

Dear Readers,

**I**t would seem that everything has already been written about the Auschwitz-Birkenau Museum, one of the world's crucial memory institutions. So far, the message has orbited around multiple accounts of oppressors and victims, alongside those of witnesses, while a further insight into the matter has been either depicted from the perspective of history or translated into the language of film. Through the columns of the *Institute of National Remembrance Review* that feature regular articles on remembrance institutions, we have delved into the role of the Auschwitz-Birkenau Museum as a memory institution alongside any challenges it has faced to keep the remains of the camp "for all eternity", as enshrined in the Act of 1947 that established the Museum. And yet like any other, the site is exposed to both time and nature-related decay and it is not free from human influence as it is visited by millions of tourists each year. In an interview, Piotr M.A. Cywiński, the director of the Auschwitz-Birkenau Museum, shared his valuable experiences on being in charge of such a critical memory institution. I mainly draw your attention to the article *Nothing is universal when it comes to human pain*, a text that makes you aware of a wide range of challenges surrounding the need to obtain funds, the enormity of conservation work, the fight against time and nature to preserve the camp's remains, the millions of visits each year, its archives and efforts to spread awareness of the Holocaust. The topic is complemented by a paper presenting the functioning of the Auschwitz Museum prepared by Franciszek Dąbrowski PhD (Institute of National



Remembrance), while both articles have been illustrated with photos taken at the Auschwitz-Birkenau Museum by Katarzyna Adamów and Maciej Foks (Institute of National Remembrance).

The other articles in this issue complement those printed back in No. 1/2019 of the *Institute of National Remembrance Review*, yet this time focusing on how countries of the former Soviet bloc coped with their totalitarian heritage. What comes to the fore is the politics of memory whose theoretical framework goes far beyond the politics of history. According to Professor Jan Assmann's widely quoted theory of memory, in a classification of memory there exist the mimetic memory, memory of things, communicative memory as well as cultural memory, with these last two being key in grasping the concept of the "politics of memory." This is further illustrated by an example of the Federal Republic of Germany, described in detail by Joanna Andrychowicz-Skrzeba PhD (Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, Mission in Poland). In her article, the author has delineated how Germans, who struggled with the legacy of the National Socialism

and the communist Socialist Unity Party of Germany, or SED, have shaped their historical awareness. From the Nuremberg trials, through the trial of Adolf Eichmann in Jerusalem or the Frankfurt trial of Auschwitz SS-crew, the German nation gradually saw the truth of the Nazi mass murders and took stock of their responsibility for the Holocaust, both of which hinted within public opinion the issue of guilt and liability for World War II atrocities. After the reunification of Germany in 1990, the issue of remembering the victims and settling accounts with the second totalitarianism—the communist regime, took on greater importance. Both direct and cross-generational facts from the World War II period and post-war history, delivered in the form of accounts and testimonies and thus serving as an immanent feature of communicative memory, has fed the cultural area of memory, as outlined in Assmann's theory. This is further elaborated in the second part of the article where the author analyses the official speeches of prominent German and Polish officials in terms of the language used while scrutinising the frequency of their references to historical events—viewed as sensitive to both Poland and Germany, as well as those underpinning friendly relations between these two, including German aid to Poland during martial law.

Though the “politics of history” is a term absent from the Czech language, according to Maciej Ruczaj PhD (Polish Institute in Prague), it is worth looking into how this peculiar model works in the Czech Republic, as it relies upon grassroots civic initiatives rather than state-run institutions. While referring to František Palacký, Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk, and Josef Pekař, the author drew from “great narratives” that have

shaped the image of Czech history, pointing to a traditional model, under which the Czechs were regarded as a nation standing on the verge of two superethnoses, Slavic and Germanic, while drawing attention to its reformation and modernisation potential and Slavic character, the latter of which sharpened once confronted with the Germanic world. This was imprinted deep in the Czech education system. Nonetheless, Czech state institutions have only to a limited extent been entrusted with researching some aspects of the politics of history; among them were, for example, the Institute for the Study of Totalitarian Regimes (*Ústav pro studium totalitních režimů*, USTR), the Military History Institute (*Vojenský historický ústav*, VHU) and non-governmental organisations, including *Paměť národa*. From a legal perspective, the Czech Republic settled its communist past by adopting the Lustration Act and Lack-of-Freedom Period Act. What is characteristic for the Czech Republic is that it has seen many social initiatives set up by intellectuals and artists that to a large extent make up the Czech politics of memory.

