



Map of the Carpathian Ruthenia. Gregor, František. *Podrobná mapa Podkarpatské Rusi*: Měř. 1:225 000. Mukačevo: Bartošek a Novotný, 1925, p. 18. National Library of the Czech Republic, kramerius5.nkp.cz

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# SOVIET UNION'S POSITION TOWARDS MUNICH CRISIS AND CARPATHIAN RUTHENIA QUESTION (1938–1939)

## **Abstract**

The article discusses the Soviet Union's position towards the Central-European (Czechoslovak) political crisis on the eve of the World War II (1938–1939). Special attention is given to the place and role of Carpathian Ukraine (Carpathian Ruthenia) during this international crisis since the conclusion of the Munich Agreement and German occupation of parts of the Czechoslovak territory.

**Keywords:** Munich agreement of 1938, German occupation, Czechoslovak crisis, Soviet Union, Carpathian Ukraine, Carpathian Ruthenia

At the end of 1930s, the international situation in Central and Eastern Europe significantly worsened, and the world found itself on the eve of the next war. Czechoslovakia found itself in the centre of increasing conflicts. The victorious allies of World War I – Great Britain and France – were gradually losing their dominating position in Europe, held for almost all of the interwar period. Germany ascended to the role of the most important international arbiter that had to be taken in the consideration by the leaders of all European countries.

Berlin, with Italian support, did everything possible to deprive Czechoslovakia of part of its territory (the Sudeten borderland, inhabited by 3 million Germans), and then to annex it. Aiming at accomplishment of its intents, Berlin sought the support of Czechoslovakia's neighboring countries, especially Hungary and Poland, in its territorial demands towards Prague. As a result, according to the Munich Conference agreement of 29–30 September 1938, Czechoslovakia, apart of ceding the Sudeten to Germany, was obliged to meet the Hungarian and Polish demands (see *Minutes* 1938; *Munich Agreement* 1938).

As Polish researcher Stanisław Żerko noted, discussing the Polish ultimatum for Czechoslovakia, only one Polish cabinet member opposed – Deputy Prime Minister Eugeniusz Kwiatkowski, stating that such move could harm Poland's image (see: *Diplomatic Note* 1938; Szembek 1972, 444–446; Żerko 2009, 171–189; *Myunkhen* 2018; *Pol'sha* 2020).

In early October 1938, Polish Army annexed the western part of Cieszyn Silesia, a territory inhabited by approximately 80 thousand ethnic Poles, for which Polish state fought already in 1918–1919 (see *Report*, October 11, 1938). This action, among others, served as a pretext for the Soviet leadership to – right on the eve of the abovementioned action – accuse the Polish government of breaching Article 2 of the Polish-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact of July 25, 1932, and raise the issue of Pact's termination (see *Information of the Soviet government concerning concentration of Polish troops on the Polish-Czechoslovak border*, September 23, 1938, *Dokumenty* 1969: 363, doc. no. 257). In the end, the Soviet government chose not to terminate the agreement, and on October 31 officially confirmed its validity. This was also announced in joint Polish-Soviet communique of November 27, 1938 (see “Soobshcheniye TASS o sovetsko-pol'skikh otnosheniyakh ot 27 noyabrya 1938 g.,” *Izvestiya* no. 275 (6742), November 27, 1938; Mar'ina 2007, 27).

Hungary, following the First Vienna Award of November 2, 1938, managed to annex the territories inhabited by Hungarian minority in the southern parts of Slovakia and Carpathian Ruthenia. Simultaneously, Prague yielded to the demands of the Slovak and Ukrainian political circles and, in October 1938, granted autonomy for Slovakia and Carpathian Ruthenia, in result building the tripartite federation: Second Czechoslovak Republic (as the pre-Munich Czechoslovak state was the First Republic) (Ofitsyns'kyy 2020a, 145–150).

Contemporary British and French policies contributed to the annexation of the territories of Czechoslovakia, and its following liquidation, as British and French governments did little to contain German expansion. On the contrary, by signing the Munich Agreement those governments *de facto* recognized Central and Eastern Europe as the sphere of dominating Third Reich influences, and its demands as a „natural process”. Just on the eve of those events, Neville Chamberlain's position was presented by his closest associate Horace Wilson in the talk with the Soviet ambassador in London Ivan Maysky on May 10, 1938 as follows:

„Chamberlain thoroughly considers the possibility of German expansion in the Central and South-Eastern Europe and also the possibility of annexation (in this or other form) of a number of smaller Central-European and Balkan states by Germany. However, he assumes that it is a lesser evil than war with Germany in the near future” (see “Telegram of the Soviet Minister Plenipotentiary in Great Britain I.M. Mayski to USSR NKID, May 11, 1938, *Dokumenty* 1981, 91, doc. no. 22.)

