Authors of the story recalled Polish-German agreement of 1934, which in their opinion included a clause on military cooperation<sup>38</sup>. The coverage stated, that Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact allowed USSR to get back the territories illegally incorporated by Poland in the early 1920s. A secret protocol to the German-Soviet agreement of 23 August 1939 went unnoticed.

Poland was presented as a country that *de facto* participated in the policy of territorial partitions, carried out by the Hitler. Finally, Poland was equated to the Third Reich as an aggressor, that forced USSR to take self-defence measures. Provocatively enough, authors of the story moved the outbreak of WWII to 22 June 1941 by quoting

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<sup>38</sup> Polish-German declaration on non-aggression was signed 26 January 1934 in Berlin by the Polish ambassador Józef Lipski and head of the Third Reich’s diplomacy Konstantin von Neurath. The declaration did not have the force of a legal obligation and it did not include any confidential clauses, which would extend its content. The declaration began a period of normalisation in Polish-German relation in 1934-1939.

former member of the Central Committee of the Soviet Union's Communist Party, Valentin Falin<sup>39</sup>.

Polish Embassy in Moscow reacted to this film with a statement. It noted a.o. participation of Prof. Narochitskaya, member of the Presidential Commission to Counter Attempts to Falsify History to the Detriment of Russia's Interests.

In the summer of 2009 Russian propaganda campaign was fuelled by two additional events. 3 July 2009 Parliamentary Assembly of OSCE passed a resolution, which equated Stalin and Hitler's crimes. Russian authorities understood, that the point of view of Central European countries received international support, which requires counteraction. Secondly, in January 2010 Ukraine will hold presidential elections. Historical policy is one of the controversies among the main competitors there<sup>40</sup>.

17 August SVR posted on its web page a selection of documents from 1935-1945. They were supposed to prove that Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact was a justified measure to prevent Germans' attack on USSR from the territory of the Baltic states and that Red Army entered those countries in 1940 on the request of the local authorities. Then, 20 August, SVR functionary, major general Lev Sotnikov, commented broadly on the documents in "Izvestia" daily. Symptomatically, the Soviet intelligence reports, advertised by Sotnikov as only recently declassified, were already published three years before<sup>41</sup>. According to the Russian news agencies, SVR will issue yet another selection of reports 31 August 2009 – this time dedicated to Poland's foreign policy in the 1930s. This way Russian intelligence services attempt to create an impression, that Polish state archives still buries documents from the eyes of researchers of the interwar period. There is no doubt that Russian special services tried to provoke tension in the bilateral relations on the eve of Prime Minister Putin's visit to Gdańsk 1 September 2009.

Articles by the head of RF Presidential Administration, Sergey Naryshkin, and Minister of Foreign Affairs, Sergey Lavrov, in special edition of MGIMO (Moscow State Institute of International Relations) journal "Vestnik" in August 2009 may serve as yet another example of Russian states' engagement in modern propaganda campaign. Both authors listed Poland among the countries forging the history by suggesting, that USSR was partially responsible for the outbreak of WWII. In this context Prof. Anatolij

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<sup>39</sup> Valentin Falin – communist party activist and Soviet diplomat. Chairman of the International Department of the Central Committee of the Soviet Union's Communist Party, Secretary of the Central Committee of the Soviet Union's Communist Party, and long-time ambassador to Bonn.

<sup>40</sup> M. Menkiszak, "Rosyjska kampania historyczna" [Russian Historical Campaign], "Tydzień na Wschodzie" 28(103), 26 August 2009.

<sup>41</sup> "Eurasian Secret Services Daily Report", 23 August 2009. [www.axisglobe.com](http://www.axisglobe.com)

Torkunov's, Rector of MGIMO, role in the propaganda campaign should be noted. In May 2009 already, he publicly justified Molotov-Ribbentrop pact during the international conference on the genesis of WWII in the Royal Castle in Warsaw. Prof. Torkunov argued that Stalin's decision was provoked by alleged plans by Poland and Germany to attack USSR. The above-mentioned special edition of MGIMO journal demonstrates how instrumental is Moscow's approach to the Polish-Russian Working Group on Difficult Matters<sup>42</sup>, which Prof. Torkunov is co-chairing.

