

Institute of National Remembrance

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IPN Statement on the Desecration of the Cemetery in Katyn

The Institute of National Remembrance strongly protests against the desecration of the resting place of thousands of Polish officers murdered by the NKVD in the spring of 1940 in Katyn. Actions directed at making Katyn a place of the dissemination of fictitious information on the fate of Bolshevik prisoners of war in 1920, are further manifestations of the Soviet and Russian policy of lies and historical manipulation which ought to be explicitly condemned and which bear clear signs of provocation.

In view of the above, we wish to note that shedding false light on the fate of Bolshevik prisoners of the 1920s was a propaganda-driven activity, deliberately planned by the state authorities of the USSR in the early 1990s. At that time, the leaders of the Soviet party and the state recognized that there was no possibility of denying the facts about the mass murders of Polish officers by the NKVD in Katyn and other locations where executions had been carried out. In order to neutralise the public reception of the acknowledgement of the Katyn massacre, on 3 November 1990, the President of the USSR at that

time, Mikhail Gorbachev, issued a decree, ordering Soviet state institutions (KGB, USSR Academy of Sciences, USSR Prosecutor's Office, USSR Ministry of Defence) to find such events in the "history of Soviet-Polish bilateral relations, which resulted in losses of the Soviet side".

It was only in the wake of these orders and due to the purposeful manipulation of facts, that the Soviet side introduced the fabricated problem of the fate of Bolshevik prisoners of war of 1920 - taken prisoner during the Polish defence against the Bolshevik "heading west", into bilateral relations and opinions of the general public. This was done deliberately, even though the Soviets were well aware that Poland did not commit crimes against these prisoners. It was known that, in Polish camps, mortality among Bolshevik prisoners was due to natural causes, including illnesses, primarily outbreaks of epidemic diseases spreading among prisoners of war. High mortality, caused by severe sanitary and epidemiological conditions, occurred in most of the prisoner-of-war camps in Europe after the First World War and other regional conflicts.

The fate of the Bolshevik prisoners of war was never kept secret by Poland. All the prisoners who died were buried publicly and with due respect, in collective graves in communal resting places such as the Rakowicki Cemetery in Cracow. The Bolshevik prisoners were laid to rest on the same cemetery lots as participants of other wars and soldiers of the Polish Army who had died due to war wounds, diseases and other hardships of battle. The death of any soldier was duly

honoured, irrespective of his nationality or the army he had served in.

Having complete knowledge of these facts for the several decades which have passed since the war of 1919-1920, the Soviets have never raised this issue in bilateral relations: being fully aware that there were no murders committed on the Bolshevik prisoners of war, because Poland did not use such criminal methods against prisoners. Such far-reaching manipulations in the context of the fate of Bolshevik prisoners had not even been used in times of Soviet domination over Poland, when both the USSR and the authorities of communist Poland, which were fully dependent on the Soviets, went to great lengths to create a negative image of the Second Republic of Poland.

In 1990 the authorities of the USSR took measures to eliminate the negative connotations brought on by taking responsibility for the Katyn massacre. Since then, the number of Bolsheviks who had died in Polish camps has been exaggerated. False claims about the causes and circumstances of their deaths have also been disseminated. Even though credible research conducted by Polish and Russian historians has numerous times proved that the propaganda cannot be justified by any factual grounds, Russia intentionally continues its policy of historical manipulation.

The fact that Katyn, not related to the war of 1919-1921 in any way, but sanctified by the blood of Polish officers murdered by NKVD in 1940, was chosen as a place for presenting falsifications about prisoners of war 1919-1921, additionally confirms the provocative and instrumental nature of these activities.

Such examples of violating the memory of victims of Soviet crimes result in indignation as they are both dishonourable and uncivilized ways of manipulating history in order to achieve political goals.

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