American neutrality did not help Czechoslovakia either. During the press conference on September 30, 1938, the US Secretary of State, Cordell Hull, announced that the Munich Conference results brought a „general relief” and called for the strengthening of the efforts for peaceful development of the international relations. (see Telegram of the Soviet *charge d'affaires ad interim* in USA to USSR NKID, September 30, 1938, *Dokumenty* 1979, 336–337, doc. no. 222.)

In fact, the only ally of Czechoslovakia in Europe that was – at least declaratively – willing to assist it militarily, was the Soviet Union. In the address given on September 21, 1938, in Geneva during the League of Nations session, the Soviet People's Commissar of Foreign Affairs, Maxim Litvinov, declared that his country intended to fulfill all obligations of the

Soviet-Czechoslovak agreement on mutual assistance of May 16, 1935, and that the Soviet military were ready to immediately consult the French and Czechoslovak General Staffs on the joint specific action with France, aiming at necessary assistance for Czechoslovakia with every available means (see “Speech of the People’s Commissar of Foreign Affairs of USSR M.M. Litvinov in the plenary session of League of Nations on September 21, 1938”, *Izvestiya* no. 222 (6689), September 22, 1938.)

However, the Western states’ attitude to the proposal of forming a collective security system was reserved. The Soviet-French treaty of mutual assistance of May 2, 1935, was ratified by France only a year later. Most doubts were raised regarding the fact that the Soviet Union did not have a common frontier with Germany, so the Soviet armies, intending to fulfill its obligations, would have to pass through Polish and Romanian territories. However, those states were far more afraid of the Soviet Union than of Germany, and categorically refused to give consent to the passage of the Soviet forces. The French and the British had the impression that the Soviet Union intended to draw these countries in the conflict with Germany, while staying away from such conflict itself. After the information about the effects of the repressions inflicted on the Soviet Army reached the West, the military alliance with the Soviet Union was considered of little value there (see *Telegram of the Soviet Minister Plenipotentiary in Great Britain I.M. Mayski to USSR NKID*, March 22, 1938).

The detailed study by Second Bureau of the French General Staff “Aide soviétique éventuelle à la Tchéco-Slovaquie” (“Possible Soviet assistance for Czechoslovakia”) of September 15, 1938, noted that “la puissance apparente de l’armée soviétique et le potentiel militaire soviétique ne correspondent pas à la situation réelle” (“the apparent strength of the Soviet Army and the Soviet military potential do not reflect the real situation”). The last part of the study “Aide qui pourrait être fournie par Ursul de Tchecoslovaquie en cas d’agression allemande” (“Assistance that Soviet Union could offer to Czechoslovakia in case of German aggression”), points out that “L’aide soviétique peut être fournie plus sous forme de soutien aérien ou militaire que dans l’envoi de troupes au sol” (“Soviet assistance should rather be provided in the form of air support and military supplies, than by deployment of forces on the ground”) (see *Aide soviétique* 1938).

In the last decades, following the general changes in the Central and Eastern Europe, historians of the region’s countries abandoned the traditional Soviet and post-Soviet historiographical interpretation of pre-war Moscow’s policy as peaceful in character and aiming only

at containment of German aggression and prevention of European war. Central and Eastern European researchers have sharply criticized the Soviet leadership's actions resulting in the Soviet-German Non-Aggression Pact (Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact) of August 23, 1939, and some of them even stressed that it was the Soviet Union that started or provoked this war.

To such attitudes, in my opinion, belongs also the ascribing to the Soviet leadership the intention of starting the offensive war in Europe already in Autumn of 1938 during the Czechoslovak crisis. This could explain, for example the position of a Polish historian, Marek Deszczyński, and his serious deliberations „whether the Red Army was capable of conquering Central Europe in Autumn of 1938 under the slogan of helping the ČSR?” (Deszczyński 2003, 202). Other Polish researchers also noted the fact that in the Autumn of 1938, the Polish government acknowledged the Soviet threat (see Peplowski 1996, 297–310; Włodarkiewicz 2002, 191–210; Kornat 2002, 207; Kornat 2010, 828).

