

## THE SOVIET INVASION OF POLAND, BASED ON MATERIALS OF THE SOVIET PRESS

ANTON RESHETOV

PhD student

Saint-Petersburg State University, Russia

reszetow@gmail.com

---

**ABSTRACT:** In September 1939, the Soviet newspapers published dozens of articles focusing on the weaknesses of the Polish armed forces, state institutions, and sorry condition of the Ukrainians and Belorussians in the then Poland. The Soviet press did not conceal that the Red Army units had been involved in hostilities against the Polish Armed Forces. Each day the newspapers informed the readers about the Red Army's successful advance westward; about the weakness of the Polish forces and the welcome accorded by the local populace to the Red Army soldiers. In September 1939, the Soviet press sought to create a very negative image of Poland and the Poles in the eyes of the Soviet people.

**KEYWORDS:** Soviet invasion of Poland, Red Army's Polish march, propaganda in the Soviet Union

---

The 1st September 1939 witnessed the beginning of World War II, indisputably, one of the bloodiest events in the history of mankind. On this day Nazi Germany invaded Poland. As it happened, the Soviet Union was to play its role in those developments. The Soviet press gave but little coverage of the hostilities, but the sympathy of Germany's actions was, nonetheless, well pronounced. The first large article on the subject appeared in the *Pravda* as late as 14 September. On this day it featured the article "On the internal causes of Poland's defeat" on its first page.<sup>1</sup> So, what did the *Pravda*, the leading Soviet newspaper, point out as the causes of so fast a defeat suffered by Poland? The *Pravda* indicated that in the Commonwealth of Poland only 60% of the population were Poles, whereas others were Ukrainians, Belorussians, Jews and other ethnic groups. There were in the country over 8 million Ukrainians, and over 3 million Belorussians.

"The position of the Ukrainians and Belorussians is characterized by national oppression and lawlessness with reference to them. The ruling classes of Poland did everything to turn the Western Ukraine and Western Belorussia into a colony without any rights, a colony given over to the Polish bosses for plundering." Further on, the same document reads: "The Polish ruling classes maintain their supremacy over the national minorities by punitive expeditions, court-martial, the White Guards' terror, and unleashing of national discord. In this aspect, Poland's policy is not different from the political oppression of czarism..." It was this article that began to prepare the public opinion in the USSR for events that occurred on 17 September. Thus Moscow decided to stake on the need to free the Ukrainians and Belorussians.

On 18 September the predominant subject of Soviet newspapers was the beginning of "The Red Army's Polish march." The first pages featured the note of the USSR government submitted to the Polish ambassador in Moscow on the morning of October 17. This note deserves a special consideration since Schulenburg made his amendments to this document. The initial version, which Stalin had read to the ambassador on the night of 16–17 September, contained 3 items defined by Schulenburg as "unacceptable to us." In reply to the ambassador's objections, Stalin, as subsequently wrote Schulenburg, "changed the text very readily so that now the note fully suited us." So, the version sent to the Polish ambassador and officials of other states and published in the *Pravda*, was not only coordinated with Nazi Germany, but also contained amendments proposed by the third Reich's ambassador who was directly involved in its preparation.

The self-same issue of the *Pravda* published a speech by Molotov made on 17.09.1939. Here is a quotation from it. "A situation emerged in Poland which drives the Soviet government to special measures pertaining to the safety of our state. The Soviet government believes it is its sacred duty to offer a helping hand to its brothers, the Ukrainians and Belorussians living in Poland." The same issue of the newspaper contained a number of articles dealing with the rallies all over the USSR, at which the peasants and workers voiced their joy over the "the liberation of fraternal peoples from the yoke of the Polish bosses."<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> *Pravda* 14.09.1939. №255, 1.

<sup>2</sup> *Pravda* 18.09.1939., №259., 1.

On the following day, a joint German–Soviet communiqué was published, on which the Germans insisted from the start. This read: “In order to avoid any unsubstantiated rumors concerning the tasks of the German and Soviet troops operating in Poland, the Soviet and German governments declare that the actions of their troops are not aimed at achieving any goals that run counter to the interests of Germany or the Soviet Union and contradict the letter and intent of the non-aggression pact concluded between Germany and the USSR. On the contrary, the task of those troops is to restore calm and order in Poland disturbed by the collapse of the Polish state and thus to help the Polish population in restructuring the environment in which their state exists and functions.”<sup>3</sup>

The *Krasnaya Zvezda* (Red Star) newspaper, the central organ of the USSR Commissariat of Defence, regularly published bulletins from the Polish-Soviet front. So, on 18 September 1939, it publicized an operational report of the Red Army General Headquarters, which read: “In the morning of 17 September, the troops of the Workers’ and Peasants’ Red Army crossed the border over the entire length of the western bank of the Western Dvina river (our border with Latvia) up to the Dniester river (our border with Romania). Our aviation shot down 7 Polish fighter planes and forced to land 3 heavy bombers whose crews were detained. The population welcomes the Red Army units with jubilation.”<sup>4</sup>

Thus, the Soviet press did not conceal that the Red Army units had been involved in hostilities against the Polish Armed Forces. Each day the newspapers informed the readers about the Red Army’s successful advance westward; about the weakness of the Polish forces and the welcome accorded by the local populace to the Red Army soldiers.

