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INTRODUCTION: The End of History or the History that Started to Happen?

The transition in the Soviet Union went in multiple directions, which were unexpected to the architect of the *perestroika*. Apparently, the dissolution of the Soviet Union, as well as further developments in the countries that gained independence, were not even remotely wanted by Mikhail Gorbachev. However, the outcome of the transition was uneven in political or territorial terms. While for the former Warsaw Pact countries the collapse of the Soviet dominance and disintegration of the Communist parties' dictatorships opened the way to the restitution of sovereignty, for the former Soviet republics the change was quite tumultuous. The Lithuanian and Latvian bid to restore independence was met with Soviet armed response, the establishment of Moldovan, Georgian, Azerbaijani and Armenian independent states resulted in the ignition of national conflicts, exacerbated by Russian interference, and the formation of the unrecognised statehoods – Transnistria, Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Artsakh (Nagorno-Karabakh), as well as the joining of the Nakhichevan to Azerbaijan, and the introduction of the so-called Gagauz clause in the Moldovan constitution. The course of the Tajik civil war was also an opportunity for Russian interference. The former Soviet imperial policies of Russification (equated with positively-seen Sovietisation) caused a forced influx of the Russian-speaking Soviet citizens into the other Soviet republics, and the degradation of national languages and cultures (seen as beacons of a 'bourgeoisie nationalism'). The division of the Soviet empire along the boundaries of former Soviet republics – emerging as independent states, in many instances ruled by their former Communist party elites – resulted in forming states with unclear or non-existent allegiance of their citizens and inhabitants, economic and energy dependence, unstable national legitimacies, and conflicts spread along unexpected lines. The political shape of post-Soviet countries also emerged differentiated. The establishment of formal democratic rule went through divergent paths: from development into fully functioning democracies in the Baltic states, through the grey zone of states wavering from the rule of law to the kleptocratic and oligarchic rule, up to dictatorships. Those occurrences have set a number of deadlocks to the internal and international position of the then new post-Soviet states. The Russian interference left several "caches of conflict" in South Caucasus and in Moldova in form of the unrecognised statehoods of Transnistria, South Ossetia and Abkhazia, thwarting Georgian and Moldovan political aspirations and tying their policies to the Russian position in the matters of their very sovereignty. The large numbers of Russian-speaking inhabitants of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania undermine the political and social stability of those countries. In fact, many of the former Soviet countries appeared to be hostages to divisive Soviet policies, and their ability to achieve their own sovereignty and rule of law was distinctly tied to their capacity of establishing national aims and narratives.

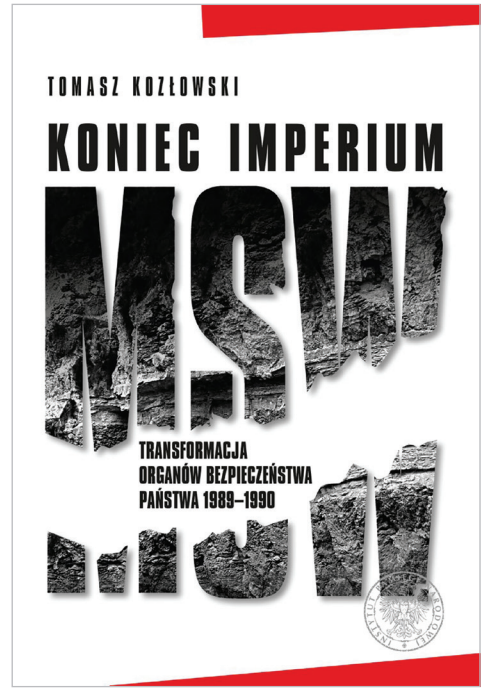
The distinct feature of the transformation in the former Soviet Union – in fact shared to some extent with the former Soviet Bloc

countries – was the occurrence that any kind of traditional political currents predating establishment of Soviet rule and even some elements of national identities was blurred or actually outdated (although matters of legal continuity were of key importance for the Baltic states). The ruling elites faced not only power struggles and confrontation with foreign (mainly Russian) interference, but also conflicting national and also religious identity narratives, often failing to navigate between the need to secure national identity and state cohesion, bid to establish rule of law and fair representative democracy, as well as overwhelming corruption, lack of identification with new state, post-Soviet nostalgias and allegiances. Building a new political entity and passage from a lack of freedom and ideologically motivated reign of lies to a system based on human and citizen rights, and identity security, needed political and also narrative cohesion as well as integrity and consistency in nation-building.

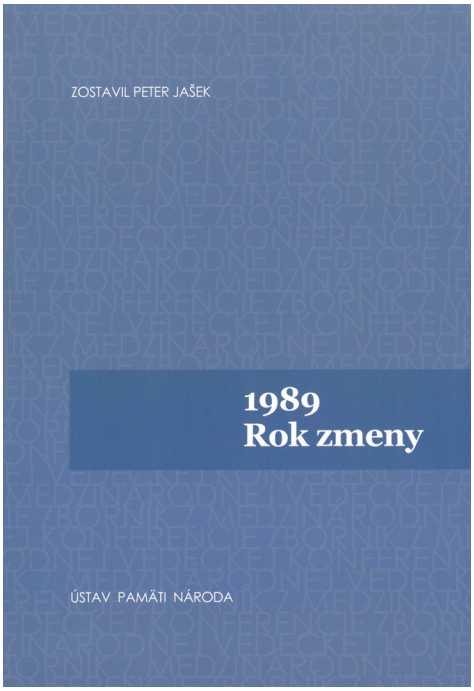
*

This volume was prepared concurrently to the edition of the issue 6 (2024–2025) of *Institute of National Remembrance Review*. The organisational and editorial matters caused the planned issue concerning transformation of Central and Eastern Europe in 1988–1991 to be split into two parts. This part encompasses the papers on the transformation occurrences in the former Soviet Union countries and provides overviews of selected books concerning their democratic transformation.

Among the included texts are articles by Jacek Wróbel (employee of the IPN Archives) on the separatist uprising in Transnistria – the quasi-state on the border between Moldova and Ukraine; by Dr. habil. Dariusz Miszewski (lecturer with the War Studies University in Warsaw) on Russian interference in Ukrainian internal affairs in regard to its separatist and autonomous movements; by Dr. Monika Rogers (researcher at the Lithuanian Institute of History in Vilnius) on the legal changes originating from process of democratic transition and dealing with the Soviet past in Lithuania; and by Dr. Yuriy Serebriansky (Deputy President of the Kazakhstan PEN Club) on the impact of the transformation in the USSR on the Polish diaspora – in fact composed of the descendants of Polish deportees and exiles from Communist era – in Kazakhstan. The issue closes with some book review articles: by Dr. habil. Zbigniew Bereszyński (independent researcher) on Tomasz Kozłowski's book (*Koniec imperium MSW. Transformacja organów bezpieczeństwa*



Tomasz Kozłowski. *Koniec imperium MSW*. Warsaw: Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, 2019



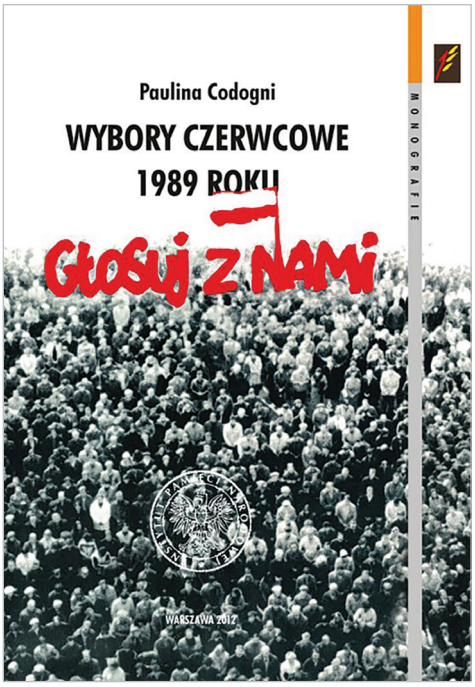
1989. Rok zmeny. Zborník z medzinárodnej vedeckej konferencie. Bratislava 4.–5. Novembra 2014. Ed. Peter Jašek. Bratislava: Ústav pamäti národa, 2017

państwa 1989–1990, 2019) concerning the transition of the Communist security police during the democratic transformation in Poland; by Dr. Prokop Tomek (historian at the Military Historical Institute in Prague) on an edited volume about the events of 1989, published by the Slovak Nation's Memory Institute (*Ústav pamäti národa*, ÚPN) (*1989 Rok zmeny. Zborník z medzinárodnej vedeckej konferencie, Bratislava 4-5 November 2014. 1989 – Year of Change. Anthology of the International Scientific Conference, Bratislava 4–5 November 2014*, 2017); by Dr. Daniel Povolný (historian at the Institute for the Study of Totalitarian Regimes, USTR, in Prague) on an edited volume about the fall of communist regimes in Central Europe, published by the Institute of Contemporary History in Prague (*Ústav pro soudobé dějiny AV ČR*, ÚSD) (*Dominový efekt: opoziční hnutí v zemích střední Evropy a pád komunistických režimů v roce 1989*, 2013); by Professor Hubert Wilk (researcher at the Tadeusz Manteuffel Institute of History of Polish Academy of Sciences in Warsaw) on Michał Przeperski's book *Dziki Wschód. Transformacja po polsku 1986–1993* concerning the social face

Dominový efekt. Opoziční hnutí v zemích střední Evropy a pád komunistických režimů v roce 1989. Eds. Petr Blažek and Jaroslav Pažout. Prague: Ústav pro soudobé dějiny AV ČR, 2013

of transformation in Poland; by Dr. habil. Cecylia Kuta (researcher at the Institute of National Remembrance Branch in Cracow) on Paulina Codogni's book (*Wybory czerwcowe 1989 roku*, 2012) about the process of political transformation in Poland; and by Professor Grzegorz Hryciuk (lecturer at the University of Wrocław) on Matěj Bílý's book (*Varšavská smlouva 1985–1991*.

Michał Przeperski. *Dziki Wschód. Transformacja po polsku 1986–1993*.
Cracow: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2024



Paulina Codogni. *Wybory czerwcowe 1989 roku*. Warsaw: Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, 2012

Matěj Bílý. *Varšavská smlouva 1985–1991. Dezintegrace a rozpad*. Prague: ÚSTR, 2021

Dezintegrace a rozpad, 2021) concerning the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact. The issue ends with a conference report penned by Piotr Skrzypiński (doctorate student at Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań) concerning the October 2024 conference in Toruń held on the 40th anniversary of abduction and murder of Fr. Jerzy Popiełuszko.

**

The next issue will focus on the relations between artists and dictatorial power in the former Soviet Bloc.

Franciszek Dąbrowski,
ORCID 0000-0002-4255-6985

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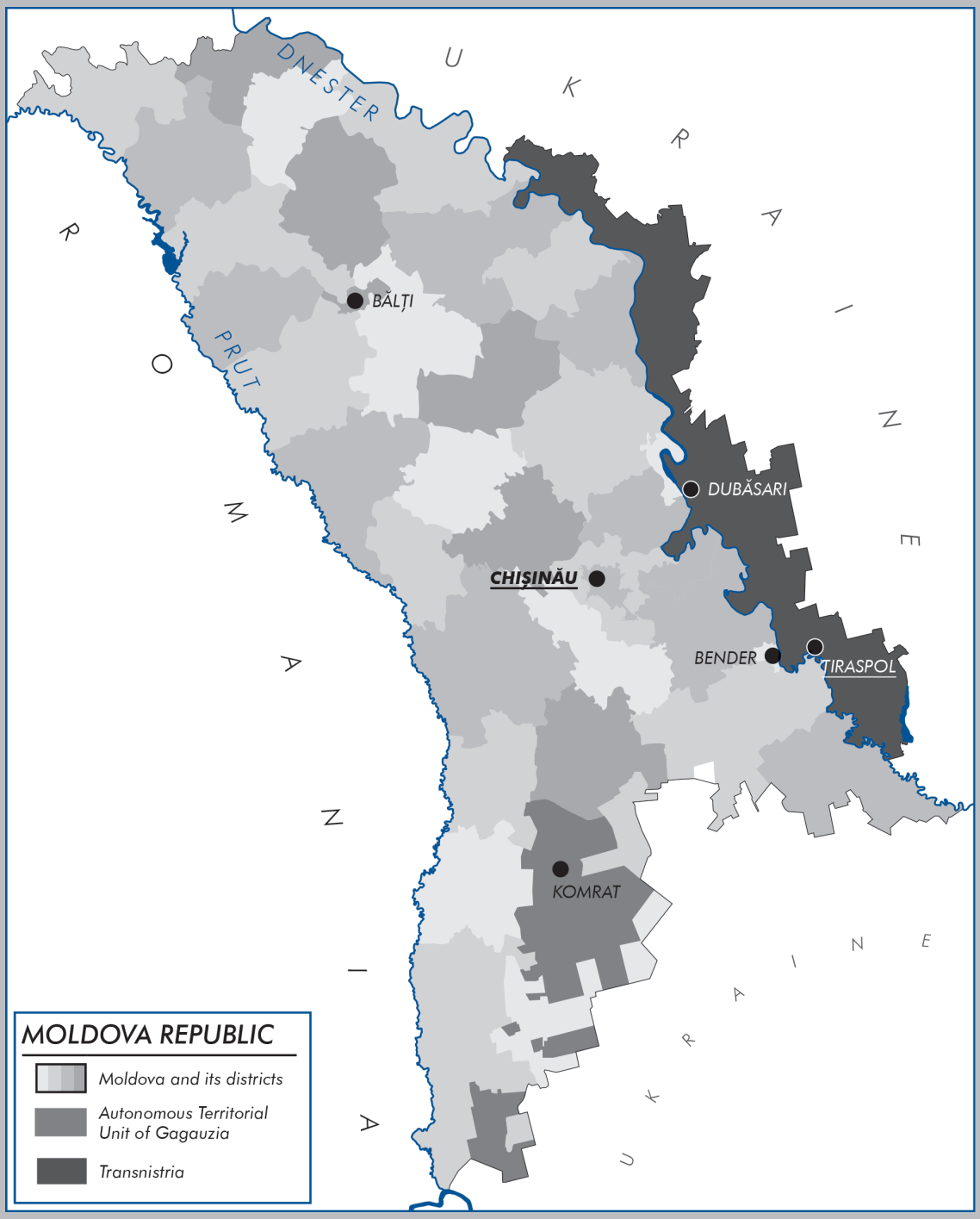

Moldova with the areas of Transnistria and Gagauzia marked. The borders of Transnistria according to official Moldovan law on Transnistrian autonomy; in fact Transnistria controls city Bender and area of Chițcani laying on the right bank of Dniester, while Moldova controls areas to the north and south of Dubăsari on the left bank of Dniester.

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THE EMERGENCE OF SEPARATIST TRANSNISTRIA

Abstract
Transnistria is a separatist state entity located in a territory internationally recognised as part of the Republic of Moldova, on the left bank of the Dniester River. Its creation resulted from factors both internal – including the concerns of the Transnistrian population over Romanian nationalism in an independent Moldova along with the efforts of local elites to maintain control over the region – and external, namely the Kremlin's strategy of leveraging Transnistrian separatism to retain influence over Moldova. This article analyses the causes of Transnistrian separatism, reconstructs the process of its emergence and the continued existence of an unrecognised *de facto* state, and then outlines the political, economic, and international context of the separatist republic, as well as the peace process.

Keywords: Transnistria, Moldova, Russia, separatism, secession, Transnistrian War, Transnistrian conflict

Introduction

The Pridnestrovian Moldavian Republic (PMR, or Transnistria) is a separatist state entity within territories recognised internationally as part of the Republic of Moldova. It encompasses the left bank of the Dniester River, formerly part of the Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic (MSSR), as well as two enclaves on the right bank: the city of Bender (Tighina) and the Chiţcani district. Transnistria stretches approximately 200 km in length and 12–15 km in width, covering an area of 4,160 km². Meanwhile, the authorities in Chişinău exercise control over enclaves on the eastern bank of the Dniester, to the north and south of Dubosar, but do not recognise these areas as part of the 'administrative unit on the left bank of the Dniester' (Wróbel 2003, p. 51; Solak 2014, p. 133; *Atlas Pridnestrovskoy Respubliki*, p. 9; Crivenco and Löwis 2022). The population of Transnistria has been steadily declining due to high levels of economic migration, and current estimates place it between approximately 300,000 (Całus 2023) and 350,000 (Pieńkowski 2023).

Separatist Transnistria is one of the flashpoints that emerged after the collapse of the Soviet Union. It was created as a result of opposition from the elite and society of the left bank of the Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic (MSSR) to the aspirations of the Romanian-

Vladimir Lenin monument in front of Transnistrian parliament, Tiraspol, Transnistria (2024). Photo: tanya_tatyana / Shutterstock ID 2540041485

Bessarabia in the early 20th century. Fragment of a map of Russia from *Stielers Hand-Atlas*, Gotha: Justus Perthes Geographischer Anstalt, 1904. National Library, Warsaw, Poland

speaking community and elite of the right bank of Moldova for Romanian national revival, Romanianisation of the republic, and its independence, as well as the plans of some Moldovan elites to unite Moldova with Romania (Romanianisation of Moldova is understood here as the replacement of Russian with Romanian as the official state language, the introduction of national symbols referring to Romania along with the historical symbols of Moldova, and the Romanianisation of the education system, among other measures). The creation of separatist Transnistria should also be seen as being influenced by Moscow, which, by supporting the unrecognised republic, gained an effective instrument for exerting political pressure on Moldova.

This article aims to analyse the causes of Transnistrian separatism – both internal and external, including Russian influence – reconstruct the process of Transnistria's emergence and continued existence as an unrecognised de facto state, and outline the political, economic, and international situation of the separatist republic, as well as the peace process. An additional element, providing a point of comparison, is the development of Gagauz separatism, in which open, full-scale conflict was avoided and the dispute was resolved through the creation of the Gagauz Autonomy.

Historical Background (19th and 20th Centuries)

At the end of the 18th century, the territory of present-day Transnistria was incorporated into the Russian Empire. The southern part of Transnistria was taken from the Ottoman Empire under the Treaty of Jassy (1792), while the northern part was seized from the First Polish Republic as a result of the Second Partition of Poland (1793).

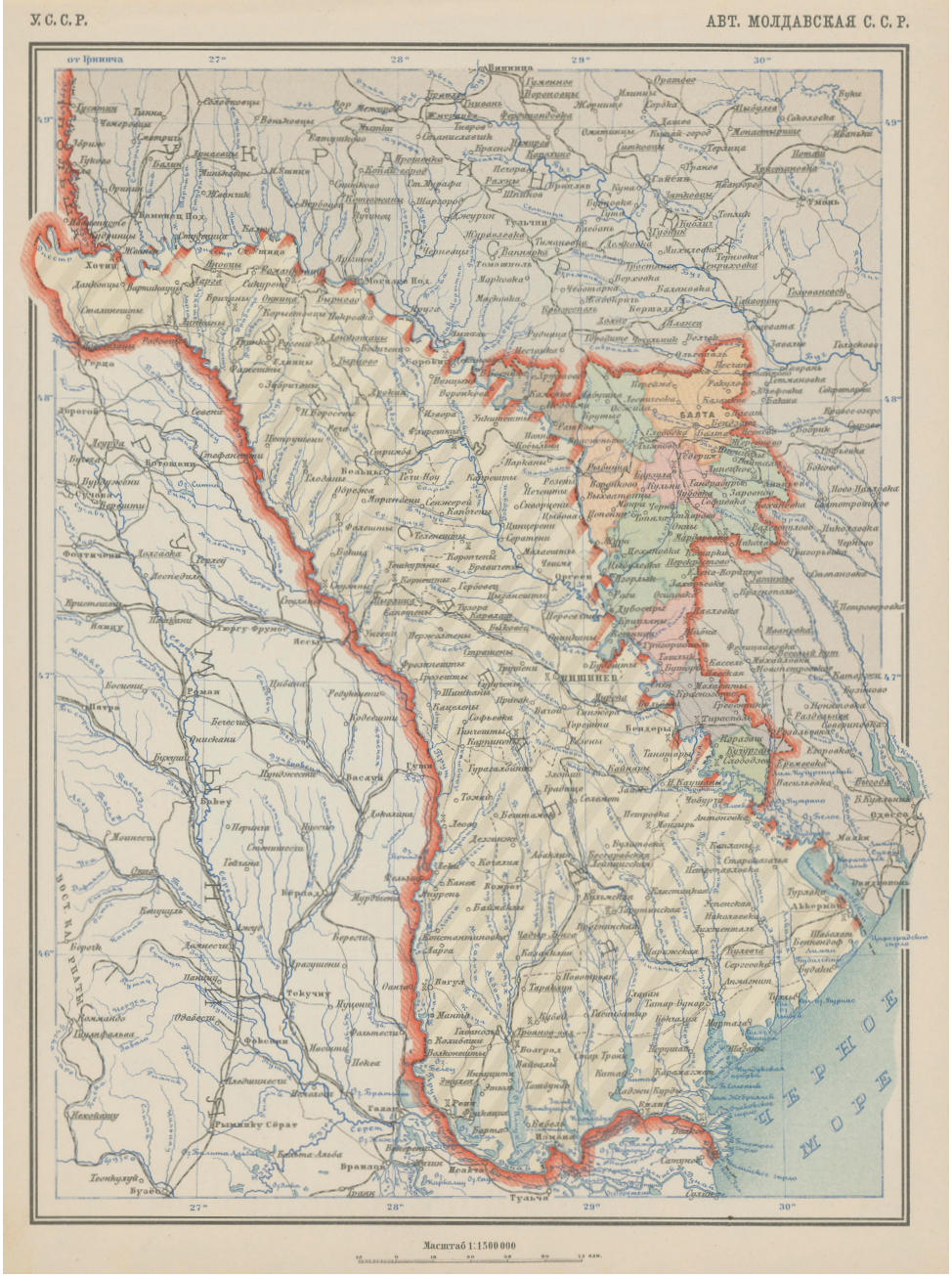
Under the Treaty of Bucharest in 1812, Russia annexed Bessarabia from the Ottoman Empire – the territory between the Dniester and Prut rivers, which today forms the right bank of the Republic of Moldova.

During the 19th century, Transnistria became part of the so-called New Russia, experiencing significant civilisational development and migration of Slavic populations to the region. Tiraspol, the present-day capital of the Pridnestrovian Moldavian Republic (PMR), was founded during this period (Oleksy 2018, pp. 169–170).

On 9 April 1918, right-bank Moldova (Bessarabia) united with Romania following a decision by the local parliament, the Country Council (*Sfatul Țării*), and remained part of Romania throughout the interwar period, until 1940.

Transnistria, by contrast, did not belong to pre-war Romania, with the exception of Bender lying on the right bank of Dniester. This territory became part of the Moldavian Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (MASSR), established in 1924 within the Ukrainian SSR. By creating the MASSR, Moscow aimed to establish an ideological and organisational base for the eventual conquest of Bessarabia. The Kremlin never reconciled itself to the loss of this former Russian province. In Transnistria today, the current separatist republic is often presented as the legal successor to the MASSR. This narrative is disseminated among the local population through historical education and official propaganda (Gil 2006, pp. 41–42; Vahl and Emerson 2004, pp. 2–3).

In a secret protocol attached to the Ribbentrop–Molotov Pact of 23 August 1939, the Soviet government emphasised its 'interest in Bessarabia' – in reality, its intention to annex the region – while the German side declared complete political disinterest, effectively acquiescing to Soviet claims. On 26 June 1940, the Soviet Union issued an ultimatum to Romania, demanding the cession of Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina. The Romanian government accepted the ultimatum, and on 30 June, the Red Army entered these territories. On



Moldavian Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic and Bessarabia (marked as "under Romanian occupation"). *Atlas Soyuza Sovetskikh Sotsialisticheskikh Respublik*. Moscow: Izdanie TsIK SSSR, 1928. National Library, Warsaw, Poland

Moldavia from 28 June 1940 to 22 June 1941. Fragment of the map *Das Europäische Rußland*, Bielefeld–Leipzig: Velhagen & Klasing, 1941. National Library, Warsaw, Poland

11 July 1940, northern Bukovina and the northern and southern parts of Bessarabia – the former Romanian districts of Hotin (Ukrainian: Khotyn) (north) and Cetatea Albă (Ukrainian: Bilhorod-Dnistrovskyi, up to 1944 Akkerman) (south) – were incorporated into the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic. The central part of Bessarabia was merged with the Moldavian Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (within its reduced borders) to form the Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic (MSSR) (Gil 2006, p. 48). In the MSSR, industry was nationalised and agriculture collectivised. Significant numbers of Moldovans were deported to Siberia and other remote regions of the Soviet Union; in 1941, approximately 30,000 people were deported (Vahl and Emerson 2004, p. 3; de Garda 2021).

Moldavia after 22 June 1941. Fragment of the map *Das Europäische Rußland*, Bielefeld–Leipzig: Velhagen & Klasing, 1942. National Library, Warsaw, Poland

Following Romania's participation in the Third Reich's invasion of the USSR in June 1941, Bucharest temporarily regained control of Bessarabia, and Romanian occupation of Transnistria also began. In 1944, as the tide of World War II turned, the Soviet Union re-occupied both Transnistria and Bessarabia.

After regaining control of the Moldavian SSR, the borders from before the German invasion were restored. The entire Moldavian SSR underwent forced Russification. The Romanian language, referred to as Moldavian, was written in the Cyrillic (*Grazhdanka*) alphabet (Gil 2005, pp. 15–17).

After regaining control of the Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic, the Stalinist regime ruthlessly suppressed all forms of opposition. Pro-Romanian activists, the landed gentry, clergy, and intelligentsia

were either executed or deported deep into the Soviet Union. Between 1944 and 1951, approximately 45,000 people were exiled to Siberia or Central Asia. Moreover, to terrorise the Moldovan population, the Soviet authorities employed the same instrument previously used in Ukraine: the Great Famine (*Holodomor*). Peasants had their crops and livestock confiscated and were barred from travelling to cities in search of work or food. This campaign began in 1946 and, within less than three years, resulted in the deaths of between 150,000 and 200,000 people, with some estimates reaching 300,000. Approximately one in fourteen inhabitants of the Moldavian SSR perished during the Great Famine. These repressions led to the deep Sovietisation of Moldova and the near-complete elimination of all opposition (Całus 2020, pp. 284–288; Caşu 2010, pp. 43–46).

In the 1950s and 1960s, the territory of present-day Transnistria underwent intensive industrialisation, attracting migrants from other areas of the Soviet Union. Consequently, the population of Transnistria became more Sovietised than that of right-bank Moldova and was more closely connected to the Soviet empire. Furthermore, the 14th Soviet Army was stationed in Transnistria, with the families of its officers and soldiers living in the region, further strengthening the local community's attachment to the USSR (Oleksy 2018, pp. 45–46).

These Soviet-era changes created profound economic differences between right-bank Moldova and Transnistria. The areas west of the Dniester were predominantly agricultural, producing wine and fruit, while Transnistria was far more industrialised. Major industrial facilities were established in the region, including the steelworks in Rybnitsa (Romanian: Rîbnița), the cement factory in Rybnitsa, and the largest power plant in the region at Dnestrovsc (Dnestrovsk). As a result, the left bank of the MSSR, home to only 15.2% of the republic's population, produced 40% of GDP, 90% of electricity, 56% of consumer goods, and 33% of industrial goods. Differences in urbanisation were also notable: west of the Dniester, 43% of the population lived in cities, compared with 66% on the east bank (Oleksy 2018, p. 45; Kosienkowski 2010, p. 41).

During the Soviet period, the proportion of Moldovans in the republic remained stable at between 64% and 66% of the population. Despite official declarations of support for the development of all nationalities in the USSR, a policy of Russification prevailed. Russian became the only official language, and primary schools and universities taught exclusively in Russian. Nevertheless, only a small minority of Moldovans (and Gagauz) declared Russian as their native language

in the 1989 census. In contrast, Slavic minorities, as well as German and Jewish communities, experienced significant Russification.

By 1989, 1,003,500 people, or 23.1% of the population of the Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic, considered Russian their native language. Romanian (Moldovan) remained the dominant language in rural areas, while Russian was more commonly spoken in cities. West of the Dniester, Moldova remained Romanian-speaking, whereas the left bank rapidly became Russified (Solak 2006, pp. 55–58).

Ethnic differences between the territories on the left and right banks of the Dniester were therefore significant. On the right bank of the Dniester, Moldovans made up 68.4% of the population, with the remainder comprising Ukrainians, Russians, Bulgarians, Gagauz, Jews, and other nationalities. On the left bank, Moldovans constituted only 39.3% of the population, with the majority being Russian-speaking (Vahl, Emerson 2004, p. 4; Solak 2006, p. 60).

By the second half of the 1970s, the elite of left-bank Moldova consisted of the directors of large industrial enterprises, local administrators, and military officers. There was a high turnover of personnel between the first two groups, with the same individuals holding senior positions in both industry and the administration of Tiraspol and the surrounding region consecutively. This created a relatively homogeneous environment, united by common interests and more closely connected to Moscow than to Chişinău, partly because local industry was directly controlled from Moscow. The broader Transnistrian community, including many immigrants from other regions of the USSR, also felt a stronger connection to the Soviet state and culture than to Moldova itself. To a large extent, this applied even to Pridnestrovian Moldavians, who were heavily Sovietised (Oleksy 2018, pp. 46–48).

The situation was markedly different in right-bank Moldova. In the early decades following the creation of the Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic, the Soviet authorities distrusted the inhabitants of the right bank, as they had been raised in 'bourgeois' Romania, which led to their marginalisation. This, combined with the fact that most right-bank Moldovans were rural residents, resulted in the dominance of Russian language and culture in the public life of the Moldavian SSR and the emergence of a 'glass ceiling' for right-bank Moldovans. Their career opportunities were severely limited throughout the entire existence of the MSSR. During the first twenty years of the Moldavian SSR, Russian-speaking activists from the left bank overwhelmingly dominated the republic's governing bodies,

and Russian became ubiquitous in state structures. The process of *korenizatsiia* (indigenisation) of the state apparatus, which began in the 1960s, somewhat mitigated the dominance of non-Moldovans in the republic's institutions. Nevertheless, in 1989, Moldovans held only about one-third of management positions in industry and administration and constituted only one-third of the membership of the Communist Party of Moldova (CPM). It was not until 1989 that Petru Lucinschi became the first leader of the CPM who was born on the right bank (Oleksy 2018, pp. 48–50; Miarka 2020, p. 74; Kowalczyk 2024, p. 256).

Thus, the society of the Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic was divided into two distinct communities, geographically separated by the Dniester River. The inhabitants of the left bank were more pro-Soviet, more Sovietised, and generally more satisfied with life in the USSR, while those on the right bank were more attached to the Romanian language and culture and tended to resent being treated as second-class citizens in their own republic.

The Process of Moldova Gaining Sovereignty and Independence

At the end of the 1980s, during the era of glasnost and perestroika in the Soviet Union, the Moldovan (Romanian) national and reform movement became increasingly active in Moldova.

In 1988, several associations were established that, alongside social demands, and these concerning human and economic rights, placed particular emphasis on the national revival of Moldovans. They called for the introduction of Moldovan (Romanian) written in the Latin alphabet as the official language of the Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic and demanded recognition of the unity of the Moldovan and Romanian languages. Among the associations raising national issues, two are particularly notable: the Alexei Mateevici Literary and Music Club and the Moldovan Democratic Movement in Support of Perestroika, known as *Demdvizhenie* (short for *Demokraticheskoe Dvizhenie*, Democratic Movement).

The Mateevici Club, operating since January 1988, organised public outdoor meetings. Initially attended by only a dozen or so people, the Club soon attracted a rapidly growing number of participants. While the gatherings were ostensibly cultural events dedicated to Romanian-language culture, they rapidly acquired a political character. Attempts

at repression by the authorities failed to halt the Club's development.

In February 1989, the Club co-organised a march of 30,000 people to the Moldovan Academy of Sciences, presenting a wide range of demands – from the introduction of the Latin alphabet to environmental issues. This event represented one of the first mass anti-government demonstrations in the Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic. Similar clubs soon emerged in the Moldovan provinces.

Constituted on 3 July 1988, Demdvizhenie organised mass demonstrations and garnered significant support. The movement called for administrative reforms and democratisation in line with Mikhail Gorbachev's slogans, but its core demands, like those of the Mateevici Club, focused on linguistic and national issues. Demdvizhenie aimed to Romanianise/Moldovanise the country and separate it from the USSR. By the end of 1988, the movement had approximately 300 support groups across Moldova and an extensive organisational network in 19 cities and districts of the republic.

Initially, the Communist Party of Moldova condemned both associations and opposed their reform proposals. However, under pressure from Moscow, it conceded on some minor issues at the end of 1988 (J. Solak 2014, pp. 118–119; Vahl and Emerson 2004, pp. 4–5; Erizanu 2021; Panici 2003; Oleksy 2018, pp. 52–53).

The establishment of a civic movement in Chișinău on 30 December 1988 to defend the rights of the Russian-speaking population – the Interethnic Movement "Unitate-Edinstvo" (Interdvizhenie) – was treated by Demdvizhenie as a Soviet provocation (the official founding congress of Interdvizhenie "Unitate-Edinstvo" took place on 8 July 1989 at the Chekhov Theatre in Chișinău; see Institute for Social and Political Research and Regional Development 2019). In response, from January 1989, Demdvizhenie organised a series of anti-Russian rallies on Chișinău's main street. Repeated clashes occurred between demonstrators and the militia, and Russian speakers were reportedly beaten in public (J. Solak 2014, p. 119).

The two most important Moldovan opposition associations – the Mateevici Club and Demdvizhenie – united on 20 May 1989 to form the Popular Front of Moldova (PFM). The Front's main demands concerned language issues and the pursuit of the republic's sovereignty. The PFM quickly gained massive support: its demonstration in Chișinău in August 1989, known as the Great National Assembly, attracted around half a million people. Based on the Greek principle of direct democracy, various legislative proposals were voted on there. Although these votes had no legal authority, they exerted pressure on

the parliament. In August 1989, language bills were passed at the Great National Assembly (Oleksy 2018, pp. 53, 178; Vahl and Emerson 2004, p. 5; Cojocaru 2003, p. 11; Skoczylas 2013, p. 27; J. Solak 2014, p. 120).

The PFM campaign proved successful. On 31 August and 1 September 1989, the Supreme Council of the MSSR adopted three language laws establishing Moldovan as the official state language, written in the Latin alphabet, while Russian remained the language of interethnic communication. Gagauz was granted official status in areas inhabited by the Gagauz minority. The laws also confirmed the identity of Moldovan with the Romanian language, and all state employees were required to learn Moldovan. In many cases, employees who did not know the language were dismissed (Vahl and Emerson 2004, p. 5; Oleksy 2018, p. 55; Kosienkowski 2007, p. 207).

In the elections to the Supreme Council of Moldova in February 1990 (second round in March), the PFM won 120 of the 380 seats. Although the Communist Party of Moldova (CPM) retained the largest number of deputies, a split within the party facilitated the success of the national movement, as some CPM deputies defected to the Front while others abstained from attending sessions. As a result of a compromise between the CPM and the PFM, the leader of the Front, Mircea Druc, became Prime Minister of the Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic, while Mircea Snegur, a CPM member considered sympathetic to the national movement, became Chairman of the Supreme Council (Oleksy 2018, p. 55; Vahl and Emerson 2004, p. 5; Skoczylas 2013, p. 27).

Following the fall of Nicolae Ceaușescu's regime in Romania in December 1989, the idea of uniting Moldova with Romania gained growing support within the PFM. After the elections, at the end of April 1990, the new Supreme Council adopted the tricolour Romanian flag with the Moldovan emblem at its centre as the national flag and recognised the Romanian anthem as Moldova's official anthem (Vahl and Emerson 2004, p. 5).

On 6 May 1990, in a symbolic gesture, visa and passport requirements were suspended for six hours, allowing Romanians to cross the border en masse. Populations on both sides fraternised, and long-lost relatives were reunited (Całus 2015, p. 16; Całus 2020, pp. 17–23).

On 23 June 1990, the Supreme Council of the Moldavian SSR adopted a declaration of Moldavian sovereignty, establishing the supremacy of the republic's legislation over that of the Soviet Union. Subsequently, the parliament introduced the office of president and, on 3 September 1990, appointed Mircea Snegur as the first president

of the republic (Vahl and Emerson 2004, p. 5; Skoczylas 2013, p. 27; J. Solak 2014, p. 259; *website of the President of Moldova*).

In 1990–1991, talks were held between Chișinău and Bucharest on the unification of Moldova with Romania; however, only a minority of the population supported this solution. The radicalisation of the Popular Front of Moldova led to the loss of some leaders and public support, while deteriorating relations with Transnistria and Gagauzia further discouraged the idea of unification.

By early 1991, the political elites in Chișinău reached a consensus that Moldova should remain a sovereign – and potentially independent – state with strong cultural ties to Romania (Vahl and Emerson 2004, pp. 5–6).

In May 1991, the Moldovan parliament renamed the country from the Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic to the Republic of Moldova. On 25 June 1991, Moldova was proclaimed a sovereign state within the confederation of Soviet republics.

Following the failure of the August coup in Moscow, the Moldovan authorities outlawed the Communist Party on 23 August, and on 27 August 1991, the Supreme Council declared the independence of the Republic of Moldova (Vahl and Emerson 2004, p. 6; Kosienkowski 2007, p. 209).

Units of the Soviet 14th Army refused to submit to Moldovan authorities, remaining under Moscow's command, which prompted demands for their withdrawal. In response, the creation of a national army was initiated (Topolski 2006, p. 92).

President Mircea Snegur, who had initially supported unification with Romania, changed his position and opted to maintain Moldova's independence. At the summit in Almaty on 21 December 1991, Snegur formally introduced Moldova to the Commonwealth of Independent States (Oleksy 2018, p. 56; J. Solak 2014, p. 28).

Transnistria on the Eve of Secession

In response to the actions of the authorities in Chișinău and the trend of Romanianisation in the republic, as well as occasional acts of xenophobia directed against Russians and Russian-speaking people, concern grew among the Slavic-speaking population on the left bank of the Dniester. In Transnistria, fears emerged that, should Moldova unite with Romania, the Russian-speaking population would automatically become second-class citizens due to their lack of knowledge of the Romanian language.

Infantry fighting vehicle BMP-2 with painted acronym "PMR" (*Pridnestrovskaya Moldavskaya Respublika*, Transnistrian Moldavian Republic) and Transnistrian flag, used as part of "Bendery Memorial of Glory," i.e. memorial of 1990 war. Bendery, Transnistria (2024). Photo: Photoframe123 / Shutterstock ID 2512055645

Anxiety was further fuelled by xenophobic and sometimes anti-Semitic slogans proclaimed by some activists of the national movement, such as "suitcase–station–Russia," "down with the occupiers," "we will drown the Russians in Jewish blood," or "Russians beyond the Dniester, Jews to the Dniester" (for example, the poet Leonida Lari shouted from the stage: "Let my hands be covered in blood up to my elbows, but I swear that soon there will not be a single Russian left in Moldova"; cf. J. Solak 2014, p. 95; Oleksy 2018, p. 53).

These sentiments were actively exploited and reinforced by the Transnistrian elite, who perceived the developments in Chișinău and right-bank Moldova as a direct threat to their interests. This elite, consisting of the local nomenklatura and directors of industrial plants, sought to retain control over the region's industry, which accounted for approximately 70% of the industrial output of the entire Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic (Wróbel 2003, p. 54).

The creation of a separatist Transnistria was undoubtedly in the Kremlin's interest. Certain political circles in Moscow clearly supported the establishment of a secessionist republic, enabling Russia to exert influence over the newly independent Moldova. A key question remains as to the principal initiator of the separatist republic: the local Transnistrian elites or the Kremlin.

Local elites had an evident interest in creating a separatist Transnistria, and they were able to amplify the fears of Slavic communities regarding nationalist slogans in Moldova. At the same time, Russia had its own strategic interest in a separatist Transnistria,

as it provided leverage to pressure the authorities in Chișinău and force them to take certain steps (a similar situation occurred in the case of the separatist republics of Abkhazia and South Ossetia in the internationally recognised territory of Georgia, and a slightly different one in the case of Nagorno-Karabakh, located in the recognised territory of Azerbaijan).

Even without definitively resolving this question, the arguments for both perspectives are clear.

The primary motivation of the Transnistrian elites was to preserve political and economic control over the region in opposition to the Moldovan authorities, who were pursuing independence. These elites formed a tightly knit group with strong connections to the local population. The local roots of the separatist movement are further indicated by Transnistria's sense of separateness within the Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic and the surprising independence and assertiveness of its elites, even in relation to their Russian patrons.

On the other hand, as noted by Dr. Witold Rodkiewicz, a leading expert on Russia at the Centre for Eastern Studies in Warsaw, at the end of the 1980s the Soviet authorities, in an attempt to block the sovereignty of the union republics, sought to oblige them to take into account the right to self-determination of areas densely populated by nationalities other than the nominal nationality of the republic. Furthermore, there is substantial evidence that separatist initiatives were promoted from above, along party, industrial, and KGB lines. Janusz Solak explicitly stated that the Transnistrian republic was "invented in Moscow" (J. Solak 2014, pp. 95, 171).

It seems that the Kremlin version of the initiative should be given consideration. The Soviet Union was a highly hierarchical structure, and Transnistrian irredentism served, to some extent, to consolidate the old order in the region. Of note is also the involvement of individuals and groups from other parts of Russia and the broader Soviet/post-Soviet space in the Transnistrian separatist movement. For many years, Vladimir Antiufeyev served as Minister of State Security of Transnistria and was the second most important political figure in the republic. Previously, he had commanded the OMON special unit of the Soviet militia in Riga, responsible for suppressing Latvian independence demonstrations, and later became Deputy Prime Minister for Security of the separatist Donetsk People's Republic. The leader of Transnistria, Igor Smirnov, was a Soviet official who spent most of his life in the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic and the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic, only arriving in Transnistria

in 1987. These circumstances reinforce the view that Moscow played a decisive role in the creation of separatist Transnistria.

Throughout the republic, Russian speakers protested against the policies of the People's Front of Moldova.

Facing a weak political position nationwide, where the PFM's influence was supported by part of the Communist Party of Moldova, pro-Russian forces began to concentrate in the Transnistrian region and in Comrat, the largest city in Gagauzia. They started to contemplate independence from Chișinău. The aggressive and chauvinistic rhetoric of Moldovan nationalists facilitated the mobilisation of the local Russian-speaking population (Oleksy 2018, pp. 57–58, 178; J. Solak 2014, p. 119).

On 11 August 1989, the United Work Collective Council was established in Tiraspol, the largest city in Transnistria (*Ob'edinionnyi Soviet Trudovykh Kollektyvov*, OSTK), becoming a platform for the Russian-speaking population of Moldova. The Council called for a two-hour warning strike on 16 August 1989, in which over 27,000 people participated. On 21 August, a general strike broke out in Tiraspol and was joined by workplaces in Chișinău, Bender, Comrat, Bălți, and other Moldovan cities. On 26 August, a republican strike committee was formed. Demonstrations continued in the streets of Tiraspol, gathering around 200,000 people—more than the city's population. These events are remembered in Transnistrian history as the "Republican Strike" and are seen in the PMR as a turning point when the Transnistrian political community emerged, with residents recognising their shared interests (J. Solak 2014, p. 96; Oleksy 2018, p. 60).

The authorities in Chișinău ignored the strikers' demand to introduce two official languages – Romanian (Moldovan) and Russian. As previously mentioned, on 31 August 1989, the Supreme Council of the MSSR established Moldovan as the state language and Russian only as a language of interethnic communication. The positions of the parties were irreconcilable: the Moldovan national movement sought to reclaim the republic for Moldovans, while the protesters demanded a formally bilingual state. The protesters soon realised that their demands had no chance of being met in Chișinău.

Under pressure from Moscow, the strike was suspended. Delegates to the plenum of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union brought Mikhail Gorbachev's personal request to the strikers to end the strike. Since Gorbachev supported recognising Russian as a state language throughout the USSR, the strikers hoped

he would pressure Chișinău on their behalf. The Transnistrian elites understood that the all-Union centre was too weak to support pro-Soviet forces in Moldova and that power in Chișinău had permanently passed into the hands of the Moldovan national movement. The fact that the left bank remained under the control of a group over which the Transnistrian leaders – mainly factory directors – had no influence meant that they would eventually lose their position. Faced with this reality, the Transnistrian elites embarked on a path toward Transnistria's independence.

In the local and Supreme Council elections held on 25 February 1990, candidates from the Workers' Collectives won in Transnistria. At the first session of the Tiraspol City Council, the newly elected councillors chose Igor Smirnov as chairman, who quickly rose to become the leader of Transnistria. However, in the Supreme Council of the Moldavian SSR deputies from Transnistria were isolated and unable to pursue their demands effectively (J. Solak 2014, pp. 96–97; Oleksy 2018, pp. 61–62).

The Gagauz Issue

The Transnistrian problem was closely linked to Gagauz separatism. The Gagauz are a Turkic-speaking people who adhere to the Orthodox faith, with their largest concentration in Moldova (154,000 people according to the 1989 census).

In February 1988, a discussion club of the Gagauz intelligentsia, Gagauz-Halky (Gagauz People), was established. On 21 May 1989, it was transformed into a structure uniting the most important Gagauz socio-political organisations.

The laws introducing Moldovan written in the Latin alphabet as the state language of the Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic, combined with the aspirations of some Moldovan elites to unite with Romania, consolidated and radicalised the Gagauz national movement (in 1989, only 4.4% of the Gagauz population spoke Moldovan). As a result, on 12 November 1989, at the Extraordinary Congress of Representatives of the Gagauz People, the establishment of the Gagauz Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (GASSR) was proclaimed in areas densely populated by Gagauz within the MSSR. A day later, the Presidium of the Supreme Council of the Moldavian SSR declared this resolution invalid.

On 27 July 1990, the parliament of the Moldavian SSR denied the Gagauz the right to autonomy, despite the efforts of Gagauz deputies.

In response, on 19 August 1990, at the First Congress of Gagauz Deputies of All Levels in Comrat, the creation of the Gagauz Republic was announced – a socialist republic independent of Moldova but remaining part of the USSR, effectively replacing the GASSR. Two weeks later, on the left bank of the Dniester, the Pridnestrovian Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic was proclaimed, also within the USSR (Kosienkowski 2007, pp. 207–208; J. Solak 2014, pp. 77–80; Hatłas 2009, pp. 65–71; Vahl, Emerson 2004, p. 5).

It is noteworthy that both Gagauzia and Transnistria established congresses of deputies of all levels, indicating coordination between the two separatist movements.

Prime Minister Mircea Druc organised paramilitary formations ("volunteers"), 20,000 strong, supported by the MSSR Ministry of Internal Affairs, to disrupt the parliamentary elections in Gagauzia scheduled for October 1990. The outbreak of open conflict was prevented by the deployment of troops from the USSR Ministry of Internal Affairs to areas densely populated by the Gagauz people. On 28 October 1990, elections to the Supreme Council of Gagauzia were held without hindrance. A few days later, a clash between Moldovan and Transnistrian militias in Dubăsari resulted in several deaths. The Supreme Council of Moldova reacted negatively, dissolving the Moldovan paramilitary formations. Consequently, tensions between the central authorities and Gagauzia eased (Kosienkowski 2007, pp. 208–211; Hatłas 2009, p. 72).

Following Moldova's declaration of independence in August 1991, a government was formed in Gagauzia in October. On 1 December 1991, presidential elections were held (Stepan Topal became president), and a referendum on the independence of the Gagauz Republic, which remained part of the USSR at the time, ended positively.

When war broke out between Moldova and Transnistria in March 1992, Gagauzia remained largely peaceful. Chișinău's failure in the war with Transnistria prompted the Moldovan authorities to seek a compromise with Gagauzia. The Gagauz side also wanted to avoid war, and Gagauzia's capabilities were far smaller than those of Transnistria.

From the second half of 1992, the Moldovan parliament worked on a bill concerning Gagauz autonomy, but progress stalled throughout 1993. A compromise became possible due to the victory of the Agrarian-Democratic Party of Moldova in the February 1994 parliamentary elections, in which representatives of the Gagauz people ran, the involvement of Turkish President Süleyman Demirel, and

the 1994 referendum in which Moldovans voted against unification with Romania. The compromise was facilitated by the loss of power by the former People's Front of Moldova – operating since 1992 as the Christian Democratic People's Front – a strongly nationalistic party unwilling to grant broad autonomy to the Gagauz people (Kosienkowski 2007, pp. 209–210; Bejan 2017, interview with S. Topal; Baluk 2007, p. 43; Partidul Popular Creştin Democrat (PPCD), e-democracy.md).

On 29 July 1994, a new constitution of the Republic of Moldova was approved, allowing for the possibility of granting special status to the left bank and southern regions of Moldova. On 23 December 1994, the parliament passed a law on the special legal status of Gagauzia (*Gagauz-Yeri*), establishing the Autonomous Territory of Gagauzia. Gagauzia was granted the right to self-determination should Moldova cease to be an independent state, particularly in the event of unification with Romania. On 5 March 1995, a referendum was held to define the borders of the Gagauz Autonomy (Kosienkowski 2007, p. 210; Hatłas 2009, pp. 75–77).

In Gagauzia, the threat of separatism was similar to that in Transnistria. The population of Gagauzia is heavily Russified, and, as in Transnistria, there were fears of a Romanian/Moldovan national movement and the possibility of Moldova being annexed by Romania. However, in Gagauzia open armed conflict was avoided. Several factors contributed to this. Gagauzia has less potential, both in terms of population and economy, including industry. Its territory is also more difficult to defend, consisting of the main area with its capital in Comrat and three separate enclaves, and lacking natural barriers such as the Dniester River, which protects Transnistria. Additionally, no USSR or Russian Army units were stationed in Gagauzia, unlike in Transnistria. These factors prompted Gagauz leaders to be more cautious in their relations with Chişinău.

When war broke out in Transnistria, both sides wanted to prevent a similar conflict in Gagauzia. Granting autonomy to Gagauzia eased tensions but did not fully resolve the issue. The region remains pro-Russian, both in terms of its society and its political leadership. In 2014, a referendum held in Gagauzia – deemed illegal by Chişinău – showed that 98.9% of residents would choose independence if Moldova lost its sovereignty and united with Romania, and 98.4% preferred joining the Russia-Belarus-Kazakhstan customs union (Serban and Ungureanu 2023). Yevgenia Gucul, elected Bashkan (Governor) of Gagauzia in

2023, is associated with the pro-Russian Şor Party and engaged in provocative pro-Russian activities. On 6 March 2024, she met with Vladimir Putin in Sochi. On 9 April 2024, she signed an agreement on behalf of Gagauzia with Promsvyazbank, a Russian state-owned bank closely linked to the military sector and subject to Western sanctions following Russia's invasion of Ukraine (Oleksy 2024).

Declaration of Sovereignty of the Pridnestrovian Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic and Declaration of Independence by the Pridnestrovian Moldavian Republic

In 1990, anxiety and a sense of threat grew among the Russian-speaking inhabitants of Moldova. On 14 May 1990, nationalist militants in Chișinău beat a young man to death for speaking Russian in public. His funeral took place on 22 May. On the same day a demonstration against violence toward Russian-speaking people was held. Riots broke out, and deputies from Transnistria and Gagauzia were attacked, prompting them to stop participating in parliamentary proceedings, citing concerns for their personal safety. A few days later, on 26 May 1990, PFM leader Mircea Druc became Prime Minister of the Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic (Oleksy 2018, pp. 62, 116; J. Solak 2014, p. 99).

These events convinced the Transnistrian elites and the broader left-bank community that they should strive for maximum independence from the authorities in Chișinău.

On 2 June 1990, at the initiative of the Tiraspol authorities, the First Congress of Deputies of All Administrative Levels (from village councils to the Supreme Council of the Moldavian SSR and Supreme Council of the USSR) was convened in Parkany. The broad representation aimed to demonstrate the democratic nature of the meeting. During the congress, provisional authorities of Transnistria were established: the Coordinating Council, headed by Igor Smirnov, and the Executive Committee It was declared that the decisions of the Moldovan authorities would only be valid in Transnistria after approval by the Coordinating Council. A referendum on the creation of a republic independent of Chișinău was ordered. The participants also recognised Transnistria as a free economic zone, excluding the region's enterprises from the economy of the Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic.

On 23 June 1990, the parliament in Chișinău adopted a declaration of sovereignty, declared the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact invalid, and deemed the 1940 creation of the Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic unlawful. In response, Transnistria moved toward the creation of a sovereign republic, arguing that if the establishment of the MSSR had been illegal, its incorporation of Soviet Transnistria was also unlawful (Oleksy 2018, pp. 62–63; J. Solak 2014, pp. 97–98).

After the strike ended in August–September 1989, the United Work Collective Council in Tiraspol continued its political rebellion, campaigning for a referendum on Transnistrian autonomy.

In a referendum held in Rybnitsa on 31 December 1989, 91.1% of voters supported the creation of the Transnistrian Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic, with a turnout of 81.8%. In a subsequent referendum in Tiraspol on 28 January 1990, 96% of voters supported the establishment of the TASSR, with a turnout of 92.3%

In June 1990, the authorities in Tiraspol launched a large-scale propaganda campaign ahead of the vote on Transnistria's secession from the Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic. As a result, in a series of referendums held in Transnistria and right-bank Bender, 95.8% of voters (according to data provided by the Transnistrian authorities, the reliability of which remains uncertain) voted in favour of the region's secession from the Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic.

On this basis, on 2 September 1990, the Second Congress of Deputies of All Levels proclaimed the establishment of the Pridnestrovian Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic (PMSSR) within the USSR. The congress appointed a 50-member Provisional Supreme Council chaired by Igor Smirnov, whose task was to establish state institutions and prepare elections for a fully-fledged Supreme Council.

The secession of Transnistria from the Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic was supported by the local nomenklatura and the directors of industrial enterprises in the region (J. Solak 2014, pp. 96–98; Oleksy 2018, p. 63; Wróbel 2003, p. 53).

Paramilitary formations were established in Transnistria with the support of the 14th Soviet Army. At that time, the Moldovan authorities could counter them only with police forces (Topolski 2006, p. 91).

The conflict gradually escalated as both sides made increasingly intransigent demands. On 2 November 1990, OMON special units of the Moldovan police intervened in Dubăsari, using firearms and killing three demonstrators while injuring several others.

As the disintegration of the USSR continued, the process of Transnistria gaining independence advanced. On 25 November 1990,

general elections to the Supreme Council of the PMSSR were held. The newly established parliament created the post of chairman of the republic, soon renamed president of the republic.

On 8 December 1990, the Pridnestrovian Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic declared full sovereignty (J. Solak 2014, pp. 98–99; Oleksy 2018, p. 64; website of the Supreme Council of the Pridnestrovian Moldavian Republic).

The Moscow coup of 19–22 August 1991 was supported by both Transnistria and Gagauzia. In response, the authorities in Chișinău arrested the Transnistrian and Gagauz leaders. On 29 August, Igor Smirnov was detained in Kyiv, and deputies from Transnistria as well as political activists from Tiraspol were also arrested (Topolski 2006, p. 92, fn. 3; J. Solak 2014, p. 100).

In reaction to these arrests, Transnistria established a Women's Strike Committee, which mobilised thousands of women to block railway lines across Transnistria, demanding the release of the detained leaders. For over a month, the activists halted all train traffic between Moldova and the rest of the Soviet Union. Eventually, on 1 October 1991, the authorities in Chișinău relented and released the detainees (J. Solak 2014, p. 100; Oleksy 2018, pp. 70–72).

On 28 August 1991—one day after Moldova declared independence—the Pridnestrovian Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic likewise declared independence as the Pridnestrovian Moldavian Republic. The local nomenklatura and industrial elites successfully exploited the prevailing public sentiment (Wróbel 2003, p. 53).

On 2 September 1991, the Transnistrian parliament adopted a provisional constitution modelled on the Soviet one, as well as the coat of arms and flag of the new republic.

A referendum on independence and general presidential elections were held on 1 December 1991, resulting in Igor Smirnov's election as the first president of the Pridnestrovian Moldavian Republic (J. Solak 2014, p. 98).

In September 1991, a decision was also made to form Transnistria's own armed forces – the Republican Guard – while paramilitary units had been active in the region since late 1990. The Guard received support from volunteer Cossack detachments. By the end of 1991, the separatist forces had gradually taken control of an increasing number of Moldovan public institutions, including administrative buildings, police stations, schools, newspaper offices, and local radio stations. The Moldovan authorities, aware of their own forces' poor equipment and fearing further escalation, initially refrained from the use of force.

However, on 13 December, Moldovan police opened fire for the first time during an attempt to seize government buildings in Dubăsari (Vahl and Emerson 2004, p. 6; Oleksy 2018, p. 72).

Following the failure of the August 1991 coup, Moldova's declaration of independence, and, most importantly, Transnistria's own declaration of independence, tensions escalated sharply.

On 6 September, an attempt by Moldovan Interior Ministry and OPON forces to enter the left bank of the Dniester failed when Transnistrian authorities blocked the access roads and bridges. A second attempt on 25 September by Moldovan police units to break through the Transnistrian defences in the Dubăsari area also ended in failure.

In this situation, Tiraspol received open support of the commander of the 14th Soviet Army, General Gennady Yakovlev. General Yakovlev openly stated that he did not intend to prevent 2,500 of his officers and several thousand recruits from defending their families, thereby effectively consenting to their joining the Transnistrian forces. Many soldiers of the 14th Army were natives of the region. According to Yakovlev's officers, the general planned to hold a ceremony during which the soldiers of the 14th Army would swear allegiance to the Transnistrian Republic. Having exceeded his authority and acted on his own initiative, Yakovlev was dismissed by the command in Moscow and expelled from the army. He was subsequently appointed by Igor Smirnov as commander of Transnistria's defence forces. His successor, General Yuri Netkachev, was instructed to maintain formal neutrality in the conflict (Oleksy 2018, p. 73; J. Solak 2014, pp. 100–101).

The War in Transnistria

Armed incidents began long before the outbreak of full-scale civil war. Attempts by the Moldovan police to capture Dubăsari took place in November 1990, and again in September and December 1991. Dubăsari was chosen as the target of these operations primarily because it lies roughly in the centre of Transnistria; its capture would have effectively cut the separatist republic in half. Moreover, as the majority of the local population was Moldovan, the authorities in Chișinău hoped they would support Moldovan actions. In the following months, the situation in Dubăsari remained tense, with both the Moldovan police and the Transnistrian militia operating in the city. By the end of February 1992, mutual provocations became increasingly frequent (Oleksy 2018, pp. 70, 77).

On 1 March 1992, riots broke out in Dubăsari, triggered by yet another operation by Moldovan special forces. During the unrest, someone in the crowd opened fire, killing the head of the Transnistrian militia. The Transnistrian authorities regarded this as a provocation by Moldovan special services and placed a Republican Guard battalion on alert. Upon learning of the militia chief's death, after midnight, a crowd of Dubăsari residents surrounded the Moldovan police station still present in the city. The police negotiated an agreement allowing them to be transported to 'proper' Moldova by bus, escorted by Transnistrian Cossacks. However, as the officers were boarding the bus, the Cossacks came under fire from unidentified assailants – one was killed and two wounded. A shootout followed.

A few hours later, the 1st Special Forces Brigade of the Moldovan Ministry of Internal Affairs set off from Chișinău towards Transnistria. On 2 March 1992, the first armed clash occurred near Cocieri (Oleksy 2018, pp. 78–79; J. Solak 2014, pp. 104–105).

In the face of the outbreak of open conflict, the commander of the 14th Russian Army declared neutrality. However, despite General Yuri Netkachev's opposition to supporting Transnistria and his efforts to maintain neutrality, weapons were repeatedly transferred to the separatist side through covert agreements at lower levels of command, and his troops often acted insubordinately in this regard. Weapons and equipment began to disappear from the barracks. The most notorious incident occurred on 14 March 1992 in Parkany, when several thousand women from the Women's Strike Committee arrived at the barracks and demanded that the weapons depots be opened. The Russian soldiers complied, and the Women's Committee seized, among other things, more than 1,300 rifles. It later emerged that the commander of the Parkany garrison had been involved in the incident and that the Women's Committee had been protected by a unit of the Transnistrian Guard.

In mid-March and early April, Moldovan forces launched two offensive operations aimed at capturing Dubăsari. As previously mentioned, the purpose of this move was to divide the separatist-controlled territories into two parts and prevent Tiraspol from transferring reinforcements between the northern and southern sections of the republic. After the capture of Dubăsari, the plan was to advance south and take Tiraspol. Although the Moldovan forces enjoyed a significant advantage in weaponry, the separatists succeeded in holding their positions.

On 12 April, the parties to the conflict signed a truce negotiated through Russian mediation. However, the Moldovans resumed

military operations on 10 May. The Transnistrian side increasingly pressured the command of the 14th Army to intervene on behalf of the separatist republic. A mass protest organised by the Women's Strike Committee began at the army headquarters, and individual units started to defect to the Transnistrian side.

