

# Divided Eastern Europe



Divided Eastern Europe:  
Borders and Population Transfer, 1938-1947

Edited by

Aleksandr Dyukov and Olesya Orlenko

**CAMBRIDGE**  
**SCHOLARS**  

---

**P U B L I S H I N G**

Divided Eastern Europe: Borders and Population Transfer, 1938-1947,  
Edited by Aleksandr Dyukov and Olesya Orlenko

This book first published 2012

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

12 Back Chapman Street, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2XX, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data  
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Copyright © 2012 by Aleksandr Dyukov and Olesya Orlenko and contributors

All rights for this book reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the copyright owner.

ISBN (10): 1-4438-3582-X, ISBN (13): 978-1-4438-3582-4

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Editorial Preface .....	vii
-------------------------	-----

## **Part I. Borders Transfer: Legal and Diplomatic Aspects**

The Ukrainian Factor in the Development of the International Situation, 1938-1939 .....	2
Alexander Shubin	

“Cordon Sanitaire”: A Strategical Problem and its Solution .....	20
Mikhail Meltuhov	

The Union of Bessarabia with the USSR: Diplomacy Issues and Legal Framework .....	29
Sergey Nazaria	

The Forming of Western Belarus Borders in 1939-1940.....	40
Oxana Petrovskaya	

## **Part II. Population Transfer: National, Political and Ideological Aspects**

“Make this Land German Again!”: The Nazi Population Policies in the <i>Wartheland</i> , 1939-1941 .....	74
Alexander Prusin	

Polish Plans for Solving the Ukrainian Question in the Run Up to the Second World War .....	92
Vladimir Komar	

The Problem of Refugees from Poland in Soviet-German Relations (September 1939 – June 1940) .....	102
Dmitriy Tolochko	

Ethnic Changes in Volhynia and Eastern Galicia during the Second World War in the light of the work of the “Poland-Ukraine: Difficult Questions” International Historical Seminar .....	121
Waldemar Rezmer	
The Reunification of Bessarabia with the USSR/Russia and the Mass Population Migration .....	132
Pyotr Shornikov	
From Ethnic Eviction to Deportation of the “Dangerous Elements”: Lithuanian and Soviet Deportations in Lithuania, 1939-1941 .....	147
Alexander Dyukov	
Resettlement and Deportation in the Ukrainian-Polish Border Area between 1944 and 1947: Controversial Issues in Recent Ukrainian Historiography .....	158
Igor Ilyshin	
Changing Citizenship: Eastern European DP’s on their way to Emigration as reflected in the Archives of the International Tracing Service.....	174
Sebastian Schönemann	
Population Deportations and Transfers: Evil or Necessary Evil? .....	182
Vladimir Makarchuk	
<b>Part III. Living on the Frontier: Social and Cultural Aspects</b>	
World War Two and Ethno-demographic Changes in Western Oblasts of Ukraine .....	194
Ivan Terluk	
Did they become Latvian.... or German? Social Aspects of the Fate of Russian and Byelorussian Children Deported to Latvia between 1942 and 1944 .....	202
Aron Shneer	
The Famine of 1946-1947 in Russia and the Ukraine: General and Specific.....	213
Viktor Kondrashin	
Contributors .....	227

## PREFACE

In 1938, on the eve of what would mark the beginning of the Second World War during the international crisis, Eastern Europe was divided – in every sense of the word. New governments, which were generally regarded as national states, rose from the ashes of the old pre-modern Austro-Hungarian and Russian empires. However, civic nations were not formed within them; the titular ethnic groups were far from being the only representing populations in these states. Ukrainians, Belorussians, Jews and Lithuanians in Poland; Moldavians, Jews and Hungarians in Romania; Russians, Jews and Germans in the Baltic States; Germans, Poles and Hungarians in Czechoslovakia – they were all regarded by their countries' authorities as “alien” and at times suspicious elements, which needed to be controlled, have limited rights and, if possible, be forced to assimilate. With such a policy, interethnic tension could not be avoided and mass violence soon followed.

The situation was aggravated by the presence of large territories in Eastern European states, which were compactly populated by non-titular nationalities. The principle of peoples' rights to self-determination, as proclaimed by W. Wilson, remained a matter of wishful thinking. The new states in Eastern Europe were the offspring of wars and revolutions. It is not surprising then, that their borders were initially determined by the rights of the powerful: thus, Poland seized and later annexed the Vilnius district and the western oblasts of Ukraine and Belarus, while Romania occupied Bessarabia. New borders divided entire peoples, having created the very foundation for inter-state conflicts as well as the desire to revise the established order in the region. This revision, which was desired by so many, was initiated by Great Britain, France, Germany and Italy with the creation of the Munich Agreement. It then continued with the seizure of Teschen Silesia by Poland, of Zakarpattia by Hungary and the accession of western Ukrainian and Belorussian oblasts, Bessarabia and the Baltic States to the USSR. It was only after the conclusion of the Second World War that new borders of Eastern European states were established.

The Second World War, for which the revision of Eastern European borders became the trigger, was one of the most terrible events in the history of Europe. The practical realization of the Nazi racial ideology led to the extermination of millions of “racially inferior” people: Jews, Gypsies,

Russians, Ukrainians, Belorussians. However, the mass violence in Eastern Europe was not limited to the crimes of the Nazis: the Polish-Ukrainian massacre in Western Ukraine, the extermination of Serbs in Croatia, the implementation of ethnic cleansing in Karelia by occupying Finnish authorities, the postwar expulsion of Germans from Czechoslovakia and Hungary – to some extent, they were all the result of cumulative interethnic tension in pre-war times. The war furthered the radicalization and hardening of these conflicts, however their roots lie in the not so distant past. After the war, the main players of these interethnic clashes were allowed the steps – at the expense of changing borders and exchanging populations – to create a mono-ethnic state. After forty-odd years, after the collapse of the USSR, interethnic violence has only erupted in the territory of former Yugoslavia – one of few truly polyethnic states in the region. It is difficult to rid oneself of the idea that a reformation of borders and ethnic make-up in Eastern Europe in the late '30s and '40s of the 20<sup>th</sup> century had not only tragic consequences, but favorable ones as well.

