

# Institute of National Remembrance

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## The criminal nature of the German occupation of Poland 1939-1945. Standpoint of the Institute of National Remembrance

The Holocaust was a state enterprise of the German Reich. Its implementation, course, time, as well as the selection of tools and crime scenes were the result of the decisions issued by state organs of the German Reich.

The German Reich could implement the Holocaust in Poland only after the aggression on and destruction of the independent Republic of Poland.

The Republic of Poland did not accept any concessions to the demands of Adolf Hitler. As the first country in the world, it mounted armed resistance to the German Reich in 1939. It was conquered after a lonely fight, abandoned by its English and French allies, crushed as a result of the co-operation of two totalitarian regimes: German and Soviet.

The Republic of Poland never undertook capitulation talks with the Germans, having remained a militant side for the entire period of the war. Never did it consent to the genocidal practices of the occupiers. Neither did it leave the allied side even for one second of the World War II. The state authorities of the Republic of Poland in exile directed the Polish armed forces to fight against Germany on the European and African fronts. They also governed the Polish Underground State they managed to recreate in a country under hostile occupation.

The German Reich looked for collaborators of crimes against European Jews. In situations when whole countries collaborated with it, as in the case of France, the Reich widely used their help in organizing the genocide of European Jews. The Republic of Poland remained a declared enemy of the German Reich - its authorities never even considered participating in any form of collaboration with the national-socialist power.

The totalitarian German Reich, exercising absolute power over a subjugated society, enforced the policy of terror and enslavement. The German Reich imposed criminal provisions of German law on the whole community of enslaved citizens of the Republic of Poland. It exercised power through segregating individual groups of the population. The Germans announced their nation as a "master race." The incapacitated Poles were thought of as people of the second category, exposed to the most cruel forms of repression. Jews were treated even worse - they were refused any legal protection, and were later appointed the role of the first nation condemned to physical annihilation by the

German Reich.

The German Reich closed the Jews in specially separated city districts (ghettos). Under the threat of death, it forbade them to leave these areas arbitrarily. Under the threat of the death penalty the German Reich forbade Poles any form of help that might be offered to Jews hiding outside the ghettos.

By enforcing ruthless power in the ghettos and outside the ghettos, the German Reich sought various groups of people who, in exchange for special treatment, would become tools used to execute criminal orders. It found such collaborators among the Polish population outside the ghettos and among the Jewish population in the ghettos. For its own purposes, the German Reich established new German police formations from among Poles ("blue" police) and in the ghettos from among Jews (Judicher Ordnungsdienst). Like every totalitarian state, the German Reich made extensive use of collaborators and informers. It protected those who, through denunciations and loyalty to the imposed German legal regulations, gave vent to criminal instincts or wanted to take advantage of the opportunity to obtain material goods.

In areas outside the ghettos, part of the Polish population showed acts of extreme courage by providing help and hiding Jewish fellow citizens. These were illegal actions under the law of the German Reich - heroes who took such actions were exposing themselves to death, often exposing their families' lives as well . They were not the majority - in the circumstances of terror the majority always tries to survive while remaining calm in the face of imposed power. The instincts of survival,

focus on the support of relatives and not strangers, were also displayed by the majority of the Jewish population in the ghettos. In light of the frightened and passive majority of the population, living in the world of the occupant's orders, that the attitudes of heroism always stand out as a model for imitation.

In a society dominated by totalitarian violence, illegal activities, including those aimed at regaining independence or social resistance (including help for Jews who were being hidden) are the domain of only the most courageous part of society. Similarly, in the ghettos, only a small group of Jewish residents took up underground resistance activities. As mentioned before, due to the fact that activities described above were illegal, they had to be kept secret not only from the totalitarian authorities but also from other residents. Without this, no resistance, no underground or opposition movement would have been able to survive.

Most people - in both the ghettos and outside them - were exposed to ruthless German terror. Even a single secret informer or overt collaborator of the German authorities was enough to paralyze entire communities with fear. Outside the ghettos, German regulations prohibiting Jews from staying in these areas generated opportunities for such activities. In order to achieve personal gain, part of the population tried to take advantage of the criminal circumstances created by the totalitarian state. An ardent part of the police formations created by the German Reich outside and inside the ghettos took an active part in crimes committed on fellow citizens and

confreres. All such actions (including denunciations of Jews in hiding and Poles who were hiding them) were acts of betrayal of the Republic of Poland.

Even during the war, conditions permitting, the Polish Underground State performed death sentences on such functionaries, and the Jewish resistance movement did so in the ghettos. The Republic of Poland - also through the authorities of the Polish Underground State - warned all collaborators of the German Reich against criminal responsibility, even after Poland regains independence.

Poland repeatedly alarmed the world about German crimes. In the discussion on the Holocaust, the words of the Prime Minister of the Polish Republic, Gen. Sikorski, uttered in New York on 16 December 1942, remain valid. It was he who appealed to the Allies who were still passive in view of the enormity of these crimes:

*In order to visualize the terrifying massacre of Jews, you ought to imagine, for example, the entire area of Manhattan being fenced off inside the ghetto walls, behind which all Jews from the western hemisphere are imprisoned and gradually and methodically annihilated in groups of several thousand a day by machine gun salvos, poisoned in gas chambers or killed by means of electric current. At the same time, referring to the documents of the Polish underground, he said: The number of Jews killed has reached one million and is increasing every day. Everyone is being killed, the rich, the poor, the old, women, men, youth, babies. All of these people are guilty of having been born to a Jewish nation condemned to be destroyed by Hitler. That is why*

*we Poles, Catholics, must speak up. We do not want to be Pilates. We cannot actively counteract German murders. We cannot do anything, save anyone, but we strongly protest from the depth of our hearts, taken over by pity, indignation and terror.*

The authorities of the Republic of Poland have never intended to protect perpetrators of crimes - regardless of their nationality. All Poles who took part in the crimes of the German Reich were treated as those who compromised civil duties during the war. Nothing in this matter and in these assessments has changed since the war, up to the times of contemporary free Poland.

The Institute of National Remembrance has always considered, considers and shall consider it its duty to stigmatize their cooperation with Germany, and to publish facts related to it. Nationality should not be a determining factor in protecting criminals and denouncers in Poland. The Institute of National Remembrance has consistently applied and will apply the same measure to the criminals and collaborators of the totalitarian German Reich, as to the criminals and collaborators of the totalitarian Soviet Union and the post-war communist state. There is no reason why any act of cooperation of a Polish citizen against fellow citizens should be subject to any protection.

The Institute is committed to cherish and protect the memory of millions of Polish, Jewish and other victims of totalitarianism - regardless of the provenience of criminals, regardless of their nationality. At the same time, the Institute of National Remembrance is

fully convinced that any discussion on the victims of German occupation excluding the German Reich (as a state that was the organizer of the Holocaust and committed crimes on millions of Jews and Poles, imposed criminal laws, made decisions on mass genocide, sent armed groups against innocent civilians, and protected every group of obeying German regulations) moves us away from understanding the realities of war and occupation in Poland.

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