Alongside the fighting, peace negotiations were also taking place. Three ceasefires were concluded but subsequently violated by Moldova.

After the failure of the plan to capture Dubăsari, the Moldovan command decided to target the right-bank city of Bender, which remained under Transnistrian control (Oleksy 2018, pp. 79–84; J. Solak 2014, pp. 106–112).

On 19 June 1992, the Battle of Bender began – the bloodiest phase of the Transnistrian war. According to the Moldovan operational plan, codenamed "Trojan Horse," Moldovan police officers, special service agents, soldiers and members of paramilitary sabotage groups began to infiltrate Bender several hours before the attack on the city. At the moment of the regular army's assault, they were to seize control of key strategic points.

The Moldovan forces attacked the city from three directions but encountered fierce resistance. The Moldovan saboteurs who had infiltrated Bender proved largely ineffective. The commander of the Russian 14th Army subsequently transferred to the Transnistrian side, among other things, ten T-64 tanks, several armoured personnel carriers, and artillery pieces. The Transnistrian counterattack, supported by tanks, was successful – partly because the Moldovan troops believed they were being attacked by the Russian 14th Army. Panic ensued, and some Moldovan units fled. Nevertheless, the Transnistrian side failed to completely expel the Moldovan forces from Bender, and heavy street fighting ensued (Oleksy 2018, pp. 86–89; J. Solak 2014, pp. 113–115).

At the end of June 1992, General Aleksander Lebed assumed command of the Russian 14th Army. On 26 June, Moldovan aircraft flying over Transnistria were fired upon by the 14th Army's air defence units. That same day, General Lebed held a press conference at which he declared: "The army will remain neutral, but the nature of this neutrality will change. It will be a completely different kind of neutrality – a wartime neutrality. It will mean that as long as they do not poke at us, we will not poke at anyone" (as cited in Oleksy 2018, p. 91). The general added that, from that point on, the 14th Army would cooperate with the Transnistrian armed forces. At a subsequent press conference, he went so far as to threaten Moldova, labelling it a fascist state and accusing the authorities in Chișinău of genocide.

Gen. Alexandr Lebed monument, Bendery, Transnistria (2024). Photo: Photoframe123 / Shutterstock ID 2512043501

With the support of the Russian 14th Army, which attacked Moldovan positions, the Transnistrian forces succeeded in holding Bender and driving the government troops out of the city.

After Lebed's statements accusing the Moldovan authorities of fascism and genocide, and declaring armed neutrality, Russian forces subsequently launched an attack on Moldovan positions threatening Bender. Lebed's statements indicated an increasing likelihood of the Russian 14th Army intervening on the side of Transnistria. Under pressure from Russian threats, Chișinău agreed to halt the fighting. On 6 July 1992, Moldovan President Mircea Snegur and Russian President Boris Yeltsin signed a ceasefire agreement. However, Moldova was initially reluctant to implement the terms of the truce and continued to shell Transnistrian positions. Only after further Russian warnings did Moldovan forces finally cease fire (Oleksy 2018, pp. 90–94; Solak 2014, pp. 115–116).

Throughout the conflict, the Russian 14th Army repeatedly supplied Transnistrian forces with light and heavy weaponry and ammunition. Its soldiers assisted in mining the approaches to the separatist defensive lines. A considerable number of Russian Cossacks and other volunteers from Russia also took part in the fighting on the Transnistrian side. In the final phase of the conflict, units of the Russian 14th Army became directly involved in combat operations in support of the unrecognised republic (Chirtoaca 2004, pp. 43–45).

On 21 July 1992, the Presidents of Russia and Moldova signed in Moscow the Agreement on the Principles of a Peaceful Settlement of the Armed Conflict in the Dniester Region of the Republic of Moldova.

A security zone was established along the demarcation line. To ensure compliance with the agreement – supervision of the security zone and maintenance of the ceasefire – a trilateral Moldovan–Russian–Transnistrian Joint Control Commission (JCC) was established, based in Bender, together with a trilateral peacekeeping force composed of Moldovan, Russian and Transnistrian contingents (*Agreement on the Principles…*).

Transnistria After the War

Thanks to the agreements imposed by Russia in July 1992, Transnistria's existence was secured.

The separatist entity possesses all the attributes of a state except international recognition – formally, it remains part of the Republic of Moldova (even Russia has not recognised its independence). The Pridnestrovian Moldavian Republic exercises full control over its own territory and has a constitution, a president, a unicameral parliament (the Supreme Council), armed forces, a militia, its own currency (the Pridnestrovian rouble, introduced in 1994), as well as a flag and a coat of arms. The capital of Transnistria is Tiraspol (Wróbel 2012, p. 31; J. Solak 2014, p. 63).

Russian soldiers marching during the 9 May parade in Tiraspol, Transnistria (2017). Photo: annva / Shutterstock ID 1091042126

Transnistria's political system is authoritarian, with the security services maintaining strict control over society. Until 2016, however, genuine elections were held in the separatist republic, allowing for changes in government (in the case of the presidency, there have been two such changes). Since 2016, full power in Transnistria has been seized by a mafia regime linked to the Sheriff holding company, which prevents candidates competitive with its authority from standing in presidential or parliamentary elections. The elements of political pluralism that had previously existed have been eliminated (Rodkiewicz 2011; Całus 2016; Pieńkowski 2023; Freedom House 2024, 2025 and previous years; Całus, Kosienkowski, Oleksy, Pieńkowski, Rajczyk 2014, pp. 23–24; Gnatkova 2020).

The core of Transnistria's armed forces is the Dniester Republican Guard – approximately 4,500 personnel – which is about half the size of the Moldovan army but better armed. In addition, there are border guard troops, a militia, civil defence forces and the Black Sea Cossack Army, which can reach around 3,000 men after mobilisation. These units, commanded by a military ataman elected by the Cossack army, constitute an important part of the militarised Cossack community, which enjoys legally guaranteed autonomy (J. Solak 2006, pp. 152–153; J. Solak 2014, pp. 153–162).

"Sheriff" chain shop in Rybnitsa, Transnistria (2017). Photo: The Road Provides / Shutterstock ID 1802781649

In the case of renewed conflict in Transnistria, military assistance from Russia was also anticipated, but this is currently unrealistic. Almost the entire 14th Russian Army has been withdrawn; Russian peacekeeping forces are few in number; and the war in Ukraine means that Russia would be unable to come to Transnistria's aid from its own territory if necessary. This is all the more so since Ukraine has declared that, if requested by Chișinău, it would assist Moldova in eliminating the separatist republic, including by force. However, the authorities in Chișinău are not inclined to pursue such a scenario (Całus 2023).

The Economic Situation of Transnistria and the Sheriff Company

Transnistria accounted for 12.4% of the territory of the Moldavian SSR and was inhabited by 15.2% of its population, yet its economic significance was considerably greater. The left bank of the Dniester was the most industrialised region of the Moldavian SSR. After the collapse of the USSR, Transnistria managed to preserve most of its industrial potential despite the difficulties of operating within an unrecognised state. This was partly possible because the leadership of the separatist republic consisted of directors of industrial enterprises, who were well acquainted with economic management. Nevertheless, the economic situation in Transnistria deteriorated during the 1990s – in the first decade of the parastate's existence, its industrial production declined 2.5 times, and agricultural output fell fourfold. Economic growth was recorded for the first time only in 2000 (Kosienkowski 2010, pp. 41–42; Wróbel 2012, p. 33).

It should be noted that throughout the 1990s, the most important Transnistrian enterprises remained state-owned. At the same time, grassroots entrepreneurship developed, with the increasingly powerful "Sheriff" company distancing itself from competitors. Large state-owned enterprises were privatised only at the beginning of the 21st century. Although this privatisation was not officially recognised by the authorities in Chișinău, in practice, the privatised companies were able to join international capital groups.

Transnistria also possesses its own military industry, which is linked to the problem of illegal arms exports from the parastate. However, the largest source of weapons illicitly exported by Transnistria was the military depot of the 14th Russian Army located in Cobasna (Russian: Kolbasna).

Due to the very low price of electricity in Transnistria – resulting from Gazprom's virtually free gas supplies – the region has attracted investors from Russia and China, who have engaged in "cryptocurrency mining."

A distinctive feature of Transnistria is the dominance of the Sheriff holding company, which since 2016 has also exercised de facto full political control over the Pridnestrovian Moldavian Republic.

Sheriff was founded in mid-1993 by two former officers of the Transnistrian Ministry of Internal Affairs and has long served as the business foundation of the region's political elite.

The company has achieved supremacy in many sectors of Transnistria's economy. It owns a network of petrol stations, the dominant supermarket chain in the region, and the largest wholesale enterprises. It operates its own private television station – the only one in Transnistria – and is virtually the monopoly provider of cable television services. Sheriff also controls the only mobile phone network in the separatist republic, as well as the largest publishing house, an advertising agency, a construction company, and several food industry plants, including AquaTir, a producer of caviar and fish products. The company further owns the Tirotex textile factory and the renowned Transnistrian cognac producer Kvint. Sheriff has monopolised the import of petroleum products, spirits, and alcohol, while simultaneously enjoying tax and customs privileges. It has also been exempted from the mandatory sale of foreign currency. According to some estimates, the Sheriff holding company currently controls at least 80% of Transnistria's economy.

At the same time, Sheriff has derived – and to a considerable extent continues to derive – profits from criminal activities, including smuggling across the Transnistrian section of the Moldovan-Ukrainian border. The company is known to have cooperated with criminal groups from Odessa and Russia.

In 1997, Sheriff founded the FC Sheriff Tiraspol sports club. Shortly thereafter, it invested approximately USD 200 million in the construction of a state-of-the-art stadium with capacity of 15,500 spectators and a large sports complex, the most modern facility of its kind in the region.

Over the past two decades, Sheriff has gradually achieved political dominance in Transnistria. It established its own political organisation – the Renewal (*Obnovlenie*) party – which has held a majority in the republic's parliament since the 2005 parliamentary elections. In December 2016, Sheriff succeeded in installing Vadim

Krasnoselsky, a politician representing its interests, as president of Transnistria. Since then, the company has exercised full control over the republic.

It should be noted that Transnistria's lack of international recognition entails a range of economic difficulties, although it also provides certain advantages to its economy. One of the key problems is the region's exclusion from the SWIFT system due to its unrecognised status. Consequently, the administration in Tiraspol established its own electronic payment infrastructure – the Klever system – and introduced Raduga payment cards, which, however, cannot be used outside the separatist republic (Eberhardt 2011, pp. 12, 15–16; Oleksy 2018, pp. 125–134, 158–159; Wróbel 2003, p. 15; Wróbel 2012, pp. 37–38; Całus 2016; Kowalczyk 2024, pp. 267–271).

Transnistrian-Russian Relations

Transnistria has largely survived thanks to the assistance of the Russian Federation. This support takes the form of political backing in international forums and in negotiations with Moldova, even though the political visions pursued by Tiraspol and Moscow are not always fully aligned.

Marshal Alexandr Suvorov monument in Tiraspol (erected 1979, designed by Ya. Druzhynin and Yu. Chistyakov). The Transnistrian statehood emblem is in the foreground, behind the monument are the visible flags of the Abkhasia, South Ossetia and Mountain Karabakh states. Tiraspol, Transnistria (2020). Photo: s_oleg / Shutterstock ID 1802781649

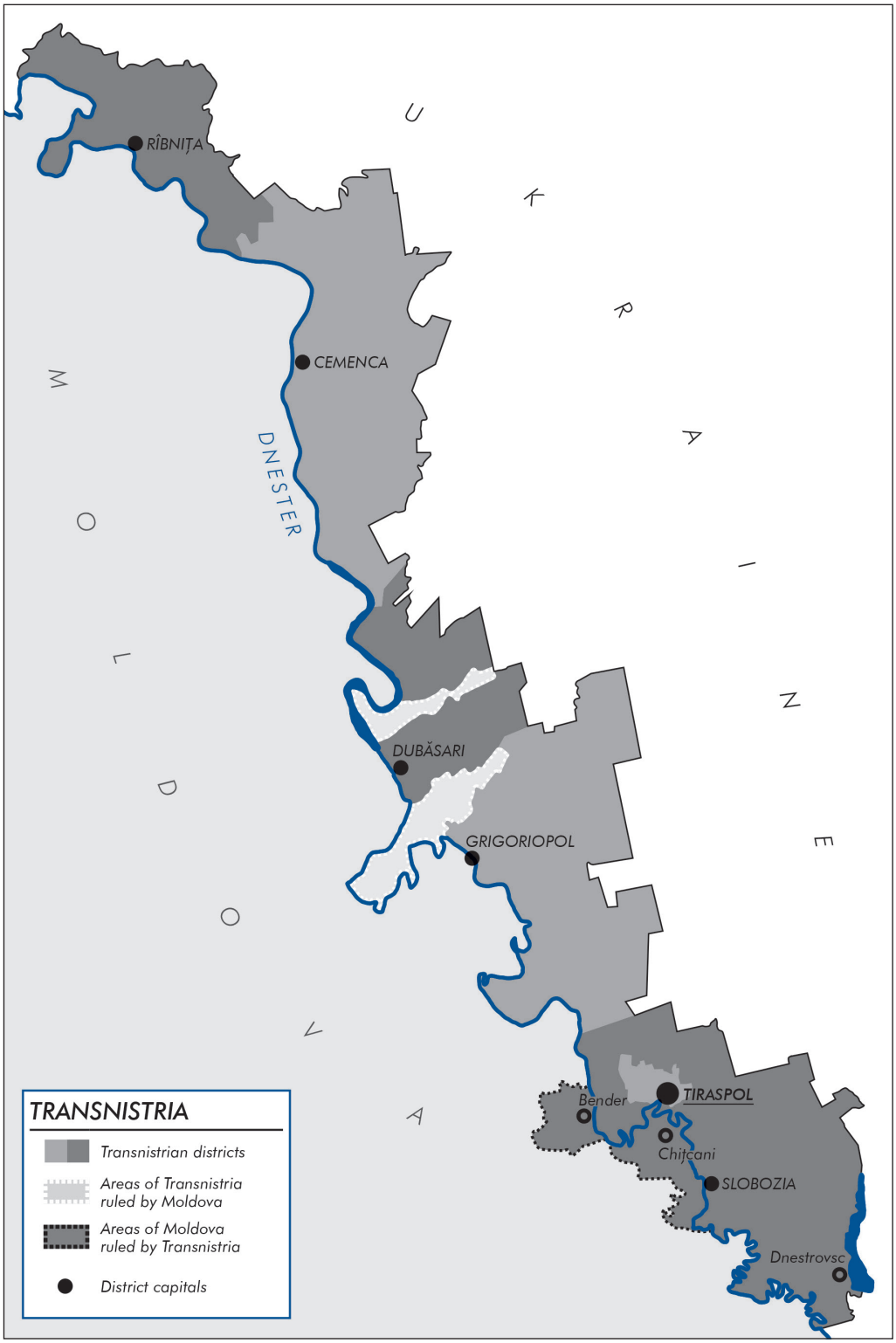
Equally significant is Russia's multifaceted military support for Transnistria. This primarily concerns the Russian troops stationed in the region – both those forming part of the trilateral peacekeeping contingent and the units of the Russian 14th Army, which in 1995 was transformed into the Operational Group of Russian Forces (OGRF). The OGRF has never been completely withdrawn from Transnistria. Its continued presence is justified by the need to guard the Russian military depots in Cobasna (Russian: Kolbasna) , some of which remain in place. At the same time, this support constitutes a form of assistance to Transnistria's industrial–military complex. Moscow has supported the modernisation of the parastate's military industry, providing technology and qualified technical personnel to supervise compliance with production standards on site.

Russia's economic aid to Transnistria is equally important. It includes the supply of natural gas to the region – essential for the functioning of the separatist republic's industry. For a long time, Transnistria only paid part of the cost of these supplies, and Gazprom did not press for payment. Since 2009, Transnistria has ceased paying Gazprom for gas altogether. Orders from the Russian defence sector and loans from Gazprombank are also vital to the Transnistrian economy. Furthermore, the Russian banking sector provides crucial support to Transnistrian banks excluded from the international settlement system. Transactions carried out in Transnistria are recorded in financial documents as operations of Russian banks conducted from the territory of the Russian Federation.

The Russian Federation also assists the region through a variety of social programmes – among them, funding scholarships for Transnistrian students, granting local youth free places at Russian universities, and offering healthcare-related aid, such as staff training (Kosienkowski 2010, pp. 93–107; Kosienkowski 2019, pp. 3–22; Kosienkowski 2008, pp. 16–19; Wróbel 2012, p. 34; Kowalczyk 2024, pp. 258, 271).

Transnistria has long served Russia as a means of exerting pressure on Moldova. Whenever Chișinău distanced itself from Moscow, the latter refrained from urging the authorities in Tiraspol to negotiate with the Moldovan government. Conversely, when Chișinău took Russian interests and political objectives into account in its policies, prospects for an agreement with Tiraspol appeared more promising – although the relative independence of the Transnistrian authorities from their Russian patron often complicated such efforts.

Since the 1990s, the principal objective of Russia's policy towards Transnistria has been the creation of a Moldovan–Transnistrian


RÎBNIȚA
CEMENCA
DNESTER
DUBĂSARI
GRIGORIOPOL
TIRASPOL
Bender
Chișcani
SLOBOZIA
Dnestrovsc
UKRAINE
MOLDOVA
TRANSNISTRIA
Transnistrian districts
Areas of Transnistria ruled by Moldova
Areas of Moldova ruled by Transnistria
District capitals

Dmitriy Kozak, former Russian Deputy Prime Minister (2008–2020), (8 July 2010, Moscow). Photo: De Visu / Shutterstock ID 57170452

federation. Such an arrangement would impede Moldova's integration into Euro-Atlantic structures and ensure that the resulting state remained sufficiently dependent on Russia. This strategic consideration explains why Moscow has never recognised Transnistria's independence, unlike in the cases of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Moscow came closest to realising this objective during the negotiations on Dmitry Kozak's Plan in 2003. The so-called Kozak Memorandum – whose signing was cancelled by the Moldovan side at the last moment in November 2003 – envisaged the establishment of a tripartite federation composed of Moldova proper, Transnistria, and Gagauzia. Under its provisions, Tiraspol and Comrat would have been granted extensive powers to block federal legislation unfavourable to them, including international agreements. The memorandum also legalised the presence of Russian troops in Moldova for at least twenty years, under the guise of peacekeeping forces guaranteeing observance of the agreement. Given the likely addition of pro-Russian voters from Transnistria to Moldovan society – already divided between supporters of the West and Russia – and the expected involvement of Transnistrian elites and services infiltrated by Russian intelligence in Moldovan political life, it can be assumed that the federation proposed in Kozak Memorandum would have become dependent on Moscow and would have effectively abandoned prospects of integration with Western structures (Solak 2014, pp. 172–178; Oleksy 2018, pp. 240–245; Całus 2016-2, pp. 77–78; Kozak Memorandum). To forestall similar federalist solutions in the future, in July 2005 the Moldovan Parliament adopted a law establishing Transnistria's autonomy (see *Parliament of the Republic of Moldova Law on Fundamental Regulations*… on the OSCE website).

In Tiraspol, however, the annexation of Transnistria by Russia remains the preferred scenario. Yet the Transnistrian elites must take into account the position of their Russian patron, which continues to treat the separatist republic as a geopolitical instrument (for the legal aspirations of Transnistrian statehood see Serzhanova 2016; Serzhanova 2017a; Serzhanova 2017b).

The Peace Process and Plans to Resolve the Conflict

Peace negotiations aimed at achieving a political settlement of the conflict have been ongoing since 1992. The mediators include Russia; since 1993, the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (later transformed into the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe, OSCE); and, since 1995, Ukraine. From October 2005, the European Union and the United States have also participated in the talks. This format, known as the 5+2 formula, brings together the two parties to the conflict and three mediators (the OSCE, Russia, and Ukraine), as well as two observers (the EU and the US) (Całus et al. 2014, p. 56; Wróbel 2003, p. 16; J. Solak 2014, p. 298). Despite the duration of this peace process, no final resolution to the conflict has been achieved. Following the outbreak of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, negotiations in their existing form effectively lost relevance.

Summary

Since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Russia has regarded the post-Soviet space as its sphere of influence. Its strategic aim has been to minimise Western influence in the region and to limit the independence of the newly established states. One of the principal instruments employed to this end has been the support of separatist state entities – so-called parastates. This has been the case with Transnistria, which for decades after the collapse of the USSR enabled Moscow to exert political influence over Moldova and, to a lesser extent, Ukraine. Russia resorted to military force only as a last resort – it was the threat of intervention by the 14th Russian Army that compelled Chișinău to agree to a ceasefire, thereby ensuring the survival of the de facto Transnistrian state. In subsequent years, Transnistria continued to exist largely due to Russia's comprehensive political, economic and military support, including the ongoing stationing of Russian troops in the region. However, the Kremlin's instrumental use of Transnistria as a geopolitical tool, though effective in maintaining leverage over Moldova, ultimately failed to achieve its main strategic goal – the creation of a Moldovan-Transnistrian federation dependent on Russia. The importance of

Transnistria has diminished since the outbreak of the full-scale war in Ukraine, primarily as a result of the parastate's isolation from Russia by the territory of a country now engaged in armed conflict with it.

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ATTEMPTS BY RUSSIA TO **DESTABILISE** THE UKRAINIAN STATE USING POLITICAL MEANS AND **INTERFERENCE** IN ITS RELATIONS AMONG ITS NATIONALITIES **(1991–2014)**

Abstract
As a result of the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, Ukraine declared its independence. In the years 1991–2013, Russia continuously interfered in Ukraine's internal affairs, supporting separatist movements of the Russian minority and of Russian-speaking Ukrainian citizens. In 2014, Russia engaged in an act of aggression against Ukraine. It made use of pro-Russian separatists, Ukrainian citizens, in the annexation of the Crimean Peninsula and the creation of the pseudo-independent Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics (Donbas). After a further attack on Ukraine in 2022, Russia conducted the annexation of Ukraine's south-eastern oblasts. Russia questions the ethnic, cultural, and religious separateness of the Ukrainian nation. It holds that Russians, Belarusians, and Ukrainians should form a single, common union state. It denies Ukraine the right to independent choice of international integration structures, primarily accession to the European Union and NATO.

Keywords: Ukraine, Russia, Autonomous Republic of Crimea, Zakarpattia Oblast, Chernivtsi Oblast, Donbas

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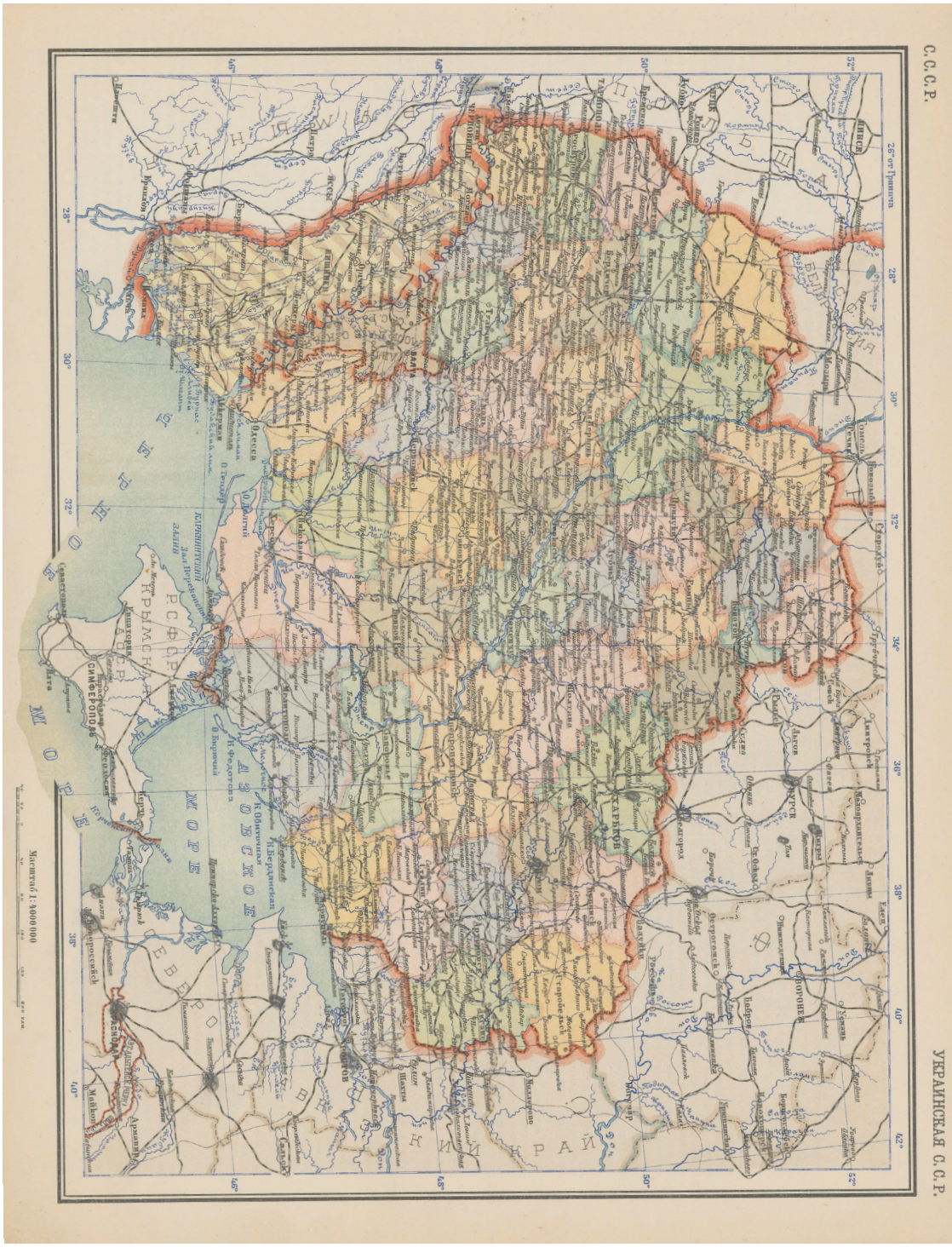
Introduction

The Russian Federation considers the entire area of the former Soviet Union to be its exclusive zone of influence (Bryc 2022; Szoszyn 2022; *Putin…* 2022). The Russian Federation assumed the dependent states of Central and Eastern Europe would be part of the Russian integration structure. To keep them within the Russian zone of influence, it used political, economic, and military pressure. The decisions of these states in favor of integration with Western integration structures, in particular NATO and the European Union, have been perceived by Russia as a hostile policy. For this reason, it has incited separatism among the Russian, Russian-speaking, and Orthodox populations of Georgia (Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Adjara), Moldova (Transnistria, Gagauzia), and Ukraine (Transcarpathia, Crimea, Donbas) (here one could also include support for non-Russian Armenian separatism in Azerbaijan, namely Nagorno-Karabakh); Russia destabilises these states if their leadership is not aligned politically with Russian interests. Russia supports separatist provinces in neighboring states, invoking in its international propaganda a series of arguments, such as these provinces' right to self-determination, the protection of the rights of the Russian population, the maintenance of peace, human rights, the war on terror, and so on. Russia has recognised such regions, completely dependent on Russia in economic and military terms, as independent states (2008, Abkhazia, South Ossetia in Georgia) integrating them into Russian international structures or annexing them, as in the case of Crimea (2014), Donbas (2022), and parts of the Kherson and Zaporizhzhia oblasts (in Ukraine) (2022). The aim of this article is to show, based on the example of Ukraine, how Russia has attempted to dominate the post-Soviet sphere after the collapse of the Soviet Union, by exploiting



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political, economic, ethnic, cultural, and historical differences. In the view of the author, the Russian state makes use of methods used by Tsarist Russia and the Soviet Union; it has adapted them to current international relations in order to ensure the effectiveness of its imperialist policies along traditional lines of Russian expansionism (Pertsev 2025). The use of a chronological-historical method allows the difficulties facing Ukraine in terms of territorial cohesion and national minorities to be shown (Horska 2009), difficulties which Russia attempts to exploit to subjugate the Ukrainian state to itself and/or to partition it.

The Collapse of the USSR, the Creation of Integration Structures in its Former Territories, Ukraine and Euro-Atlantic Integration Structures

Between the years 1989–1991, the Eastern Bloc and the USSR collapsed. The former Soviet republics declared their independence in spite of attempts by the Soviet army and the Communist Party of the Soviet Union to halt this process during 1988–1991. To this end, the Soviet Union and Russia made use of conflicts between nationalities and the Russian minorities to incite separatist movements in individual Soviet republics, informed mainly by geopolitical considerations rather than ethnic ones (Szul 2024; Miszewski 2020, pp. 263–307; Rutland 2015, p. 122–128). During the independence of these states, Russia has continued its policy of their internal destabilisation (Nadskakuła-Kaczmarczyk 2021, pp. 487–514; Żakowska 2021, pp. 515–535; Gardocki 2015, pp. 37–55; Olszewski 2021; Kosienkowski 2010; Solak 2009). After the unsuccessful August Coup attempt, incited by Gorbachev's deputy, the vice-president of the USSR Gennady Yanayev (Anisimow 2017, pp. 410–413; Jach 2005, pp. 359–378), the leaders of Belarus, Ukraine, and Russia signed the Belovezha Accords on 8 December 1991, creating the Commonwealth of Independent States in place of the USSR (Michur-Ziemba 2007, pp. 223–246). Bringing together the majority of the former Soviet republics, although without the Baltic states, this organisation did not create deep relations between the post-Soviet states. Russia in turn did not wish to allow the states of the CIS to join political, economic or military organisations which it itself was not a member of, or which it considered to be hostile, such as the European Union or the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (Inoziemcew 2025; Panek 2023; cf. Panek

2015; Panek 2021). Apart from the CIS, established mainly for show, Russia also created political, economic, and military organisations with stricter formulas of cooperation that the former Soviet republics were meant to join. These included the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO), established on the basis of the Tashkent Treaty in 1992; from 2002 the CSTO included Armenia, Azerbaijan (1993), Belarus (1993), Georgia (1993), Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Russia, and Uzbekistan; in 1999 Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Uzbekistan left the CSTO, although the latter rejoined for the period of 2006–2012; the Union State of Belarus and Russia, established in 1996; the Eurasian Economic Community, in 1996–2014 this included Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan (1998), as well as Russia and Uzbekistan (2006–2008); the Eurasian Customs Union, in 2010 this included Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Russia; the Eurasian Economic Union, in 2015 this included Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Russia (*Quo vadis…* 2020; Grabowiecki and Fiedorczuk 2021). Refusal to accede to these organisations was treated by Russia as a hostile policy towards itself and a threat to its security (Jarosiewicz and Fischer 2015, pp. 1–7; Szewczyk 2017, pp. 83–94; Kiss, Bktasheva and Szabó 2021, pp. 35–64). When political, economic, and propaganda operations did not bring about a change in the positions of other post-Soviet states, Russia has resorted to interference in their internal affairs, including with the use of force, such as in the case of Moldova – the Transnistria War 1990–1992 (King 2000; Całus 2016), Georgia – the South Ossetia Wars 1991–1992 and 2008; the war in Abkhazia 1992–1993 (Górecki 2022 A; Saparov 2014; Lynch 1998; Chervonnaia 1994), Azerbaijan – the Armenian--Azerbaijani Nagorno-Karabakh conflict 1992–1994, 2016, 2020, 2022, and 2023 (Szeptycki 2021; Górecki 2020b), Ukraine – 2014–2015 the annexation of Crimea and the war in Donbas, since 2022 the Second Russo-Ukrainian War and the annexation of the Donetsk, Luhansk, Zaporizhzhia, and Kherson oblasts (Plokhy 2023A; Ramani 2023; D'Anieri 2023) and in the states of Central Asia – Tajikistan 1992–1997 and Kazakhstan 2022. [The Chechen Wars, due to the fact that the Russian Federation has not renounced their national sovereignty over Chechnya, would be beyond the scope of this article, as it concerns Russian support for separatism beyond the borders of Russia – editor's note].

In 1990, the Verkhovna Rada of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic enacted a resolution on the declaration of the sovereignty of Ukraine, which for the Ukrainian communists was to be a road

towards a new socialist union of Soviet republics with a limited role for the center (Moscow), while the Ukrainian nationalists expected it to be a road to an independent Ukraine. In March 1991, the communist authorities of Ukraine took part in a USSR-wide referendum aiming to preserve the Union, conducted at the behest of the president of the USSR, Mikhail Gorbachev (Magocsi 2017, p. 915). Among the 83.52% taking part in voting, 70.16% opted for preserving the USSR, while 27.99% were against this. On the same day, proponents of Ukrainian independence organised the so-called Galician Referendum (in the Lviv, Ivano-Frankivsk, and Ternopil *oblasts*), in which voters received two ballots, one white (the USSR referendum) and one grey (Ukrainian independence), the results for the abovementioned three *oblasts* were 89.6%, 90%, and 85.3%, respectively for Ukrainian independence. In turn, the inhabitants of Crimea (except Sevastopol) responded with 79.3% in favor of preserving the USSR, with a turnout of 87.6% (Rest 2021). A closer look at the results of the referendum shows that the western oblasts, which before the World War II were a part of the Second Polish Republic, were in favor of the independence of Ukraine. The eastern and southern oblasts of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic, where there was a significant Russian minority and where the majority of inhabitants spoke Russian as their first language, were in favor of preserving the USSR and Ukraine as one of its constituent republics (Petro 2015, pp. 18–31; Kiryukhin 2015, p. 57–64). The collapse of the USSR could not, however, be prevented either by the referendum or the special powers granted to the president of the USSR, Mikhail Gorbachev, in December 1990. Three days after the unsuccessful coup attempt by the vice-president of the USSR Gennady Yanayev in Moscow, the Verkhovna Rada announced in August 1991 the Act of Declaration of Independence of Ukraine. The Communist Party of Ukraine was delegalised. In the independence referendum held on 1 December, 84.18% of the citizens of Ukraine took part, of whom 90.32% voted in favor of independence. Poland was the first state to recognise Ukraine, followed on 2 December 1991 by Canada and Russia. In December 1994, the United States, Great Britain, Russia, and Ukraine signed a memorandum in Budapest guaranteeing the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine in return for Ukraine handing over its post-Soviet nuclear arsenal to Russia and agreeing to join the nuclear non-proliferation treaty (Synowitz 2014).

Russia, however, was not reconciled with the independence of Ukraine nor of Belarus, treating the Russians, Belarusians, and Ukrainians as

a single nation (Radzik 2016). Russia managed to implement integration with Belarus in the form of the Union State of Belarus and Russia (1996). A similar process was intended for Ukraine (Molhanov 2015, pp. 195–204; Radzik 2016, pp. 64–67; Kwiatkowska 2024). In the post-Soviet zone, Russia has used political and economic instruments to protect its interests. Political means have included supporting pro-communist and pro-Russian elites in elections, exploiting the Russian minority, aggravating antagonisms between nationalities in order to destabilise independent states, imposing itself as a peacekeeper in internal conflicts which it itself has inspired, recognizing the independence of rebellious provinces, granting inhabitants of such provinces Russian citizenship and including them within the Russian currency and economic system. Economic means have included granting privileged access to the Russian domestic market, sale of energy resources at preferential prices, tariff wars. Alongside military means such as supporting separatisms via the Russian military and special forces, such as in Transnistria, Nagorno-Karabakh, Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Crimea, Donbas, and by maintaining military bases in Armenia, Belarus, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Tajikistan, and Ukraine. Russian armed forces have also been present as "peacekeeping forces" in conflict regions, and the Soviet Union and then Russia has been involved in and conducted armed interventions in Moldova 1990–1992, Tajikistan 1992–1997, Georgia 2008, Ukraine 2014–2015, 2022, Azerbaijan 2020–2024, and Kazakhstan 2022 (Akopjan 2012, pp. 481–485; Włodowska-Bagan 2011, pp. 38–46; Rogozińska and Olech 2020; Zala 2025).

Since accepting membership in the CIS, Ukraine has not joined the structures created by Russia in the former USSR (Kowalski 2022, pp. 435–450). It began in 1997 to cooperate in creating an alternative structure to the CIS in the form of the GUAM organisation, a regional body associating Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, and Moldova. This initiative was started in 1994 by Georgia. During a summit of the Council of Europe in Strasbourg (1997), a consultative forum was established. In the years 1999–2005, Uzbekistan was also a member of the organisation (GUUAM). In May 2006, the presidents of the four GUAM states signed a declaration on the creation of the GUAM Organisation for Democracy and Economic Development, headquartered in Kyiv. Its main aims are: 1. the democratisation of member states, protection of human rights, and economic development, 2. cooperation in the resolution of regional conflicts and ensuring stabilisation and security, 3. creation of a free trade zone for member states and ensuring energy security, 4. actions aimed

Viktor Yushchenko, former president of Ukraine (2005–2010) (left), Petro Poroshenko, former president of Ukraine (2014–2019) (centre), Leonid Kuchma, former president of Ukraine (1994–2005) (right), during the funeral ceremony for Leonid Kravchuk. Kyiv, Ukraine (17 May 2022). Photo: Dmytro Larin / Shutterstock ID 2157724451

at European integration by strengthening ties with the European Union, NATO, and other organisations, and with the United States (Król-Mazur 2013, pp. 293–325; Grabowiecki and Fiedorczuk 2021, pp. 135–156). Russia regarded GUAM as a hostile operation by the West against its structures formed in the post-Soviet zone. It held a similarly hostile assessment of the Eastern Partnership, established in 2009 at the initiative of Poland and Sweden within the framework of the European Neighbourhood Policy and with the participation of Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova, Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia (Miszewski 2019, pp. 63–85; Szczot, Jaśkiewicz, and Lebediuk 2018; *EU Policies…* 2014).

The policies of Ukrainian authorities regarding Western structures – the European Union and NATO – since the beginnings of an independent Ukraine have been ambiguous, for political, social, and economic reasons (Sawicz 2010, pp. 158–168; Malak 2010, pp. 169–174; Kravchenko 2010, pp. 201–206). Since 1991, Russia has consistently threatened Ukraine with political and economic consequences for its possible accession to the EU and NATO (Vlasenko 2010, pp. 65–70; Boratyn 2010, pp. 71–78). The post-Soviet authorities of Ukraine have attempted to maneuver between the East and the West. In 1991, Ukraine became a member of the North Atlantic Cooperation Council. After giving up its Soviet-era nuclear arsenal (the Budapest Memorandum 1994) in return for guarantees of security and territorial integrity from Russia, the United States, and Great Britain allowed Ukraine to conclude the

partnership agreement with NATO (NATO-Ukraine Commission 1997). In 1994, a partnership and cooperation agreement was signed between Ukraine and the EU. At the first Ukraine-EU summit in 1997 in Kyiv, then-president Leonid Kuchma confirmed Ukraine's desire to be associated with the EU. In 1999, work began on the establishment of a free-trade zone. The EU adopted a common strategy towards Ukraine focused on a market economy, democracy, and human rights. In 2000, the EU confirmed its willingness to enter into negotiations on an Association Agreement with Ukraine. Due to the oligarchisation of the economy, corruption, the absence of independent courts, and violations of democratic order (such as the murder in 2000 of the journalist Georgiy Gongadze, in which the highest authorities were involved, including president Kuchma), the EU proposed in 2003 that Ukraine merely participate in the European Neighbourhood Policy (Legucka 2010, pp. 29–33; Zotkin 2015, pp. 201–214). Up to 2004, the highest priority of the EU was the accession of the Central European states, leaving Ukraine as an item of secondary interest. There were fears regarding the impact of its agricultural output and corruption, as well as its dependence on Russia, which perceived Ukraine as its own security zone against the West (Kirsenko 2010, pp. 9–14). After the so-called Orange Revolution, president Viktor Yushchenko confirmed the aspirations of Ukraine to join the EU and NATO, aspirations which had been sidelined by Leonid Kuchma. When in 2008 Ukraine became a member of the World Trade Organisation, the EU began negotiations with it on the subject of a free-trade zone, an Association Agreement, and visa-free movement. President Yushchenko in turn announced a NATO Membership Action Plan. At a summit in Bucharest in 2008, the NATO member states did not accept the Action Plans for Ukraine and Georgia (Jureńczyk 2019, pp. 117–119; Bajor 2010, pp. 207–214). The conflict between president Yushchenko and prime minister Yulia Tymoshenko further delayed the integration of Ukraine and the West (Figura 2010, pp. 79–87). Both of these were leaders of pro-western parties and competed for the leadership of the country. The Ukrainian political scene was also divided by the Russo-Georgian War of 2008 and by the conflict with Gazprom, which demanded payment of Ukraine's debts while the country was embroiled in an economic crisis, namely the global financial crisis of 2008 (Kubaczyk and Solak 2010, pp. 46–47, 56–57). Russia forced Ukraine to accept higher gas prices after the "gas war" of 2008–2009 – Putin-Tymoshenko agreement (Makowska 2010, pp. 197–200). The EU merely proposed that Ukraine take part in the

Eastern Partnership at the initiative of Poland and Sweden (Miszewski 2019, pp. 63–85; Cianciara 2014). In 2010, president Yanukovych announced the neutrality of Ukraine. In the resolution adopted by the Verkhovna Rada on the basis for domestic and foreign policy (2010), mention of the accession of Ukraine to NATO and the EU disappeared. This was influenced by the imprisonment of the former prime minister Tymoshenko (accused of fraud and losses incurred to Naftogaz of Ukraine relating to a contract with the Russian Gazprom). In 2012, the EU again proposed the conclusion of an Association Agreement with Ukraine. In November 2013, under threat of closure of the Russian domestic market to Ukraine and a hike in Russian raw materials prices, president Yanukovych declined to sign the Association Agreement with the EU at the Eastern Partnership summit in Vilnius. Armenia also declined to conclude the agreement under pressure from Russia and instead joined the Customs Union of Russia, Belarus, and Kazakhstan. At this same 2013 summit in Vilnius, Association Agreements with Moldova and Georgia were initialed. Russia did not wish to allow the integration of Ukraine with the EU and NATO as it was aiming at Ukraine's vassalisation (Doroszko 2015, pp. 239–245). Russia's plan to end the crisis in Ukraine in 2014 after Yanukovych was removed from power included the following elements and demands: implementation of the agreement of 21 February 2014 (return to the 2004 constitution with restrictions on the president's powers; a new government within 10 days; presidential elections by the end of December 2014; and an agreement accepted by the opposition, president Yanukovych, the EU, and Russia; the agreement did not come into force after Yanukovych fled to Russia); the end of street protests, evacuation of buildings occupied by radical groups, their disarmament and initiation of investigations into acts of violence; the convening of a Constitutional Assembly representing all regions of Ukraine to draft a new constitution; adoption of Ukraine's status as a federal and neutral (in political and military terms) state; the granting of Ukrainian and Russian the status of official languages; the granting of autonomy to regions in the political, economic, financial, cultural, and foreign relations spheres, and granting them the right to freely elect legislative and executive authorities; respect for minority rights and non-interference in religious matters; local and parliamentary elections after the adoption of the constitution; the right of Crimea to freely choose its status; and guarantees from Russia, the EU, the US, and the UN Security Council for Ukraine's federal system,

Leonid Kravchuk (1934–2022), president of Ukraine (1991–1994) (2019). Photo: Drop of Light / Shutterstock ID 1493926991

sovereignty, territorial integrity, and neutrality. As a result of the severe political crisis (the Revolution of Dignity, Euromaidan), the Ukrainian parliament removed Viktor Yanukovych from power on 22 February 2014. Prime minister Arseniy Yatsenyuk and president Petro Poroshenko (2014–2019) signed an Association Agreement and an agreement on a free-trade zone with the EU in 2014, just as Moldova and Georgia had done before. Membership in the EU and NATO once again became a priority of the new Ukrainian authorities. As a result, Russian president Putin terminated the free-trade agreement with Ukraine. The EU was not inclined to revise its wait-and-see policy regarding Ukrainian membership despite the confrontational policy of Russia, and the First Russia-Ukraine War 2014–2015 (Bushuev and Cöllen, 2015; *Russia…* 2015). In the amended Ukrainian constitution of 2019, norms were defined regarding the strategic course towards EU and NATO membership. At a NATO summit in Brussels in 2021, the decision on the possibility of Ukrainian and Georgian membership was upheld. Ukraine submitted an application for membership in NATO on 30 September 2022, after the Russian annexation of the occupied territories. At a NATO summit in 2023 in Vilnius, Ukraine did not obtain acceptance for fast track membership by the end of the Russia-Ukraine War.

Despite the ban of 1991 on the communist party in Ukraine, post-communist forces had enormous influence on Ukrainian political and economic life (Szweda 2015, pp. 162–175). The presidents of Ukraine Leonid Kravchuk (1991–1994) and Leonid Kuchma (1994–2005) had both been members of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU). The Ukrainian economy was highly dependent on Russian export markets and energy resources. Ukrainian oligarchs had ties

Viktor Yanukovych, former president of Ukraine (2010–2014) (left), Vladimir Putin, then Russian Prime Minister (right). Istanbul, Turkey (8 June 2010). Photo: UkrPictures / Shutterstock ID 1574283172

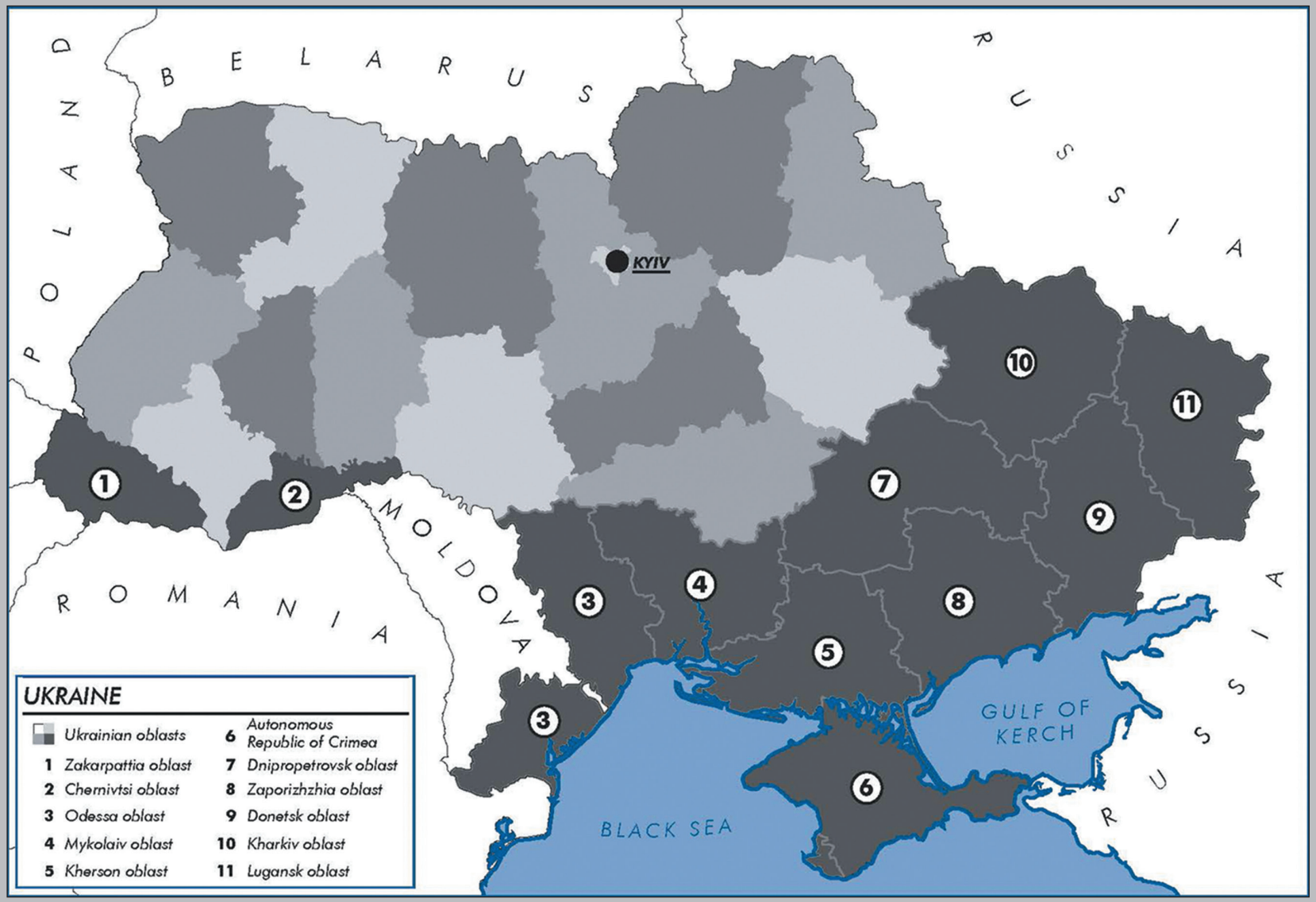
with Russian political and economic elites. The Socialist Party of Ukraine, established in 1991, did not become an alternative for former members or sympathisers of the CPSU, and did not obtain significant support within Ukrainian society. In 1996, a group split off from it led by Nataliya Vitrenko, a former member of the CPSU, who created the anti-Western and pro-Russian Progressive Socialist Party of Ukraine, financed by Russia. The party was delegalised in 2022. The most powerful party in Ukraine after the Orange Revolution (2004) was the pro-Russian and pro-Soviet Communist Party of Ukraine, which found its greatest support in central and south-eastern Ukraine. The new CPU was in favor of Ukraine's participation in structures created by Russia in the post-Soviet zone. It was also in favor of the equal status of the Russian and Ukrainian languages and the federalisation of Ukraine. It opposed the policy of Ukrainisation of the state and Ukraine's integration with NATO and the EU, twice supporting the pro-Russian Viktor Yanukovych in the presidential elections in 2004 and 2010. The CPU considered the Orange Revolution (2004) and the Revolution of Dignity (2013–2014) as Western interference in Ukraine's affairs, and Yanukovych's removal from power in February 2014 as a coup d'état. In 2015, the CPU was delegalised.

Separatist Areas and Aspirations for Autonomy in Independent Ukraine

Along its path to independence, Ukraine has seen the appearance of historical, ethnic, political, and economic separatisms (Krpan 2022, pp. 131–151). The driving factors behind these events were the activation of the outgoing Soviet political and economic elites, who presented among local communities an idealised view of the Soviet past, as well as the Russian minority which did not accept an independent Ukrainian state, and Russian media and cultural interference (such as demands to put Russian on an equal footing with Ukrainian and to maintain Soviet symbols in Ukraine). These appeared in Ukraine mainly in the Crimean Oblast, where Soviet authorities had allowed the restoration into the Ukrainian SSR in February 1991 of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, which as the Crimean Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic had been liquidated in 1946, and in the Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts (Donbas). In turn, efforts to obtain autonomy in some form became apparent in the Chernivtsi and Zakarpattia oblasts (Marples 2015, pp. 8–15; Voytyuk 2021, pp. 401–402).

I. The Autonomous Republic of Crimea

After World War II, the population of Crimea was dominated by ethnic Russians (Chazbijewicz 2001, pp. 48–61). In 1944, based on accusations of treason in the form of support for the Third Reich, Soviet authorities deported some 300,000 of the native inhabitants of Crimea, including 200,000 Crimean Tatars and 50,000 Germans, as well as Armenians, Kurds, Greeks, Bulgarians, Turks, Persians, and Roma (Olszański 2014, pp. 1–6; Romańczuk 2020, pp. 104–108). After 1989, the Soviet authorities allowed the Crimean Tatars to resettle in Crimea (Chazbijewicz 2001, pp. 200–205). After Ukraine's declaration of independence in August 1991, the pro-Russian separatist authorities of the Crimean ASSR announced in September a declaration of state sovereignty. In February 1992, the Crimean ASSR was transformed into the independent Republic of Crimea, and in May a constitution was adopted. Kyiv maintained authority over Crimea but agreed to the establishment of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea with a pro-Russian majority in the authoritative body in Simferopol, the Supreme Council of the ARC (parliament)


POLAND
BELARUS
RUSSIA
KYIV
MOLDOVA
ROMANIA
RUSSIA
GULF OF KERCH
BLACK SEA
UKRAINE
Ukrainian oblasts
1 Zakarpattia oblast
2 Chernivtsi oblast
3 Odessa oblast
4 Mykolaiv oblast
5 Kherson oblast
6 Autonomous Republic of Crimea
7 Dnipropetrovsk oblast
8 Zaporizhzhia oblast
9 Donetsk oblast
10 Kharkiv oblast
11 Lugansk oblast

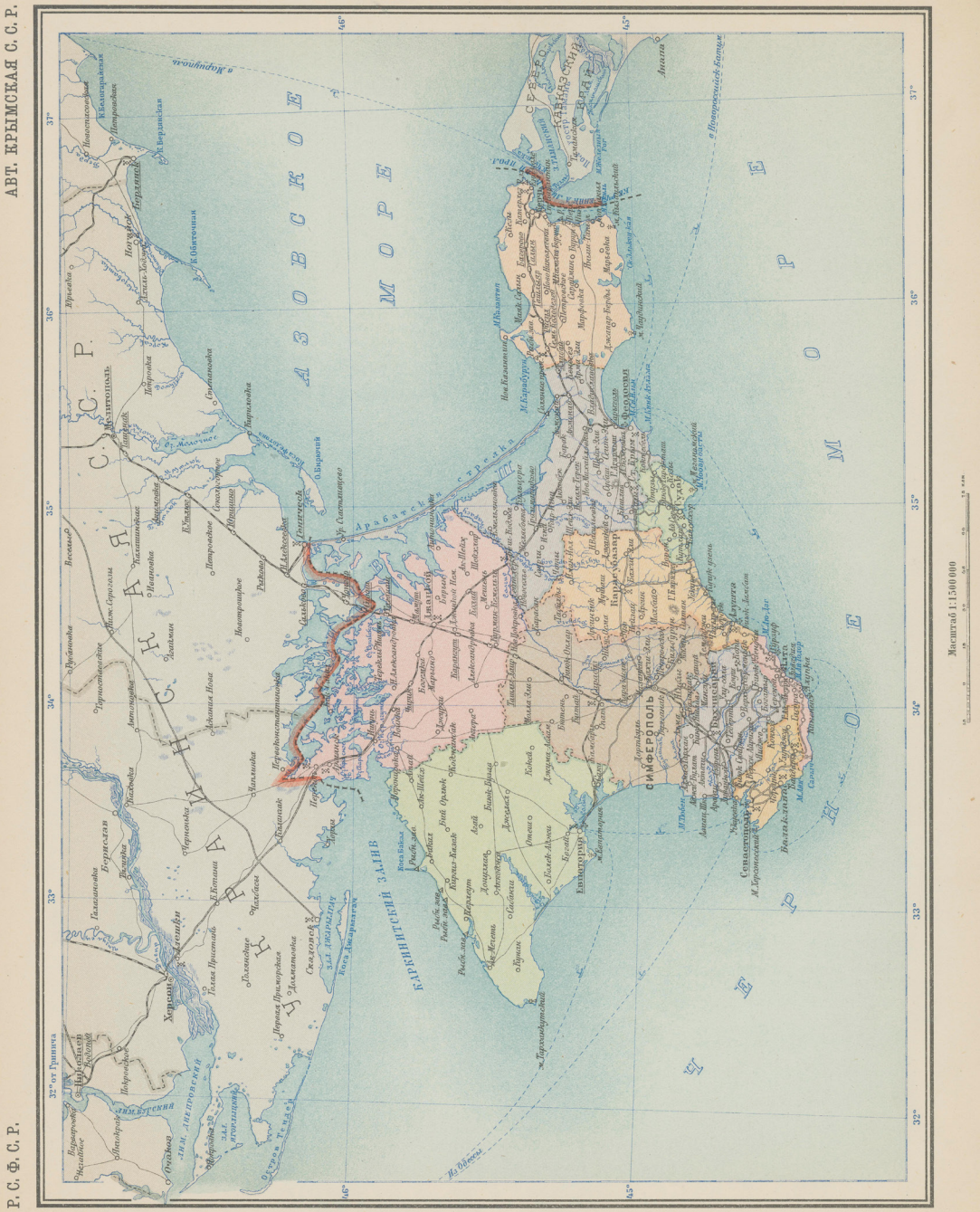
and the Crimean government of the ARC, based on the constitution of the ARC of 21 October 1998 (*Vseukrayins'kyi…* 2001). In the 1990s, Russia withdrew its support for the separatist authorities in Crimea due to the internal difficulties it was experiencing (the constitutional crisis of 1993, the First Chechen War of 1994–1996) and because it was involved in other separatist conflicts in the post-Soviet zone.

The price for keeping Crimea was the agreement of the Ukrainian government to continue to allow the Black Sea Fleet to be stationed at its base in Sevastopol, which was under the direct authority of Kyiv (Mironowicz 2014, pp. 207–208; Rogozińska and Olech 2020, pp. 68–69; *Vseukrayins'kyi…* 2001). The Ukrainian-Russian agreement on the status and conditions of the Russian Federation's Black Sea Fleet's presence in Ukraine, signed on 28 May 1997, allowed the Russian base to operate until 2017 and a troop strength of 12,500. President Viktor Yushchenko (2005–2010) announced plans for its liquidation after the expiration of the agreement. In Kharkiv in April 2010, presidents Viktor Yanukovych of Ukraine (2010–2014) and Dmitry Medvedev of Russia signed the Kharkiv Pact. The period of stay of the Russian Black Sea Fleet in Crimea was extended by 25 years, beginning 28 May 2017, with automatic renewal for five-year periods in the absence of a written notification of termination by one of the parties to the agreement, that is until 2042 with an option to extend until 2047. Russia was to supply gas to Ukraine at preferential prices until 2020.

The Russian media claimed that after the removal of president Viktor Yanukovych from power in February 2014 as the result of a "coup d'état," power in Kyiv had been taken over by "fascists" (Hutchings, Szostek 2015, pp. 173–185). On 23 February, Ukrainian citizens of Russian descent organised demonstrations inspired by Russia in Kerch, Simferopol, and Sevastopol, demanding the organisation of an independence referendum by the autonomous authorities of Crimea. Crimean Russians began to establish "self-defense forces." The inhabitants of Crimea obtained the right to apply for Russian citizenship and Ukrainian soldiers were permitted to join the Russian army. Russia used its base in Sevastopol to take control of Crimean cities. From 26 February, Russian soldiers while not wearing insignia occupied strategic points and protected pro-Russian demonstrations. After Russian forces took control of the seat of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea on 27 February, pro-Russian authorities created the appearance of legitimacy of Russia's operations

in Crimea in the face of international public opinion. On 6 March, the Supreme Council of the ARC passed a resolution on the incorporation of Crimea into Russia and for this purpose announced a referendum planned for 16 March (Wierzbowska-Miazga et al. 2014). The combined Supreme Council of the ARC and the City Council of Sevastopol adopted a declaration of the independence of Crimea on 11 March. In it, they referred to the declaration of independence of Kosovo (2008) and the ruling of the International Court of Justice (2010) which stated that the unilateral declaration of independence adopted by Kosovo had not violated international law. The pace of Russian actions was determined by the attitude of the Ukrainian authorities towards the illegal actions of the ARC authorities and the operations of Russian forces in Crimea and the Black Sea – Ukrainian forces in Crimea numbered about 15,000 soldiers, while the Russian Black Sea Fleet numbered roughly 11,500; in mid-March, the Ukrainian authorities estimated the number of Russian soldiers in Crimea at 22,000, while American authorities estimated this number at 45,000 (Uehling 2015, pp. 66–75; Kathanowski 2015, pp. 76–84; Skrukwa 2021, pp. 474–92). Ukraine undertook no military operations against the Russian aggression in Crimea for fear of a Russian attack on Donbas. Russian authorities claimed that they were ensuring peace for national minorities and Russian citizens in Crimea, who had been threatened by the "nationalist" government in Kyiv supported by "fascist right-wing" Ukrainian organisations. The March referendum was monitored by international observers from Russia and Russia-friendly countries, as well as international political organisations financed by the Russian authorities (turnout was reportedly 84%, with 96.6% of voters allegedly in favor of joining Russia). Ukrainians and Crimean Tatars boycotted the referendum. The Supreme Council of the ARC, dissolved by order of the Ukrainian parliament, declared the independence of the Republic of Crimea and Sevastopol on 17 March. A day later, the authorities signed an agreement for the incorporation of Crimea into Russia, which took effect on 21 March. The Republic of Crimea and Sevastopol became the Crimean Federal District (in 2016 joined with the Southern Federal District). The international community did not recognise the referendum or the annexation of Crimea by Russia. These were recognised only by Afghanistan, Cuba, Nicaragua, North Korea, Syria, and Venezuela; states with an anti-Western alignment and perceived as allies of Russia.

