



Dear Readers,

We would like to welcome you to the first issue of the *Institute of National Remembrance Review* – a journal whose aim, in the idea of its editors, is to become a reliable source of information for English-speaking readers about the recent history of Poland and Central Europe. The spread of knowledge about the region's contemporary history is essential, but despite the passing of time and significant improvements in the information flow, the most severe obstacle – the language barrier – still has to be overcome. The aim of this journal, issued in English and dedicated to academics, opinion leaders and other interested circles, is to present the results of Polish research and the Central European point of view on problems of contemporary history.

Each issue of the journal will present a collection of interdisciplinary studies on a selected problem from the history of the former Communist-bloc countries. In addition to research papers, it will include presentations of memorial sites and historical museums in Central and Eastern Europe commemorating the war, occupation, and Communist dictatorships. Discussions and reviews of historical papers

written in the countries' native languages will also be published.

Composed of two parts, the first issue of the journal features articles on the politics of history and politics of memory of the former Soviet bloc countries. The topic of how to overcome the Communist heritage on many levels is a good starting point for a discussion on the past of those countries affected by the 20th century's totalitarian regimes.

Both the politics of history and the politics of memory belong to the soft power of state policy, and form parts of the transformation policy in the countries of the region. After the fall of the Soviet bloc, the collapse of the USSR, and the transformation from Communist dictatorships to new, mostly democratic forms of government, the nations of Central and Eastern Europe faced the task of rebuilding their statehood, which included political and economic transformation, the restitution of property, de-Communisation and vetting, and academic and historical education. The shared experiences of aggression, occupation, annexation, genocide, and since 1944 the Communist dictatorship, have posed similar challenges in overcoming the consequences of the past.

By juxtaposing studies on various aspects of the politics of history and politics of memory after almost a generation (after events of 1989–1991), it has become possible to notice common elements (most often referring to how to deal with the war and the Communist dictatorships), but also the differences resulting from local specificities or from radically different approaches to the problem. At one polar extreme stand the countries which manipulate the historical image to legitimise their political actions; and at the other, the countries where the politics

of memory or politics of history is understood as a response to the need to create a social and national image, and is implemented following the truth and ethics of the historian's profession.

In almost all of the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, there are state remembrance institutions – in some cases, more than a few. Where the political transformation was early accompanied by transformation processes, such as the restitution of property confiscated by dictatorships or purging public institutions of people from the former regime (de-Communisation, vetting), these institutions of memory became normalised and began to wield a significant influence on the internal life of the country (for example in Germany and the Czech Republic). The lack or the weakness of some procedures (especially de-Communisation and vetting) led to the functional weakening or even the marginalisation of these institutions (for example Romania or Bulgaria), or, on the contrary, to the development of a state historical policy, compensating for the deficiencies of the political transformation. An essential and noteworthy element of the culture of memory is the activity of non-governmental organisations (which often have their roots in the circles of democratic opposition to the Communist dictatorships, such as the Polish *KARTA* Centre [*Ośrodek KARTA*], and similar organisations in the Czech Republic and Estonia). This is easy to explain: a significant role in the opposition movement was played by referring to historical truth which had been distorted by Communist propaganda. The defence of the human and civil rights of the victims of Communist regimes was also connected with their fate – the harm done to entire

communities, nations, and social groups which had been censored and falsified by the historical scholarship officially preached by the dictatorships. The shape of the politics of history and the politics of memory was created in the process of democratic transformation: from social movements (such as the independent publishing movement in Poland of the 1970s and 1980s) to institutionalisation and full participation in public discourse. For example, the commemoration of post-war armed resistance against the Communist dictatorship (in Poland the so-called *Żołnierze Wyklęci* [“Cursed Soldiers”], or the “Forest Brothers” in the Baltic states) began with the practically niche activity of a few researchers and activists, then transformed into lively social discussions, and was finally included in the collective self-image and popular culture.

