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## ANTI-POLISH WORLD WAR II NARRATIVES IN THE RUSSIAN INTERNET MEDIA SPACE

a Case Study of the period from December 2019 to April 2020

### ABSTRACT

The article touches upon the anti-Polish narratives in the Russian Internet media space that appeared during the period between December 2019 and April 2020. An anti-Polish media campaign initiated by the speech of Russia's president Vladimir Putin in December 2019 gradually unfolded into a large-scale information war that included multiple actors disseminating the relevant narratives. For the purpose of the study publication of the following segments of the Russian Internet were analyzed: Russia's state and official sources, Russian main TV programs, Russian leading historical societies, Russian independent historians and their social media channels where applicable.

### KEYWORDS:

politics of memory, Poland, Russia, World War II, Vladimir Putin, Russian media, Internet discourse

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## INTRODUCTION

On 19 December 2019, Russian President Vladimir Putin condemned the Resolution of the European Parliament of 19 September 2019 on the equal responsibility of the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany in initiating the Second World War. This narrative was further developed during a number of Putin's speeches and meetings on 20 December 2019 and 24 December 2019, in which Vladimir Putin and state-funded Russian media put practically all the blame for the outbreak of the World War II not only on Nazi Germany but also on Poland.

Polish authorities immediately responded to these statements and thus a range of mutual accusations of manipulations with history started. The Russian authorities and media continued their anti-Polish rhetoric and brought to the discussion many issues which have been disputed with Poland for many years. The goal of this paper is to present an overview of the recent Russian-Polish dispute – both on official levels and in the media – and provide a brief analysis and assessment.

In particular, this paper aims to:

1. establish the main sources of anti-Polish rhetoric in the Russian internet media space;
2. review video, audio and printed materials on this topic;
3. extract the main anti-Polish narratives in the Russian internet media space.

The period of the analysis specifically covers the propaganda campaign which started in December 2019, when Vladimir Putin for the first time publicly commented on the resolution of the European Parliament of 19 September 2019 and paid specific attention to Poland and its role in World War II. Usually, the main propaganda campaigns in Russia that are connected with the Second World War or the Great Patriotic War (the notion widely used in Russia's public discourse covering the 1941–45 war period) coincide with big anniversaries.<sup>1</sup> For this reason, the whole information campaign preceding May 2020 (the 75th anniversary of the end of the Great Patriotic War and World War II in Europe) became the object of this research.

<sup>1</sup> See: Maria Domańska and Jadwiga Rogoża, 'Naprzód, w przeszłość! Rosyjska polityka historyczna w służbie "wiecznego" autorytaryzmu', *Raport OSW*, May (Warszawa: Ośrodek Studiów Wschodnich, 2021), p. 9; Maria Domańska, 'Dr Domańska: Rosja aktywizuje się na polu historii przed okrągłymi rocznicami', *Polskie Radio 24*, 6 January 2020, <<https://polskieradio24.pl/130/5548/Artykul/2431610,Dr-Domanska-Rosja-aktywizuje-sie-na-polu-historii-przed-okraglymi-rocznicami>> [accessed 28 August 2021].

This study will focus on the following discourses in the December 2019 to April 2020 period:

- those of Russian official bodies, institutions and leaders, their social media channels (where applicable) and their interviews and speeches in mass media;
- those of Russian media outlets: newspapers, TV channels, official YouTube channels of Russian TV Channels;
- those of semi-official institutions that realise politics of memory;
- those of independent Russian historians and their social media channels (where applicable).

The historical policy of Russia serves as one of the main instruments of the legitimization of the authoritarian regime and intensifies when other economic, political, social and international legitimation factors weaken.<sup>2</sup> The Russian Federation began to abuse its historical policy on the international arena on a larger scale during Vladimir Putin's third term as Russia's president in between 2012 and 2018,<sup>3</sup> although the initial traits of such an approach appeared for the first time in 2003.<sup>4</sup> In 2009, Dmitry Medvedev established a special commission to investigate historical falsifications that signalled an alarming trend of instrumentalisation of history and abuse of the politics of history.<sup>5</sup>

Since 2014, after the beginning of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict in Donbas and the annexation of Crimea, the usage of historical policy intensified dramatically<sup>6</sup> with an implementation of neoimperial historical narration.<sup>7</sup> On 5 May 2014, Vladimir Putin signed amendments for the Russian Criminal Code which implied imprisonment for up to five years for intended proliferation of untruthful information about the role of the USSR in World War II.<sup>8</sup> Simultaneously, another trend was strengthening: increasing consolidation of authoritarian power and the necessity to substitute the lack of national ideology with 'past legitimization' of Russia's external policy and 'reanimation of the past national project' instead of creating a future one.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>2</sup> For more about this Great Patriotic War myth in Russian Ideology, see: Maria Domańska, 'Mif Velikoj Otečestvennoj vojny kak instrument vnešnej politiki Rossii', *Sprawy Międzynarodowe*, 72.4 (2019), 208.

<sup>3</sup> Domańska and Rogoża, 'Naprzód, w przeszłość!', p. 10.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

<sup>5</sup> Łukasz Adamski, 'Dr Łukasz Adamski: Pamięć pod specjalnym nadzorem. Ile lat więzienia grozi za zajmowanie się historią w Rosji?', *Kresy24.pl – Wschodnia Gazeta Codzienna*, 31 May 2021, *Il wojna światowa na Kresach* <<https://kresy24.pl/dr-lukasz-adamski-pamiec-pod-specjalnym-nadzorem-ile-lat-wiezienia-grozi-za-zajmowanie-sie-historia-w-rosji/>> [accessed 1 September 2021].

<sup>6</sup> Domańska, 'Mif Velikoj Otečestvennoj vojny', p. 204; Domańska and Rogoża, 'Naprzód, w przeszłość!', p. 9.

<sup>7</sup> Maria Domańska, 'Mocarstwowy mit wojny we współczesnej polityce zagranicznej Kremla',

*OSW commentary*, 316 (Warszawa: Ośrodek Studiów Wschodnich, 2019).

<sup>8</sup> Adamski, 'Pamięć pod specjalnym nadzorem'.

<sup>9</sup> Domańska, 'Mif Velikoj Otečestvennoj vojny', p. 208.