According to a Russian researcher in the field, historian Vladimir Nevezhin, the outright reorientation of the Soviet leadership from the peaceful to expansionist attitude followed only after the signing of the Soviet-German Non-Aggression Pact. In Nevezhin's opinion, right from this moment, the Soviet propaganda apparatus, forging the ideological base for the rapprochement with Nazi Germany, simultaneously started the campaign justifying the Soviet territorial conquests. The testing period for such a propaganda was above all the Soviet Army's „Polish campaign” in September 1939, conducted under the pretence of „securing the peace and order in former Polish territories”. The 'liberation' slogans were finally abandoned by the Soviet leadership during the „Finnish campaign” of 1939–1940. While the West saw the „Phoney War”, the Soviet Union considered as its enemy not the Nazi Germany, but the British and French „imperialists” – „warmongers”, „Polish noblemen”, „gangs of White Finns”, etc. However, in the Spring of 1941, as Nevezhin claims, when Germany started to actually threaten the Soviet interests, Soviet leaders returned to anti-Fascist and anti-German slogans, and simultaneously started the campaign aiming at preparing the country and its people for a „crushing offensive war” in Europe (Nevezhin 1997; Nevezhin 2000; Mel'tyukhov 2002; SSSR 2007; Chubar'yan 2008).

Ultimately, Russian historians do not answer the question whether in the Autumn of 1938 the Soviet Army would be able to launch the offensive against the Central European nations under the guise of helping Czechoslovakia. However, the records of the General Staff of

the Soviet Army (Workers' and Peasants' Red Army) from 1938 are, for the most part, currently available for researchers. Such records typically contain detailed data on *Ordre de bataille* and strength of the armed forces of the potential enemies of the Soviet Union, and discuss the principles of strategic dislocation of the Soviet armed forces in case of war, in the West as well as in the East. One such document, dated March 24, 1938, prepared in the General Staff of the Red Army, and signed by its Chief, *komandarm* first class Boris Shaposhnikov, openly states that

„The Soviet Union should be prepared to fight on two fronts: in the West against Germany and Poland and partially against Italy, possibly joined by limitrophes [adjacent countries], and in the East with Japan” (see: *Note of the Red Army General Staff* [March 24, 1938]).

Anyway, it would be very hard to believe in the peaceful character of contemporary Soviet foreign policy, considering that the country was significantly engaged against the Fascist states bloc in Spain, and that unfounded persecutions and political murders took place in the Soviet state itself. However, despite the December 1989 condemnation of the secret protocol to Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact by the Congress of People's Deputies of the Soviet Union (see: *Postanovleniye 979-1* 1989), and the then Russia's Prime Minister Vladimir Putin 2009 statement on „immoral character” of Pact and its lack of „perspectives for fulfilment” (Putin 2009), the majority of Russian researchers still assume that the Non-Aggression Pact contained „nothing reprehensible” in itself, and was a real preventive measure aiming at averting German aggression against the Soviet Union (Bosiacki 2004, 238; *Sovetsko-pol'skiye* 2001; *Mezhdunarodnyy* 2009).

At the same time, Russian historians admit that this Pact gave 'green light' to the Nazi attack on Poland, but in the same way as in the previous year the Munich Agreement helped Hitler fulfill his revanchist plans towards Czechoslovakia (Herman 2020). Only some researchers are of a different opinion. Among them is Mark Solonin who maintains that even though admitting that British and French leaders made a great mistake signing the Munich Agreement, it should be noted that those countries did not annex even a slightest piece of the Czechoslovak territory as compared to the result of the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact, i.e. seizing by Red Army of territories not limited to those of the Polish Republic (Solonin 2011a; Solonin 2011b; Solonin 2011c). Moreover, Edouard Daladier and Neville Chamberlain agreeing to the Munich



arrangements were striving to maintain the general peace, while Joseph Stalin, approving the Soviet-German Non-Aggression Pact, most probably already knew that Poland would be soon attacked by Germany, and that after ‘Munich’ Hitler was not trustworthy anymore. Special reports of the Red Army Intelligence Directorate already in the second half of March 1939 indicated an attack on Poland as possibly one of the next directions of German aggression in Eastern Europe (see: *Red Army Intelligence Directorate special report*, March 23, 1939). The Oberkommando der Wehrmacht directive of April 3, 1939, concerning war preparations in 1939/1940 foreseen in the ‘Fall Weiss’ strategic plan for the invasion of Poland, stated that Hitler decided that „preparations should be made in order to enable implementation [of ‘Fall Weiss’ plan] at any moment after September 1, 1939” (see *Cover letter for the “Fall Weiss” directive*, April 3, 1939; *Oberkommando der Wehrmacht Directive No. 37/39*, April 11, 1939; *Enclosure to the Oberkommando der Wehrmacht Directive No. 37/39*, April 11, 1939).