From the moment of their return to Crimea, the Crimean Tatars did not support the pro-Russian authorities in Crimea or its incorporation into Russia. They were not swayed by Soviet nostalgia. The first Congress of Tatars in Crimea in 1991 had recognised the peninsula as their national homeland. However, until 2014 the authorities in Kyiv had de facto not supported the repatriation of Crimean Tatars or their adaptation to life in Crimea, adopting what was in fact an unfriendly stance regarding the Tatars (see Krawetz 2024; Olszański 2014). The Crimean authorities on their part hindered their arrival and resettlement in the peninsula with administrative decisions (Chazbijewicz 2001, pp. 217–225; 235). Disputes with the Crimean authorities occurred, mainly regarding the return of former Tatar real estate properties and the rights of Tatars as an indigenous people. It was only after the loss of Crimea to Russia on 20 March 2014 that the Ukrainian parliament legally recognised the institutions of the Crimean Tatars which had been operating since 1991 and granted them legal guarantees for their cultural and national activities ("On guarantees of the rights of the Crimean Tatar people as a part of the State of Ukraine"). In November 2015, this same institution recognised the deportation of the Crimean Tatars in 1944 from Crimea to Central Asia as genocide, and so 18 May was made the Day of Remembrance of the Victims of the Crimean Tatar Genocide (Romańczuk 2020, pp. 111–112). In 2014, the Crimean Tatars publicly denounced the Russian invasion of Crimea and the anti-Ukrainian actions of the autonomous authorities in Crimea. Previously, they had supported the Revolution of Dignity (Euromaidan 2013–2014). They had expressed their desire to remain within the Ukrainian state. The Mejlis of the Crimean Tatar People did not recognise the results of the pro-Russian independence referendum organised by the Republic of Crimea or its annexation by Russia. The anti-Russian stance of the Crimean Tatars did not escape the notice of the Russian authorities. Initially, they tried to win over the Crimean Tatar community through certain concessions regarding national-cultural and religious affairs (such as the construction of a mosque in Simferopol). However, the majority of Crimean Tatar society remained either anti-Russian or at least passive in regards to the process of the de-Ukrainisation of the peninsula (Romańczuk 2020, pp. 114–115). Hard-liners were subject to repression by the Russian authorities. The Crimean Tatar community joined the political and armed struggle for the restoration of Ukrainian statehood in Crimea (Voytyuk 2016, pp. 209–228; Zasztowt 2022, pp. 155–164).



Pre-war Autonomous Crimean Soviet Socialist Republic (part of the Russian Federal Soviet Socialist Republic) (1928). *Atlas Soyuza Sovetskikh Sotsialisticheskikh Respublik*. Moscow: Izdanie TsIK SSSR, 1928. National Library, Warsaw, Poland

II. Donbas (the Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts) and Other Oblasts of South-Eastern Ukraine

Donbas (the Donetsk Coal Basin, Donetsk Basin) is a historical and economic region situated mainly in Ukraine, covering the Donetsk, Luhansk, and partly the Dnipropetrovsk, Kharkiv, and Poltava oblasts (roughly 50,000 km^2), and in Russia as a part of the Rostov Oblast (roughly 10,000 km^2) (Gil 2018, pp. 247–256; Baca-Pogorzelska and Potocki 2020). Donbas experienced rapid economic development in the 19th century. It had enormous reserves of natural resources, mainly coal, which provided the impetus for the beginnings of its coal extraction, metallurgy, and machine industries. Separatism vis-a-vis the central government in Kyiv smoldered in Donbas since the beginnings of the Ukrainian state (Kuromiya 1998). It was mainly of an economic and regional nature. After the Ukrainian declaration of independence in August 1991, the regional elites in Donbas demanded in 1991 to remain within the USSR or to be granted autonomy within Ukraine; in the independence referendum of 1991, 84% of the votes in Donbas were cast for the independence of Ukraine, while in Luhansk this number was 83.9% (Adamovych 2014). After the collapse of the USSR, pro-Soviet political elites wanted to retain power and adapt economically to the new reality. They emphasised the economic and ethnic-cultural specificity of south-eastern Ukraine, which in their opinion should have had territorial autonomy. They took advantage of post-Soviet state economic assets, leading to the oligarchisation of the Ukrainian economy. To this aim, they exploited separatism to consolidate clan and regional political and economic power against the central government in Kyiv. During the elections to the Verkhovna Rada in March 1994, the regional authorities in Donetsk and Luhansk conducted local consultative referendums. Voters were asked whether they would agree to the federalisation of Ukraine, the recognition of Russian as an official language equal to Ukrainian, the equal status in administration and education of the Russian and Ukrainian languages in Donetsk and Luhansk, and closer integration of Ukraine with the CIS. To all of these questions more than 80% of respondents in these oblasts answered yes (Gevarin 2007). The regional authorities in the Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts, pro-Russian parties and organisations financed by Russia kept nostalgia for the Soviet era alive among the inhabitants and constantly stressed the separateness of the south-eastern oblasts from the western oblasts of Ukraine. The latter they

defined as nationalist, Banderite, and fascist. This anti-Ukrainian message was amplified by the Russian media, which had free access to Ukraine (Włodkowska-Bagan 2012, pp. 36–61).

Pro-Soviet economic and political elites supported the Party of Regional Revival "Labour Solidarity of Ukraine", formed from the combination of various regional political parties in 2000 and since 2001 known as the Party of Regions (promoting the federalisation of Ukraine, the equal status of the Russian language with Ukrainian, the protection of the rights of the Russian minority, rejection of the Ukrainisation of the country), and supported by Russia. This became one of the most powerful political parties at the expense of the weakened communists. It was led by the so-called Donetsk Clan (Karmazina, Bevz, and Rotar 2018), a quasi-mafia political and economic grouping (operating in south-eastern Ukraine, mainly in industrial regions, having emerged from the former Soviet political elites, among others including Volodymyr Rybal, a former member of the CPSU in Donetsk and Chairman of the Verkhovna Rada (2012–2014), Mykola Azarov, Viktor Yanukovych, and Rinat Akhmetov. After V. Yanukovych's loss in the 2004 presidential election (and the outbreak of the Orange Revolution as a result of the falsified second round of voting) to Viktor Yushchenko, representatives of the Party of Regions in the Verkhovna Rada and in oblast-level assemblies of south-eastern Ukraine proclaimed the South-East Ukrainian Autonomous Republic in Luhansk in 2004. They asked Russia for assistance in maintaining the new structure (*Odesskie…* 2004, *Yanukovich…* 2004; *Khar'kov…* 2004).

Created in 2005 by Oleh Frolov and Andrei Purgin, the pro-Russian separatist organisation called the Social Movement "Donetsk Republic" (Obshchestvennoe dvizheniye "Donetskaya Respublika"; *Общественное движение "Донецкая республика"*) demanded autonomy for eastern Ukraine and a federal system, claiming heritage from the Donetsk-Krivoy Rog Soviet Republic (1918). The organisation had outposts in the Donetsk, Luhansk, Kharkiv, Zaporizhzhia, Dnipropetrovsk, and Mykolaiv oblasts. For pursuing a policy of Russian irridentism, its members were imprisoned. In 2007, they raised the flag of the Donetsk Republic and demanded incorporation into Russia. In 2012, they opened an "embassy" in Moscow and issued "passports." They took part in pro-Russian irridentism (Boyars'ka 2015, pp. 454–461; Margvelashvili and Frolov 2006). In November 2014, the Donetsk Republic movement was successful in elections to the separatist parliament of the Donetsk People's Republic (the People's Council of the DPR), unrecognised

by Ukraine or the international community, winning 64.43% of the votes – or 68 out of 100 seats (*Glavoy…* 2014). In September 2022, after the annexation of the Donetsk Oblast by Russia, the organisation was absorbed into the pro-Putin Russian political party United Russia (Vserossiyskaya politicheskaya partiya "Edinaya Rossiya"; *Всероссийская политическая партия "Единая Россия"*) (see *Bolee…* 2023).

After the removal from power of V. Yanukovych, Russia incited sabotage and armed actions in south-eastern Ukraine in defense of the Russian minority which allegedly was under pressure from the authorities in Kyiv, a so-called hybrid war, perhaps better termed a Russian special operation, in 2014–2015, (Forró 2019; Forró 2021; Pieniążek 2017). For its aspirations to join Western structures, Russia had already been threatening Ukraine with such actions since 2008 (the war with Georgia was also a warning for Ukraine). Pro-Russian forces organised demonstrations against the "fascisation" of Ukraine and the "government of nationalists" in Kyiv, including in Kharkiv, Mykolaiv, Dnipropetrovsk, Kherson, Donetsk, Luhansk, Mariupol, and Odessa. They were organised by the local authorities and security structures linked to the Party of Regions, the Communist Party of Ukraine, and pro-Russian organisations. At these demonstrations, Russian operations in Crimea were shown support. Russian flags were displayed on public buildings. Demands for the autonomy of the south-eastern oblasts of Ukraine and its federalisation were heard. Pro-Russian militias attacked public gatherings in support for the authorities in Kyiv. On the day of the referendum in Crimea, improvised plebiscites were held in the cities of south-eastern Ukraine in favor of the idea of Novorossiya (Kinstler 2014). Anti-government demonstration (promoting the slogans "coup in Kyiv" and "Yanukovych the legitimate president") took on irredentist features. After the incorporation of Crimea into Russia, there were military actions in south-eastern Ukraine and demands for incorporation into Russia (Olszański 2014a). Pro-Russian militias occupied Ukrainian institutions and attacked the headquarters of the state militia and Security Service of Ukraine – the most well-known pro-Russian militias were Oplot, Vostok, Kalmius, Sparta, and Somalia in the DPR and Odessa, Prizrak, Zarya, Vityaz, Rus, and Modjahed as well as numerous Cossack regiments in the LPR (Piechal 2015, p. 2). The pro-Russian irridentists received military support from Russian saboteurs (Russian soldiers without insignia) and from volunteers from Transnistria, Abkhazia, South Ossetia, and Russia (Cossacks,

Chechens, Tajiks, Ossetians, and Armenians). The Security Service of Ukraine (SSU) informed Kyiv that the separatists were led by employees and soldiers as well as agents of the GRU (Main Directorate of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation), the VV MVD FR (Internal Troops of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Russian Federation), the FSB FR (Federal Security Service of the Russian Federation), and the SVR FR (Foreign Intelligence Service of the Russian Federation).

On 6 April 2014, pro-Russian separatists simultaneously attacked the buildings of Ukrainian regional and municipal authorities and the SSU in Kharkiv, Donetsk (Donbas People's Militia, Donbas Volunteer Army), and Luhansk (South-East Army, North-South Army). After gaining control of these, on 6 April they announced the creation of the Donetsk People's Republic (DPR) and the parliament of the Luhansk People's Republic. The Luhansk People's Republic (LPR) was officially proclaimed on 27 April at a separatist rally (Konończuk 2014). The authorities of the DPR and LPR scheduled a referendum for 11 May and the following day declared their independence. They requested the dispatch of peacekeeping forces from Russia. Both separatist republics were organised, directed, and financed by Russia (Lyubashenko 2016, pp. 51–68; Piechal and Strzelecki 2017). The armed forces and military and civilian intelligence services of Russia were responsible for organizing the armed forces and security structures of the DPR and LPR. (Nikonorov 2015). With the assistance of Russia, pro-Russian separatists attacked further Ukrainian oblasts of Kharkiv, Dnipropetrovsk, Zaporizhzhia, Kherson, Mykolaiv, and Odessa. They were supported in this by soldiers of the armed forces of Russia (for example, the Special Purpose Forces of the Russian Federation, the so-called Spetsnaz, subordinate to the 8th Directorate of the GRU). The former prime minister of the DPR, Alexander Borodai, stated that without Russia's help, the DPR and LPR would not have been created (Coynash 2019).

The pro-Russian Kharkiv People's Republic, established on 7 April, was liquidated on the same day by the SSU (without casualties). Similarly, anti-Ukrainian attempts to establish so-called people's republics were thwarted by the Ukrainian security services and Euromaidan supporters in the first half of May 2014 in Odessa and Mariupol. In Odessa, this resulted in some tragic events. As a result of skirmishes between supporters and opponents of Euromaidan, a fire broke out in the Trade Unions House in Odessa resulting the deaths of 42 opponents of Euromaidan. The inept investigation conducted by the Ukrainian municipal security services has so far failed to punish those

"Independence referendum" polling station in Donetsk, Ukraine (11 May 2014). Photo: Denis Kornilov / Shutterstock ID 192031832

responsible for this tragedy. In the meantime, Russian propaganda has exploited this tragic event to accuse Ukrainian authorities of a cover-up protecting the perpetrators (*Desyat'…* 2024).

On 24 May 2014, the LPR and DPR signed an agreement in Donetsk on the creation of the Federal Republic of Novorossiya (Pieniążek 2015). On 22 May, at a convention of the Novorossiya Party formed on 13 May 2014, Pavel Gubarev announced the unification of the south-eastern regions of Ukraine: Donetsk, Luhansk, Kharkiv, Kherson, Zaporizhzhia, Dnipropetrovsk, Mykolaiv, and Odessa (for data on the population and languages of these regions, see Appendix and *Vseukrayins'kyi…* 2001; on the identity of the inhabitants of the Donbas regions, see, among others, Studenna-Skrukwa 2014). The capital of the self-proclaimed state was Donetsk, and its president Valery Kaurov. The planned nationalisation of industry in Donbas was announced. The declaration establishing the confederation was read out the day before the presidential elections in Ukraine. After the signing of the Minsk Protocol on the ceasefire (Ukraine, Russia, and representatives of the DPR and LPR), the operations of the Novorossiya FR ceased in May 2015. This decision was made due to a lack of support from the inhabitants of south-eastern Ukraine, the weakness of pro-Russian forces outside the Donetsk and Luhansk regions, and armed factional fighting among the separatists. The internet site of the parliament of

Novorossiya was taken offline (Pawłowska 2015). Mere pro-Russian propaganda in Ukraine, political forces financed by Russia since 1991, and a significant percentage of the population with an ambiguous national identity (a bilingual Ukrainian population that uses Russian on a daily basis) were not enough for Russia to occupy south-eastern Ukraine with its Russian minority (Białobłocki 2016, pp. 61–80; Pietnoczka 2018, pp. 1–14). Russia's aggression against Ukraine in 2014 (the First Russo-Ukrainian War) strengthened the national identity of Ukrainians who use Russian as their first language. This allowed Ukraine to mount strong resistance during the Second Russo-Ukrainian War after the Russian invasion in 2022 (Plokhy 2023B).

On 13 April 2014, Ukrainian authorities began anti-terrorist operations aimed at liquidating the DPR and LPR. The annexation of Crimea and the war in Donbas demonstrated the weakness of the Ukrainian security forces and army, among other reasons due to Russian infiltration, and of state institutions (Olbrycht and Chmura 2018, pp.73–84; Wilk 2017, pp. 8–11; *Pokerowa…* 2025). The Ukrainian anti-terrorist operation resulted in 2014 in the recovery of 75% of the territories previously occupied by separatists. At that point, the Russian army joined the conflict on their side. Russia denied any involvement of its armed forces in south-eastern Ukraine. It called the armed actions in the area a popular uprising and civil war against the nationalist government in Kyiv (elected democratically, unlike in Russia), supported by anti-semitic and fascist Ukrainian groups (Machnikowski 2014, pp. 24–26). The armed phase of the conflict in Ukraine ended on 5 September 2014 with the signing of a ceasefire agreement in Minsk by Ukraine, Russia, the OSCE, the DPR, and the LPR (the so-called Minsk Contact Group). This agreement was not implemented, so on 12 February 2015, another agreement was signed in Minsk (known as Minsk II) with the aim of ending the conflict in Donbas. The first agreement signed by the Minsk Contact Group contained a set of measures aimed at de-escalating the conflict and restoring Kyiv's authority, while granting autonomy to the DPR and LPR. In return, Ukraine was to regain control of the Russian-Ukrainian border. The second agreement was to be overseen by France, Germany, Russia, and Ukraine (the so-called Normandy Format). Ukraine was obliged to introduce a federal system by the end of 2015, with special rights for the DPR and LPR, though not covering the entire Donetsk and Luhansk regions (Kardaś and Konończuk 2015).

The Minsk Protocols resulted in the dependence of Ukraine on Russia. Both of the breakaway republics became para-states. Russia

was not named as the aggressor but rather as a peacekeeper in an alleged civil war in Ukraine (Pełczyńska-Nałęcz, Buras 2017, pp. 1–3). A summit of the Normandy Format was convened on 9 December 2019 for the first time since 2016, indicative of the impasse which had been reached. This meeting in Paris resulted in a declaration that the Minsk Protocols would remain the basis for peace (Chawryło and Iwański 2019; Pełczyńska-Nałęcz, Buras 2017, pp. 5–7). It was the last meeting in this format.

In 2014–2018, Ukraine conducted an anti-terrorist operation against pro-Russian separatists in Donbas, who sought to take complete control of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions by force of arms. In January 2018, the Ukrainian parliament adopted a resolution on Ukraine's state sovereignty in the temporarily occupied territories of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions. The Ukrainian anti-terrorist operation conducted by the SSU in Donbas was renamed Operation Joint Forces, led by the Ukrainian military to liberate the occupied territories of Ukraine. It was conducted until 22 February 2022, the start of the Russian aggression against Ukraine.

The DPR and LPR (2014–2022) were bilaterally recognised by Russia (21 February), Syria (29 June), and North Korea (13 July 2022), as well as by the pro-Russian para-states of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. After this further aggression of Russia against Ukraine and after the fictitious referendums of 27 September, Russia annexed the DPR and LPR along with the Kherson and Zaporizhzhia oblasts on 30 September 2022. The Russian Duma ratified the annexations on 3 October. The UN Secretary General António Guterres declared the Russian annexation plan to be in violation of international law on 29 September. In the UN Security Council, Russia vetoed a resolution condemning the annexation of a part of Ukraine as a violation of international law. The UN General Assembly adopted a resolution on 12 October 2022 during an extraordinary session condemning Russia for this illegal annexation with a vote of 143 from 193. Belarus, Syria, Nicaragua, and North Korea stood by Russia. China, India, and 33 other states, mainly from Africa, abstained, while 10 did not take part in the vote. On 23 February 2023, in a vote in the UN General Assembly 141 states voted for a resolution to end the war with the withdrawal of Russian forces from Ukraine. Seven UN member states voted against this resolution (Belarus, Eritrea, Mali, Nicaragua, North Korea, Syria, and Russia), while 32 abstained (including China and India), with 13 not taking part in the vote (Zaręba 2022, pp. 1–2; Menkiszak, Domańska, and Żochowski 2022).

III. Aspirations for Autonomy: the Zakarpattia Oblast

The Zakarpattia Oblast (Transcarpathia), with an area of 12,700 km² and a population of over 1.25 million (2001), with its capital in Uzhhorod (117,300), has historical traditions of separateness and a multi-ethnic composition resulting from the region's changing national affiliation (2001): Ukrainians (including Rusyns) 1.01 million (80.5%), Hungarians 151,500 (12.1%), Romanians (including Moldovans) 32,100 (2.6%), Russians 31,000 (2.5%), Roma 14,000 (1.1%), Slovaks 5,600 (0.5%), and Germans 3,500 (0.3%). The Transcarpathian region comprises the historical lands of Subcarpathian Rus and Northern Maramureş, as well as two strips belonging to the former Czechoslovakia – one along the border with Slovakia and Poland to the west and southwest of the Uzh Valley, and another along the border with Slovakia and Hungary, south of Uzhhorod, with the town of Chop. Before the lands now comprising the Zakarpattia Oblast became part of Ukraine, they belonged to the Kingdom of Hungary, the Austrian Monarchy, the Austrian Empire, Austria-Hungary (until 1918), Czechoslovakia (1918–1938), the Czechoslovak Republic (1938–1939, autonomous Carpathian Ukraine), an independent Carpatho-Ukraine (14–18 March 1939), which was liquidated by Hungary with the help of Poland (Samuś, Badziak, and Matwiejew 1998; Dąbrowski 2007), Hungary (1939–1944), and Soviet Ukraine (1945–1991). In Polish, Romanian, Slovak, Hungarian, and Czech nomenclature, Rus is referred to as Carpathian or Subcarpathian, while in Ukrainian it is referred to as Transcarpathian, which is not only due to its geographical location. The multi-ethnic Zakarpattia Oblast is among the poorest regions of Ukraine. It has an agricultural character and poorly developed infrastructure, though it is rich in tourism and scenic assets. Against this background, the Hungarian ethnic minority, benefiting from assistance from Hungary, stands out (Jarnecki 2021, pp. 77–79).

The Ukrainian authorities classify the Carpatho-Rusyns as Ukrainians (ethnic composition: Lemkos, Rusyns of Szlachtowa, Uhrintsy, Zamieshantsy, Boykos, Hutsuls, Rusyns of Šariš in eastern Slovakia, Rusyns of Transcarpathia, and Rusyns of Pannonia). The Lemkos, Rusyns of Szlachtowa, and Boykos were mostly displaced in 1945 from Poland to the USSR, while the rest were forcibly displaced in 1947 to the former territories of the Third Reich transferred to Poland in 1945, being considered part of the Ukrainian nation

(without differentiating Carpatho-Rusyn ethnic groups). For the Carpatho-Rusyns, all these groups are part of the Rusyn nation, but in Poland, Slovakia, and Ukraine, they are considered separate ethnic groups (Kosiek 2020, pp. 383–411). Paul Robert Magocsi, an American historian, professor of political science, chairman of the World Congress of Rusyns (2005–2009), and Rusyn activist, is a proponent of the autonomy of the Zakarpattia Oblast. He considers the Carpatho-Rusyns to be a separate nationality without a state whose ethnic lands lie in Slovakia, Romania, Hungary, Poland, and Ukraine (Magocsi 2022). On the Polish-Slovak-Ukrainian border, a Lemko People's Republic of Rus existed, proclaimed on 5 December 1918 in Florynka (a village in Poland). This entity declined to join the West Ukrainian People's Republic. At the Paris Peace Conference (1919), its representatives favored an autonomous association with Czechoslovakia. Poland liquidated the republic forcibly in 1920.

In March 1991 in the Slovakian town of Medzilaborce, a social and cultural organisation was established, the World Council of Rusyns, at the First World Congress of Rusyns. The Carpatho-Rusyns do not feel themselves to be part of the Ukrainian nation. They do not see their historical origins in Kievan Rus, of which they were not a part. They consider themselves to be a separate East Slavic people, along with the Ukrainians, Belarusians, and Russians. The post-Soviet elites, with the support of the Carpathian Rusyn Society and the Hungarian Cultural Federation in Transcarpathia, sought autonomy for the region. In October 1991, the Rada of the Zakarpattia Oblast adopted a declaration on the autonomy of Transcarpathia (*Pro status…* 1991; Ostapec 2015, pp. 143–160; Pipasz 2011). Along with the referendum on Ukraine's independence (90.13% in favor of independence in Transcarpathia), a referendum was held on granting autonomy to the region. More than 78% of the inhabitants of Transcarpathia supported its territorial autonomy (with a turnout of 82.7%). Support of more than 80% was noted in municipalities with a Hungarian majority (*Pro status…* 1991; *Referendum…* 1991a). In March 1992, the authorities of the oblast sent a draft resolution to the authorities in Kyiv on Transcarpathian autonomy. Kyiv was inclined to agree only to territorial self-government, fearing similar demands from the Russian minority which would have threatened the cohesion of Ukraine. After the central authorities refused to grant this autonomy in May 1993, Carpatho-Rusyn leaders formed the Provisional Government of Subcarpathian Rus, with Ivan Turyanitsa as prime minister (Niewiadowski 1995; Turyanitsa 1999). He was

a member of the World Council of Rusyns (1993–2001), president of the Carpathian Rusyn Society (1992–2004), and a researcher at Uzhhorod State University. He died in April 2023. His government passed a declaration of accession to the Commonwealth of Independent States, which led to it being delegalised in August 1994 by the Ukrainian authorities. In March 2007, the Rada of the Zakarpattia Oblast recognised the existence of the Rusyn nationality (however, this was not recognised by the central authorities, and the declaration has no legal force). In 2012, the Rusyn language was recognised as a regional language. However, the majority of Ukrainian society and Ukrainian academia still consider them to be part of the Ukrainian nation (Malski and Zińko 2020, pp. 105–106). The Carpatho-Rusyns are organised in political, social, and cultural terms. They have their own representatives in the parliaments and local governments of Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, and Poland, and also have Rusyn cultural institutions (such as the Museum of Rusyn Culture in Prešov in Slovakia).

Russia has fueled Rusyn separatism. In 2007, Dmytro Sydor, a clergyman of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church subordinate to the Moscow Patriarchate, organised the Union of Rusyn Organisations of Transcarpathia, the "Soym of Subcarpathian Rusyns" (Riabow 2007). He claimed that there were not 10,000 Rusyns in Transcarpathia, as reported by the Ukrainian census (2001), but 800,000. He demanded that Rusyns have Rusyn programs on television and radio, that they be able to introduce additional subjects into the educational system for teaching the Rusyn language and its history, and that the Rusyn language be recognised as a regional language in Transcarpathia. The Rada of the oblast rejected his demands for the autonomy of the Zakarpattia Oblast. In 2008, Dmytro Sydor declared the independence of the Republic of Subcarpathian Rus, for which the national authorities accused him of threatening the state integrity of Ukraine. His activities were financed by Russia. Sydor demanded that Russia recognise the independence of Subcarpathian Rus. In 2012, he was sentenced to prison by court in Uzhhorod (*Svyashchenniku*… 2012; *Lideru*… 2012; *Rusiny*… 2011). On 10 September 2019, the then Czech president Miloš Zeman hosted a delegation in Prague representing Rusyns striving for autonomy from Ukraine which included Sydor, on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of the peace treaty with Austria in Saint Germain-en-Laye, which recognised the Subcarpathian Rus as a part of Czechoslovakia with the right to autonomy (*Zakarpatts'kyi*… 2019; Miszewski 2017, pp. 43–47).

In 2008, the self-proclaimed prime minister of the Subcarpathian Rus, Petro Hetsko, asked the Russian authorities to recognise the independence of the Subcarpathian Rus (this took place in a significant context, specifically the Russo-Georgian War and Russia's recognition of the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia). Russia made use of the "Rusyn prime minister" once again in 2014 during its aggression against Ukraine (Jarnecki 2021, pp. 80–88; *Ukraińscy…* 2015). The Rusyn community did not support his pro-Russian activities. They were interested in European integration due to the Rusyn diaspora in Central Europe. However, Russian aggression in 2014 and 2022 is worrying for the Rusyns, as well as other national minorities in Transcarpathia, due to conscription into the Ukrainian army and the possible material and political consequences for the region.

The Hungarian minority enjoyed cultural and national autonomy in Transcarpathia wherever it predominated and was able to use the Hungarian language on an equal footing with Ukrainian in the public space (Szczygieł and Klauziński 2018). This changed in 2017 after the adoption of the Law on Education by the Ukrainian parliament. Hungary accused Ukraine of using schools for the Ukrainisation of the Hungarian minority (Malski and Zińko 2020, pp. 112–113, 117). It has regularly intervened in affairs regarding the Hungarian minority, supporting it politically and financially. The Transcarpathian Hungarian Cultural Association (*Kárpátaljai Magyar Kulturális Szövetség*, KMKSZ) was established in 1989. In 1991, the KMKSZ established the Hungarian Democratic Union in Ukraine (*Ukrajnai Magyar Demokrata Szövetség*, UMDSZ). After splitting off from the KMKSZ in 2005, the UMDSZ founded the Hungarian Democratic Party of Ukraine (UMDP). At the same time, in 2005 the KMKSZ founded the Hungarian Party in Ukraine (*Ukrajnai Magyar Párt*, UMP). This is supported by the Fidesz party (*Magyar Polgári Szövetség,* Hungarian Civic Alliance) led by prime minister Viktor Orbán. In 2020, a dispute arose between Hungary and Ukraine as a result of the Hungarian government's open support for the nationalist Hungarian Party in Ukraine (UMP) in local elections (the UMP received 12% of the vote and 8 of the 64 seats on the Transcarpathian Regional Council, the most in its history). Ukrainian security services conducted a search of the UMP headquarters, which only served to intensify the conflict. Since Russia's invasion of Ukraine (the Second Russo-Ukrainian War of 2022), Hungary has not provided military assistance to Ukraine like other NATO and EU members, and has consistently criticised Ukraine for its hostile

policy toward the Hungarian minority. Hungary claims that in this way it is protecting the Hungarian minority from bombardment of Transcarpathia by Russia. The autonomy of Transcarpathia has been postulated by Victor Orbán. Despite its multi-ethnicity, no political power in Transcarpathia for the time being is demanding secession. According to a November 2020 poll by the Democratic Initiatives Foundation, 0.6% of Transcarpathia's inhabitants were in favor of secession from Ukraine, and 2.8% were in favor of autonomy. (Potocki and Héjj 2020; Trojan 2022; Kaźmierczak 2022). Historian László Zubánics, leader of the Hungarian Democratic Party in Ukraine (UMDP), which cooperates with President Volodymyr Zelensky's Servant of the People party, believed that the Hungarians still present in Transcarpathia numbered less than 100,000. This was thought to be due to the policy of prime minister Viktor Orbán, who continued Hungary's long-standing policy of supporting the Hungarian minority in neighboring countries. Hungary grants them citizenship, facilitates emigration, and in the case of Transcarpathia, it is also a matter of avoiding conscription into the Ukrainian army for Ukrainian Hungarians (*Victor Orbán*… 2025). The Hungarian consul in Berehove (the capital of Transcarpathian Hungarians) distributed Hungarian passports among the Hungarian minority, leading to his expulsion from Ukraine and a diplomatic rift between Hungary and Ukraine (Malski and Zińko 2020, pp. 118–119; Jóźwiak and Szeligowski 2018; Potocki and Héjj 2023). The activities of a Hungarian agent network among the inhabitants of Transcarpathia are also heightening Ukrainian-Hungarian tensions (Gizińska, Sienicki 2025; Ion 2025), a process intently followed by Russia. Following Russian inspiration, two arson attacks on the Hungarian cultural center in Uzhhorod occurred in 2018 (*Kolejne*… 2018). Russia has conducted a propaganda campaign in Transcarpathia to separate it from Ukraine and has organised preparations for sabotage activities to destabilise the internal situation in the oblast (*Ukraińskie*… 2022; Mrowicki 2022).

In recent years the issue of language and identity rights of the inhabitants of the Transcarpathian Rus has been the subject of work by the Venice Commission – to which representatives of both Hungarians and Transcarpathian Rusyns have submitted specific proposals (Medvid 2023). An opinion issued by the Venice Commission regarding the Ukrainian law on national minorities highlighted a series of concerns. in particular regarding the restriction of the freedom to use minority languages (*Opinion*… 2023, pp. 22–23).

IV. Aspirations for Autonomy: the Chernivtsi Oblast

The oblast, with an area of 8,100 km² and a population of over 922,800, was created in 1940 from northern Bukovina, part of Bessarabia (including Khotyn) and the Hertsa region, comprised of territories of Romania annexed in 1940 by the USSR. The capital of the oblast is Chernivtsi (population 240,100). Its ethnic composition is as follows: Ukrainians 689,100 (75%), Romanians 114,600 (12.5%), Moldovans 67,200 (7.3%), Russians 37,900 (4.1%), and other ethnic groups 1.9%. In 1991, the independence of Ukraine was supported by 92% of the inhabitants of the oblast. In addition, a Moldovan minority also lives in the Odessa Oblast – almost 124,000 people, which accounts for 5% of its population. The Romanian authorities have not encouraged the Romanian minority to demand autonomy for the Chernivtsi region, because the Hungarian minority in Romania has made such demands in Transylvania (Rajczyk 2021, pp. 123–139; Puzyniak 2021, pp. 330–349). The Chernivtsi Oblast is one of the poorest regions of Ukraine. It is rich in scenic and tourism assets and has transport routes to the Balkans as well as significant mineral resources.

Markijan Malski and Igor Zińko from Lviv National University have emphasised that

> "national minorities, inhabiting primarily border areas in the so-called ethnic diffusion zone, are indigenous peoples: Romanians from Bukovina and Transcarpathia, Hungarians from Transcarpathia, Moldovans from Bessarabia and Bukovina, some Russians from the Luhansk region and Crimea, Poles from Galicia, etc. Some minorities cultivate the memory of the unlawful, forceful annexation to Ukraine, with the support of political forces, including foreign ones. Such sentiments are often fueled by the mass media in the historical homeland" (Malski and Zińko 2020, p. 119).

Naturally, historical and territorial issues in Romanian-Ukrainian relations have had an impact on bilateral relations. Romanian politicians and the Romanian minority claim that the state of the educational system and of the cultural life of ethnic Romanians is unsatisfactory. Nationalist political forces in Romania propagate the idea of a return to the so-called Greater Romania. Some Romanian minority organisation demand the combination of areas they inhabit in the Zakarpattia and Chernivtsi oblasts into an autonomous Romanian

region in Ukraine. Many Ukrainian Romanians have dual citizenship, something which is de facto barred by Ukrainian law (which forbids the voluntary acquisition of a foreign citizenship). As many as 50,000 inhabitants of the Chernivtsi Oblast may have such a dual citizenship (Malski and Zińko 2020, p. 122; Janiga 2022). Romanian and Moldovan minorities also inhabit Budjak, which historically was part of Moldova, and which in Ukraine is part of the Odessa Oblast.

Among the Romanian minority, an increase in nationalism and separatist aspirations began to appear after 2014, with fear of intensified Ukrainisation (Ştefan 2016). After demonstrations, representatives of the Romanian minority complained about increased surveillance by the Security Service of Ukraine (SSU; *Sluzhba Bezpeky Ukrayiny,* SBU). Despite protests from, among others, the National Council of Romanians in Ukraine (*Noi…* 2017), on 5 September 2017 the Verkhovna Rada passed a law reforming Ukrainian education, which restricted the teaching of minority languages in Ukrainian schools. The law reforming Ukrainian education places an emphasis on the teaching of the Ukrainian language at the cost of national minority languages. This was meant primarily to affect the Russian minority, but outside of Russia it has been most strongly criticised by Hungary and Romania (Sadecki, Piechal, and Dąbrowski 2017; Pogłódek 2020, pp. 5–19). The Romanian side has accused the Ukrainian authorities of underestimating the size of the Romanian minority and separating Romanian and Moldovan nationalities in Ukrainian statistics (which the Ukrainian authorities, however, stopped doing in 2023). Romania sees this as splitting the Romanian nation (Pieńkowski 2021; Malski and Zińko 2020, p. 106). Additionally, since 2002 there has been a dispute over Ukraine's economic activities in the Danube Delta (namely the dredging of waterways which alters the flow), which have had a negative impact on the natural environment in the Delta, something which is of great scenic and tourism value to Romania (Kastory 2022, pp. 239–252; Donaj 2013). Poland has attempted to prevent the Romanian-Ukrainian dispute from taking on the dimensions of the pro-Russian policies of Viktor Orbán. This is of particular importance in light of the destabilisation by Russia since the 1990s and the destabilisation of Ukraine in the context of the security of NATO's eastern flank as well as of the security of the states mentioned (Pieńkowski 2022). Despite this conflict, Romania and Ukraine share common geopolitical interests in terms of security vis-a-vis Russia (Całus 2022). Romania is interested in restoring the territorial integrity of Moldova and in its participation in the

European Union and NATO, as well as in the distant prospect of the re-unification of the two countries. For Ukraine, the pro-Russian Transnistria, in which Russian forces are stationed, is a threat to Ukraine's Black Sea coast (Tărîță 2021, pp. 350–367).

Conclusion

Contemporary Russia has benefited from a long tradition (Tsarist Russia, the USSR) of creating independent entities on its borders, which have then asked its authorities for incorporation. Russian bases in neighboring countries have often served as a preliminary stage on the road to Russian annexation. In its imperialist policy, Moscow has used its own interpretation of the right to self-determination, which precedes Russian annexation (separatism – irredentism – secession – incorporation). After the collapse of the USSR, Russia considered the independent states located in the post-Soviet zone as belonging to the Russian sphere of influence. It expected them to join the integration structures it had created or to remain neutral towards structures it considered hostile. In order to influence the domestic and foreign policy of the former Soviet republics, it exploits political, economic, and military means, as well as the Russian minority, the Russian-speaking population, and Orthodox religious identity (Stopka 2024). Among these populations, Russia stirs up separatist movements that lead to the breakup of states if their governments do not pursue policies in line with Russian interests. It supports separatist provinces in neighboring countries, citing, in the Russian understanding, the right to self-determination, the defense of the rights of the Russian population, the preservation of peace, human rights, the peaceful resolution of conflicts, and the fight against terrorism – in order to incorporate them, in whole or in part, into the borders of its empire. It advocates for their recognition by the international community (Abkhazia, South Ossetia). At the same time, it concludes integration agreements with them within the framework of Russian political, economic, and military structures, which ultimately lead to their incorporation, as in the case of Crimea (2014) or the south-eastern regions of Ukraine (2022) (see Kryukov 2025). Russia has denied countries affected by separatism, such as Azerbaijan, Moldova, Georgia, and Ukraine, the right to restore constitutional order by using force against separatists in accordance with their own domestic law. Russian armed forces

supporting separatists are called peacekeeping forces, and the partition of these states is called the right to self-determination. On the other hand, Russia considers all separatist movements within its territory to be illegal (inciting separatism is punishable by five years in prison) and labels their representatives terrorists (for example, Chechnya, Dagestan, Ingushetia, Buryatia, Tatarstan), using force rather than political means against them. International criticism of the Russian authorities' use of excessive force in Chechnya (the First and Second Chechen Wars) was described by Russia as interference in its internal affairs (Przybyła 2011, pp. 149–153). It has also refused to allow representatives of the OSCE and the Council of Europe into conflict zones in Russia, and has exercised its veto power in the UN in conflicts to which it was a party. In all military operations in Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Transnistria, Crimea, and Donbas, Russian troops have violated humanitarian laws against civilians and supported ethnic cleansing carried out by the authorities of these separatist provinces. Russia's actions towards these former Soviet states are a modern version of Russian imperialism, which Moscow previously pursued under Tsarist Russia and during the existence of the USSR. With its policy of fuelling separatism in Central and Eastern Europe, it has also undermined the European security system (in the face of the impotence of the Council of Europe and the OSCE regarding Russian policy) established after the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the USSR. The destabilisation of neighbouring countries serves Russia's interests in strengthening its position in the region (despite the negative repercussions of this policy on its international relations). Russia treats the Black Sea and Caucasus regions as areas essential to its economic and military security and as a route for expansion into the Balkans, the Mediterranean Basin, and the Middle East.

After Vladimir Putin's accession to power in 2000, Russia has evolved toward authoritarianism. The centralisation of political and economic power and the modernisation of the Russian armed forces were aimed at returning Russia to the international arena as a global power. Contemporary Russia continues the traditions of Tsarist Russia and the USSR in terms of destabilising neighbouring countries and waging a civilisational struggle against the West. It imposes high prices for energy resources on Central and Eastern European countries, closes its domestic market in violation of trade agreements, influences the election results of neighbouring countries, and finances networks of agents of influence, such as in the form of pro-Russian political parties and pro-Russian candidates in parliamentary and presidential

elections. It carries out similar activities aimed at destabilizing the European Union as a whole and its individual member states (separatisms in Western Europe) (see Ostrowski 2024; Jakubowski 2023; Deja 2020; Turecki 2020; *Partia…* 2019; *Rosyjska…* 2019; *Nowe…* 2019; Łomanowski 2016).

Since 1991, Russia has exploited internal ethnic, historical, cultural, economic, and religious problems (such as the conflict in the Ukrainian Orthodox Church over its dependence on the Moscow Patriarchate), as well as the lack of minority rights in Ukraine to inspire separatism among the Russian minority and Russian-speaking Ukrainian citizens in Crimea and south-eastern Ukraine. Separatist, autonomist, or regionalist aspirations in other regions of Ukraine, formerly belonging to neighbouring countries, did not pose a threat to its territorial integrity. In its propaganda, which reaches Ukraine, Russia proclaims the common historical, cultural, and religious ties between the peoples of Russia, Belarus, and Ukraine. It has idealised the community of states in the post-Soviet zone. It has financially supported the political, social, and national-cultural activities of political and economic elites in Russian-speaking regions who demand from the authorities in Kyiv territorial autonomy, federalisation of the state, the equality of Russian and Ukrainian as state languages, and the subordination of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church to the Moscow Patriarchate. In Russian electronic media, which have been freely available in Ukraine, Russia has opposed Ukraine's integration with Western structures such as the European Union and NATO as enemies of 'Orthodox civilisation' and Russia itself. It has called the national renewal of Ukraine a nationalism which threatens the existence of national minorities, or "Banderitism" and "fascism." After the pro-Western Orange Revolution (2004) and Revolution of Dignity (2013–2014), when Russia was losing control over Ukraine, it stirred up Russian irredentism in Ukrainian regions where Russian was the predominant language. The indecision of the West regarding the integration of post-Soviet states (apart from the former Baltic republics) was interpreted by Russia as tacit consent to informally recognise the post-Soviet zone as its exclusive sphere of influence.

After the outbreak of the Revolution of Dignity, Russia exploited Ukraine's internal crisis to carry out a series of special political, social, and military actions in Crimea and south-eastern Ukraine. It has financed, equipped, and directed armed groups in order to destabilise Ukraine. As a result of these actions, the Autonomous Republic of Crimea "declared independence" in order to "independently" become

part of Russia. In eastern Ukraine, the so-called "independent people's republics" (the DPR and LPR) initiated the creation of the so-called Novorossiya in order to separate the Kharkiv, Dnipropetrovsk, Mykolaiv, Kherson, Zaporizhzhia, and Odessa regions from Ukraine. When pro-Russian separatists and Russian saboteurs failed to find support among the local population, Russia launched an invasion of Ukraine (the First Russo-Ukrainian War, 2014–2015). Russia has failed to persuade Poland, Slovakia, or Romania to make territorial claims against Ukraine. Only Hungary has fallen in line with that anti-Ukrainian policy. However, it should be emphasised here that the Rusyn, Crimean Tatar, Romanian, and Hungarian minorities have strived to preserve their national and cultural identity within the Ukrainian state. In contrast, the Russian (and Russian-speaking) minority allowed Russia to exploit them for actions aimed at dismantling the Ukrainian state. The demand for the federalisation of the Ukrainian state is a constant theme for Russia with regard to Ukraine. For this reason, the Ukrainian authorities have not agreed to abolish the unitary state system.

Without political, economic, and military consolidation of the post-Soviet zone, Russia has no chance of playing the role of a global power (as do the United States and China together with their allies), even in a multipolar system. The influence of Russia over the control of global resources (such as prices of oil and gas, the export of foodstuffs, arms trading) is steadily falling. With its resources and population, Ukraine is vital to Russia; without it, Russia can only be a regional power. Therefore, it decided to launch an attack on Ukraine in 2022 without hiding behind pro-Russian separatists in order to establish a pro-Russian government in Kyiv and/or annex the south-eastern regions in the Second Russo-Ukrainian War (*Saying…* 2025). Russian policy toward the post-Soviet zone also has deep ideological roots, stemming primarily from the old doctrine of the unity of the three East Slavic nations (Russia, Belarus, and "Little Russia," that is, Ukraine), which together form the great Russian nation. This doctrine (and its applications), which would require a very broad separate study to discuss, undoubtedly draws on numerous cultural, linguistic, religious, and political aspects of Eastern Europe, as well as social, national, and cultural events dating back to Imperial Russia and the USSR.

Moscow's approach to Ukraine and Belarus is mainly guided by geopolitics and its own interests. Such was the case under Tsarist Russia, when it shared its lands containing a Ukrainian population with the Austrian monarchy (as a result of the partitions of the Polish-

Lithuanian Commonwealth in the 18th century). After World War I, Soviet Russia destroyed the Belarusian People's Republic and the Ukrainian People's Republic. The Polish-Soviet border after 1945 was not an ethnic border. Russia has been doing the same since 1991, never supporting the Belarusisation of post-Soviet Belarus or the Ukrainisation of post-Soviet Ukraine, whose ability to exist independently is constantly undermined by President Putin and his entourage. The borders of Russia end wherever its expansion is halted.

Appendices

Modern Crimea: History, Population, and Territory

After the annexation of the Crimean Khanate (in 1783), its lands became part of the Russian Novorossiysk Governorate, and then of the Taurida Oblast (1802–1921, Simferopol). Russia initiated a planned campaign of settlement. After the 1917 revolution, the Crimean Tatars established the Crimean People's Republic (1917–1919). After its defeat, the Bolsheviks and rebellious sailors of the Black Sea Fleet established the Taurida Soviet Socialist Republic (March–May 1918). After this was liquidated, the Germans permitted the formation of a Crimean Tatar government under Solomon Krym. In October 1918, Crimea was taken by the White Army of General Anton Denikin. Prime minister S. Krym demanded that the Supreme Council of the Paris Peace Conference (1919) entrust Poland with a mandate over the Crimean People's Republic. In April 1919, the Red Army abolished the government of the Crimean People's Republic, creating the Crimean Soviet Socialist Republic. In June 1919, Crimea was once again taken over by General Denikin's troops (from April 1920, General Pyotr Wrangel), which were defeated in November 1920 by the Red Army. In 1921, the Crimean Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (1921–1946) became part of the Russian SFSR. In 1946, the Soviet authorities downgraded the Crimean ASSR to the level of the Crimean Oblast, which in 1954 was transferred to the Ukrainian SSR.

Population of Crimea: 1795: Crimean Tatars 87.6%, Russians 4.3%, Ukrainians 1.3%; 1917: Crimean Tatars 28.7%, Russians 41.2%, Ukrainians 8.6%; 1939: Crimean Tatars 19.4%, Russians 49.6%, Ukrainians 13.7%; 1989: Crimean Tatars 1.6%, Russians 67.1%, Ukrainians 25.8%; 2001: Crimean Tatars 12.1%, Russians 58.3%, Ukrainians 24.3%.

Crimean Oblast, area 26,080 km², population 1.97 million, capital Simferopol (336,200, Russians 66.7%, Ukrainians 21.3%, Crimean Tatars 7%), historical lands of the Crimean Khanate, ethnic composition (2001): Russians 1.18 million (58.32%), Ukrainians 492,200 (24.32%), Crimean Tatars 243,400 (12.03%), Belarusians 29,300 (1.45%), Tatars 11,100 (0.55%), Armenians 8,700 (0.43%), Jews 4,500 (0.22%), Poles 3,900 (0.2%), Moldovans 3,800 (0.2%), Azerbaijanis 3,700 (0.2%), and Greeks 2,800 (0.1%).

Sevastopol City Council, area 863,500 km², population 385,900, city of Sevastopol 344,800 (90.6% speak Russian, 6.8% speak Ukrainian), ethnic composition (2001): Russians (71.6%), Ukrainians (22.4%), Belarusians (1.6%), Tatars (0.7%), Crimean Tatars (0.5%), Armenians (0.3%), Moldovans (0.2%), Jews (0.3%), and Azerbaijanis (0.2%).

Donbas

In the years 1919–1924, eastern Donbas (until 1918 part of the historical Don Cossack Land, while the southern part of the Donetsk Oblast was part of the Shakhty Region) was part of the Ukrainian SSR. It was transferred to the Russian FSRS in the North Caucasus Region, in whose western districts nearly 40% of the Ukrainian population remained (in 1934, the Azov-Black Sea Krai was separated, and in 1937, the Rostov Oblast was separated). Part of Russia's Rostov Oblast is the Taganrog District (until 1918 part of the Don Cossack Land), which between 1918 and 1923 was part of the independent Ukrainian People's Republic, and later the Ukrainian SSR. In 1924, it was taken away from the Ukrainian SSR (Donetsk Oblast) and transferred to the North Caucasus Krai (since 1937, the Rostov Oblast). Until the outbreak of World War II most of its inhabitants were Ukrainians. The Ukrainian SSR had ethnic grievances against the Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic and the Russian Socialist Federal Soviet Republic. Moscow did not follow ethnic principles when changing borders during the Soviet era, but rather the interests of local elites ruling within the Soviet administration.

Novorossiya

Novorossiya or Novorossiyskaya Zemlya, colloquially New Russia and New Rus, is a historical region in south-eastern Ukraine, Moldova, the separatist para-state of Transnistria, and south-western Russia. The term Novorossiya was introduced in 18th-century Russia after the

wars with Turkey in the former Wild Fields located between the lower Dniester, the Black Sea, and the Sea of Azov, and the southern border of Little Russia and the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth before 1793. Between 1764 and 1783 and 1796 and 1802, the Novorossiya Governorate existed in this area, which in 1802 was divided into the governorates of Yekaterinoslav, Kherson (1802–1803, Mykolaiv) and Taurida. In the years 1822–1874, together with the Bessarabian Governorate it formed part of the Novorossiysk-Bessarabian Governorate.

Regions of Ukraine Affected by Pro-Russian Separatism – Population and Area

Donetsk Oblast, area 26,500 km², population 4.34 million, capital Donetsk (950,000, Ukrainians 46.7%; Russians 48.2%), after the Russian occupation, the capital is Mariupol (458,500, Ukrainians 48.7%, Russians 44.4%), then Kramatorsk (162,800, Ukrainians 70.2%, Russians 26.9%), historical lands of Zaporizhzhia Sich, Sloboda Ukraine, and the Don Cossack Land, in a referendum on preserving the USSR (1991) 84.6% of the inhabitants voted in favor, in an independence referendum (1991) 83% voted in favor, ethnic composition (2001): Ukrainians 2.74 million (56.9%), Russians 1.84 million (38.2%), Greeks 77,500 (1.61%), Belarusians 44,500 (0.92%), Tatars 19,200 (0.4%), Armenians 15,700 (0.33%), Jews 8,800 (0.18%), Azerbaijanis 8,100 (0.17%), Georgians 7,200 (0.15%), Moldovans 7,200 (0.15%), Bulgarians 4,800 (0.1%), Germans 4,600 (0.1%), Poles 4,300 (0.09%), and Roma 4,100 (0.08%).

Luhansk Oblast, area 26.7 km², population 2.23 million, capital Luhansk (397,700, Ukrainians 49.6%, Russians 47%, Russian spoken by 85.3% of inhabitants), after Russian occupation, capital Severodonetsk (99,100, Ukrainians 59.0%, Russians 38.7%), historical lands of Sloboda Ukraine and the Don Cossack Land, in the independence referendum (1991) 83.86% in favor, ethnic composition (2001): Ukrainians 1.47 million (57.96%), Russians 991,800 (39.05%), Belarusians 20,600 (0.81%), Tatars 8,500 (0.34%), Armenians 6,600 (0.26%), Moldovans 3,300 (0.13%), Azerbaijanis 3,100 (0.12%), Jews 2,700 (0.1%), Roma 2,300 (0.09%), and Poles 2,100 (0.08%). Over 68.8% of the population considered themselves Russian-speaking, and 30.0% considered themselves Ukrainian-speaking.

Kharkiv Oblast, area 31,400 km², population 2.6 million, capital Kharkiv (1.42 million, Ukrainians 62.8%, Russians 33.2%, Russian

spoken by 65.9% of inhabitants), historical lands of Sloboda Ukraine and Zaporizhzhia Sich, ethnic composition (2001): Ukrainians 2.05 million (70.7%), Russians 742,000 (25.6%), Belarusians 14,700 (0.5%), Jews 11,500 (0.4%), Armenians 11,100 (0.4%), Azerbaijanis 5,600 (0.2%), Georgians 4,400 (0.15%), Tatars 4,200 (0.14%), Moldovans 2,500 (0.09%), and Vietnamese 2,400 (0.08%).

Kherson Oblast, area 28,460 km², population 1 million, capital Kherson (279,100, Ukrainians 76.6%, Russians 20%, 45.3% spoke Russian), independence referendum (1991) 90.13% in favor, ethnic composition (2001): Ukrainians 961,600 (82%), Russians 165,200 (14.09%), Belarusians 8,200 (0.7%), Tatars 5,300 (0.46%), Armenians 4,500 (0.39%), Moldovans 4,200 (0.36%), Turks 3,700 (0.32%), Crimean Tatars 2,100 (0.18%), Roma 1,800 (0.15%), and Jews 1,700 (0.15%).

Zaporizhzhia Oblast, area 27,180 km², population 1.67 million, capital Zaporizhzhia (710,000, Ukrainians 70.3%, Russians 25.4%, 56.8% spoke Russian), historical lands of the Zaporizhzhian Sich and the Crimean Khanate, independence referendum (1991) 90.66% in favor, ethnic composition (2001): Ukrainians 1.36 million (70.8%), Russians 476,700 (24.74%), Bulgarians 27,700 (1.44%), Belarusians 12,600 (0.66%), Armenians 6,400 (0.33%), Tatars 5,200 (0.27%), Jews 4,300 (0.23%), Georgians 3,900 (0.2%), Azerbaijanis 2,500 (0.13%), and Moldovans 2,470 (0.13%).

Dnipropetrovsk Oblast, area 31,900 km², population 3.14 million, capital Dnipropetrovsk (980,900, Ukrainians 72.6%, Russians 23.5%, 66% spoke Russian), historical lands of the Zaporizhzhian Sich, independence referendum (1991) 90.36% in favor, ethnic composition (2001): Ukrainians 2.82 million (79.3%), Russians 627,500 (17.6%), Belarusians 29,500 (0.8%), Jews 13,700 (0.4%), Armenians 10,600 (0.3%), Azerbaijanis 5,600 (0.2%), Moldovans 4,400 (0.12%), and Roma 4,100 (0.11%).

Mykolaiv Oblast, area 24,600 km², population 1.11 million, capital Mykolaiv (470,000, Ukrainians 72.6%, Russians 22.6%, 63% spoke Russian), historical lands of Yedysan, Zaporizhzhia, and Podolia, ethnic composition (2001): Ukrainians 1.03 million (81.91%), Russians 177,500 (14.06%), Moldovans 13,200 (1.04%), Belarusians 8,400 (0.66%), Bulgarians 5,600 (0.44%), Armenians 4,300 (0.34%), Jews 3,300 (0.26%), Koreans 1,700 (0.14%), Azerbaijanis 1,500 (0.12%), and Roma 1,500 (0.11%).

Odessa Oblast, area 33,300 km², population 2.27 million, capital Odessa (1.01 million, Ukrainians 61.6%, Russians 29%, 80%

spoke Russian), historical lands of Jedysan, Budjak, Podolia, and Poberezhzhia, independence referendum (1991) 85.38% in favor, ethnic composition (2001): Ukrainians 1.54 million (62.8%), Russians 508,500 (20.7%), Bulgarians 150,700 (6.1%), Moldovans 123,800 (5%), Gagauz 27,600 (1.1%), Jews 13,400 (0.6%), Belarusians 12,800 (0.5%), Armenians 7,400 (0.3%), Roma 4,000 (0.2%), Poles 3,200 (0.1%), Germans 2,900 (0.1%), Georgians 2,800 (0.1%), Azerbaijanis 2,800 (0.1%), and Tatars 2,600 (0.1%).

Oblasts and Territories of Ukraine with Aspirations for Autonomy – Population and Area

Zakarpattia Oblast: According to the Austro-Hungarian census of 1910, the population was almost 606,000, of which 330,000 (54.5%) spoke Rusyn, 185,400 (30.6%) spoke Hungarian (in the 1921 Czechoslovak census: 102,400 Hungarians, 80,000 Jews), 64,200 (10.6%) spoke German, 11,700 (1.9%) Romanian, 6,300 (1%) Slovak, and 8,200 (1.4%) other languages. According to the Soviet census (1989), out of a total population of 1.24 million: Ukrainians (including Rusyns) numbered 976,750 (78.4%), Hungarians 155,700 (12.5%), Russians 49,450 (4.0%), Romanians 29,480 (2.4%), Roma 12,450 (1%), Slovaks 7,300 (0.6%), and Germans 3,470 (0.3%).

Bukovina (Rom. Bucovina; Ukr. Буковина, Bukovina) a historical region in Central Europe located between the Eastern Carpathians and the middle Dniester River. Since 1940, it has been divided into Northern Bukovina (Ukraine) and Southern Bukovina (Romania). In former times, it belonged to the northern part of historical Moldova. A Polish minority lives in Bukovina on both sides of the border.

Hertsa (Rom. Ţinutul Herta, Ukr. Край Герца, Krai Hertsa) a historical region in south-western Ukraine, near the border with Romania, part of historical Moldova. It covers the same area as the Hertsa region, and 93% of its inhabitants are Romanian.

Budjak, Ukrainian census from 2001: population 617,200, including 246,900 Ukrainians (40%), Bulgarians 129,000 (21%), Russians 124,500 (20%), and Romanians/Moldovans 78,300 (13%).

Persons Associated with Separatist Movements

Viktor Yanukovych, born in 1950, son of a Belarusian father and Russian mother, member of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, Ukrainian politician, professor of economics and law, prime

minister from 2002 to 2005 and from 2006 to 2007, chairman of the pro-Russian Party of Regions from 2003 to 2010, and president from 2010 to 2014. After being removed from power in February 2014, he fled to Rostov-on-Don (Russia). He planned to return to Ukraine with Russia's help, or to become president of a state created in the south-eastern regions of Ukraine, where the Party of Regions and the Russian minority dominated. In 2019, he was convicted in absentia by a court in Kyiv for treason for requesting military assistance from Russia against the opposition.

Mykola Azarov replaced Yanukovych as leader of the Party of Regions. He was deputy prime minister and minister of finance, then prime minister (2010–2014). Born in 1947 in Kaluga (Russia), Azarov, whose real name is Nikolai Yanovich Pakhlo, was a co-founder of the Party of Regions and its leader (2001–2002, 2010–2014). Although he was the son of a Russian mother and an Estonian father, Azarov considered himself Russian. In 1984, he settled in Ukraine, joined the CPSU, founded the pro-Russian Civic Congress of Ukraine in 1992, and was a member of the Verkhovna Rada (the Ukrainian parliament) from 1994. After being removed from power in 2014, Yanukovych and Azarov fled to Russia, where they attacked the new Ukrainian authorities and organised the pro-Russian Committee for the Salvation of Ukraine.

Prime minister of the DPR, **Alexander Borodai**, Russian Major General of the FSB (participated in the war in Transnistria, Deputy Director of the FSB since 2002), former political advisor to prime minister Sergey Aksyonov of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea (27 February–17 March 2014).

Minister of defense of the DRL, colonel of the Spetsnaz GRU **Igor Girkin** (pseudonym Igor Strelkov, participation in the wars in Transnistria, Bosnia and Herzegovina (on the Serbian side), in both Chechen wars, and the annexation of Crimea).

Valery Bolotov, president of the LPR (May–August 2014), served in the Airborne Division in Vitebsk during the Soviet era, participated in the Nagorno-Karabakh War, and was chairman of the Airborne Forces Veterans Association in Luhansk.

Marat Bashirov, a Russian citizen and prime minister of the Luhansk People's Republic (July–August 2014), sat on the board of the Russian international news agency Interfax.

Igor Plotnitsky, minister of defense, then president of the LPR from 2014 to 2017, 1982–1991 career artillery officer in the Soviet Army. After removal from office, he left for Russia.

Leonid Pasechnik, Igor Plotnitsky's successor as president of the LPR, former minister of security of the LPR, former officer of the Ukrainian secret services, agent of the FSB FR.

Pavel Yuryevich Gubarev, born in 1983 in Severodonetsk, served as the self-proclaimed governor of the DPR from March to November 2014. He participated with the People's Militia of Donbas in the seizure of the regional government headquarters in Donetsk. He was removed from power and his position was abolished. He was a member of the paramilitary, racist, and nationalist Russian National Unity (RNU), operating in Russia and among the Russian minority in the post-Soviet zone, cooperating with the FSB. Members of the RNU participated in the aggression against Ukraine in 2014 and 2022. In Ukraine, Gubarev belonged to the pro-Russian Progressive Socialist Party of Ukraine (1998–2022) led by Nataliya Vitrenko, who is associated with Aleksandr Dugin. Gubarev's wife, Ekaterina, serves in the Russian administration in the occupied territories of Ukraine. In 2023, Gubarev became the head of the Club of Angry Patriots, founded by Igor Strelkov (Girkin). Its goal is to annex Ukraine or part of it to Russia (Novorossiya).

Valery Vladimirovich Kaurov, born in 1956 in Odessa, politician and entrepreneur, considered himself an ethnic Russian, would-be leader of the Odessa People's Republic, liquidated in 2014 by the SSU. He was a member of the pro-Russian Progressive Socialist Party of Ukraine, and then of the pro-Russian party "Russian Bloc" (1999 Russian Movement of Ukraine, since 2001 "For the Unity of Rus," in 2002 "For One Russia" merged with the Russian-Ukrainian Union into the "Russian Bloc"), which twice supported Viktor Yanukovych in the presidential elections and cooperated with the Party of Regions. The party was delegalised in Ukraine in 2014.

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GULF OF
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REVERSING HISTORICAL INJUSTICES, FACING NEW LEGAL CHALLENGES:

Lithuanian Liberation and post-Soviet Transition (1987–2004)

Abstract
The aim of this article is to reconstruct the process of the restoration of Lithuania's independence in the context of the fall of Communism and the transition to democracy. The chronological boundaries are the year 1987 (the first mass demonstration in Lithuania after the suppression of so-called Kaunas Spring in 1972) and the early 2000s (symbolic years marking full Lithuanian transatlantic integration, joining the EU and NATO). Special attention will be given to the social transition, followed by almost a uniform demand for restoring the rule of law and rebuilding historically-threatened justice. Law and justice were the essential planes of Lithuanian post-Soviet transformation – but in its historiography these dimensions are receiving less attention than the economic or political transition.

