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Genocide in Volhynia and Eastern Galicia 1943–1944

Abstract

Ukrainian nationalists tried to de-polonize the South-Eastern Borderlands by means of mass genocide and they achieved this goal to a great extent. That, however, puts them on a par with the criminal regimes of Joseph Stalin and Adolf Hitler. The author of this article describes the genocide of Polish inhabitants in Volhynia and Eastern Galicia committed by the Organisation of Ukrainian Nationalists (Orhanizatsiya Ukrayins'kykh Natsionalistiv, OUN) and the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (Ukrainska Povstanska Armiya, UPA) between 1943 and 1944. These events in European history are not well-known.

Keywords

Genocide, Volhynia and Eastern Galicia, Ukrainian Nationalists, the Ukrainian Insurgent Army.

From the European perspective of the history of World War II, the genocide committed by the Organisation of Ukrainian Nationalists (Orhanizatsiya Ukrayins'kykh Natsionalistiv, OUN) and the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (Ukrainska Povstanska Armiya, UPA) on the Polish inhabitants of Volhynia and Eastern Galicia between 1943 and 1944 remains a little-known event. Among the foreign historians, only Timothy Snyder mentions it in fragments in his fundamental work *Bloodlands: Europe Between Hitler and Stalin* (*Skrwawione ziemie*¹). The enslavement at Poland after World War II restricted an in depth research only to the crimes committed by the Germans. Today, an average Polish citizen knows a lot about the extermination of the Poles and the Jews; it is also a part of the curriculum in Polish schools to organize trips to Auschwitz and other extermination camps.

¹ T. Snyder, *Skrwawione ziemie*, Warszawa 2011, p. 355.

It is hard to see such a symmetry when it comes to the crimes that were perpetrated on Polish people by the Soviets at that time. With Poland being dependent on its eastern neighbour, it was impossible to divulge information concerning the Red Army's invasion of Poland in September 1939, the deportations and exile to Siberia, the Katyń massacre and the other places of execution of the twenty-two thousand representatives of the Polish military and intellectual elites. The truth about this last crime had been carefully kept secret for years both by the Kremlin and by the Communist authorities of the People's Republic of Poland. The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics acknowledged responsibility for the crime only in 1990.

Therefore the post-war generations were learning about the Soviet crimes either from the stories told by their grandparents or parents, or from emigration literature, illegally smuggled into the country. Only when Poland truly regained its independence in 1989 could the problem be dealt with in full measure. Today the literature on the subject already comprises hundreds of publications, with new research papers and memoirs still being published. The martyrdom endured by the Polish people at Soviet hands therefore became a permanent element of Polish historical consciousness.

After the dissolution of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics in 1991, the Third Republic of Poland borders the Republic of Ukraine to the east. As a consequence of difficult historical experiences, Ukraine is treated by many as a some kind of a "barrier" to the east. The desire to look for an ally against the resurging Russian imperialism, was not alien to Polish authorities either. The conspiracy of silence they instigated was intended to cover up everything that might have stirred up irritation in the mutual Polish-Ukrainian relationship. Therefore, it was the relatives of the victims and amateur historians that were the first who demanded that the truth about the genocide committed by Ukrainian nationalists on Polish people of Volhynia and Eastern Galicia should be revealed. It is astonishing that the activity of those people was at first regarded as detrimental to the national interests of Poland.

The silence of the Polish elites suited many of the historians from Western Ukraine as well. In order to cover up the event of genocide they even resorted to distorting history². Unfortunately, there seems to be no end in sight to this process.

² Bohdan Zubenko constitutes a classical example here, he wrote: "Confronted with the raging Polish terror, the command of UPA ordered Polish colonists to leave Volhynia for Poland

To understand why during the Second World War, in the South-Eastern Borderlands of the Second Polish Republic, Polish and Ukrainian reasons of state were mutually exclusive we need to go back in time to the year 1918. The defeat of the nations that had once taken part in the partitions of the Polish State, i.e. Russia, the Austro-Hungarian Empire and Prussia, provided a unique chance for many nations of East-Central Europe, including the Poles and the Ukrainians, to gain independence. Both nations, while delineating their territorial aspirations, expected to see Eastern Galicia, which they cohabited for centuries, within their borders. The Ukrainians (Ruthenians³) comprised the majority of its population, however it was not them but the Poles and the Jews that constituted the economically, culturally and intellectually dominant class. The capital city of Lwów (Lviv) was the main bone of contention, as it was mainly inhabited by the Poles and had been inextricably linked with the history and culture of the Polish Republic for centuries. If we were to add that the Germans, Austrians, Czechs, Armenians and Russians also lived in the territory of Eastern Galicia, that it was a religiously diverse region⁴, and that at the same time there were many mixed marriages, we are going to see a real melting pot, in which the task of delineation of fair borders seemed inconceivable.

Great Britain and the United States, as the representatives of Western powers, kept encouraging the reviving Polish State to limit the territorial claims to its ethnographic borders⁵. Not only would it mean giving up the key role they could have played in this part of Europe, but also renouncing many priceless monuments of Polish culture and leaving many centres of Polish population in

under threat of punishment. Most of the Poles complied with the order. Some Polish historians, describing the events that took place in Volhynia at that time, scream about the injustice that befell the Poles. Some of the Ukrainian renegades try to agree with them. [...] The truth is that the Polish people entered Volhynia uninvited and left unregretted. Let the dogs die like dogs". B. Zubenko, *Polszcza i Ukrainia. Polsko-ukraiński widnosciny w mynulomu ta šohodni*, Lwiv 1998, p. 86.

³ It was a name given to those Ukrainians who identified with the history, and culture of the old Polish Republic.

⁴ The predominant religion in Volhynia was Eastern Orthodox Christianity, whereas Eastern Galicia was dominated by Roman Catholics belonging either to the Latin or the Greek rite. There were also many Jews, Protestants, and the followers of the Armenian Catholic Church.