The diversity of these politics of history across the countries results from many factors. The first is the extremely diverse historical and cultural background of the nations in question (this means that the experiences of war and Communist dictatorship shared by the whole region did not bring identical results). Particularly noticeable were the differences between those states and communities that been annexed by the USSR (such as the Baltic states or Ukraine), the states of the former Soviet bloc, and finally, the states that had enjoyed political and national independence in the 20th century for a short period of time before the establishment of Soviet rule. These differences also result from the degree to which the politics of history and its place in general state policy have been integrated and institutionalised.

At the other end of the spectrum of active politics of memory, there are countries whose authorities treat historical policy

in a manipulative way, as merely a tool for legitimising their structures and actions. They have almost abandoned the process of dealing with the dictatorial Communist past, and the public space even displays elements of its affirmation (as in the cases of Russia and Belarus). We should also note the imposition of a state 'historical standard' in Russia, carried out with the participation of formally non-governmental organisations.

It can be observed that the politics of history implemented in the region (understood in the broader sense as the attitude towards the past) has become a kind of litmus test for measuring the level of democratisation in each state. It may function as a tool for political engineering, manipulation or even propaganda; or at the opposite end, involving the conscious participation of states in shaping the discourse on the identity of civic communities, while maintaining respect for the norms of a democratic state and methodology of historical research. What makes the difference is the presence of a free discussion about the past and an unrestricted verification of the academic discourse about history.

The first issue of *Institute of National Remembrance Review* starts with an editor's debate entitled 'Poland's politics of history since 1989. Considerations, challenges, tools, and goals' between Prof. Włodzimierz Suleja, Prof. Andrzej Nowak, Prof. Rafał Chwedoruk, and Maciej Korcuć PhD. It is complemented by an article by Prof. Jan Pomorski, an outstanding Polish researcher in this field, published as another voice in the discussion (*ad vocem*).

Naturally, this debate focused mainly on the Polish context. The participants of the debate synthetically presented the notion

itself, focused on the beginnings of the modern Polish politics of history, and pointed to possible lines for its development. Among the conclusions were the observations of a permanent presence of a politics of history in national politics and the evolution of its model. This evolution passes through several stages. The first is the creation by the state of a framework for discussion and research, education, and identity, then the consolidation of a model of a vision of the past accepted by the state, and finally the institutionalisation of this policy – the introduction of *lois mémorielles* (memorial laws). The extreme expression of the reinforcement of the politics of memory resulting from the radical nature of past events is the penalisation of individual statements (as in the case of the so-called Auschwitz lie [*Auschwitz-Lüge*]).

The situation of this notion in an international and political context by Prof. R. Chwedoruk and Prof. A. Nowak in their interview is noteworthy. They indicated the patterns and counter-patterns functioning in the collective historical imagination, and presented the way in which they may be used in propaganda (for example in pop culture, where this activity may become both a vehicle for specific historical narratives, while also limiting itself to the role of image slogans with poor ties to real history or cultural traditions).

The articles collected in the first issue are devoted to the politics of history and the politics of memory of countries that were part of the former USSR until 1991: the Russian Federation, Belarus, Lithuania, Estonia, Ukraine, and Georgia.

The use of historical argumentation in shaping the image and ideology of the Russian Federation in recent years is discussed in articles by Prof. Andrzej Nowak (of the

Jagiellonian University in Cracow, Poland) and Jolanta Darczewska PhD (of the Centre for Eastern Studies in Warsaw, Poland). A look at the situation in Russia reveals an integrated state propaganda system using well-trying tools embedded in the current political context. The main asset of Russia's politics of history remains its victory in World War II, which is exploited with great commitment and on many levels. The historical narrative was unified, and efficiently transformed facts into legends. Its mythogenic function was intended to create patterns: archetypes of behaviour, a hierarchy of characters and events, a particular interpretation of the past. In the case of the processes of building the identity of many communities and nations, the mythogenic effect of the historical narrative was often democratically multi-themed and inclusive. However, in the case of the narration which was forced through and unified by the state's organisation, it was transformed into a propaganda system and a tool of manipulation. Shaping the historical image of a community for interim political purposes has nothing to do with the real healing of national traumas or dealing with the past. At the same time, the Russian politics of history has clearly focused on following all the contradictory (conflicting) historical narratives appearing in other countries. It consistently and selectively attacks the weakest elements of these narratives in order to discredit them, together with the communities that created them. The offensive use of politics of history has become a sort of trademark of Russian foreign policy.