22 August 2009 TV Rossiya broadcasted a documentary story "Secrets of the classified protocols", which elaborated the above-mentioned thesis on Poland's role in unleashing WWII. The film was consulted by a long-time FSB spokesman, general Alexandr Zdanowicz. It accused Poland of manipulating history for political reasons. Second half of August 2009 witnessed growing number of articles reinterpreting the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact.

**In 2009 Kremlin launched new historical campaign, aimed predominantly at Poland. Propaganda attack came partially as a reaction to Poland's position on Russia's invasion on Georgia in August 2008 and to the progress in diversification of energy resources supplies to Poland. However, celebration of 70th anniversary of the outbreak of WWII in Gdańsk and Kremlin's intention to anticipate international discussion on Soviet-German relations in 1939-1941 were of key significance. In 2009 – similarly to the campaign of 2004-2005 – state officials played active role in reinterpretation of history.**

## **9. ANNEX**

"Pages of History – Reason for Mutual Complaints or Ground for Reconciliation and Partnership?" article by Prime Minister Putin, published 31 August 2009 in Polish daily "Gazeta wyborcza" should be regarded on the background of Russian contemporary

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<sup>42</sup> Polish-Russian Working Group on Difficult Matters – established in 2002 during President Putin's visit to Poland. After two sessions its works have been suspended. In December 2007 heads of diplomatic services of Poland and Russia reactivated the Group in a new content. Diplomats were replaced by the researchers and experts. Prof. Adam Daniel Rotfeld (former Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Poland and long-time director of SIPRI) and Prof. Anatolij Torkunov (rector MGIMO, member of Board of the Russian MFA).

historical propaganda. As well as his participation in international celebration of 70th anniversary of the outbreak of WWII a day after. The above-mentioned publication and speeches delivered by Putin in Gdańsk combine all elements of that propaganda.

Putin recognised 1 September 1939 as the outbreak of the most disastrous and slaughterous war that entire humanity have ever lived through. But then he went immediately to discuss the victorious ending of the conflict, noticing that Poland and Russia were allies. Head of the Russian government put victory over the Third Reich in the same category with other pillars of contemporary European security architecture: Helsinki Final Act, demolition of the Berlin Wall and democratic transformation in USSR and Eastern Europe. Then Putin condemned attempts to "anatomize history" and to seek "pretexts for mutual complaints and resentment". He also stated, that "no country can boast of having avoided tragedies, dramatic turning points or state decisions having nothing to do with high morals". Prime Minister Putin admitted, without referring to any particular country, that some make "the Nazi accomplices heroes, placing victims on a par with executioners and liberators – with occupants".

The paragraph, where the author of "Pages of History" relativised co-responsibility of the USSR for the outbreak of WWII, ends with a condemnation of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact. Nevertheless, Vladimir Putin immediately recalls the Munich Agreement of 1938 to prove, that "the Soviet Union (...) remained face to face with Germany, since the Western States had rejected the proposed system of collective security". Head of the Russian government expressed his belief, that it was the German party, that sought a non-aggression pact with Stalin in 1939. Putin concluded, that rejecting Berlin's offer would be "unwise", because it would expose the USSR to collision with "the Nazi almighty military machine". This type of statements Apart are obviously irrational – 23 August 1939 Poland was still separating the Soviet Russia from Germany. It was precisely the division of Poland by Hitler and Stalin, that enabled the former to attack USSR. If Ribbentrop-Molotov pact was a defensive measure from Stalin's side, how Prime Minister Putin would explain Soviet mass repressions against Polish citizens, including murdering more than 20 thousand officers, carried out after 17 September 1939? It is striking, that Putin did not mention secret protocol to the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact.