⁵ British Prime Minister, David Lloyd George, was particularly against the idea of a strong and territorially extensive Poland. He is believed to have said that to hand over Silesian industry to the Poles would be tantamount to giving a watch to a monkey. Anna Cieniła writes extensively about British territorial plans concerning Poland; these developed already during the First World War. See: A. Cieniła, *Polityka brytyjska wobec odrodzenia Polski 1914–1918*, „Zeszyty Historyczne” (1969), vol. 16, pp. 67–94.

the hands of fate. We need to remember that at that time the Polish Republic was the only country in this part of Europe that effectively resisted Bolshevik expansion westwards.

The war over Eastern Galicia was initiated by the Ukrainians, who in the night of October 31st – November 1st 1918 captured Lwów. Not for long though, since as a result of collective resistance of a group of civilians and military men, with a notable group of teenagers (the famous Lwów Eaglets), after twenty-two days of fighting they were driven back from the city. The conduct of the defenders of the city over the Poltva River was acclaimed by many people worldwide. Among those was also the Marshal of France Ferdinand Foch, who said that the population of the city that endures so much suffering and humiliation can be governed by no other authority but a Polish one.

By mid-July 1919, the Polish army took control over the whole of Eastern Galicia. It has been referred to as Eastern Lesser Poland ever since, and became incorporated into the territories of the Second Polish Republic, which was later recognized by international community⁶. However, the source of the conflict, which resided in the fact that the Ukrainians did not have their own country, did not disappear. The hopes were ruined ultimately when on 18th March 1921, the Treaty of Riga signed by Poland and Russia divided the territory inhabited by the Ukrainians. Independent Ukraine was not created either in Galicia or in the territory of so-called “Great Ukraine”⁷, which was formally included into the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic.

During the war over Eastern Galicia both the Polish and the Ukrainians accused each other of war crimes and mistreating prisoners of war. Already in November 1918 the Sich Riflemen engaged in numerous violent acts on the civilians of Lwów⁸. Many more such events were perpetrated outside the capital of Eastern Lesser Poland, where Greek Catholic clergy was instrumental

⁶ Ultimately, by the decision of the Conference of Ambassadors Polish rights to the territory of Eastern Galicia were recognized on 15th March, 1923.

⁷ Reference to the territory from the Zbruch River, to Donetsk, Kharkiv and Luhansk, the capital of which is Kiev.

⁸ See, inter alia: J. Białynia Chołodecki, *Ks. Jan Diugiewicz i tegoż męczeńska śmierć w związku z krwawymi wypadkami lat 1918–1919*, Lwów, no date of publication. pp. 2–4; G. Łukomski, Cz. Partacz, B. Polak, *Wojna polsko-ukraińska 1918–1919*, Koszalin-Warszawa 1994, pp. 92–95; L. Kania, *W cieniu orłąt lwowskich*, Zielona Góra 2008, pp. 117–122.

in propagating hatred towards the Poles⁹. It was not an easy task to contain tensions and grievances that had grown up around this issue.

According to the census of 1931, there were about 4.5 million Ukrainians living within the borders of the Second Polish Republic¹⁰. As the most numerous ethnic minority in the country they constituted at the same time the majority in the territory of Volhynian Voivodeship and Stanisławów Voivodeship. Most of them were hostile towards Poland. The Polish Republic had been enfeebled by the war and was not able to fulfil their economic expectations, much less the national ones. However, Ukrainian political parties, schools, associations, and sport clubs operated there without obstacles, and there was freedom of the press, the Orthodox and Greek Catholic Churches were not persecuted, and the Ukrainian cooperative movement flourished.

The mutual Polish-Ukrainian relations were also on the whole amicable. Wiktor Chmieluk recalls: “In our village of Skorodyńce until the year 1939, the villagers lived together in harmony, as neighbours do, they respected each other, and even got married to each other. There were many mixed Polish-Ukrainian marriages. On the occasion of their holidays they used to invite each other to Christmas Eve suppers, midnight Mass, church fairs etc. The processions marched with a Polish brass band from the church, and vice versa. [...] The school was Polish but there were separate classes for Ukrainian children during which they were taught Ukrainian language”¹¹. The problem of religious education of the children in mixed marriages was solved in an original way. The sons were supposed to follow the faith of their fathers, and the daughters followed their mother’s faith. That is how they attempted not to disturb the delicate harmony.

Some of those Ukrainians who remained hostile towards the Polish State organized themselves around the illegal Ukrainian Military Organization (Ukrayins’ka Viys’kova Orhanizatsiya, UVO) – since 1929 the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists. They sought to accomplish their goal through terrorist

⁹ See, inter alia: G. Łukomski, Cz. Partacz, B. Polak, *Wojna polsko-ukraińska 1918–1919*, op. cit., pp. 95–104; J. Wołczański, *Nieznana korespondencja arcybiskupów metropolitów lwowskich Józefa Bilczewskiego z Andrzejem Szeptyckim w czasie wojny polsko-ukraińskiej 1918–1919*, Lwów-Kraków 1997, pp. 152–169; L. Kania, *W cieniu orląt lwowskich*, op. cit., pp. 130–131, 164–166; Z. Konieczny, *Stosunek duchowieństwa greckokatolickiego do Polski i Polaków w czasie wojny polsko-ukraińskiej*, in: *Materiały i studia z dziejów polsko-ukraińskich*, edited by prof. dr hab. B. Grotta, Kraków 2007, pp. 43–63.

¹⁰ *Mały Rocznik Statystyczny 1939*, Warszawa 1939, p. 22.