The Polish conviction that Poland was the first victim of the war, and suffered the highest proportional losses *per capita*, has an unquestionable place in the national remembrance concerning 20th century (Kornat 2015; Yazhborovskaya 2015). The Russian conviction

Neville Chamberlain, British PM, after arrival from Munich on the Heston Airport, 30 September 1938. National Digital Archives, Warsaw, Poland, collection Koncern Ilustrowany Kurier Codzienny – Archiwum Ilustracji, ref. no. 3/1/0/5/268



that the victory in the Great Patriotic War saved the Soviet nation from biological extermination is equally established. At the same moment, Russians as the victors in this war claim the right to exclude their national remembrance from the juxtapositions with European standards. The rightfulness of this concept in the Russian society is out of discussion, and the cult of victory in the war without doubt thwarts the Russians' ability of critical analysis of Stalin's actions and of the Soviet era generally (Assmann 2014, 165).

In 2020, on the occasion of 75th anniversary of the Soviet victory in World War II, the Boris Yeltsin's Presidential Library in Moscow shared on its website more than 1700 items: archival records, photographs and parts of newsreels concerning the pre-war period. The first batch of these resources encompasses chronologically the period from February 1933 to the end of August 1939. Almost half of these records were published for the first time. All of those records are digitized and indexed in Russian and English. These sources are extremely varied in regard to the contents, provenance and authorship. However, there is something that ties all of them. According to the director of the historical documentation department of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Nadia Barinova:

“not coincidentally the project starts with the pre-war records. We observe the attempts at accusing the Soviet Union on par with Germany for launching the World War II. This absolutely cannot be allowed, those documents literally scream in protest against this politicized version” (*Obnarodovany* 2020).

Returning to the events of Autumn 1938, it should be noted that Soviet actions aiming at supporting Czechoslovakia were, above all, motivated by the intent to fulfill the obligations of the Soviet-Czechoslovak mutual assistance agreement, and then to prevent a serious change of European geopolitical configuration, unfavorable for Moscow, that would emerge from an armed conflict. However, for example, the post-war official academic publication ‘History of the Great Patriotic War of the Soviet Union in 1941–1945’ stated that

“Soviet government was resolved to ... come forward in defense of Czechoslovak Republic even in case of the French government defaulting on its obligations, and Poland and Romania impeding Soviet actions” (*Istoriya* 1960, 147).

– this statement should be assumed as a propaganda figure of speech only.

Moscow could not take the matter of the armed assistance for its ally in Central Europe seriously, considering that the Polish government did all it could to prevent the Soviet troops coming in aid of Czechoslovakia from passing through Romanian territory (by diplomatic pressure on Bucharest), and blocked such a possibility on its own territory by starting the great training exercises of the Polish armed forces in Volhynia in critical days of September 1938, with the same objective (I am not analyzing here the grounds for such actions which, from the contemporary Warsaw's point of view, were completely justified) (see *Project of the Resolution*, September 20, 1938).

Worthy of note is the German press reaction to the Soviet People's Commissar Litvinov address in the League of Nations on September 21, 1938. Particular discontent was roused in Berlin by Litvinov's statement that the Soviet Union was prepared to fulfill its obligations toward Czechoslovakia. The *Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung* commented on the Soviet People's Commissar address on September 28, 1938 as follows:

“Litvinov, confirming in his address the campaign conducted by the Soviet Union against Germany, tried also in the plenary session to incite the League of Nations against the Third Reich to provoke a world war. [...] The British and French position demonstrates the isolation of the Soviet Union. We see that the Soviet Union intends to loose the game started 20 years ago with Beneš” (see *Excerpt of the secret TASS bulletin*, September 28, 1938).

A week before the Munich Conference, on September 23, 1938, Litvinov, in a dispatch from Geneva, informed the Soviet People's Commissariat of the Foreign Affairs, and *de facto* also Stalin that

“Taking into consideration that European war, in which we would be drawn in, is not in our interest, and that everything must be done to avoid it, I propose to consider calling at least a partial mobilization and launching a press campaign to make Hitler and Beck believe in the possibility of a great war with our participation” (see Telegram of the People's Commissar of the Foreign Affairs of the Soviet Union (Litvinov) to USSR NKID from Geneva, September 23, 1938, *Dokumenty 1977*, 520, doc. no. 369).