Still today, historians have yet to agree upon a single assessment of the eastern European events in the 1930s and 1940s. Assessments are generally found to be the victim of national subjectivism. Furthermore, many topics associated with the problems of juridical assessments – with regard to the changes in the region's state borders and resettlement (including forced resettlement) of entire ethnic groups – require the efforts not only of historians, but of juristic specialists as well. With the goals of intensifying research on these problems, the Russian foundation “Historical Memory” organized the international scientific conference “A Divided Eastern Europe: The Transfer of Borders and Populations, 1938 – 1947,” which was conducted in Lviv (Ukraine) on the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> of September, 2010. This collection proposed to the reader was based off of the materials from this conference.

Researchers from Russia, Belarus, Ukraine, Poland, Moldavia, Israel, Germany and the USA have all contributed articles featured in this collection. These articles vary greatly in theme, approach and assessment of the processes under consideration; in our opinion, any polyphony found promotes a deeper understanding of both the material and the specificity of national historiographical schools.

Without laying claim to the comprehensive coverage of the chosen topic, we nonetheless hope that our collection will assist in raising a deeper awareness of the meaning behind the transformation of Eastern European states in the 1930s and 1940s, thus providing the opportunity to

see how such political and social realities led to the creation of a new heir  
– modern Europe.

—Aleksandr Dyukov and Olesya Orlenko



# **PART I.**

## **BORDERS TRANSFER: LEGAL AND DIPLOMATIC ASPECTS**

# THE UKRAINIAN FACTOR IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE INTERNATIONAL SITUATION, 1938-1939

ALEXANDER SHUBIN

Ukraine was not one of the international actors during the critical events of 1938-39 which led to the war in Europe. Nevertheless, the "Ukrainian question" played a very important, sometimes key role in relations between the USSR and the West, on which, for the first time (but not for the last time), the fate of the world was directly dependent, during this period.

After the Munich Agreement, the USSR was left dangerously isolated, and solved this in a way that has led to disputes today, not only purely historical disputes, but ethical ones as well. In discussions about the causes of the Pact and of the Second World War, the "Ukrainian factor" is almost never considered, and unjustly so. It explains several anomalies, the first of these being the delay in the reversal of Chamberlain's policies. After the Munich Agreement, Chamberlain planned broad cooperation with Germany as part of the policy of appeasement, which was at the height of its success at the end of 1938 and beginning of 1939. It is thought that Chamberlain abandoned appeasement on the fall of Czechoslovakia, when it became obvious that Hitler had conned him. However, this is not the case.

## **What offended Chamberlain?**

On 15 March 1939 Hitler invaded Czechoslovakia (or rather, what was left of it). At first the British Prime Minister reacted calmly to this event - after all Czechoslovakia "had broken itself up", and, as represented by President Hácha, surrendered to the mercy of the Fuhrer. But, after literally one day, the position of the British Prime Minister, the real leader of the League of Nations, dramatically changed, and he began accusing Hitler of deception. "In just one day Chamberlain moved from appeasement

to open threats"<sup>1</sup>, writes conservative politician L. Amery with some surprise. What happened?

To understand this we need to go back several months. The Munich Agreement considerably weakened the government of Czecho-Slovakia in Prague. On 11 October 1938 an autonomous government was set up in the Ukrainian populated Subcarpathia region. On 2 November 1938, after dividing Czechoslovakia, representatives of Germany and Italy meeting in Vienna (the first Vienna Award) proposed the creation of the state of "Carpatho-Ukraine" in the east of the country. Uzhgorod was given to Hungary, which laid claim to this territory, but the rest of the region remained autonomous with Khust as its capital. An authoritarian regime was established in the region and on 20 January all political parties were disbanded apart from the Ukrainian National Union (UNU) Unsurprisingly, at the elections to the Soim on 13 February, the UNU gained an overwhelming majority of the votes. A local army, "the Carpathian sich" was created, with 2000 soldiers.

Between November 1938 and March 1939 diplomatic circles were hotly debating information about Hitler's preparations to advance on Ukraine. In January, A. Halifax wrote: "It seemed at first, and this was confirmed by people close to Hitler, that he was planning expansion to the East, but in Germany in December the prospect of an independent Ukraine as a vassal to Germany was discussed openly"<sup>2</sup>. On 30 November, Chamberlain's adviser Horace Wilson gloated to the Soviet ambassador Maisky that "Hitler is going to carry out the next major strike against Ukraine. The technique will be approximately the same as in the case of Czechoslovakia. First a growth in nationalism and uprisings among the Ukrainian population, and then the liberation of Ukraine by Hitler in the name of freedom".<sup>3</sup> Stalin was also concerned about the Carpathian "gnat", who wanted to "annex the elephant", i.e. the whole of Ukraine, with Hitler's help.

As is well-known, Subcarpathia did not share a border with the USSR. So how could it become the "Ukrainian Piedmont"? Both Moscow and Berlin were well aware that this would be possible if there was an agreement between German and Poland. However, while this was a topic of negotiations in German, for the USSR it was a reason for intense suspicion. It was not only the friendly German-Polish relations between 1934 and 1938 and the gloating reasoning of the British, but also other intelligence, which led to this suspicion. For example, citing Italian

---

<sup>1</sup> Amery L., *Moya politicheskaya zhizn'*, Moscow, 1960, S. 564.

<sup>2</sup> God krizisa. 1938-1939, T.1, Moscow, 1990, S. 201.