¹¹ L. Kulińska, *Dzieci Kresów II*, Kraków 2006, p. 167.

activity, and aimed to separate the Polish Republic from its south-eastern territories and to establish a Ukrainian State there. Their first action was a failed assault on Józef Piłsudski in Lwów. Only between January 1922 and March 1923, they committed almost 150 arson attacks, 60 acts of sabotage, robbed 11 manor houses, and killed twenty-two soldiers and police officers¹². Moreover, those Ukrainians who decided to cooperate with the Polish state, for example the poet and politician Sidor Tverdohlib, or the mathematician and headmaster of a teacher training college in Przemyśl, Sofron Matwijas, died at their hands. In the following years UVO made a failed assassination attempt on the president Stanisław Wojciechowski and committed a series of robberies of mail-coaches and tax offices. All those events made it even more difficult to rebuild the Borderlands after the ravages of war, and did not contribute to their economic growth, internal stability and the unification with the Polish state.

Polish policy towards the national minorities at that period of time aimed at total national assimilation. It was an unrealistic programme, and what is more, it generated social unrest. Everything changed when the reins of the government were assumed by Józef Piłsudski and the politicians associated with him i.e. Leon Wasilewski, Tadeusz Hołowko, Bronisław Pieracki i Henryk Józewski.

They wanted to make the Ukrainians rightful citizens and bind them in that way to the Second Polish Republic¹³. The long-term goal was to turn their expansion against Russia, the division and weakening of which was in the interest of Ukrainian nationalists, and the ruling circles of the Second Polish Republic as well¹⁴. Henryk Józewski was the main executor of the Marshal's plan: he created something like a "Ukrainian" Piedmont in Volhynia, supported local education, culture and language, and celebrated Greek-Catholic holidays. With his sensible and tolerant actions he contributed to the creation of the pro-government Volhynian Ukrainian Union¹⁵ (Ukrainian:

¹² L. Kulińska, *Działalność terrorystyczna i sabotażowa nacjonalistycznych organizacji ukraińskich w Polsce w latach 1922–1939*, Kraków 2009, p. 146.

¹³ It was a programme of so-called assimilation with a country, as opposed to national assimilation, the proponent of which was the National-Democratic Party (Stronnictwo Narodowo-Demokratyczne) and the politicians associated with it, such as Roman Dmowski or Stanisław Grabski.

¹⁴ R. Torzecki, *Kwestia ukraińska w polityce III Rzeszy 1933–1945*, Warszawa 1972, pp. 48–49. This so-called Promethean project was a Polish attempt devised with the intention to liberate the nations defeated by USSR from its control by secretly providing them with support.

¹⁵ Ukrainian political party between 1931–1939.

VUO), and weakened the influences of the nationalists and communists alike in this territory.

In 1930 the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN) instigated another major series of acts of sabotage in the territory of Eastern Galicia. Their squads raided banks and government offices, cut down telephone poles, destroyed railway tracks and bridges, killed the settlers and teachers, and burnt manor estates. Altogether, a total of 191 acts of terrorism took place in this territory from July to November that year.

The Polish authorities dispatched military troops to the areas affected by the riots, and the local population was made responsible for their provisions. Tribute was imposed and public flogging was introduced, which made the situation slightly less tense. Then the nationalists directed their acts of terrorism against those Polish politicians who were in favour of the agreement. In 1932 they killed Tadeusz Hołówko, and Bronisław Pieracki was murdered two years later. In response to this, the authorities established the Bereza Kartuska detention camp¹⁶.

The aforementioned events caused a lot of animosity among the Ukrainians. They had already been criticising the military settlement of the Borderlands initiated by the Polish authorities¹⁷ for a long time, as well as the dissolution of some Ukrainian schools in favour of the bilingual ones¹⁸, and they also expressed their discontent when the permission to set up a Ukrainian university was refused, and attempts to grant autonomy to Eastern Galicia failed¹⁹. In 1938 (three years after the death of Piłsudski) Józewski was dismissed, and the authorities got back to the plans of national assimilation. About 200 disused

¹⁶ People suspected of subversive activities and spying were detained there, as well as political and economic criminals and reoffenders. A wide range of tortures was meant to break the prisoners down, both physically and mentally. Out of the three thousand people who went through the camp, Ukrainians constituted 17%. W. Śleszyński, *Obóz odosobnienia w Berezie Kartuskiej*, Białystok 2003, p. 97.

¹⁷ It was executed in accordance with the Act of Parliament of 17th December 1920, concerning the distribution of land to the soldiers of the Polish Army, “*Dziennik Ustaw Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej*” 1920, no 4, item 18, pp. 40–41. Because the act increased the proportion of Polish ownership in the Borderlands it was received with great disapproval by the ethnic minorities. However, it yielded positive results very quickly – many settlers became the pioneer activists and showed great enterprise in their environment.

¹⁸ That is Polish-Ukrainian ones.

¹⁹ Such solution was suggested by the Act of Parliament of 26th September, 1922, concerning the regulations of general local governments, of Lwów, Tarnopol and Stanisławów voivodeship in particular, “*Dziennik Ustaw Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej*” 1922, no 90, item 829, pp. 1553–1555. It has never been carried out in practice.

Orthodox churches in the Chełm Land were knocked down, which strongly affected the religious feelings of the Ukrainians.

The Polish ethnicity policy turned out to be a failure and caused members of ethnic minorities to feel, in large measure, like second-class citizens. Summing up, the question arises: Did the Second Polish Republic really cause the Ukrainians such great harm that would have justified the bloody retaliation that took place from 1943 to 1944? Or do we need to look for its reasons elsewhere, such as the assumptions of the integral Ukrainian nationalism, which turned out to be one of the most criminal ideologies of the 20th century?

Let us have a look at the political programme of OUN–UVO. In their attempts to establish an ethnically homogeneous state, the nationalists did not take into account the aspirations of any other nation inhabiting the Borderlands. In “The Decalogue of the Ukrainian Nationalist”, published in Stepan Łękawski’s brochure in 1929, they demanded:

1. You shall attain a Ukrainian state or die in the struggle for it. [...]
2. You shall not hesitate to commit the greatest crime, if the good of the cause requires it.
3. You shall regard the enemies of Your Nation with hate and perfidy.
4. You shall aspire to expand the strength, renown, riches and the size of the Ukrainian state even by means of enslaving foreigners²⁰.