The politics of memory in Russia and Poland demonstrate many divergences, specifically in their perception of the common history and the history of the lands between these two countries, especially Belarus and Ukraine.<sup>10</sup> Multiple elements of Russia's and Poland's approach towards Belarusian and Ukrainian territories create a dividing cleavage between these two states with an annual discussion of one of the most tragic episode of 17 September 1939,<sup>11</sup> among many other issues. Moreover, both nations remain very sensitive towards their history and historical memory,<sup>12</sup> thus their polemic over history hardly ever stops.

The largest recent information attack targeting Poland took place in December 2019.<sup>13</sup> After six months of ongoing development of aggressive rhetoric towards Poland, Polish politicians, Polish politics of memory and Polish perception of history and Russia, Russian President Vladimir Putin continued the World War II narrative with his article in the *National Interest* that dealt with his explanation of the outbreak of World War II and included assessment of the behaviour of most European countries before 1939.<sup>14</sup> In this article, the Russian President once again stated his negative opinion towards Poland and the Polish pre-1939 government; he presented a summary of his thoughts, which confirmed how crucial this narrative remains for Russian political elites and state historical ideology.

## STATEMENTS OF RUSSIAN OFFICIALS AND STATE BODIES

### Vladimir Putin, President of the Russian Federation

On 19 December 2019, Russian President Vladimir Putin held an annual press-conference.<sup>15</sup> The Russian leader discussed a number of domestic and international issues, but the topic which attracted immense attention was Putin's comment<sup>16</sup> about the beginning of the Second World War and the

<sup>10</sup> Łukasz Adamski, 'Russian politics of memory towards Poland. The bones of contention between Poland and Russia', *Polishhistory.pl* <<https://polishhistory.pl/russian-politics-of-memory-towards-poland/>> [accessed 2 September 2021].

<sup>11</sup> Łukasz Adamski, 'Dr Łukasz Adamski: Putinizm i II wojna światowa. Mechanizm wyparcia', *Kresy24.pl – Wschodnia Gazeta Codzienna*, 17 September 2020, II wojna światowa na Kresach <<https://kresy24.pl/dr-lukasz-adamski-putinizm-i-ii-wojna-swiatowa-mechanizm-wyparcia/>> [accessed 2 September 2021]; Łukasz Adamski, 'Tężkoe bremja 17 sentjabrja 1939 goda', *Novaja Pol'sha*, 17 September 2019, Idei <<https://novayapolsha.pl/article/tyazhkoje-bremja-17-sentyabrya-1939-goda/>> [accessed 2 September 2021].

<sup>12</sup> Rafał Stobiecki, 'Historians Facing Politics of History. The Case of Poland', in *Past in the Making. Historical Revisionism in Central Europe after 1989*, ed. by Michal Kopeček (CEU Press, 2007), pp. 179–192.

<sup>13</sup> Domańska, 'Mocarstwowy mit wojny'.

<sup>14</sup> Vladimir Putin, 'Vladimir Putin: The Real Lessons of the 75th Anniversary of World War II', *The National Interest*, 18 June 2020 <<https://nationalinterest.org/feature/vladimir-putin-real-lessons-75th-anniversary-world-war-ii-162982>> [accessed 2 September 2021].

<sup>15</sup> Prezydent Rosji, 'Bol'shaja press-konferencija Vladimira Putina', 19 December 2019 <<http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/62366>> [accessed 2 September 2021].

<sup>16</sup> 'V Pol'she otreagirovali na slova Putina o Vtoroj mirovoj vojne', *Gazeta.Ru*, 20 December 2019 <[https://www.gazeta.ru/politics/news/2019/12/20/n\\_13838498.shtml](https://www.gazeta.ru/politics/news/2019/12/20/n_13838498.shtml)> [accessed 4 September 2021].

European Parliament's (EP) resolution that was adopted on 19 September 2019 and condemned the Ribbentrop–Molotov Pact.<sup>17</sup>

A journalist from *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* asked the Russian President to comment on the resolution of the EP adopted on 19 September 2019.<sup>18</sup> Putin stated that he condemned totalitarianism and confirmed that the cult of Stalin had also been condemned [in Russia]. But he also condemned the EP resolution and believed it was incorrect and unprecedented, and comparing the Soviet Union to Nazi Germany was extremely cynical. Then the Russian president recalled the Munich agreement and the partitions of Czechoslovakia which happened in 1938. Vladimir Putin quoted a diplomat and said that 'Poland did everything to take part in the partitions of Czechoslovakia'.<sup>19</sup>

The Russian President added that he intended to write a separate article on that topic and show how various states contributed to the appeasement of the Nazi Germany leader Adolf Hitler. Putin stated that Stalin – unlike the leaders of France and the United Kingdom – never met with Hitler or signed any papers. However, it is true that the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact with secret protocols was signed.<sup>20</sup>

At the same time, the USSR was the last country to sign a non-aggression pact with Germany. They say that there were secret protocols and partitions of Poland, but Poland itself participated in the partitions of Czechoslovakia. Vladimir Putin admitted that Soviet troops had entered Polish territory in line with secret protocols. However, troops marched in 'after the Polish government had lost control over its domestic affairs and military forces, which had already reached the Polish-Romanian border themselves'.<sup>21</sup>

The Russian leader concluded that the Red Army entered Brześć nad Bugiem (Putin used the name of the city from the period of the Russian Empire, i.e., 'Brest-Litovsk') after the fascist German troops had left; hence, it just walked in into an empty Brest fortress. Putin opined that the same principle should have been applied to the whole Polish territory. The German troops invaded the territory, then left it, then the Soviet troops entered the territory, 'so they did not capture it'.<sup>22</sup> Then, Vladimir Putin invited the audience to join him at a meeting with the leaders of

<sup>17</sup> European Parliament, 2819 (RSP) – *Resolution on the importance of European remembrance for the future of Europe*, 18 September 2019 <[https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/RC-9-2019-0097\\_EN.html](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/RC-9-2019-0097_EN.html)> [accessed 4 September 2021].

<sup>18</sup> Prezydent Rosji, 'Bol'shaja press-konferencija Vladimira Putina'.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), where he was planning to disclose a few archival documents.<sup>23</sup>

The Russian President kept his promise and shared a number of details from the disclosed archival documents the next day, 20 December 2019, during an informal summit of the CIS leaders in Saint Petersburg.<sup>24</sup> Vladimir Putin repeated his negative assessment of the EP resolution from 19 September 2019, which condemned the Molotov–Ribbentrop non-aggression pact and assigned equal responsibility for the initiation of the Second World War to the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany.