The Ukrainian publications also covered in detail the actions of the Red Army. Since 18 September, the *Soviet Ukraine* newspaper published not only the materials concerning the motives of the Soviet government’s decision, and information about mass rallies and the operational situation, but also data on history, for instance similar to what is given below. “Over the centuries the Polish landlords sucked the blood of the Ukrainian and Belorussian peoples, oppressed and exploited them. Obtaining, after World War I, from Britain and France, the right to exist

<sup>3</sup> *Izvestia* 19.09.1939., №257., 2.

<sup>4</sup> *Red Star* 18.09.1939., № 214., 2.

as a state with the functions of the Triple Entente’s watchdog, the Polish landlords avidly rushed at the Ukrainian and Belorussian lands. They stabbed the bayonet into the flesh of the Ukrainian and Belorussian peoples and brought back, on the lands they seized, the bloodiest pages of history when their forefathers subjected Ukraine and Belorussia to fire and sword. The Western Ukraine and Western Belorussia were the grimmest of dungeons of the pan-Polish prison of the peoples, and the sinks of squalor and monstrous national and social oppression.”<sup>5</sup>

Curiously, efforts were made to point out the principal difference from the insertion of the Russian Empire’s troops into Western Ukraine in 1914. According to the publications, back then the troops performed as occupants, whereas now the Red Army acted as a liberator.<sup>6</sup>

The *Soviet Ukraine* paid more attention to military actions than the central Soviet press. Whereas the *Pravda*, *Izvestiaya* (News), and *Red Star* published formal summaries, the newspaper of Kiev supplied more abundant and more emotional information about the combat operations. What image of the Polish armed forces’ soldiers and officers did the Soviet newspapers try to create? According to them, the ordinary soldiers deserted en masse, not wishing to fight for “the Poland of landlords”. The lower ranks of the Polish armed forces are very vividly described by the following lines from the Polish soldiers’ letter published on the pages of the Ukrainian front’s newspaper. “We, the forcibly mobilized workers and peasants, the former soldiers of the Polish army, send fraternal greetings to the Workers’ and Peasants’ Red Army, which is bringing liberty to the working masses, Ukrainians, Belorussians, Jews, Poles, and other nationals living in Western Belorussia and the Ukraine. All the working population of our territory enthusiastically hails the Red Army which provides friendly help to the working people in their struggle for liberation from the Polish landlords.”<sup>7</sup>

The Polish officers were presented as “a professionally inefficient crowd of cowards” “capable of nothing except attacking the wagon trains and defenseless villages.”

The Soviet newspapers quite openly described the hostilities, and

<sup>5</sup> *The Soviet Ukraine* 18.09.1939., №215., 3.

<sup>6</sup> *The Soviet Ukraine* 24.09.1939., №220., 1.

<sup>7</sup> *Red Star* 22.09.1939., №6., 1.

reported the number of personnel killed, wounded and taken captive and the quantity of downed aircraft. However, we came across only one mention in the periodic press of establishing a POW camp for Polish soldiers and officers. The article published in the Ukrainian front's newspaper contained the author's interview with captive soldiers who took a keen interest in the Red Army's combat achievements and in life in the Soviet Union. The author expressly emphasized that the officers were averse to communicating with soldiers and kept apart from them.

In order to describe, as full as possible, the general tenor of the Soviet newspapers we refer to one of the most odious Soviet publications of the pre-war era, the newspaper *The Atheist*.

The organ of the central council of the Soviet Union's rampant non-believers, *The Atheist* acrimoniously criticized the Polish government for the persecution of the Russian Orthodox Christians and members of the Uniate Church.<sup>8</sup> According to its publications, the Polish government regularly violated the item of the Riga Peace Treaty of 1921 on the rights of the Russians, Ukrainians and Belorussians to freely perform their religious rites. Quote "The Polish landlords enforced Catholicism on the Ukrainians and Belorussians. The landlords thus tried to enslave the working population still more." According to the publications, on the Kresy territory the Russian Orthodox and Uniate temples were converted, en masse, into the Polish Roman-Catholic churches whereas the non-Catholic population was systematically oppressed and victimized."

Further on, *The Atheist* criticized representatives of other religions. According to it, many rabbis collaborated with secret police despite the fact that "the Polish landlords orchestrated still more violent pogroms than those in the czarist Russia."<sup>9</sup> Many rabbis informed on the Jews to police and openly supported the Polish government and meanly licked the Polish landlords' boots."

In addition to the Orthodox Christians and Uniate believers, the Poles also oppressed, according to the publications, the Muslims who lived in the districts of Vilno and Nowogródek. It was accentuated that the oppression and forcible conversion to the Roman Catholic faith and Polish way of life applied exclusively to the peasants, workers and

<sup>8</sup> *The Atheist* 21.09.1939., №27., 2.