Aliaksandr Laneuski PhD (of the Institute of History of the Polish Academy of Sciences in Warsaw, Poland) presents a pioneering case

study on building a historical image of the security services as a tool for legitimising elements of the apparatus of power in the Republic of Belarus. The politics of history has become an element for building the elite of the state (in this case, the security officers). The Belarusian authorities have affirmatively drawn on the Russian historical propaganda scheme and copied it as needed and on their own scale. Some of its elements, such as the cult of the German-Soviet War 1941–1945, have been used with enthusiasm.

The historical identity of the Estonian people and Estonia's politics of memory are discussed by Toomas Hiio (of the Estonian Institute of Historical Memory and the Estonian War Museum – General Laidoner Museum in Tallinn). The politics of memory in Estonia could be described as a working-through of the traumas of the past and the patterns of building the national identity created in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (based mainly on anti-German resentment), and commemorating the losses of the period 1940–1991, especially those caused by the USSR. Dealing with the 1940–1991 period occupies a central place in Estonian politics of memory, which naturally contrasts it with the Russian ideological-historical offensive.

Two articles discuss the politics of memory in Lithuania. The first, by Prof. Alvydas Nikžentaitis (of the Lithuanian Institute of History in Vilnius, Lithuania), presents a general outline of the Lithuanian culture of memory and politics of history at the turn of the 21st century. The change in the 'figure of memory' in Lithuania is proof that the process of dealing with the traumas of the past is still ongoing, including in external relations. The second is a case study by Prof. Jaroslav

Volkonovski (of the University of Białystok's Branch in Vilnius, Lithuania), which discusses the establishment of a national catalogue of holidays and days of memory (referring to the historical experiences of the Lithuanian people and their cultural identity). This study is devoted to examples of legal tools intended to capture and concretise the changing public demands for shaping the society's historical consciousness; it also presents the changing nature of these legal solutions.

The other case study is an analysis of the exhibition at the National Museum of Ukrainian History during World War II in Kyiv, Ukraine (called the Museum of the Great Patriotic War until 2015) by Olga Gontarska (of the Institute of History of the Polish Academy of Sciences in Warsaw, Poland). In her article, she analysed the attempt to adapt the message of the institution of remembrance to changing national narratives, sometimes formed by conflicting memories, composing expositions of affirmed elements of the past, including them in a common narrative without fully interpreting them, denying some messages, while mechanically supplementing the so-called 'white and black spots' in history (that is, topics which have so far been omitted or falsified). The final effect was the creation of a message consisting of confrontational but not disputatious narratives.

The existing elements of politics of history in contemporary Georgia were presented by Wojciech Górecki (of the Centre for Eastern Studies in Warsaw, Poland). The case of Georgia seems unique in comparison with other former Soviet countries because it involved a process of transition from the absence of any identity policy to its formation and initial institutionalisation in parallel to the

process of state reconstruction. The pattern of memory culture in Georgia remains atypical. The deep relations with Russia dating back to the 18th century, the ambiguous attitude towards Stalin, and the recent confrontation with Russia and its satellites make it inhomogeneous. Although Georgia builds on the history of the First Republic (1918–1921), it also assumes elements of a decisive break with the Soviet and Russian past. The issue is illustrated with pictures of the monuments. Many of them still exist in the public space as the (un)wanted representations of the past...

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