Then, the Russian leader quoted several pre-World War II documents. Many such details touched upon Poland. Putin denied that Russian authorities had ever asserted that Poland, the Baltic States and Western countries initiated the war. Then, he mentioned the so-called Piłsudski–Hitler pact of 1934,<sup>25</sup> when Poland and Germany agreed not to fight each other. Putin quoted French pre-war Foreign Minister Édouard Daladier, who did not trust Poles, according to the cited documents. Moreover, Poles denied that they had the ability to help France if it was attacked by Germany. Putin said that Daladier concluded that, in such a case, military union between France and Poland would be pointless.<sup>26</sup>

Vladimir Putin subsequently read out several passages about the annexation of Czechoslovakia. He described how Poland ‘simultaneously with Germany’ invaded Czechoslovakia on 1 October 1938.<sup>27</sup> In Putin’s opinion, Poles were aware that ‘without Hitler’s support’ their intention to annex part of Czechoslovak territory had no chance. The Russian President stated that Poland had also dragged Hungary into the partitions of Czechoslovakia. Thus, Germany got what it wanted: Poland and Hungary supported it in its operation against Czechoslovakia, whilst France and the UK remained silent. The Russian president also noted that ‘within the special operative group “Silezia”, Poles were preparing and deploying special fighters to the territory of Czechoslovakia, in this way preparing to divide and occupy Czechoslovakia’.<sup>28</sup>

On 23 September 1938, the Soviet Union stated that it had to denounce its non-aggression pact with Poland due to Poland’s aggression towards Czechoslovakia. Putin continued by saying that Poland did everything possible not to allow the Soviet Union to provide assistance to Czechoslovakia: Poland did not let Soviet troops cross the country and

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Prezident Rossii, ‘Neformal’nyj sammit SNG’, 20 December 2019 <<http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/62376>> [accessed 5 September 2021].

<sup>25</sup> The name of the pact is non-aggression declaration between Poland and Germany, signed by Piłsudski from Poland’s side and von Neurath from Germany’s side, or the Hitler–Piłsudski pact.

<sup>26</sup> Prezident Rossii, ‘Neformal’nyj sammit SNG’.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

threatened to bring down Soviet airplanes.<sup>29</sup> Putin concluded that during the Nuremberg Tribunal, the defendants – former Nazi leaders – admitted that they would have not attacked further if Western states had supported Prague: ‘The Munich agreement had an aim: to remove Russia from Europe.’<sup>30</sup> The Munich agreement made World War II inevitable.<sup>31</sup>

Furthermore, Vladimir Putin quoted Hitler, who stated that ‘Germany was interested in the preservation of a strong national Poland’, and the strong Polish army at the Polish-Russian borders would enable Germany to save money on military expenses. Putin interpreted this as ‘looking like a military union against the Soviet Union’.<sup>32</sup> Hermann Göring also confirmed that Germany needed a strong Poland. Later, on 6 January 1939, according to Putin, the German and Polish Foreign Ministers agreed that the ‘Ukrainian question’ would remain a prerogative of Poland.

The next quote shared by Vladimir Putin related to the note of the French Ambassador to Poland after a meeting with his Polish colleagues on 31 May 1939. Léon Noël stated that for Poles ‘a Russian is a barbarian’, a person from Asia. Putin opined that this statement was very racist, similar to *Untermensch*, which is what not only Russians, Belarusians, and Ukrainians but also Poles were later called by the Nazis.<sup>33</sup>

Finally, the Russian President touched upon ‘the Jewish question’ in his speech. Hitler initially wanted to deport European Jews to Africa, which would be ‘the first step to genocide’, according to Putin. In response to that, the Polish Ambassador in Germany wrote to the Polish Foreign Minister: ‘If this happens, we will erect a nice monument to Hitler in Warsaw’.<sup>34</sup>

Subsequently, Vladimir Putin came to the conclusion that ‘Poles, with their increasing ambitions, facilitated the beginning of the Second World War. So today we see that the graves of people who were winning the war, were dying in Europe, liberating such countries from Nazism, are desecrated’.<sup>35</sup>

Putin repeated once again that the Red Army entered Brest when the Polish government lost control over its territories. Hence, the Red Army did not even have to fight anyone there.<sup>36</sup>

The Russian First Channel later shared the video from the event.<sup>37</sup> Special attention was paid to the role of Poland in initiating the war as well as to

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> ‘Ob istinnykh pričínach načala Vtoroj mirovoj vojny govoril Vladimir Putin na neformal’nom sammite SNG’, *Vremja*, Pervyj kanal, 20 December 2019 <<https://www.itv.ru/news/2019-12-20/377765-ob-istinnyh-prichinah-nachala-vtoroy-mirovoy-voyny-govoril-vladimir-putin-na-neformalnom-sammite-sng>> [accessed 5 September 2021].

<sup>32</sup> Prezident Rossii, ‘Neformal’nyj sammit SNG’.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> ‘Ob istinnykh pričínach načala Vtoroj mirovoj vojny’.

the monuments to Soviet soldiers. Vladimir Putin commented that Europeans remove Soviet monuments in order to 'hide their crimes, not to revenge the Soviet Union'. The Russian President added that aggressive Russophobia and anti-Semitism occur simultaneously in some European countries.<sup>38</sup>

On 24 December 2019, Vladimir Putin took part in the assembly of the Ministry of Defence, where he again discussed the secret documents he had shared previously. The Russian President noted that the fact that struck him most was the discussion between Poles and Germans of 'the Jewish question'.<sup>39</sup> 'Bastard, anti-Semitic swine', added Putin, referring to the Polish Ambassador in Germany in 1939, Józef Lipski.<sup>40</sup>

On 23 January 2020, Vladimir Putin gave a speech in Jerusalem,<sup>41</sup> to which he had been invited to commemorate Holocaust Remembrance Day. Putin said that collaborators in many European countries had contributed greatly to the Holocaust: 'On territories of the Soviet Union where such criminals [collaborators] operated, the majority of Jews were killed. Thus, 1.4 million Jews were killed in Ukraine, 220 thousand Jews were exterminated in Lithuania, 77 thousand in Latvia'.<sup>42</sup> Putin added that the Nazis planned to also exterminate Belarusians, Poles, Russians and Ukrainians, whom they called *Untermenschen*. However, the Soviet Union made this plan impossible, as it not only defended itself but also brought liberation to Europe. However, it had to pay a high price for that: 27 million Soviet citizens died. Putin concluded that nowadays historical memory increasingly often becomes a political instrument, which is unacceptable.<sup>43</sup>

Polish President Andrzej Duda did not go to Jerusalem for the ceremony. Although he was invited, his intention was to give a speech, like the presidents of Russia, France and Germany, but Israel did not satisfy his request, according to the BBC.<sup>44</sup>

As Polish-Russian relations were not improving, the participation of the Polish delegation in the Victory Parade to celebrate the 75th anniversary of the Victory in the Great Patriotic War became questionable. Putin's Press Secretary, Dmitry Peskov, announced on 4 February 2020 that the invitation had not been sent to the representatives of Poland.<sup>45</sup> According to Peskov, this question was not 'on the agenda yet'.<sup>46</sup>

<sup>38</sup> Prezident Rossii, 'Neformal'nyj sammit SNG'.