<sup>3</sup> Dokumenty vneshney politiki SSSR, T. 21, Moscow, 1977, S. 658.

diplomats, Soviet agents reported as early as May-July 1938 that a broad coalition from Britain to Japan would attack the USSR by January 1939. The main attack would come from Germany, via Poland. After this the Ukraine would be divided between Poland and Germany<sup>4</sup>. This intelligence seems fantastic now, but some of the details were subsequently confirmed - first and foremost that there was an agreement between Britain and Germany on solutions to the Czech and Spanish questions and that Czechoslovakia was completely subordinate to Berlin. Intelligence had also reported that the creation of the coalition would be hindered by delays in solving the "Spanish question"<sup>5</sup>. Most likely, the information (or misinformation) from the Italians reflected Mussolini's hopes, which were only partly realised and were discussed privately with German and British circles. Concerning the "Ukrainian question", one thing was obvious to the participants in these conversations: flirtation with the Ukrainian nationalists did not mean that Germany and Poland would allow the creation of an independent, even only officially independent, Ukrainian state. However, handing over right-bank Ukraine to Poland would enable a return to an old idea, which was previously supported by Pilsudski - the creation of a formal federation with Ukraine and Lithuania.

Thus, the project of "solving the Ukrainian question" as a pretext for breaking up the USSR seemed entirely real at the end of 1938 in both Moscow and London. But Berlin would have to take the decision, and Hitler's intentions remained unclear.

On 15 March, immediately after the occupation of Czechoslovakia, the Soim of Carpatho-Ukraine declared independence and elected Avgustyn Voloshyn as its president. However, Hungary acted quickly against Hitler's ally and attacked Khust on 14 March. Contrary to expectations, Hitler did not come to the defence of Carpatho-Ukraine; the 'sich' turned out to be unsuccessful soldiers and were defeated on 16-17 March.

A "German theme" emerged among Ukrainian emigrants as an explanation for this defeat. The former Austrian officer Richard Yary, who led the 'sich', was considered "the puppet of the Germans", the Carpathian sich itself was created with the help of the Germans, and its troops were recruited in territories occupied by the Germans<sup>6</sup>. However, there is no

---

<sup>4</sup> Vestnik Archiva Prezidenta RF. SSSR-Germaniya 1933-1941 gg. Moscow, 2009, S.163.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., S. 164.

<sup>6</sup> Central archives of Federal'noy sluzhby bezopasnosti Rossii (TsA FSB), F.100, Op.11, D.7, Ll.10, 16.

evidence that the Germans directly ordered the commanders to lose the battle with the Hungarians<sup>7</sup>.

Hitler had already abandoned "the Ukrainian question", but before March 1939 this was not known, even among those close to him in Berlin. Warnings that Hitler may move not east, but west, entering London, were connected with the abandonment of the "Ukrainian game" (which Halifax also wrote about in January)<sup>8</sup>. The "Ukrainian question" became a political litmus test to assess Hitler's intentions.

Hitler's decision depended on Poland's position. A change in mood among the Poles could be traced after Munich, when the Nazis moved on from the "Sudeten problem" to the "Danzig issue". Under the Treaty of Versailles Germany ceded Silesia and the "Polish Corridor" - the Baltic coastal area around Gdynia (between the main territory of Germany and East Prussia) to Poland, and Danzig, populated by Germans, became a free city under the patronage of the League of Nations. Danzig was de facto occupied by Poland. Hitler, true to his policy of restoring all land inhabited by Germans, intended to annex Danzig and the Polish Corridor. As Poland was considered an ally, the Germans were prepared to compensate it at another's expense. It soon became clear that the Poles did not want to create a Ukrainian state even under their own control. Without publicly abandoning the Ukrainian game, Hitler was prepared to sacrifice it for a union with Poland to solve the issues which were more important to him. But meanwhile the Ukrainian card could also be played against the Poles. Warsaw was just as concerned about the "Ukrainian question" as Moscow.

On 24 October 1938 Ribbentrop proposed a joint policy for Poland in relation to the USSR based on the Anti-Comintern Pact. Germany promised not to create a puppet Ukrainian state in Carpatho-Ukraine. In return for all of this, Poland was expected to agree to transfer Danzig to Germany and create an extraterritorial German road and railway to connect the two parts of the Reich.

Ribbentrop was even prepared to discuss a more favourable option: exchanging the Baltic coast for the Black Sea coast - at the expense of the

---

<sup>7</sup> Yary actively collaborated with the German intelligence services, but after the war he lived peacefully in a Soviet occupied zone of Austria (See: Kucheruk O., Riko Yary - the Mystery of the OUN, Lvov, 2005). This gives grounds to suspect that he also worked with the Soviet intelligence services. However, even he did (and if he did it was not necessarily in 1939), this does not mean that Yary offered a poor resistance to the Hungarians on the orders of the Germans or the communists. Carpatho-Ukraine could not resist Hungary for long as it was completely isolated with the neighbouring Poland and Romania as its enemies.

<sup>8</sup> God krizisa. 1938-1939..., S. 201.

USSR and without any kind of independent Ukraine. A route from Poland to the Baltic Sea could then be found through the Baltic States. The restoration of the borders of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth from the start of the 18th century was a tempting prospect. But whether the Germans would grant Poland's territorial claims to the USSR and Lithuania and ensure access to the sea, or, do the opposite and create a new Ukrainian state, was not yet known. And they wanted to take the Baltic coast now. The fate of Czechoslovakia had shown that it was not safe to be a satellite of Germany. Poland intended to show Hitler, that it was not Czechoslovakia. The Polish leaders decided that it was too risky to exchange their current access to the sea for "the pie in the sky" of the USSR. And they refused Germany's offer.

In November the German leadership still hoped that if there was a "Soviet-German conflict, Poland [would] be on [their] side"<sup>9</sup>. But during the Christmas holidays Hitler was persuaded that Poland would not take part in his bold plans to carve through Eastern Europe, and this changed the direction of the next attack. On 8 March, Hitler told his close associates of his intention to smash the West first and only then destroy the USSR. Nevertheless, Hitler did not stop consultations with Poland, and did the Poles a favour by refusing to support Carpatho-Ukraine. The point of no return came in the days immediately following the invasion of Czechoslovakia. As Poland did not respond to the favour with gratitude, work on "Fall Weiss" began in April, and the countdown to the German invasion of Poland began.