After the conclusion of the Munich Agreement, on September 30, 1938, the situation changed fundamentally. Decisions taken in Munich by chiefs of four European governments finally paralysed any possibility of Soviet intervention in the Czechoslovak question *sensu largo*. Moscow interpreted Munich as British and French and Hitler's approval for the neutralization of Soviet ally in the Central and Eastern Europe. Moscow condemned Czechoslovakia for not resisting, and expressed concern that in the future the German expansion could be directed against the Soviet Union (see the Speech of the President of the Council of People's Commissars of the Soviet Union V.M. Molotov in the celebratory session on the 21st anniversary of Great October Socialist Revolution on November 6, 1938, *Izvestiya* no. 261 (6728), November 10, 1938). However, the danger of an all-European war was temporarily averted.

There was another reason that, with time, compelled Moscow to partially revise its earlier position towards the Czechoslovak crisis of Autumn 1938. It should be noted here that Czechoslovakia was formed not only as a result of the Czech and Slovak May 31, 1918 Pittsburgh Agreement, but also of the Scranton (Pennsylvania) Agreement of November 1918, signed by Czech leaders and Ruthenian émigré activists from Transcarpathia; the latter agreed to join the newly formed Czech state on condition of having autonomy granted to them. Czechoslovakia was also obliged by the St.-Germain Treaty of September 10, 1919, to form an autonomous unit in the territories inhabited by Ruthenians south of the Carpathians, in the boundaries defined by the Allied states, and to grant it the broadest degree of self-government (Subtel'nyy 1993, 387). Czechoslovak government did not *de facto* provide the Carpathian Ukraine the autonomic status, despite the provisions of St.-Germain Treaty and Trianon Treaty of June 4, 1920, with Hungary. The Carpathian Ruthenia (under this name the Transcarpathia was included in the Czechoslovak state in 1919–1938) and the “Ukrainian question” in general, from the very beginning, were of major importance in the Prague relations with the neighbouring countries, in the first place with Soviet Russia and Poland. There exists the notion in recent Polish historiography that Czech leaders flirted with Moscow, and saw the then Polish Eastern border on Zbruch river as temporary. For example, Marek K. Kamiński stated that according to the Czechoslovak Foreign Minister Edvard Beneš, Poland should have lost the Eastern Galitsia (or the Eastern part of former Austrian province of Galitsia) to the Soviet Russia. In such case, Czechoslovakia would have had a common border with

the Soviet Union in the Eastern Carpathians (Kamiński 2001, 434). In the recent Czech historiography, this notion has been definitely rejected. For example, Jaroslav Valenta pointed out that M.K. Kamiński (who authored the book „Konflikt polsko-czeski 1918–1921”, “Polish-Czech conflict 1918–1921”) believed in contemporary Polish journalists’ inventions (inspired in 1919 by Warsaw and Budapest) that Czechoslovakia was interested in detaching the Eastern Galitsia from Poland and establishing a common Czech-Ukrainian-Russian border there. Valenta noted that the contemporary Czechoslovak leaders – President Tomáš Masaryk, Prime Minister Karel Kramář, Foreign Minister Edvard Beneš – did not see the Ukrainian question in Eastern Galitsia favourably. On the contrary, they were ready to support the Polish position in the matter. Moreover, Valenta claims that in 1918–1919 Prague maintained only economic relations with the West-Ukrainian People’s Republic, as Eastern Galitsia was then the only potential oil source for Czechoslovakia (Valenta 2003). However, in the letter to the academic journal “Dzieje Najnowsze”, Marek Kamiński maintained that Edvard Beneš even signed an agreement with West-Ukrainian People’s Republic leader Yevhen Petrushevych concerning the detachment of the Eastern Galitsia from Poland and forming a union with Czechoslovakia. According to the Polish historian, this occurrence inclined Warsaw to launch the campaign to detach Slovakia and Carpathian Rus from Czechoslovakia (Kamiński 2003).

This example of the polemics between present-day Czech and Polish researchers on the matter of the Soviet involvement in the Czechoslovak-Polish relations and in the so-called “Ukrainian question” shows that even today the problem is a sensitive one for both nations. It should be noted here that the contemporary Czechoslovak government’s position is most precisely mirrored in the circular dispatches of the Czechoslovak Foreign Minister (and from 1935, the President of the Republic) Edvard Beneš, sent to the Czechoslovak diplomatic posts abroad (see *Cirkulární* 2002).