<sup>39</sup> Sputnik na ruskom, 'Svoloč', *svin'ja antisemitskaja*: Putin o posle Pol'shi v nacistskoj Germanii, online video recording, YouTube, 24 December 2017, <<https://youtu.be/RJjM-5nZwsc>> [accessed 6 September 2021].

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> RT na ruskom, *Putin učastvuet v meroprijatijach v pamjat' o žertvach cholokosta* – LIVE, online video recording, YouTube, 23 January 2020, <<https://youtu.be/LMoHGUP4S14>> [accessed 6 September 2021].

<sup>42</sup> RT, *Putin učastvuet v meroprijatijach v pamjat' o žertvach cholokosta*.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Svjatoslav Chomenko, 'Dva Osvencima. Kak Pol'sha i Rossija vojujut vokrug Vtoroj mirovoj', *BBC Russian Service*, 27 January 2020 <<https://www.bbc.com/russian/features-51272629>> [accessed 5 September 2021].

<sup>45</sup> 'Peskov soobščil ob otsustvii priglašenija Pol'shi na parad Pobedy', *RBK*, 4 February 2020 <<https://www.rbk.ru/politics/04/02/2020/5c393ca49a7947101d1625d6>> [accessed 7 September 2021].

<sup>46</sup> Natal'ja Anufrieva, 'Kreml' projasnil vopros s priglašeniem Pol'shi na prazdnovanie Dnja Pobedy', *Vzgljad.Ru*, 4 February 2020 <<https://vz.ru/news/2020/2/4/1021854.html>> [accessed 5 September 2021].



## THE MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) of the Russian Federation regularly publishes information on diplomatic meetings with representatives of various countries, including Poland.

On 3 December 2019, Russian Ambassador to Poland, Sergei Andreyev, gave an interview to the *Rossija 24* channel. The Ambassador pointed out that 'those countries which were liberated by the Red Army had no doubt that this was not just a liberation but a rescue'.<sup>47</sup> The journalist added that a Polish law from 2017 implicates the destruction of all Soviet memorials in Poland and 230 monuments to the deeds of the Red Army are now doomed. The Russian Ambassador replied that Polish officials pretended not to notice that an exhibition had opened in Warsaw [they ignored its opening] and were fighting against contemporary Russia. The interview took place on the day when the exhibition 'The Way to the Victory: Historical Chronicles Testify', organized by the Russian Historical Society, opened in Warsaw.<sup>48</sup>

On 4 December 2019, the First Deputy Minister of the Russian Federation, Vladimir Titov, met with the heads of diplomatic missions from Austria, Hungary, Germany, Poland, Slovakia, Czechia and Switzerland, with whom he discussed bilateral relations, exchanged opinions on relations between Russia and the EU and between Russia and the NATO, and they touched upon the issues of military actions in Ukraine and Syria.<sup>49</sup>

The tone of such notes later changed. On 22 January 2020, the Information and Press Department of the Russian MFA published an official commentary regarding the Russian-Polish dialogue on the history of their bilateral relations.<sup>50</sup> This commentary called the Polish state's publications on the history of the World War II 'a hysterical denial of inviolable facts'.<sup>51</sup> It also stressed that 'it was not Russia who initiated termination of the bilateral dialogue' and 'Warsaw should initiate steps to correct the situation on the basis of an unpoliticized approach'.<sup>52</sup>

<sup>47</sup> RIO, *Put' Pobedy pokažut žiteljam Varšavy*, online video recording, YouTube, 4 December 2019 <<https://youtu.be/XR9MtzKlkAU>> [accessed 7 September 2021].

<sup>48</sup> Vera Marunova, 'V Varšave otkrylas' vystavka "Put' k Pobede: istoričeskie istočniki svidetel'stvuyut'", *Rossijskoe istoričeskoe obščestvo*, 4 February 2019 <<https://historyrussia.org/sobytya/v-varshave-otkrylas-vystavka-put-k-pobede-istoričeskie-istočniki-svidetel'stvuyut.html>> [accessed 7 September 2021].

<sup>49</sup> Ministerstvo inostrannykh del Rossijskoj Federacii, 'O vstreče pervogo zamestitelja Ministra inostrannykh del Rossii V.G. Titova s glavami diplomatičeskikh missij gosudarstv Central'noj i Vostočnoj Evropy', 4 December 2019 <[https://archive.mid.ru/ru/foreign\\_policy/news/-/asset\\_publisher/cKNonkJE02Bw/content/id/393420](https://archive.mid.ru/ru/foreign_policy/news/-/asset_publisher/cKNonkJE02Bw/content/id/393420)> [accessed 7 September 2021].

<sup>50</sup> Ministerstvo inostrannykh del Rossijskoj Federacii, 'Kommentarij Departamenta informacii i pečati MID Rossii o rossijsko-pol'skom dialoge po istorii našich otnošenij', 22 January 2020 <[https://archive.mid.ru/ru/foreign\\_policy/news/-/asset\\_publisher/cKNonkJE02Bw/content/id/4003966](https://archive.mid.ru/ru/foreign_policy/news/-/asset_publisher/cKNonkJE02Bw/content/id/4003966)> [accessed 7 September 2021].