Analysis of the origins of WWII led Vladimir Putin to the conclusions with clear reference to the present times: "All experience of the prewar period (...) provides strong evidence, that it is impossible to set up an efficient system of collective security without involvement of all countries of the continent, including Russia". According to the author

of "Pages of History", common sufferings of the victims of the Nazis and common fight (including the German opposition to Hitler's regime) against the Nazis are the source of today's reconciliation and international cooperation. Interestingly, Putin compared post-war French-German reconciliation (which opened the way to the establishment of the European Union) to the Russian-German partnership, which in his opinion "made it possible to take a determining step towards building the Big Europe". The latter refers to the concept of the European order, Russian diplomacy has been promoting since 2004. The concept calls for two equal and respecting each others zones' integration processes: west European one and post-Soviet one.

Vladimir Putin expressed his gratitude for care and respect Poles show to graves of 600 thousand Soviet soldiers, who lost their lives to liberate Poland. He also admitted his understanding to the sensitivity of Poles about Katyn. Simultaneously, however, Putin related this crime to the deaths of Red Army soldiers in Polish war prisoners camps in 1919-1920. "Pages of History" end with an optimistic assessment of the future of Polish-Russian relations in political, social and economic spheres.

The article has been constructed in a way, that single statements create impression, that the Russian Prime Minister disassociates himself from the Stalin historiography (recognition of 1 September 1939 as the beginning of WWII; condemnation of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact; tribute the victims of Katyn massacre). However, the same statements, when read in a context, inevitably lead to a conclusion that Putin did not back out of the principal elements of Russian historical propaganda. E.g. he implicitly denied findings of the official expert commission, established within the framework of the Katyn investigation by the Military Prosecutor's Office of RF. Renown Russian scientists, members of the commission, stated 2 August 1993: a) Poland consistently rejected German offers to join anti-Soviet alliance in the 1930s; b) USSR consciously participated in German aggression on Poland and the Baltic States, in disrespect to the international law; c) mass execution of the Polish military in 1940 was the gravest crime against the peace and mankind – the war crime, which Soviet leadership is responsible for<sup>43</sup>.

Prime Minister of the Russian Federation repeated most of the points presented in "Gazeta Wyborcza" in Gdańsk 1 September 2009: both during the press conference with Prime Minister Donald Tusk and the international celebrations. In his Westerplatte

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<sup>43</sup> "Rosja a Katyń" [Russia and Katyn], "Biuletyn Historycznej Agencji Informacyjnej", KARTA [Historical Information Agency Bulletin of the KARTA Centre], Warszawa 1994. The document was brought back 3 September 2009 by "Rzeczpospolita" daily.

speech, Putin added – which was not conformant with the truth – that Duma has formally condemned Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, while the governments of other countries still need to disassociate themselves from the agreements concluded in the 1930s with Berlin. In fact, the agreement of 23 August 1939 was condemned only by the quasi-parliament of USSR in 1989 – contemporary Russian authorities have never done it officially. Besides, the comparison of agreements concluded by the European countries with the Third Reich with the offensive alliance between Stalin and Hitler is groundless.

Seemingly conciliatory tone of Putin's article is meant to demonstrate Moscow's openness to the dialogue with Central European countries, including on historical issues. Long-expected return visit to Poland of the head of Russian government after the visit paid by Prime Minister Donald Tusk to Moscow 8 February 2008 – deliberately or not – has soothed the reaction of the Polish ruling coalition (of Civic Platform and the Polish People's Party) to the above described statements by the Russian state officials and special services. Obviously, the Polish government withheld from decisive responses to the Russian historical propaganda in order not to provoke cancellation of Putin's visit. This way Russia attempted to strengthen divisions on the Polish political scene to show, that those political parties, that challenge Russian official interpretation of history are isolated not only in Europe but even in Poland.