Recent Polish historiography also unanimously assesses the Prague’s position toward Warsaw in the subsequent period (during the common Polish-Ukrainian expedition against Bolshevik Russia in April-May 1920, and the Polish-Bolshevik fights on the Wisła River in August 1920) as unfavorable, which resulted in the overall resolution of the Czech-Polish territorial controversy for Cieszyn Silesia in favour of Czechoslovakia (Kamiński 2001, 6). According to Kazimierz Wierzbiański, a former Polish press attache of the Polish embassy in Prague, the Czechoslovak government rejected all Polish proposals

concerning the agreement on political and military cooperation. In his opinion, Czech leaders considered interwar Poland as “Central European Balkans”, embroiled in territorial disputes with Germany and the Soviet Union, and therefore acquiesced to Moscow’s demands, and did not want to cooperate with Poland. In Wierzbiański’s assessment, had the Soviet Union (not favoring a military alliance joining Poland and Czechoslovakia) not exerted pressure on Beneš, such a Polish-Czechoslovak alliance would have inclined France for a stronger support, which could discourage Hitler and Stalin from aggressive moves against Central-European countries (Wierzbiański 1986). For the sake of a balanced historical view, it should be noted that also Polish leaders considered Czechoslovakia as an “artificial creation” in the post-Versailles Europe. The Polish Foreign Minister Józef Beck’s letter to the Polish ambassador in Germany of September 19, 1938, concerning the instructions for the talks with Hitler, contains the following passage:

“We consider the Czechoslovak Republic as an artificial creation, satisfying some doctrines and combinations, but not respecting the reality of the needs and healthy rights of the Central European nations” (see: Letter of the Polish Minister of Foreign Affairs Józef Beck to the Polish Minister in Germany Józef Lipski, containing the instructions for the talks with Adolf Hitler, September 19, 1938, *Dokumenty* 1969, 361, doc. no. 256).

As is universally known, the Slovak and Transcarpathian leaders took advantage of the German annexation of Sudeten on October 1, 1938, and subsequent weakening of the Prague government, and declared autonomy. On October 11, 1938, the Czechoslovak government under German pressure agreed to the creation of autonomous government for the “Transcarpathian Ukraine”. The Transcarpathian Ukraine’s autonomy was supported by the Third Reich; the Reich did not support Polish-Hungarian plans for the annexation of the whole Transcarpathian Ukraine by Hungary (see Telegram of the German Minister in Hungary O. Erdmannsdorf to the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs, October 13, 1938, *God* 1990, 46, doc. no. 26).

On November 22, 1938, the Czechoslovak parliament confirmed Transcarpathian Ukraine’s autonomy, which instantly caused some agitation in several countries. The mobilisation of the Ukrainian national movement alarmed, first of all, the Polish government, which favored Hungarian aspirations for the annexation of Subcarpathia. In the opinion of Polish and Hungarian leaders, the establishment of a common Polish-Hungarian border would liquidate the source of the Ukrainian

upheaval in its very beginnings. Thus, during the short existence of Carpathian Ukraine, Polish and Hungarian military units constantly incited provocations on its borders (Samuś, Badziak, Matwiejew 1998; Morozov 2004; see *Telegram of the Soviet Minister Plenipotentiary in Czechoslovakia S.S. Alexandrovskiy to USSR NKID*, October 29, 1938).

Many European states were also alarmed by the autonomous Carpathian Ukraine government's Germany-oriented stance – as the only country that allegedly “promised Ukrainians their protection”. The Carpathian-Ukrainian newspaper “Nova Svoboda” informed about such supposition (the newspaper was published in Uzhhorod, then in Khust, where all of the local Czechoslovak authorities, institutions and organization evacuated to after the Vienna Award of November 2, 1938) (see *Nimechchyna za Pidkarpattya*, October 18, 1938, p. 1; *Dva nimets'ki plyany*, October 23, 1938, p. 1; *Nimechchyna stverdzhuye*, November 22, 1938, p. 2). Prime Minister Avhustyn Voloshin held Utopian hopes for Hitler's pro-Carpathian-Ukrainian sentiments. This occurrence was not accidentally (although without further developments) the reason why British and French governments perceived Hitler's “support” for the Carpathian Ukraine as the first step to the establishment of the vassal Ukrainian state by Germany.