Despite not using the "Ukrainian question" in public policy, the German leadership did use the Ukrainian nationalists. Up until July 1941 they did not know that Germany was not intending to facilitate Ukrainian independence, and they were ready to see Hitler as an ally, not just a master. On 15 August, the *Abwehr* formed a guerrilla-rebel unit made up of members of the OUN and headed by Roman Sushko, member of the Main *Provid*, to organise a revolt in Western Ukraine. The services of this unit were never needed, but OUN members continued to serve in armed units in regions adjacent to the USSR<sup>10</sup>, which could not fail to make the Soviets nervous.

In London, the events of 16-17 March 1939 were interpreted in view of previous information about Hitler's intentions to use the "Ukrainian game" against the USSR. The fact that Hitler did not march on Ukraine led

---

<sup>9</sup> Fleischhauer I., Pakt. Gitler, Stalin I initsiativa germanisly diplomatii 1938-1939, Moscow, 1991, S. 92.

<sup>10</sup> Dyukov A., Vtorostepennyi vrag. OUN, UPA I reshenie "evreyskogo voprosa", Moscow, 2008, S. 30-31.

Chamberlain to believe that Hitler, having subordinated the Eastern European countries to his will, may now turn on the West.

When he found out what had happened, Chamberlain exchanged mercy for anger. In an angry speech on 17 March 1939 Chamberlain appeared to reject the policy of appeasement. On 31 March he offered Poland a guarantee that Britain would go to war if the country suffered any "direct or indirect aggression". By indirect aggression he meant what had happened to Czechoslovakia in 1939. When Albania was invaded by Italy the guarantee was extended to the Balkans.

The British guarantees to Poland were a major problem for Hitler. Chamberlain's move was very carefully considered to show who was the boss in Europe. After Poland's refusal to participate in Barthou's schemes and the share of Czechoslovakia taken by the Poles, Hitler considered Poland a satellite state. In accepting the British guarantees, Poland proved that this was not the case.

The British offer of guarantees and the ultimatum issued by Germany at the same time, on 21 March 1939, left Poland with a choice - either become a German satellite, or an "equal" ally with the West. To ally with the West was more honourable than to ally with Hitler. But siding with Britain would make a union between German and Poland against the USSR impossible. Hitler would not want an ally who had been sent from London. Six days before the German invasion of Poland, on 24 August, Göring told the Polish ambassador, Lipski: "The main obstacle to friendly relations between the Reich and Poland is not the Danzig issue but the alliance between Poland and England"<sup>11</sup>.

## Troops and fears

Coulondre, the witty French ambassador in Moscow, noted that the Anglo-French guarantee would be most profitable to Stalin, who was now separated from Hitler by an anti-German coalition: "From now on he can watch events unfolding as though standing on a balcony away from the danger"<sup>12</sup>. But Stalin was in no hurry to enjoy the view from the balcony and send for tea. He knew that the balcony was unstable. It was someone else's balcony, and Stalin could not strengthen the unstable balcony of his own house.

Coulondre could not see how a future attack on the USSR looked from Moscow. Throughout the existence of a united Russian state, invasions

---

<sup>11</sup> Proektor D.M., *Fashizm: put' agressii i gibeli*, Moscow, 1989, S. 206.

<sup>12</sup> Quotation in: *Fleischhauer I., Pakt. Gitler, Stalin...*, S.112.

from the West had come from three fronts: from the north - here the main target since the 18th century had been Petersburg/ Petrograd/ Leningrad; in the centre - to Moscow, which was the most convenient centre of government for the country due to its geographical position and transport links; from the south - to Ukraine and the Caucasus, rich in resources. In 20th century wars involving huge armies which cannot be kept fed, an attack has to be supported by transport links to bring food supplies, weapons and ammunition. In these conditions a direct attack on Moscow would be almost impossible - transport links could easily be cut off from the north and south. This lesson was obvious enough from the losses suffered by Napoleon's army in Russia.

A direct advance on Moscow from the western border would only be possible if attacking from the north and south at the same time, on several different fronts. The war would be uneconomical - around three times fewer soldiers than were allocated to the whole campaign could be concentrated on the main front. But to end a war with Russia, Moscow would have to be attacked. Therefore the only sensible strategy in attacking Moscow directly while advancing from the north and south at the same time would be to end the war within a year. If this risky strategy was not used, then the attack should be made from northern and southern fronts. After establishing itself in the Baltics, the invading army, well supplied via the Baltic Sea, could attack Petrograd/ Leningrad and take it within a year, obtaining good winter lodgings and, again, excellent transport links. And by the following year they could begin to advance on Moscow from that position. In the first year Ukraine would be attacked from the south. The invading army could get its supplies through Poland and Romania, and via the Black Sea and from the resources of Ukraine itself - the breadbasket of Eastern Europe. If Ukraine was taken the following year, the army could also advance on Moscow from comparatively nearby. Or, if the Bolsheviks were broken but not completely defeated, an honorary "second Treaty of Brest-Litovsk" could be signed (based on the model of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk of 1918), and the resources of Ukraine and possibly the Caucasus could be obtained. Thus, the optimal strategy for European countries in a war with Russia would be a "flanking" strategy - attacking from the north and south and therefore surrounding Moscow. But this strategy had an important disadvantage - the war would last at least two years.

The danger of "flanking" made the Soviet leadership especially nervous when there was talk of a potential aggressor approaching the Baltics and Leningrad, of the German's flirting with the UNO and OUN and of the lifting of the ban (established in May 1936 at the Montreux Convention)

prohibiting military ships from passing through the Turkish straits into the Black Sea.

On 7 March 1939 news reached Moscow of an agreement between Germany and Estonia which would allow German soldiers to be stationed close to Leningrad. Together with "Carpatho-Ukraine", this was the start of "flanking". Stalin did not yet know of the crisis in German-Polish relations. The enemy's strategy of flanking was like the sword of Damocles hanging over the USSR.