In his article, Paweł Ukielski PhD (Polish Academy of Sciences, Warsaw Rising Museum) has suggested a synthetic analysis of the Slovak politics of history. Since the Velvet Revolution, the author said, the Slovaks have not yet come up with a coherent framework for its politics of history. However, adequate steps were taken by both state institutions and social circles. A widespread debate on the Slovak national identity encompassed origins from the Great Moravia, the symbolism of Slovakia, and its separate nature from both the Czech Republic and first and foremost Hungary, as well as issues like lustration and decommunisation.

As for the institutional sphere, the Institute of National Remembrance (*Ústav pamäti národa*, ÚPN) was established and archives of the former Communist security police in Czechoslovakia were opened to tackle the last two issues.

In turn, Professor Andrzej Nowak (Jagiellonian University in Cracow, Polish Academy of Sciences) gives his insights into Poland's politics of history and its relations with its neighbors—Ukraine, Belarus, Lithuania, and the Russian Federation—between 1989 and 2007. This required state authorities to both build new bilateral ties—while forming their doctrinal background—and then develop them. Carried out in accordance with the Mieroszewski-Giedroyc doctrine (that was articulated in anticipation of the fall of Soviet Union in the Polish emigre Paris-based periodical *Kultura*), cooperation could exert an influence on how Poland and its neighbours reinterpreted their past, after some joint archive research and document exchange. Polish authorities were consistent in invoking the Mieroszewski-Giedroyc doctrine, developed in exile before the collapse of communism in Poland, that urged reconciliation between Poland and its newly emerged neighbours in the East. This certainly contributed to ease tensions over Poland's plausible territorial claims. Nevertheless, it could hardly adapt to post-Soviet realities. In its stead, the doctrine morphed into a tool for Poland's politics of history at home.

For his part, János M. Rainer (Eszterházy Károly University) focused in his paper on the tendencies of political reflection on the contemporary history of Hungary. A nationwide campaign to build state institutions tasked with carrying out research

activity and spreading the knowledge of the 20th century was launched back in 1998 and gained momentum only after 2010. The origins of this movement should be viewed through the prism of the political “dealing with the past”, a past that brought much harm to Hungary. The country's historical baggage embraces, among other things, its losing a significant part of its territory after World War I ended with a complete military defeat, the 1919 communist revolution, the rise of interwar semi-authoritarianism, Hungary's policy of territorial revenge and its alliance with Germany during World War II. This in turn led to the German occupation and totalitarian regime of 1944, the participation in the Holocaust, and the Soviet occupation of Hungary, followed by a successful attempt to turn the country into a communist one, as well as the bloody 1956 Hungarian Revolution against communism and Soviet domination. Hungary fought an uphill battle to find a key to allow it to interpret its past so that it could uphold its national identity and settle the past.

In his paper, Stefano Bottoni PhD (University of Florence, Italy) delved into discourses on the totalitarian past of post-communist Romania. With a synthetic review of research on the Securitate structures, alongside with a description of how the communist security police crimes were settled and of that social discussion that ensued over the activities of state institutions (by establishing CNSAS and IICCMER, as well as the Tismăneanu Commission), the author has devised a compelling framework to compare Romania's discourses with those in other Central European countries.

Finally, the issue closes with analyses of two Polish publications: “Memory of

Communism” by Paweł Śpiewak, discussed by Cecylia Kuta PhD (Institute of National Remembrance, Cracow), and “From the Tsar to the ‘Tsar.’ A Study of the Russian Politics of Memory” by Wojciech Materski, as outlined in a study by Witold Wasilewski PhD (Institute of National Remembrance, Warsaw).

Although having been published some time ago, the book by Professor Śpiewak has not been translated into English, and thus it did not gain a full reception from English-speaking readers. Its author has broadly described Polish discourses on the recent past as they have determined the course of Poland’s post-1989 historical debate, alongside the state’s politics of history. He has comprehensively outlined both the character and core of some disputes over Poland’s contemporary history while laying out the attitudes of the main actors involved. The work is an excellent addition to the essays by Professor Andrzej Nowak (on the shift in Poland’s politics of history) and Stefano Bottoni PhD (on discourses on the past in present-day Romania) in this issue, as well as in the Editors’ debate, published back in No. 1/2019.

The book by Professor Materski is Poland’s newest and most complex publication, encompassing Muscovite, Russian, Soviet, and post-Soviet politics of history. As its Polish edition has come out only recently, it has not received a wide reception in English-speaking countries. Its analysis serves as a complement to the papers on Russia’s politics of history, published in both issues of the *Institute of National Remembrance Review*.

Just like in the previous issue, the one we are now putting in your hands comprises

an assemblage of photographs of places and monuments, in line with Professor Assmann’s “figures of memory” that carry the past meanings into the present while framing a significant reference point for the future.

Anna Karolina Piekarska  
Editor-in-Chief

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