The future Ukrainian empire was supposed to stretch from the Caucasus to Western Galicia, and was meant to encompass the area measuring 1.2 million square kilometres in total. It was to be an ethnically homogeneous nation, and there was only one solution for the Polish, Jews, or other nations – to leave it voluntarily. This plan could only be fulfilled through war that would result in liberating “the Ukrainian territory” which was at that time under the control of four countries: USSR, Poland, Czechoslovakia and Romania. The nationalists allied themselves with Germany, which was aspiring to change the order in Europe established at the Conference in Paris²¹, and after Hitler’s rise to power, also meant to acquire some territories to the East. OUN–UVO was involved in espionage activities in their favour. In return they received financial support and

²⁰ L. Kulińska, *Działalność terrorystyczna i sabotażowa nacjonalistycznych organizacji ukraińskich w Polsce w latach 1922–1939*, Kraków 2009, pp. 56–57.

²¹ Reference to the decisions of the Treaty of Versailles, signed by Germany on 28th June, 1919, which deprived the country of 18% of the territories and all the colonies, reduced its army to 100 thousand, declared it guilty of initiating the war and for that reason ordered the payment of 132 million gold marks as reparation to the victors.

its agents and combatants were provided training with the Reichswehr at special centres in Munich, Królewiec and Gdańsk. The Third Reich was not the only country that wanted to take advantage of the Ukrainians for their own ends. It should be pointed out that the activity of the nationalists was also supported by USSR, Czechoslovakia and Latvia, as they had a vested interest in weakening the position of the Polish State.

OUN has been making preparations to start an anti-Polish uprising in the South-Eastern Borderlands since 1939. Together with OUN youth groups (so-called “Yunatstvo”)²² it was twenty-thousand-strong at that time. The threat of a Polish-German war was becoming more and more imminent, this being conducive to the plans of the nationalists. At the end of June and the beginning of July 1939 during the talks between colonel Roman Sushko and colonel Erwin von Lahousen the details of the action were worked out. It was the task of OUN to control the railways from Nowy Sącz to Stryj as well as the region of Podolia. The weapons were to be supplied by the Germans through airdrop. Additionally, a Ukrainian Legion was organized in the Third Reich, which after entering the territory of the Borderlands was supposed to be extended by conscripting Ukrainian deserters from the Polish Army.

On the 1st September, 1939 Germany attacked Poland. Ten days later, when the Wehrmacht reached the outskirts of Lwów, OUN started to execute their plan. In many towns of South-Eastern Galicia, especially in the territory of Brzeżany and Podhajce county its hit squads started to disarm Polish soldiers and policemen and murder the civilians. The nationalists managed to capture Stryj, which they held for a few days.

In those days of the national tragedy of the Polish people, OUN perpetrated many acts of cruelty. In Bartatów, Jaśniska, Jasienica Solna and Schodnica several dozen captured soldiers and civilians were captured and burnt alive. In the village of Kołki a group of policemen who voluntarily submitted themselves to captivity was murdered. Only in the territory of Brzeżany county there were more than 17 active criminal bands, that caused the death of roughly 1200 people. Furthermore, in the region of Przemyślany, Rohatyń and Buczacz as many as 2000 Polish refugees died at the hands of the nationalists. There were riots against the Polish army even in Lwów, dominated by the Poles, during its ten-day-long defence against the German forces.

²² Ukrainian paramilitary youth organization, under the authority of OUN.

All in all, in September 1939, OUN committed various acts of sabotage in 183 different towns. Its members captured one tank, eight planes, seven cannons, 25 cars, 103 machine guns, more than 7000 rifles and pistols, and took 3610 Polish prisoners²³. According to still incomplete data, nearly 3000 people died at the hands of the nationalists in the South-Eastern Borderlands.

Thanks to the efforts of numerous police and military forces some of the riots were put down. As the Second Polish Republic was on the verge of collapse, the situation of the Poles, deprived of the authority of their own country, was getting worse. But the worst was yet to come.

On the 17th September the Red Army crossed Polish Eastern border. This fact took the leaders of OUN completely by surprise²⁴, but it did not cause any anti-Polish actions to cease. The Soviets did not want any underground activities, either Polish or Ukrainian, on the territory of the Eastern Borderlands which they then controlled, and were infiltrating both of these movements effectively. Expanding their network of spies, they readily took advantage of the minorities, relying on their aversion towards the Polish State. Ukrainians, as well as Jews and Belarusians alike named Polish families designated for deportation, benefiting from the parcelling out of the goods belonging to the deported landowners and military settlers.

The German attack on the USSR was received with enthusiasm. In many villages and towns Wehrmacht troops were greeted with bread and salt, with the flying banners of the Orthodox Church, and the people thanked them for the liberation from Bolshevik captivity. From the moment the Nazis took power, the nationalists assisted them eagerly in murdering the Jews and members of Polish intelligentsia. At that time OUN had already been divided into two competing factions. Thanks to the favourable treatment from the occupying forces, members of Andriy Melnyk's OUN-A joined the ranks of the Ukrainian Auxiliary Police (*Ukrains'ka Dopomizhna Politsiia*), which took part in the liquidations of ghettos, street round-ups and executions of Jewish people. In 1943, under the auspices of the Ukrainian Central Committee the 14th Waffen Grenadier Division of the SS – "Galizien" was established, which became

²³ J. A. Młynarczyk, *Niemieckie plany wobec ludności polskiej i ich realizacja w 1939 roku*, in: *Spojrzenie na polski wrzesień 1939 roku*, edited by T. Kondracki, Warszawa 2011, pp. 137–138.

²⁴ Its leaders were not familiar with the protocol added to the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact on 23rd August, 1939, according to which there was going to be a joint German–Soviet attack on Poland and the partition of Central and Eastern Europe into their spheres of influence.

famous for the pacification of Polish villages of Podkamień, Palikowy, Huta Pieniacka, Chodaczków Wielki, Majdan Nowy and Majdan Stary.