<sup>51</sup> Ministerstvo inostrannykh del Rossijskoj Federacii, 'Kommentarij Departamenta informacii i pečati MID Rossii o rossijsko-pol'skom dialoge po istorii našich otnošenij'.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

The next message published neutral information on the meeting of the Deputy Foreign Minister of the Russian Federation, Andrei Rudenko, and the Polish Ambassador to Russia, Włodzimierz Marciniak, on 4 February 2020, when they discussed relations within the Commonwealth of Independent States and the 'conflict in Ukraine'.<sup>53</sup>

The last message within the studied period related to the postponement of the visit of the Polish delegation to Katyń and Smolensk. The Russian authorities criticized Poland for stating that it had not received information on logistics in a timely manner, although in the official diplomatic note received by the Russian MFA the stated reason was the COVID-19 pandemic. The commentary concluded that such behaviour of the Polish authorities, who 'speculate on the tragedy of the Polish citizens who died in the catastrophe', became a 'terrible ingratitude'.<sup>54</sup>

Several Russian media outlets published a number of pieces containing statements by acting Russian Foreign Minister, Sergei Lavrov (formally on that day he was an 'acting minister due to the resignation of then Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev's cabinet'), on current Russian-Polish relations. The Head of Russian MFA gave a regular press-conference on 17 January 2020 to sum up the results of 2019.<sup>55</sup> The Russian-Polish disputes became one of the main subjects of the conference.<sup>56</sup> Lavrov stated that Polish President Andrzej Duda had refused to go to Israel to commemorate Holocaust Remembrance Day and had tried to persuade European and American colleagues to support his point of view on the common past. He also condemned Poland's initiative to remove Soviet monuments.<sup>57</sup> However, he noted that historians from both countries should cooperate; Polish Foreign Minister Jacek Czaputowicz also supported this idea later.<sup>58</sup>

In January–February 2020, the official MFA website published a number of articles devoted to the Polish Ambassador in Russia and a discussion of these countries' responsibility in the Second World War.

On 27 January 2020, in his interview for *Izvestiya* newspaper, the Russian Ambassador in Poland, Sergei Andreyev, opined that the attitude Polish authorities towards World War II is conditioned by the Polish politics

<sup>53</sup> Ministerstvo inostrannykh del Rossijskoj Federacii, 'O vstreče zamestitelja Ministra inostrannykh del Rossii A. Ju. Rudenko s Poslom Pol'shi v Moskve V. Marčinjakom', 4 February 2020 <[https://archive.mid.ru/ru/foreign\\_policy/news/-/asset\\_publisher/cKNonkJEo2Bw/content/id/4018838](https://archive.mid.ru/ru/foreign_policy/news/-/asset_publisher/cKNonkJEo2Bw/content/id/4018838)> [accessed 7 September 2021].

<sup>54</sup> Ministerstvo inostrannykh del Rossijskoj Federacii, 'Kommentarij Departamenta informacii i pečati MID Rossii o perenose vizita pol'skoj delegacii v Smolensk i Katyń', 3 April 2020 <[https://archive.mid.ru/ru/foreign\\_policy/news/-/asset\\_publisher/cKNonkJEo2Bw/content/id/4094520](https://archive.mid.ru/ru/foreign_policy/news/-/asset_publisher/cKNonkJEo2Bw/content/id/4094520)> [accessed 7 September 2021].

<sup>55</sup> Ministerstvo inostrannykh del Rossijskoj Federacii, 'Vystuplenie i otvety na voprosy SMI i.o. Ministra inostrannykh del Rossijskoj Federacii S.V. Lavrova v chode press-konferencii po itogam dejatel'nosti rossijskoj diplomatii v 2019 godu, Moskva, 17 janvarja 2020 goda', 17 January 2020 <[https://www.mid.ru/ru/foreign\\_policy/news/-/asset\\_publisher/cKNonkJEo2Bw/content/id/4001740](https://www.mid.ru/ru/foreign_policy/news/-/asset_publisher/cKNonkJEo2Bw/content/id/4001740)> [accessed 7 September 2021].

<sup>56</sup> Ekaterina Zabrodina, 'Lavrov: Pol'sha navjazyvaet Zapadu svoju versiju itogov Vtoroj mirovoj', *Rossijskaja gazeta*, 17 January 2020 <<https://rg.ru/2020/01/17/lavrov-polsha-navjazyvaet-zapadu-svoiu-versiiu-itogov-vtoroj-mirovoj.html>> [accessed 7 September 2021].

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Evgenij Pudovkin, 'Glava MID Pol'shi ocenil vozmožnost' razrjadki v otnošenijach s Rossiej', *RBK*, 12 March 2020 <<https://www.rbc.ru/politics/12/03/2020/5e61141a9a79475a0825462f>> [accessed 8 September 2021].

of history. The Russian Ambassador added that the Polish state does not honour members of the Polish Army (*‘Vojsko pol’skoe’* in Russian) and recognizes only war veterans who fought in the underground Home Army and regular military units subordinated to the Polish government in exile in London. The Ambassador said that the Polish government tries to forget that the Red Army had liberated concentration camps.<sup>59</sup> The interview ended with a discussion of another controversial issue: removal of monuments to Soviet soldiers in Poland. Andreyev stated that around one hundred of them that are not at burial places still remain untouched and confirmed that several hundreds of such monuments had been removed between 2014 and 2019 in Poland.<sup>60</sup> According to the BBC, he also stated that ‘Neither Poland nor Poles would exist on earth had the Victory of the Soviet Union not happened’ and that ‘Poland should be thankful to the Soviet Union.’<sup>61</sup> On 28 January 2020, the Russian MFA labelled as fake news<sup>62</sup> an article published by *The Telegraph*, entitled ‘Europe “has a duty” to stand up to Russia over the rewriting of holocaust history’,<sup>63</sup> which cited the Polish Prime Minister, Mateusz Morawiecki.

On 5 February 2020, the Russian Ambassador to Poland, Sergei Andreyev, gave an interview to the international news agency RIA Novosti. Sergei Andreyev commented on the Polish resolution regarding the shared blame between the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany in initiating the Second World War, saying that the Nuremberg process had confirmed that Germany was the only country that started World War II, but it was not stopped on time by the United Kingdom, France and Poland.<sup>64</sup>

The Ambassador mentioned the Munich agreement, when part of Czechoslovakia was annexed by Poland, whereas the Soviet Union was doing everything possible to stop the aggressor, Nazi Germany, despite hindrance from the UK, France and Poland.<sup>65</sup> Andreyev added that as a result the USSR had to make a non-aggression pact with Germany on 23 August 1939 to secure itself independently. In September 1939, the Soviet Union entered the territories of Western Belarus and Ukraine so that the Ukrainian and

<sup>59</sup> Èl’nar Bajnazarov, ‘Fakt spaseniya Pol’shi Krasnoj armiej starajutsja zatuševat’, *Izvestija*, 27 January 2020 <<https://iz.ru/968040/elnar-bainazarov/fakt-spaseniya-polshi-krasnoi-armiei-starajutsia-zatushevat>> [accessed 8 September 2021].