It was in these conditions that the 18th Congress of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks) met. On 10 March, Stalin gave a speech in which he outlined a picture of world war: "Warmongers" are setting the USSR and Germany against each other over Ukraine, trying to "have others pull the chestnuts out of the fire for them", i.e. to get the USSR to sacrifice its people to hold back the aggressor, while remaining in safety themselves. Of course, the USSR, true to its policy of "collective security", was as ready as before to help the victims of aggression, but only if Western countries did the same. Then Stalin presented his analysis of the relations between the two imperialist groups. He presented the policies of the "Axis" as follows: "War against the interests of England, France and the United States? Nonsense! "We" are waging war on the Comintern, not on these states. If you don't believe it, read the "Anti-Comintern Pact" concluded between Italy, Germany and Japan"<sup>13</sup>. Stalin called these actions by the "Axis" nations, "a clumsy game of camouflage". "The leader of the people" warned the West to be more compliant with the USSR, or pay. A warning to the Germans followed. They were being used in another's game. Supporters of appeasement were trying "not to hinder Germany from embroiling itself in European affairs, not to interfere with a war with the Soviet Union: to allow all the belligerents to sink deeply into the mire of war, to encourage them surreptitiously in this, to allow them to weaken and exhaust one another; and then, when they have become weak enough, to appear on the scene with fresh strength, to appear, of course, "in the interests of peace," and to dictate conditions to the enfeebled belligerents. Cheap and easy!"<sup>14</sup>. Invading the USSR would be the beginning of the end of Hitler; the West would use him for their own purposes and discard him to history.

The speech did not yet contain any calls for closer relations with the Nazis, only an attempt to avert military conflict and at the same time oppose the "imperialists".

---

<sup>13</sup> Stalin I.V., *Voprosy leninizma*, Moscow, 1946, S. 569.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, P. 570.

The Fuhrer did not read Stalin's speech at the time. But Hitler, even without Stalin's hints, could already sense that he was being used by Chamberlain, and that it would end in world domination by Britain.

In the West, Stalin's speech was perceived to show that he was well-informed and ready to continue the policy of collective security, and they decided to respond. The famous political, and later military, negotiations of the summer of 1939 were based on impressions that later turned out to be false.

The British impression was that Hitler might negotiate with Britain but not with the USSR. The French impression was that Stalin might negotiate with Britain and France but not with Hitler. Hitler's impression was that the West would not go to war, and therefore that it was more important to negotiate with Stalin. Stalin's impression was that there was conflict between the two groups of imperialists. He would enter into an agreement with whoever had more to give to the USSR.

The position of Poland was not taken into consideration. And this offended the Polish politicians. The superpowers forgot that a small, but proud, nation could paralyse their plans, which were not favourable to Poland.

Military negotiations in Moscow reached a dead-end because of the issue of the passage of troops through Poland. Just as in political negotiations, the Czechoslovakian experience was at the centre of attention. In 1938, the USSR was ready to help the victims of aggression, but the Red Army could not get to the battle field. Poland was then part of a pro-German coalition. Perhaps it would be different this time?

But no. The Poles firmly stood up to the USSR in defence of their borders. And one of the main reasons for this stubbornness was again the "Ukrainian question". The Polish Commander-in-Chief, Edward Rydz-Śmigły, declared that: "regardless of the consequences, Russian troops will never be permitted onto a single inch of Polish land"<sup>15</sup>. Ukrainian and Belarusian "inches" of land in the "Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth" were also implied. Although the USSR recognised the legitimacy of the borders determined by the Treaty of Riga in 1921, it disputed Poland's full sovereignty over western Ukrainian lands and demanded that this territory be granted autonomy. This was supported by Britain and France in the 20s and early 30s. The fact that Poland refused to grant autonomy to the ethnic minorities, undermined the legitimacy of its occupation of western Ukraine and western Belarus, at least in the eyes of the USSR<sup>16</sup>.

---

<sup>15</sup> Quotation in: Meltyhov M., *Sovetsko-pol'skie voyny 1918-1939*, Moscow, S.194.

<sup>16</sup> See: Makarchuk V., *Gosudarstvenno-territorial'nyi status zapadno-ukrainskih*

"The military conferecne soon foundered upon the refusal of Poland and Rumania to allow the transit of Russian troops," writes Churchill sadly, "The Polish attitude was "With the Germans we risk losing our liberty, with the Russians our soul.""<sup>17</sup> (Marshal Rydz-Śmigły). Poland would later face first the one and then the other. But, at least the soul of the Polish people is still in one piece. "The obstacle to such an agreement was the terror of these same border countries of receiving Soviet help in the shape of the Soviet armies marching through their territories to defend them from the Germans and incidentally incorporating them in the Soviet-Communist system of which they were the most vehement opponents", continues Churchill. Poland, Rumania, Finland and the three Baltic States did not know whether it was German aggression or Russian rescue that they dreaded more. "It was this hideous choice that paralysed British and French policy"<sup>18</sup>. In reality the choice in 1939 was not so "hideous" - the USSR would be allowed into the territory of the "Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth" under explicit conditions and under the supervision of the still powerful Britain and France. It was a totally different situation, than in 1944-1945, when the USSR entered Eastern Europe with force. But the Polish leadership were not confident even in this situation.

To allay unnecessary fears, Voroshilov proposed a specific plan for the passage of Soviet troops through Polish territory using two narrow corridors. The options for war proposed by Shaposhnikov, Chief of Staff of the Red Army, impressed the French representative, Doumenc, as they were so specific. In contrast to his British colleagues, Doumenc knew a lot about land operations, but had only a vague idea of the East European military scene. Voroshilov's plan proceeded from the long-standing "flanking" problem: the northern column would pass through the Vilnius corridor, blocking the German's attempts to attack the Baltics, and the southern column would go through Galicia, cutting the Germans off from Ukraine and from Romanian oil. Both themes would continue in further Soviet military planning.