Keywords: post-Soviet transition, law, democracy, transitional justice, Lithuania

Introduction

On 11 March 1990 the Supreme Soviet of the Lithuanian SSR (serving as the parliament after the first democratic election since the Soviet occupation in 1940) officially declared Lithuania's independence from the Soviet Union. However, the process of transition into democracy and claims for independence did not start from this particular date – and did not end on this date either. In his article I attempt to reveal a particular period of Lithuanian late modern history – from the late 1980s protests and so called "Singing revolution," through external and internal struggles for democracy, security and recognition until the final success in the early 21st century, namely Transatlantic and European integration. In this article I have chosen a specific approach – to discuss the key events of Lithuanian liberation and post-Soviet transition primarily through the lens of law and justice. Although I am also keeping other processes and transformations (political, economic, social, geopolitical) in mind.

Most of Lithuania's attempts related to the restoration of the rule of law after the long years of Soviet occupation focused on the dimension of transitional justice. Researching the transition from communist regimes to democracies in the late 20th century is a well-established tradition in Eastern and Central European historiography and political science (Tismaneanu 1998). However, the novelty of the research presented here lies in its legal history-oriented approach. In Lithuanian and foreign historiography on the Lithuanian post-Soviet transition, the legal dimension has received less attention than economic or political transitions – or such topics as nation building and identity policies. Here the work by Richard C.M. Mole can be mentioned, which had focused on the transition of Lithuanian, Estonian and Latvian national identities during and after the collapse of the USSR (Mole 2002).

The economic transition – as well as political change and building democracy – has been analysed by such authors as Zenonas Norkus (2008), Rasa Čepaitienė (2023), and Jaroslav Volkonovski (2019); furthermore, Alvydas Nikžentaitis (2019) focused on changes in the culture of remembrance. There was also research on the post-Soviet generational shift and the experiences of people, born and socialised in the Soviet Union, but entering adult life in as citizens of a free Lithuania (*Soviet and Post-Soviet Lithuania – Generational Experiences* 2022).

However, there are much fewer works related to the transition of law. The issues of transitional justice were researched by Justinas Žininskas

(2002). Dainius Žalimas explored the topic of Lithuanian and other Baltic countries' attempts to prove the fact that the Soviet occupation was a crime of aggression and a violation of the international legal order (Žalimas 2001; 2003; 2006). Eugenijus Palkšys focused on the transition of criminal law in the period of 1990–1994 (Palskys 1995). Julija Ravaitytė studied the topic of lustration (Ravaitytė 2014). The author of this article has also previously published on the Lithuanian post-Soviet legal transition – but from the point of view of exact legal reforms, using purely historical criminological methodology and without broader political context as in this article – and without a clear focus to transitional justice (Rogers 2023).

So there is a lack of a broader analysis of both transitional justice and the criminal law shift in the context of state-building, democratic reform and consolidation of Lithuanian independence and statehood. Therefore this article aims to focus on these aspects.

Methodology

The research presented in this paper is strongly related to the tradition of focusing on transitional justice – the process of the transformation of post-conflict and post-dictatorship societies from an authoritarian or totalitarian government model to democracy, while addressing previous violations of human rights.

The roots of transitional justice are often associated with the post-World War II period in Europe, with the establishment of the International Military Tribunal at Nuremberg and the general process of denazification. According to the International Center for Transitional Justice, "transitional justice refers to how societies respond to the legacies of massive and serious human rights violations":

> "It asks some of the most difficult questions in law, politics, and the social sciences and grapples with innumerable dilemmas. While every context is unique, societies and individual stakeholders the world over must find answers to the same difficult questions about whether, when, and how to embark on a path toward a peaceful, just, and inclusive future where past crimes have been acknowledged and redressed and citizens and leaders agree that violence and human rights abuses can never again happen" ("What Is Transitional Justice?")."

The process of transitional justice is seen as a universal agenda, applied in various societies in the world when wars, dictatorships, and

other incidents of "massive" and "serious" human rights violations, end. It is based on a victim-centered approach – seeking, one way or another, to establish justice for victims and their families and compensate them for their losses that happened due to the violations of their fundamental human rights, including political repressions, war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocides ("What Is Transitional Justice?").

In the social sciences and humanities, the theoretical and methodological background to research transitional justice has been developed by various scholars and often applied to vast number of geographic areas that had experienced mass cruelties and injustices – from South America to post-communist (or post state-socialist) Eastern Europe. Scholars such as Ruti G. Teitel (2000), Arthur Paige (2009), Jens Iverson (2013) and others were searching for a theoretical background for the concept of transitional justice. Here we can also mention the numerous works of Raluca Grosescu which she wrote (Grosescu 2024; Grosescu and Ursachi 2009) and co-edited (*Transnational Advocacy Networks and the Globalisation of Anti-Communism after 1989* 2020; *Justice, Memory and Transnational Networks. European and South American Entanglements* 2019; *State Socialism and the Evolution of Post-War International Criminal and Humanitarian Law* 2019; *State Socialist Experts in Transnational Perspective. East European Circulation of Knowledge during the Cold War (1950s–1980s)* 2018; *Transitional Criminal Justice in Post-Dictatorial and Post-Conflict Societies* 2015).

Transitional justice is usually understood in a narrow sense – as the way to deal with past non-democratic regimes and compensate past injustices. However, the methodological focus of this article is broader. In order to focus on transitional justice and the victims of past crimes (Nazi Germany and communist USSR), independent Lithuania, first of all, had to create a functioning system of criminal justice and implement a large-scale legal reform. This process was not easy and smooth due to several factors: a) legacies of the Soviet law and criminal justice system; b) the need to address the potential corruption of politicians, lawyers and officers of the criminal justice field; c) organised crime that was flourishing in the whole post-Soviet and post-state-Socialist sphere.

One of the authors who noticed and identified the struggles of the legal systems of post-Soviet societies in that regard very early was Loise I. Shelley. She realised that the whole post-Soviet sphere in the early and mid-1990s shared similar patterns: difficulties in the reform of criminal and criminal procedure law, the growth of criminal offences and organised crime (Shelley 2002, pp. 223, 226–227).

According to Shelley, with no exception, organised crime grew in post-Soviet countries and penetrated their societies, economies and political elites, thus preventing a rapid and successful transition to democracy, building the rule of law and increasing the economic and social well-being of citizens of the new states that emerged. Growing crime numbers, especially organised crime, created great challenges to legal reform (Shelley 2002, pp. 223, 226–227).

In this article, as its scope does not include organised post-communist and post-Soviet 90s crime and corruption, I will not analyse these phenomena in detail. However, it is worth mentioning that these indeed were factors, somewhat preventing many 1990s societies achieving quick legal reforms related to a rule of law-based order. And post-Soviet Lithuania in that respect was no exception (Rogers 2023).

Humberto Cantú Rivera, whose research was focused on establishing the rule of law in organised crime-torn Mexico, claims that there are key elements in the process of transitional justice: a) attempts to enforce the rule of law and human rights; b) claims "to recognise the official truth of authorised misconduct that took place in the past"; c) a need "to punish perpetrators," and d) a requirement "above all, to ensure victims' rights to truth and reparation" (Rivera 2014, pp. 57–81). As we see, in Rivera's theoretical interpretations, the victim is in the central position – whether of political, war or criminal (meaning non-political crime) violence. According to Rivera:

> "While many experiences of traditional transitional justice have taken place in post-authoritarian contexts, the convergence of the main elements used in those traditional cases leads us to suggest that these models could also apply to societies in transition, not from a particular form of government to another, but from a developing democracy into a law-abiding society. In this sense, a bottom-up approach that aims at attaining truth, reform and change will be necessary to break a cycle of impunity and develop social and government institutions that respect and enforce the rule of law and human rights." (Rivera 2014, p. 57)

Back in 2014, when the article was published, Rivera hoped that if the tendencies of the Mexican governments' attempt to restore rule of law and focus on transitional justice will prevail, "it could potentially lead to the restoration of public trust in the authorities and pave the way for reconciliation between society and the State" (Rivera 2014, p. 57). Although Mexico's case is not directly related to the post-Soviet realities,

the general principles and theoretical insights expressed in Rivera's analysis are very helpful in understanding the fundamental principles of mass violence-caused trauma, and the process of transitional justice and reconciliation. These, despite huge cultural differences around the world and variety of different cases, are somewhat fundamental.

So, not only the exact process of transitional justice, related to the crimes and perpetrators of the political and state violence – but restoration of the rule of law in general can be seen as the key elements of successful legal reform.

It is important to stress that this view lines up with the attitude towards transitional justice of the European Union. For example, as the Council of EU suggests "the EU seeks to prevent violations and abuses of human rights throughout the world and, where these occur, to ensure that victims have access to justice and redress and that those responsible are held to account," and "transitional justice is therefore a key priority for the EU when engaging in situations of gross violations of human rights and serious violations of international humanitarian law and international criminal law" ("Conclusions on EU's support to transitional justice" 2015).

Key elements of transitional justice are mentioned in this EU document: a) "fighting impunity," b) "providing recognition and redress to victims," c) "fostering trust," d) "strengthening the rule of law," e) "contributing to reconciliation and non-recurrence." The "victim-centered approach to transitional justice" is also stressed ("Conclusions on EU's support to transitional justice" 2015).

Keeping the above-mentioned processes and perspectives in mind, in this article I propose the use of a methodology that focuses on three types of historical injustices and rule of law-based order related post-Soviet challenges, experienced by Lithuanian state and society (that became evident after the liberation from the USSR and during the post-Soviet transition):

Occupation and annexation of an independent country – interwar Republic of Lithuania (dealing with crime of aggression).

Crimes and injustices against civilians: a) experienced by the victims of occupying regimes (Nazi, Soviet) and external powers such as the USSR in the 1990s (war crimes, crimes against humanity, genocide, nationalisation of property and so on); b) experienced by Lithuanian residents and minorities, committed by the residents and/or citizens of Lithuania (from genocide to discrimination).

I will attempt to measure how successful the attempts to reverse the abovementioned injustices were.

However, the article will not exclude economic or social injustices, and those caused by organised crime and generally high crime numbers. These are very important, however impossible to handle due to the limited scope of this article – and due to the fact that the lens of law is too narrow to explain the complexities of these problems.

The main research questions are: how Lithuanian society and state was claiming and rebuilding justice in the transitional period to democracy during and after the split from the USSR and the Lithuanian Declaration of Independence? What difficulties they faced? What challenges were dealt with? And what was helpful to overcome these challenges?

It is important to stress that claims for justice came out not (or not only) from the political discourse – but, as we will see in the coming chapters, originated from civic society and deep wounds and traumas (Gailienė 2021). Most of these claims for justice came from the "bottom level" and various grassroots initiatives – as, for instance, printing the memoirs of the former deportees in Soviet Lithuanian cultural journals as early as in the 1988 (Grinkevičiūtė 1997).

Dealing with Injustices Against the Lithuanian State: from Crime of Aggression to the Collaboration with the Enemy

Lithuania, along with other two Baltic countries, was occupied and annexed by the USSR (twice) and Nazi Germany in the 1940s. It ended the history of an independent, modern, national model-based Republic of Lithuania, which lasted for more than two decades. Nevertheless, the understanding that Lithuania was and should be an independent country, not a colony or territory, ruled by the Soviet powers, inside occupied Lithuania (Davoliūtė 2015) and among the Lithuanian diaspora in the West (Dapkutė 2016, 236–258) has survived Stalinism and was lingering in the deeper levels of society until the declarations of Perestroika and official regaining of the lost memory of Soviet atrocities in the USSR – the process that was more broadly described by Alexei Yurchak (2006).

Such understanding was based on the perspective of international law. The occupation of the Baltic countries was never recognised by major Western countries. The consensus formed, under which Baltic states were seen as still to exist as sovereign states under international law, despite the Soviet occupation (Mälksoo 2022).

First of all, such a stance in international law to the occupation of the Baltics emerged due to the fact that these countries were victims of Soviet and Nazi aggression (Žalimas 2003).

The first aggressive activity against Lithuania came from Nazi Germany. After Hitler's totalitarian state started international aggression, "especially after it made an accord with the Bolshevik USSR, a new threat arose for the independence of the states created after WWI, including Lithuania" (*Lithuania in 1940–1991: the History of Occupied Lithuania* 2015, p. 33).

"After Hitler occupied the Czech Republic," on 20 March 1939, Lithuanian Foreign Minister Juozas Urbšys was handled an ultimatum by German Foreign Minister Joachim von Ribbentrop to surrender the Klaipėda region to Germany. "The following day Lithuanian government decided to satisfy Berlin's demand." Thus, Lithuania lost two thirds of its access to the sea, including the economically very important harbour of Klaipėda (*Lithuania in 1940–1991: the History of Occupied Lithuania* 2015, p. 34).

On 23 August 1939, the infamous Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact was signed. Framed as an non-aggression treaty between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union, it included a secret protocol that divided Eastern Europe into spheres of influence of either Germany or the Soviet Union. At that time Lithuania came under the Nazi sphere of influence, while the other Baltic states, Finland, Romanian Bessarabia, and Eastern Poland were claimed by the USSR. Following the pact, the Nazis invaded Poland on 1 September, 1939 (*Lithuania in 1940–1991: the History of Occupied Lithuania* 2015, p. 35).

At that time, Nazi Germany was trying draw Lithuanian into a war against Poland, encouraging the country to organise a "March of Lithuanians to Vilnius"; however, the Lithuanian government chose to pursue its interwar policy of neutrality. That changed very soon. After the USSR invaded Poland on 17 September 1939 and captured Vilnius, and after Germany and USSR signed the so-called "Boundary and Friendship Treaty" (28 September 1939) that handed over Lithuania to Moscow, the USSR "demanded that the Lithuanian government sign a mutual assistance treaty with the USSR, under which Vilnius would be handed over to Lithuania, but Red Army garrisons would be deployed in its territory." This time Lithuania gave in and officially lost neutrality – thus becoming an even easier target for USSR aggression. The treaty was signed on 10 October 1939 (*Lithuania in 1940–1991: the History of Occupied Lithuania* 2015, p. 37).

Soon repressions – deportations, imprisonments, forced displacements – began against the Polish population of the Vilnius region (Stravinskienė 2016; 2012, p p. 39–47).

Actual occupation followed soon afterwards. On 7 June 1940 Red Army began gathering at the Lithuanian border for a direct invasion. On 14 June 1940, Urbšys and the Lithuanian government were presented with a Soviet ultimatum, which demanded the formation of a new government, acceptable to Moscow and the admission of an unlimited contingent of the Red Army into Lithuania. President Antanas Smetona first proposed resisting, but most ministers were in favour of surrendering. Thus, on 15 June 1940, Lithuania was occupied by the USSR (*Lithuania in 1940–1991: the History of Occupied Lithuania* 2015, p. 47).

Repressions against residents, as well as active Sovietisation, followed quickly. The first targets were the members of former political elite, state institutions employees, business owners, and representatives of the intelligentsia such as teachers. Some of them were imprisoned during the first days of the occupation (Purs 2024).

Multiple crimes against civilians were committed at that time by the Soviet regime. The largest in scale was the June deportation of 1941. It was a mass deportation of people from Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, present-day western Belarus and western Ukraine, as well as present-day Moldova. The June deportation of 1941 targeted tens of thousands of people. Various nationalities, including the Jews, were targeted in the Baltic states, as the Soviet regime was often repressing people due to their social status (*Narratives of Exile and Identity: Soviet Deportation Memoirs from the Baltic States* 2018).

During the Soviet period, according to Vitalija Stravinskienė, all ethnic groups living in Lithuanian territory "were subjected to forced migrations and to mistreatment and injustice due to their political, religious, ethnic, or social status." According to her, "during the periods from 1940 to 1941 and from 1944 to 1953, about 260 000 individuals not only of Lithuanian but also of Polish, Jewish, German, Russian, Belarus, Tartar, Karaite, or other descent or nationality were deported or imprisoned" (Stravisnkienė 2012, p. 19).

There were brutal crimes committed inside Lithuanian territory too – including the Rainiai massacre, the mass torture and murder of between 70 and 80 Lithuanian political prisoners by the NKVD, with help from the Red Army, in a forest near Telšiai, during the night of 24–25 June 1941 (Šiušaitė 2005).

It is estimated that 23 000 residents of Lithuania were imprisoned, deported or killed by the Soviet regime in the period between 15 June

1940, and 22 June 1941 ("Lietuvos gyventojų netektys 1940–1986 ir 1991 metais").

After the war between Nazi Germany and USSR broke out on 22 June 1941, Lithuania was occupied by Nazi Germany. This period was extremely tragic for Lithuanian Jews, the the Romani (also called Roma) minority, Poles and other groups. It is estimated by historians today that, for example, one of three Roma people were killed during the Nazi genocide, which would be around 500 people (Selenis, 2023; Bubnys 2023; Lisauskaitė 2004).

Already in the summer of 1941, mass killings of Jews started in Lithuania. Ghettos for Jews were established in Vilnius, Kaunas and Šiauliai. Before the Nazi-Soviet War, about 208,000 Jews lived in Lithuania. During the Nazi occupation the Lithuanian Jewish community (Litvaks), famous for its history and culture, was almost completely destroyed – about 195–196,000 Lithuanian Jews were murdered ("Holokaustas Lietuvoje"). It is estimated that at least several thousand Lithuanians participated in the murdering of Jews or other Holocaust-related actions, such as, for instance, planning and enabling the killing (Cedor 2021).

The Soviet Union reoccupied most of the territory of the Baltic states in its 1944 Baltic Offensive during World War II. The Red Army regained control over the three Baltic capitals.

In today's Lithuanian historiography it is agreed that the annexation of the Baltic States by the USSR in 1940 had no basis in international law. It is considered that, due to this fact, a large part of the international community refused to formally approve this annexation (Anušauskas 2014).

Interpreting the Baltic occupation under the international, the principle established earlier by the Stimson Doctrine was applied in the Welles Declaration. The declaration on the Baltic case was issued on 23 July 1940 by the then acting Secretary of State, US Under Secretary of State Sumner Welles, defining the basis for the non-recognition by the United States of the Baltic occupation. The Stimson Doctrine, articulated in 1932 by US Secretary of State Henry L. Stimson, was a policy of non-recognition of territories acquired through aggression. However, the British and US governments eventually reached the consensus to recognise the Soviet occupation *de facto* – if not *de jure*. So, in the terms of international law, the legality of Lithuanian occupation and annexation was never recognised. It is considered a crime of aggression (Žalimas 2003; Liivak 1987, p p. 329-348; Mälksoo 2022; Hough III 1984, p. 301; Juda 1975, p p. 272–290; Whitmore 2019, pp. 20–22; Crowe 1983, p. 401).

After re-capturing Lithuanian territory, the Soviets restarted mass repressions. Large part of the Soviet terror was related to forced collectivisation. In the period of 1944–1953, 186,000 people were arrested and imprisoned, 118,000 deported. It is estimated that 20–25 thousand victims died in prisons and gulags, 28,000 died in the places of deportation – the USSR's far North-East, where the living conditions were extremely harsh, and forced labour and illnesses contributed to high mortality (*Lietuvos gyventojų netektys 1940–1986 ir 1991 metais)*.

Despite this, the armed resistance was still ongoing. It is not a coincidence that, during the time of Soviet occupation, the ambassadors of this belief in Lithuanian independent destiny were, first of all, members of Lithuanian armed anti-Soviet resistance (1944–1953). On 16 February 1949 the leaders of the Lithuanian Armed Resistance signed a document, called the "Declaration of the Union of Lithuanian Freedom Fighters (ULFF)," in Lithuanian "Lietuvos laisvės kovos sąjūdžio deklaracija" ("LLKS Tarybos 1949 m. vasario 16 d. Deklaracija ir signatarai"; Girdzijauskas and Sajauskas; "Lithuanian Partisans Declaration of February 16, 1949").

Together with other documents passed at the meeting, the Declaration provided the legal and political basis for the Lithuanian armed resistance. The document proclaimed the ULFF as an organised armed resistance to the Soviet occupation and its council as the sole legitimate authority in the territory of Lithuania. By signing the declaration, the ULFF assumed the responsibility of leading the restoration of an independent democratic state of Lithuania, where equal rights for all citizens and social care is guaranteed. The document also states that the "Communist party, as dictatorial and essentially opposite to the main aim of the Lithuanian nation and the keystone provision of the Constitution – independence of Lithuania, – is not considered a legal party" ("Lietuvos Laisvės Kovos Sąjūdžio Tarybos 1949 m. vasario 16 d. deklaracija – vakarietiškos politinės kultūros, laisvės ir demokratijos idėjų pergalė šiapus Geležinės uždangos"; "Declaration of the Council of the Movement of Struggle for Freedom of Lithuania, 16 February 1949, information by the Lithuanian Special Archives").

It is worth mentioning that the discussed declaration was eventually recognised as a legal act of Lithuania. On 12 January 1999, the Seimas (Lithuanian Parliament) passed a decree stating that the Council of the Union of Lithuanian Freedom Fighters, which signed the Declaration of 1949, exercised functions of the highest political and military structure and was the only legitimate authority in the

territory of the occupied country ("Lietuvos Respublikos įstatymas dėl Lietuvos Laisvės Kovos Sąjūdžio Tarybos 1949 m. vasario 16 d. deklaracijos").

When the armed resistance collapsed against the NKVD and MGB forces and Soviet military units (20,500 of its members and supporters died; *Lietuvos gyventojų netektys 1940–1986 ir 1991 metais*), dissidents and peaceful resistance members were continuing the memory and tradition of Lithuania's statehood. Some underground organisations, such as the anti-Soviet organisation, the Lithuanian Liberty League, even officially declared the claims for independent political statehood and demanded that the USSR grant Lithuania the right to leave (*Lietuvos laisvės lyga: nuo „Laisvės šauklio" iki nepriklausomybės*, 2004).

Others, such as the Catholic underground and dissidents, were more modest with their rhetoric – but kept hope alive for independence in their discourse and underground publishing as well (Archive (online) and information about Lithuanian Catholic Anti-Soviet underground periodical "Lietuvos Katalikų Bažnyčios kronika").

Even Lithuanians and persons of other nationalities, living in the country, who did not actively participate in dissident circles and did not have direct access to dissident discourse (for instance, to the illegal publications), still preserved the memory of Lithuania's political independence. The memory and trauma of Soviet repressions – kept in the families – was also defining the negative attitude towards the Soviet regime (Gailienė 2021).

Hence Lithuanian society arrived at the turning point of the late 1980s still having a certain understanding and memory about the need for political independence – and a feeling of injustice of acts committed by the Soviet regime against the Lithuanian state. Such an understanding was also encouraged by the Lithuanian diaspora from the other side of Iron Curtain that was actively lobbying for Lithuanian independence in the United States and Western Europe. The discourse of the Western diaspora could reach Soviet Lithuania through the underground press that was smuggled to the West and back to occupied Lithuania (Vegytė 2021).

When the processes of Perestroika started in the USSR, for Lithuania it became a window of opportunity to reinstate justice – and to reverse the crime of aggression committed against the Lithuanian state by Hitler and Stalin. There were attempts to organise larger demonstrations and claim political independence already in the 1950s and 1970s – but those protests were soon crushed, and their participants repressed by the KGB (Kareniauskaitė 2012a).

Lithuanian Freedom League rally at Vilnius Cathedral, accompanying a hunger protest demanding the release of Lithuanian political prisoners (August 1988). Photo: Maciej Kossowski (1988). Institute of National Remembrance Archives, Maciej Dariusz Kossowski Collection, ref. no. 2328/14

This time, due to the changed political climate in the USSR, the situation was different. A group of dissidents with long oppositional experience organised a demonstration and a rally in front of a monument of Adam Mickiewicz in Vilnius on 27 August 1987. The choice of date was not a coincidence. The Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact and its secret protocols, which determined the fate of the Baltic States before World War II, were publicly condemned during this event. So, the political claims to reverse the injustices inflicted on the occupied Lithuanian state, caused by the mentioned pact, were crystal clear (Ganusauskas 2006; "Kaip prokuratūra ir KGB bandė sužlugdyti mitingą prie Adomo Mickevičiaus paminklo, lš Antano Terlecko dienoraščio" 2006, pp. 57–58; "Apie Lietuvos laisvės lygos organizuotą pirmąjį okupuotoje Lietuvoje viešą protesto mitingą, įvykusį 1987 m. rugpjūčio 23 d. Vilniuje, prie Adomo Mickevičiaus paminklo" 2006, p. 68).

The rally was attended by some 500–1000 people. During this demonstration, speeches were given and the pre-war Lithuanian National Anthem was sung. Nijolė Sadūnaitė – the first speaker at the rally, a nun, political prisoner and famous personality of Catholic anti-Soviet underground – condemned Joseph Stalin and Adolf Hitler for their crimes against humanity, for the occupation of the Baltic States, and the millions of victims of the regimes. Speakers of the demonstration demanded Lithuania's independence. The event was attended by foreign news media correspondents. The participants of the mentioned demonstration were targeted, threatened and even experienced physical violence by the KGB. But, due to the fact that the Soviet regime now posed itself as the one that respects human

rights, mass arrests did not happen at this time. This opened the door for the new developments (Kareniauskaitė 2012b).

The protests and activities – from appeals for Lithuanian autonomy within the USSR to open demands for independence – grew in number and scale. On the next anniversaries of the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact – 23 August 1988 and 1989 – the protests were massive. In 1989 the protest joined the three Baltic countries, now referred to as the Sisters of the shared fate, together in the famous "Baltic Way" ("1989 m. rugpjūčio 23 d. – Baltijos kelias").

Another key step was the formation of the Lietuvos Persitvarkymo Sąjūdis (LPS, known as "Sąjūdis", in English – the Lithuanian Reform Movement) in June 1988. It became the basis for the political opposition that actually designed the Lithuanian exit from the USSR, with the use of tools of the Soviet law, and free elections. Sąjūdis won the first democratic elections to the Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republic Supreme Council, and declared the independence of Lithuania on 11 March 1990. The members of Sąjūdis argued that the Soviet Constitution itself declared a right of the so-called Soviet Republic to leave the USSR. It was true "on paper," but not imaginable in practice (Senn 1991).

Also, the Communist Party of Lithuania (LKP) split from the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) on 19–23 December 1989, at the 20th Congress of the LKP. (Before that, there was a split of Lithuanian communist party into an independent LKP and the pro-Soviet LKP-TSKP, which continued to remain a constituent part of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union). Thus, the only opponents of Lithuanian independence were the not numerous and practically marginal members of the Communist party who refused to leave the CPSU and formed the "alternative" communist party (Tamošaitis 2016, p. 53; Kareivaitė 2014).

However, the Lithuanian Declaration of Independence was not seen as an opportunity by the Soviet Union, despite the official rhetoric of restoring rule of law and the fact that the Soviet Constitution itself – only formally, of course – allowed the republics to leave. While Lithuania, just like the other Baltic countries, had seen itself as the state that never joined the USSR voluntarily, but was occupied by a military force – according to the Soviet attitude, the occupation had never happened and Lithuania was a legitimate part of the USSR (Žalimas 2001; 2006).

The political tension between Vilnius and Moscow grew drastically from March 1990 – and eventually brought more victims. In violent

actions of the Soviet Armed Forces against civilians in Vilnius between 11 and 13 January 1991, 14 civilians were killed and many more injured (in various sources it also often referred to 13 victims, as one them died not on the spot, but in the hospital later) (see Švedas 2021, p. 9).

First, an economic blockade was imposed by the USSR against Lithuania, together with increased military pressure. Soviet military units occupied the Vilnius buildings of the Political Education and the Party Higher School. Those later became the headquarters of the abovementioned "alternative" Communist Party of Lithuania, loyal to Moscow. As a result of the economic blockade, in January 1991, the Lithuanian government raised prices of important supplies several times. The move was followed by protests. The Prime Minister of Lithuania Kazimira Prunskienė resigned, the pro-Moscow *Yedinstvo* (Unity) movement organised a rally in front of the Parliament building. According to Human Rights Watch, the Soviet government at that time had planned a propaganda campaign designed to increase ethnic tensions, or use any social tension to destabilise the Lithuanian population – in order to drag the country back to the USSR ("Glasnost in jeopardy: human rights in the USSR. A Helsinki Watch Report," pp. 36–37).

On 10 January Mikhail Gorbachev addressed the Lithuanian Parliament, demanding a restoration of the Soviet Constitution in Lithuania and the revocation of "all anti-constitutional laws." Here it is worth mentioning that the 1990 Lithuanian Declaration of Independence explicitly denied the legality of alien constitutions in Lithuania (in fact, primarily of Soviet constitution) – and thus was seen by the Soviet leadership as "anti-constitutional" (Kasperavičius, "Sausio tryliktoji").

As it appears, the violence exercised by the Soviet Army in Lithuania in January 1991 was meant to be a prelude to a well-planned coup. The process was planned and pursued together with part of the local Communist party loyal to the Soviets ("1991 m. sausio įvykių byla: prieš 20 metų ir šiandien" 2019).

On 11 January 1991, the Soviet armed forces began operations in Vilnius. They seized the building of the Department of National Defense, the Press Palace, used violence and injured some civilians who gathered to defend these buildings. Lithuanian residents gathered massively to protect the Parliament, TV broadcasting tower, TV and Radio buildings, and other important state's infrastructure. On the night of 13 January 1991, Soviet troops stormed the buildings of the Radio and Television, the TV tower, killing 13 civilians that night.

One seriously wounded person died on the 18 February, there were also 837 wounded and injured (*Sausio 13-oji: tarp atminties ir istorijos* 2021; "1991 m. sausio įvykių byla: prieš 20 metų ir šiandien" 2019; Mickevičiūtė and Mozūraitienė 2022).

A group of Moscow-loyalist "alternative" communist party individuals, such as Mykolas Burokevičius, Juozas Jermalavičius, and others, announced that they had seized power, but major Lithuanian state institutions, municipalities and the majority of the population remained loyal to the legitimate government. As crowds of civilians continued to surround the parliament, Soviet troops did not attack again (*Sausio 13-oji: tarp atminties ir istorijos* 2021).

After the January 1991 events, Lithuania gained more and more political support from foreign countries, as well as from the democratic opposition in Russia, Ukraine and elsewhere. Eventually, after the political changes in Russia, the independence of Lithuania was protected and gained full diplomatic recognition. (*Sausio 13-oji: tarp atminties ir istorijos* 2021).

From the very beginning, the January 1991 events were understood in Lithuania as a crime of aggression. Justice was demanded in the case of both – for Soviet and Nazi occupations in the past, and for this crime in the present moment. Seeking such justice became the consensus of both the 1990s legislators and the community of lawyers, seeking to implement the law (Sagatienė, 2022).

Although it was not possible anymore to put on trial the Soviet and Nazi leaders, their officers and local collaborators, responsible for the occupations and annexations of the Baltic countries – the ones responsible for the January 1991 events were eventually prosecuted. This included the mentioned Burokevičius and Jermalavičius, who were apprehended in Belarus on the request of Lithuanian prosecutors in 1994 and brought to Vilnius (Vireliūnaitė 2015). The accusations at this time consisted of attempts to overthrow the government of Lithuania, anti-State activity. (LRT video archives on the January 13 trials). Accusations at that time were placed against more suspects, including Soviet security forces and military officers, but as these persons were not physically captured and the law in 1994 did not allow *in absentia* trials, the criminal prosecution processes against them were cancelled (Vireliūnaitė 2015).

According to the public information report submitted by the Vilnius District Court, the case concerning the investigation of the January 1991 events and criminal prosecution of the persons responsible for the crimes committed then, is one of the most significant cases in

Lithuania's law enforcement history. It took "almost twenty years" to investigate it, as both laws and forensic investigation tools and technologies were changing ("1991 m. sausio įvykių byla: prieš 20 metų ir šiandien" 2019).

It is important to stress that there were two 13 January trials: the first verdict was passed in 1999 and was focused mostly on the aspect of anti-state activity and planned coup. The second trial was at that time (1999) separated from the first one, due to the changed laws that now allowed trying the suspects *in absentia*. Also, when the 'first case' reached the Vilnius District Court, gross violations of the criminal procedure valid at that time were found, so the case was eventually examined against six suspects only. The 'second' case against the remaining 42 defendants was returned to the General Prosecutor's Office for investigation ("1991 m. sausio įvykių byla: prieš 20 metų ir šiandien" 2019).

The first case of 13 January was not investigated for crimes against civilians as defined by international humanitarian law (crimes against humanity, war crimes, as in the "second" case). The defendants were convicted at that time according to the following articles of the Criminal Code then in force: for the crimes specified in Article 68 (public instigation to overthrow the sovereign government and take over the control of the state by force) and in Article 70 (creation and participation in the activities of anti-state organisations). The indictment also covered sabotage (Article 67 of the Code), but the accused was acquitted (European Court of Human Rights. Second Section Case of Kuolelis, Bartoševičius and Burokevičius v. Lithuania (Applications nos. 74357/01, 26764/02 and 27434/02). Judgment. Strasbourg, 19 February 2008. Final 07/07/2008, 10–11).

So, the January 1991 events were understood in the legal discourse around this case primarily as a crime against the Lithuanian state. Thus, the first trial was not primarily focused on the prosecution of the perpetrators for the damage inflicted to the civilian victims. The verdict in the "first" trial, passed on 23 August 1999 by the Vilnius District Court demonstrated that it was extremely important for the law enforcement institutions to prove that the defendants acted deliberately, kept contacts with Moscow, knew about the plans to overthrow the democratically elected government, supported these plans, and assisted the Soviet actors involved ("1991 m. sausio įvykių byla: prieš 20 metų ir šiandien" 2019).

The investigation of the second January 1991 case took place over many years, the verdict of the court of first instance, the Vilnius District Court, was passed on 27 March 2019. This was a process of

a different, victim-centered approach (Vilniaus apygardos teismo 2019 m. kovo 27 d. nuosprendis Sausio 13-osios byloje).

It is worth mentioning that in the first case of January the accused were sentenced to imprisonment. Both Burokevičius and Jermalavičius served their prison sentences in Lithuania (Černevičiūtė and Zaksaitė, 2025).

In the second case 67 persons in all were finally convicted, but 65 were tried in absentia. However, all of them received sentences of imprisonment (Sinkevičius 2022; "Lietuvos Aukščiausiasis Teismas paskelbė nutartį Sausio 13-osios byloje", 30 June 2022).

Dealing with Historical Injustices Against Civilians

Since the late 1980s, Lithuanians started collecting information about the victims of repressions by the occupational regimes against civilians. The "Sąjūdis" had established the Commission for the Investigation of Stalinist Crimes in July 1988. This Commission began distributing special questionnaires, collecting data on Lithuanians deported, imprisoned, or murdered by the Soviet authorities. In 1991, another institution investigating the crimes of the occupation regimes began operating in Lithuania – the Center for the Investigation of Repressions in Lithuania, headed by Teresė Birutė Burauskaitė (*Interview with Teresė Birutė Burauskaitė* 2025; Vitkus 2024).

At that time there were still living witnesses of these atrocities. Such grassroot initiatives, after regained memory, eventually transformed into institutions of transitional justice and memory.

After regaining independence, Lithuanian state was also putting in efforts to re-establish itself in the international community. In order to be accepted by democratic countries, the new independent state had to ensure the application of standards of international law. This meant in regard to the historical damages:

a) Reforming criminal law according to the standards of rule of law and human rights protection, ensuring justice for the victims and a fair trial for suspects.

b) Granting justice for the victims of repressions, war and political violence: honouring and compensating the victims, punishing the perpetrators.

c) Addressing justice-related issues with other nations and national minorities (through law or diplomacy). For example, the legacy of the

interwar conflict with Poland needed to be solved – and the shared experience of the Soviet terror inflicted on Lithuanians and Poles was a catalyst for seeking reconciliation. The real bleeding wound was the Holocaust – silenced during the Soviet era, its remembrance reappeared as the political regime was changing.

d) Ensuring public access and education about the repressions and perpetrators.

Reforming Criminal Law According to the Standards of the Rule of Law

From Soviet Union Lithuania has 'inherited' criminal law and the whole system of criminal prosecution. Therefore, in order to seek justice for victims of the Soviet and Nazi occupations, a legal reform was necessary.

It took some time to design new laws. The reformed Soviet Criminal Code (The Criminal Code of the Soviet Lithuania) and Criminal Prosecution Code (The Criminal Prosecution code of the Soviet Lithuania) were also still in use for the transitional period.

There were reasons for slow reform. In the first half of the 1990s, the number of crimes was significantly rising in Lithuania – and therefore the decision was made to apply the Soviet criminal and criminal procedure codes during the transitional period. The fast drafting new codes and a super quick large scale criminal law reform at that time appeared to require too much time, effort, and expense – as the staff of the criminal prosecution system were putting all of their efforts into fight crime and bring back public safety. Thus Lithuania chose the strategy of maintaining the Soviet codes in force, but replacing the undemocratic laws with more just ones. Another important need was to ensure that the norms of the Lithuanian Constitution (Lietuvos Respublikos Konstitucija 1992) were included in the criminal laws – as, for example, a new definition of the principle of presumption of innocence. Soviet ideological terms and vocabulary were also quickly removed from criminal and criminal procedure codes (Palskys 1995).

The Soviet Criminal Prosecution Code had multiple amendments. Significant changes were enacted between 1990 and 1994. Pretrial detention was limited to 18 months. Some other changes also addressed the rights of suspects. The defense rights and its participation in criminal proceedings were expanded. The amended Soviet Criminal Prosecution Code also separated the prosecution, defense and court

functions, which were to be performed independently. These changes increased the fairness and objectivity of the prosecution process. The updated code was harmonised with the new judicial system. A total of 320 changes were made in the former Soviet Code of Criminal Procedure from 1990 to 1994. The most important of them were the change of Soviet terminology, deleting the Soviet institutions, and references to Soviet laws (Palskys 1995).

The criminal law reform process was very important, because it ensured the right to a fair trial – and prevented turning criminal law into a political tool to repress opposition, as it was during the Soviet era.

Also, some discriminatory norms against civilians, originating from the Soviet law, had to be changed. The attempts of the new Lithuanian state to observe human rights led to various other changes in the penal law. For example, decriminalisation of male homosexuality (that was considered a crime and punished by law in the Soviet Union) was seen as an important issue in the early 1990s – also, but not only, due to the pressure of foreign human rights activists. As archival documents of the Lithuanian Ministry of Interior show, several people had been imprisoned after the Lithuanian Declaration of Independence for homosexual intercourse. The Minister of Interior of that time, Petras Valiukas, had the opinion that male homosexual intercourse should be decriminalised and an amnesty granted for those imprisoned – soon it was achieved (Lithuanian State Modern Archives, f. 79, inv. 1 c. 7, pp. 4–5).

One more important step towards more democratic system of criminal prosecution was the abolishing of the death penalty. It was abolished in 1998 when the Constitutional Court of Lithuania declared that the death penalty is unconstitutional in Lithuania (The decree of the Constitutional Court of Lithuania of 9 December 1998 "Regarding the compliance of the death penalty, provided as the sanction by the Article 105 of the Criminal Code of the Republic of Lithuania, with the Constitution of the Republic of Lithuania").

The new Criminal Prosecution Code was adopted on 14 March 2002 (Baudžiamojo proceso kodekso patvirtinimo, įsigaliojimo ir įgyvendinimo įstatymas, 2002) and came into operation on 1 May 2003 (Švedas, Veršekys, Levon and Prapiestis 2017, p. 9). The new Criminal Code was adopted in 14 March 2002, and came into power on 1 May 2003 (Lietuvos Respublikos baudžiamojo proceso kodekso patvirtinimo, įsigaliojimo ir įgyvendinimo įstatymas, 14 March 2002).

The main difference between the 'old' Soviet and transformation period Lithuanian penal codes and the newly drafted one, can be

seen in the very way of structuring and definition of crime. In the old code the crimes against the Soviet state were of the main focus and importance. The new code was drafted in such a way that the violation of fundamental human rights and major international crimes, such as genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity, are seen as having the greatest importance. These crimes are now defined first, they trigger the harshest sanctions and penalties. The articles criminalizing most major international crimes can be applied retroactively and have no extinctive prescription (Rogers 2023; *Lietuvos Respublikos baudžiamasis kodeksas. Tekstas su pakeitimais ir papildymais iki 1994 m. liepos mėn. 19 d.; Lietuvos Tarybų Socialistinės Respublikos Baudžiamasis kodeksas*, 1978; *Lietuvos Respublikos Baužiamasis kodeksas*).

However, it is important to emphasise that the crime definition itself was changed already on 4 October 1990. In the Soviet Lithuanian criminal code, a crime was defined as "an unlawful, socially dangerous act (action or omission) provided for in the criminal law, which encroaches on the Soviet social or state system, the socialist economic system, socialist property, citizens' personality, their political, labour, property and other rights, and also any other kind of socially dangerous activity, which would encroach on the socialist legal system" (*Lietuvos Tarybų Socialistinės Respublikos Baudžiamasis kodeksas*, 1978). From 1990, the new definition of a crime was "… an action dangerous to society (an act or an omission) envisaged by the Criminal Law, which encroaches on the order of the Republic of Lithuania, its political and economic systems, property, the personality of citizens, political, labour, property and other rights and freedoms of citizens, as well as any other dangerous activity, defined by criminal law, which encroaches on the legal order established by Lithuania" (*Lietuvos Respublikos baudžiamasis kodeksas. Tekstas su pakeitimais ir papildymais iki 1994 m. liepos mėn. 19 d.*, p. 3).

So, while the transitional period ("reformed Soviet") code, used in the 1990s, despite considerable changes, still reminded some scholars of "a badly made mosaic", where the new, human rights orientated norms contradicted the old Soviet ones – the new code was considerably different in its very core and focused on democratic principles and the rule of law (Rogers 2023; Palskys 1995).

In general, the Lithuanian criminal prosecution system in the 1990s and early 2000s was getting more and more features of the rule of law-based structure. However, as the following sections will demonstrate – many struggles still existed and needed to be addressed.

Also, the practical implementation of the reformed law was not in all cases successful, when it came to the victims and perpetrators of the repressions, violence and even genocide during the Soviet and Nazi occupations.

Granting Justice for Victims of War, Repressions and Political Violence

The process of honoring and compensating victims in the 1990s was functioning, first of all, by passing the required laws. Lithuania recognised violence committed during Lithuania's occupations, and honored victims of the Soviet Union and Nazi German regimes' leaders, officers and their collaborators. The laws passed granted victims and resistance fighters legal status: "Law of the Republic of Lithuania on the Legal Status of Persons who became Victims of the Occupations of 1939–1990" (Lietuvos Respublikos asmenų, nukentėjusių nuo 1939–1990 metų okupacijų, teisinio statuso įstatymas), adopted 30 June 1997, entered into force on 1 July 1997; b) "Law on the legal status of participants in the resistance to the occupations of the Republic of Lithuania in 1940–1990" (Lietuvos Respublikos pasipriešinimo 1940–1990 metų okupacijoms dalyvių teisinio statuso įstatymas), adopted on 23 January 1997, entered into force on 2 July 1997.

Both laws defined categories and provided definitions of the victims and perpetrators, including the victims of Nazi genocide and Stalinist mass repressions (deportations, sending to the gulag, unfair imprisonment and politically-motivated death sentences). Repressions against anti-Soviet dissidents and other opposition were also included. These categories of people were turned from the "deviants" and "criminals" (as the Soviet legal system defined them) into victims.

According to the law defining legal status of victims and the law defining legal status of resistance and freedom fighters, a person who committed war crimes or violated international humanitarian law during the Soviet and Nazi occupations could not obtain these statuses (that encompassed also a material compensation). This also meant that if a person was fighting against Soviet occupation, but collaborated with the Nazis (or vice versa), he or she could not be granted the status of a hero or victim. These statuses could be granted posthumously as well. (Lietuvos Respublikos asmenų, nukentėjusių

nuo 1939–1990 metų okupacijų, teisinio statuso įstatymas; Lietuvos Respublikos pasipriešinimo 1940–1990 metų okupacijoms dalyvių teisinio statuso įstatymas).

The transitional justice and recognition of the Soviet and Nazi victims was seen as an important issue, as Lithuania was aiming to be incorporated into the Western legal order, and because of the claims for justice by the victims of the former occupying regimes. Former Soviet political prisoners of Lithuania actively participated in post-Soviet debates and claimed their rights and justice. For instance, due to their efforts and protests, in the former KGB headquarters and prison building in Vilnius, the Museum of Occupations and Freedom Fights (formerly the Museum of Genocide Victims) was established in 1992 by the Minister of Culture and Education of the Republic of Lithuania and the President of the Union of Political Prisoners and Exiles. (See more in "Istorija", on the Genocid website. The signing of international treaties and conventions sped up the process; Žilinskas 2002, pp. 154–155).

Lithuania was also attempting to organise the criminal prosecutions of the perpetrators. A draft of the law "on criminal responsibility for crimes against the residents of Lithuania" was prepared in 1992 (Minutes of the session of the Lithuanian Parliament, 24 March 1992).

It targeted genocide, war crimes, and crimes against humanity. The draft law declared that the crime of genocide was committed in Lithuania by both Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union. It included political and social groups as the victims in the definition of genocide (Lithuanian State Modern Archives, f. 79, inv. 1, c. 7, p. 136).

This act was adopted on 9 April 1992 under a slightly modified title – the "Law on Liability for Genocide of the Lithuanian Residents." The act entered into force on 15 April 1992 (Lietuvos Respublikos Įstatymas dėl atsakomybės už Lietuvos gyventojų genocidą). It is important to mention that tortures and deportation were defined in this law as forms of genocide. So, the concept of genocide in this law, according to Lithuanian legal scholar Justinas Žilinskas, had a broader meaning than in the UN Genocide Convention (Žilinskas 2002, p. 155).

Later, genocide and other serious crimes defined in the international law were included as delicts in Lithuanian Criminal Code – that was adopted on 26 September 2000, and came into operation on 1 May 2003 (Lietuvos Respublikos Baužiamasis kodeksas).

Another important issue was the restitution of the property lost during the wars and occupations. The process of restitution of property

took place in the 1990s. The majority of the population was affected as all private real estate (buildings, land) had been nationalised already at the beginning of the Soviet occupation. (On the restoration of the ownership rights of citizens to residential houses, see the ruling of the Constitutional Court of Lithuania, Case No. 11-1993/9-1994).

However, the situation with the Jews was different. As the majority of the Lithuanian Jews were killed during the Holocaust, and after the war majority of those who survived emigrated to Israel – most of the survivors were not Lithuanian citizens at the time and could not claim the property rights ("Information of the Foundation for Disposal of Good Will Compensation for the Immovable Property of Jewish Religious Communities" 2023).

The situation needed to be improved. On 21 June 2011, the Lithuanian parliament (Seimas) adopted the law aimed at providing compensation for Jewish private property expropriated by the Nazis and Soviets (Republic of Lithuania Law on Good Will Compensation for the Illegally Expropriated Immovable Property of Lithuanian Jews and Jewish Religious Communities of Lithuania).

However, the implementation of the law did not function properly. Therefore, on 20 December 2022, Seimas approved 37 million euros in compensation for Jewish private property expropriated by the Nazis and Soviets, by passing the amendments to the Law on Good Will Compensation for the Property of Jewish Religious Communities. Under the new amendments, the funds had to be allocated to the Good Will Foundation in permanence. The money was intended to be allocated to these Jews whose private property was seized during the occupations, as well as their heirs. The foundation can allocate 5 million to 10 million euros to meet individual requests for compensation for lost property. The compensations had to be paid for the property that belonged to persons of Jewish ethnicity who lived in Lithuania before or during World War II and that was illegally expropriated during the occupation. The law came into force in January 2023 ("Lithuania to compensate expropriated Jewish private property", 20 December 2022).

Attempts to bring the perpetrators to justice were crucial to the victims – but difficult in practice. Most of the Soviet and Nazi crimes took place several decades ago – so prosecution of those responsible was complicated. But Lithuania did attempt to prosecute several persons, who were suspected of crimes of genocide, war crimes or crimes against humanity. In these cases, the victims were Lithuanian citizens (both ethnic Lithuanians and of other ethnicity).

When it comes to laws, the already mentioned reformed Soviet criminal code and the "Law on Liability for Genocide of the Lithuanian Residents" of 1992 were used for the criminal prosecution of suspects of genocide, crimes against humanity, and war crimes (Nazi and Soviet). As already mentioned, when it comes to Soviet crimes, the concept of genocide in Lithuanian legislation and courts was understood and interpreted in a broader sense than in the Genocide convention – and this eventually led to difficulties at the European Court of Human Rights (Žilinskas 2002) that we will discuss soon.

In general, there were not very many court cases in Lithuania related to genocide and crimes against humanity. For instance, in the beginning of 2004 courts of first instance had five such cases. In that year they received three new cases, finished five cases in total (of which four finished with a verdict). Five persons received sentences. In 2005 there were only two such cases in courts. In 2007 and 2008 there was not even a single case. In 2009 there were three old cases and thirteen added. Courts managed to resolve nine cases that year in total – and that was one of the busy years ("Lietuvos teismai. Statistika").

Trials of Nazi perpetrators in Lithuania were the real issue. After the declaration of Lithuania's Independence Restoration of 1990, also due to newly-found archival material, multiple deportation proceedings were initiated by the US institutions against Lithuanian nationals. They were suspected by the US authorities of hiding their past involvement in the Holocaust. Some of these persons were deported to Lithuania in the early and mid-1990s, where local prosecutors started to investigate their cases ("Praeitį nuslėpę tautiečiai vejami iš Amerikos", 13 May 2008).

Only two of these cases eventually reached the Lithuanian courts, as investigations of crimes committed by the suspected Nazi collaborators Aleksandras Lileikis and Kazys Gimžauskas started ("Praeitį nuslėpę tautiečiai vejami iš Amerikos", 13 May 2008).

During the Nazi occupation, Gimžauskas (1908–2001) worked for Vilnius District of the Lithuanian Security Police. After an investigation of his activities began in the US, he returned to Lithuania in 1994 and he lost his US citizenship in 1996. In 1997, a criminal case was brought against him in the General Prosecutor's Office of Lithuania: he was accused of crimes of genocide under the abovementioned law. K. Gimžauskas became the first Lithuanian citizen to be found guilty of Holocaust crimes by the Vilnius District Court in 2001; he was exempted from serving the sentence due to old age and poor health (Stankeras, "Gimžauskas Kazimieras").

Aleksandras Lileikis (1907–2000) served as the commander of the Lithuanian Security Police in Vilnius District during the German occupation (1941–1944). In 1996 the United States revoked his citizenship on the grounds that the person had concealed his past. In fact, the US Department of Justice had been investigating the Lileikis case since the 1980s, but it was not until 1990–1991, when Lithuania regained its independence and the archives in Vilnius were opened, that Lileikis' signature was confirmed to be on the documents that said Jews were being handed over to a special squad and had to be killed in Panerai. In 1996, Lileikis left the USA and settled in Vilnius. He was accused of the genocide of Jews and put on trial. The case was actively followed by American Jewish organisations and Israeli officials, as well as representatives of the US Congress. A. Lileikis died in 2000, before the trial was completed. Before his death, he was recognised as unable to participate in his trial due to illness (Vereikis 2004). There were other attempts prosecution, but these were unsuccessful due to lack of evidence – the historical research on Nazi occupation perpetrators in Lithuania is still ongoing.

So the trials of potential Holocaust perpetrators in Lithuania took too long, although attempts were made to secure justice for the victims. One of the problems was that the suspects lived abroad. Another was their old age and the fact that many potential suspects were not alive anymore. The statistics, quoted earlier, of total cases concerning genocide and crimes against humanity in Lithuanian courts demonstrate that there were not that many such cases in general ("Lietvuos teismai. Statistika"). So, the slow and not very efficient prosecution of Nazi perpetrators was rather the rule in Lithuania than the exception – similar trends can be detected in the case of Soviet crimes.

Historical research on these topics also took quite a long time, causing many debates on whether one or another person really could have served the Nazis and committed genocide – or if the documents proving their involvement were in fact authentic (many existing documents in Lithuania originally came from Soviet post-war trials of Nazis). There is still a certain reluctance to publish the already known names of the Holocaust perpetrators, claiming a lack of evidence. For example, in 2016 the Genocide and Resistance Research Center of Lithuania has composed a list of suspected Lithuanians who became Nazi collaborators and were involved in the Holocaust. The list was made using archival data. The General Prosecutor's Office was hoping to use this new information to start pre-trial investigations into the genocide, based on a request of the Lithuanian Jewish community and

the Genocide and Resistance Research Center. However, it turned out that none of the 2039 people on the list were alive (Želnienė 2016).

In regard to the Soviet perpetrators, Lithuanian courts at first struggled to correctly define the crimes committed. They were using a definition of genocide, based on targeting political groups, and these attempts failed. In the Vasiliauskas v. Lithuania case (2015), the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) found Lithuania in breach of the European Convention on Human Rights, Article 7 (a retroactively applied broadened definition of genocide, embedded in the national law) (see Case of Vasiliauskas v. Lithuania, Judgement. Strasbourg, 20 October 2015).

In this case, the Lithuanian Prosecutor's Office in 2001 started an investigation against Vasiliauskas on charges of genocide. In 1953, he participated in an operation by Soviet services against two Lithuanian ex-Soviet partisans, brothers J.A. and A.A., who were hiding in the forests of the Šakiai district. When M.Ž., who was tried together in a criminal case for genocide, provided the Soviet authorities with information about the location of the partisans, an operation to capture or liquidate the partisans was planned. Several soldiers were used to carry out the operation, and Vasiliauskas also participated in it. J.A. and A.A. resisted the attempt to detain them and opened fire on MGB officers and Soviet soldiers. Those returned fire, killing the partisans (Didžioji kolegija. Byla Vasiliauskas prieš Lietuvą, p. 5).

In its judgment of 4 February 2004, the Kaunas Regional Court found that there was sufficient evidence to convict the accused of the crime of genocide. So the investigation took 3 years (Didžioji kolegija. Byla Vasiliauskas prieš Lietuvą, p. 6).

Kaunas Regional Court convicted the defendant of genocide under Article 99 of the Criminal Code and sentenced him to six years imprisonment. M.Ž. was also convicted as an accomplice in the commission of genocide under the same provision of the Criminal Code. She was sentenced to five years imprisonment. Both were exempted from the sentence due to illness (Didžioji kolegija. Byla Vasiliauskas prieš Lietuvą, p. 7).

The Kaunas Regional Court noted that the 1992 Law "On Liability for the Genocide of Lithuanian Residents" provided for the possibility of criminal liability for genocide retroactively. The court of appeal of Lithuania also noted that social and political groups are covered by Article 99 of the Lithuanian Criminal Code that defines genocide. It recognized that such a definition is broader than in the Genocide Convention. But, according to the Lithuanian court, such

an inclusion of additional groups was "justified and reflected reality." The Lithuanian courts considered that the Genocide Convention does not contain provisions on the possible broad interpretation of the concept of genocide, but also does not prohibit such an interpretation; according to the court, the concept of genocide has also been broadened in the criminal codes of other states (Didžioji kolegija. Byla Vasiliauskas prieš Lietuvą, pp. 7–8). It seems that although such interpretation was not received well by the ECtHR, it did fit the Eastern European reality.

However, the courts finally learned how to apply the term "genocide" in more precise way. In the Drėlingas v. Lithuania case (2019), the ECtHR found that the Soviet repressions and violence against a targeted national group can be classified as a genocide. It this case the group in point was the members of the Lithuanian armed resistance. The court ruled that the actions of the Soviet repressive structures against resistance members could be classified as a genocide, because partisans represented Lithuanians as a national group – and attempted to protect the continuation of its existence (Case of Drėlingas v. Lithuania, Judgement. Strasbourg, 12 March 2019).

Addressing Injustice-Related Issues with Other Nations and Minorities: Attempts at Reconciliation

The recreation of an independent state in Lithuania also meant the end of discriminatory practices towards minorities. But the process was not smooth, either. For instance, some religious minorities, which suffered under the Soviet law, were finally recognised – but others feel discriminated against even until today (Ališauskienė, 2023).

Lithuania's policy towards national minorities in some cases was crucially important – and the failure of such a policy could mean a failure of international relations. This is particularly true in respect to the Polish and Jewish minorities regarding Poland and Israel. In both cases Lithuania's situation was complicated due to historical reasons. Interwar conflict with Poland and tragic loss of almost all of the Lithuanian Jewish population during the Holocaust with the assistance of local collaborators.

However, Lithuania's case was different from Latvia and Estonia. Lithuania during the Soviet period did not have a large Russian minority, and therefore did not perceive Russian nationals as a threat

to national security. Differently than in Latvia and Estonia, Russians living in Lithuania during the process of liberation were granted citizenship with no conditions attached.

In the case of Polish and Jewish minorities, the issues were, as mentioned, connected to historical traumas and the process of reconciliation.

The interwar conflict with Poland did not became a political problem in the late 1980s and early 1990s as a result of efforts from both sides to move on from the painful past. Already during the Cold War, some Polish and Lithuanian intellectuals – such as Polish émigré activists Juliusz Mieroszewski, Jerzy Giedroyc and Lithuanian dissident, writer and member of the Lithuanian Helsinki group, Tomas Venclova, who was inspired by the Polish example – promoted the idea of peaceful coexistence between Lithuania, Poland, Belarus and Ukraine when their communist regimes would fail (Sirutavičius 2017; 2022).

Also, members of the "Solidarność" Trade Union supported the Lithuanian struggle for freedom. Pope John Paul II was a great inspiration, leading to mutual forgiveness. The role of this Pope was very important in Lithuania – a country where Catholics form the majority of the population. In 1994 the Pope visited Lithuania, and in his speeches encouraged both Lithuanians and local Lithuanian Poles to reconcile. Politicians and diplomats from both sides also made efforts for Polish-Lithuanian reconciliation. Finally, in 1994, the state treaty was signed expressing mutual friendship, good neighborhood and respect for each other's borders (Sirutavičius 1997, p. 346).

It was a great achievement that the memory of the Polish-Lithuanian Interwar conflict did not define the international relations of these countries in the 1990s. This painful past could not be further exploited by such currently hostile countries as Russia, which has been putting in efforts to abuse such memory in their narratives, so supporting their current aggression and hybrid warfare (Chivvis 2017).

So, Lithuanian and Polish reconciliation can be considered a real success story. Today it is considered a great achievement and an example for post-conflict societies. However, not everything was perfect as some tensions have existed and still exist.

These tensions with Poland lasted for many years, and were related to Lithuania's unwillingness to allow the use of Polish spelling in official documents and geographic names. Here, first of all, it should be mentioned Lithuania's state policy not to allow the original spelling of the names of persons who belong to national minorities – affecting, most of all, the Polish minority in Lithuania. The debates if it is a good idea

to give in to Polish requests, lasted for decades. Finally, on 18 January 2022 the Lithuanian parliament adopted a law on spelling of surnames in identity and civil-status documents. According to the law, documents confirming the identity of Lithuanian citizens will be spelled using the Latin alphabet. It means that the characters "q", "x", "w" as well as the digraphs "cz", "sz" and "nn" may be used. However, the use of diacritical marks from other languages was not allowed – for example, letters such as "ł", "ć" (from Polish) will not be used (Chmielewski 2022).

According to the Polish Centre for Eastern Studies (OSW), "The adopted law does not include Polish diacritics, thus it does not fully meet the expectations of Lithuanian Poles. At the same time, however, it marks a significant change in the approach of the authorities to the postulates of, among others, the Polish minority and may positively influence the atmosphere of the mutual relations" (Chmielewski 2022).

In the case of the Jewish minority, the process of reconciliation was more complicated – mostly due to Lithuania's reluctance to admit that some ethnic Lithuanians willingly took part in the Holocaust. The role of Lithuanian collaborators in the Holocaust was an issue in the 1990s, and it still is today. Also, the status of those who rescued Jews needed to be recognised – it was done only in June 2014, when the Seimas adopted amendments to the Law on the Legal Status of Participants in the Resistance to the Occupations of 1940–1990 (project No. XIP-1968(4), which equated the rescuers of Jews during the Holocaust with participants in the fight for freedom ("Žydų Gelbėtojai prilyginti Laisvės Kovų Dalyviams", 17 June 2014).

There were reconciliation efforts. Lithuanian president Algirdas Brazauskas travelled to Israel to apologise to the Jewish nation for the Lithuanians who participated in the Holocaust. Such a diplomatic action opened a door for warming the relationship between Lithuania and Israel. Lithuania also introduced a program to grant a national award to those Lithuanian citizens who rescued Jews.