<sup>60</sup> Konsul’skij otdel Posol’stva Rossii v Pol’še, ‘Otvety Posla Rossii v Pol’še S.V. Andreeva na voprosy gazety “Izvestija”’ (Facebook post, 30 January 2020) <[https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story\\_fbid=1422897637869986&id=580221758804249](https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=1422897637869986&id=580221758804249)> [accessed 8 September 2021].

<sup>61</sup> Chomenko, ‘Dva Osvencima. Kak Pol’ša i Rossija vojuyut vokrug Vtoroj mirovoj’.

<sup>62</sup> Ministerstvo inostrannykh del Rossijskoj Federacii, ‘O popytke britanskoj The Telegraph perepisat’ istoriju Vtoroj mirovoj vojny’, 28 January 2020 <[https://archive.mid.ru/nedostovernie-publikacii/-/asset\\_publisher/nTzOQTrrCFdo/content/id/4006076](https://archive.mid.ru/nedostovernie-publikacii/-/asset_publisher/nTzOQTrrCFdo/content/id/4006076)> [accessed 7 September 2021].

<sup>63</sup> Mathew Day, ‘Europe “has a duty” to stand up to Russia over re-writing of holocaust history’, *The Telegraph*, 26 January 2020 <<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2020/01/26/europe-has-duty-stand-russia-re-writing-holocaust-history/>> [accessed 8 September 2021].

<sup>64</sup> Ministerstvo inostrannykh del Rossijskoj Federacii, ‘Interv’ju Posla Rossii v Pol’še S.V. Andreeva meždunarodnomu informacionnomu agentstvu “RIA Novosti”, 5 fevralja 2020 goda, 13 February 2020 <[https://www.mid.ru/ru/press\\_service/publikacii-i-oproverzenia/publikatsii/1427099/](https://www.mid.ru/ru/press_service/publikacii-i-oproverzenia/publikatsii/1427099/)> [accessed 7 September 2021].

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*

Belarusian nations could be reunited, and the Soviet Union had secured time to prevent Germany invading the USSR quickly, and this had enabled the Soviet Union to win the Great Patriotic War.<sup>66</sup> Such statements of the Russian Ambassador fully repeat the narratives adopted by Soviet historiography in the 1950s, which were challenged during *perestroika* and which had returned to the official discourse since the second half of the 1990s.

Sergei Andreyev also confirmed that the Soviet Army had liberated Poland and Auschwitz and had not waited to do so, as the Polish Prime Minister had previously stated. The Russian Ambassador pointed out that only one hundred monuments to Soviet soldiers out of the 561 present in 1997 in Poland remained untouched. He concluded that such 'memory wars' serve the contemporary political conjuncture in Poland.<sup>67</sup>

On 9 February 2020, Director of the Third European Department of the Russian MFA, Oleg Tyapkin, gave an interview to the international news agency Russia Today in which he discussed various issues of bilateral Polish-Russian relations.<sup>68</sup> Tyapkin commented on the resolution adopted by the Polish parliament concerning the Second World War. This Russian diplomat opined that Warsaw tries to falsify and distort the history of World War II using anti-Russian rhetoric in order to distract the global community from the shameful politics of pre-war Warsaw, i.e., participation in the partitions of Czechoslovakia and anti-Semitism. The interview also touched upon the removal of the monuments to Soviet soldiers in Poland as well as another painful issue for Russian diplomacy: the planned removal of the monument to Marshall Ivan Konev in Prague.<sup>69</sup>

On 13 February 2020, the Russian Ambassador in Poland, Sergei Andreyev, gave an interview to the *Russian Business Channel*. He stated that Polish-Russian relations at this point were 'the worst since the end of the Second World War'. He accused Poles of trying to 'turn the tables' in history in order to weaken the international position of Russia. The Ambassador stressed the fact that the 'undemocratic Soviet Union' had saved the European countries which had been occupied by Germany.<sup>70</sup>

Andreyev said that 2014 became a turning point in bilateral relations: 'when myth construction crossed all possible limits', Russia decided to start calling things by their proper names. Later, the Russian Ambassador

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Ministerstvo inostrannykh del Rossijskoj Federacii, 'Interv'ju direktora Tret'ego evropejskogo departamenta MID Rossii O.N. Tjapkina Meždunarodnomu informacionnomu agentstvu "Rossija segodnja", 9 fevralja 2020 goda', 10 February 2020 <<https://www.mid.ru/ru/detail-material-page/1426510/>> [accessed 7 September 2021].

<sup>69</sup> Ministerstvo inostrannykh del Rossijskoj Federacii, 'Interv'ju direktora Tret'ego evropejskogo departamenta MID Rossii O.N. Tjapkina'.

<sup>70</sup> Ministerstvo inostrannykh del Rossijskoj Federacii, 'Posol Rossii v Pol'she — RBK: «U nas samye plochie otnošenija posle vojny», 9 fevralja 2020 goda', 19 February 2020 <[https://www.mid.ru/ru/press\\_service/publikacii-i-oproverzenia/publikatsii/1427644/](https://www.mid.ru/ru/press_service/publikacii-i-oproverzenia/publikatsii/1427644/)> [accessed 7 September 2021].

repeated the theses expressed in his previous interview with RIA Novosti on 5 February 2020 regarding the inevitability of the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact as a result of the Munich agreement and the unwise politics of the Western states that had failed to stop Germany. He stated that the Russian President had received no official invitation to take part in the 75th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau: only diplomatic representatives in Poland received such invitations, and Putin did not come for that reason. Sergei Andreyev concluded that it would be pointless to re-establish a joint group composed of historians from both countries to discuss controversial issues.<sup>71</sup>

Similarly to other state entities, the Russian MFA also organized a few activities to celebrate the 75th anniversary of Victory Day. To commemorate the 75th anniversary of the Great Victory (9 May 1945), the Russian Foreign Ministry decided to publish a number of important documents from their archives. Thus, on 4 February 2020, the Russian MFA shared a series of documents from the Crimean (Yalta) Conference of 4–11 February 1945,<sup>72</sup> drafts of speeches for 9 May 1945,<sup>73</sup> as well as a large number of documents entitled ‘Diplomacy and the Liberation Mission of the Red Army in Central and Eastern Europe’.<sup>74</sup>