<sup>9</sup> *The Atheist* 01.10.1939., № 28., 2.

craftsmen whereas the Polish government preferred to maintain friendly relations and build far-reaching plans with the ruling clique of exploiters and Moslem priests. Quote "The Polish landlords cherished dreams of acquiring colonies in the East. To this end, they courted the Islamic priests, paid them, and built mosques"

Criticizing the Catholic Church, *The Atheist* was also preoccupied with collaboration between the Polish government and the Orthodox and Uniate churches. According to the publications, the Uniate church had been created for the soonest possible conversion to Catholicism (it is worth noting that this term was widely used by the Soviet journalists in 1939) of population of the Western Belorussia and Western Ukraine. The Orthodox church, despite the oppression exercised by the Poles "humbly declared to the government its readiness to help the Anti-Soviet Poles in their struggle against the Soviet Russia."<sup>10</sup> The publications stressed that "the priests, Petliura's sidekicks and other churchmen" were the chief reserve of the Polish intelligence service.

A somewhat unusual summary of the events of September–October 1939 was presented by Molotov on 31 October 1939 at the session of the USSR Supreme Council. Quote "The ruling circles of Poland arrogantly boasted "the strength" of their state and "the might" of their armed forces. However, just a brief blow against Poland dealt first by the German and the Red armies was enough to leave nothing of that hapless creation of the Versailles treaty which existed by exploiting un-Polish nationals."

"The traditional policy" of unprincipled flirtation with Germany and the USSR proved inefficient and ended in bankruptcy."<sup>11</sup> Further on in the same source "It goes without saying that at the moment of the complete collapse of the Polish state our government had to hold out a helping hand to the Ukrainian and Belorussian brothers living on the territory of the Western Ukraine and Western Belorussia. And it did precisely so. As the Red Army made a combat advance across those territories, it occasionally had quite serious skirmishes with the Polish troops, resulting in losses. The total loss sustained by the Red Army in Western Belorussia and Western Ukraine amounts to 737 dead, and 1862 wounded, all in all 2,599 men... The newly obtained territory

<sup>10</sup> *The Atheist* 11.10.1939., №29., 3.

<sup>11</sup> *Pravda* 01.11.1939., №303., 2.

of the Western Ukraine and Belorussia measures 196 thousand square kilometers with a population of around 13 million people, of which more than 7 million are Ukrainians, over 3 million Belorussians, over 1 million Poles, and over 1 million Jews.”

Very telling are the Soviet caricatures of 1939. They vividly show what image of Poland and the Poles the Soviet leaders tried to create for the population. Besides, pay attention to the editorials of the Soviet newspapers in the Polish language, which began to be published in Kresy. All this enables us to visualize the informational environment of the local populace following the joining to the USSR.

In September, the Soviet newspapers published dozens of articles focusing on the weaknesses of the Polish armed forces, state institutions, and sorry condition of the Ukrainians and Belorussians in the then Poland. In September 1939, the Soviet press sought to create a very negative image of Poland and the Poles in the eyes of the Soviet people. The caricatures of that period convincingly testify to this. Probably, it is this image, created by the Soviet propaganda in the early World War II, that partially accounts for a certain strain in the relations between our countries to this day.

## THE HOLOCAUST AND THE HUNGARIAN OCCUPATION FORCES IN THE WEST-UKRAINIAN TERRITORIES

ÁKOS FÓRIS

MA student in History and Archives  
Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest, Hungary  
forako1989@gmail.com

---

**ABSTRACT:** The Hungarian Royal Army occupied more than half million square kilometres in the Soviet Union between 1941 and 1944. During the occupancy the soldiers of the Hungarian Occupation Forces were instrumental in the destruction of Ukrainian Jews. It has two reasons: the Hungarian units collaborated with Germans and the Hungarian Army was anti-semitic in partisan war. In my writing I demonstrate through examples of two Hungarian units the ambivalent Jewish Policy of the Hungarian Army in the occupied Soviet territories. The members of the 49/II and 50/I battalions were involved in the liquidation of ghettos in Gaysin and its countryside in 1941–1942.

**KEYWORDS:** World War II, Eastern front, Holocaust, Ukraine, Hungarian Royal Army, occupation

---

The Hungarian Royal Army occupied more than half million square kilometres in the Soviet Union between 1941 and 1944. During the occupation the soldiers of the Hungarian Occupation Forces were instrumental in the destruction of Ukrainian Jews.

In my study I demonstrate the ambivalent Jewish Policy of the Hungarian Army in the occupied Soviet territories through the examples of two Hungarian units. The Hungarian and the Soviet Courts<sup>1</sup> called the members of the 49/II and 50/I battalions to account in the second half of the 40s and at the beginning of the 50s, because these units were

---

<sup>1</sup> *Historical Archives of the Állambiztonsági Szolgálatok Történeti Levéltára/Hungarian State Security* (hereafter, ÁBTL) *fond*3.1.9 V-38933. 66-70. (Béla Csúpy's interrogation protocol. Budapest, 30nd September 1965.); *Magyar Nemzeti Levéltár Csongrád Megyei Levéltár/The National Archives of Hungary Archive of Csongrád County* (hereafter MNL CSML) XXV. *fond*8. Nb. 138/1948. Béla Csúpy's investigation file.