The French supported the idea of the Red Army passing through strictly defined bands of Polish territory. But, when the Poles learnt of the details, they were afraid of these plans. The route proposed for movement of troops went through the most disputed territories. Today Soviet troops would take Vilnius and Galicia and tomorrow they would refuse to leave, saying that it is not Polish land. The Poles were also worried about the

---

zemel' v period Vtoroy mirovoy voyny, Moscow, 2010, S. 132-147.

<sup>17</sup> Cherchil W., Vtoraya mirovaya voyna, Kn. 1, (Churchill W., The Second World War, Book 1) Moscow, 1991, S. 177.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., S.163.

USSR taking part in future peace talks as one of the victors, and claiming their share. At the expense of Poland.

Having met with opposition from the Poles, the allies proposed entering into an agreement without their approval (at this time it was still very important to intimidate Hitler, even for Chamberlain), but Voroshilov refused. The Red Army should have the right to enter Poland on the first day of the war, not when the Polish army had already been broken.

Entering into an agreement without the right of passage was very dangerous. A simple series of events followed: Germany invades Poland, bringing destruction. Britain, France and the USSR declare war on Germany. After this, the French and British attack the Siegfried line, while the main battles unfold on the Eastern front. After all the appeasement moves this strategic trap was the most probable. In fact, this was to hit Poland within a month.

On 17 August, British diplomats, worried by Hitler's refusal to cooperate with their suggestions, joined the French efforts to push the Polish position from its deadlock. But the Poles stood firm. The Polish ambassador, Lukasevich, said in a conversation with Bonne: "What would you say if you were asked to trust the protection of Alsace-Lorraine to Germany"<sup>19</sup>. Alsace and Western Ukraine were both acquired territories, whose security the interlocutors were not completely sure of. The despondent Bonne thought that refusing to agree to the passage of Soviet troops meant that "Poland took on responsibility for the possible failure of military negotiations in Moscow and for all consequences arising from this"<sup>20</sup>. I.e. for the war which devoured the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth.

### Stalin's choice

In 1942 Stalin told Churchill: "We formed the impression that the British and French Governments were not resolved to go to war if Poland were attacked but that they hoped the diplomatic line-up of Britain, France and Russia would deter Hitler. We were sure it would not." Stalin used a conversation between representatives of the allies as an example: "How many divisions," Stalin had asked, "will France send against Germany on mobilisation?" The answer was: "About one hundred". He then asked: "How many will England send?" The answer was: "Two, and two more later". "Ah, two and two more later," Stalin had repeated. "Do you know", he asked, "how many divisions we shall have to put on the Russian front if

---

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., S.19.

<sup>20</sup> Quotation in: Sipols V., *Tayny diplomaticheskoye. Kanun Velikoy Otechestvennoy voyny.1939-1941*, Moscow, 1997, S.79.

we go to war with Germany?" There was a pause. "More than three hundred"<sup>21</sup>. Stalin exaggerated his intentions of three years previously (nevertheless at the time of the conversation with Churchill the Second World War was under way and he had to deploy as many divisions as he had, and even more). At the negotiations in 1939, Voroshilov said that the USSR would deploy 136 divisions against Germany. Nevertheless, this was more than the French could deploy (in reality at the time of the Polish-German war they managed 78 divisions), and considerably more than the British, who tried to conduct the whole European concert with these troops.

The deadlock in negotiations with Britain and France pushed Stalin to accept Germany's offer, while his reluctance to side with Germany led to the deadlock in negotiations with the "Entente".

By 22 August, the French government were ready to sign an agreement, but without the agreement of Poland, this would change nothing.

On 15 August, the German ambassador, Schulenburg, was instructed by Ribbentrop to ask the Soviets to accept a visit from the great leader of Germany in the near future. This offer was supposed to be read out to Molotov, but not given to him. If the deal failed, the paper should not fall into the hands of the enemy. After he heard the offer, Molotov agreed that they needed to act quickly on this.

But at the end of a pleasant conversation, Molotov disappointed the German ambassador - there was no need to rush the visit from Ribbentrop, "so that it was not just limited to conversations in Moscow, but concrete decisions were made"<sup>22</sup>.

On 17 August, when Schulenburg visited Molotov, the latter had already consulted with Stalin and responded to Ribbentrop's earlier question: "The Soviet government acknowledges the German government's declaration of its true desire to strengthen political relations between Germany and the USSR..." But a list of past grievances followed. However "as the German government has now changed their previous policies", it should first show that its intentions are serious by entering into economic agreements: to grant the Soviet Union 200 million marks in credit over seven years (in 1946 no one even remembered this) and to supply high-value equipment. First the agreements and then all the rest. The next step could be to enter into a non-aggression pact or reaffirm the old neutrality pact of 1926. And, finally, the most appealing part: "with the simultaneous conclusion of a special protocol which would define the

---

<sup>21</sup> Cherchil W., *Vtoraya mirovaya voyna...*, S.177-178.

<sup>22</sup> SSSR-Germaniya 1939. Dokumenty I materialy o sovetsko-germanskikh otnosheniyah s aprelya po oktyabr', Vilnius, 1989, S.37.

interests of the signatory parties in this or that question of foreign policy, and would form an integral part of the pact"<sup>23</sup>. This protocol could provide for everything, including relations with Poland, and for this the Germans were ready to enter into closer relations with a recent enemy. But the division of spheres of influence and the secrecy of the protocol were not mentioned.

It was only on 19 August that the Soviet leadership gave in to the German attentions and the path to Ribbentrop's visit to Moscow was opened.

The most controversial document, adopted on 23-24 August 1939, both from a legal and an ethical point of view, was the secret protocol. For the purposes of this paper, we are interested in its political significance. The differences between this document and the documents signed on 28 September are of interest. There are two important differences. Firstly, territorial divisions and spheres of influence are not mentioned. Secondly, the division of these spheres would be through the centre of the Polish state ("approximately by the line of the rivers Narev, Vistula and San"), while on 28 September the USSR no longer made claims to any land lying beyond the Curzon line. However, the protocol of 23 August did not exclude that a diminished Polish state may be preserved<sup>24</sup>. It was then clear the the USSR should include part of this future Polish state in its sphere of influence (but not as its territory), so as not to give it up entirely to the care of Germany.