The Director of Information and the Press Department of the Russian MFA (‘MFA Official Representative’), Maria Zakharova, played a vocal role in the recent Polish-Russian conflict. On 22 December 2020, Zakharova stated that Poland was the one to blame for the deterioration of bilateral relations because of its aggressive rhetoric, removal of monuments to anti-Nazi fighters, and encouragement of the European Union to impose anti-Russian sanctions.<sup>75</sup> This was Zakharova’s response to Warsaw’s official rebuttal of Vladimir Putin’s words concerning Poland’s negative role in the beginning of the World War II, when the Polish government disagreed with the Russian President’s interpretation of the inception of the war. This message was also published by Vesti.ru<sup>76</sup> and Gazeta.ru.<sup>77</sup>

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Ministerstvo inostrannykh del Rossijskoj Federacii, ‘Dokumenty Jaltinskoj (Krymskoj) konferencii 4–11 fevralja 1945 goda’, 4 February 2020 <<https://www.mid.ru/ru/detail-material-page/1426048/>> [accessed 7 September 2021].

<sup>73</sup> Ministerstvo inostrannykh del Rossijskoj Federacii, ‘Dokumenty IDD ko Dnju Pobedy’, 27 April 2020 <<https://www.mid.ru/ru/detail-material-page/1431048/>> [accessed 8 September 2021].

<sup>74</sup> Ministerstvo inostrannykh del Rossijskoj Federacii, ‘Diplomatija i osvoboditel’naja missija Krasnoj armii v central’noj i vostočnoj Evrope’, 12 March 2020 <<https://www.mid.ru/ru/detail-material-page/1429444/>> [accessed 8 September 2021].

<sup>75</sup> Rossijska 24, *Zacharova uličila Pol’šu v podryve dvustoronnich otnošenij s RF*, online video recording, YouTube, 12 March 2020 <<https://youtu.be/AgfF5oDFyRk>> [accessed 9 September 2021].

<sup>76</sup> ‘Zacharova uličila Pol’šu v podryve dvustoronnich otnošenij s RF’, *Vesti*, Vesti.Ru, 22 December 2019 <<https://www.vesti.ru/article/1297333>> [accessed 8 September 2021].

<sup>77</sup> ‘Pol’ša mnogo let podryvala otnošenija s Rossiej, zajavila Zacharova’, *Gazeta.Ru*, 22 December 2019 <[https://www.gazeta.ru/politics/news/2019/12/22/n\\_13843958.shtml?updated](https://www.gazeta.ru/politics/news/2019/12/22/n_13843958.shtml?updated)> [accessed 9 September 2021].

Two days later, on 24 December 2019, Maria Zakharova provided a further interpretation to Poland's politics towards Russia. She opined that contemporary Polish authorities created the conditions of modern politics' dependence on history, and this prevents both countries from building friendly relations.<sup>78</sup>

Zakharova responded officially to the fact that the Russian Ambassador was summoned to the Polish Foreign Ministry in Warsaw on 27 December 2019. On 29 December 2019, Maria Zakharova took part in the 'Voskresnyi Vecher s Vladimirom Solovyovym' talk show on the *Rossija 1* channel. Russian pro-Kremlin journalist Solovyov asked Zakharova several questions regarding the recent dispute with Poland.<sup>79</sup>

The Russian diplomat spoke about modern European authorities' initiatives that involve glorifying criminals and making heroes from anti-heroes. She added that the Nuremberg Tribunal had made all the necessary conclusions. Zakharova said that the fact that the Russian Ambassador was summoned to the Polish MFA was part of diplomatic routine; however, the question remains why this had been done.<sup>80</sup> The Official Representative of Russia's MFA stated that by doing this Poland was trying 'to turn the tables in their own interest'.<sup>81</sup>

In the continuation of Zakharova's talk with Solovyov, she reminded the audience that Russia had never tried to rewrite history, had always been committed to the results of the Nuremberg process, and had never tried to manipulate history for political reasons.<sup>82</sup> Russia's Official MFA Representative confirmed that Soviet monuments abroad should not be touched and Russia would always react if they were.<sup>83</sup>

Solovyov changed the subject by emphasizing that France hardly fought against Nazi Germany and officially joined the Allies only thanks to Stalin's efforts and his personal relations with Charles De Gaulle.<sup>84</sup> Zakharova replied that democracy and tolerance in Europe became possible only thanks to the Soviet Union's help during the Second World War, but that Europe is incredibly ungrateful – as shown by the fact that it now votes for anti-Russian sanctions.<sup>85</sup>

The next subject of the conversation between Maria Zakharova and Vladimir Solovyov was anti-Semitism in Europe during World War II.

<sup>78</sup> Stanislav Krasil'nikov, 'Zacharova: Pol'sha prodolzhaet uvjazyvaj' istoriju s nynušnjimi otnošenijami s Rossiej', TASS, 24 December 2019 <<https://tass.ru/politika/7418305>> [accessed 9 September 2021].

<sup>79</sup> *Rossija 24*, *Voskresnyj večer s Vladimirom Solov'evym ot 29.12.19*, online video recording, YouTube, 30 December 2019 <<https://youtu.be/yeOJD4zI8HA>> [accessed 11 September 2021].

<sup>80</sup> *Rossija 24*, *Voskresnyj večer s Vladimirom Solov'evym*.

<sup>81</sup> 'Marija Zacharova otvetila na vyzov posla RF v MID Pol'shi', *REN.Tv*, 30 December 2019 <<https://ren.tv/news/v-rossii/642702-mariia-zacharova-otvetila-na-vyzov-posla-rf-v-mid-polshi>> [accessed 9 September 2021].