How Hitler's plans were seen by British in December 1938, may be seen from the following account of the Soviet minister plenipotentiary in Great Britain, Ivan Maysky who informed Kremlin that:

“Hitler's plan comes down to regaining the ‘Corridor’ and Silesia, and detaching the Ukrainian part from Poland, uniting it with Carpathian Ukraine, and to establish of these two the vassalized Ukrainian state of the Czechoslovakian type. It is the task for the nearest future. In the longer perspective, Hitler perhaps thinks about launching of an operation against the Soviet Ukraine, however he is not going to take such risk now” (see Record of the Conversation of Soviet Minister Plenipotentiary in Great Britain I. Mayski with Lloyd George MP, December 6, 1938, *Dokumenty* 1977, 661–662, doc. no. 479; Telegram of the Soviet Minister Plenipotentiary in France Ya. Z. Surin to USSR NKID, December 8, 1938, *Dokumenty* 1977, 662–663, doc. no. 480).

The possibility of transforming Transcarpathia into the core of a larger independent Ukrainian state alarmed also the Soviet leadership and caused further tensions in the Berlin-Moscow relations. The German press used granting of the autonomy to the Transcarpathian Ukraine to launch the campaign for merging the Soviet Ukraine with

Carpathian Ukraine. The formal German support for the idea of establishing a great Ukrainian state – starting from the Carpathian Ukraine (a dream of Avhustyn Voloshin's government as well as of the Organization of the Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN) leadership) aimed at pressuring not only Poland and Hungary, but also the Soviet Union (Vegesh 1998, 16; Grytsak 2000, 202).

Many of the coded dispatches of the Soviet chargé d'affaires in Germany, Georgiy Astakhov, directed to the People's Commissariat of the Foreign Affairs note the intensive discussions of the "Ukrainian question" and manners of its solution in the Nazi circles in Germany. In one of those dispatches, of December 14, 1938, Astakhov reported:

"The solution of the 'question' on the basis of the establishment of 'united' Ukraine, composed of all of its parts, including the Soviet one, is being considered... We could justify our rights to the Carpathian Ukraine far better, namely, that it [Carpathian Ukraine] could belong to the ours [territories]." (see *Telegram of the Soviet charge d'affaires ad interim in Germany G.A. Astakhov*, December 14, 1938.)

The People's Commissar of the Internal Affairs Lavrentiy Beria's report of December 21, 1938, referring to the information gained in the Italian Foreign Ministry circles, openly informed Stalin about the German plans of the intervention against the Soviet Union:

"During Ribbentrop's last visit in Rome, it became clear that the moderate Italian tendencies towards the Soviet Union did not find a response in Berlin. With respect to this question, Hitler fully solidarizes with the Japanese. He wants to make the bridgehead against the Soviet Union from today's Czechoslovakia and Subcarpathian Ukraine... To that end, he will supposedly not restrain himself from the violation of Romanian, and if necessary, also Polish borders." (see *Information of the People's Commissar of the Internal Affairs L.I. Beria to I. V. Stalin*, December 21, 1938).

In his speech during 18<sup>th</sup> Assembly of VKP(b) on March 10, 1939, Stalin could not omit this question. He criticized the idea of adjoining the 30-million Soviet Ukraine to the region inhabited by barely 700.000 people, regarding it as "joining of the elephant to a little goat". This criticism, however, was not directed at the German leadership, but against the English, French and American press, which, according to Stalin

NIECH ŻYJE RZĄD ROBOTNICZY I WŁOŚCIANSKI

REDAKCJA... ADMINISTRACJA...

Cena numeru 10 groszy



Wydawca: Rada Naczelna P. P. S.

PLACATKA POLICYJNA WYDZIAŁA GOSPODARWA

NIECH ŻYJE SOCJALIZM!

WARSZAWA I, UL. WARSZAWA NR. 7... KONTAKT CZECHOWE W P.K.G. 175

Wersja polska... Wersja czeska... Wersja słowacka...

Słowacja ogłosiła niepodległość pod protektorem Berlina
Nowy rozbiór Czechosłowacji
Wojska niemieckie wkroczyły do Morawskiej Ostrawy



KSIĄDZ TISO

Wypowiedź w Czechosłowacji... LONDYN I PARYŻ ODMÓWIŁY INTERWENCJI

WYDARZENIA W CZECHOSŁOWACJI... O STARCZAKACH NA GRANICACH WĘGERSKICH

Roosevelt żąda 150 milionów dolarów na walkę z bezrobociem

Prezydent Roosevelt żąda 150 milionów dolarów na walkę z bezrobociem

NA LIP... Jak to się odbyło... ZARZĄDZENIA WOJSKOWE POLSKIE NA GRANICY RUSI PODKARPAKIEJ

Ultimatum Budapesztu i odpowiedź Pragi

Węgry obsadzają Ruś Podkarpacką
Zadanie opuszczenia Rusi przez wojska czeskie

Prezydent Hacha wyjechał do Berlina

Wieloletni... Władza... Władza...