This conclusion is proved additionally by the events that took place in Moscow at the time, when Prime Minister Putin visited Gdańsk. 1 September 2009 the governmental daily "Rossiyskaya gazeta" published an article by the Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergey Lavrov, entitled "Tragedy of WWII: who is guilty?" Head of the Russian diplomacy judged an assumption, that USSR could be co-responsible for the outbreak of WWII, to be an example of history forging. He also stated, that WWII was rooted already in Treaty of Versailles, in European countries' struggle "to direct the aggression of Hitler's Germany to the East" and to block projects such as the Eastern Pact<sup>44</sup>. The above-discussed article included also a statement that "the victory over fascism and the events preceding the war, regardless of how they are evaluated today, gave all countries of the Central, Eastern and Southern Europe as well as on the former USSR space contemporary borders, that remain recognised by most of the Euro-Atlantic family". This way Lavrov draw a link between questioning purely liberating character of the Red Army winter offensive and questioning European security architecture 1991+.

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<sup>44</sup> International military alliance proposed by France, when Adolph Hitler came to power. Paris' intention was to guarantee the borders in Central and Eastern Europe. Warsaw blocked the Pact, which would allow for the Soviet army to enter the Polish territory in the case of German aggression to the East.

Russian Foreign Intelligence Service went even further 1 September 2009. During the press conference major general Lev Sotskov presented a book "The Secrets of Polish Policy. Selection of documents 1935-1945". He ensured the journalists, that the archival records included in the book prove that Poland was going to attack USSR arm in arm with Hitler. Hence, SVR justified Stalin's participation in the aggression on the pre-war Poland. Piotr Gontarczyk of IPN pointed out numerous methodological errors in SVR "study"<sup>45</sup>, e.g. lack of basic information about the origins of the reports included in the book. There are also obvious omissions (like including reports on general Anders' army in the chapter referring to 1938). All in all the setbacks demonstrate ignorance of the textbooks on Polish history on the side of the authors of "The Secrets of Polish Policy".

2 September 2009 "WWII Score" book edited by Natalia Narochitskaya and Valentin Falin was presented during the 22nd International Book Fair in Moscow. It included a study by Sergey Drozzhin. He did not content himself with accusing Józef Piłsudski of an alliance with Adolph Hitler, but accused the pre-war Poland's authorities of planning the Holocaust of Polish Jews. In the preface to the publication Minister Sergey Lavrov expressed his belief that the book will "contribute greatly to the efforts aiming at consolidating historical truth in the circumstances when the truth becomes subject of disgusting politicising and open forging".

Finally, 10 September 2009 "Mezhdunarodnaya zhizn", monthly magazine of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, published an article by deputy director of the Historic-Documentary Department of the MFA, Alexei Dulyan, entitled "Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, a Portrait against the History Background". The Russian official admits, that USSR's decision to sign the pact of 23 August 1939 was immoral, but still necessary. Moscow was made to do it, because the western countries have rejected the Soviet projects to rebuild European security architecture. Stalin's aim, according to Dulyan, was to postpone the conflict with Hitler. This time there are no accusations of Poland. Dulyan focuses on the policies of Paris and London towards Germany and concludes by stating, that the experience of 1939 proves the necessity to redesign collective security in Europe – just as president Medvedev proposed in June 2008.

**One should not expect current Russian historical propaganda campaign to end any time soon. 17 September 2009 commemorates the Soviet aggression on Poland 70 years ago. January 2010 Ukrainians will vote for their president.**

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<sup>45</sup> P. Gontarczyk, "Polska w oczach wywiadu sowieckiego" [Poland in the Eyes of the Soviet Intelligence], "Rzeczpospolita" 3 September 2009.



**Then, in the spring, Poland will celebrate 70th anniversary of the Katyn massacre and in May the whole world will celebrate 65th anniversary of the end of WWII. All those events will incline Russian leadership to present its position on historical issues. There are no grounds to think, that this time the leadership will break with the Soviet legacy.**

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