But state's honors after the declaration of Lithuania's independence were given to some members of the Lithuanian armed anti-Soviet resistance without precise vetting. Only later, historians established that some Lithuanian resistance members had their role in Holocaust. For example, in 2014 the Genocide and Resistance Research Centre of Lithuania published the evidence that partisan Juozas Krištaponis, who was awarded legal status of Resistance Fighter in 1997, was involved in the Holocaust and responsible for killing Jews in the territory of Belarus (Dėl Juozo Krikštaponio (Krištaponio) veiklos nacių okupacijos metais, 19 December 2014). The exact number of Lithuanian anti-

Soviet resistance fighters involved in the Holocaust is not clear even today – as well as names of many perpetrators (Noreika 2020).

As we already mentioned, attempts to obtain and publish such data were made. The Genocide and Resistance Research Center has created a list of suspected Lithuanian Holocaust perpetrators (Želnienė 2016). However, the list has still not been been published.

Publishing Data on Repressions and Perpetrators, Sanctions, Education and Remembrance

The historical debates – such as the one about the role of Lithuanians involvement in the Holocaust and other crimes – are still ongoing. These debates trigger the memory conflicts and "monument wars." Some local communities resist the idea of removing the monuments of Lithuanian collaborators with Nazi or Soviet regimes – justifying such reluctance with the lack of historical data about the activities of certain persons and with different interpretations of historical phenomena (Pumprickaitė 2015; "Klausiate – atsakome. Kuo nusikalto S. Nėris?," 8 September 2015).

So, in Lithuania the question remains, for instance, what to do with the monuments of anti-Soviet resistance fighters who were allegedly associated with crimes of genocide or others, such as war crimes against civilians. The other issue is collaboration with the Soviet regime. Even today it is not finally clear how to interpret the actions of great Lithuanian poets and other artists who were also Soviet collaborators.

Here it is worth mentioning that public demonstration of Soviet and Nazi symbols is banned in Lithuanian by the Code of Administrative Offences in 2008 (188-18 straipsnis. Nacistinių ar komunistinių simbolių platinimas ar demonstravimas).

Many issues related to the material and symbolic heritage of totalitarian regimes (including monuments, street names, other practices of memorialisation and heroisation) still need to be resolved. The so-called "law of de-Sovietisation" is attempting to achieve these goals. This law, officially called "Law of the Republic of Lithuania on the Prohibition of Propagation of Totalitarian, Authoritarian Regimes and Their Ideologies" was adopted in 2022 (Lietuvos Respublikos draudimo propaguoti totalitarinius, autoritarinius režimus ir jų ideologijas įstatymas). This legislation was intended to force the removal

of Soviet-era monuments and streets in the country ("Lithuania passes 'desovietisation law'," 13 December 2022) – although, according to the law, the same applies to the monuments and street names of the Nazi-regime collaborators as well (Lietuvos Respublikos draudimo propaguoti totalitarinius, autoritarinius režimus ir jų ideologijas įstatymas).

I should also discuss the process of lustration. In comparative studies of post-communist countries, Lithuania was usually seen as one of the countries that have taken the strictest lustration measures. But in the local mass media discourse, an exclusively negative attitude towards the implementation of the lustration policy in Lithuania can be seen. According to the researchers, the truth lies somewhere in between: some part of the lustration in Lithuania could be seen as a success story, some – as a failure (Ravaitytė 2014, pp. 6–42).

The law was strict with regular ("cadre") employees of the Soviet repressive apparatus. "Law of the Republic of Lithuania on the assessment of the State Security Committee of the USSR (NKVD, NKGB, MGB, KGB) and the current activities of the staff of this organisation" (adopted on 16 July 1998, entered into force on 1 January 1999) has regulated that "the State Security Committee of the USSR (NKVD, NKGB, MGB, KGB)" was "recognised as a criminal organisation that committed war crimes, genocide, repression, terror and political persecution in the USSR-occupied Republic of Lithuania." For 10 years from the entry of this law into force, restrictions were applied to the former personnel – they were not allowed to work in the Republic of Lithuania as state officials or employees in government, municipalities, national defense institutions, the State Security Department, the police, the prosecutor's office, courts, the diplomatic service, customs, the State Audit Office and other state institutions of control and supervision. They also could not take a job as lawyers and notaries, work in banks and other credit institutions, strategic economic facilities, security and detective services, communication systems, educational institutions as pedagogues, tutors, or managers of these institutions, and hold any duties related to the possession of a weapon (Lietuvos Respublikos įstatymas dėl SSRS valstybės saugumo komiteto (NKVD, NKGB, MGB, KGB) vertinimo ir šios organizacijos kadrinių darbuotojų dabartinės veiklos).

However, the controversy happened with the secret informers of the Soviet repressive system and with the reserve personnel. The "Law of the Republic of Lithuania on registration, confession, crediting and protection of persons who secretly cooperated with the special services of the former USSR," adopted on 23 November 1999, in

force from 1 January 2000, regulated that "persons who cooperated with the special services of the USSR must come to register at the so-called 'lustration commission' within 6 months from the date of acceptance of law", its registration and publication. They were required to "voluntarily admit in writing to the State of Lithuania that they have secretly cooperated with the former activities of the special services of the USSR." In this case, the law ruled that "the information and data provided by registered and credited persons are classified and stored in accordance with the established procedure." (Lietuvos Respublikos asmenų, slapta bendradarbiavusių su buvusios SSRS specialiosiomis tarnybomis, registracijos, prisipažinimo, įskaitos ir prisipažinusiųjų apsaugos įstatymas).

So, if the secret informer admitted ties with KGB and confessed to the state – the information of his or her activities became secret. Such situation limited victim's rights to get information about their perpetrators. The society also lost the right to full archival information – even former repression institutions' archival documents, except that the names of the confessed people are available to general public and are published at the special website since 2010 ("KGB Veikla"). Therefore, the lustration was criticised by victims' organisations, such as the unions of former deportees and political prisoners ("Stringantis KGB archyvų viešinimas", p. 3).

Until today, there lingers a lack of clarity about the number and fate of particular former KGB employees and secret informers. According to historians Arūnas Streikus and Kristina Burinskaitė, there were several thousand new secret informers recruited every year, but most of them remained rather passive – they just signed the agreement, for instance, in order to be able to travel abroad (Jurčenkaitė 2023). Also, the level of damage done by the secret informers was very different: from almost none or minimal to severe (Jarusevičius 2023).

In 2023 the number of confessed KGB secret informers in Lithuania was 1589 (Jarusevičius 2023). It is speculated that about 1000 secret informers did not confess to the commission ("Svarbus pokalbis. Knygos apie KGB agentus autorė Burinskaitė: Lietuvoje šiuo metu gali būti apie tūkstantį neprisipažinusių agentų" 2023).

Unfortunately, the numbers of KGB informers and officers who were subject to any sanctions are not available.

Even the specific already-mentioned website on KGB activities does not list the numbers of such KGB employees, although biographies on this organisation's leadership are available (LSSR KGB vadovų ir pavaduotojų biografijos, "KGB Veikla").

Conclusions

The Lithuanian process of transitional justice overall can be termed a success story – but it had some problems.

The regaining of political independence from Moscow was successful, but the cost of it was paid by the victims of January 1991. The attempts to honour the victims of political violence and genocide were made in both the legal and political sphere. The January events trials can be seen, also, from the standpoint of symbolic justice. It was a way to name the crime of aggression towards Lithuania in legal terms.

Restored relationships and friendship with Poland and Israel, as well as the attempts to protect the rights of local minorities are also parts of the success story.

The problem was and still is a lack of justice – actual and symbolic – towards the victims of both Nazi and Soviet collaborators from Lithuania. The process of lustration did not go as smoothly as expected. Also, the number of crimes of genocide and crimes against humanity taken to the courts was low – first of all, due to the old age of the perpetrators. And even when they were sentenced, serving a prison sentence was rather an exception – because, due to their poor health conditions, even convicted criminals could be released.

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REPUBLIC OF KAZAKHSTAN
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THE IMPACT OF ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL **TRANSFORMATION** ON THE POLISH DIASPORA IN KAZAKHSTAN **SINCE 1991**

Abstract
Following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the political and socio-economic landscape of the post-Soviet republics underwent significant transformation, opening new opportunities for their independent development and the assertion of national identity. At the same time, these newly independent states faced considerable economic challenges resulting from the disintegration of the centrally planned economy of the USSR, coupled with a lack of established external relations with other countries and international organisations. This article examines the impact of the political and economic changes in Kazakhstan since 1991 on the Polish diaspora as part of the country's multiethnic population. The material analyzed in this study includes personal recollections of Poles published in the *Ałmatyński Kurier Polonijny* magazine between 2012 and 2017, as well as

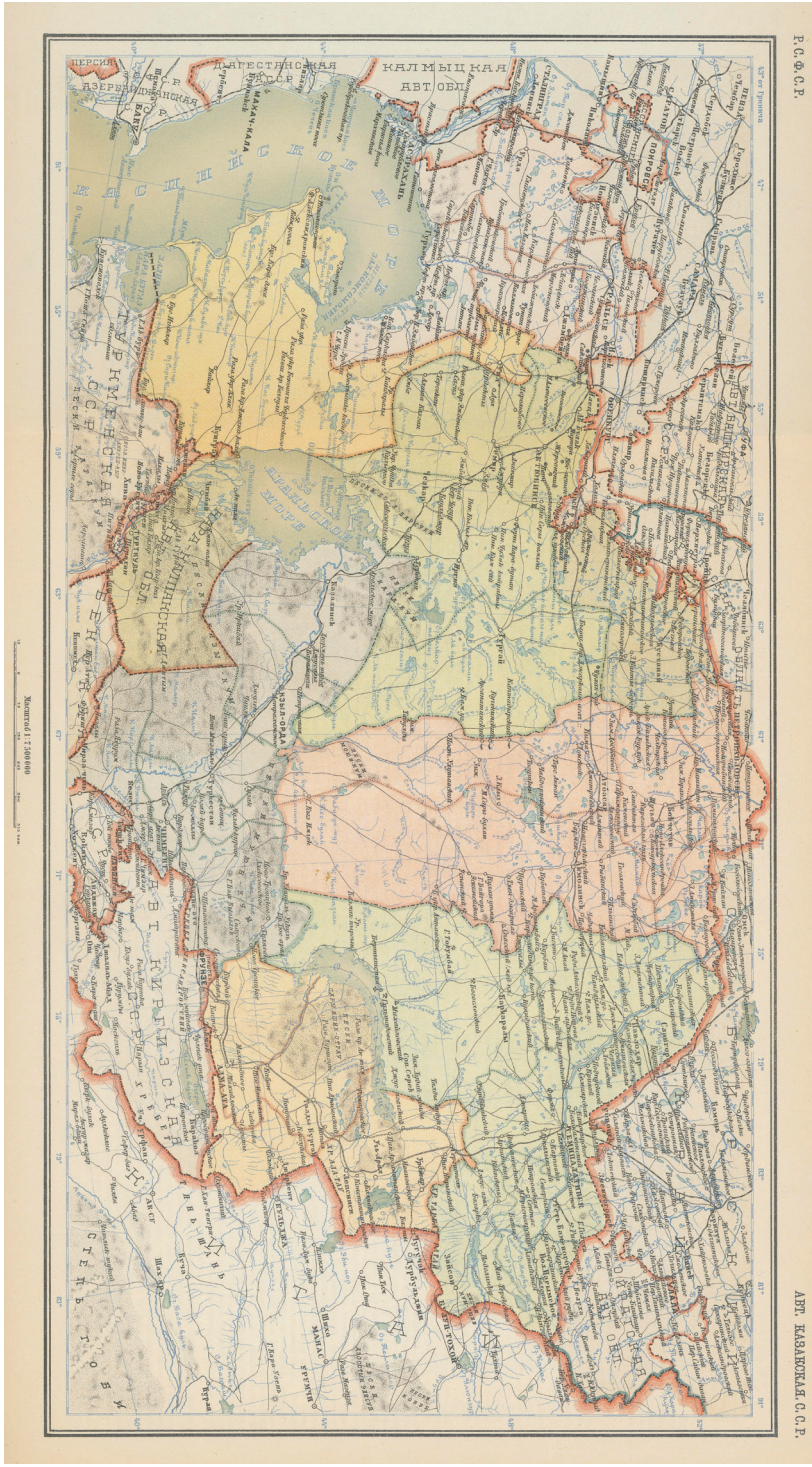
data from a survey conducted among Poles who emigrated from Kazakhstan to Poland for permanent residence since 2015, alongside responses from individuals currently residing in Kazakhstan.

Keywords: Demographic policy of Kazakhstan, Polonia in Kazakhstan, Poles in Kazakhstan, Migration process in Kazakhstan, Migration policy in Poland

Introduction

The Soviet period in the history of the Polish diaspora in Kazakhstan has been thoroughly examined by both Polish and Kazakhstani scholars, including Stanisław Ciesielski, Piotr Hlebowicz, Sławoj Szynkiewicz, K. Iglicka, D. Panto, N. Abuov, S. Mashimbaev, L. Isova, A. Berkimbayeva, and D. Legkiy. The presence of Poles in the territory of present-day Kazakhstan dates back to the period of the Russian Empire; however, the Polish population increased significantly during the Soviet era, primarily due to forced deportations under Stalinist policies. Over these years, Kazakhstani Poles became an integral part of broader Kazakhstani society, forming a distinct Polish diaspora within the country's multi-ethnic framework. Alongside the Poles, numerous other ethnic groups are present – altogether 130, according to the 2021 census conducted by the Bureau of National Statistics – many of them also found themselves in Kazakhstan as a result of mass deportations during the Soviet period.

The presence of a multinational population, with ethnic Kazakhs comprising only 37.82% of the total population at the end of the Soviet period (Serebryanskiy 2020), posed significant challenges to the government of a newly-independent Kazakhstan in 1991 following the dissolution of the USSR. The history of Kazakhstani Poles in the post-Soviet period has also attracted scholarly attention. Notable contributions include the work of Professor Marek Gawęcki, the first Ambassador of the Republic of Poland to Kazakhstan (1994–2000), whose publications such as "Kontakty z ojczyzną a tożsamość Polaków w postsowieckim Kazachstanie" and "Czwarty żuz. Sytuacja nierdzennej ludności w postsowieckim Kazachstanie" have explored the identity and situation of Poles in Kazakhstan after the collapse of the USSR (Gawęcki 2004; Gawęcki 2007). Research on the identity of Kazakhstani Poles has also been conducted by Luba Jakubowska (now Ślósarz) and other scholars (Ślósarz 2011).



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This article examines the impact of Kazakhstan's post-1991 economic and political developments on the lives of Kazakhstani Poles, with a particular focus on the decision-making process between repatriation to the historical homeland and remaining in Kazakhstan. While foundational, most studies on this topic were conducted between 1990 and 1998 and do not fully capture the current situation of the Polish diaspora in Kazakhstan. The present analysis draws on recent data concerning Kazakhstan's economic and demographic conditions, statistical sources, and materials published in the *Ałmatyński Kurier Polonijny* magazine, including personal testimonies and family histories of Kazakhstani Poles published since 2012. In addition, the article presents findings from a survey conducted among ethnic Poles from Kazakhstan, focusing on those who migrated to Poland after 2015 as well as those who chose to remain in Kazakhstan. The survey asked respondents to identify key factors influencing their decisions to either relocate or stay.

The working hypothesis of this study is that, among the factors influencing the migration of Poles from Kazakhstan to Poland since the early years of independence, the most significant has been the economic hardship experienced during the difficult period of Kazakhstan's post-Soviet transformation.

In 1991, the USSR formally ceased to exist. Over the preceding seventy years, several generations had come and gone, yet witnesses to the tragic events of the deportation period remain alive today. The forced deportations of the Stalinist era were the defining historical experience for Kazakhstani Poles, most of whom ended up in modern-day Kazakhstan as a result of these events. Other developments, such as wartime labour mobilisation during World War II and the major Soviet industrial and agricultural campaigns – including the Virgin Lands campaign (*Tselina*) – affected Poles in a similar way to other Soviet citizens. However, the experience of Poles was further shaped by their legal status as special settlers, which imposed severe restrictions until 1956. Like many other forcibly relocated groups – Germans, Koreans, Crimean Tatars, and the peoples of the Caucasus – Poles shared the fate of living in Kazakhstan under constraint and marginalisation. These events occurred against the backdrop of an earlier tragedy – the Kazakh famine, during which ethnic Kazakhs lost approximately a quarter of their population as a result of forced sedentarisation policies (Cameron 2018).

This historical context underpins the formation of the Polish community in Kazakhstan. Despite the trauma of deportation,

Poles became participants in the country's economic development and contributed to the emergence of the Soviet national identity. Throughout these decades, the Polish community managed to preserve many of its cultural traditions and religious practices – though to a lesser extent its language. Polish was not taught in Kazakhstani schools, and many deportees had arrived from Ukraine, where different linguistic dynamics prevailed. According to official census data, there were 34,057 Poles in Kazakhstan in 2009, compared to 35,319 in 2021 (National Composition of the Population of the Republic of Kazakhstan according to the 2009 and 2021 Censuses). Throughout a long period of Kazakhstan's history, Poles have remained and continue to be part of the country's population, with their numbers changing over different periods, as shown in the table below (Keller and Shoshana 2024).

Table 1. Demographic changes of the Polish diaspora in Kazakhstan across different periods.

Period	Polish population of Kazakhstan	% of total population
1939	54,809	0.8%
1959	53,102	0.5%
1970	61,400	0.5%
1979	61,100	0.4%
1989	59,400	0.4%
2009	34,057	0.21%
2021	35,319	0.18%

Materials

The empirical material for this study consists of two main sources. First, the recollections of members of the Polish diaspora published in the *Ałmatyński Kurier Polonijny* (AKP) magazine between 2012 and 2017 were analysed. Second, data were collected through a survey conducted among ethnic Poles who either emigrated from Kazakhstan to Poland for permanent residence starting in 2015 or who currently reside in Kazakhstan. In total, 26 publications from the AKP magazine were examined. The survey involved eight respondents: four individuals who relocated to Poland and four representatives of the Polish community who chose to remain in Kazakhstan.

Ciuksza family – Polish deportees in Kazakhstan (after 1940). Photo: Institute of National Remembrance Branch in Szczecin Archives, collection of Związek Sybiraków, Branch in Gorzów Wielkopolski, ref. no. Sz 671/1, vol. 4

Methodology

The study employed both classical and contemporary research methods. Content analysis and the comparative method were used to examine qualitative data derived from personal recollections and testimonies. In addition, quantitative data were processed using statistical analysis methods.

The Situation of Poles in Kazakhstan in the Early Period of Independence: The Economic Situation in Kazakhstan at the Beginning of the Independence Period

In the initial years following independence, Kazakhstan began the process of forming the core institutions of a sovereign state. In 1991, the country held its first nationwide presidential elections; in 1992, national symbols were officially adopted; and in 1993, a new constitution and national currency were introduced. On 2 March 1992, the Republic of Kazakhstan was unanimously admitted as a member of the United Nations during the 46th session of the UN General Assembly. However, the early years of independence laid

bare the significant challenges facing the country in its transition to sovereignty. Kazakhstan entered a profound economic crisis caused by the collapse of the Soviet Union, resulting in a sharp recession from 1992 to 1994 and extremely high inflation. Between 1990 and 1995, the country's gross domestic product (GDP) declined by 36%, and in 1992, inflation reached a record 3,060%, while approximately 1.6 million people were unemployed.

In response to the crisis, the government initiated a series of economic reforms. In 1997, the development strategy "Kazakhstan 2030" was introduced as a roadmap for long-term national growth. The strategy identified seven priority objectives: national security; internal political stability and national unity; sustainable economic growth; improved health care, education, and social welfare; efficient use of energy resources; infrastructure development – particularly in transport and communications; and the creation of a professional and effective public administration (Mukhamediyev and Temerbulatova 2021). The disintegration of internal economic ties within the centrally planned Soviet economy led to widespread job losses among skilled workers and the suspension or restructuring of large industrial enterprises that had previously produced goods for inter-republic trade. Between 1990 and 1995, real GDP declined by 36% due to the severing of economic links with former Soviet republics, the emigration of ethnic Russians and Germans, the breakdown of production chains, and hyperinflation, which exceeded 1,000% annually from 1992 to 1994 (Felipe and Rhee 2013). According to a report by the Asian Development Bank, Kazakhstan's early post-independence years were marked by substantial economic instability, which in turn affected the country's political and institutional development (Felipe and Rhee 2013). In the 1990s, vast areas of agricultural land in Kazakhstan fell out of use, and only in recent years has agricultural output begun to approach pre-independence levels. Livestock farming, in particular, still remains below those benchmarks (Anderson et al. 2018). Nonetheless, sustained economic growth – driven primarily by the extraction of energy resources and rising household incomes – led to a dramatic reduction in poverty, from 47% to 2.6%, and by 2013, the unemployment rate had declined to 5%.

The sectoral structure of foreign direct investment (FDI) in Kazakhstan demonstrates a strong concentration in the extractive industries. The mining sector accounts for 61.5% of total FDI, with oil and natural gas extraction representing 59.5%, and geological exploration and surveying activities comprising another 21.1%. All

other sectors of the economy collectively receive just over 17% of total FDI, with manufacturing receiving a modest 7.4%. While the influx of foreign investment has contributed positively to Kazakhstan's overall economic development, the uneven sectoral distribution of capital has exacerbated both regional and sectoral disparities. Kazakhstan's heavy reliance on global commodity markets also exposes its economy to significant vulnerability in the face of price fluctuations (Arsakhanova 2005).

One of the major constraints on increasing the output of competitive industrial goods is the severe deterioration of fixed capital assets. Insufficient investment has resulted in the accelerated depreciation of production infrastructure and processing technologies. Existing depreciation regulations do not adequately support the timely replacement of outdated equipment. Consequently, outdated machinery and technologies contribute to high material and energy consumption, elevated production costs, and low competitiveness of many industrial goods in both domestic and international markets (Arsakhanova 2005). Despite these structural limitations, continued economic growth in subsequent years – fuelled by energy exports and rising income levels – further reduced poverty and unemployment.

Polish deportees in Kazakhstan, working in the "Stalin" kolkhoz cotton farm (after 1940). Photo: Institute of National Remembrance Branch in Szczecin Archives, collection of Związek Sybiraków, Branch in Gorzów Wielkopolski, ref. no. Sz 671/1, vol. 4

A review of Kazakhstan's economic transformation over the three decades since independence highlights several critical junctures: the re-establishment of trade and political ties with former Soviet republics through the formation of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and a regional free trade area; the surge of foreign investment and rapid economic growth in the early 2000s, primarily driven by natural resource exports; the global financial crisis of 2008–2009; deepening Eurasian integration through the establishment of the CIS Customs Union in 2010 and the Eurasian Economic Union in 2015; the sharp decline in global oil prices in 2015–2016, which led to GDP contraction and currency devaluation; and, more recently, the global COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, which further disrupted the economy (Mukhamediyev and Temerbulatova 2021).

The Situation of Poles in Kazakhstan in the Early Period of Independence: Similarities and Differences in the Situations of the German and Polish Diasporas in Kazakhstan

Parallels can be drawn between the situation of Poles and Germans in Kazakhstan following the collapse of the Soviet Union, as both groups faced comparable challenges as ethnic minorities in a newly independent state. As Tamara Volkova (Volkova 2022) noted, emigration of ethnic Germans to Germany increased sharply in the early 1990s, driven by a complex set of political, social, and economic factors. On 25 October 1990, Kazakhstan adopted its Declaration of State Sovereignty, and earlier, on 22 September 1989, the Law on Languages of the Kazakh SSR was enacted, designating Kazakh as the state language. With the proclamation of independence on 16 December 1991, political transformation and deteriorating economic conditions accelerated the outmigration of non-titular ethnic groups. According to incomplete data from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Kazakhstan, nearly 300,000 ethnic Germans left for the Federal Republic of Germany between 1988 and 1992. According to Alfred Dederer (Aisfel'd and Dederer 2017), among those Germans who had survived the 1941 deportations, there persisted a sense of psychological unease and fear of renewed forced relocation – this time from Kazakhstan. Incidents involving ethnic tensions in Novy Uzen and Ust-Kamenogorsk further intensified fears of rising Kazakh nationalism and religious fundamentalism

among the German population. Another important motivation for emigration was rooted in the moral and symbolic sphere. Although official documents acknowledged that tens of thousands of ethnic Germans had made substantial contributions to Kazakhstan's national economy, their efforts were not perceived as adequately recognised. A particularly sensitive issue was the legal and personal status of those who had served in the wartime "labour army," whose contributions were not officially equated with military or civilian labour front service. The Labour Army (Russian: трудовая армия, *trudovaya armiya*) referred to militarised labour formations in the USSR. These units were composed of conscripted civilians or demobilised soldiers who were assigned to perform essential non-combat labour, particularly in industry, construction, and agriculture, often under military discipline. Following the collapse of the USSR and the establishment of diplomatic relations between Kazakhstan and Germany, several repatriation and financial support programs were initiated by the German government. However, the government of Kazakhstan was reluctant to support the mass emigration of ethnic Germans for a number of reasons (Badalova and Zolotareva 2017). Firstly, their departure had a tangible negative impact on the economy: according to internal estimates (though the methodology is not specified), the emigration of every 100,000 Germans caused economic losses amounting to 4 billion rubles (in 1990 prices). Secondly, officials expressed concern that the departure of ethnic Germans had a demoralizing effect on other minority groups, thereby undermining political stability in the republic (Volkova 2022).

The Situation of Poles in Kazakhstan in the Early Period of Independence: Economic Aspects of the Life of the Polish Diaspora in Kazakhstan

Thus, deteriorating economic conditions and various psychological factors were key drivers of the hardships experienced by ethnic Germans in Kazakhstan and their subsequent emigration. Comparable patterns are evident in the case of the Polish diaspora. As Zdzisław Nowiński (Nowiński 2002) observes, the economic downturn of the mid-1990s had a pronounced negative effect on the Polish population in Kazakhstan. Beginning around 1996, the economic stagnation became particularly visible. For example, collective farms (*kolkhozes*),

where many ethnic Poles were employed, ceased to pay wages, instead issuing food ration cards that had little practical value, as store shelves were empty.

Significant assistance in the organisation and cultural consolidation of the Polish community in Kazakhstan came from Polish civil society. Jan Plater-Gajewski, from Warsaw, was among the first to visit Kazakhstan in early 1990. During his 10-day visit, he helped establish the Union of Poles in Kazakhstan, which by March of that year already had 11 branches. A Polish song competition was organised during his visit, with 28 ensembles participating – including three Polish-language groups. However, most participants performed Polish songs in other languages. Nowiński (2002) also details the scale of humanitarian assistance provided by Polish organisations. In 1994, the first exploratory convoy of the Polish Humanitarian Action (*Polska Akcja Humanitarna*, PAH) was dispatched to Kazakhstan, delivering six tons of medicines and other goods. In 1994–1995, three additional humanitarian convoys followed, with the majority of supplies directed to the Medical-Sanatorium Centre in Kazakhstan. The organisation also provided aid to the Regional Children's Hospital in Kokshetau, the city with the largest concentration of ethnic Poles in the country (approximately 25,000). Other beneficiaries included a district hospital (400 beds), a centre for children with disabilities (250 beds), and a children's hospital (250 beds). Later, from 14 June to 4 July 1996, a large humanitarian shipment was organised by the "Pomost" Foundation – Help for Poles in the East, based in Radom. The convoy included two trucks (each with 24-ton capacity) and two escort vehicles with a trailer carrying audio-visual equipment (televisions, VCRs, a collection of historical films, and satellite receivers), as well as folk costumes and scout uniforms for Polish children in Tyumen, Western Siberia. The total value of this shipment was estimated at USD 211,386.67 (Nowiński 2002).

In the early years of independence, the changes brought about by the new political and economic circumstances were not immediately apparent, particularly in the provinces. Although the economic situation deteriorated significantly, the local population was largely accustomed to such hardships from previous periods of instability (Gawęcki 2005).

> "Kazakhstan of those times remains in my memory as a country engulfed by economic crisis. There was little to buy. Kazakhstan was at a crossroads. There was no certainty whether it would be possible to transition from

> communism to independence without conflicts. Kazakhstan in 1997 and Kazakhstan in 2013 represent two different eras. There is noticeable progress in many aspects of daily life. A few years ago, I was surprised that the Polish language was not preserved among the Poles in Kazakhstan. Now it does not surprise me. These were simply the consequences of history. Despite the lack of knowledge of the Polish language, they recognise their roots and nationality, which is often indicated by their surnames and life stories. There are numerous testimonies of loyalty to Poland. The language issue is important for those Poles who want to return to present-day Poland. Our task is to bring Poles in Kazakhstan closer to the contemporary realities of Poland, which has changed dynamically. Practically every decade is a different Poland. I would like, despite these changes, for the connection between Poles in Kazakhstan and Poland to be maintained." From an interview with Andrzej Papierz, Consul General of the Republic of Poland (Serebriansky 2013).

The source material for this article section consists of personal recollections and testimonies of members of the Polish diaspora in Kazakhstan, published in the *Ałmatyński Kurier Polonijny* between 2012 and 2018. Several of these memoirs highlight the hardships associated with the economic conditions in Kazakhstan during the 1990s and in subsequent years. The recollections of Leon Krynicki, an active member of the Polish community in Kazakhstan, also serve to illustrate the situation:

> "A film by Rafał Dzienciolowski and Andrzej Papierz, 'Far Away, Even Further.' was shown. The fact is that our esteemed Consul General, 18 years ago, as a journalist of Polish television, along with a fellow journalist Rafał Dzienciolowski, came to Northern Kazakhstan and filmed a report on local Poles. We, Almaty residents, had long asked to show this film. On the screen were the tragic 90s. Chaos in the villages. Collective farms were collapsing. There was no electricity. Equipment stood without fuel, no spare parts, no work. People were confused and depressed. The German population left their homes and went to their historical homeland. Russians went to Russia. Poles remained, exhausted and worn out. Their hands were shown, with twisted, unbending fingers like tree roots. One thin Polish woman in simple peasant clothes spoke in Polish about the harsh realities of life. The familiar collective farm life was collapsing. While talking to journalists, she took out bread from the oven. They used perforated pots, but the bread was fluffy, rosy, and half a meter high" (Krynicki 2015).

"In 1970, she married Yuriy Aleksandrovich Zaychenko (1944–1998). By origin: her father was Polish, her mother was Ukrainian. In 1977, their son Andrey was born. In 1972, she transferred to work in urban social welfare. Since 1987, she worked as a plastic and rubber presser, and later as a caster at the Instrument-Making Plant. In December 1996, she was laid off, one year before retirement. Since 1997, she has been on an ecological pension, and since 2002, she has been receiving an additional rehabilitation allowance" (Rezontova 2014).

"In 2011, trade between Poland and Kazakhstan exceeded 1 billion US dollars, strengthening Kazakhstan's position as Poland's primary economic partner in Central Asia and the fourth largest in the post-Soviet territory.
The Kazakhstani side also emphasises and values the significant contribution of Polish exiles to the development of modern Kazakhstan, to the study of Kazakh culture and customs, and to the popularisation of knowledge about Kazakhs and Kazakhstan. Notable individuals include Adolf Januszkiewicz, Alexander Zataevich, and Bronisław Zaleski. It should be noted that today, representatives of the Polish diaspora are actively involved in the social and political life of Kazakhstan. Two Kazakhstani Poles, Anatoly Makovsky and Svetlana Romanovskaya, are deputies in the Kazakh Parliament. Representatives of Polonia are active in business and economic activities. An example is the successful agricultural complex of the Rafalski brothers in the 'Tayinsha' area of the North Kazakhstan region", from an interview with Jerzy Wenderlich by Oleg Chervinsky (Chervinsky 2012).

Significant steps in economic cooperation between Poland and Kazakhstan included the establishment of the Polish Business Club in Almaty (16 February 2010) in cooperation with the Embassy of the Republic of Poland in Almaty, uniting Polish entrepreneurs working in Kazakhstan, and the Association of Business Clubs of the Republic of Kazakhstan (26 May 2010), which united representatives of the Polish Business Club and business circles of Kazakhstan to support Polish-Kazakhstani economic initiatives.

"Despite the modest staffing of the representation, as well as the lack of an economic affairs officer, we provided extensive support to Polish economic entities seeking to establish contacts with representatives of Kazakhstani businesses. I personally conducted twelve such exploratory visits, promoting Polish business and creating a favourable climate for

future Polish economic missions to Kazakhstan (meetings with akims [mayors] in Almaty, Atyrau, Aktobe, Shymkent, Taraz, Taldykorgan, Ust-Kamenogorsk, Bishkek, Jalalabad). I participated (speeches, opening of Polish stands, etc.) in the grand openings of international exhibitions such as Worldfood Kazakhstan, Kazupack, or Agroworld held at the Atakent exhibition centre in Almaty (the main meeting place for entrepreneurs from Kazakhstan and Central Asia). I attended many press conferences dedicated to Polish Kazakhstani business issues and spoke with representatives of Kazakhstani media (press, TV) about the opportunities and prospects of economic and trade cooperation with Poland.
The representation office prepared and participated in the implementation of thirteen economic missions and business visits from Polish entrepreneurs. We participated in regular meetings of the Polish Business Club in Almaty. Forty-seven Kazakhstani-Polish enterprises and twenty-five enterprises with Polish capital operate in Almaty. In 2012, the trade turnover between Poland and Almaty increased by 21% and reached 825 million dollars" – Wiesław Osuchowski, Consul General of Poland in the Republic of Kazakhstan, interview by Oleg Chervinsky (Chervinsky 2015).

"Polish exports to Kazakhstan have long been dominated by machinery, mechanical and electrical equipment, pharmaceuticals, household chemicals, cosmetics and hygiene products, dairy products, fruits, including the extremely popular 'Polish apples,' sealants, paints, and varnishes, as well as meat and meat products.
Poles deported to Kazakhstan in 1936–1937 brought with them a high work culture and respect for labour. These people established a positive image of hardworking Polish neighbours here, and in general, a positive image of Poland among the population of Kazakhstan.
The trade turnover between Poland and Kazakhstan in 2011 was 1,696,803.10. In 2012, it was 2,103,000.90. In 2013, it was 1,171,729.4. In 2014, it was 1,025,692.40 [million USD].
There are about 190 business entities with Polish capital registered in Kazakhstan, half of them in Almaty. Thus, besides Polonia, another part of the Poles living in Almaty are Polish businessmen. The Polish Business Club operates in Kazakhstan, managed by Mr. Artur Januszewski in Almaty Andrzej Stefański, head of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Poland in Kazakhstan (Chervinsky 2015).

"Ambassador of Poland in Kazakhstan Mr. J. Kluczkowski, followed by Consul General Mr. A. Papierz, expressed gratitude for the respect

> shown to the Poles by the country's leadership and the region. They also expressed pride in our compatriot A. Rafalski, who, under the difficult conditions of the 90s, managed to preserve the village infrastructure, save the people, and prevent the collective farm property from being dismantled. Being an experienced manager and administrator (his father B. Rafalski was the chairman of the Chkalov District Executive Committee of the Kokchetav Region), he created a new rural entity – Tayinsha-Astyk Ltd, a strong team, and despite the vagaries of nature, achieves high profits" (Krenitski 2015).

In the Tayinsha District of North Kazakhstan Region, the village of Yasnaya Polyana is often described as exemplary in terms of both agricultural productivity and social infrastructure. The settlement boasts a well-developed farm, a first-aid station, retail shops, a public bathhouse, a school, a children's mini-centre, a cultural centre, a café, a Catholic church, a Polish cultural house, and a museum dedicated to the history of special settlers. The village is also noted for its clean streets and well-maintained homes. Today, Yasnaya Polyana continues to undergo positive transformation. The agricultural sector is expanding, the local farm enterprise is growing stronger, landscaping and beautification projects are ongoing, and new social facilities are being introduced. On the village's official celebration day, regional governor Erik Sultanov and Anatoly Rafalski, general director of "Tayinsha-Astyk Ltd.," participated in the ceremonial opening of a new sports and recreation complex (Chervinsky 2016).

In his welcoming address, District Mayor E. Imanislam highlighted key historical milestones in the village's development. Initially known as "Point No. 2" (Donetsk village), it was later reorganised into the collective farm "Krasnaya Zvezda" ("Red Star"), which eventually evolved into one of the most prosperous agricultural enterprises in the region, now characterised by a robust and well-developed social infrastructure (Chervinsky 2016).

> "I am already 82 years old, and I have lived a happy life. I realised many dreams through my son, who graduated from Bauman University instead of me and now lives in Almaty. I went from an engineer to the director of the largest design institute in Central Asia. I have awards. I often travel to Poland, where my younger brother lives, whom I helped move from Karaganda with his family in the difficult 90s. They live well, and no one reproaches them" (Lubchansky 2016).

"My father, Leonid Polyansky, graduated from school in 1974, worked for a year on a collective farm, and in May 1975, he joined the army. He returned in the spring of 1977, and already in September, he entered a pedagogical college. He worked as a physical education teacher in a rural school until 1989. Then he decided to get higher education and entered the history faculty of the pedagogical institute in Petropavlovsk. After graduating, my father began working as a history teacher. Our family still lives in the village of Yasnaya Polyana. My parents work at the Yasnaya Polyana secondary school. My father is a history teacher, and my mother is a deputy principal and a teacher of Russian language and literature" (Polyanskaya 2017).

In the 1990s, the Republic of Kazakhstan lagged behind industrialised nations in terms of agricultural production. To address this issue, a process of agricultural restructuring was initiated in 1991. By 1998, a total of 138 agricultural associations had been established across the republic. In April 1999, the North Kazakhstan Region saw the formation of the *Kazexportastyk* holding company, one of the country's largest agro-industrial groups. In February 2010, two major companies – *Agrofirma Kzyltu-Nan* Ltd. and *Tayinsha-Astyk*

Polish deportees transported to a gold mine in Kazakhstan (1942). Photo: Institute of National Remembrance Branch in Szczecin Archives, collection of Związek Sybiraków, Branch in Gorzów Wielkopolski, ref. no. Sz 671/1, vol. 4

Ltd. – joined the *Kazexportastyk* holding. These enterprises are among the largest in the country, specializing in the production and processing of agricultural goods.

Tayinsha-Astyk Ltd., established in 2005 and headquartered in the village of Yasnaya Polyana (Tayinsha District, North Kazakhstan Region), focuses on livestock breeding, including Kazakh White-Headed and Canadian Holstein cattle breeds. The Polish Ambassador to Kazakhstan (2000–2004), Zdzisław Nowicki, referred to Yasnaya Polyana as "a little Warsaw in Kazakhstan." The village was founded on 14 June 1936 by Polish settlers deported from Ukraine. Of the 183 original settler families, 127 were of Polish origin. Today, the third generation of ethnic Poles resides in the village (Stepanenko 2020).

Poles deported to Kazakhstan not only endured the economic hardships of the early years of Kazakhstan's independence – while still facing the lingering effects of Soviet-era laws that had restricted their rights compared to other citizens – but also contributed to the development of the country's economy, primarily in the agricultural sector.

The Situation of Poles in Kazakhstan in the Early Period of Independence: Cultural Aspects of the Life of the Polish Diaspora in Kazakhstan

As noted by Adrian Berski (2012), the standard of living of the Polish minority in Kazakhstan is comparable to that of the titular Kazakh population. The Polish diaspora remains concentrated in three main regions: North Kazakhstan, Akmola, and Karaganda, as well as in the vicinity of Almaty. Approximately 2,500 Poles reside in the capital. Compared to other ethnic groups in Kazakhstan, Poles are among the least urbanised minorities. More than 80% of the deported Poles continue to reside in rural areas and are employed in agriculture. The initial legal restrictions placed on them – including the prohibition against settling in cities and large towns – continue to limit their economic and social mobility.

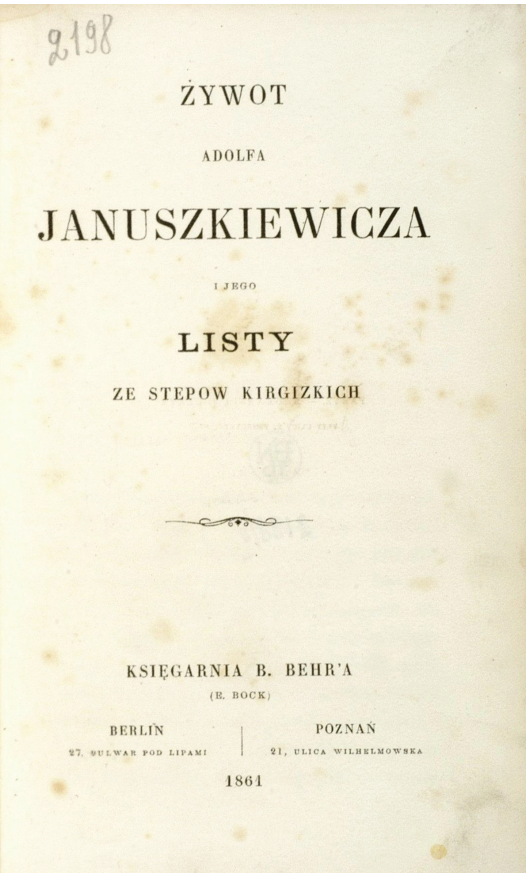
The first Polish cultural association in Kazakhstan was established in 1989 in Kokshetau (formerly [up to 1993] Kokchetav), initiated by Anatoly Dyachinsky. Similar centres soon emerged in Karaganda (led by F. Boguslavsky), Almaty (A. Levkovsky), and other cities. These associations were officially registered in 1992 and subsequently united under the umbrella of the Union of Poles in Kazakhstan (*Związek*

Polaków Kazachstanu, ZPK). Structurally, the ZPK comprises thirteen regional associations, each headed by an elected chairperson (*prezes*). At the local level, district and village organisations are incorporated into the regional branches of the ZPK. The activities of the Union at the national level are coordinated by the Republican Coordination Council, led by an elected national chairperson. The Almaty consular district includes approximately 30% of the Polish population in Kazakhstan and encompasses seven of the thirteen regional Polish associations, as well as eight district-level organisations affiliated with the ZPK (Serebriansky 2013).

> "The Public Association "Zhambyl Regional Polish Cultural Center" was established in 1997 and registered with the justice department on 11 June. On 3 March 2011, it was re-registered and renamed the Public Association "Zhambyl Regional Centre for Polish Language and Culture Polonez". The founder and first chairperson of the centre was Anna Petrovna Rabtsevich, the daughter of repressed Poles. Having worked for many years as a civil engineer, a competent and intelligent specialist in her field, she was passionate about her historical homeland and the Poles scattered across Kazakhstan. After Anna Rabtsevich moved to Poland, the centre was headed by Viktor Mikhailovich Kanevsky, the son of repressed parents. He began his career as a senior master at a local college, later worked as a deputy director, was an honoured teacher of the Republic of Kazakhstan, held the title of distinguished excellent professional educator, and was awarded government honours" (Kalkova 2015).

> "Albertina Antonovna Bakovskaya lived her long life in the village of Gorky, worked tirelessly, and despite the tragic nature of her fate, was very kind, responsive, and helped everyone, giving away her last possessions if someone needed them. She had a small house with a garden plot where she constantly grew potatoes and cabbage. And what carrots and garlic she had – they were fit for an agricultural exhibition! Her house was always impeccably clean and smelled of something familiar and delicious. Perhaps that's the smell of childhood. We must give credit to the collective farm management for the attention they paid to the lonely woman in her everyday problems. Even in the difficult 1990s, the leadership of the collective farm in the village named after Gorky, headed by Stanislav Sobolevsky, did not abandon my aunt and provided her with material assistance. Albertina Antonovna was assigned a social worker who took care of her and provided all kinds of help around the house" (Baikovski and Baikovskaya 2015).

Several Polish-language periodicals have been published in Kazakhstan, reflecting the cultural and social life of the local Polish community. For many years, the Shortandy District Association of Poles "Poliane" issued the magazine *Głos Polski*. Since 2012, the quarterly *Ałmatyński Kurier Polonijny* has been published in Almaty by the Polish Cultural Center "Więź," headed by Oleg Chervinsky. In 2020, a new publication entitled *Almator* was launched by Piotr Boroń and Lucyna Ejma, based at Secondary School No. 23 in Almaty, which hosts a dedicated Polish class. Since 1991, several positive factors have influenced decisions among members of the Polish diaspora in Kazakhstan regarding migration, and these factors remain relevant today. Meanwhile, the influence of earlier negative factors has diminished due to improvements in Kazakhstan's economic conditions, as well as the removal of restrictions on mobility, access to higher education, and career opportunities.


2198

ŻYWOT

ADOLFA

JANUSZKIEWICZA

I JEGO

LISTY

ZE STEPOW KIRGIZKICH

KSIĘGARNIA B. BEHR'A

(E. BOCK)

BERLIN | POZNAŃ

27, BULWAR POD LIPAMI | 21, ULICA WILHELMOWSKA

1861

Title page of the book *Żywot Adolfa Januszkiewicza i jego listy ze stepów kirgizkich* [*Adolf Januszkiewicz's life and his letters from the Kyrgyz steppe*], Paris-Berlin-Poznań: J. Claye, P. Behr, 1861. National Library, Warsaw, Poland

The establishment of Polish cultural and educational organisations capable of maintaining contacts with institutions and authorities in Poland has played a significant role in providing both internal and external support for the Polish community in Kazakhstan.

The first Polish-language school class in Kazakhstan was established in 1988 in the village of Ozernoe, following the signing of the Cooperation Agreement between the Ministries of Education of the Republic of Kazakhstan and the Republic of Poland. Within the framework of this agreement, the Polish side has regularly dispatched 35–40 Polish language teachers to schools across Kazakhstan, supplying textbooks, educational materials, and technical teaching aids to support instruction (Lewkowski 2016).

On 11 May 2013, a commemorative plaque was unveiled at Almaty School-Gymnasium No. 23 to mark the naming of its Polish-language class after the Polish exile Adolf Januszkiewicz (1803–1857) – a Polish

patriot, ethnographer, and collector of Kazakh oral traditions, best known as the author of *Diary Notes from Travels in the Kyrgyz Steppes*.

Polish language instruction in Kazakhstani schools enables children of Polish descent to pursue higher education opportunities at universities in Poland and contributes to the preservation and transmission of their ethnic and cultural identity.

Diplomatic relations between the Republic of Kazakhstan and the Republic of Poland were formally established on 6 April 1992. In March 1994, the Embassy of the Republic of Poland was opened in Kazakhstan. The Polish Embassy, General Consulate, Polish Chamber of Commerce and Industry, and the Polish trade representative office have since maintained active cooperation with the Polish diaspora in Kazakhstan and with Kazakhstani authorities, providing support for cultural, educational, and economic initiatives aimed at strengthening the Polish community in the country.

> "A unanimous decision was made to establish a branch of the "Więź" Polish Society in Zhanashar. Victor Iosifovich Veselsky was elected as chairman, with Nina Vitalyevna Bartoshevskaya as deputy. Branches were later established in Dmitrievka, Oktyabr, Nikolaevka, Talgar, and other settlements with a significant Polish population, totalling eight branches. In the early years after the society's and its branches' formation, humanitarian aid was provided through the Polish Humanitarian Action (PAH), including packages with household items, school supplies, children's goods, and financial assistance ranging from $20 to $100 for the neediest. In 1995, Polish Prime Minister Waldemar Pawlak visited Almaty officially, announcing a $30 million loan from Poland to Kazakhstan, which invigorated the activities of the Polish Union in Kazakhstan and reinforced hopes for a connection with their historical homeland.
>
> A significant event was the meeting with the President of Poland, Aleksander Kwaśniewski, in October 1999, which further bolstered the activities of the "Więź" society" (Lewkowski 2016).

In parallel with economic development, educational and cultural ties between Kazakhstan and Poland have continued to expand. Notably, fruitful cooperation has been established in the academic sphere. Kazakh National University (KazNU) has formed partnerships with eleven higher education institutions in Poland. These include the Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń, universities in Koszalin, the University of Łódź,

the Częstochowa University of Technology, and the Poznań Center for Human Rights at the Institute of Legal Sciences of the Polish Academy of Sciences, as well as the Adam Marszałek publishing house. These partnerships have created favourable conditions for academic exchange between faculty and students of both countries. The number of students participating in academic mobility programs continues to grow annually. Leading Polish scholars and professors regularly deliver lectures at KazNU and supervise doctoral students. Notably, the Faculty of Chemistry and Chemical Technology at KazNU houses a laboratory named in honour of Nobel laureate Marie Skłodowska-Curie. Academic exchange programs in the fields of natural sciences, law, and humanities are actively developing (Chervinsky 2017).

Kazakhstan proclaimed itself a unitary state in 1991. Subsequently, on 1 March 1995, the Assembly of the Peoples of Kazakhstan was established to represent the interests of the country's multi-ethnic population, including the Polish diaspora. In 2007, the organisation was renamed the Assembly of the People of Kazakhstan, reflecting a shift toward a more civic-oriented model of national integration. The Assembly of the People of Kazakhstan is a non-legislative entity established by the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan. It plays a consultative and coordinating role in shaping and implementing state policies aimed at ensuring public accord and national unity. The declared core principles of the Assembly include: Equality of rights and freedoms for all citizens of the Republic, regardless of race, ethnicity, language, religion, or social status; Comprehensive development and preservation of national cultures, languages, and traditions of the peoples of Kazakhstan; Expansion of integrative cooperation with international organisations; Formation of a unified Kazakhstani identity through the consolidation of the country's multiethnic population; Promotion of spiritual unity, interethnic friendship, and mutual understanding among the peoples of Kazakhstan.

The overarching mission of the Assembly is to preserve interethnic and interfaith harmony and social stability in the republic. It develops policy proposals to strengthen interethnic relations, supports the cultural and spiritual revival of ethnic groups, and encourages civic political culture grounded in democratic values. The Assembly also serves as a platform for reconciling diverse national interests and addressing potential social tensions through compromise and dialogue. The Assembly holds a constitutional quota of nine seats in the *Mazhilis* (lower house) of the Parliament of Kazakhstan. The procedure for electing these deputies is defined by the Constitutional

Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan "On Elections." Elections are conducted during an Assembly session convened by the President of the Republic, with the participation of the Assembly's Chairperson and members of the electoral commission of the respective territorial unit. A number of activities in Kazakhstan are jointly supported by the state, the Assembly, the Polish Embassy, and both Polish and local civic organisations. One of the most prominent examples of cultural cooperation is the *Polonia* Śpiewająca festival, which has evolved from a small singing event into a major annual celebration of Polish identity and culture in Kazakhstan. According to organiser Mila Sukhovetskaya, the Polish Embassy in Astana, particularly Consul Bartosz Jabłoński, played a key role in the early development of the event by providing guidance and support. The festival also received backing from the *Wspólnota Polska* association and local authorities, including the regional *akimat* and the Akmola Assembly of the People of Kazakhstan. The first edition of *Polonia Śpiewająca* featured 13 groups and solo performers from Astana, Pavlodar, Kokshetau, and districts of North Kazakhstan and Akmola regions, comprising a total of 51 participants. In its second year, the festival achieved official national status, expanding to 21 groups and 112 participants from cities such as Astana, Karaganda, Pavlodar, Petropavlovsk, and Kokshetau. By the third year, the event attracted 162 participants from Astana, Almaty, Kokshetau, Kostanay, Pavlodar, Petropavlovsk, Taiynsha, Taraz, Ekibastuz, and surrounding districts. In its most recent edition, 124 individuals took part, representing cities and districts including Astana, Almaty, Kokshetau, Kostanay, Pavlodar, Temirtau, Shymkent, Ekibastuz, and Taiynsha, with additional applications submitted from Taraz and Aktobe (Chervinsky 2015). The Union of Poles of the Akmola Region receives regular support from a variety of governmental and cultural institutions, including the Secretariat of the Akmola Assembly of the People of Kazakhstan, the House of Friendship, the Regional Centre for Folk Creativity, and the Departments of Culture, Internal Policy, and Education. In 2009, the Union won a government social contract to produce Polish national costumes, receiving 1 million tenge to sew six sets of traditional men's and women's outfits from the Łowicz region. In 2010, with financial support from the regional *akim*, two women's costumes from the Silesian region and matching footwear were produced. The regional administration continues to provide annual funding for the centre's activities, including the organisation of cultural events.

Polish deportees in Peschanka, Kostanay district, Kazakhstan (1942). Photo: courtesy of Hałaciński Family.

Further assistance has been provided through the Embassy of the Republic of Poland in Astana, which facilitated the acquisition of traditional Kraków and noble costumes, furniture, office equipment, and educational materials for Polish language instruction. The *Wspólnota Polska* association has also been a consistent donor, offering annual financial and material support to sustain the Union's operations and cultural programming (Chervinsky 2015).

The Situation of Poles in Kazakhstan in the Early Period of Independence: Religious Aspects of the Life of the Polish Diaspora in Kazakhstan

There is a clear religious revival among Kazakhstani Poles. Apart from the theological basis of this phenomenon, it must be acknowledged that Catholicism, even though Polish is often not the language of liturgy there, is perceived as a Polish religion. If someone consciously chooses to identify as Polish, they typically demonstrate this through their affiliation with the Catholic Church as well. Church gatherings, besides providing religious experiences, offer an excellent opportunity to manifest not only one's religious affiliation but also national identity. They also serve as occasions for informal information exchange

(Gawęcki 2005). As in the Soviet period, the ability to practice religion remained one of the most important elements in preserving cultural identity, traditions, and community cohesion among Poles in Kazakhstan. In the post-Soviet era, religious life has continued to play a central role in sustaining the Polish diaspora's sense of belonging and cultural continuity.

A number of contemporary memoirs include detailed descriptions of religious activities, offering valuable insights into the broader socio-economic conditions faced by the Polish community. These narratives provide a lens through which one can assess not only the persistence of religious and cultural practices, but also the material circumstances under which they were maintained.

> "Poles awaited the time when public associations began to form, Polish language teachers, missionaries, and priests arrived. They taught the language, promoted Polish culture and customs, and conducted Holy Mass in Polish. The Polish community began to rally around these people, opening language classes and churches. After marriage (the family of Boris Bober, Mrs. Antonina's husband, was exiled to the Almaty region), the family moved to live in Dmitrievka village. They worked diligently in agriculture, raising and educating two children. When in the 1990s the question arose of where the Polish diaspora in Dmitrievka would gather for Holy Mass, Mrs. Antonina invited people to her home. Her personal qualities such as love for people, readiness to serve others, compassion, integrity, and modesty played a significant role. For 20 years, Mrs. Antonina prepared her home monthly to receive parishioners. Her doors were always open to those who wanted to communicate with God. A priest came monthly to conduct Holy Masses, and public figures, students, graduate students from Poland, and consulate representatives came to meet with Poles. People came to Holy Mass not only from Dmitrievka and Bayserke, but also from Tonkeris, Chapaevka, Kokterek, Pervomayka, Energeticheskoye, Pokrovka, Luch Vostoka, Almaty, Kapchagay, and other places. Religion classes, retreats with youth and children, and meetings with elderly people were held here. In September 2001, a group of parishioners was invited to meet with Pope John Paul II in Astana, and Mrs. Antonina was honoured to occupy a place for distinguished guests during the Holy Mass at the Motherland Square in Astana. Over the years, children grew up, and many went to study in Poland. About a hundred parishioners moved to live permanently in Poland, Russia, Canada, Germany, and other countries" (Volvach 2013).

In 1997, a figure of the Virgin Mary with a net full of fish was erected on the shore of Lake Sasykol. It was consecrated by Pope John Paul II during his visit to Kazakhstan in 2001. In 1990, a Mary Queen of Peace Catholic parish was established in Ozernoye, with Fr. Tomasz Peta, who is now the Archbishop Metropolitan of the Archdiocese of St. Mary in Nur-Sultan, as the first priest. Construction of a church began, resembling the one in Medjugorje (an international pilgrimage centre in Bosnia and Herzegovina), although the residents did not know about this place before (Całczyńska 2021).

> "In 1997, the Polish cultural and educational society 'Polonia' was established in Taldykorgan, and Deonisia Pavlovna Belyavskaya became its first member, as well as a member of the society's council, where she still serves. Deonisia Pavlovna actively participates in the work of the Polish centre, the assembly, and the council of elders. She is awarded for a Distinguished Culture Contribution and is a cinema industry merit badge holder. She continues to work actively in our Polish centre, the assembly, and the council of elders, for which she has received letters of appreciation from President Nazarbayev, and on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the Republic of Kazakhstan's independence she was awarded a medal. For 20 years, there has been a Polish community in our village, and for 12 years there was a Polish language elective class at the school. Our elders have always supported and helped us in everything. We prayed at home with Galina Novakowska. Teachers from Poland lived at Sabina Novakowska house. Everyone helped as best they could. Now we have the Church of Divine Mercy. Many priests have changed over the years. When Albert Grigoryevich Levkovsky from Almaty first came to our village in 1993, he brought with him Father Klaudiusz. Masses were held in the home of Sergey Kardash in 1993. Father Kalikst Salak, who served from 1993 to 2004 in the villages of Zhanshar, Bazarkeldy, Kosmos, Bayanday, and the cities of Talgar and Issyk, came to us. In 1995, Masses were held in the home of Nadezhda Andreevna Glazkova. In 1996, Masses were held in the home of the Alisovs family, and when they moved to Germany for permanent residence, this house was acquired to create a church. In 1996, the house was rebuilt and renovated. Our Roman Catholic church became the Church of the Crown of Thorns. Here, lectures were held for children, youth, and older generations. Father Kalixt visited our homes and was a spiritual mentor. In 1996, we had a major confirmation celebration in Zhanshar, with participation of 30 parishioners. The charitable medical ambulatory at our church was built in 1999 under the guidance of Brother Diego Kim Changam Nan. Financial

support for the construction and equipping of the ambulatory came mainly from believers in Korea. Father Diego's team included excellent doctors specializing in sujok therapy, who came and provided treatment for villagers of all nationalities and religions for free and selflessly, ensuring no one was left without medical assistance. They held consultations once a week. However, for about three years now, our ambulatory has not been operating due to the lack of heating and water. Now consultations are held in Almaty, at the Holy Trinity Parish" (Levitskaya 2013).

"In our village of Nura, a branch of the Polish society was organised in 1994, led by my sister Yadviga and her husband Mikhail. They were involved in the rehabilitation of repressed Poles; a total of 33 Poles from our village were rehabilitated. In 2003, a church was opened in Nura and named the Church of the Mother of the Holy Rosary. It exists to this day, although fewer people attend now, as many have moved to Poland, Germany, Russia, and Canada" (Guzovskaya 2017).

The preservation and maintenance of the Catholic faith and traditions during a difficult historical period has been a crucial factor in sustaining Polish identity among Poles in Kazakhstan. This factor may also be regarded as one of the primary links connecting the Polish diaspora to the home country.

The Situation of Poles in Kazakhstan in the Early Period of Independence: Aspects of the Impact of the Repatriation Program on the Life of the Polish Diaspora in Kazakhstan

According to the 2021 national census, 35,319 individuals of Polish ethnicity currently reside in Kazakhstan, constituting approximately 0.18% of the country's total population. The Polish population is concentrated primarily in the northern regions of the country, including the North Kazakhstan Region, Akmola Region, and Kostanay Region. The highest concentration is found in the North Kazakhstan Region, where 10,848 Poles reside – comprising 2% of the region's population. Today, the Polish diaspora in Kazakhstan is composed almost entirely of individuals born in the country during the Soviet or post-Soviet periods. For the majority of Poles in Kazakhstan, Russian is the primary language of everyday communication. In contrast to other Slavic ethnic groups in the republic – such as Russians, Ukrainians, and Belarusians

– the Polish population did not experience mass emigration during the early post-Soviet years. As a result, the proportion of Poles in the North Kazakhstan Region even increased, despite the overall population decline due to negative natural demographic trends. The Polish community in Kazakhstan consists mostly of two main groups: descendants of settlers who arrived between the late 19th and early 20th centuries, and descendants of forcibly deported Poles – primarily from what is now Ukraine and Lithuania – who were exiled to Kazakhstan during the 1930s and 1940s under Stalinist policies.

The villages and towns where Poles currently live reflect the multinational structure of the entire Republic of Kazakhstan. Poles who previously lived in Ukraine adapted to the need to coexist with representatives of other nationalities, such as Ukrainians, Germans, Jews, and Russians. Long-standing mutual ties allowed homogeneous cultural communities to form, resulting from the blending of elements from various ethnic groups. In the responses of those surveyed, interethnic relations in their places of residence before forced resettlement are generally described positively, without any interethnic conflicts (Gawęcki 1998).

On 17 January 1956, a decree issued by the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR formally lifted the special settlement restrictions imposed on Poles exiled in 1936. However, despite the abolition of these restrictions, the geographic distribution of the Polish diaspora in Kazakhstan remained largely unchanged.

By the time of the 1959 Soviet population census, Poles were formally recognised as full-fledged citizens of the USSR, and special supervision over them had been officially abolished. Nonetheless, as archival evidence indicates, many continued to be monitored by administrative authorities and had not been officially rehabilitated. Although they were considered Soviet citizens, most ethnic Poles did not possess internal passports until 1959. In certain regions, passports were not issued to them until the 1970s (Gawęcki 1998).