On the other hand, Stepan Bandera's criminal OUN-B targeted defenceless Polish people as their enemy in the fight for the Ukrainian State. There are few places where its armed forces – which created in 1942 the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA) – fought any significant battles with the Wehrmacht, or German police forces²⁵. The Nazis, following the principle of “divide and conquer”, preferred to tolerate this escalating, tragic conflict in silence.

On the eve of the genocide, the Polish population in Volhynia, reduced by Soviet deportations and German forced labour transports, amounted to slightly more than three hundred thousand people (14,6% of the sum total)²⁶. At that time, the first acts of violence took place; there were isolated cases of people and families that fell victim to them – involving mainly of the Poles working for the German administrative sector. As the terror was escalating, at the end of the year, first self-defence units started to be formed. They were very weak, though, basically their role was reduced to patrolling the precincts and warning people of danger. They were unable to oppose UPA troops, whose ranks in 1943 were increased by German police deserters. UPA self-defence units (Samooboronnei Kushchovi Viddily), Security Service of OUN-B, as well as the local peasants took part in the murders and the plundering of Polish possessions. In 1943 the criminal plan of murdering all the Polish people of Volhynia started to be executed.

It is not entirely clear who is to be held responsible for this decision. At the beginning of 1943 one of the commanding officers of UPA wrote: “Effective as of the 1st March 1943, we are going to stage an armed uprising. It is a military action and as such it is directed against the invader. The present invader, however, is only a temporary invader, so we should not waste our powers fighting them. The real invader is yet to come [about the USSR]. When it comes to the Polish cause, it is not a military issue, but a minority one. We are going to deal with in the same way as Hitler dealt with the Jewish cause. Unless they remove themselves”²⁷.

²⁵ For more on this topic, see: G. Motyka, *Ukraińska partyzantka 1942–1960*, Warszawa 2006, pp. 214–237.

²⁶ G. Hryciuk, *Przemiany narodowościowe i ludnościowe w Galicji Wschodniej i na Wołyniu w latach 1931–1948*, Toruń 2005, p. 272.

²⁷ G. Motyka, *Od rzezi wołyńskiej do akcji „Wisła”*, Kraków 2011, pp. 126–127.

In all probability, the decision was made among the three people: Dmytro Klyachkivsky – head commander of OUN-B in Volhynia, Ivan Litvinchuk – UPA commander in north-eastern Volhynia and Vasil Ivahiv – OUN-B military clerk. The first of them issued in July, 1943 the following directive: “We should undertake a great action of extermination of the Polish element. As the German armies withdraw, we should take advantage of this convenient moment to exterminate the entire male population from 16 to 60 years of age. [...] We cannot lose this battle, and it is necessary to diminish Polish forces at all costs. Forest villages and those near forests, should disappear from the face of the earth”²⁸.

UPA committed the first massacre of the Polish population on 9th February 1943 in the village of Parośla. 173 people died then. In the night of 26th – 27th March, 179 people were killed in Lipniki, and less than a month later the Polish settlement of Janowa Dolna was burnt down: 600 people died there. By the end of June, the sea of blood engulfed all the counties of Volhynia, except for Luboml county.

The escalation of the killings took place on 11th July, 1943. These events went down in history by the name of “bloody Sunday”. At 3 a.m. UPA units perpetrated a coordinated attack on 99 Polish villages. The following facts and figures speak volumes about the scale of the genocide: in the village of Gurów only 70 people out of 480 survived, in the village of Sądowa only 20 out of 600, in Zagaje out of 350 people only a dozen or so remained alive. Some attacks were organized during Sunday church services by surrounding the churches in which the congregation gathered. For example in Poryck, about a hundred people were killed in such a way in half an hour, and another one hundred at their homes. In Kisielin, under the belfry of a Roman-Catholic church 80 people were shot and finished off with bayonets. For 11 hours the members of UPA lay siege to those hidden upstairs in the presbytery; they tried to defend themselves with bricks taken from disassembled walls and stoves, so UPA did not manage to capture them.

All in all, in July 1943 UPA raided 530 Polish villages and settlements killing seventeen thousand people. The action was repeated at the end of August, when 85 villages were attacked – mainly in the western counties of Volhynia. 529 people were murdered in the village of Wola Ostrowiecka, including 220 children under the age of 14; in the village of Ostrówki 438 people died, including 246 children under the age of 14. Altogether, in August 1943 nationalists attacked 301 places and killed eight thousand people.

²⁸ W. Filar, *Wydarzenia wołyńskie 1939–1944*, Toruń 2008, p. 121.

All the villages were burnt down. When the massacres were completed Ukrainian peasants gathered to loot the possessions of the victims. Their land was also distributed. Those who survived were heading for major towns and centres where parishes, departments of Polish Welfare Committee (Polski Komitet Opiekuńczy), and local people organized help for them. The wounded were sent to hospitals where many of them died.

Another wave of terror took place in Volhynia in December 1943 at Christmas. The UPA fell on the remaining Polish population centres and centres of self-defence in the counties of Równe, Łuck, Kowel and Włodzimierz. The action was continued at the beginning of 1944, taking advantage of the evacuation of German garrisons initiated as a result of the advances of the Red Army from the east; the members of UPA committed then a horrible crime killing roughly 460 people in Stary and Nowy Wiśniowiec, including women and children. Until this day the local church presents a haunting sight with its burnt walls and general dilapidation.

Blockages of the roads leading to the cities where the refugees expected to find food and shelter were organised to fight the Polish. Following the order of Yuriy Stelmashchuk, the commander of the Military District UPA-North, in the destroyed villages the remaining buildings and churches were disassembled or burnt, orchards were cut down – in a word, all the traces of the actual existence of the Poles were being erased.

A few words about the Polish efforts to prevent the tragedy seem to be in order. The command of the Home Army (Armia Krajowa, AK), seeing the imminent storm, planned to get rid of some of the more eager OUN-B activists. They had been forestalled, however, by the events of the “bloody Sunday”.