Władza... Władza...

Władza... Władza...

Władza... Władza...

Władza... Władza...

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The first page of the Polish Socialist newspaper "Robotnik" of 15 March 1939, announcing German and Hungarian annexations of Czechoslovakia, and the Slovak declaration of independence: "Slovakia announced independence under Berlin's protectorate. New Partition of Czechoslovakia. German troops entered Moravská Ostrava", "Budapest's ultimatum and Prague's response. Hungarians occupy Carpathian Ruthenia. Demand for Czech troops to leave Ruthenia." National Library, Warsaw, Poland, polona.pl



“cried themselves hoarse that Germans are coming for the Soviet Ukraine, that they have now the so-called Carpathian Ukraine (...), that Germans will merge the Soviet Ukraine no later than this Spring (...) with the so-called Carpathian Ukraine. It looks like this suspicious noise is aimed at rasing the Soviet Union’s wrath against Germany and provoke a conflict with Germany for no clear reason.” (see *XVIII Syezd* 1939, 8–9).

The German leadership took Stalin’s speech for the Soviet Union’s resignation from claims to this part of Ukrainian-inhabited territories. Simultaneously to the final subjugation of the Czechoslovak Republic by Germany on March 15, 1939, Hitler accepted the Hungarian occupation of the Transcarpathia, as Hungary on February 24, 1939, joined the Anti-Comintern Pact (see *Cover letter*, March 15, 1939, and *Note*, March 16, 1939). Budapest ultimately demanded that the Czechoslovak authorities cede the Transcarpathian Ukraine to Hungary. On March 14, 1939, the parliament of the Carpathian Ukraine declared independence, but the very next day the Hungarian army invaded that territory (the entire territory of the Transcarpathian Ukraine was captured by March 18, 1939). (Ofitsyns’kyy 2020b, 60–73).

In the diplomatic note of March 18, 1939, the Soviet People’s Commissar of Foreign Affairs, Maxim Litvinov, personally informed the German ambassador in the Soviet Union, Friedrich Werner von der Schulenburg, that the Soviet government cannot recognize the annexation of the Czechoslovak Republic by the Third Reich. The note stressed, in particular, that

“Czechoslovak president Mr. Emil Hácha, when signing the Berlin document on 15<sup>th</sup> this month [March], had no authority from his nation to do that, and acted in distinct contradiction of Articles 64 and 65 of the Czechoslovak Constitution and the will of his nation. As a result, the document cannot be recognized as lawfully valid... The above remarks are also fully applicable to the change of the status of Slovakia in the spirit of its subordination to the German Reich, which is not justified in any way by the Slovak nation’s will (...). The actions of the German government are the signal for a brutal invasion of the Hungarian forces in Carpathian Ruthenia and a violation of the basic rights of its population.” (see *Personal note*, March 18, 1939).

In the opinion of the Soviet government, German actions did not remove the threats for the universal peace. On the contrary, they fundamentally increased such threats, infringing Central European stability.

It should be noted, in conclusion, that the hopes of those politicians who expected the establishment of a common Czechoslovak-Soviet frontier, were met only after World War II. Actually, it happened at the moment when the Soviet dictat was imposed in Czechoslovakia, as in the whole Central and Eastern Europe. The Polish-Czechoslovak territorial dispute over the Cieszyn Silesia had to be resolved not in Prague or Warsaw, and not with the participation of the Western states, but in Moscow, with Soviet intermediates. The 'Munich History' finally ended only in 1974 when an agreement between Czechoslovakia and the Federal Republic of Germany was signed.

A natural desire to justify the actions of one's own nation may be seen in each of the many imagings of the past in national remembrances. Nations never erase the losses and tragedies from their remembrances. However, the particularities of a national remembrance cannot be the basis for enmity between nations and conflicts between the states. The recognition of the neighbouring nations' imagings of the past, and the understanding of the historical reality behind it, is of essential importance here: not the acceptance, but understanding, not the replacement of its own historical truth by a foreign one, but the complementation and enrichment with one's own reception of history.

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