A significant step toward restoring historical justice for repressed peoples came with the adoption of the Declaration of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR on 14 November 1989, entitled "On Recognizing as Illegal and Criminal the Repressive Acts Against Peoples Who Were Forcibly Relocated and Ensuring Their Rights." This document officially rehabilitated all repressed peoples and condemned the repressive acts committed against them – including forced relocation, the abolition of national-state entities, and the imposition of terror and violence in special settlements – as illegal and criminal at the state level.

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, Kazakhstan experienced large waves of emigration, significantly altering the country's demographic composition. The peak of the demographic crisis, marked by substantial population decline, occurred between 1993 and 1997. During this period, the negative net migration balance reached 1,969,600 people. The key trend in the evolving ethnic structure of the republic was the growth of the titular ethnic group (Kazakhs) and the sharp decline in the size of major diasporas, such as Russians, Germans, Ukrainians, and Belarusians. The country's total population continued to decline until mid-2002 (Serebrianskiy 2020). The outmigration of Russians, Belarusians, and Ukrainians was largely driven by ongoing familial ties with relatives in Russia and other former Soviet republics. In addition, the German government actively facilitated the repatriation of ethnic Germans from Kazakhstan by offering favourable migration conditions. Broader push factors included Kazakhstan's economic difficulties in the 1990s and interethnic tensions in neighbouring post-Soviet states. By contrast, the relatively stable numbers of the Polish diaspora during this period may be attributed to less favourable economic conditions in Poland, which made repatriation less attractive. Furthermore, in the early years of independence, a private business involving the resale of used cars imported from Germany emerged in Kazakhstan. These vehicles were often transported via Poland, where Kazakhstani entrepreneurs reportedly encountered corruption and road crime. This contributed to a somewhat negative perception of Poland in Kazakhstan, although the situation improved significantly after 2006.

The General Consulate of the Republic of Poland in Almaty, established by order of the Polish Minister of Foreign Affairs, officially commenced its operations on 18 September 2009, following the relocation of the Polish Embassy to the capital of Kazakhstan, Astana.

Before the opening of the consulate, the Polish Humanitarian Action (*Polska Akcja Humanitarna*) had taken significant steps to support the Polish diaspora in Kazakhstan. In 1994, the organisation launched a long-term Repatriation Assistance Program. Between 1995 and 2000, it drew attention to the circumstances of Poles living in Kazakhstan by organizing six Christmas-season pilgrimages for elderly Polish exiles. The foundation covered the full cost of these visits, including airfare, travel documentation, group accommodation, and meals during their stay in Poland (Gancarz 2012). Support from Polish governmental and non-governmental institutions has played a vital role in fostering

connections between Kazakhstani Poles and Poland. Participation in Polish-funded programs, including the state repatriation initiative, has contributed not only to the physical return of some members of the diaspora but also to the preservation of Polish cultural identity and language among those who have remained in Kazakhstan.

Several personal recollections documented in the memoirs of Kazakhstani Poles refer directly to the rehabilitation of family members, offering insight into how these historical processes are remembered at the individual and community levels.

> "Olga Barabash-Alekseeva, a member and activist of the Polish Cultural Center in Almaty: My mother, Lyudmila Pavlovna (always was father's daughter, very much like him), began fighting for justice. Since 1989, she wrote to the Supreme Court and achieved a document of full rehabilitation for her father" (Barabash 2012).

The adoption of legislation concerning the rehabilitation of Poles in the USSR granted former deportees the formal right to leave their assigned places of settlement, relocate to major urban centres, and pursue higher education. However, due to widespread economic hardship, these opportunities were difficult to fully realise. Moreover, the 1932 decree "On the Establishment of a Unified Passport System throughout the USSR and Mandatory Passport Registration" significantly restricted citizens' freedom of movement by requiring state approval to change one's place of residence. In Alma-Ata, the largest city in Kazakhstan and home to the country's leading institutions of higher education, relocation was possible only with a special permit, which was extremely difficult to obtain (Baiburin 2021).

Today, many Kazakhstani Poles express a desire to relocate permanently to Poland. However, it is also clear that a considerable number intend to remain in Kazakhstan. Whether this community will preserve its ethnic and cultural traditions in the long term, and whether it will serve as a bridge for cooperation between two geographically and historically distant countries, remains an open question (Gawęcki 1998).

In 1995, at the initiative of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Poland, the Interdepartmental Team for Repatriation was established. One of its key achievements was the adoption of legal regulations in July 1996, which authorised Polish consuls to issue approvals for settlement in Poland (Gancarz 2012). A significant advancement occurred with the entry into force of the

new governmental Repatriation Act on 1 May 2017. This legislation enables individuals of Polish origin residing in Kazakhstan and other parts of the Asian former USSR to return to their historical homeland (Chervinsky 2017).

Polish presidential minister Andrzej Dera, when asked about the repatriation process of Poles from Kazakhstan, stated: "It is not finished yet. Currently, about 7,000 Poles are waiting to return to Poland. In recent years, the entire procedure and the transit of Poles living in Kazakhstan to Poland have accelerated" (Mikowski 2023).

On 20 December 2016, a group of 150 individuals of Polish descent arrived in Poland from Kazakhstan. The new repatriates were accommodated at an adaptation centre in Pułtusk, where the organisation *Wspólnota Polska* implemented a comprehensive adaptation program (Chervinsky 2017).

Between 2001 and 2015, approximately 5,000 individuals relocated to Poland under the national repatriation program. According to the 2017 reform of repatriation regulations, an estimated 10,000 persons from the Asian territories of the former USSR are expected to benefit from repatriation within a ten-year implementation period (Chervinsky 2017).

Polish institutions such as Wspólnota Polska and Pomoc Polakom na Wschodzie play an active role in both the repatriation process and the organisation of preparatory cultural exchange programs for the Polish diaspora in Kazakhstan. A further important mechanism of engagement is the Pole's Card (*Karta Polaka*), introduced by the Sejm of the Republic of Poland on 7 September 2007. The stated purpose of the program is to implement constitutional provisions regarding support for Poles abroad, fulfil a moral obligation toward them, and strengthen their connection with their historical homeland. Although the Pole's Card does not grant Polish citizenship or the right to permanent settlement in Poland, nor does it allow visa-free entry, it provides significant privileges related to residence, employment, and access to education in Poland. Between 2008 and 2018, a total of 3,084 Pole's Cards were issued in Kazakhstan.

According to the official position of the Polish authorities, Poland remains open to receiving individuals of Polish origin from Kazakhstan who wish to return to their historical homeland. The state provides support for their relocation and integration. Preparatory activities aimed at informing and assisting prospective repatriates are also conducted within Kazakhstan. Simultaneously, Poland regards the Polish community in Kazakhstan not only as a beneficiary of

repatriation policy but also as a valuable link for fostering cultural exchange and strengthening economic cooperation between the two countries.

The Situation of Kazakhstani Poles After 2018

In order to identify the factors influencing the current situation of Poles in Kazakhstan in frames of developing this analysis, a survey was conducted by the author among two target respondent groups: (1) individuals of Polish descent who relocated to Poland under the repatriation program and (2) individuals of Polish descent who currently reside in Kazakhstan. Data were collected using a written questionnaire consisting of open-ended questions during the period of July to August 2025. In total, eight representatives of the Polish diaspora participated in the study: four from the first group (now living in Poland), and four from the second group (residing in Kazakhstan).

An analysis of the responses is presented below, grouped according to each respondent category on a non-anonymous basis (with two exceptions).

The Situation of Kazakhstani Poles After 2018: First Group – Poles Who Relocated to Poland

The first set of questions focused on the timing of relocation: "When did you move to Poland for permanent residence?" All respondents reported having moved between 2018 and 2022.

The responses to the question regarding the reasons for relocating to Poland were as follows:

> "My mother wanted our children to study in Poland, so I fulfilled her wish. I hadn't planned to emigrate, but the pandemic changed everything: I fell ill and was left alone. After that, we prepared the documents, and I moved. In Poland, my daughters received a state-funded apartment" (Elena Urazgeldiyeva).
>
> "The main reason was that our daughter was growing up, and we understood that the earlier she enrolled in a Polish school and began learning the language, the easier it would be for her to adapt, make friends, and master the language – so all doors would be open to her in life" (Oleg Chervinsky).

"It was about returning to our roots, a better future for both children and parents, and reuniting with relatives" (Irena Poplawska).
"Our Polish roots gave us the opportunity to receive the Pole's Card and pursue higher education at quality institutions in Poland. Of course, the standard of living is also better" (Darya Boginska).

The next question was formulated as follows "What was the most difficult period of your life in Kazakhstan, and why?," and the respondents answered it as follows:

"I don't recall any particularly difficult moments in Kazakhstan – even the hardships of the 1990s passed me by" (Elena Urazgeldiyeva).
"I don't really know how to answer this question. Each period had its own difficulties and positives" (Oleg Chervinsky).
"The early 1990s. Every stage of life in Kazakhstan had both positive and negative aspects" (Irena Poplawska).
"The hardest time was during school – intense academic pressure and stressful final exams" (Darya Boginska).

In response to the question, "Do you have any ties to Kazakhstan now, apart from memories?" the respondents provided the following answers:

"My grandson, who moved from Kazakhstan at age three (now six), answers "Kazakh" when asked who he is. In animation class, he asks to draw the Kazakh flag – that's our connection" (Elena Urazgeldiyeva).
"Of course there is a connection, and it will always remain: the graves of loved ones, my wife's father – my daughter's grandfather – who lives in Almaty, close friends and colleagues. We try to return to Kazakhstan once or twice a year. I also continue publishing analytical articles in the Kazakhstani media, which requires me to stay informed about domestic developments. Recently, I've also tried to foster Kazakhstani–Polish business ties by helping Polish entrepreneurs find goods and partners in Kazakhstan. I advise Kazakhstani citizens on business and living conditions in Poland. I also support the life of the Kazakhstani Polonia, helping publish the Polonia journal and supporting visiting youth delegations. Before moving to Poland in 2019, I was elected Honorary Chairman of the Union of Poles in Kazakhstan – a role that carries responsibilities" (Oleg Chervinsky).
"Only memories" (Irena Poplawska).
"Only one thing connects me – my parents, who stayed in Kazakhstan" (Darya Boginska).

Although the small number of respondents does not permit a meaningful quantitative analysis, a qualitative interpretation is nevertheless informative, particularly due to the age diversity among participants, which ranged from students to retirees. This diversity enables the identification of recurring motives for migration. Among the most frequently mentioned reasons were family reunification – particularly following children who had remained in Poland after completing their studies – and the perception of improved living conditions in Poland. However, the dominant motivation expressed by respondents was a desire to return to their ancestral homeland, to reconnect with family, and to secure a better future.

Regarding continued ties to Kazakhstan, two respondents referred only to personal memories. In one case, a child identified as "Kazakh," indicating that Kazakhstan is still discussed within the family. Another respondent reported maintaining strong professional connections with the country. In Poland, the Union of Kazakhstani Poles serves as an organisational platform for migrants from Kazakhstan, helping them to maintain social and cultural bonds.

Previous studies (Łucka 2021; Gorbanuk 2004) have highlighted adaptation challenges among repatriates from post-Soviet countries, including limited initial proficiency in Polish and the continued use of Russian in domestic settings. The theme of economic hardship in Kazakhstan during the 1990s appeared in two of the four responses to the question about the most difficult period in their lives in Kazakhstan. This finding further supports the conclusion that migration to Poland was primarily driven by a desire to return to one's roots and by hopes for a more promising future for the next generation.

The Situation of Kazakhstani Poles After 2018: Second Group – Poles Currently Residing in Kazakhstan

Participants from this group were asked to describe the reasons why they have chosen to remain in Kazakhstan:

> "My daughter is finishing school next year. She plans to enter a Polish university, and that's probably the main reason I'm still in Kazakhstan" (Respondent 1).
> "I have a well-paying job in Kazakhstan, and my in-laws, who oppose relocation, live here" (Anatol Niegoda).

> "For me and my family, it's a safe and familiar place. The political and social environment allows us to choose to live here without discrimination. Also, we feel no strong ties to the historical homeland: our ancestors were deported from present-day Ukraine and spoke Surzhyk. We're not even certain they were ethnically Polish" (Ana Maskievich).
> "I lack sufficient proficiency in Polish, which would hinder integration and downgrade my civic status to that of a second-class citizen" (Respondent 2).

In response to the question of whether the participants had ever considered relocating to Poland, the following answers were given:

> "Yes, I've long considered it. What held me back was a lack of reliable information on the procedures and the possibility of retaining my pension" (Respondent 1).
> "Yes. I feel comfortable in Poland" (Anatol Niegoda).
> "Yes, I've thought about it – alone and with my parents – because others in our family have done it. But for us, it's more of a fallback option in case we're forced to leave Kazakhstan. Until then, we are satisfied being part of the Kazakhstani Polonia" (Ana Maskievich).
> "No opportunities to move have presented themselves" (Respondent 2).

In response to the question about which period of their life in Kazakhstan they considered the most difficult, the following answers were provided:

> "The early 1990s" (Respondent 1).
> "The 1990s" (Anatol Niegoda).
> "If we're talking about generations, then based on stories from my parents and grandparents – and my own experience – I would say there has not been a particularly difficult period. Kazakhstan provides enough freedom to avoid feeling burdened by living here" (Ana Maskievich).

As with the first group, the limited sample size precludes statistically significant conclusions. Nevertheless, two respondents identified the 1990s as the most difficult period in their lives – an assessment consistent with that of the repatriated group. The reasons given for remaining in Kazakhstan included close family ties, stable employment, and the perception of migration as a possible, though not urgent, option. These responses reflect both emotional and practical attachments to Kazakhstan. All respondents had, at some point, contemplated migration.

One respondent indicated that relocation was not feasible due to a lack of opportunity. The knowledge that repatriation remains an ever-present and guaranteed option likely contributes to a sense of psychological security among members of the diaspora. The decision to remain in Kazakhstan also appears to be economically justified. One respondent remarked that, for her family, identification as members of the Polish diaspora in Kazakhstan was itself a source of cultural fulfilment.

Conclusion

The economic and political developments in Kazakhstan since the country's independence in 1991 have impacted the Polish minority in much the same way as the broader population – albeit against a backdrop of historically rooted disadvantages, including the deprivation of basic civil rights that persisted until the 1970s.

The situation of the Polish community in Kazakhstan has been shaped by a complex interplay of both adverse and beneficial factors. Based on the conducted analysis, the following key factors can be identified:

Negative factors: Severe economic conditions during the early years of Kazakhstan's independence; Initial disenfranchisement, including restrictions on settlement in urban centres, which limited access to economic and social opportunities.

Positive factors: The right to establish cultural centres and publish Polish-language periodicals; The opportunity to study the Polish language in secondary schools; Institutional support from the Embassy and Consulates of the Republic of Poland in Kazakhstan, as well as Polish organisations following the establishment of diplomatic relations; The development of economic cooperation between Kazakhstan and Poland; The inclusion of the Polish diaspora in the Assembly of the People of Kazakhstan; Access to archival materials related to political repression and opportunities for legal rehabilitation; The implementation of the "Pole's Card" (*Karta Polaka*) program.

The current condition of the Polish community in Kazakhstan requires further comprehensive research.

Based on the analysis of memoirs published in the Ałmatyński Kurier Polonijny and the survey findings presented above, it can be concluded that the economic hardships of the 1990s remain a central factor motivating ethnic Poles in Kazakhstan to participate in Poland's repatriation program and pursue emigration. Respondents frequently cited the hope for a better future for their children as a key reason for relocation. Another significant

factor shaping migration decisions is the ideological and institutional framework developed by the Polish government for engagement with its diaspora (*Polonia*), including a variety of repatriation and support programs aimed at facilitating return migration. The future decisions of Kazakhstani Poles regarding permanent relocation to Poland will likely depend on the evolution of Kazakhstan's economic conditions as well as broader regional political stability.

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TOMASZ KOZŁOWSKI

KONIEC IMPERIUM MSW

TRANSFORMACJA ORGANÓW BEZPIECZEŃSTWA PAŃSTWA 1989–1990

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AN OVERVIEW

Abstract

The book under review here, *Koniec imperium MSW. Transformacja organów bezpieczeństwa państwa 1989–1990* by Tomasz Kozłowski, is the first book-length publication devoted entirely to the transformation within the Polish apparatus of internal affairs during 1989–1990. It covers the background, course and results of that process. The author offers a critical verification of popular ideas about the transition from the Security Service (SB) and the Citizens' Militia (MO) to the Office of State Protection (UOP) and the Police. The publication features little-known or previously unavailable historical sources. The book has a major significance for understanding not just the premises and mechanisms of reorganisation in the interior apparatus, but also the mechanisms of transformation in Poland as a whole.

Keywords: Tomasz Kozłowski, transformation, reorganisation of state security organs, review

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The subject of political transformation in Poland is one of the most controversial topics both in our historiography and in current political life. It has become shrouded in various myths and, even after three decades, continues to evoke strong emotions. This will probably remain the case for many years to come (perhaps until the last generation directly involved in the events of that time leaves the political scene).

Research projects aimed at providing a reliable and in-depth understanding of the historical realities of that time, undertaken *sine ira et studio* and confronting the past with the images and myths that exist in the social consciousness, should thus be valued all the more highly. An excellent example of this approach to the country's recent political past is Tomasz Kozłowski's book *Koniec imperium MSW. Transformacja organów bezpieczeństwa państwa 1989–1990 [The End of the Ministry of Internal Affairs Empire: The Transformation of State Security Bodies, 1989–1990]* published in mid-2019 by the Institute of National Remembrance. This publication addresses the particularly interesting, yet difficult and controversial topic of the liquidation of the Security Service and the creation of the Office of State Protection on its ruins, all within a much broader historical context, covering not only the political transformation of the Ministry of Internal Affairs in 1989–1990, but also its earlier activities beginning in 1981.

This is not the first publication on this subject. The transformations in the Ministry of Internal Affairs were discussed by Antoni Dudek, among other topics, in his book on the collapse of the communist system in Poland (Dudek 2014, pp. 451–477). Among the works of a contributory nature, the articles by Kazimierz Mordaszewski, Jan Widacki and Stanisław Hoc are worth mentioning (Mordaszewski 2009, pp. 19–20; Widacki 2020, pp. 18–21; Hoc 2011, pp. 99–110). It is worth mentioning that Stanisław Hoc was formerly an officer of the Security Service and then a researcher and lecturer at the Feliks Dzierżyński Higher School of the Ministry of Internal Affairs in

Legionowo and at the Academy of Internal Affairs; (cf. Bereszyński 2014, pp. 263–264). Particularly noteworthy is Rafał Leśkiewicz's article, which is a comprehensive "attempt to describe the process of transforming the communist state security organs, i.e. the Security Service (SB) of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, into the state security service, i.e. the Office of State Protection (UOP)" (Leśkiewicz 2016, pp. 165–188); an extended version of this article, entitled "Formal and legal aspects of the establishment of the Office of State Protection," was published in the internal publication of the Internal Security Agency, (see Leśkiewicz 2015). Patryk Pleskot also devoted considerable attention to the issue of transformation in the Ministry of Internal Affairs, at both the central and local levels, in the last chapter of his monograph on the capital city structures of the Security Service (Pleskot 2018, pp. 249–274). It is also worth mentioning the selection of sources edited by Sebastian Pilarski, illustrating the role of the Security Service in the political transformation process in Poland in 1988–1990, using the Łódź region as an example (see *Służba Bezpieczeństwa* 2009; cf. Bereszyński 2011, pp. 589–592). However, Tomasz Kozłowski's book is unique in that it is the first comprehensive publication devoted entirely to the process of systemic transformation in the Ministry of Internal Affairs; in the meantime, the book was also reviewed by Michał Przeperski (see Przeperski 2019).

The author of the reviewed publication set himself the goal of "establishing and organising basic facts, sometimes demythologising them, and confronting the perceptions of the transformation" (Kozłowski 2019, p. 9). This intention was realised to a degree that is close to exhausting the topic. The author has managed to critically and convincingly verify what is probably the entirety of the common perceptions regarding the transition from the Security Service and the Citizens' Militia to the Office for State Protection and the Police. He described in detail the conditions, course and effects of this process. At a time when so-called alternative history has become fashionable, he did not shy away from attempting to answer the question of whether events could have unfolded differently than they actually did. Any additions or corrections to the picture he has painted can only be of a supplementary nature.

The reviewed book includes an introduction, five chapters on specific topics arranged chronologically and thematically, and a conclusion, formally treated as the sixth chapter – "An attempt at synthesis." This structure does not raise any fundamental objections, except for the conclusion, which, in my opinion, has been unnecessarily treated as

one of the sequential chapters (this is, of course, only a minor detail). Each chapter, except for the last one, that is, the conclusion, consists of several subchapters (from three to five), each with its own title.

The first chapter, entitled "The End of the Ministry of Internal Affairs," is devoted to the activities of the Ministry of Internal Affairs during the pivotal period of 1981–1990, until the liquidation of the Security Service and the Citizens' Militia. The first subchapter of this chapter, entitled "The Kiszczak Decade," deals mainly with the activities and internal structure of the Ministry of Internal Affairs during the period when it was headed by General Czesław Kiszczak, that is from 31 July 1981 to 6 July 1990. The introductory part contains, in particular, information about the political circumstances surrounding Gen. Kiszczak's takeover of the ministry as a result of personal power struggles within the highest leadership of the Polish United Workers' Party (PZPR) and between Warsaw and Moscow (the previous head of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, Mirosław Milewski [a member of the Political Bureau and secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party – editor's note], lost his position after a failed attempt to undermine the position of General Wojciech Jaruzelski and Stanisław Kania). This is followed by a concise presentation of developments in the ministry on the eve of martial law and after its introduction, characterising the new practices and organisational solutions introduced by General Kiszczak, drawing on his experience in the army. The assumptions and consequences of the sweeping reorganisation of the ministry, carried out in 1983 pursuant to the Act on the Office of the Minister of Internal Affairs and the scope of activities of subordinate bodies, were discussed.

Much attention was devoted to the criminal activities of officials from the Ministry of Internal Affairs, considering the issue of Gen. Kiszczak's personal responsibility for tolerating or attempting to cover up such cases. In this context, particular reference was made to cases such as the famous "Żelazo" scandal [smuggling and corruption in the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Polish People's Republic in the 1970s, uncovered in the 1980s – editor's note] the lethal beating of Grzegorz Przemyk (in 1983) and the murder of Father Jerzy Popiełuszko (in 1984). The author of the reviewed work points out that the then leadership of the Ministry of Internal Affairs sought to tighten control over the Security Service, as evidenced, among other things, by the establishment of the Officer Protection Board [*Zarząd Ochrony Funkcjonariuszy*, ZOF; an internal control unit within the Ministry of Internal Affairs – editor's note] in December 1984. In his

opinion, this fact contradicts the thesis that General Kiszczak was unaware of the illegal activities of his subordinates.

In the opinion of Tomasz Kozłowski, General Kiszczak, as Minister of Internal Affairs, "accumulated unprecedented power in his hands" (Kozłowski 2019, p. 38). It could also have been used "against potential political rivals" (Kozłowski 2019, p. 34).

In the further part of the same subchapter, the author characterises the personnel potential of the Security Service in the 1970s and 1980s. In his opinion, these years were "in many respects a golden age for the Security Service" (Kozłowski 2019, p. 39). During this period, the ranks of this service grew significantly – nearly three times faster than the total number of personnel in the ministry. What attracted candidates to work for the SB were primarily material benefits and privileges. Ideological motivation ceased to matter and in the 1980s it could only be mentioned in a few cases. However, when comparing historical reality with myths on the subject, the author points out that, over time, working for the SB became less and less attractive to young people, who could find better working conditions and pay in various sectors of the economy. Furthermore, employment in the SB was associated not only with certain privileges, but also with more or less severe restrictions, for example on the possibility of travelling abroad. As a result, over time, the SB faced an increasingly acute problem of staff shortages.

The author rightly points out the key role of the SB in the political system of the Polish People's Republic. However, it is difficult to agree with the statement that this service constituted "one of the pillars of the authoritarian system" (Kozłowski 2019, p. 39; the term "authoritarian" in relation to the political system of the Polish People's Republic also appears in the summary on pages 287, 288 and 297). This description is certainly not adequate for the political system operating in the so-called People's Poland and other communist bloc countries. Personally, I would lean towards the perhaps overly colloquial term "botched totalitarian system." This system was originally created as a regime with totalitarian aspirations, but in the case of Poland, these aspirations were ultimately not realised, and by the 1980s, such aspirations had essentially disappeared (with the possible exception of certain circles of the so-called party hardliners in the Polish United Workers' Party). General Jaruzelski's personal position as First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party was undoubtedly very strong; he was certainly the most powerful person in the country at the time, but it cannot be said that he played the role of a typical

dictator in an authoritarian system. His personal power was primarily an external expression of the power wielded by circles rooted in the apparatus of the Polish United Workers' Party under the supervision of the Kremlin.

The final part of this subchapter contains comments on the role played by the Ministry of Internal Affairs in preparing the political changes that took place in Poland in 1989, as well as on the feelings with which SB officers received the victory of Solidarity candidates in the elections held on 4 June 1989. These comments emphasise the depressing impact of the events of that time on the attitude and mood of the officers. To provide a more complete picture of the situation, it should be added that the same events also became a factor motivating the Ministry of Internal Affairs to intensify its activities. On 6 June 1989, two days after the elections, General Władysław Pożoga, First Deputy Minister of Internal Affairs, during a teleconference he had convened, assessed the current political situation and stated that the tasks of the security apparatus remained unchanged, but that "in the new situation" operational activities and work with the agents should be intensified (Institute of National Remembrance Branch in Wrocław Archives, ref. no. 09/140, Meeting of the staff [of the Voivodeship Office of Internal Affairs in Opole] on 7 June 1989, p. 60). At that time, the Security Service had by no means laid down its arms.

The subchapter entitled "Structural changes in the Ministry of Internal Affairs" describes the attempts made in 1989 and early 1990 to adapt the Ministry of Internal Affairs to the changed political reality through a partial reorganisation of the service, involving the liquidation of some organisational divisions and the establishment of new units with different competences. The first attempt was made at the end of May 1989, when the Ministry of Internal Affairs' "W" Office which was responsible for secret surveillance of correspondence [in other words, postal censorship – editor's note], was dissolved. Much more far-reaching changes were made after 24 August of the same year, with the creation of new organisational divisions for the protection of the constitutional order of the state, the protection of the economy, and studies and analyses, replacing divisions III (surveillance of the political opposition), IV (surveillance of the Church), V (surveillance of the opposition among workers) and VI of the Security Service, as well as the Study Office (surveillance of the most important opposition figures) and the Main Inspectorate for Industrial Protection (industrial guard) with their subordinate field units. At around the same time, the Political and Educational Service ("political officers" in

the Ministry of Internal Affairs) was abolished, and ZOMO (mobile units designed to suppress demonstrations) was disbanded, replaced with the Prevention Units of Citizens' Militia. In February 1990, the Board for the Protection of Officers was dissolved. To a lesser extent, the competences, structure or operating principles of certain other structures within the ministry were also changed. Tomasz Kozłowski draws attention to the cosmetic nature of the changes at that time with regard to the structures of the Security Service.

The next subchapter, entitled "The 'rollback' strategy of the Security Service," describes a different type of adaptive measure, consisting in the gradual reduction of the SB's personnel and the transfer of people and jobs to the MO structures. The author points to the negative consequences of these actions, writing that they were perceived as unfair to the militiamen, while the transferred SB officers "were unsure whether they would actually remain in service" (Kozłowski 2019, p. 59). In his opinion, the reform implemented in this way "was accompanied by enormous chaos, sowed uncertainty among former secret police officers and militiamen, and had a negative impact on the quality of work of state security agencies" (Kozłowski 2019, p. 62).

In the same subchapter, the author writes that "most of the activities of Departments I and II were classic intelligence and counterintelligence tasks." However, he notes that "emigration and the democratic opposition, which received support and equipment from abroad, were also targeted by officers, including those from Division XI of Department I" (Kozłowski 2019, p. 62). It should be added here that Division II of the Security Service was also responsible for surveilling and combating German minority circles in Poland. Starting in 1983, these circles began to organise on an increasingly larger scale, and by the end of the 1980s, the process had already gained momentum. The related preventive and repressive measures were among the most important tasks of Division II of the Security Service at that time. They had much in common with the activities of the Security Service towards opposition circles and clearly went far beyond counterintelligence activities (cf. Bereszyński 2017, pp. 112–124, 147–183).

The next subchapter, entitled "Decomposition of the Ministry of Internal Affairs", deals with personnel and organisational issues related to the political breakthrough in Poland and the restructuring of the ministry. This concerns, in particular, numerous personnel changes in individual positions, mass retirement of employees or their transfer to HR departments, resignations, and so on. These personnel changes

were driven by factors such as a sense of uncertainty, the negative image of the ministry in the eyes of the public, and the desire to find better jobs in other areas of social life. The culmination of these phenomena occurred in March 1990. Their consequence was a drastic deepening of staff shortages in the ministry's bodies. At the same time, Polish society experienced a "sharp increase in common and economic crime" (Kozłowski 2019, p. 72). The ministry, weakened by staff shortages, was unable to face the new challenges effectively, especially since, as the author emphasises, it was a bureaucratic machine accustomed to operating under different political conditions, namely those of an overwhelming advantage of the state and its institutions over citizens. This situation clearly encouraged the development of various forms of crime, especially organised crime.

Contrary to its title, "The Last Order: Destruction of Security Service Documents," the last subchapter of Chapter One is not limited to the phenomenon of the mass destruction of security service materials at the turn of 1989 and 1990. The author provides a wealth of information that deepens our understanding of this phenomenon and its mechanisms, but he also addresses another issue, namely the subsequent fate of some of the surviving documents and their role in the public life of the Third Republic of Poland. In particular, he touches upon the still controversial topic of materials concerning Lech Wałęsa and his relations with the Security Service, as well as the so-called "Olin case," which arose in 1995 when the then Minister of Internal Affairs, Andrzej Milczanowski, who was associated with Wałęsa, accused one of the leading activists of the Democratic Left Alliance of collaborating with Soviet and then Russian intelligence. According to Tomasz Kozłowski, these two cases may be indirectly linked. He suggests that General Kiszczak, who kept materials concerning Wałęsa [files on a secret collaborator codenamed 'Bolek' – editor's note] at his home, could have used these materials in 1995 to blackmail Wałęsa in connection with "Olin's" case. According to Kozłowski, the blackmail attempt at that time was ineffective, and no similar attempts had been made against Wałęsa before. This is a very important contribution to the discussion on whether Wałęsa's actions at various stages of his life could have been influenced to some extent by behind-the-scenes pressure using materials produced by the Security Service.

As regards the phenomenon of document destruction itself, it is worth mentioning that the records kept on this subject do not necessarily correspond to the actual state of affairs. Some of the materials which, according to these records, were to be destroyed

in 1989–1990, actually ended up in the private possession of former SB officers, for example as a kind of insurance policy. Some of these materials ended up in the IPN archives years later, such as a collection of documents produced in connection with various operational cases concerning the opposition circles in Opole in 1988–1989 (files with reference number AIPN Wr, 373/1. These files remained in the private possession of former SB Division III officer Lieutenant Cezary Kudyba for many years).

It is also worth adding that the mass destruction or "privatisation" of files in 1989–1990 has resulted in enormous difficulties, and in many cases even made it practically impossible, to carry out vetting procedures and has generally obscured the picture of the past with regard to vetting issues. In the last months of their operation, SB officers, for obvious reasons, destroyed or removed primarily materials that were still in their operational use at that time. However, there was not enough time to do the same for files that had already been archived. For this reason, it is quite common that there are no operational files on agents used by the Security Service in the final period of its activity. It can be assumed that agents used until the very end often had significant operational value. Unfortunately, such cases most often escape vetting procedures due to the lack of relevant operational files. The records kept in such cases are not sufficient to prove cooperation with the security apparatus in court. In general, it is easier to prove cooperation in regard to agents abandoned before the political transformation in Poland, and thus whose files were archived. Paradoxical situations may therefore arise in which we can prove collaboration with the Security Service regarding someone who did not meet the expectations of that service and, as a result, their collaboration was terminated before the end of the Polish People's Republic, while we are unable to prove collaboration to someone who was much more useful to the Security Service and was therefore used by it until the very end.

The second chapter of the reviewed book is devoted to the political aspects of the reform of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, carried out in 1989–1990 as part of the political transformation in Poland. It should be added that the title of this chapter is somewhat misleading, as it refers only to the political conditions of the reforms.

The introductory part of this chapter, entitled "Our Prime Minister, Your Ministry of Internal Affairs" [the title is a clear reference to Adam Michnik's significant opinion article "Your President, Our Prime Minister" published in *Gazeta Wyborcza* on 3 July 1989, postulating

a division of power between Communist party and Solidarity opposition in newly elected parliament, see (Michnik 1989) – editor's note], discusses the circumstances surrounding the election of General Jaruzelski as President of the Polish People's Republic (19 July 1989) and the subsequent formation of a government headed by Tadeusz Mazowiecki (12 September 1989). In this context, the activities of the Security Service at that time are briefly characterised, both in relation to the extra-parliamentary opposition of the time and to the newly elected parliamentarians representing Solidarity, with particular emphasis on attempts to influence the further development of the political situation in the country, and especially the election of the president by the National Assembly. The political elite of the time, led by Solidarity, as well as the church hierarchy, were greatly influenced by the fear that the security apparatus and the military might attempt to halt the changes. The author points to the low probability of such a danger materialising in the international situation at that time, which was fundamentally different from that which existed in December 1981, when martial law was imposed. All this calls into question the legitimacy of the "strategy of small steps and evolutionary change" adopted by the Solidarity elites of the time, with the blessing of the church hierarchy (Kozłowski 2019, p. 104).

The subchapters "Pressure from the Solidarity movement" and "Accelerating the process: advisors and Solidarity deputy ministers" describe the situation of the Ministry of Internal Affairs after the formation of Tadeusz Mazowiecki's government, public opinion on the matter, and the views of various political circles on its future. There were reports of demonstrations organised in various parts of the country by groups demanding the dissolution of the Security Service and the Citizens' Militia and an investigation into their activities to date. The last of these subsections is devoted in particular to the origins of the so-called police acts passed in April 1990, which provided for the liquidation of the MO and SB and their replacement by the Police and the Office for State Protection.

The next subchapter, "Trade unions and contacts with the new elite," discusses grassroots initiatives by officers themselves to bring about change in the ministry and their efforts to organise their own union structures. This mainly concerns the Independent Self-Governing Trade Union of Citizens' Militia Officers (NSZZ FMO), which had been gradually forming since autumn 1989, but the author also mentions similar initiatives on the part of Security Service officers.

The content of this subchapter should be supplemented with a few important facts. In particular, there was no mention of the fact that on 9 and 10 January 1990, in Kiekrz near Poznań, at another meeting of delegates of initiative groups (the previous one had taken place on 17 December 1989), the Provisional Council of the National Coordinating Committee of NSZZ FMO was established, with its seat in Gdańsk. The chairman of this council was Captain Roman Hula from Piekary Śląskie, and one of his deputies was Senior Sergeant Jan Jabłoński, dismissed from work in 1981 for organising trade union activities within the militia. The new union declared in particular its intention to work towards the creation of a state police force based on the MO. It is worth mentioning how the independence of this union was understood. It was supposed to mark its separation from the structures of the All-Poland Alliance of Trade Unions and "Solidarity" ("O jawność…" 1990, pp. 1–2).

It is also worth mentioning the initially promising attempt to establish Solidarity structures among MO officers, undertaken by those who feared that the NSZZ FMO, referred to by them as the Kiekrz union, might be dependent on the existing leadership of the ministry headed by General Kiszczak. This initiative, the only one of its kind in Poland, was launched by officers of the District Internal Affairs Office in Brzeg. On 5 January 1990, the Organising Committee of the Solidarity trade union was established there (Górniak and Olszewski 1990, p. 5). The source of concerns that NSZZ FMO might be linked to the existing leadership of the ministry was, in particular, a coded telegram sent in the summer of 1989 from the Ministry of Internal Affairs to the heads of Regional Internal Affairs Offices (RUSW) throughout the country. According to this ciphertext, the heads of individual RUSWs were to become involved in organising union structures within the ministry and ensure that suitable personnel were selected for them. In a written statement dated 1 August 2020, Senior Staff Sergeant Ryszard Karciarz, a former militiaman and retired police officer, stated that in July 1989, as the duty officer of the RUSW in Brzeg, he received and decrypted correspondence of this content and forwarded a copy to Second Lieutenant Andrzej Wojtycza, who was on duty that night as the control officer. The latter shared the contents of the ciphertext with Władysław Frasyniuk, then leader of the Lower Silesian Solidarity movement. (Statement by Senior Staff Sergeant Ryszard Karciarz, 1 August 2020, digital copy of the document in the author's private collection). On 14 January, the Provisional Management Board of the Solidarity Trade Union

of RUSW Militiamen in Brzeg was established (Telegram from the Provisional Executive Committee of the Solidarity Trade Union of RUSW Militiamen in Brzeg to the Regional Executive Committee of Solidarity in Wrocław [14 January 1990], photocopy of the document in the author's private collection). On the same day – it was a Sunday – information about this was communicated to the faithful by priests during all Holy Masses in both churches in Brzeg. Referring to the difficulties caused to trade unionists by the head of the RUSW, Lt. Col. Sławomir Wajda, the priests asked the faithful to pray for the new social initiative. Its chairman was Second Lieutenant Andrzej Wojtycza, inspector of the Economic Crime Division, former employee of the local agricultural machinery factory "Agromet", and graduate of the Agricultural University in Wrocław (This officer and another militia officer from Brzeg, master corporal Ireneusz Telego [son of Czesław Telego, an employee of "Agromet"], had been in contact with the local Solidarity movement since 1988. They passed on information about the mood among officers and the intentions of the Security Service. The following persons also became members of the Solidarity Trade Union of RUSW Militiamen in Brzeg: Sergeant Zbigniew Pszczolarski, Sergeant Zbigniew Duszeńko, Master Corporal Stanisław Mizera [three vice-chairmen], Senior Sergeant Zbigniew Wentrys [secretary], Sergeant Włodzimierz Wróbel [treasurer], Lieutenant Tadeusz Lech, Lieutenant Leszek Szkot, Master Corporal Ireneusz Telego, Sergeant Kordian Kropcio, and Sergeant Jerzy Pszczolarski; the source is telegram mentioned above).

In the days that followed, several dozen RUSW officers joined Solidarity. At the same time, 36 militiamen surrendered their Polish United Workers' Party membership cards, declaring themselves apolitical. The Militia "Solidarity" in Brzeg did not agree that the NSZZ FMO should be considered the sole representative of the professional community of militia officers. This position was presented in particular in a letter sent in January 1990 to the editorial office of *Trybuna Opolska* (Statement by the Organising Committee of the Solidarity Trade Union of RUSW Militiamen in Brzeg, 13 January 1990, photocopy of the document in the author's private collection).

On 13 February 1990, members of the Brzeg Solidarity movement began a protest action which involved flagging the headquarters of the RUSW and official vehicles. They demanded the dismissal of the current head of the RUSW, Lt. Col. Sławomir Wajda, who had been obstructing their union activities. The campaign ended on 16 February when this demand was met. At the same time, Brzeg militiamen

declared their support for a similar protest action by Voivodeship Internal Affairs Office (WUSW) officers in Wałbrzych, who were demonstrating their dissatisfaction with the sluggishness of the Ministry of Internal Affairs in implementing the demands they had made (Górniak and Olszewski 1990a, p. 5; Górniak and Olszewski 1990b, pp. 1–2). The latter action was also mentioned in the reviewed book (Kozłowski 2019, p. 146). It is worth noting that this was not an isolated phenomenon and had its counterpart in Brzeg.

In mid-March 1990, the Provisional Management Board of the Solidarity Trade Union of RUSW Militiamen in Brzeg protested against the transfer of Security Service officers to the local militia. This was a reaction to a personnel order issued at the end of February by the head of the WUSW in Opole to transfer twelve SB officers to work in the militia division of the RUSW in Brzeg (Personnel order [of the head of the Voivodeship Internal Affairs Office in Opole] No. 048/90 of 28 February 1990; Statement of the Provisional Management Board of the Solidarity Trade Union of Militiamen in Brzeg, 15 March 1990 – photocopies of documents in the author's private collection). The statement issued on this matter by the militia Solidarity was supported by the Inter-Enterprise Coordinating Committee of NSZZ Solidarity in the Brzeg Region (Position of the Presidium of the Solidarity Trade Union in Brzeg Region, 19 March 1990, photocopy of the document in the author's private collection). In May 1990, under pressure from Second Lieutenant Wojtycza and his colleagues from the Solidarity movement within the militia, SB officers were removed from almost all rooms of the RUSW in Brzeg (Statement by Andrzej Wojtycza dated 17 August 2018, digital copy of the document in the author's private collection).

The Brzeg militia "Solidarity" was supported by the Inter-Enterprise Organising Committee of NSZZ Solidarity in Brzeg, led by Zbigniew Oliwa (Letter by the Inter-Enterprise Organising Committee of the Solidarity Trade Union in Brzeg, 5 May 1990, photocopy of the document in the author's private collection). In an interview with journalists from "Trybuna Opolska", local union activists spoke in favour of further changes in the Ministry of Internal Affairs, warning: "If we merely repaint the ossified militia hierarchy and change its name to 'police', we will not regain even a minimum of public trust" (Górniak and Olszewski 1990b, pp. 1–2).

The union members in militia uniforms were initially supported by regional authorities of Lower Silesia's Solidarity movement, led by Władysław Frasyniuk. However, the life of the militia "Solidarity"

was short-lived. This was decided by Lech Wałęsa, who, at a meeting with the National Coordinating Committee of NSZZ FMO held on 14 February 1990 in Gdańsk, took the position that only one trade union should operate in the Ministry of Internal Affairs ("Nie zmieniamy…" 1990, p. 4; cf. Kozłowski 2019, p. 142). NSZZ FMO became the sole trade union in this environment. Due to Wałęsa's negative stance, the militia "Solidarity" in Brzeg lost the support of regional union authorities in Wrocław. However, the local Solidarity movement in Brzeg did not forget about the trade unionists in Militia uniforms. In May 1990, in the first post-war local elections, Second Lieutenant Andrzej Wojtycza became one of the Solidarity candidates for the City Council. He was probably the only militiaman in Poland to be elected as a councillor (Statement by Andrzej Wojtycza dated 17 August 2018, digital copy of the document in the author's private collection). This gave him four years of informal immunity in his professional environment. However, serious problems began to arise later on. In an official opinion issued in June 1995, the then district police commander in Brzeg, Superintendent Leszek Bednarski, concluded that, despite his extensive professional experience and previous awards, Commander Wojtycza did not qualify for promotion, as had been predicted in an earlier opinion of this kind (Official opinion, 22 June 1990, photocopy of the document in the author's private collection). Instead, one of Wojtycza's subordinates was promoted and consequently became his superior. Humiliated in this way, Wojtycza requested a transfer from his position as deputy head of the Traffic and Prevention Department of the District Police Headquarters in Brzeg to the Local Police Training Centre (Report [of Andrzej Wojtycza], 21 July 1990, photocopy of the document in the author's private collection). It is worth noting that Leszek Bednarski, mentioned above, distinguished himself in the past with particular zeal in his activities related to combating opposition activities in Brzeg. Despite working in the militia division (in the Criminal Section of the RUSW), in 1983 he attempted to prosecute individuals involved in distributing leaflets, thereby entering into the competence of the Security Service. It got to the point where the Security Service itself opposed his actions, considering them a source of complications in its own operational work (cf. Bereszyński 2014b, pp. 260, 265–266). The fact that a figure with such a past was able to exert a negative influence on the professional career of the co-organiser of the militia "Solidarity" movement speaks volumes about the effects and scope of the transformation in the Ministry of Internal Affairs).

I believe that the case of the militia "Solidarity" in Brzeg deserved a more detailed presentation here, given its complete absence from the literature to date. It shows that changes in the Ministry of Internal Affairs did not necessarily have to develop in the direction they did in 1990. A different scenario was also possible, but it was ruled out by Lech Wałęsa's controversial declaration of 14 February 1990, mentioned above.

The subchapter entitled "Czesław Kiszczak signs off" is devoted to the last months of General Kiszczak's tenure as Minister of Internal Affairs. It addresses, in particular, issues such as the destruction of Security Service files, Prime Minister Mazowiecki's attitude towards the pace of change, and the reasons and circumstances surrounding the dismissal of General Kiszczak from his position as minister. The author characterises various "survival strategies" attempted by the ministry's leadership at the time: creating "the appearance that the SB was capable of transforming itself into an institution defending democracy," introducing reforms simulating the dissolution of the SB, "playing the role of guarantor of the Round Table agreements and the continuity of state reforms," presenting itself as "the guarantor of public order" (Kozłowski 2019, pp. 157–159). On the other hand, an attempt was made to find an answer to the question of why Prime Minister Mazowiecki delayed the pace of change, with the result that in 1990 Poland, which had previously been a leader of political change in Central and Eastern Europe, was overtaken by other countries. According to the author of the reviewed book, it was not about keeping to the agreement concluded with the communists at the Round Table: Mazowiecki was motivated by something else, namely the fear of "a possible counterattack by hardline renegades or even the architects of the Round Table themselves – Jaruzelski and Kiszczak" (Kozłowski 2019, p. 160). What ultimately forced him to dismiss Kiszczak was the new political situation, related in particular to the emerging conflict between Mazowiecki and Lech Wałęsa.

The main topic of Chapter Three, entitled "Legal Reforms" are the changes in the legal situation of the Ministry of Internal Affairs that took place in 1990. In the next three subchapters, entitled "Drafts: parliamentary and ministerial," "Sejm stage," and "Senate stage," the political conditions and course of the legislative processes that led to the adoption of the police laws, which came into force on 6 May 1990, are analysed. The author points out that the head of government's desire to quickly and efficiently reorganise the Ministry of Internal Affairs, even at the cost of lowering legislative standards, clashed

with the attitude of senators, who wanted a well-thought-out and well-written law that would respect human rights.

However, the first of the above-mentioned subchapters also touched on a slightly different topic, the gradual liquidation of certain elements of the previous system, which were taking place in parallel with the legislative processes and which "were associated with the worst by the public" (Kozłowski 2019, p. 163). In this context, the case of the liquidation of the Voluntary Reserve of the Citizens' Militia, finalised in November 1989, was presented in detail [a kind of "workers' militia" being the reserve auxiliary forces of the communist order police – editor's note].

Chapter Four – "Verification," with the subchapters "Formulating Assumptions", "Procedure" and "Verification and What Next", is another example of the demythologisation of our knowledge about the political transformation in Poland. It deals with the two-stage vetting process conducted in 1990 for former Security Service officers applying for employment in the Police or the Office for State Protection. The author uses the term "verification," which has been in common use for many years, but points out at the outset that it is inadequate in relation to the historical phenomenon described.

The issue of the so-called verification of former Security Service officers remains one of the most controversial topics in Poland's recent political history. The reviewed book may contribute to changing this state of affairs by thoroughly analysing the mechanisms, course and effects of "verification," taking into account its broader social and political context, including the international context.

The author draws attention to the discretionary nature of the verification process, resulting in huge differences in its results across individual voivodeships. It also points to the difficulties associated with the social hermeticism of the former SB officers, which meant that the members of the qualification committees lacked the knowledge necessary to properly assess individual cases and, to put it bluntly, to effectively separate the proverbial wheat from the chaff. Under these circumstances, some of the decisions may have been unfair to the persons assessed, while others may have been beneficial to individuals who actually deserved to be disqualified. By demythologising the issue of the effects of "verification," the author emphasises that in general it did not determine the professional future of former SB officers who underwent this procedure. According to his findings, "out of over 10,000 positively verified candidates, at most every second one was able to find a job at the UOP" (Kozłowski 2019, p. 215).

Tomasz Kozłowski is highly critical of the view that it was possible in 1990 to implement the so-called zero option, which would have involved removing the vast majority or even all SB officers from the services. He points out that the option was not fully implemented even in Czechoslovakia and the former German Democratic Republic, where the scale of personnel changes was greatest. He points out that, contrary to his later statements on the matter, even Antoni Macierewicz, one of the later ministers of internal affairs, was not in favour of the zero option.

The last of the above-mentioned subchapters, "Verification and what next," is devoted to those SB officers who did not pass the qualification procedure or did not submit to it at all. Many of them, responding to "social demand in times of heightened crime," joined "detective and security agencies, most often run by their colleagues or former superiors" (Kozłowski 2019, p. 218). Some, on the contrary, joined "organised criminal groups" (Kozłowski 2019, p. 221). The author critically examines the view that former officers of the Polish People's Republic's secret services became financial beneficiaries of the political transformation in Poland. According to him, this opinion "seems justified, but only in relation to that group of officers who had exceptional experience and knowledge, e.g. gained from working in intelligence or units responsible for combating economic crime" (Kozłowski 2019, p. 226).

The main topic of Chapter Five, entitled "The Birth of the UOP," are the circumstances and mechanism of the organisation of the Office for State Protection, as well as various aspects of the activities of this service in the early period of its existence. The subchapter entitled "The New Geopolitical Order and Intelligence" characterises the international context in which the UOP took over most of the human resources of the civil intelligence services of the Polish People's Republic (Department I of the Ministry of Internal Affairs). In 1989–1990, these services proved very helpful to Poland's new political partners, particularly the United States, thus gaining a positive image in their eyes. In this context, one may wonder – as does the author of the reviewed book – whether the privileged treatment of the former PRL intelligence services in the creation of the UOP was largely determined by domestic or foreign factors.

The subchapter entitled "Organisation of the new service" is devoted to building the organisational and human resources capacity of the UOP. The author points to various sources of personnel for this service: mainly former SB officers, but also some circles of the

former opposition, such as the Freedom and Peace Movement, the Independent Students' Association, the Fighting Youth Federation and the Confederation of Independent Poland. Confronting historical reality with myths about it, he emphasises that the main problem in organising the UOP was "a lack of people to do the work" (Kozłowski 2019, p. 251). Many people who were approached with such offers did not want to be associated with a service perceived as the successor to the Security Service, especially since a career there did not seem stable or predictable. According to the author, the latter factor was the most important. In this light, it is difficult to defend the view that recruiting UOP personnel mainly from former SB officers was unfair to people from other backgrounds and that an alternative solution was possible.

The subchapter entitled "At the origins of the Third Republic of Poland. Politics, economy and counterintelligence" characterises the working conditions of the UOP in the new political and socio-economic reality shaped by the collapse of the communist bloc and the political transformation in Poland. The tasks of this service were presented and their implementation was shown in practice, with particular attention paid to counterintelligence work and the fight against economic crime. In this context, reference was made, among other things, to certain cases related to the activities of the Russian special services in Poland, in particular the high-profile case of Vladimir Alganov [a Russian intelligence agent, identified as the case officer in charge of an agent codenamed "Olin" – editor's note] and his many years of activity in our country. There was also mention of an investigation conducted by the Office for State Protection (UOP) in connection with a loan taken out in Moscow by the political heirs of the Polish United Workers' Party (PZPR) [in secret, from the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) in 1990, to finance enterprises and a newspaper associated with former party activists – editor's note].

Much attention was devoted to the difficulties faced by the UOP, resulting from underfunding, staff shortages and the failure of legal regulations to adapt to the challenges posed by the new socio-economic reality. In the author's opinion, "the Office for State Protection lacked the strength and resources to face the challenges of the period of transformation and globalisation – the deepening economic and state crisis and the development of international economic crime" (Kozłowski 2019, p. 268). Counterintelligence, "underfunded and constrained by regulations, had to face crime of an unprecedented nature and scale. From the outset, it was fighting a losing battle" (Kozłowski 2019, p. 266).

The author of the reviewed work also addressed the negative aspects of the UOP's activities related to the involvement of this service in the current political games in the country. The famous case of Colonel Jan Lesiak, whose team was involved in the surveillance of centre-right circles, which came to light in 1997, is described.

At this point, it is necessary to draw attention to a linguistic error that frequently appears in various publications, namely the confusion between confiscation and requisition. On page 275, the author writes about the requisition of documentation relating to cases handled by Lesiak. Meanwhile, requisition involves the seizure of certain goods (such as food or vehicles) for the needs of the military or other authorities, with compensation. In the case we are interested in here, it would be more appropriate to talk about confiscation. It would be good if this distinction became more widely recognised among those involved in the editing of various publications.

A bit earlier, on page 260, the author quotes, without further comment, a statement by former Minister of Internal Affairs Krzysztof Kozłowski, who, justifying his decision to abolish the department for combating economic crime, stated that this department, operating within the structures of the MO, "was particularly closely linked to the Security Service" (Kozłowski 2019, p. 260). However, the matter is not so simple, and Kozłowski's statement definitely requires more detailed commentary (cf. Borysiuk 2022, pp. 582–620).

The fact is that the activities of the economic crime division had a lot in common with the operational work of the SB. On the one hand, the Security Service was also involved in combating economic crime, and on the other, the economic crime division was used to exercise operational control over certain work establishments, replacing the SB in this respect. Therefore, one can speak of a certain complementarity or even partial duplication of the activities of both services. What is more, in 1981, before the introduction of martial law, the economic crime division was preparing proposals for the internment of Solidarity activists from enterprises supervised by this division (Bereszyński 2014b, pp. 17–18, 24, 558–560, 562, 566). However, generalising in such cases would be unfair to the considerable number of honest officers working in the economic crime division. An example are officers of this division in the RUSW in Brzeg, who, long before 1989, distanced themselves in various ways from the political reality of the Polish People's Republic. It was in this environment that the aforementioned initiative to create the militia structures of Solidarity was born. One of the founders of the new

trade union organisation was the head of the RUSW economic crime division, Lieutenant Tadeusz Lech, and the leading activists included Second Lieutenant Andrzej Wojtycza and Lieutenant Leszek Szkot from the same division (Górniak and Olszewski 1990, p. 5). It should also be added that, when necessary, officers from various divisions of the MO were involved in activities for the SB, including the traffic police. The economic crime division was no exception in this regard.

In the subchapter entitled "Counterpoint: military special services," for comparative purposes, the author included his observations on the transformation of the national defence structures. He points to similarities and differences between the developments in the Ministry of Internal Affairs and those in structures subordinate to the Ministry of National Defence. The things they had in common include the mass destruction of documents produced during the communist era. The differences were particularly evident in the lenient treatment of the military special services by politicians with Solidarity roots, who were guided by the mistaken belief that the army was more apolitical (Kozłowski 2019, p. 276). As a result, changes in these services lagged far behind those in services subordinate to the Ministry of Internal Affairs.

In the summary, treated as the sixth chapter of the study – "An attempt at synthesis" – the author generally leans towards the thesis that, in 1990, the state authorities at the time applied the right model of change in the Ministry of Internal Affairs. In his opinion, there was no real possibility of implementing the so-called zero option at that time, contrary to the view still appearing in the press that the special services of the Third Republic of Poland should be built from scratch: "No one wanted a thorough reform, not even politicians more radical than Kozłowski or Milczanowski" (Kozłowski 2019, p. 291). On the other hand, the author criticises the way in which the ministry was restructured: "the establishment of the Office for State Protection was not preceded by a broad discussion on the role of special services in a democratic state, and no clear tasks were set for the new institution" (Kozłowski 2019, p. 290).

Tomasz Kozłowski argues against the widely held view that "the secret services controlled national politics behind the scenes in the 1990s" (Kozłowski 2019, p. 292). In his opinion, it was "rather the opposite. It was the politicians who wanted the UOP to be loyal, not necessarily apolitical. […] The secret service was usually ready to carry out the orders of any authority. […] Many politicians not only took advantage of the situation in which the services sought support, but also deepened this pathology, consciously or not, with successive personnel changes that undermined the sense of continuity and

independence of the ministry. They themselves showed the officers that loyalty to their patrons was a condition for their survival, only to later discover, to their surprise, that the services were at the disposal of every successive political leader" (Kozłowski 2019, pp. 292–293).

The last sections of the book are devoted to attempting to answer the "question of the legacy of the Security Service." The author regrets that "Poland was late in carrying out vetting," which opened "the door to blackmail and the use of incriminating documents by secret service agents and their political masters" (Kozłowski 2019, p. 296). He points out that the first attempt at vetting, undertaken in 1992, "compromised the idea of disclosing the connections of public figures with the Security Service for many years" (Kozłowski 2019, p. 296). Another important issue of the "legacy" of the communist security services is the enormous effort that the Ministry of Internal Affairs (and the Military Intelligence Service) put into erasing the traces of their criminal activities – mainly by destroying files.

According to Tomasz Kozłowski, "Poland has had trouble finding its way to come to terms with communism for years" (Kozłowski 2019, p. 297) and, in fact, it has not found it so far. Some consolation can be found in the fact that, as the author of the reviewed book states, we did not fare worse than most countries of the former Eastern Bloc.

The book draws heavily on sources that were previously little known or unavailable. For the first time, materials from the Sejm Committee on Administration and Internal Affairs and the Senate Committee on Human Rights and the Rule of Law were used to such an extent. The source material for the reviewed work also includes protocols and transcripts of meetings of the Citizens' Parliamentary Club and its leadership, which have been little used by previous researchers. The documentation of the then national leadership of NSZZ Solidarity and the transcripts of the Council of Ministers' meetings from 1989 and 1990 were also consulted. The author also used resources from the Archive of New Records and the Institute of National Remembrance.

The reviewed book is of great importance for understanding not only the premises and mechanisms of the reorganisation of the internal affairs department, but also the mechanisms of the entire political transformation in Poland. By critically examining various myths on the subject, the author has given us the opportunity to take a sober and rational look at the political reality of the time. This is particularly valuable in a situation where mythologised ideas on this subject continue to circulate in society: on the one hand, there is uncritical glorification of the changes that have taken place and their

authors, and on the other, total condemnation of the transformation as the result of an alleged collusion between the old and new political elites. A rational attitude towards the past can also have positive consequences for our public life, which is entangled in ongoing and topical disputes about the assessment of historical events.

The author's observations on the mutual relations between political authorities and special services, as well as the threats arising from the improper shaping of these relations, are also particularly noteworthy. These observations are not only of historical value but can and should also serve as food for thought for those actively involved in current political life.

The author of the reviewed publication skilfully used an extremely rich source material of various origins, which is often difficult to access for the average researcher. Thanks to his thorough analysis and correct interpretation of sources, he answered many important questions and, in other cases, paved the way for further research. The resulting book has all the potential to become a classic in its field.

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Michał Przeperski

Transformacja po polsku

1986–1993

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MICHAŁ PRZEPERSKI
DZIKI WSCHÓD
TRANSFORMACJA
PO POLSKU 1986–1993

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AN OVERVIEW

Abstract
This text presents a critical review of Michał Przeperski's book *Dziki Wschód. Transformacja po polsku 1986–1993* (The Wild East. Transformation in the Polish style 1986–1993), which examines the social transformations in Poland during the final years of the communist regime and the initial phase of democratic governance.

Keywords: transformation, society, Poland

Original version: This text is an edited and expanded version of the article: Wilk, Hubert. "Wszystkie kolory transformacji." *Nowe Książki* 9 (2024): 61–62.

Michał Przeperski, despite his young age, is a historian of established reputation. His books are part of the academic discourse and are appreciated by both specialists and general readers interested in contemporary history. Following the highly acclaimed and well-received biography of Mieczysław F. Rakowski (Przeperski 2021), the researcher, affiliated with the Tadeusz Manteuffel Institute of History of the Polish Academy of Sciences and the Polish History Museum, has now turned to a subject that, until recently, has not been the focus of broader historical reflection beyond the realm of political history – namely, the period of transformation. This situation, however, is beginning to change, as evidenced by recent publications emerging from institutions such as the Jan Kochanowski University in Kielce and the University of Rzeszów (see, for example: Miernik and Młynarczyk-Tomczyk 2023; Grata 2022). *Dziki Wschód. Transformacja po polsku 1986–1993* is, as the author states in the introduction, an attempt to present the experience of the late 1980s and early 1990s "up close, in all its complexity" (p. 13). As he has emphasised on multiple occasions, it was his long-standing interest in social history, inspired by the Annales school, that led him to undertake this topic – one that represents a clear gap in Polish historiography – by employing the methodological framework characteristic of the French historical tradition. At the same time, however, Przeperski distances himself from describing his book as strictly "academic", referring to it on various occasions as "formatted in a form close to academic" (discussion of M. Przeperski's book held on 27 October 2024 at the Tadeusz Manteuffel Institute of History of the Polish Academy of Sciences in Warsaw). What does this imply? Namely that the scholarly apparatus – particularly footnotes – was reduced to the necessary minimum. Nevertheless, all the fundamental principles of the historian's craft have been upheld: the work is grounded in a broad and critically evaluated source base.