Some attempts to negotiate were also made. However, when on 10th July 1943 the Polish delegates Zygmunt Rumel and Krzysztof Markiewicz, together with a coachman, Witold Dobrowolski, went to hold talks with the command of OUN Security Service, they were brutally imprisoned, then tortured, and finally pulled apart by horses. Their bodies were buried in an unknown place.

In such circumstances the only thing that the Polish could do was to flee to major cities or organise self-defence centres on the spot. They were created only in 128 locations²⁹ – some even covered the area of a dozen or so villages. The lack of weapons constituted a problem, and even the ones that were

²⁹ W. Siemaszko, E. Siemaszko, *Ludobójstwo dokonane przez nacjonalistów ukraińskich na ludności polskiej Wołynia 1939–1945*, vol. 2, Warszawa 2000, p. 1067.

available could be confiscated by the Germans as a result of a denunciation from an enemy. It occasionally happened that even they – the representatives of the occupying forces – provided the Poles with some limited number of weapons.

The centres that played a crucial role in the defence of the Polish people were located in Przebraże, Huta Stepańska, Pańska Dolina, Huta Stara, Zasmyki, Zaturce, Dederkały Wielkie, Jagodzin-Rymacze, Antonówka, Andersówka, Witoldówka, Bielin and Ostróg. Particular mention has to be made of the first one, which was commanded by Henryk Cybulski. It has found a place in history. Around ten thousand people found refuge there, including Jews wanted by the Germans, and Soviet prisoners of war. Seven infantry companies and a scouting cavalry unit constituted the military forces of Przebraże – altogether, there were a few hundreds of determined, trained and armed defenders. In August 1943, with the help of Soviet and Polish guerrilla squads, they managed to repulse the attack of powerful UPA forces counting ten thousand people. They also made successful counterattacks on the centres where the enemy units were concentrated.

On the orders of the Commander of the District of Volhynia, Colonel Kazimierz Bąbiński, the creation of the centres was supported by the local forces of the Home Army (AK). The acts of retaliation such as burning down Ukrainian villages, murdering women and children were forbidden. In late July 1943, during the escalation of the killings, the decision was also made to create Polish guerrilla squads in the territory of Volhynia. There were roughly 1500 people fighting in nine of these groups. Their actions reinforced the already existing or newly-formed self-defence centres. They were unable to counteract the genocide being done as their enemies came from among the forces of UPA, Military Counterintelligence Services (Służba Kontrwywiadu Wojskowego – SKW), and OUN Security Services counting about several dozen thousand people in total.

In this tragic situation it was for political reasons that the command of the Polish underground did not decide to have a tactical agreement with the Germans in order to acquire a larger amount of weapons from them. As a result, small self-defence centres created by the Poles did not stand any chance and by the time the Red Army entered the country they either had ceased to exist or had been evacuated somewhere else. Only major centres, encompassing larger areas and supplied with firearms, managed to survive – the nationalists managed to break up only two of them, out of 16: in Huta Stepańska and Antonówka. To

a considerable degree the presence of German or Hungarian troops or Polish and Soviet guerrilla groups in the vicinity was a favourable factor.

The inhabitants of Volhynia who joined the German police troops (after the Ukrainians deserted) also tried to defend Polish villages. There were about 1200 Poles in their ranks. After the Russians crossed the eastern borders of the Polish Republic in January 1944, they created so-called destruction battalions (*Istriebitielnyje bataljony*), in which twenty-three thousand Polish people served in the territory of Volhynia and Eastern Galicia. In Soviet service they protected Polish villages, state facilities and farm buildings. Being familiar with the locality, they were successful in combating the nationalist underground, which is why they became the target of particular hatred from UPA.

The entry of the Red Army onto the Polish territory resulted in the creation of a large front-line unit in the form of the 27th Home Army Infantry Division of Volhynia. Apart from their participation in the Operation Tempest (Polish: *akcja Burza*), they also carried out sixteen major military actions against UPA. Yet all the efforts turned out to be belated and insufficient, and the land of Volhynia had already become a great cemetery of the Polish people. According to the calculations of Władysław and Ewa Siemaszko, only in 1943 more than thirty-five thousand people lost their lives there. The genocide was accompanied by a mass exodus, especially from the rural regions. The Government Delegation estimated that in October that year only 170,000 Poles³⁰, gathered mostly in major cities and defence bases, remained in the territory of Volhynia.

From the beginning of 1944, the wave of mass terror moved onto the territories of the Voivodeships of Lwów, Stanisławów, Tarnopol and Lublin. The most appalling crimes were committed in: Huta Pieniacka (939 people murdered), Chodaczków Wielki (862), Podkamień (596), Kutry (about 500), Palikrowy (365), Bednarów (250), Lubienie (240), Stańkowa (212), Moosberg (205), Bruckenthal (200), Landestreu (200), Stefanówka (200), Kolomyia (200), Pniów (200), Wola Wysocka (187), Hanaczów (168), Białe (161), Pasieczna (157), Ludwikówka (152), Bryńce Zagórne (145), Słobódka Konkolnicka (145), Wołczków (140), Korościatyn (135), Dołha Wojniłowska (132), Berezowica Mała (131) and Hucisko Pieniackie (128). Only in April, 1944, eight thousand people lost their lives. The above-mentioned 14th Waffen Grenadier Division of the SS “Galizien” was responsible for some of the crimes, and so was the

³⁰ R. Torzecki, *Polacy i Ukraińcy. Sprawa ukraińska w czasie II wojny światowej na terenie II Rzeczypospolitej*, Warszawa 1993, p. 288, footnote 118.

Ukrainian police. The latter one started more and more often to murder the Poles in the very centre of Lwów, and met with an energetic response on the part of the Polish underground³¹.

Such a scale of exterminatory actions was determined by the pace of the Red Army's advance, which in February 1944 reached the Zbruch River. UPA order, intercepted by AK, commanded: "In view of the advances of Bolshevik forces on the eastern front, it is necessary to speed up the liquidation of the Polish element. They must be totally wiped out, their villages burned down and the Polish population must be destroyed"³².