### **"Promised to the Ukrainians"**

By 17 September the historical fog had dispersed and it became clear than Britain and France had not provided any real help to their ally, that their guarantee had been a bluff, and that the war they had declared against Germany was a "phoney war". Poland suffered one defeat after another against Germany and Hitler had no reason to preserve it. The secret protocol of 23 August was already growing old. Stalin's plans also began to change.

Stalin delayed "joining the game" until 17 September, showing the world that he was not getting involved in the German-Polish war. This irritated the German leadership who turned out to be the only aggressor. The question was even asked of what to do with the eastern part of Poland, which came under the Soviet sphere of interests, if the USSR did not send

---

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., S. 40-41.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., S.63-64.

troops in. On 12 September, Ribbentrop spoke to Keitel and Canaris about the possibility of creating a Ukrainian state there (although the USSR was not yet hostile). Andriy Melnyk, leader of the OUN, was ready to set up a coalition government for Galicia from Canaris' gift<sup>25</sup>.

The USSR army crossed the border. The Polish ambassador in Moscow was given a note with an official explanation of Soviet actions: "Warsaw no longer exists as the capital of Poland. The Polish government has collapsed and shows no signs of life. This means that the Polish state and its government have de facto ceased to exist." In reality the government still lived, working in Kolomiya near the Romanian border. The arguments used had been introduced by Chamberlain in the diplomatic reversal after the fall of Czechoslovakia. If the state had collapsed, then agreements made with it were no longer valid: "In the same way the agreement concluded between the USSR and Poland ceased to be valid". This was the main reason that the "disappearance" of the Polish government had to be reported. Later security motives, key to Soviet foreign policy propaganda, came into effect: "Left to itself and without leadership, Poland had become fertile ground for any chance or unexpected occurrence which could threaten the USSR. Therefore, the Soviet government, hitherto neutral, can no longer remain neutral in the face of these facts". This meant that the USSR ceased to be neutral, i.e. essentially, entered the war. "Neither can the Soviet government react indifferently to the fact that our brothers, the Ukrainians and Belarusians who live on Polish territory, left to the mercy of fate, remain undefended." This was an important reversal in Soviet ideology, which was the start of a new stage in the long evolution from international to national priorities. While previously the USSR had planned to "liberate" and "defend" all peoples, now - only those who had territories which were part of the USSR. A union of "brothers" - an important motif of Hitler's ideology - was now being used by the Soviet Union. "In view of these circumstances, the Soviet government has issued instructions to the Commander-in-Chief of the Red Army to order the troops to cross the border and defend the lives and property of the populations of Western Ukraine and Western Belarus". The ideological change occurred gradually, all the more so as the part of the territory inhabited mainly by Poles, was within the Soviet sphere of influence: "At the same time the Soviet government intends to take all measures to liberate the Polish people from this ill-fated war into which they have been plunged by their foolish leaders, and give them the chance to live peacefully"<sup>26</sup>. At this time the secret dividing line was still

---

<sup>25</sup> Makarchuk V., Gosudarstvenno-territorial'niy status..., S.158.

<sup>26</sup> "Pravda", 18 sentyabrya 1939.

valid. Government officials, who were destined to lead sovietization, were still focused on the idea that part of Polish territory would join the USSR as the Polish Soviet Republic<sup>27</sup>. However, in just a few days the PSSR project disappeared into the archives.

The Belarusian and Ukrainian fronts, seizing land in the east of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth from the north and south, met with considerably less opposition from the weakened Polish forces which remained in the region than the Germans had done.

The Ukrainian and Belarusian populations, dissatisfied with the policies of the Polish authorities, came onto the streets on mass to welcome the arrival of the Red Army. Of course, not all of the population was celebrating, but they did not come out in protest. On 20 September, during the battle of Grodno, the local population helped the Soviet troops.

On 19 September a Soviet-German communiqué was published, in which the USSR were forced to put their armed forces in the same league as the Wehrmacht: "The aim of these forces is to restore peace and order in Poland, which had been destroyed by the collapse of the Polish State, and to help the Polish population to reconstruct the conditions of its political existence."<sup>28</sup> In short, the fourth partition of Poland. But Stalin wanted to divide not Poland proper, but the multi-national Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth - to divide regions populated by Poles from regions populated by Belarusians and Ukrainians. Schulenburg was informed of this on 19 September. On 25 September Stalin personally explained his motives to Schulenburg. The division of the Polish population itself could cause friction between the USSR and Germany. Therefore they could take the Polish part of the Soviet sphere of influence up to the Vistula in exchange for Lithuania.

Stalin kept quiet about his other motives. By not trying to capture part of Poland, Stalin skilfully avoided accusations of aggression. Germany had committed the aggression, and the USSR had simply defended the peoples, the majority of whose countrymen lived in the USSR. The Soviet Union was not attacking the Poles. There was no oppression. Stalin would have needed the initial inclusion of part of Poland in the Soviet sphere of influence if events led to the preservation of a diminished Poland. Then this state would be independent both from Germany and the USSR. Now this was no longer necessary, and Hitler could take the conqueror's prize of the whole of Poland and all the international consequences this would bring. Stalin's calculation was correct. The western countries preferred not to consider the USSR an aggressor.

---

<sup>27</sup> Makarchuk V., Gosudarstvenno-territorial'niy status..., S.187.

<sup>28</sup> "Pravda", 19 sentyabrya 1939.

The German researcher H. L. Weinberg draws attention to the military and strategic "oddity" of this exchange of part of Poland for Lithuania: "Stalin gave the Germans the chance to get closer to Moscow, but distanced them from Leningrad"<sup>29</sup>. Did Stalin sacrifice Moscow's security for non-interference in the German-Anglo-French war? It is a very important observation. But Stalin did not sacrifice this at all. This exchange is one more piece of evidence that Stalin saw an attack against Leningrad (a variant of the "flanking" strategy) as a greater threat than a German attack from the west, towards Moscow.