With regard to the sources, it is worth examining what the author has drawn upon in constructing the narrative. It is clearly apparent that his approach aligns closely with the findings published by sociologists and anthropologists working on the subject in the 1980s and 1990s. The works of Winicjusz Narojek (Narojek 1991; Narojek 1995), Mirosława Marody (Marody 1996), Hanna Świda-Ziemba (Świda-Ziemba 1994), among others, constitute an important point of

reference for Przeperski. It should also be noted that these are, in fact, among the few scholarly studies addressing this period – excluding, of course, the works of Antoni Dudek, which focus almost exclusively on political history. A further important element of the source base is the use of visual materials found online. Excerpts from news, entertainment, and advertising programmes are treated as equally valid objects of analysis. Archival sources have been used only sparingly – primarily materials from the collections of the KARTA Centre, along with selected reference numbers from the Archives of New Records, the Archives of the Council of Ministers, and the Qualitative Data Archive of the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology of the Polish Academy of Sciences. This will probably be one of the main objections raised by many historians. The press appears to have been similarly marginalised. Suffice it to say that *Trybuna Ludu*, the main newspaper of the ruling Polish United Workers' Party, is cited in the context of publishing the resolution of the 10th Plenum of the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party, while texts from *Gazeta Wyborcza* – a daily newspaper affiliated with the Citizens' Committee "Solidarity" and the Independent Self-Governing Trade Union "Solidarity" between 1989 and 1990 – are not referenced at all. This omission is somewhat surprising, particularly in the case of the latter. I can, of course, understand that researching press materials may be cumbersome and time-consuming; however, in the digital era – when many archives have been digitised – identifying relevant material would arguably not have posed an insurmountable challenge. Another issue, of course, is whether material from the daily press would have significantly altered the overall picture. An excellent complement to the narrative, however, is the skilful incorporation of song lyrics that comment on the surrounding reality. The principal source for Przeperski, however, is accounts. And here, a degree of uncertainty arises. Only in the "Acknowledgements" does the author provide any indication of whom he interviewed, leaving the interested reader almost entirely in the dark regarding his interlocutors – aside from a brief note mentioning the use of interviews deposited at the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology of the Polish Academy of Sciences.

The chronological framework of the book spans the years 1986 to 1993. For Przeperski, this particular period most effectively captures the specificity of the transformation. Following Mirosława Marody, he designates 1986 as the starting point – a moment when no significant change seemed imminent. Notably, this is also the year of the author's

birth. The closing point, 1993, is more symbolic in nature: it marks the withdrawal of Russian troops from Polish territory, the electoral victory of post-communist parties, and – perhaps most consequential for the future – the enactment of the Act on the Tax on Goods and Services and on Excise Duty. Viewed from this perspective, the major milestones of political history during that period – such as the Round Table Talks or the June 1989 elections – do not serve as primary reference points for the so-called ordinary Kowalskis and Nowaks, who were more preoccupied with their immediate circumstances than with political developments.

While the reasons for the book's chronological framework are explained quite convincingly, the reader learns what the titular Wild East signifies only between the lines. Naturally, the first association – reinforced by the cover illustration, which features the well-known cowboy motif – is the Wild West and the American pioneers venturing into an unfamiliar and hazardous environment. This image, originally the silhouette of Gary Cooper from one of the most iconic Western films in cinema history, *High Noon*, depicts a lone gunslinger before a duel; however, in this context, the figure holds a ballot rather than a revolver. This image was famously used on posters urging participation in the elections of 4 June 1989. Indeed, the author consistently strives to portray Poles during the breakthrough period in precisely this manner. On page 245, Przeperski writes: "In Poland in the early 1990s, the situation was extreme. Weak state structures and an atmosphere of permissiveness allowed both free expression of creativity and the emergence of pathological or outright criminal activities." Slightly earlier, he notes: "Citizens' sense of security was plummeting at an alarming rate. In January 1988, half of Poles believed that crime was on the rise. Polish streets were beginning to resemble the Wild West – or rather, the Wild East" (p. 83). Elsewhere, Przeperski observes: "There are freedoms, but also growing brutality and competition. It is the Wild East" (p. 158). It can thus be understood that, for Przeperski, the titular depiction of Poland during the breakthrough years is associated with a dramatic – both as societally perceived and borne out by hard statistical evidence (crime rates) – lack of security, an absence of clear rules, and the brutal nature of capitalism entering the country. This atmosphere is epitomised by one of the most notable Polish films of the period, *Psy* [Polish slang for police, "Pigs"] by Władysław Pasikowski. Public opinion polls clearly demonstrate that Poles did not feel safe and, moreover, struggled to comprehend the rapid changes taking place.

The book is composed of seven monographic chapters. This structure, chosen by the author, is clear and accessible. The opening chapter, titled "It Could Have Been Different," offers a well-crafted synthesis of political history, effectively organising the key facts. However, Przeperski shows little interest in delving deeply into the political conflicts of the time. It is evident that he intended to establish a firm political and economic framework for the breakthrough years – a framework designed to support what I regard as the book's greatest strength: the multitude of vivid and varied episodes that constitute the remainder of *The Wild East*. This latter part is, in turn, heterogeneous in character, encompassing chapters that are analytical, descriptive, and at times written with a journalistic flair. This is not a criticism, though the stylistic diversity can at times be somewhat striking. On the one hand, the narrative evokes the style of the excellent *Cięcia* (Leyk and Wawrzyniak 2019), a collection of memories from employees of enterprises privatised in the 1990s; on the other, it recalls *Duchologia polska* (Drenda 2016), which portrays the years of transformation through the lens of various artefacts – objects, customs, events – and even, though not included in the bibliography, *Znaki szczególne* by Paulina Wilk, a memoir of childhood in the late communist era (Wilk 2014). The entire work is very well written. Przeperski tells his story in vivid language, coining compelling terms such as "market Leninism," "revolution of aspirations," and "habitually socialist people." He is unafraid to give space to his interlocutors – as seen in the excellent passages from the chapter "Revolution of Aspirations" – and quotes vivid, often highly entertaining episodes, such as the account of a real-life *Wielka Majówka* [The Grand May Long Weekend] in the late 1980s or the dispute between the Soviet consul and the Polish censor. The former refers to Krzysztof Rogulski's well-known 1981 film, in which Rysiek, a teenage runaway from an orphanage, steals a million złotys and, together with Julek – a boy he meets by chance – embarks on an adventurous journey across Poland, spending the stolen money along the way. Przeperski recounts the real story of a certain Krzysztof Kamil Baranowski, a wanted conman who, whether consciously or not, appears to recreate the wild adventures of the two protagonists from *Wielka Majówka*. Equally compelling is the story of Marek, a journalist from various newspapers in Małopolska, who reported on a meeting between the youth of Bochnia and the Soviet consul. The report, which focused primarily on the accidents at the Chernobyl power plant, was not well received by the censors. The Soviet consul

spoke quite candidly about negligence and outdated technology. It was only through the personal intervention of a diplomat at the Kraków censorship office that the recording of the meeting was ultimately allowed to be published.

Importantly, Przeperski does not yield to the fashion of idealising the 1980s and 1990s or the nostalgia that often accompanies it. He consistently and dispassionately highlights the absurdities that marked the end of the Polish People's Republic and the beginning of the Third Polish Republic. As it transpired, political transformations did not immediately translate into changes tangibly experienced by ordinary Poles. To put it bluntly: changing the country's name did not alter its essence. However, one fundamental shift did occur: with the fall of communism, Poles regained their state, and from that moment onward, they became responsible for it.

Przeperski strives to avoid judging his characters through the lens of the decades that have passed since the transformation, as well as the hindsight we now possess regarding its consequences. Marcin Zaremba's observation in his recent book is pertinent here: "Not everything that seemed obvious 'after' was obvious 'before'" (Zaremba 2023, p. 23). Przeperski follows this approach, and rightly so. He repeatedly stresses that "[…] we must resist the temptation to project onto Poles from thirty-some years ago what we know today" (p. 20) and reminds the reader that "this is what we know today" (p. 372). At times, however, Przeperski appears to fall into the very trap he cautions against. This is evident, for instance, in his discussion of aspirations in chapter four, where he addresses the phenomenon of supermodels from the early 1990s. His reference to the "nightmarish aesthetics of 'heroin beauty'" (p. 198) reflects a perspective that is clearly shaped by hindsight. At that time, concepts such as body positivity were virtually unknown, and aesthetic standards – then as now – changed in cyclical fashion. Poles of that era, eating American fast food (or merely dreaming of it, as such establishments were just beginning to appear in major cities), were certainly not conscious of healthy eating habits. The downplaying of Polish sport in the 1980s – expressed, for example, in the phrase "[…] Polish sportsmen sometimes achieved success" (p. 12) – is arguably not entirely justified. While it is understandable that the author aims to convey the prevailing sense of despair at the end of the Polish People's Republic, figures such as Zbigniew Boniek (a prominent player for Juventus and Roma), Waldemar Legień (1988 Olympic judo champion), Lech Piasecki (winner of the Peace Race and 1985

world champion), as well as the successes of Polish football teams in international competitions – such as the bronze medal at the 1982 World Cup and the legendary cup matches of Widzew Łódź in the 1982/83 season – serve as examples suggesting that the portrayal of sporting misery may be somewhat overstated.

Perhaps the most striking omission in Przeperski's book is the near-complete neglect of the transformation of the rural areas and the changes that affected its inhabitants. The author himself refers to the countryside as a "shock absorber of changes" (p. 217), but only briefly alludes to its role. Recent publications, such as *Zboże rosło jak las* by Bartosz Panek (Panek 2024), demonstrate that this topic is highly significant and perhaps even crucial to a comprehensive understanding of the Polish transformation as a whole. The role and presence of the Church during the period under discussion is also scarcely addressed. It is reasonable to assume that many Poles turned to this institution in times of hardship. Why, then, is there no mention of John Paul II's pilgrimages to Poland in 1987 and 1991? It is surprising that these events, which formed a significant part of the experience of the majority of Polish society, are absent from the narrative. Also absent is any mention of Anatoly Kashpirovsky, who was extremely popular at the time, along with other similar figures. Poles looked to healers with hope partly because state institutions, including those responsible for healthcare, were neither efficient nor reliable enough to provide a sense of security in this regard. The inclusion of this aspect would, in my view, enrich the *The Wild East* narrative. Moreover, the addition of detailed statistical data on various phenomena would undoubtedly be beneficial, as it would allow for their hierarchical organisation and potentially highlight their significance more clearly.

To sum up, the overall assessment of Michał Przeperski's book, despite the reservations outlined here, is very positive. The author has accomplished his task by portraying the period of transformation and capturing its diverse hues – even if, particularly in the sections concerning the late 1980s, the narrative predominantly employs various shades of grey.

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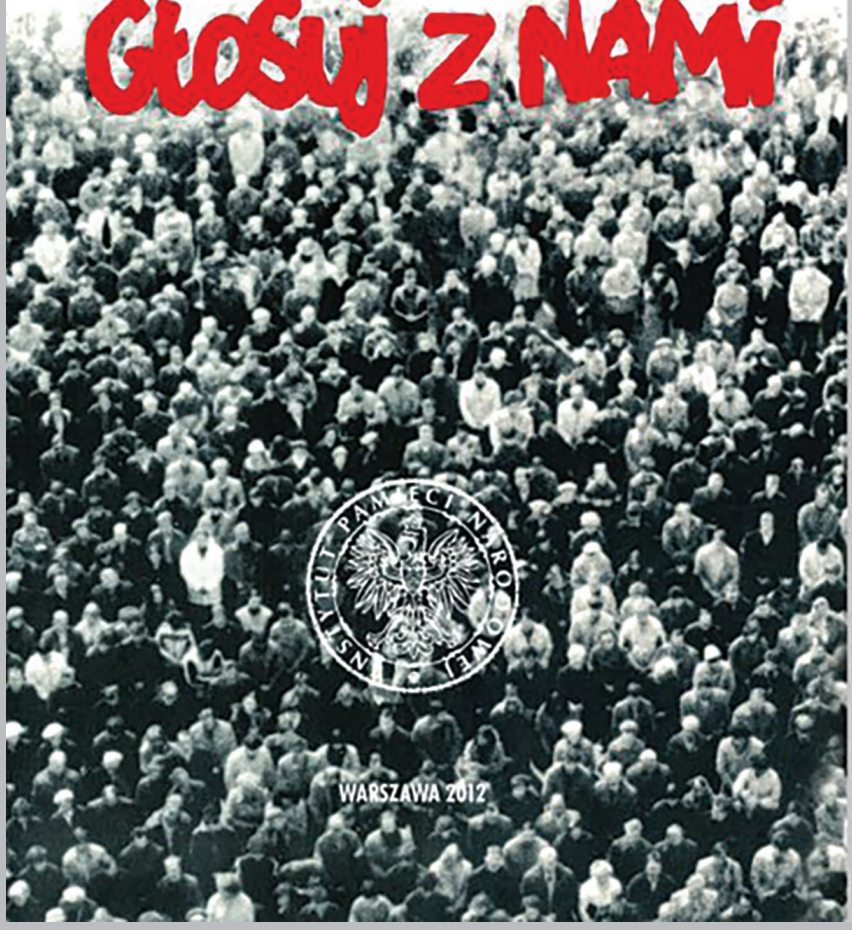
DZIKI WSCHÓD

Paulina Codogni

WYBORY CZERWCOWE 1989 ROKU

GŁOSUJ Z NAMI

MONOGRAFIE



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THE BITTER-SWEET TASTE OF VICTORY

PAULINA CODOGNI

WYBORY CZERWCOWE 1989 ROKU. U PROGU PRZEMIANY USTROJOWEJ.

Warsaw: Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, 2012

Abstract
This paper outlines Paulina Codogni's book on the process and political occurrences of the parliamentary elections in 1989 in Poland, that led to decomposition of the Communist political order, and democratic transition.

Keywords: The 1989 elections in Poland, the June elections, political transformation, political change in Poland, opposition in the Polish People's Republic

As a result of the agreements reached at the Round Table, the authorities of the Polish People's Republic agreed to re-legalise the Independent Self-Governing Trade Union "Solidarity" (NSZZ Solidarność), which took place on 17 April 1989. Three days later, on 20 April, the activities of the Independent Self-Governing Trade Union "Solidarity" of Individual Farmers were also formally legalised. At the same time, the Communist authorities agreed to limit their dominance in the media. This led to the emergence of new opposition-related information initiatives in the public sphere: on 28 April, Polish Radio began broadcasting "Studio Wyborcze Solidarność" (Solidarity Election Studio), and on 9 May, a similar initiative was launched on Polish Television. The day before, the first issue of *Gazeta Wyborcza*, the press organ of the opposition, was published, and on 2 June, *Tygodnik Solidarność* reappeared (the first issue appeared on 3 April 1981, published by NSZZ Solidarność; between 13 December 1981 and 1 June 1989, the publication of the magazine was suspended by the authorities of the Polish People's Republic).

The most groundbreaking and indeed the most important achievement of the Round Table was the communist authorities' agreement to hold partially free parliamentary elections. The communists were motivated by a desire to share political responsibility for the upcoming economic reforms and the country's deteriorating economic situation. At the same time, the electoral system was secured by a number of mechanisms protecting the interests of the ruling camp: a limit was set on the number of seats available to opposition candidates, which ensured that the PZPR (Polish United Workers' Party) and its allies would retain control over the formation of the government. A presidency with broad powers was also created, and the party retained influence over the security apparatus, including the military and the Ministry of Internal Affairs. In the following weeks, an intense election campaign began. In April, opposition candidates for the Sejm and Senate were announced, many of whom used photos with Lech Wałęsa as a symbol of their involvement in the Solidarity movement. Volunteers associated with Citizens' Committees played a huge role here, organising meetings and events throughout Poland to promote the candidates. It is worth mentioning, however, that not all of the opposition supported the Round Table agreements – groups such as the Confederation of Independent Poland (KPN), led by Leszek Moczulski, put forward their own candidates, criticising the compromise with the communists. Organisations such as Fighting Solidarity and the Fighting Youth Federation called for a boycott of

the elections, considering them not fully democratic. The first round of voting took place on 4 June 1989. The turnout was approximately 62%. Candidates associated with the "Solidarity" movement won 160 of the 161 seats available in the Sejm, and in completely free elections to the Senate, they won as many as 99 seats out of 100. Although this was a devastating blow to the communist authorities, it should be noted that out of 18 million voters, as many as 7 million voted for candidates from the ruling camp.

Several important publications have already been written about the 1989 elections to the Sejm and Senate in Poland, including works by Antoni Dudek (Dudek 2009), Andrzej Friszke (Friszke 2024), Paweł Kowal (Kowal 2012), Sebastian Ligarski and Grzegorz Majchrzak (Ligarski and Majchrzak 2019), Andrzej Małkiewicz (Małkiewicz 1994), Jan Skórzyński (Skórzyński 1995), and edited by Konrad Białecki, Stanisław Jankowiak and Rafał Reczek (*Krok ku wolności. Wybory czerwcowe 1989 i ich konsekwencje* [A Step towards Freedom. The June 1989 elections and their consequences] 2015). Particular attention was paid to the functioning of Citizens' Committees, as exemplified by the work of Inka Słodkowska (Słodkowska 2006; Słodkowska 2014), Tadeusz Borkowski and Andrzej Bukowski (Borkowski and Bukowski 1993). Works analysing the 1989 elections from a regional perspective have also been published (for example, *Olsztyński czerwiec '89* [Olsztyn June '89], edited by B. Burniewicz, R. Gieszczyńska, et al., Olsztyn 2009; *Koniec pewnej epoki. Wybory parlamentarne 1989 roku w województwie szczecińskim w dokumentach* [The end of an era. The 1989 parliamentary elections in the Szczecin Voivodeship in documents], introduction, selection and compilation by A. Kubaj, Warsaw–Szczecin 2010; *Upadek systemu komunistycznego na Górnym Śląsku. Wokół przemian 1989 roku w województwach katowickim i opolskim* [The collapse of the communist system in Upper Silesia. The changes of 1989 in the Katowice and Opole Voivodeships], eds. A. Dziuba and Sebastian Rosenbaum, Katowice 2010; *Wybory parlamentarne w 1989 r. w Polsce południowo-wschodniej* [Parliamentary elections in south-eastern Poland in 1989], eds. M. Gliwa and M. Krzysztofiński, Rzeszów 2011; *Wybory czerwcowe 1989 r. w województwie poznańskim. Wybór dokumentów* [The June 1989 elections in the Poznań Voivodeship. Selected documents], introduction and editing by Ł. Komorowski, selection and compilation by H. Budzyńska et al., Poznań–Warsaw 2021). There have also been publications devoted to the activities of the apparatus of repression, which monitored and attempted

to control the political transformation process during that period (including: *Służba Bezpieczeństwa wobec przemian politycznych w latach 1988–1990. Region łódzki* [The Security Service in the face of political changes in 1988–1990. The Łódź region], introduction, selection and compilation by S. Pilarski, Warsaw–Łódź 2009; *Wybory '89 w Polsce południowo-wschodniej w dokumentach SB* [The 1989 elections in south-eastern Poland in the documents of the Security Service], introduction by J. Borowiec and D. Iwaneczko, selection and compilation by J. Borowiec, Warsaw-Rzeszów 2009).

Despite the passage of time and the growing number of publications on the June 1989 elections, Paulina Codogni's book *Wybory czerwcowe 1989 roku. U progu przemiany ustrojowej* [The June Elections of 1989: On the Eve of Political Transformation], published in 2012 by the Institute of National Remembrance, remains a fundamental work on the subject. To date, it has been reviewed only once. Shortly after its publication, Łukasz Garbal reviewed it in the magazine *Nowe Książki* (Garbal 2012). On the occasion of the 35th anniversary of the June elections, which took place in 2024, it is worth reaching for this important book again. It should be noted that it was awarded the Władysław Pobóg-Malinowski Prize for the Best Historical Debut of 2010 in the doctoral thesis category.

In her monograph, Paulina Codogni presents a detailed analysis of one of the most important events in the process of Poland's political transformation. Her book not only reminds us of the significance of the parliamentary elections of 4 June 1989, but also sheds new light on their context, course and consequences. The publication enriches the existing debate by presenting a multidimensional view of this groundbreaking event.

The author has meticulously examined the process of political transformation that began during the Round Table negotiations and culminated in the formation of Tadeusz Mazowiecki's government. The crucial point of this watershed were the June 1989 elections which showed both the strength of the Solidarity opposition and the weakness of the ruling camp. For some, the result was a great triumph, for others it was a painful collision with reality. The unexpected defeat of the authorities and the decisive victory of the opposition surprised both sides of the political dispute, forcing solutions that no one had previously anticipated. These elections significantly accelerated the transition from a one-party system of "people's democracy" to a pluralistic parliamentary democracy based on free political competition. Codogni accurately captured the key turning points

in this process that had a decisive impact on its further course, and objectively presented the difficulties involved in building consensus between former political enemies.

As the author mentions in the introduction, the book does not exhaust the subject and does not cover it comprehensively. Some issues, such as the international context of the elections or their repercussions, were treated marginally. Economic issues were also touched upon only to a limited extent.

The publication is based on archival documents, contemporary press articles, accounts of participants in the events described, diaries, memoirs, and numerous studies related to the subject matter that were available at the time. In terms of source materials, the author drew on archival collections held in six archives: the New Records Archive, the Institute of National Remembrance Archive, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Archive, the Karta Centre Archive, the Archive of the President of the Republic of Poland, and the Senate Archive.

The book is divided into six chapters that logically guide the reader through the complex process of the June elections. Codogni presented the political and social situation in Poland in the second half of the 1980s, emphasising the events leading up to the Round Table talks. She paid particular attention to the dynamics of negotiations between the authorities of the Polish People's Republic and the Solidarity opposition, showing how compromises were gradually worked out, which became the basis for subsequent elections. In the following chapters, the author moves on to a detailed description of the electoral process. She analyses the method of selecting candidates by the Citizens' Committee and the mechanisms for determining the electoral lists of the Polish United Workers' Party. She reveals not only logistical and organisational challenges, but also numerous internal conflicts in both political camps. Codogni does not shy away from difficult topics, such as tensions within the Citizens' Committee regarding candidate selection procedures, which in her analysis becomes one of the key elements changing the perception of the myth of a "national agreement against the Polish United Workers' Party."

One of the most important contributions of the book is the demythologisation of the June elections. The author reminds us that they were not fully free, but partially regulated, which was a result of the Round Table agreements. These were plebiscite-style elections, in which the moderate opposition feared that it might find itself in a minority regarding the freely contested seats. Codogni shows

how the authorities of the Polish People's Republic also feared this scenario, seeing in it the possibility of a rise in the importance of radical opposition fractions that questioned the agreements of the Round Table.

The author rightly points out that although the elections brought victory to the opposition, it was neither clear-cut nor lasting. Codogni draws attention to the rapidly dwindling support for the moderate opposition and the fact that its assumption of joint responsibility for governing drew it into the political system, relieving the PZPR of some of its responsibility for the situation in the country. At the same time, activists associated with the Communist Party retained real influence, which distinguishes Poland's transformation from the experiences of some other post-Communist countries.

Paulina Codogni's monograph has several significant advantages. Firstly, the author draws on a wide range of sources, including archival documents, eyewitness accounts and press analyses, which gives her work a sound research foundation. Secondly, Codogni avoids simplifications and unambiguous judgements – her approach is balanced and her conclusions are based on facts, which gives the book an academic character, but at the same time makes it accessible to a wider audience. The structural clarity of the work is also worth highlighting. The chapters are logically structured, allowing the reader to easily follow both the chronology of events and the analysis of political phenomena. An additional advantage are the appendices containing a list of names of parliamentarians elected in the June 1989 elections and photographs. This makes the book not only a valuable source of knowledge, but also a research tool for other historians.

Although the book *The June Elections of 1989* is very valuable, it is not without certain weaknesses. One of the main criticisms could be that the long-term effects of the elections on the Polish political scene are discussed too briefly. Codogni signals a problem of erosion of support for the moderate opposition, but does not fully develop this point. Furthermore, there is no in-depth comparison of Poland's transformation with other Central and Eastern European countries. Although the author mentions the specific nature of the Polish case, further discussion of this topic could enrich the analysis and present the Polish experience in a broader international context.

Paulina Codogni's book makes an important contribution to the literature on political transformation in Poland. This publication encourages readers to reflect once again on the June elections and their significance. This work may serve as a basis for further

research, especially in the field of comparative analyses of political transformations in the region.

Paulina Codogni's *The June Elections of 1989* is a book that deserves attention from historians, political scientists, and anyone interested in Poland's recent history. The author avoids simplifications and presents the complexity of the electoral process and its consequences. This publication reminds us that June 1989 marked the beginning of a convoluted process of transformation that needs to be understood in all its complexity. This is a work that should be in the library of every historian, political scientist and anyone interested in political change in Central and Eastern Europe. Codogni's book is one of the most important studies on the June 1989 elections and, at the same time, opens up space for further research and discussion.

Years later, it has become clear that what was not sufficiently emphasised in Codogni's monograph is that the elections of June 1989 were of fundamental importance for the fall of the communist regime not only in Poland, but also accelerated the course of events in Central and Eastern Europe. The Polish people, exercising their right to vote, rejected communism, which became a turning point in the country's history. The result of the vote came as a surprise both to the communist authorities, who – in accordance with the Round Table agreements – intended to maintain control over the state, and to the opposition, which did not expect such strong public support. Importantly, divisions and discrepancies were visible both within the power structures – in the Polish United Workers' Party and the Security Service – and within the opposition itself. Among communist decision-makers, hardliners clashed with groups leaning towards reform. Similarly, there were differences within the opposition – alongside supporters of moderate dialogue with the authorities, there were groups that were distrustful of compromise and called for complete decommunisation. The parliamentary elections, although held under the so-called "contract," unexpectedly became the beginning of a profound political transformation, opening the way for Poles to achieve full sovereignty.

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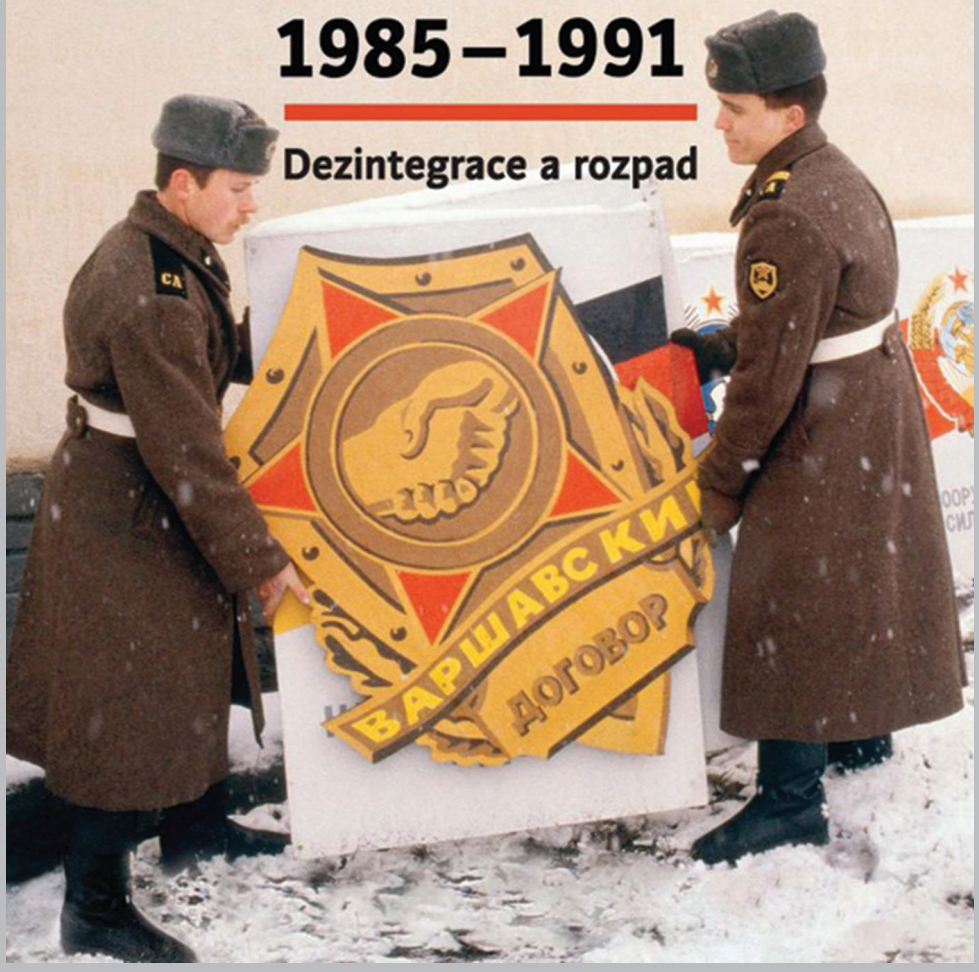
GŁOSUJ Z NAMI

Matěj Bílý

Varšavská smlouva

1985 – 1991

Dezintegrace a rozpad



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MATĚJ BÍLÝ
VARŠAVSKÁ SMLOUVA 1985–1991
DEZINTEGRACE A ROZPAD

Praha: ÚSTR, 2021

Abstract
This paper reviews Matěj Bílý's second book on the Warsaw Pact history outlining the final years of Pact's functioning and its demise, parallel to the demise of the Soviet Union and its domination in the Central and Eastern Europe.

Keywords: Warsaw Pact, Soviet Union

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Thirty years which had passed by 2021 since the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact, or in fact the formal confirmation of the collapse thereof, should provide historiography with a sufficiently safe perspective for the analysis and description of even the most controversial phenomena and events. However, this has not resulted – certainly not in Poland – in a flood of papers devoted to the political and military relations of the Soviet Union with its satellite states/allies in Central and Eastern Europe and in Southern Europe between 1945 and 1991. Although such restraint might seem commendable – at least from a methodological point of view, given that fundamental source materials of Soviet origin remain inaccessible – considering the increasing opportunities offered by the archives of other member states of the alliance, any failure to undertake such research may be regarded as a form of opportunism or an unwillingness to take on difficult challenges. Introducing a national perspective, even in fragmentary studies, undoubtedly allows a better understanding of the mechanisms by which the alliance of "people's democracies" under Soviet leadership functioned. It makes it possible to discern a somewhat more nuanced mechanism of dependence and the non-unilateral nature of interactions between the hegemonic power and its clients.

At the forefront of publications which, in their own way, marked the 65th anniversary of the formation and the 30th anniversary of the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact, stands the work of Matěj Bílý, a Czech historian who, since his studies at Charles University in Prague, has consistently researched the history of the Pact. His master's thesis was devoted to the first fifteen years of the alliance's existence – from its establishment in 1955 to 1969 (the author's biography was published on the Institute for the Study of Totalitarian Regimes website, now it is available on the Institute of Contemporary History of the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic website; see "PhDr. Matěj Bílý, Ph.D."). In his doctoral dissertation, published in 2016 by the Institute for the Study of Totalitarian Regimes (*Ústav pro studium totalitních režimů*, ÚSTR), he presented the alliance's heyday between 1969 and 1985 (see Bílý 2016; the English edition was published by Academica Press: Bílý 2020). His latest book documents the final years of the alliance's existence, its disintegration and dissolution, in the radically different political landscape of 1991.

As in his earlier works, Matěj Bílý focused primarily on the mechanics of the Warsaw Pact as a political organisation, devoting less attention to its military aspects, although – as he himself repeatedly noted – throughout the entire existence of the Pact, its military structures operated more effectively than its political ones.

The author made an attempt to characterise the internal transformations and the efforts aimed at reforming not only the methods and style of operation but also the political structures of the Warsaw Pact. In the context of a new approach to international policy proclaimed by the new leader of the Soviet Union, Mikhail Gorbachev, and, consequently, the greater subjectivity of the other member states of the alliance, certain structural reforms were intended to be carried out, bringing the Warsaw Pact closer to its Western antagonist – NATO. The growing divergence of interests among the individual states of the Pact, which also affected the hitherto exceptionally cohesive "group of six" (the Soviet Union, Poland, Czechoslovakia, the German Democratic Republic – GDR, Hungary, and Bulgaria), did not allow for the introduction of any major changes. Although some bodies met more frequently and regularly, and the exchange of views during their meetings ceased to resemble the ritualistic incantations of newspeak (so distinctive of the Brezhnev-era stagnation), apart from the creation of a dozen working groups, it was not possible to strengthen – following the North Atlantic model – the role of the Secretariat and the Secretary of the Warsaw Pact. Recognising the peculiar organisational dualism and the operational autonomy of the military structures, the author discussed separately the activities of the political bodies on the international stage between 1985 and 1989 and the functioning of the alliance's military agencies. The third part of the work was devoted to the period 1989–1991, marked by an increasingly rapid disintegration of the Warsaw Pact structures, reflecting the internal processes, namely the collapse of the existing regimes in Eastern Europe. The military role of the Pact declined even more rapidly than its political significance. The 1991 meeting in Prague was, in essence, nothing more than a *coup de grâce* for an organisation which no longer had any *raison d'être* in the new, changed realities.

In attempting to outline a comprehensive vision of the history of the Warsaw Pact during the final period of its existence, Bílý focused primarily on the initiatives and activities of the alliance as a supranational political structure, taking due account of the internal context – the momentous transformations taking place within the

member states of the alliance. Certain topics – particularly issues concerning military cooperation – were only outlined or mentioned briefly. In line with the theoretical model of the "decentralisation of the Cold War," Bílý saw smaller countries as actors that were independent to a certain extent, not treating them as part of a satellite monolith that implemented a line imposed by Moscow, but rather as entities attempting to pursue their own goals, both in the international arena and in their relations with Moscow.

The author sought to guard against a sort of Czechocentrism arising from the relatively better – though not always easier – access to sources held in Czech archives. In addition to the archives of party and administrative authorities, he succeeded in gaining access to documents of the Warsaw Pact concealed under the designation of the Operational Directorate of the Czechoslovak General Staff, which – somewhat by chance – were made available to him at the turn of the first and second decades of the 21st century. As far as relations with the Warsaw Pact are concerned, these materials are similar to those stored in the Archives of the Institute of National Remembrance as Collection of Documents concerning the Warsaw Pact, which, pursuant to the 1991 agreement, were not available to researchers for many years. The author, for instance, made use of records of military meetings of Warsaw Pact bodies in Czech translation, although copies of these documents in their original language – Russian – can often be found in Poland. Certain issues – such as plans for the development of the armed forces during the final five years of the alliance's existence as a military pact, or the reorganisation and reduction of the armed forces, partly as a result of the Warsaw Pact's shift to a defensive doctrine – were discussed by the author using the example of the Czechoslovak People's Army. Broader use of Polish materials would, in all likelihood, have lent greater legitimacy to some of the author's conclusions. The actions undertaken by the Czechoslovak authorities – given the far-reaching unification of military policy among the member states of the Warsaw Pact in the mid-1980s – may be regarded as representative or exemplary of the activities of the military leaderships of the other countries of the Pact.

In addition to Czech sources, the author also used Polish documents from the Archives of Modern Records (materials of the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party) and documentation of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the Second Directorate of the General Staff of the Polish Army, and the aforementioned Warsaw Pact documents held in the Archives of the Institute of National

Remembrance. He also accessed valuable materials of the leadership of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany (*Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands*, SED) and records of meetings of the Warsaw Pact's decision-making bodies preserved in the collections of the Bundesarchiv Abteilung Berlin-Lichterfelde. Of great importance were materials of the CPSU leadership stored in the Dmitri Volkogonov's Collection at the Library of Congress, as well as documentation held at the National Security Archive in Washington. The author also skilfully used the exceptionally valuable archival collections compiled by the international research team called the Parallel History Project (PHP), including documentation of meetings of the Warsaw Pact's governing bodies posted on the project's website (see Parallel History Project On Cooperative Security website). Unfortunately, it should be noted that some of the links provided by the Author to these webpages are no longer active.

Among the source publications, the most valuable proved to be the collection of archival materials on the history of the Warsaw Pact, *A Cardboard Castle?,* prepared by Vojtech Mastny and Malcolm Byrne (Mastny and Byrne 2005). One of the most frequently cited sources is the semi-memoir work by Polish diplomat Jerzy Nowak devoted to the final years of the Warsaw Pact (Nowak 2011). The author also made use of the rather limited literature, including studies concerning the final period of the alliance's history, presented from national perspectives by Jordan Baev (Baev 2000), Csaba Békés (Békés 2003), and Wanda Jarząbek (Jarząbek 2010). However, the list of sources used does not include the final volume of Andrzej Skrzypek's trilogy on Polish-Soviet relations in the post-war period (Skrzypek 2008), or the works of General Franciszek Puchała on the military aspects of Polish-Soviet relations within the Warsaw Pact (Puchała 2011). Despite drawing on many German publications, the omission of important works such as Oliver Bange's study on the GDR's military and alliance policy from 1969–1990 (Bange 2017), Daniel Niemetz's analysis of the National People's Army and security agencies during the crisis and transition period of 1985–1990 (Niemetz 2020), see also recent book by Winfried Heinemann (2011, 2025), and Colonel Siegfried Lautsch's interesting work on operational planning in the 1980s, leaves a certain sense of incompleteness (Lautsch 2013). Russian-language studies – for example those by Rudolf Pikhoia and Irina Bystrova (Bystrova 2006), Vladimir Zolotaryov (Zolotaryov and Putilin 2014), and others – should not have been overlooked. A language barrier prevented the author from using Romanian publications on Romania's

stance towards the Warsaw Pact (*Sozialistische Waffenbrüder…* 2020; Opriş 2008), as well as the highly interesting work by Miklós Horváth on Hungary's functioning within the structures of the Warsaw Pact (Horváth and Kovács 2016). It would undoubtedly have been worthwhile to draw also on publications devoted to the disarmament negotiations conducted during the 1980s. Bílý focuses primarily on the Soviet and East European reception of these negotiations and the assessment of the Western position. According to the author, a crucial turning point in the history of the Warsaw Pact was the rise to power in the Soviet Union of a very young – for the time – ideological and reform-minded General Secretary of the CPSU Central Committee, Mikhail Gorbachev. He intended to change the form and, to a considerable extent, also the substance of cooperation within the Warsaw Pact. This was part of Gorbachev's vaguely defined strategy towards the Eastern Bloc. The purpose of increasing the emancipation of the Eastern Bloc countries was to reduce the political and economic cost of maintaining these territories within the Soviet sphere of influence. These changes were supposed to be beneficial for both sides, but they did not proceed at a satisfactory pace. In the spring of 1987, Gorbachev began to conclude that his ideas could be realised only through more radical reforms. Consequently, alongside the acceleration of changes in domestic policy in 1988, the issue of expediting transformations in the internal policies of the allied countries appeared on the agenda of the meetings of the Warsaw Pact's highest political body. This complicated relations with many of the Pact's allies, which continued to be led by conservative and traditionalist groups.

After 1985, the political structures of the Pact began to function in a more regular manner. The Soviet side became more willing and efficient in providing information and presenting new foreign policy initiatives. The growing activity of the alliance translated into an increase in the prestige and significance of the Warsaw Pact. Since the attention of the Pact's members was focused on inter-bloc relations within Europe, this entailed a weakening of cooperation with non-European socialist countries.

According to Bílý, the Kremlin ceased to surprise its allies with initiatives on the international stage, announcing them in advance. Moscow attempted to transform the alliance from an organisation focused on military issues and on formulating joint – often general – positions toward ideological opponents into a platform for cooperation between the countries of the Eastern Bloc, where

a wide range of mainly political issues would be discussed. Military issues were to move into the background. Attempts were also made to identify new areas of activity, such as economic integration and issues of internal development in socialist countries.

Despite significant changes in its mode of operation, the structures of the Pact were reformed only to a small extent. Moreover, discussions on organisational reforms never became particularly heated. On the most important disarmament issues in the dialogue between the superpowers, the Pact had a similar role to that before 1985, namely to fully support Soviet policy and positions.

The political transformation of the alliance in the face of changes in international politics, the evolution of internal situations, and the dilution of Soviet control increasingly led to strong confrontations of views. At the same time, the gap between the position of the "group of six" and that of Romania, which had previously tended to dissent, became ever smaller. The convergence towards the Soviet position occurred above all in connection with disarmament initiatives and cuts in military spending. Differences, which had not been so serious until 1988, began to grow in tandem with the internal changes taking place within those countries and the increasingly explicit articulation of their own national foreign policy goals. In the absence of a culture of open and constructive debate, the issue of the Pact's effectiveness became ever more apparent.

Unlike civilian structures, the military institutions of the alliance operated without major changes until 1989. New trends arrived with a delay and became noticeable only in 1988. One of the most important issues was the adoption of a statute of the Warsaw Pact for times of peace and war. However, the attempts made in this regard essentially dissolved into discussions and constant changes and comments made by individual alliance states. In the military sphere, the re-evaluation of military policy, the shift in the Pact's doctrine from offensive to defensive, and a new approach to disarmament talks proved to be key developments.

The specific metamorphosis of the military doctrine in 1987 did not, in the author's view, appear merely as a result of Gorbachev's reformist policy, but rather stemmed primarily from the deep defensive position in which the alliance had found itself since the early 1980s, resulting from its increasingly evident and widening technological and economic lag behind the West. While for the marshals and generals it was a matter of making concessions, as small as possible, dictated by realities, for Gorbachev's milieu, ideologically communist as it was,

it was a departure from the dogma that war was to be the decisive historical confrontation ensuring the ultimate victory of socialism worldwide.

In 1988, Gorbachev came to the conclusion that he could not end the "Cold War" without making serious concessions that would allay Western suspicions and improve the image of the USSR in the world. The decisive factor was economic: it had been no longer feasible to sustain the existing pace of armament. In 1988, problems with the implementation of the "military five-year plan" in the Warsaw Pact countries became fully apparent. Although top-level delegations from individual countries agreed with the recommendations of the Warsaw Pact High Command, they were increasingly unable to implement them – and indeed implemented such recommendations to a lesser and lesser extent. The rift that emerged between Gorbachev's milieu and the dogmatically minded Soviet generals led political authorities to take a closer look at the functioning of the Pact's military structures and to introduce personnel changes at the highest positions. The First Deputy Minister of Defence of the USSR and Supreme Commander of the Unified Armed Forces of the States Parties to the Warsaw Pact (UAF), Marshal Viktor Kulikov (born 1921 – died 2013), as well as the Chief of Staff of the UAF, Army General Anatoly Gribkov (born 1919 – died 2008), were dismissed. The military began to take greater account of both political and economic realities.

Economic difficulties also led to even greater interest in disarmament talks than before. The Warsaw Pact countries, keen to slow the deadly pace of armament that was crippling their inefficient economies, were inclined to make greater concessions in terms of military reduction, and even to undertake unilateral action. According to Bílý, the proposals put forward by the Warsaw Pact were more constructive, and the flexibility, forced by the economic situation, was greater than that shown by the NATO countries.

The international situation, coupled with the evolution of the internal situation within the individual member states of the alliance, meant that not only Romania, but over time also the reform-minded Hungary and Poland, began from 1988 onwards to pursue their own goals within the Warsaw Pact to an ever greater degree. By the late 1980s, their course clearly began to move beyond the limits set by Gorbachev. Fear of radical reforms brought Romania closer to the Soviet Union. In 1989, the conservative regimes of Czechoslovakia and East Germany watched developments among their neighbours with concern. The gradual fragmentation of the alliance meant that any

military action to protect communist rule had become both unfeasible and unimaginable.

According to Bílý's assessment, by 1990 Gorbachev had failed to strengthen the Warsaw Pact internally, had found no new cohesive substance to bind the alliance together, and had failed to secure new legitimacy for the organisation. The Soviet leadership was guided by the idea of transforming the alliance along NATO lines. This was not only to adapt the reformed organisation to new needs but also to ensure its existence until such time as the Warsaw Pact and NATO would merge into a new, pan-European security system. The continued existence of the Pact was to result, among other things, from economic factors and geopolitical realities – the functioning of the alliance was expected to provide a sense of stability to its member states during turbulent times. However, the new, non-communist authorities in the Warsaw Pact member states were either indifferent or even suspicious of Soviet intentions, treating the USSR as a threat to their national interests. Only Bulgaria welcomed the Soviet proposals, while Czechoslovakia took an entirely negative stance, fearing, for example, internal chaos within the USSR. After 1968, there were growing concerns that the Warsaw Pact could be used again as an instrument of interference in internal affairs. The Soviet leadership, increasingly preoccupied with its own internal crisis, began in 1990 and 1991 to treat its former sphere of influence as a lower priority. The unification of Germany also dealt a heavy blow to the Pact's preservation. The attitude of the alliance's representatives during the 1990 meetings, who were opposing Soviet initiatives, clearly indicated that even from the USSR's point of view, the Warsaw Pact had ceased to perform its political and military functions. It was no longer an effective mechanism for maintaining influence and dominance in the countries of Eastern Europe, and following the political transformations in the former socialist states and the fall of their previous political elites, participation in the Warsaw Pact no longer conferred legitimacy on the new leaderships. The radically changed security geography of Europe also nullified the alliance's previously stabilising function in the international arena.

Bílý's analysis of the factors leading to the destabilisation and collapse of the alliance, which were a function of the internal crises of the socialist bloc countries under the USSR's leadership, often required emphasising the importance of the economic aspect. The inefficiency of the political and economic system led to an internal crisis and, through the inability to keep pace in the arms race of

the "Second Cold War," affected the ability to achieve objectives on the international stage. This fact, repeatedly pointed out by the author, gives the impression of certain repetitions in the narrative. Likewise, the division of the description into the institutional sphere, and separately into actions in the international and military arenas, contributed to a situation in which Bílý returns in several places to certain threads – such as the specific position and (gradually softening) obstruction by Romania, or the emancipation of Hungary.

Focusing on the analysis of the Warsaw Pact as a political phenomenon, the author devotes considerable space to certain military aspects. It is here, as in his previous work, that most of the shortcomings and errors can be found. Despite his declaration that he would use native terminology – that is, Soviet or Warsaw Pact designations of weapon systems – he persistently refers to the medium-range missile known in the West as the SS-20 (including its modifications) as the RSD-10, even though this was a fictional designation adopted for the purposes of the Soviet-American arms control agreement. In fact, the system's codename was "Pioneer," and its actual internal designation was "complex 15P645 with missile 15Zh45" (and the modification: "Pioneer UTTH", complex 15P653 with missile 15Zh53). A similar situation applies to the "operational-tactical missile system" OTR-22, which actually bore the designation 9K76, codename "Temp-S" (p. 302). When discussing disarmament negotiations, he briefly mentions, without elaborating further, a very important factor raised by Warsaw Pact representatives, concerning not only the quantitative but also the qualitative characteristics of displayed armaments. Both sides – the East and the West – were aware of the varying capabilities of particular combat systems on the battlefield. The Soviet side, for example, assessed that the combat potential of the latest American and German tanks, the Abrams and Leopard 2, was two-and-a-half times greater than that of the T-55, the Warsaw Pact's standard tank. Similarly, the F-4E Phantom multirole aircraft had twice the combat value of, for instance, the MiG-21s, and nearly four times that of the MiG-21PFM. Similarly, focusing solely on the number of tactical units of ground forces deployed in Europe led to the wrong conclusion that the Warsaw Pact countries enjoyed a multiple advantage in this regard. The Warsaw Pact military was aware of this, assessing, for example, that a Polish armoured division was almost two-and-a-half times weaker than its West German counterpart (Puchała 2010, p. 118). On p. 322, Matěj Bílý incorrectly identifies the border of the European area (as defined in

disarmament agreements) as the Ural River (in fact, it is the Ural Mountains), and on p. 315 he assigns the withdrawn Soviet divisions to the Northern Group of Forces (units of the Soviet Army stationed in Poland), rather than to the Group of Soviet Forces in Germany. The reduction of Soviet troops in Central Europe announced in 1988 was to involve 50,000 soldiers and 5,000 tanks, not only in the GDR but also in Czechoslovakia and Hungary (p. 315). Incidentally, this was to be accompanied by a generational renewal of armoured equipment. On pp. 316–318, the author cites data disclosed in January 1989 by the Committee of Defence Ministers of the Warsaw Pact countries regarding the size of the Warsaw Pact and NATO armed forces. Unfortunately, he does not provide a breakdown by the armed forces of individual states, nor does he note that the information referred to the situation as of 1 July 1988, neither does he compare these figures with slightly differing numbers published in a communiqué in the press of socialist countries on 30 January 1989. It would have been interesting, for instance using Poland and Romania as examples, to show the actual methodology for calculating the main types of armament and troop numbers. Similarly, when analysing the execution of army development plans for 1981–1985 using the Czechoslovak People's Army as an example, the author calculates in great detail the surplus with which Czechoslovakia fulfilled those plans, without, however, providing information on the main objectives achieved during this period (p. 198).

Despite certain flaws and shortcomings, including the limited use of literature in less common (Russian) and more "exotic" languages (Romanian, Hungarian, Bulgarian), Bílý's work appears to be the first so extensive and comprehensive account of the history – primarily from the perspective of political activity – of the Warsaw Pact in the last six years of its existence. The author avoids excessively evaluative or stigmatising opinions. He is therefore far from presenting an unjustified – as can be seen from the line of his argumentation and conclusions – one-sided, let alone diabolical, picture of the Pact in its final period. He devotes considerable attention to Gorbachev's attempts to make the Warsaw Pact more closely resemble a NATO-style political and military alliance, with more genuinely partnership-based relations. A detailed analysis and skilful insight into the newspeak that still dominated at meetings of leaders and other bodies of socialist countries allow us to trace the fascinating differences of opinion among individual members of the alliance, which externally appeared monolithic, and their skilful handling of their own affairs and attempts to pursue

national or particular interests. Although access to sources of Soviet origin was limited to individual documents and does not always allow for a full reconstruction of the origins of certain Kremlin initiatives and actions, it is possible to trace their implementation and the reactions of other allies through access to records of meetings of the Pact's institutions and agencies, as well as internal documents of the party authorities and diplomatic records from Czechoslovakia, Germany, and Poland. Matěj Bílý's work should therefore be regarded as a pioneering, original, interesting, and valuable attempt at reconstructing the final fragment of the political and military history of the alliance of "people's democracies," which, at the moment it was transforming into an important forum for exchanging views and establishing a common political line for the Eastern Bloc, disintegrated and collapsed. At the same time, the Warsaw Pact, conceived largely as an instrument for maintaining Soviet influence and domination over its satellite states, upon the initiation of structural reforms, came into open conflict with its previous mission and purpose and moved inexorably towards annihilation, accelerated by the fundamental systemic transformations taking place in the countries of Central and Southern Europe.

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Petr Blažek a Jaroslav Pažout (eds.)

Dominový efekt

Opoziční hnutí v zemích střední Evropy a pád komunistických režimů v roce 1989

ÚSD

Ústav pro soudobé dějiny Akademie věd ČR, v.v.i.
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THE DISINTEGRATION OF THE COMMUNIST REGIMES IN CENTRAL-EUROPEAN AREA – BASIC OUTLINE. REVIEW:

DOMINOVÝ EFEKT: OPOZIČNÍ HNUTÍ V ZEMÍCH STŘEDNÍ EVROPY A PÁD KOMUNISTICKÝCH REŽIMŮ V ROCE 1989

eds. Petr Blažek and Jaroslav Pažout. Prague: Ústav pro soudobé dějiny AV ČR, 2013

Abstract
This review paper concerns the collection of studies prepared by Czech historians in cooperation with other researchers from the countries of the former Eastern Bloc. The particular articles concern the essential landmarks and development points of the transformation in selected countries (Czechoslovakia, Hungary, the German Democratic Republic, Poland and the Soviet Union) from the turn of the 1970s and 1980s of the twentieth century up to 1989, and the main personalities of the events. The book is supplemented with interesting text and illustration material.

Keywords: Czechoslovakia, German Democratic Republic, Poland, Hungary, Soviet Union, collapse of the East-European Communist regimes, KSČ, Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, SPD, Solidarity, *Charta 77*, Výbor na ochranu nespravedlivě stíhaných, VONS, Church, environmental movement

Czech historians Petr Blažek and Jaroslav Pažout along with other authors prepared the collection of studies entitled *Dominový efekt: opoziční hnutí v zemích střední Evropy a pád komunistických režimů v roce 1989 (The Domino Effect: the Opposition Movement in Central-European Countries and the Fall of Communist Regimes in 1989)*. After more than ten years this publication is still useful and has its value. For the uninformed or less proficient reader, who would like to study Central-European Communist regimes (including Soviet Union) in their closing phase of existence, this book provides the introductory and synthetical "tale" of this period. From this basis and introduction to the developmental trends of opposition movements in particular one, may proceed to the detailed descriptions of specific events, which in effect caused the collapse of the entire Eastern Bloc in 1989.

The publication is divided in four main parts – *Středoevropské souvislosti* (Central-European Contexts), *Opoziční hnutí a pád komunistického režimu v Československu* (Opposition Movement and the Fall of the Communist Regime in Czechoslovakia), *Panelové diskuze* (Panel Discussions), and *Dokumenty* (Documents). The book is supplemented with a number of contemporary photographs.

The book is an effect of the synergy between two grant projects led by both historians and of the 2009 Prague conference "Lidská práva, opoziční hnutí a pád komunistických režimů ve Střední Evropě" ("Human Rights, the Opposition Movement and the Fall of Communist Regimes in the Central Europe"). This occurrence also limited the scope and the concept of the book. It would be undoubtedly desirable if the book was not limited to the Central-European part of the (Soviet) Eastern Bloc, but also included the chapters on Bulgaria and Romania. Inclusion of the introductory synthetic study, which would compare the developments in all of those countries in terms of the essential common features, as well as differences and mutual inspirations between dissident movements in distinct countries of the Bloc would be also useful. In practically all of the chapters there are the references to the mutual contacts between specific dissident groups, which deserve more attention, possibly enclosed in a separate

study. Additionally, and to a significant extent, any view on the ties with the West and its multidimensional support for the development of democracy in the Eastern Bloc, not limited to the broadcasts of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, is largely absent.

Taking in consideration today's technical opportunities, it would be useful to attach a CD/DVD or print a QR-Code linking an online repository, to present broader and more representative choice of appendixes, especially photographs and documents with commentary. Such approach would also provide a space for oral history use, such as in the shape of audio or audiovisual recordings of panel discussions (if those were recorded), but also for the additional (structured or partially structured) recordings of interviews with eyewitnesses, for various reasons absent during panel discussions. It would be also an opportunity for the conference participants to supplement and adjust their statements. Today it is, unfortunately, apparently impossible to achieve, because many of those involved have died in the meantime, and in many cases did not leave memoirs or accounts. Perhaps such accounts cound be found in the oral history archives. In the Czech Republic this is in the first place the *Paměť národa* (*Memory of Nations*) project of the non-profit organisation Post Bellum. In Poland there are, for example, *Archiwum Historii Mówionej* (Oral History Archives) containing audio or audiovisual recordings of the witnesses of history accounts (among other things in the Warsaw Rising Musem, Karta Centre, Institute of National Remembrance, and so on), which are accessible online. The Institute of National Remembrance also runs its own YouTube channel, where some conference recordings are published. Other gaps could be possibly filled with memories of the next of kin, friends and close ones of the persons involved. One of the few recent possibilities of broadening our knowledge of this matter is providing access to the previously unordered archival records, as well as acquiring personal legacies and objects. A great challenge for the future is also the development of software enabling optical recognition of the handwriting and printed texts (OCR; some repositories and online libraries provide standard access to the scanned books with an OCR layer), and its combination with AI tools. In this way, naturally with the use of critical rules of historical research, hopefully in future there will be a better possibility to manage the exponentially increasing volume of information, and it would be easier to uncover the discreet connections hidden under its layer.

The author of the first chapter concerning the dissident movement in Soviet Union is Nikolay Ivanov, a former dissident activist in the

Soviet Union, who settled in Poland, and became professor of the chair of the recent history in the Faculty of History of the Opole University (Iwanow 2013). In the beginning he pointed out the great number of the opposition groups were formed on an ethnic basis, as the Soviet Union encompassed more than 150 nations. However, there were also groups united on the basis of faith, or their political and apolitical views. Due to the mass repressions applied by the KGB, it was never a mass movement like Solidarity in Poland. Nevertheless, in 1965 the Moscow Pushkin square rally in support of writers Andrey Sinavsky and Julius Daniel had shown that dozens of demonstrants and hundreds of followers found courage and determination to openly challenge the Soviet regime. The awareness of "not being alone" and support coming from Western broadcasters helped to break the fear barrier. The Western broadcasters were also regularily used to inform the Soviet society, as the official way was blocked, and *samizdat* (that is, independent publishing) could be distributed only among a limited number of people. In 1968–1982 (the last prepared issue of 1983 was not published) the *Khronika tekushchikh sobytiy* (Хроника текущих событий, Chronicle of the Current Events) was published, before the regime managed to stop it. Further impulses originated from protests against the occupation of Czechoslovakia in August of 1968, when the part of Soviet society hoping for changes in their own country observed the democratisation process of the Prague Spring in Czechoslovakia, as well as its crushing by Soviet tanks (the Operation "Dunaj"/"Danube" involved also Bulgarian, Hungarian, Polish, and East German troops). In 1978, after the Polish example of *Wolne Związki Zawodowe* (Free Trade Unions), the independent trade unions were founded – the *Svobodnoe mezhprofessional'noe ob'edinenie trudyashchikhsya* (*Свободное межпрофессиональное объединение трудящися*, Free Interprofessional Union of Employees, SMOT), which up until 1982 acted illegally. Not long after the eight-person strong SMOT leadership revealed their identities, harsh repressions came. Some were imprisoned, and the remainder was forcibly exiled. The KGB ruthlessly prosecuted and persistently opressed all identified opponents of Communist system. "People vanished without a trace for many years without due trial, healthy people became cripples in Soviet psychiatric institutions, and dissidents were held in strictly regimented camps" (p. 17). The ascent of Michail Gorbachev to the position of the general secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in 1985 brought a turn for the better. This unfortunately is not covered in the chapter by Ivanov, as it practically ends its argument on 1982, about the same time as the death of the

notorious "gensek" Leonid Ilich Brezhnev. Definitely a most interesting period is absent there, and certainly the chapter would be worthy of "drawing it up to" the moment of the fall of Soviet Union in 1991.

Tomáš Vilímek, historian of the Prague Institute of Contemporary History of the Academy of Sciences of Czech Republic (*Ústav pro soudobé dějiny Akademie věd* České *republiky*, ÚSD AV ČR), presented an overview of the opposition movement in East Germany since 1945, largely stepping out of the scope of the book as it concerns the 1980s up to the fall of the Communist regimes in 1989. Vilímek divided this long period into two timespans (Vilímek 2013). The first begins with the end of World War II in 1945, and ends with the raising of the Berlin Wall in 1961, which was to prevent the East Germans from "voting with their feet" and escaping to the West-Berlin or to the Federal German Republic. This period is characterised as one of fundamental enmity by the opposition, specifically the denial of the German Democratic Republic and the SED (*Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands*) as a legitimate state and its representative. After this period and up to 1989 came the attitute of so-called system immanency. In other words, after the closing of the borders part of society decided to find a *modus vivendi* with the existing Communist regime, and attempted to reform it. Still a substantial percentage of the citizens tried to emigrate – directly or through the Czechoslovak border to the Federal Republic of Germany. Unfortunately, those escapes through the Iron Curtain in many cases ended in failure, some with tragic consequences. Recently, since 2018, the Czech courts have awarded the claimants – former Eastern Germans – compensation for those grievances. The East German regime then tried to alternately "tighten and loosen the screw." In 1962 the recently introduced draft to the army encountered resistance from the pacifists, the Protestant church and other opponents of armed military service. In reaction, so-called building units were established in 1964, which however had a positive effect not only for the conscientious objectors, but also for the state's economy (Schickentanz 1997, *passim*). The building units (*Baueinheiten der NVA*) were a cheap, unpaid workforce (Eisenfeld 1996). Working together, but mostly having leisure together, had an unexpected and noteworthy effect. Gradually the movement of the building-soldiers emerged, based on the resistance against army and state, which continued after the conclusion of the eighteen-month long service. This movement already in 1967–1969 made close contacts on the regional level with the Protestant church, and started to participate in its young men's workshops. The churches became the places for meetings and exchange of views, as the Church

was the only one institution not bound with Communist ideology. The emergence of the phenomenon of *Offene Arbeit* (Open Work) followed. This enabled young people to meet in the church premises, where they had space for free expression, listen to music, but also to solve their problems for example, related to alcohol or drugs. The pacifist movement developed as well, and from the beginning of 1970s so did the alternative cultural scene. Liberalisation however started to be replaced, from 1976 on, by harsh *Staatssicherheit* (Stasi, state security police) repressions and introduction of the compulsory defense education in schools since 1978. This did not stop the further development of the independent peace movement, or formation of the environment care groups and their cooperation in 1980s. The contacts with the opposition in neighbouring states, specifically in Czechoslovakia and Poland, intensified. The evolution of the different platforms continued – *Konkret für den Frieden* in the first place, where the activists of peace, ecological, religious and human rights groups discussed the ways to forge a pluralist and democratic society in the GDR.