In the period under discussion, there were still about one million Polish inhabitants living in the territory of Eastern Galicia³³. This is the reason why it was possible to organise there much more effective defence than in Volhynia, all the more so because the local and regional AK structures provided them with greater support. Nonetheless, the genocide took its toll there as well: from 1943 to 1944 almost twenty-five thousand people died in the area.

At this point, it is necessary to draw attention to one more absolutely crucial aspect of the whole case. Everywhere the liquidation of the Polish population was carried out with extreme brutality. Below we can see an excerpt of Tadeusz Pańcyszyn's – an inhabitant of the village of Rumno – account of the events: "Father was a strong man, he tried to defend himself from the attacking murderers with his bare hands. They were beating him and hitting him with sticks. Confronted with this horde, he was completely vulnerable. He saw what had happened to his wife and daughter, Karolcia, who were now lying in a pool of blood. He was aware of the fact that he was about to die at the hands of the murderers. He knew them all well, they all lived in Rumno and were his peers and schoolmates, as a young boy he used to play together with them. Suddenly,

³¹ Reference to the action of 9 and 12th March 1944, called "Nieszpory", carried out by the combat units of Home Army, during which 11 Ukrainian police officers were shot. G. Mazur, J. Skwara, J. Węgiński, *Kronika 2350 dni wojny i okupacji Lwowa 1 IX 1939 – 5 II 1946*, Katowice 2007, p. 434.

³² W. Siemaszko, E. Siemaszko, *Ludobójstwo dokonane przez nacjonalistów ukraińskich na ludności polskiej Wołynia 1939–1945*, op. cit., p. 1281.

³³ The results of a German census from 1st March, 1943 are taken as a basis for this estimate; according to it the territory of Eastern Galicia was inhabited by 799 428 Poles, which constitutes less than 1% of the whole population. This data has been questioned by the Polish side, which claims that it was created in the atmosphere of falsehood and abuse. Vide: G. Hryciuk, *Przemiany narodowościowe i ludnościowe w Galicji Wschodniej i na Wołyniu w latach 1931–1948*, op. cit., pp. 216–232.

he received a blow to the head with an axe and fell to the floor. The tormentors were looking at him for a while, and having made sure that he was dead and did not pose any threat to them and to *Samostyina Ukraina* (independent Ukraine), they left his corpse alone.

The mass murderers knew very well that there were many more people at home. So far they managed to kill three people. They started to wonder where the rest of them had gone. They scattered around the house looking for the remaining inhabitants. Two UPA members approached the bed, from which the sobs of my sister, 5-year-old Marysia, was coming, and her cry:

– Mommy, where are you?

The girl, seeing two UPA members, tried to cover herself with an eiderdown. One of them tore the covers off her and raised a bayonet, ready to strike. The other one stopped him for a moment speaking in Ukrainian:

– Lyshy, to detyna! That is: Leave it, it's a little child!

But the first one replied:

– To polska detyna, nay hyne! (That's a Polish child, let it die!)

He tore the child's shirt off and with a sharp bayonet ripped her apart, from her crotch up to her chest. The girl gave a groan of pain and clasped her tiny hands on her wounded belly.

The butchers did not even try to end her suffering and left her like that. They strode further into the house in search of other victims³⁴.

A joint publication *Kresy Wschodnie w polskiej krwi tonące* (Eastern Borderlands drowning in Polish blood) enumerates as many as 136 methods of torture. The most cruel and sophisticated ones include: driving nails into the skull, scalping, cutting off or chopping off hands, noses, ears, lips or a tongue, blows to the head or forehead with the blunt end of the axe, tearing the mouth apart from ear to ear, slitting the throat, cleaving heads with an axe or chopping the heads off, cutting off women's breasts, cutting in half with a saw, slitting the stomach of a pregnant women and putting something inside, inserting objects into the vagina, hanging victims on their entrails, tearing their arteries off, burning palms, chopping the whole body into parts, nailing to the table, or to the cross in the church, driving a stake into the stomach, pulling the torso apart by horses or chains, dragging through the streets with a rope hanging from the neck, shooting at a man for a target practice, hanging on a barbed wire, burying alive and beheading with a scythe, setting fire to the victim, carving the skin

³⁴ L. Kulińska, *Dzieci Kresów I*, Kraków 2009, pp. 144–145.

with a razor, throwing the children alive into wells or burning houses, hanging by genitals, impaling, drowning in a river, throwing infants onto the pitchfork³⁵. This tragic record surpasses even the things that German butchers were able to devise in Auschwitz and other extermination camps.

Besides the Polish population, the terror also affected the few remaining Jews and also Russians, Czechs and Armenians. Also those Ukrainians who were related to the Poles and did not go along with killing their loved ones – husband or wife, members of distant family – died from the hands of OUN.

The picture would be incomplete if we had not mentioned those righteous Ukrainians who risked their lives to hide their Polish neighbours, warned them or helped them to escape, refusing to participate in the crimes or were brave enough to stigmatize them publically. At least a few hundred of them were killed for having done so. A Greek Catholic priest from Markowa – Mihailo Shchurovsky is worthy of particular admiration; after the murder of a Roman Catholic confrater, he was not afraid to celebrate mass according to his intention, did not organize the Jordan procession for his parishioners, and then left them saying that he did not want to die among the bandits³⁶.

According to the most credible findings of Władysław and Ewa Siemaszko, Szczepan Siekierka, Henryk Komański and Krzysztof Buczacki, the tragic number of genocide victims in the territory of Volhynia and Eastern Galicia in the years 1939 – 1947 is estimated at over 133,000 murdered Polish people. Ukrainian nationalists perpetrated genocide in 4314 towns and villages³⁷.