On 28 September Warsaw fell. On the same day Germany and the USSR concluded a treaty of friendship and boundaries. The signatories declared their intentions to ensure "peace and order" and "the peaceful coexistence of peoples" and divided the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth along a new line. When he arrived in Moscow, Ribbentrop met with a warmer welcome than previously, but negotiations went on just as long. The stumbling blocks were the Suwalki region, the lower course of the San River and the Augustów Forest. The Germans needed the forest and oil fields. Stalin was firm on his other demands, referring to the fact that the territory had been "promised to the Ukrainians". Was it really that the "Ukrainians" had been promised the land and more-or-less had Stalin by the throat, not letting him make concessions to the Germans? But, there were real circumstances behind this figure of speech. Stalin firmly and steadfastly made sure that the Germans did not get any Ukrainian territories (in 1940 he, already acting in defiance of the new secret protocol, removed one more potential "Ukrainian Piedmont" in North Bukovina, inciting the displeasure of Germany), but made no claim to Polish territory. Pandering to the national feelings of the Ukrainians, and thereby strengthening their support for the communist regime, which had been undermined by the 1932-1933 famine, Stalin also showed the whole world his commitment to the principles of the formation of boundaries on national and ethnic lines, which Britain and France had abandoned in the 30s, by compromising with Hitler in Austria and Czechoslovakia. This nationalist approach ensured that Stalin's foreign policy was perceived as completely fair not only in Berlin but also in London.

---

<sup>29</sup> Vaynberg G.L., Otkrytye voprosy I spornye momenty //Soobsheniya sovместnoy komissii po izucheniu noveyshey istorii rossiysko-germanskikh otnosheniy, T. 1, Moscow, 2002, S. 88.

## **Solving the "Ukrainian question"**

There are plenty of very negative views of the actions of the Soviet leadership and of Stalin personally in September 1939. I will not argue with these views now. But I would like some clarity and less double standards. After all, it is almost always the same people who are indignant at the "Moscow deal" who also have a positive view of the existence of Ukraine, uniting Galicia and the left-bank. And this union of the Ukrainian people happened in September 1939 as a result of the dishonourable and aggressive actions of Stalin. We could argue as much as we wanted about his motives; in my view the most important was the military strategic motive - to prevent a "flanking" attack on Moscow from the enemy. But Stalin pushed a policy of territorial expansion in the name of "solving the Ukrainian question", and this question was then decisively solved to such an extent that it can still be considered solved today.

To clarify: Either the union of the Ukrainian people within the borders of one state is good. In which case the "liberation campaign of the Red Army" was also good. Or the attack on the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth when it was already in a desperate situation, but all the same an attack and aggression - is bad, and in that case the Ukrainian state, which came about as a direct result of this aggression, is bad.

I am a historian, not a lawyer, and for me it is not so much important to work out the "legality" of events, as their causes and consequences. The causes of the events at that time were the deepening crisis of industrial society, which started in the Great Depression and expressed itself in the emergence of industrial etacracy, often taking a totalitarian form, and in the conflict between these societies for resources and, ultimately, for world domination. This conflict was cruel and bloody, but this did not stop cynical considerations being covered up by a legal veil. The USSR, Britain, German and their allies all did this. In this history, the same states committed crimes and were the victims of crimes (although the activities of Nazism and fascism obviously produced more crimes). Ukraine was not the subject of this conflict, but her resources were one of the most important tools, and the "Ukrainian question" was one of the most important acid tests. And for these risks, the people were unexpectedly rewarded with unity in September 1939 (1939-1940 including North Bukovina).

The transformation in Western Ukraine and Belarus took into account the national feelings of the majority, in democratic forms (which, clearly, did not coincide with the content). In the Soviet zone the Ukrainian and Belarusian masses campaigned for the Soviet way of life. Cinema, the

works of Soviet artists and the proper behaviour of the troops all contrasted with the caricatures of Soviet life drawn in pre-war Poland. The majority of the population decided themselves that they had simply been deceived and that life in the USSR was much better than in pre-war Poland. Counterpropaganda was suppressed by the oppressive authorities. Unsurprisingly, on 22 October an overwhelming majority of the population voted for the candidates nominated by the new authorities. The deputies then voted for the introduction of Soviet power and reunification with the Ukrainian and Belarusian SSRs, which was done on 2 November 1939.

# “CORDON SANITAIRE”: A STRATEGICAL PROBLEM AND ITS SOLUTION

MIKHAIL MELTUHOV

In the days of the Revolution and Civil War, Soviet Russia lost both the position it once held as the Russian Empire in the international arena, as well as territory in Eastern Europe. The country's level of influence it had in Europe regressed 200 years, and found itself outside of the framework of a new international relations system. It is no coincidence that Soviet leadership adopted the concept of a “world revolution,” combining new ideology with traditional tasks in foreign policy, in order to strengthen influences of other countries in the world. Strategic goals of the Soviet Union's foreign policy became a global reorganization of the Versailles-Washington system of international relations, making England, France and their allies main opponents.

It is only natural that England and France, who contributed to the rise of new governments on the western borders of the USSR, were interested in their hostile terms with Moscow. Advised by the creators of the new world order, Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and Romania represented the original “cordon sanitaire” against the Russian Revolution and had to carry out an important function in the fight against the dangers of Bolshevism. First of all, they had to secure the physical destruction of media conveying Bolshevik ideology. Secondly, they had to actively introduce a mass ideology of nationalism to the public consciousness, as remedial means for the spreading of Bolshevism. And thirdly, they had to prohibit the USSR from joining a possible revolution in Germany. Furthermore, these countries had to serve as a counterbalance for the disarming of Germany in Eastern Europe.

Initially, Anglo-French policies attempted to establish a single politico-military block in Eastern Europe between the Barents and Black seas, but it turned out that the countries located between the two seas had quite a few problems of their own; The most significant being the Polish-Lithuanian conflict regarding the province of Vilnius, which was annexed and occupied by Poland. This, in principle, dismissed the concerns of