The Stasi still acted against those circles. In 1987 the attack on the *Umwelt-Bibliothek* (Environment Library) operated by the Protestant Zionskirche community in Berlin threatened the unofficial 1978 arrangement between regime and Protestant Church on *de facto* tolerance for its activity. The ground for the attack was the printing of *samizdat* journals *Umweltblätter* and *Grenzfall*, however the edition of the latter was postponed at the last moment – thus the Stasi action was in vain (Vaatz 1996). This occurrence, however, did not discourage them from making further arrests, this time among the people from the *Initiative Frieden und Menschenrechte* (Initiative for Peace and Human Rights) movement. The Stasi managed to hide from the arrested the fact that there were various actions organised in their support. Therefore the arrested activists were given the choice to go to Federal Republic of Germany for a "long-term study visit" or be sentenced to 12 years of imprisonment; and so opted for the former. Despite such temporary weakening of the opposition activities, the number of anti-regime groups soared, as did their impact (for general references about opposition in GDR see also Neubert and Fricke 1996).

In May 1989, for example, they gathered evidence of the government forging the election, and in September *Neue Forum* emerged. The attempt to criminalise it by the SED launched a chain reaction. Already on 9 November the Berlin Wall "fell," and on 7 December the talks

at the Round Table between the regime and the representatives of opposition movements began, which lasted until 12 March 1990. The way to democracy and the reunification of Germany was open.

At the time the book was edited, Łukasz Kamiński was the president of the Polish Institute of the National Remembrance, and now he is the director of the National Ossoliński Institute in Wrocław (*Ossolineum*). He started his chapter on the opposition movement in the Polish People's Republic at the 1945 as well, but unlike Tomáš Vilímek he limited himself to the necessary brief description of the developments up to the turn of 1960s and 1970s, to introduce the reader to the basic situation in the years preceding those being the focus of his text (Kamiński 2013). After the self-immolation of Ryszard Siwiec on 8 September 1968 in protest against the August occupation of Czechoslovakia by Warsaw pact armies (including the Polish Army), the December 1970 mass protests against Władysław Gomułka's regime on the Baltic coast were brutally crushed with 45 victims. Due to this experience paid with blood, further anti-regime protests of 1980 occurred not in form of demonstrations, but as occupation strikes. In the meantime the brutal repressions by *Służba Bezpieczeństwa* (SB, Security Service) continued, as well as those by other armed services. Nevertheless, when in the Autumn of 1975 the ruling *Polska Zjednoczona Partia Robotnicza* (PZPR, Polish United Workers' Party) announced its plan to change the country's constitution and include in it the everlasting friendship with Soviet Union, party's "leading role" in state affairs, and make the observance of citizens' rights conditional to the submission to the obligations toward state, meaning specifically loyalty, it encountered fundamental resistance from the opposition as well as from the Catholic Church – then the first two points were altered, and the third one was postponed. Then the Summer 1976 protests against radical groceries price rises, caused by an economic crisis, exacerbated the situation. The government revoked the increases almost immediately, however thousands of protesters all across the country were brutally beaten, dismissed from work, or sentenced to up to ten years of imprisonment. This caused the establishment on 23 September 1976 of the *Komitet Obrony Robotników* (KOR, Committee for Defence of the Workers), which tried to coordinate help for the prosecuted workers and issue samizdat publications. In the course of 1977 further organisations joined, *Ruch Obrony Praw Człowieka i Obywatela* (ROPCiO, Movement for the Defence of Human and Civil Rights), as well as *Studenckie Komitety Solidarności* (SKS, Student Committees of Solidarity). KOR itself

evolved into the *Komitet Samoobrony Społecznej „KOR"* (KSS "KOR", Committee for the Social Self-Defence). In the following years this trend continued despite the persecutions, and new groups "emerged like mushrooms after rain." The election of the Cardinal Karol Wojtyła as a new Pope John Paul II, and his visit to Poland in 1978, did not improve the government's position. The protests and strikes against the government and measures taken by local authorities continued.

On 17 September 1980, representatives of strike committees from the entire Poland agreed to establish *Niezależny Samorządny Związek Zawodowy „Solidarność"* (NSZZ "Solidarność", Independent Self-Governing Trade Union "Solidarity") with a HQ in Gdańsk. Its most important representative was Lech Wałęsa from the Gdańsk Shipyard. The situation worsened so much that at the end of the year the government for the first time considered the introduction of a state of emergency, and the situation was discussed in Moscow in the presence of the Warsaw Pact countries' representatives. Solidarity was not aware that this time the Soviet Union, unlike in 1956 Hungary and 1968 Czechoslovakia, had ruled out external intervention, and pressed for an internal solution. In 1981 the clashes between the government and opposition, but also talks on the various levels and establishment's unfulfilled promises, continued up to the night of 12 to 13 December 1981. At this point Wojciech Jaruzelski, who in the meantime concentrated power in his hands, announced the introduction of martial law in Poland (although against the law). The immediate measures taken encompassed the internment of almost ten thousand people, and claimed the lives of nine. The opposition went underground, but continued in further resistance. However, the regime managed to break this resistance at the price of a new wave of repressions, including those killed and arrested up to the end of 1982, when it abolished martial law, and continued to force the opposition into passivity. This, however, did not succeed – to the contrary, it led to emergence of groups more radical than Solidarity (however Solidarity retained the leading position). In October 1983 this state of affairs was underlined by the award of the Nobel Peace Prize to Lech Wałęsa. The Polish leadership did not succeeded in economic matters (the crisis deepened all along), and the new murders of activists in 1984 did not help to pacify the resistance. With the entrance of *perestroika* the regime tried to don a conciliatory mask, and attempted to win over the moderate part of the opposition, which succeeded only in a few cases. However, the regime achieved an improvement in the international politics, since in January 1987 US President Ronald Reagan lifted

economic sanctions imposed on Poland after introduction of martial law in December 1981. Besides that the secret and informal talks between party and government representatives and part of the opposition begun. The assumption that state functionaries had a better negotiation position, and then they would be successful in convincing the opposition to give concessions, proved incorrect. The open talks at the Round Table, starting in February 1989, only confirmed this. Apart from the number of democratisation measures agreed upon in the Round Table sub-committees, both sides agreed to the provision of 35% of the parliamentary seats for Solidarity in the ensuing elections. In the elections of 4 July 1989, the government candidates suffered a crushing defeat, as the voters crossed them out en masse, and unanimously preferred the opposition. The newly appointed prime minister Czesław Kiszczak did not obtain Solidarity support for forming his government, and the task of forming government was entrusted to Catholic dissident Tadeusz Mazowiecki. His government was appointed by parliament on 12 September 1989, and definitely led Poland to democracy.

Eva Irmanová, historian and Hungarian studies researcher at the Institute of History of the Czech Academy of Sciences in Prague, penned a chapter on the opposition movement in Hungary, starting her argument at the turn of 1970s and 1980s (thus adhering to the "official" timespan of the volume) (see Irmanová 2013). The starting point of Irmanová's chapter is the emergence of the *Szabad Demokraták Szövetsége* (Union of Free Democrats) in 1979, and it focuses on Szabad's ties and inspirations with dissident movements in Czechoslovakia and Poland. It concerned mainly editing various *samizdat* journals and books, but also a transition from ignoring the regime to negotiating with it, aimed at gaining the right to exist. This was achieved already in 1987–1989. The sensitive point for both sides were the events in 1956, and the bloody suppression of the Hungarian Uprising against Soviet domination, which was the foundation of building "goulash socialism" by the Hungarian Communist leader of the MSMP (*Magyar Szocialista Munkáspárt*, Hungarian Socialist Labour Party) János Kádár. In September 1987 the *Magyar Demokratikus Fórum* (MDF, Hungarian Democratic Forum) emerged, which aimed to outlive the regime. The Forum focused on current aspects of the developing social and economic crisis, aimed to unite all dissatisfied with this situation, focussing on rural society, Christian tradition, and Hungarian patriotism. Only six months later, in March 1987 the *Fiatal Demokraták Szövetsége* (Fidész, Union of the Young Democrats) was

founded. Its idea was to unite the more radical groups of youth and express their positions. Those positions encompassed the establishment of an economic system based on the usual forms of private, co-operative, and state property, however without state control, along with patriotism and solidarity between Central and Eastern European nations, including the demilitarisation and uniting of Europe. National consciousness and care for the Hungarian minorities in neighbouring countries (Czechoslovakia, Romania), as well as environmental issues (primarily construction of the Czechoslovak-Hungarian waterworks Gabčíkovo-Nagymaros on the Danube river, which was discontinued by Hungarian government in 1989 on its riverbank, and later in the 1990s finished by the Slovak republic on its side). In addition, the establishment of a pluralist political system of multiple political parties became essential points of the programs of other political parties and citizen movements as well. Alongside that, independent trade unions emerged, competing with the official and monopolist ones. In June 1987 the Social Agreement was published, where, besides the aforementioned points formulated by János Kis, the main personality of Szabad, there was an unambigous demand for János Kádár to resign his post. At the same time the Agreement intended to take advantage of the *perestroika*-induced favourable situation in the Soviet Union, and refrain from leaving its power bloc, which gained it favour also among the reformist Communists. When in May 1988 Kádár in fact resigned due to health issues (he died in 1989), the course of events was set in motion. In the Autumn of 1988, the Hungarian parliament started discussing and on 11 January 1989 it enacted a law on associations and unions. As a result of this, tens of new political parties were established. This possibility of legalisation was of course used by the then main opposition parties MDF, SDS, and Fidész. In January 1989 Imre Nagy was exonerated along with other persons executed by the Soviets in 1958 for their participation in the Hungarian Revolution two years earlier. At the same time a dialogue started between the MSDS and opposition representatives, which, despite initial disagreements, resulted in the so-called Round Opposition Table on 13 June 1989. After three months of talks, on 18 September 1989 the agreement was formed, which besides changing numerous laws opened the way to the free elections in Spring 1990. Only a month later the state changed its name to the Hungarian Republic (omitting the word "People's"), and a preamble was added to the text of the constitution, declaring Hungary as a democratic independent state accepting the values of citizens' democracy and democratic socialism.

The chapter on the opposition in Czech lands at the end of the so-called normalisation period was penned by another historian from the Institute of Contemporary History of the Academy of Sciences of Czech Republic, Milan Otáhal (died 2017) (see Otáhal 2013). The chapter begins with an essential turning point of the recent Czechoslovak history – the 1968 Prague Spring and the subsequent August 1968 occupation of Czechoslovakia by Warsaw Pact armies followed by the 'normalisation' [namely the period of totalitarian reaction under the rule of Gustáv Husák – editor's remark]. Conservative (left-wing) and the pragmatic part of the political echelon (or *nomenklatura*) of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (KSČ) understood 'normalisation' as the nullification of the Prague Spring achievements. The resistance of broad parts of society was consecutively crushed by a series of administrative, but also violent means. Among the latter, deployment of all armed services to the liquidation of demonstrations on the first anniversary of Czechoslovakia's occupation in August 1969 should be particularly noted. As a result of this at least six people died. Dozens more were wounded, and approximately 2,500 people were arrested. The attacks were also directed at opposition activists among the reformist Communists, who were at the latest in 1970, through so-called checks (*prověrky*), expelled from the KSČ, deprived of their social status, and finally, along with their nearest ones, subjected to continuous persecution. Beside this, Otáhal noted other left-wing opposition trends – expelled members of the Czechoslovak Socialist Party in Brno, and radical students of Philosophy Faculty at the Charles University in Prague. According to him, after the consolidation of the power of the pro-Soviet part of KSČ in the 1971 elections, political trials in 1971 hit those three opposition streams with long-term prison sentences. However, Otáhal did not remark on the 14th KSČ congress in May 1971 preceding the 1971 elections, which was one of the 'normalisation' stages, and was linked with unfulfilled hopes for withdrawal of the Soviet Army from Czechoslovakia. The "long-term prison sentences" should be also placed in context, as the sentences of five years imprisonment cannot be compared to the death sentences and life imprisonment sentences from 1950s. The then political prisoners would probably have commented that five years could have been easily served standing up.

The importance of all those groups declined in the course of the following years, and even the 1975 Helsinki CSCE Conference (specifically the third basket of the Conference Final Act, concerning human rights) did not help. Former Communists tried in vain to start

the dialogue with government, towards the observance of citizens' and human rights. In the end, they were unable to connect with other opposition movements. For the latter the common platform became *Charta 77,* founded in 1977, devised by playwright and future Czechoslovak and Czech president Václav Havel. *Charta 77* was represented by three speakers: one of them represented reformist Communists, second the independent cultural circles, and the third – the religious democratic stream. *Charta 77* was consistently warning the ruling establishment about the necessity of observance of the international agreements made in Helsinki, then implemented in the Czechoslovak legal system in 1976. Initially the group pursued an apolitical dialogue, however, its demands were of political character. *The Státní bezpečnost* (StB, State Security) tried to destroy the group from the very beginning, which resulted in the death of the philosopher Jana Patočka, who died after a gruelling interrogation on 13 March 1977. The StB tried to publicly discredit *Charta 77* (through so-called *Anticharta* – a statement publicly signed by employees of cultural instutitions), and when this did not succeed, it surrounded *Charta 77* with silence, to make it forgotten. However, other groups emerged, such as the *Výbor na ochranu nespravedlivě stíhaných* (VONS, Committee for the Defense of the Unjustly Prosecuted) in 1978. Despite the international renown, which to a certain extent protected the leaders of *Charta 77*, up to 1989 it did not gain any mass support among citizens, or other opposition movements, which accused it primarily of collaboration with former Communists. In the meantime the StB continued with its disintegration efforts. Regarding the efforts to sentence the *Charta 77* and other opposition movements' members for criminal offences, Otáhal did not mention the *ASANACE* action. Through psychological and physical pressure applied to selected Chata 77 members, independent circles representatives, and other activists, the StB succeeded in forcing about three hundred of them to 'agree' to emigrate to the West. The situation changed for the better with the beginning of *perestroika* in the Soviet Union. However, even then such groups as *Demokratická iniciativa* (Democratic initiative), or *Hnutí za občanskou svobodu* (Movement for Civic Freedom) or *Klub za socialistickou přestavbu – Obroda* (Club for Socialist Reconstruction – Revival) did not gain significant recognition and impact in society. This applied also to the independent youth, which established in 1988 a group *Společnost za veselejší současnost* (The Society for a More Cheerful Present), inspired by the Polish *Pomarańczowa Alternatywa* (Orange Alternative), and also the

České děti (Czech Children) group, which were active in organising demonstrations. Some temporary accomplishments in dialogue with the authorities aimed at changes were achieved by the *Nezávislé mírové sdružení – iniciativa za demilitarizaci společnosti* (Independent Peace Association – Initiative for Demilitarisation of Society). The organisation of demonstrations was seen by the KSČ leadership in 1988–1989 as most threatening. After the clashes in Prague on 21 August 1988 [that was on the 20th anniversary of Warsaw Pact invasion – editor's note], and on 28 October 1988 [that was on the Czechoslovak national day, 70th anniversary of the fall of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and the formation of Czechoslovakia – editor's note], the Communist leadership unexpectedly allowed a demonstration on 10 December (the Day of Human Rights) in Prague at Škroupovo náměstí square. The result, however, did not meet their expectations, and therefore further bans and repressive measures followed. The demonstrations during so-called Palach Week from 15 to 21 January 1989, intended to commemorate the 20th anniversary of self-immolation of Jan Palach and Jan Zajíc in protest at "normalisation" and the presence of Soviet troops in Czechoslovakia, were met with such violent measures. For participation in this action Václav Havel was sentenced to nine months imprisonment, however under domestic and foreign opinion pressure he was released after serving less than four months. Then, the opposition started to differ in opinions: to continue the pressure on the Communist regime, or start communication with it? Practically, the pressure applied, as in the form of demonstrations of 21 August and 28 October 1989, and of the petition *Několik vět* ("Several years," which came from Václav Havel's circle, demanding the release of political prisoners and allowing independent initiatives, signed by 40 thousand people), but also the so-called *Navrátilova petice* for religious freedom ("Navrátil's petition," signed by six hundred thousand people; Augustin Navrátil was a Catholic activist, unlawfully sectioned and detained in a psychiatric hospital for his resistance activities), led the regime to the edge of a crisis. The last straw for the Czechoslovak citizens' patience towards the KSČ was a brutal assault of the security services launched against a peaceful demonstration on the International Day of Students on 17 November 1989.

Independent activities in Slovakia in 1987–1989 were described by Norbert Kmeť of the Institute of Political Science of the Slovak Academy of Sciences in Bratislava (Kmeť 2013). Opposition activists in Slovakia were aware that in neighbouring countries – Poland, Soviet Union and Hungary – the regimes are disintegrating, and in cooperation

with the opposition in Czech lands they also tried to strenghten the position of citizens in Czechoslovakia. In this mindset the *Charta 77* open letter of March 1987 was also penned, criticising the KSČ for the fact that, when in Poland and Soviet Union political prisoners were released, in Czechoslovakia they still were thrown behind bars. Another initiative in that year originated from the deterioration of the Hungarian-Slovak relationship. *Charta 77*, *Výbor na ochranu práv maďarské menšiny* (Committee for the Defense of the Rights of Hungarian Minority) and other representatives of the Hungarian and Slovak opposition spoke out about the anti-Hungarian StB action, and about other serious incidents harming a common coexistence. Miklós Duray (a Hungarian human rights activist and member of *Charta 77* living in Slovakia) also criticised nationality politics in Czechoslovakia and the construction of the Danube waterwork Gabčíkovo-Nagymaros. The StB acted also against Catholic dissenters, who opposed the state's supervision of churches. They had no so-called "state approval" for performing church rites and celebrations, and because of this the courts sentenced them to suspended or unconditional prison terms. Additionally the StB, for example, intentionally seized the technical documentation of buses, which were to transport the faithful to various religious events in Slovakia and abroad (such as for John Paul's II papal pilgrimage in Poland in June 1987). Despite this, some of those events were attended by up to 150 thousand people. Other churches in Slovakia also suffered persecution, as did the secret churches, peace and environmental activists. Despite all of the so-called destructive measures applied by the StB, party and state functionaries, as well as campaigns in the mass media, *inter alia* in the beginning of 1988, resistance in Slovakia continuously grew. This was proven on 25 March 1988, when in Bratislava a peaceful (although not permitted) demonstration of the faithful took place, known as *Svíčková manifestace* (Candlelight demonstration). The security forces assaulted several thousand demonstrants without hesitation with water cannons, batons, physical abuse, dogs, and also ramming people with vehicles. Later in the Autumn the trials followed, when the arrested were accused of incitement, rioting, and public order disturbances.

The opposition in Slovakia truly did not intend to be silenced, and in 1989 it continued in solidarity actions in support of the Czech opposition, as well as in printing *samizdat* and organising church pilgrimages, assemblies, and demonstrations. For commemoration of the August 1968 victims, five opposition activists, with Ján Čarnogurský in the forefront (as a lawyer he defended dissidents

and for it he was expelled from the bar), were sentenced to prison for incitement. The execution of their sentences was thwarted by the Silk Revolution of November 1989.

Petr Blažek, a historian employed at the Institute for the Study of Totalitarian Regimes (*Ústav pro studium totalitních režimů*, ÚSTR), and from end of 2023 head of the Remembrance of the 20th Century Museum in Prague (*Muzeum paměti 20. století*), prepared the chapter *Vedení KSČ a protirežimní opozice v druhé polovině osmdesátých let* (the KSČ leadership and anti-regime opposition in the second half of the 1980s) (see Blažek 2013). Blažek also begun his argument with start of 'normalisation' at the turn of 1960s and 1970s, and the document called *Poučení z krizového vývoje* (Lessons learned from crisis development), which was the KSČ official account of the Prague Spring. Blažek described the 1980s in the KSČ leadership as a period of personal crisis in the party gerontocracy, mostly visible in the Soviet Union due to the quick succession of the deaths of three general secretaries of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in 1982–1985. Such a course of events did not occur in Czechoslovakia, and all of the KSČ leaders lived to the party's bitter end. They were divided into three factions. The pragmatic trend was embodied by the prime minister Lubomír Štrougal, the conservative by Gustáv Husák, the state president and general secretary of the Central Committee of KSČ, and the third was connected with Vasil Biľak and Miloš Jakeš, neo-conservative members of the presidium of the Central Committee. The visit of Michail Gorbachev, general secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, in the Spring 1987 proved that changes must be applied to unblock *perestroika*. Thus in November 1987, Husák was forced from the position of the party's general secretary, and replaced by Jakeš. The dismissal of Biľak was also expected, however he managed to stay in his position up until December 1988, and in the meantime in September the main supporter of changes, Štrougal, resigned. The reforms were not launched, and the other protagonists appeared to be incompetent also in other fields.

Many problems (such as opposition activity) were only repeatedly discussed, however no effective solution for the improvement of the situation was decided. Step by step, the KSČ leadership was losing contact with reality, despite receiving current reports on the developments in society, and the StB did not come out from the shadow of its coercive methods and intimidation. The leaked record of Miloš Jakeš's speech held at Červený Hrádeček by Plzeň in July

1989 revealed that he was like the emperor from Andersen's tale: Jakeš admitted then that the KSČ leadership had lost popular support, and acted on its own. The only exception was the new prime minister Josef Adamec, who replaced Štrougal, however he decided to start the unofficial dialogue with the opposition in the Autumn of 1989. This was, however, too late.

When the book was printed, Jaroslav Pažout was a lecturer at the Technical University in Liberec – now he is an employee of the Institute for the Study of Totalitarian Regimes (ÚSTR). In his chapter Pažout dealt with the prosecutions for anti-regime activity in Czechoslovakia in the 1980s (Pažout 2013). In the introduction he briefly describes the problems of the Czechoslovak economy, and the visible scientific and technological fallback behind the West. However, for the common citizens the lack of, for example, some hygiene products or the increasing prices of basic food was far more important. Pažout's subject matter overlaps with the chapters by Milan Otáhal and Norbert Kmeť, the demonstrations and petition actions in 1988 are again described in detail, not to mention the voluminous references. The regime's punitive actions against the participants and organisers of the demonstrations and petitions had grown in 1989 to such an extent that the VONS members were virtually unable to follow all the trials. Pažout also analyses the entire range of punishable acts and penalties administered, including differing practices in their enforcement, with specific examples. The majority of those cases ended with fines, or rather lenient suspended sentences of several months' imprisonment, and some even with acquittal due to a lack of evidence. The politically motivated cases which ended with non-suspended prison sentences were an exception. Some of those "offenses" were punished extrajudicially by committees for the protection of public order at the national councils (that is, units of local government). This practice was ended only by the Silk Revolution and the amnesty act issued by the state president Husák on 8 December 1989. The case of Pavel Wonka, who died on 26 April 1988 in Hradec Králové due to medical negligence and the result of hunger strike is absent in the composed list of judicial sanctions against the opposition (only marginally mentioned by Norbert Kmeť). Although the matter concerns a controversial personality (an StB collaborator), it should not be excluded from the contemporary context.

The last chapter *Od Charty 77 k Občanskému fóru. Pokus o proměnu morální opozice v politickou pozici* (From Charta 77 to Civic Forum. The attempt at transformation of the moral opposition into a political

position) was penned by Jiří Suk, a historian at the Institute of Contemporary History of the Czech Academy of Sciences (Suk 2013). In this more philosophically than historically oriented text, the ideological starting points of *Charta 77* in neo-politics are outlined by Suk again, as in Otáhal. The author indicates the common points with new social movements in the West and the impact abroad of Havel's political essay „Moc bezmocných" (1978, English edition: *The Power of the Powerless. Citizens Against the State in Central-Eastern Europe*; Havel 1985). Suk described the Forum's development of thought and organisation after its establishment on 19 November 1989, primarily under Havel's guidance, including its transformation into a political party and its split in 1990–1991 into *Občanská demokratická strana* (ODS, Civic Democratic Party) of the future prime minister of the Czech Republic Václav Klaus, and *Občanské hnutí* (Civic Movement) under the guidance of the then foreign minister and deputy prime minister Jiří Dienstbier. ODS won the 1992 elections, and the defeated *Občanské hnutí*, which did not gain any seats in the parliament, disappeared soon after. According to Suk, the link between anti-regime dissent and the cultural underground was forgotten up until the second half of the 1990s, when in turn Václav Klaus suffered defeat.

Beside the points concerning the aforementioned text and photo appendixes and comments attached to them, in conclusion I would add one technical remark. It is undoubtedly commendable that the document attached to the chapters, *Vyhodnocení plnění plánu práce II. správy SNB za rok 1988* (Evaluation of the execution of the work plan for 1988 of the 2nd Directorate of the National Security Corps) (Blažek 2013, p. 2) is annotated with notes disclosing the cryptonyms of the case files concerning the dissidents named there. However, for the next time, I would suggest adjusting the practice to identify all of the cryptonyms or pseudonyms (and persons of interest hiding behind them) for all mentioned case-files, to offer a better insight into the activity of the SNB 2nd Directorate (counterintelligence) to the uninitiated reader.

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1989
Rok zmeny

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1989 ROK ZMENY. ZBORNÍK Z MEDZINÁRODNEJ VEDECKEJ KONFERENCIE, BRATISLAVA 4.–5. NOVEMBRA 2014.

1989 – YEAR OF CHANGE. ANTHOLOGY OF THE INTERNATIONAL SCIENTIFIC CONFERENCE, BRATISLAVA 4–5 NOVEMBER 2014,

ed. Jašek, Peter.
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Abstract
The purpose of this review is, first and foremost, to introduce and briefly describe a collection of papers devoted to the political changes of 1989 in Slovakia and Europe. It also offers an opportunity to provide an overview of historical and social research conducted over the past decade on the changes of 1989, their context, and their consequences in Slovakia. Although numerous works have been published, most concentrate on how witnesses recall and interpret the events. Certain areas remain neglected, such as the situation within the Communist power structures or the State Security apparatus in Slovakia. To some extent, this is also true of the volume under review. It should be noted that the Slovak

public also reads works on 1989 published in the Czech Republic. This is due not only to linguistic proximity, but also to similar developments in the two societies, which were at the time part of a single state. In addition to the state of historical research, another key question – raised not only in the present proceedings, but also in many other publications on 1989 – is whether, and in what ways, there have been changes in the manner in which Slovak society relates to this historical event, which so profoundly transformed the country and enabled it to achieve independence. It seems that the perception of 1989 in Slovakia is becoming increasingly critical.

Keywords: Velvet Revolution, November 1989, communist party, students, dissidents, State Security, StB, ŠtB

The proceedings were published three years after the conference, which will mark its eleventh anniversary this year. Has anything changed in the way people in Slovakia assess November 1989? How has the historical study of the revolutionary change progressed since 2010?

The year 1989 unquestionably marked an extraordinary historical event in modern Slovak history. It also created the conditions for the establishment of the modern independent Slovak Republic on 1 January 1993. In Slovakia, 17 November was declared a national holiday, the "Fight for Freedom and Democracy Day." However, this only happened in 2001.

In his introduction to the volume, editor Peter Jašek points out that only a short period has elapsed since the events under examination (Jašek 2017). Nevertheless, a number of documents, collective monographs, and collections of memoirs have already been published in Slovakia. Jašek admits that, even in comparison with neighbouring countries, Slovak historiography still has much ground to cover. He observes that historiographical works dedicated to the 1989 political change published in the Czech Republic also represent an important source for Slovak historiography.

Important anniversaries have often spurred a surge in publishing activity. After the proceedings under review were published in 2017, there was a notable increase in publications for the thirtieth anniversary of the Velvet Revolution. These books examined the protagonists and the changes in society after the 1989 revolution (Hríb and Mojžíš 2019; Kňažko 2019; *1989. Cesta k slobode* 2019; Kotian and Štulajter 2019). The female perspective on 1989 was

particularly noteworthy (Maďarová 2019). Some works appeared in new and updated editions in 2019 (Huďo 2019; Ondruš 2019). The Slovak Nation's Memory Institute issued a monograph in Slovak and English, accompanied by photographs and documents (Jašek et al. 2019). In 2022, a book of interviews with protagonists was published, supplemented by contributions from historians and journalists on the 1989 student movement (*Hasta la vista* 2022). Although a number of books and papers on the topic have been published in Slovakia since the 2014 conference, most have focused on the reflections of witnesses on 1989 and the subsequent decades (Hríb and Mojžíš 2019; Kňažko 2019; *1989. Cesta k slobode* 2019; Kotian and Štulajter 2019). This is why "1989 – Year of Change" remains relevant, as it presents the results of historical research.

The proceedings include 21 of the 24 papers presented at the 2014 international conference. The conference was co-organised by the Slovak Nation's Memory Institute, the Czech Institute for the Study of Totalitarian Regimes, the Polish Institute of National Remembrance, and the Historical Archives of the Hungarian State Security. The volume features texts in Slovak, Czech and English, depending on the language of the original conference presentation, with each text accompanied by a summary in another language. The common theme across all contributions is, of course, the change of 1989. Some also describe developments prior to that year, but most focus on the impact of November 1989 on Slovakia in the years and decades that followed. In addition to Slovakia, the authors consider the situation in neighbouring countries, though always separately.

The first conference session was dedicated to the international context. The study titled *»Novoje myšlenie« ako faktor revolučných zmien v stredovýchodnej Európe* ["*Novoye myshlenie*" as a Factor in the Revolutionary Changes in Central and Eastern Europe] was written by Beáta Katrebová Blehová (Katrebová Blehová 2017). A substantial body of literature is available on the topic of Soviet politics in the second half of the 1980s, as well as online sources. The author focuses on Gorbachev's policy towards the Soviet satellite states, which soon became markedly cautious, even passive, compared to the previous period. The reason why will probably remain the subject of constant speculation. Soviet policy and East–West relations (USA–USSR) in the late 1980s can be viewed from multiple perspectives, and different aspects can be emphasised. What makes this contribution particularly valuable is the author's effort to present not only the viewpoints of the winners, but also the ideas of those who were later defeated. Such

a perspective is largely absent from the other papers in the volume, as well as from other works published in Slovakia. We can hardly accept the claim that the USA disregarded the USSR in 1990. The escalating crisis in the East raised concerns that were exacerbated by the 1991 August coup in Moscow. Certainly, no one wished for rapid destabilisation. The Warsaw Pact continued to exist and remained a significant factor. Such a rapid dissolution of the Pact was not envisaged in 1990. Although the change in Soviet policy undoubtedly enabled and accelerated social changes in the former satellite countries, it is difficult to say whether this was due to naivety or ineptitude. The ultimate consequences, however, were certainly far from what Gorbachev intended. On page 25, the author mistakes the plan for the partial withdrawal of Soviet troops in Europe (by 10%) in 1989–1990 for the total withdrawal of troops from the territory of Czechoslovakia, thereby concluding that the total withdrawal was agreed upon before the outbreak of the 1989 revolutions and was therefore not one of their achievements.

In *Rok 1989 – história alebo súčasnosť?* [The Year 1989 – History or Present?], Juraj Marušiak offers a remarkable analysis of the developments in Slovakia in 1989 and the subsequent transformation of Slovak society (Marušiak 2017). He does not mention the weakening pressure from Moscow, a circumstance distinctly different from any other time during the Cold War. The USSR focused primarily on its own mounting internal problems, little alleviated by Gorbachev's unpredictable policies: the declaration of prohibition, the unilateral reduction of Soviet troops in Europe, and indications to the satellites that they should solve their own problems. The export of 'restructuring' to satellite countries did not meet with any real response among the populations, completely sceptical and apathetic after many reform attempts. However, most researchers do not take into account the inertia of ever-increasing arms spending and oversized armed forces, which placed an excessive burden on the economy, not only in Czechoslovakia. Attempts at reversing the trend were not successful. In Czechoslovakia, November 1989 revealed the emptiness of society and exposed as false the illusion of an advanced socialist society presented by the monopolised media, even when it came to the government and political elites. Practically everyone left their red banners behind without even trying to defend them. Interestingly, the author observes that the changes in Europe were not driven by a clearly articulated alternative political programme, but by a desire for remedy, firstly through "third way" models, or by returning to an undistorted form of socialism or to the pre-communist period. The author notes

that the post-November changes had only a limited impact on Slovak society, which remained in the shadows for a long time – in Czechoslovakia, but also in the European context. This, however, is just a brief introduction to the study of where Slovakia stands thirty years after the revolution and, ultimately, what we still do not know about the November 1989 change. According to Marušiak, Slovak society has yet to fully detach from the pre-November era, because, notwithstanding the political backdrop, it experienced substantial modernisation under communist rule. After 1989 disappointment, rather than satisfaction, seems to be the prevailing sentiment. The author points out that in Slovakia voices critical of the 1989 change play an important role. November is an important reference point but, for Slovakia, breakthrough events came later. November was only an important beginning.

The following two papers explore events in neighbouring countries. In *The Diplomacy of Change: the International Dimension of the Polish Political Transformation in 1989* Patryk Pleskot examines the development of the famous Polish round table talks, the subsequent election campaign, and the 1989 government crisis, drawing primarily on Western diplomatic documents (Pleskot 2017). While extending political support, the West clearly expressed concerns about unforeseeable developments and the possible escalation of problems. The USSR's actions, too, could not be predicted with certainty.

The situation in Hungary is described by Szilvia Köbel in her paper *Establishing the Rule of Law is a Process. 1989 – The Changing of the Political System in Hungary, Focusing on Freedom of Expression and the Activities of the Political Police* (Köbel 2017). By the late 1980s, it had become evident that the economic crisis could not be resolved without political liberalisation. Köbel thus convincingly explains the inevitability of political change in Hungary. She gives ample space to summarizing, through several excursions into the years 1986, 1987–1988 and 1989, how the political police's stance towards the opposition evolved in response to changes in the policy of the Hungarian United Workers' Party (*Magyar Szocialista Munkáspárt*, MSZMP).

The second conference session is aptly titled "The Fall of the Communist Regime in Slovakia." In his paper, *Bratislavskí vysokoškoláci a pochod mestom 16. novembra 1989* (Bratislava's University Students and Their March Through the City on 16 November 1989), Juraj Kucharík describes an event that, to a certain extent, has been overshadowed in the broader context of the revolutionary developments in Czechoslovakia. (Kucharík 2017).

Historiography records it without further analysing it, likely under the influence of the events that followed. A planned demonstration to mark the 17 November was held a day earlier due to the practical concern that fewer students would participate on a Friday, as they usually left for the weekend. The author provides an overview of how this demonstration is represented in the literature and describes the context of the students' critical movement in Bratislava in 1989. The students were critical of the Socialist Youth Union – the only legal youth organisation – and were concerned about anticipated changes to the Higher Education Act. On the eve of International Students' Day, Bratislava students independently expressed the same view on the matter as their counterparts in Prague. This unity attests to the then prevailing atmosphere in society. State Security knew about the event, monitored it, and penalised the participants. Nonetheless, about 250 students marched through the city centre and even spoke with politicians outside the building of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports. The protest march offered them an opportunity for expression and, in the following days, it became an integral part of the revolutionary events. The paper is supplemented by interviews with several participants and by additional documents.

Timea Verešová's paper *»Začíname sa učiť demokracii«…* (We Are Beginning to Learn Democracy), examines the revolutionary events in Košice, eastern Slovakia, using archival documents and examples of contemporary press coverage (Verešová 2017). Verešová traces the emergence of an opposition movement led, again, by students, albeit with some delay, and by civic opposition groups. On 21 November 1989, the students insisted on opening some form of dialogue. They responded primarily to events in Prague, and to the demands of the Prague strikers and the Civic Forum. The Košice leaders of the Communist Party of Slovakia were at a loss. They were completely unaware that they were facing a turning point that was ending a stage in the country's development that had lasted over forty years. Their reaction to the situation was belated, inadequate, and ultimately failed to resolve the matter. Within a few days in late November, a real transformation of the public space took place in Košice. Incidentally, this is the only paper in the volume to examine, albeit partially and at a regional level, the communist regime's reaction to the unfolding changes.

Patrik Dubovský contributes the biographical study *Hlavné aktivity Jána Langoša – od samizdatov po lustračný zákon* (Ján Langoš's Key Activities – From Samizdat to the Vetting Act) (Dubovský 2017). It offers a concise biography of Ján Langoš (1946–2006), one of the

best-known and most prominent figures of Slovak dissent, who later played an important role during Czechoslovakia's political transformation. As a member of the Czechoslovak Federal Assembly and Federal Minister of the Interior after the free elections of 1990, Langoš made a significant contribution to the country's reckoning with its communist past. His personal story mirrors the broader developments in Slovakia before and after 1989. Patrik Dubovský published a full-length biography of Langoš in book form in 2021. The book is also closely connected with the topic of 1989 and the subsequent period (Dubovský 2021).

The session dedicated to the revolution in Slovakia concludes with a short contribution by Ján Šimulčík, *Tajná cirkev v roku 1989* (The Clandestine Church in 1989) (Šimulčík 2017). The author summarises all the major events that characterise the clandestine (independent) Catholic Church in Slovakia. Given the historical and social environment in Slovakia, the Church was a strong natural opponent of the atheist Communist regime, which made no secret of its ambition to suppress religion until it would go extinct. By the late 1980s, the Catholic Church in Slovakia was increasingly more active in its efforts, both covertly and publicly, to promote religious freedoms. This proves that the Church remained an organic part of the awakening society. Major actions included mass petitions for religious freedoms, the so-called Candle Demonstration in Bratislava on 25 March 1988 (the first mass protest by Slovak citizens in twenty years), as well as extensive independent samizdat activity.

The next session bears the title "The Transformation of Society After the Fall of the Communist Regime." The collection of papers shows in many places that the study of the intellectual legacy of November 1989 and the complex paths of Slovak society in the decades that followed is not only a historical but also a political science topic of great importance in Slovakia.

Ondrej Podolec wrote the paper *K niektorým nečakaným úlohám posledného komunistického parlamentu* (On Some Unexpected Roles of the Last Communist Parliament) (Podolec 2017). November 1989 brought the return of parliamentarism. Except for the brief episode of the Prague Spring in 1968, parliament played only a marginal and decorative role during the Communist era. The author focuses on the period from the 'elections' in 1986, through legislative measures against the opposition in 1989, to the sudden changes to the Czechoslovak constitution at the end of 1989. This is more of a concise overview of significant legislative innovations at the end of the 1980s. However,

the text sometimes does not make clear what prompted them. It is also unfortunate that the author often fails to include the dates when laws and amendments were adopted.

Law is the subject covered by the following paper, *Transformační legislativa po roce 1989* (Transformative Legislation After 1989) by Czech lawyer Kamil Nedvědický (Nedvědický 2017). Nedvědický reflects on the relationship between the continuity and discontinuity of the law of the pre-November state in the post-November Czech and Slovak Federative Republic, and later in the Czech Republic. He presents the laws by which post-November society sought, with relative success, to redress wrongs, protect society, transform the economy, and so on. He concludes his overview by noting that, despite all of the obstacles, the transformation of Czech society took place on a surprisingly broad scale, and that various steps ultimately led to the establishment of the rule of law.

A seemingly marginal topic is addressed in the paper entitled *Formovanie športového hnutia po Novembri 1989* (The Development of the Sports Movement After November 1989) by Ján Grexa (Grexa 2017). Yet it is a novel presentation of the impact of political change on sport and sports organisations. The author traces the post-revolution changes in sport at both the federal level and in Slovakia. He concludes that sport rather suffered from the revolution, as many existing structures disappeared and no adequate or qualitatively better replacements were created. Interest in mass sport declined and state support for sport was not sufficiently restored. Sport may have suffered because of its apolitical nature. And the session concludes with the paper entitled *Stav slovenského divadelníctva pred rokom a po roku nula* (The Situation of Slovak Theatre Before and After Year Zero) by Martin Timko (Timko 2017). Theatre, too, had in fact been amply subsidised by the state, even while being politically controlled. Although actors could play a significant role in the process of social change, Slovak theatre found itself in existential and organisational uncertainty after 1989. The transformation of theatre was complex and seemingly devoid of innovation.

The session entitled "Churches in the Process of Transformation of Society" returns to matters of religion, which has traditionally played a major role in Slovakia. At the same time, the struggle for freedom of religion was a battleground for clashes between the communist authorities and churches in a country with a historically strong religious tradition. In the 1980s, this struggle lost much of its openness.

Novembrový medzník v dejinách Rímskokatolickej cirkvi na Slovensku (The November Milestone in the History of the Roman Catholic Church in Slovakia) was written by Peter Zubko (Zubko 2017). He points out the unprecedented amount of scholarly literature on the subject. He also surveys the state of various areas of anti-church policy at the end of the 1980s and addresses the changes in the Church after 1989. He notes that, despite the growing revival in the 1980s, the decisive change for the Church came suddenly. The Church was not mentally prepared. Therefore, in the post-November period it made numerous mistakes and lost the moral capital it had previously gained. This certainly does not apply only to Slovak Catholics.

The study *Evanjelická cirkev augsburského vyznania na Slovensku v rokoch 1989–1991* (The Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Slovakia in 1989–1991) does not confirm that the largest Protestant church in Slovakia belonged to a critical current within society in the 1980s. According to Peter Račko (Račko 2017), this church, too, was taken by surprise by the new situation. Until the political change, it was led by loyal clergy. Therefore, the main changes in the history of this church came only after November 1989. A kind of delayed revolution then took place within the church, including the use of pressure tactics.

Peter Borza, author of the paper entitled *Transformácia Gréckokatolickej cirkvi v Československu na nové společensko-politické pomery po novembri 1989* (The Transformation of the Greek Catholic Church in the New Political and Social Situation After November 1989) (Borza 2017), focuses primarily on the process of redressing the wrongs inflicted on the Greek Catholic Church by the Communist regime. In its efforts to weaken the Catholic Church, the regime had long favoured the Orthodox Church in Slovakia. The Greek Catholic Church had been strong especially in eastern Slovakia, so the study complements the spectrum of religious denominations in Slovakia. The political change in 1989 was therefore welcomed by the weakened Church, even if it had not actively participated in it. It was an opportunity to begin a new stage of change, which, however, lasted for the next twenty years.

The title of the final session is "Intelligence Services and the Fall of the Communist Regime". This is undoubtedly due to the nature of the organising institution, as well as to the importance that has always been attached to the political police in maintaining communist rule.

The contribution *Hlavní správa kontrarozvědky SNB v roce 1989* (Main Directorate of the National Security Corps [SNB] Counter-

Intelligence Service in 1989) was written by Czech historian Jan Kalous (Kalous 2017). Kalous describes the agenda of the Main Directorate of the State Security (StB) Counter-Intelligence Service, which was reorganised into this form only in 1988. It then adopted various measures aimed at eliminating the "internal enemy." The author also emphasises certain events related to the opposition movement and, above all, the ever-growing base of civic resistance. Unfortunately, the inserted list of the Directorate's leadership is entirely superfluous. The professional biographies of StB members reveal nothing about the time of the upheaval or about the counter-intelligence service itself. The author asks whether the StB could have saved the regime and why it did not do so, or whether there were similar opinions within the StB as in the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (KSČ). It can be inferred from the text that the KSČ transferred its uncertainty to the StB, which was not similarly profiled and was not accustomed to making independent political decisions.

In *Stranický aparát na federálním ministerstvu vnitra v roce 1989* (Party Apparatus at the Federal Ministry of the Interior in 1989), Milan Bárta (Bárta 2017) provides a detailed account of the structures of the Communist Party within the security apparatus, especially the StB, and its connections to the apparatus of the Central Committee of the KSČ. The meetings of communist organisations at the federal Ministry of the Interior at the end of 1989 had no significance and only confirmed the helplessness within.

Do nové éry se star(onov)ými tvářemi aneb poslední týdny kontrarozvědky (Into a New Era with Old[-New] Faces, Or the Last Weeks of the Counter-Intelligence Service) is the title of a paper by Czech expert Josef Halla (Halla 2017). He analyses the transition of the security apparatus into the new era and the last manifestations of StB activity as late as in November 1989, as well as various measures and efforts to take over the Ministry of the Interior by the new authorities, which, however, had no experience. The new authorities paradoxically relied on some of the existing StB members and reactivated others who had been dismissed after the Prague Spring for alleged political mistakes and had been out of service for twenty years. The author concludes his dense and valuable account with the appointment of Ján Langoš as federal minister of the interior after the first elections in 1990.

The last paper in this session is *Rezidentúra Brusel v roce 1989* (The Brussels Station in 1989) by Michal Miklovič (Miklovič 2017). This was an important foreign station of the StB intelligence service near both the NATO headquarters and the EU institutions. The author

described its staffing, agenda, and agent network, noting that the political change at home took the intelligence station's officers by surprise. It can be assumed that this was the case at other stations of the StB abroad as well.

Interestingly, none of the contributions in this session deals directly with the activities of the State Security (StB) in Slovakia in 1989. Three papers cover the "federal view" of the central bodies of the StB and the Ministry of the Interior, and in one case a foreign station of the intelligence service is described. It seems that the only professional study on the activities of the StB in Slovakia at the end of 1989 is the work by Jerguš Sivoš, published in a proceedings volume as early as 2009 (Sivoš 2009). Otherwise, the Slovak Nation's Memory Institute has published only works of a popularizing nature on the topic of the Slovak StB in 1989 (Jašek 2019).

Two more papers are appended. *Politické strany a volby roku 1990* (The Political Parties and the Elections of 1990) by Anton Hrnko focuses on the elections, characterises the political entities of the CSFR and their tactics, and reflects on the causes of the election results (Hrnko 2017). Rafał Łatka, in his paper *The Role of the Roman Catholic Church in the Transformations of 1989* (Łatka 2017), emphasises the importance of the Catholic Church and especially Pope John Paul II. He admits that the Church played a role mainly in Poland, and at certain moments also in Czechoslovakia and Lithuania. The book concludes with biographies of the authors.

Conclusion

Has anything changed in the way people in Slovakia assess November 1989? How has the historical study of the revolutionary change progressed since 2010?

November 1989 was a precondition for Slovak independence and a new Slovak future. However, for Slovaks, the events of 1989 are increasingly becoming history, and they are being seen as the beginning of problems in society (Marušiak 2017). Contributions analysing sport and theatre likewise show that a comparison of state support before and after 1989 does not reflect favourably on the new era in Slovakia. The relatively considerable publishing activity in Slovakia in 2017 should therefore be seen more as evidence of historical interest rather than a sign of a positive attitude towards the events of 1989.

Several papers in this volume repeat the surprising observation that little is known about the condition of Slovak society in the period before the 1989 upheaval. The topic of the Communist Party of Slovakia is almost entirely absent from the volume, except for the Košice region (Verešová 2017). Yet the role of this ruling power was crucial. In 1986, the Communist Party of Slovakia had 435,537 members, the highest number in its history, and thus represented a significant part of society (Sikora 2006). The proceedings also reveal that Slovak historiography, despite the existence of a common Czechoslovakia in 1989, is heavily focused on Slovak themes, even though the centres of power and decision-making for the whole state (the Presidium of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, the federal government, the president, the Federal Assembly, key ministries such as the Interior, Defence, and Foreign Affairs, and so on) were situated outside Slovakia, in Prague. In the reviewed volume, the important issue of State Security is represented only by contributions dealing with the central level of the political police and not directly with the situation in Slovakia. Of course, the volume reflects the papers presented. However, the fact that such contributions are missing suggests that the topics of the repressive apparatus and political power in Slovakia are probably not given much attention in Slovak historiography. By contrast, the development of the churches clearly enjoys great interest among scholars in a traditionally rather religious country.

Contributions from experts from Poland and Hungary also focused on developments in those countries. The events of 1989 undoubtedly had important international connections. Developments in neighbouring countries certainly influenced the pace and force of change. Nevertheless, except for research into Soviet politics, there is a clear lack of emphasis on the broader European perspective. According to the conference proceedings, it would seem that the revolutionary events in individual countries are now studied in isolation and in parallel.

The volume is in itself a collection of very interesting and valuable perspectives on 1989 and its temporal, spatial, and social contexts. Moreover, it is clear that there is still a lack of stimulating scholarly historical works on the events of 1989 in Slovakia and in Central and Eastern Europe. The very fact of its publication gives the volume greater significance than might appear at first. In Slovakia, the research perspective is still dominated by the viewpoint of the protagonists. Moreover, the study of the period following the historic change at the end of 1989 clearly prevails. It is not impossible that this interest

stems from the need to understand the roots of the current state of Slovak society. Current developments in Central and Eastern Europe confirm that the results of research into the roots of developments in society after 1989 can also provide answers to questions of the present. As far as historical research is concerned, Slovak historiography still has much work ahead.

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Niezłomni
wobec komunistycznego reżimu.
W 40. rocznicę śmierci błogosławionego ks. Jerzego Popiełuszki

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REPORT FROM THE NATIONAL ACADEMIC CONFERENCE »PRAWDZIWA WOLNOŚĆ JEST PIERWSZĄ CECHĄ CZŁOWIECZEŃSTWA«

(17–18 October 2024, Toruń, Poland)

Abstract
Report from the conference entitled »Prawdziwa wolność jest pierwszą cechą człowieczeństwa« – różne wymiary wolności od lat siedemdziesiątych XX wieku do chwili obecnej. Ogólnopolska konferencja naukowa w 40. rocznicę śmierci błogosławionego ks. Jerzego Popiełuszki ["True Freedom is the First Characteristic of Humanity" – various dimensions of freedom from the 1970s to the present day. All-Poland academic conference in fortieth anniversary of Fr. Jerzy Popiełuszko's death] held on 17–18 October 2024 in Toruń, Poland, organised by Centrum Badania Historii Solidarności i Oporu Społecznego w PRL [Centre for Research on Solidarity History and Social Resistance in Polish People's Republic] of the Nicolaus Copernicus University and Kujawsko-Pomorski Urząd Marszałkowski (Cujavia-Pomerania Voivodeship Marshal Office).

Keywords: Jerzy Popiełuszko, conference report, Toruń

On 17–18 October 2024, a nationwide academic conference entitled »Prawdziwa wolność jest pierwszą cechą człowieczeństwa« – różne wymiary wolności od lat siedemdziesiątych XX wieku do chwili obecnej. *Ogólnopolska konferencja naukowa w 40. rocznicę* śmierci *błogosławionego ks. Jerzego Popiełuszki* [“*True Freedom is the First Characteristic of Humanity*” *– various dimensions of freedom from the 1970s to the present day. All-Poland academic conference in fortieth anniversary of Fr. Jerzy Popiełuszko's death*] was held in Toruń, Poland.

The conference was organised on the initiative of Professor Wojciech Polak, and the papers presented at the conference addressed issues of freedom understood in the context of the struggle for truth and human dignity. The quote was not only the motto of the conference but also served as the conference's overarching theme.

The event was organised by the Centre for the Study of the History of Solidarity and Social Resistance in the Polish People's Republic, operating at the Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń, in cooperation with the Marshal's Office of the Kujawsko-Pomorskie Voivodeship. The conference was held as part of the celebrations marking the 40th anniversary of the tragic death of Blessed Father Jerzy Popiełuszko, the chaplain of Solidarity, murdered by Security Service officers in 1984, whose martyrdom became a symbol of the ongoing struggle for freedom and truth in Poland.

The event was attended by nearly thirty scholars representing universities and research institutions from across the country, providing an opportunity for a comprehensive discussion on the role and significance of freedom from the 1970s to the present day. In particular, the latest research on the figure of Fr. Popiełuszko and his teachings was discussed, as well as issues related to the cult of the blessed in the Catholic Church and forms of commemoration of his person, which emphasised the importance of his legacy in the national memory.

One of the key points of the meeting was reflection on the support that the Catholic Church provided to opposition groups during the Communist era in Poland. The significance of the Solidarity movement as a social force striving for freedom was also analysed. Current aspects of freedom in Poland – in the religious, cultural and political spheres – have prompted reflection on the influence of history on the contemporary understanding of freedom and social

responsibility. The conference was therefore not only a platform for academic debate, but also a space for joint exploration of questions about the significance of the past for contemporary values and human rights.

The conference was organised by Professor Wojciech Polak, Dr. habil. Sylwia Galij-Skarbińska, and Fr. Michał Damazyn PhD, with Judyta Bielanowska PhD acting as academic secretary. The event was intended not only to commemorate Fr. Jerzy Popiełuszko, but also to reflect on the role of freedom in history and the present day. It was an excellent opportunity for researchers and representatives of the Church to exchange ideas and experiences, which contributed to strengthening cooperation between various academic circles in Poland.

Conference Sessions

The conference consisted of six sessions, the first of which, entitled "The Church in the face of totalitarianism", was led by Dr. habil. Sylwia Galij-Skarbińska. It began with a lecture by Professor Mirosław Golon from the Nicolaus Copernicus University, who presented the topic "The catastrophe of real socialism or a chance for reform? The Communist Party and trade union freedoms in the Polish People's Republic provinces in 1980–1981." In his speech, Professor Golon provided a detailed analysis of the Communist Party's response to growing social discontent in Poland, highlighting the various measures taken by the authorities in response to the trade union movement. Next, Professor Krzysztof Brzechczyn from the Adam Mickiewicz University and the Institute of National Remembrance in Poznań delivered a lecture entitled "Did John Paul II's pilgrimage to Poland in June 1979 contribute directly to the events of August 1980? An attempt at methodological analysis". His presentation focused on methodological aspects of researching the impact of the Pope's pilgrimage on public sentiment, pointing to the links between religious and political events.

After the break, the second session took place, entitled: "Father Jerzy Popiełuszko – the steadfast chaplain of Solidarity, martyr and blessed of the Church," chaired by Professor Wojciech Polak. It was opened by Dr. habil. Łucja Marek from the Institute of National Remembrance in Cracow, who presented a paper entitled "A fighter for the faith. Thoughts and resonance of the teachings of Fr. Jerzy

Popiełuszko." In her lecture, she emphasised the priest's key ideas and their impact on society, highlighting how his teachings influenced the struggle for human rights. The next speaker was Dr. habil. Cecylia Kuta, who in her paper "Reactions of the Krakow underground press to the murder of Father Jerzy Popiełuszko and politically motivated murders in the 1980s," analysed how the underground press reported on the murder of Father Popiełuszko and what the social and political consequences of this tragic event were.

The third session continuing the themes of the second session, and also entitled "Father Jerzy Popiełuszko – the steadfast chaplain of Solidarity, martyr and blessed of the Church" led by Fr. Michał Damazyn, began with a presentation by Dr. Paweł Stachowiak of the Adam Mickiewicz University, entitled "Father Jerzy Popiełuszko and Cardinal Józef Glemp. An analysis of their relationship." Professor Stachowiak emphasised the importance of the complex relationship between Fr. Popiełuszko and Cardinal Glemp (the then Primate of Poland) in the context of the struggle for freedom and dignity. His presentation was followed by a lively discussion, with, among others, Prof. Golon, Prof. Brzechczyn, and Prof. Polak. During the same session, Fr. Antoni Poniński discussed the issue of censorship in the context of reports on the Toruń trial of the Fr. Popiełuszko murderers, highlighting the difficulties that censorship posed in reporting on this key event.

The fourth session, entitled "Priests who remained steadfast in the face of the communist regime," was again moderated by Dr. habil. Sylwia Galij-Skarbińska. During this session, Artur Brożyniak from the Institute of National Remembrance in Rzeszów discussed the figure of Fr. Stanisław Czenczek, emphasising his importance as a priest who supported the Solidarity movement both locally and nationally. Next, Fr. Michał Damazyn from Nicolaus Copernicus University presented the life and work of Fr. Wojciech Dzierzgowski, focusing on his unwavering stance against the Communist regime.

The second day of the conference began with a session also entitled "Priests who remained steadfast in the face of the Communist regime," led by Professor Wojciech Polak. The session was inaugurated by Fr. Professor Józef Marecki from the Pontifical University of John Paul II in Cracow, who delivered a lecture entitled "He fought for truth and his homeland," focusing on the steadfast attitude of Fr. Ryszard Śleboda OFMCap in the face of the Communist regime, emphasising his courage and determination in the fight for truth. Prof. Marecki's presentation inspired participants by illustrating the influence of

clergy attitudes on the social reality in Poland in the 1980s. The next speaker was Dr. habil. Elżbieta Wojcieszyk from the Institute of National Remembrance in Poznań, who, in her paper "Pastoral care for working people and individual farmers – the support of the Catholic Church for organising opposition groups and communities in the 1980s" drew attention to the key role of the Church in organising and supporting opposition groups.

The sixth session, entitled "The Machine of Communist Repression" was led by Fr. Dr. Michał Damazyn. The session was opened by Professor Wojciech Polak from the Nicolaus Copernicus University, who gave a lecture on "The Persecution of the Catholic Church in Toruń in the 1980s." In his presentation, he presented specific cases of persecution of the clergy and the faithful, analysing their historical context. Next, Dr. Franciszek Dąbrowski from the Institute of National Remembrance in Warsaw delivered a lecture entitled "The latest status and needs for the publication of source documentation from the security apparatus concerning Fr. Jerzy Popiełuszko," in which he emphasised the current state of research and the need for further source publications. During his speech, he discussed a series of publications devoted to the repressive measures taken against Father Popiełuszko (under the common series title *Aparat represji wobec księdza Jerzego Popiełuszki*), consisting of four volumes: the first, "The apparatus of repression against Father Jerzy Popiełuszko 1982–1984," edited by Jolanta Mysiakowska, with an introduction by Jan Żaryn (2009); the second volume entitled "The apparatus of repression against Father Jerzy Popiełuszko 1984. Investigation into the abduction and murder of Father Jerzy Popiełuszko," with an introduction and commentary by Jakub Gołębiewski (2014); the third, "The apparatus of repression against Father Jerzy Popiełuszko. The case of Father Jerzy Popiełuszko in the documents of the Ministry of Internal Affairs Intelligence," compiled by Dr. Witold Bagieński (2023), containing a selection of documents and an introduction; and the fourth, "The apparatus of repression against Father Jerzy Popiełuszko. The case of Father Jerzy Popiełuszko in the documents of the Ministry of State Security of the German Democratic Republic," edited by Dr. Franciszek Dąbrowski himself (2024). It is worth noting that the first two volumes are available as open access. Dr. Dąbrowski's speech highlighted the importance of these publications for understanding the scale and nature of the security apparatus's actions against the clergyman, and pointed to the need for continued work on editing documents that could contribute to a fuller understanding of the impact of the security services' actions

on the life and work of Fr. Jerzy Popiełuszko. Next, Dr. Marta Milewska from the Institute of National Remembrance in Warsaw discussed the role of the Memorial Chamber at 8 Strzelecka Street in Warsaw. In her speech entitled "The truth hidden in inscriptions, or the Memorial Chamber at Strzelecka 8 dedicated to the prisoners of the Voivodeship Department of Public Security," she focused on the significance of this place as a symbol of remembrance of the victims of repression. At the end of the session, Dr. habil. Sylwia Galij-Skarbińska from the Nicolaus Copernicus University discussed the topic "First attempts to settle communist crimes in autumn 1989 – the Sejm's Extraordinary Commission for Investigating the Activities of the Ministry of Internal Affairs." Her presentation shed light on the difficulties and challenges associated with the process of coming to terms with the past, which concluded the series of speeches and inspired participants to continue the discussion on historical memory and its significance in the context of contemporary Poland.

Conclusion

The conference was an important step in reflecting on the history of resistance to totalitarianism, highlighting various aspects of freedom and steadfastness that shaped Polish society in difficult times. Participants emphasised that events of this kind are crucial for commemorating the heroes of the struggle for freedom and for understanding their impact on contemporary Poland.

The conference concluded with a discussion during which participants shared their insights on the significance of the issues raised for the contemporary understanding of Polish history. It was pointed out that the events of the 1980s and figures such as Fr. Jerzy Popiełuszko were of great importance for collective memory and current values. Participants expressed their hope that such important topics would continue to be analysed in order to inspire new generations to work for truth and justice.

The participants of the meeting, including Fr. Professor Marecki, emphasised the need to take into account the psychological and social context in research on this event. An important element of future analyses should be the development of a collective portrait of martyrs and a psychological profile of political prisoners who experienced communist repression, which had a significant impact on their personal lives and social relations.

Recent reflections have focused on the significance of martyrdom in Polish history and its impact on contemporary values. The exchange of ideas and experiences enriched the discussion, and participants unanimously emphasised that knowledge of history is crucial to understanding current values and aspirations. The conclusions drawn from the discussion opened up new directions of research into social trauma and its legacy, which shapes the identity of contemporary Poles.

The papers presented during the conference and the discussion enabled participants to seek answers to numerous key research questions, while inspiring the formulation of new research problems, including whether the assassination of Fr. Jerzy Popiełuszko contributed to accelerating or, on the contrary, delaying the process of political transformation in Poland. The official interpretation of this act, formulated by then government spokesman Jerzy Urban, presented the murder as a provocation aimed at the government of General Wojciech Jaruzelski. Undoubtedly, the joint work of researchers and representatives of the Church, focused on the memory of the martyrs, their teachings and their social influence, will certainly contribute to a better understanding of both the historical and contemporary contexts of freedom and human rights. The full program of the conference is available online on the Marshal's Office in Toruń website. The conference proceedings were published in the end of 2025 by the Jagielloński Instytut Wydawniczy in Toruń (see Galij-Skarbińska, Polak and Damazyn 2025).

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