Contemporary Ukrainian historians try to prove that there was a Polish-Ukrainian war in the years 1942–1947. They also try to incorporate the Operation Vistula (Operacja Wisła) into it, an action organized by the post-war Polish authorities, which is a serious misuse of the term as it was only a resettlement operation. It is an attempt to relativize the crime and share the responsibility for it between both sides. It does not mean that there were not any retaliatory actions on the Polish part. Firstly, occasional ones, took place in spring 1944 in the Lwów voivodeship. The units of Home Army (AK) waged

³⁵ *Kresy Wschodnie w polskiej krwi tonące*, edited by J. Sokół, J. Sudo, Chicago-Poznań 2004/2005, pp. 148–152.

³⁶ R. Niedzielko, *Kresowa Księga Sprawiedliwych*, “Studia i materiały”, vol. 12, Warszawa 2007, p. 141.

³⁷ Wołyń 1943 – rozliczenie. Proceedings of an academic conference *W 65 rocznicę eksterminacji ludności polskiej na Kresach Wschodnich dokonanej przez nacjonalistów ukraińskich*, Warszawa 2010, p. 97.

attacks on Błyszczwody, Chlebowice Świrskie, Czerepin, Szolomyja and Sahryń, and about 70 Ukrainians were killed in Gniła, Soroki and Łopuszna. The action in the village of Pawłokoma, organized in the following year, also had a repressive character: 150 people were killed there for the persecutions of Polish population and the capture of seven people.

Polish retaliation in the Chełm Land took even a more regular form. In April 1944 AK units burnt over 20 Ukrainian villages there, which resulted in the arrival of UPA sotnya in the area. At that time, the Polish-Ukrainian frontline, more than 100 kilometres long, was established³⁸. Generally, only in that case can we speak about a Polish-Ukrainian war because it is where organized and equivalent military formations opposed each.

All the above mentioned actions affecting innocent people, including women and children cannot be excused in any way. As a consequence of Polish retaliation not more than 3,000–3,500 Ukrainians died in the whole territory of the South-Eastern Borderlands.

After the Red Army entered Polish lands, it became clear that the UPA lost the war and was not going to achieve any of its primary military-political aims. Irrespective of this, they carried on their genocidal action. From October 1944 to February 1945, more mass murders took place in Uhryńkowce (159 people killed), Dothe (150), Uście Zielone (149), Torskie and Podczahryk (144), Barysz (135), Majdan (118), Bazar (108), Presowce (103) and Sorock (about 100). When the new border between Poland and USSR was established some UPA forces moved to so-called Zacurzonie³⁹, where they continued their criminal activity. It was not until the Operation Vistula was initiated, greatly condemned by Ukrainian historians and some of the Polish ones too, that the things started to calm down there.

Ukrainian nationalists tried to de-polonize the South-Eastern Borderlands by means of mass genocide and they achieved this goal to a great extent. That, however, puts them on par with the criminal regimes of Joseph Stalin and Adolf Hitler. Not only did their activity cause the death of many thousands of innocent people, but also great tragedy and tremendous physical and psychological damage to those who survived. Leokadia Skowrońska, who

³⁸ *Polacy i Ukraińcy pomiędzy dwoma systemami totalitarnymi 1942–1945*, vol. 4, part 1, Warszawa–Kijów 2005, p. 55.

³⁹ Territory inhabited by Ukrainian population, 19.5 square kilometres in area, encompassing the eastern part of the Lublin Voivodeship and part of the former Lwów Voivodeship, which according to the Polish–Soviet border agreement of 16th August 1945 remained with Poland.

as a 10-year-old child lost her family and home, wrote after many years: “I spent the most beautiful years of what usually is a carefree childhood and youth living in poverty, misery, hunger and disease, and working hard”. She saw things that were tragic and terrifying, and simply inconceivable. “Many a time I was about to die. I asked God to take me to Him because I am all alone, ill, defenceless and hungry, deprived of my parents’ love. But God in His goodness, which is beyond human understanding, did not let me extinguish the flame of my life. I owe it only to God Almighty that I survived the terror of those years of ravages, blood and slaughter of the Polish people”⁴⁰.

In all probability, through the physical elimination of a substantial number of Poles – inhabitants of the South-Eastern Borderlands – OUN members involuntarily helped USSR in the future Sovietization and de-Christianization of these territories. Their criminal activities brought about great material losses as well. In the territory of Volhynia alone, out of the total number of 1150 rural settlements and 31,000 of households, UPA destroyed over 91% of them. Out of 252 churches and chapels, 103 were robbed, burnt or ceased to exist at all. It is not surprising that today it is one of the most economically backward regions of Europe; furthermore, it is deprived of any historical and cultural monuments.

The genocide in Volhynia and Eastern Galicia poses a difficult challenge for contemporary Ukraine, with which it has to come to terms. Celebrations in Poryck, which were organized in 2003 with the participation of the presidents of Poland and Ukraine, offered an opportunity to do so. Contrary to the expectations on the Polish part, the very much awaited word of apology did not come up.

If the accounts are not squared fairly and those horrible crimes condemned, there will not be any authentic and honest reconciliation between the Polish and the Ukrainian peoples. But can we really expect that to happen if the criminals and murderers have been glorified in Western Ukraine for over twenty years? The moral perpetrator of the genocide, Stepan Bandera, is an honorary citizen of 26 cities in the region, and his monuments “adorn” the streets of Lwów, Drohobycz, Stanisławów, Stryj, Dublany, Mościska, Uhrynów Stary, Tarnopol and Sambor. Until recently, he also held the title of the Hero of Ukraine. The same is applicable in the case of Roman Shukhevych, the commander-in-chief of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army, and

⁴⁰ L. Kulińska, *Dzieci Kresów I*, Kraków 2009, p. 53.

even UPA itself; even though they are guilty of the death of many thousands of human beings, they are considered today to have been an army fighting for national independence and the pride of Ukraine. In the western provinces of this country children are taught about UPA at schools, honouring its memory at school celebrations, and its former combatants march proudly during parades. But in fact it was an organization which was just as criminal as the units of the Gestapo, SS, NKVD, Red Khmers, Death Squads or Hutu squads, which are condemned today by the whole civilized world.