<sup>82</sup> *Rossija 24*, *Voskresnyj večer s Vladimirom Solov'evym*.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*

Zakharova recalled the end of 1960s in Poland, when the Socialist Polish government initiated an anti-Jewish campaign. Both interlocutors agreed that it was also the Soviet Union's mistake not to interfere then.<sup>86</sup> The next day, on 30 December 2019, Zakharova's interpretation of Poland's recent behaviour was published online by a number of media outlets.<sup>87</sup>

In following weeks in 2020, Zakharova remained very active in her comments on the activities of the Polish authorities in this dispute. On 21 January 2020, Russia's Official MFA Representative stated that the article in *Politico* by the Polish Prime Minister, Mateusz Morawiecki, about World War II was full of lies and manipulations. She added that Morawiecki 'killed the human being in himself'<sup>88</sup> by publishing such information. A number of media outlets reprinted this message, including the newspaper *Moskovskiy Komsomolets*.<sup>89</sup>

On 23 January 2020, *Russia Today* published an article citing Maria Zakharova, who declared that Poland had initiated a large scale disinformation war against Russia in regards to World War II.<sup>90</sup> The Director of Information and the Press Department of the Russian MFA had ensured that she had obtained information proving that the Polish government made a decision to launch a disinformation war against Russia concerning the Second World War (or the Great Patriotic War, as they say in Russia), which would serve certain political interests. Russian media immediately spread this information further.<sup>91</sup>

On 31 January 2020, after the Polish MFA publicly declared that the Polish state is entitled to reparations from Russia for Second World War damages,<sup>92</sup> Zakharova appealed to the Polish Deputy Foreign Minister, Paweł Jabłoński, on her Facebook page: 'Paweł, stop living at other people's expenses.'<sup>93</sup> This message was immediately spread by the mainstream Russian media.<sup>94</sup>

On 3 February 2020, Maria Zakharova again posted on Facebook, referring to the recent statement of the Polish Foreign Minister, Jacek

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> 'Marija Zacharova otvetila na vyzov posla RF v MID Pol'shi', *RENTv*.

<sup>88</sup> Maria Zakharova, '21 janvarja v izdanii "Politiko" vyšla stat'ja prem'er-ministra Pol'shi Moraveckogo' (Facebook post, 21 January 2020) <<https://www.facebook.com/maria.zakharova.167/posts/10221853370233112>> [accessed 9 September 2021].

<sup>89</sup> 'Zacharova nazvala samoubijstvom stat'ju prem'era Pol'shi o vojne', *Moskovskij komsomolec*, 21 January 2020 <<https://www.mk.ru/politics/2020/01/21/zakharova-nazvala-samoubijstvom-statju-premera-polshi-o-voyn.html>> [accessed 9 September 2021].

<sup>90</sup> Rossija 24, *Eženedel'nyj brifing Marii Zacharovoj ot 23.01.2020. Polnoe video*, online video recording, YouTube, 23 January 2020 <<https://youtu.be/DB-tGJsrfGU>> [accessed 11 September 2021].

<sup>91</sup> 'Zacharova zajavila o dezinformacionnoj kampanii Pol'shi po Vtoroj mirovoj', *RT na russkom*, 23 January 2020 <<https://ru.rt.com/f8p7>> [accessed 10 September 2021].

<sup>92</sup> Paweł Nadrowski, 'Wiceszef MSZ: za 2–3 dni decyzja ws. ewakuacji Polaków z Wuhan', *Radio ZET*, 29 January 2020 <<https://wiadomosci.radiozet.pl/Gosc-Radia-ZET/Gosc-Radia-ZET.-Pawel-Jablonski-u-Beaty-Lubeckiej.-29.01.2020>> [accessed 11 September 2021].

<sup>93</sup> Maria Zakharova, 'SM: "Varšava imeet "bezogovoročnoe" pravo na reparacii ot Rossii za uščerb"' (Facebook post, 31 January 2020) <<https://www.facebook.com/maria.zakharova.167/posts/10221960165942938>> [accessed 13 September 2021].

<sup>94</sup> 'Zacharova obvinila zamglavy MIDA Pol'shi v šaromyžničestve', *Izvestija*, 31 January 2020 <<https://iz.ru/970993/2020-01-31/zakharova-obvinila-zamglavy-mid-polshi-v-sharomyzhnichestve>> [accessed 13 September 2021].

Czaputowicz, that Poland had won the history dispute with Russia. Zakharova noted: 'This is what all Napoleons think: Bonaparte and the ones in hospitals',<sup>95</sup> meaning that it would be insane to say this. (In Russian language, mentally ill people are often called Napoleons, which refers to the personality disorders that such individuals might have.) This message was immediately published by the Russian news agency TASS.<sup>96</sup>

In March 2020, Zakharova changed her tone in response to the proposal from the Polish diplomacy to facilitate bilateral relations. The Russian diplomat agreed that it would be a good idea if they aimed to develop relations as the Polish side had previously been blocking that.<sup>97</sup>

The most recent comment by the Director of Information and the Press Department of the Russian MFA concerning Poland and the ongoing Polish-Russian conflict referred to the anniversary of the catastrophe in Smolensk on 10 April 2020, when Polish President Lech Kaczyński and representatives of the Polish political and military elites died on their way to Katyń near Smolensk. On 3 April 2020, Maria Zakharova stated that the Russian MFA had been doing everything to prepare for this visit.<sup>98</sup> However, the Polish MFA publicly announced that they had not received sufficient support from Russia's side to prepare for the visit, but the Russian authorities later said that in reality the visit had been cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>99</sup>

On 10 April 2020, the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs inquired about the wreck of the TU-154 aircraft that had crashed ten years earlier near Smolensk. However, the Russian MFA reminded the Polish MFA that this task could not be accomplished until the criminal case on the catastrophe was closed.<sup>100</sup>

<sup>95</sup> Maria Zakharova, 'SMI: "Glava pol'skogo MIDa Jacek Čaputowič zajavil"' (Facebook post, 3 February 2020) <<https://www.facebook.com/maria.zakharova.167/posts/10221984336827195>> [accessed 13 September 2021].

<sup>96</sup> 'Zacharova prokommentirovala slova glavy MID Pol'shi o pobeze v istoričeskom spore s Rossiej', TASS, 3 February 2020 <<https://tass.ru/politika/7672293>> [accessed 13 September 2021].

<sup>97</sup> Evgenij Pudovkin, 'Zacharova otvetila na predloženiya glavy MID Pol'shi ob ulučšenii otnošenij', RBK, 12 March 2020 <<https://www.rbc.ru/politics/12/03/2020/5e6a3ef59a79471f646ca542>> [accessed 13 September 2021].

<sup>98</sup> Galina Dudina, 'Otnošenija Rossii i Pol'shi otložili do postkoronavirusnyh vremen', *Kommersant*, 3 April 2020 <<https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/4311363>> [accessed 15 September 2021].

<sup>99</sup> Ariadna Rokossovskaja, 'Vlasti Pol'shi otmenili vizit v godovščinu katastrofy Tu-154 iz-za koronavirusa', *Rossijskaja gazeta*, 4 April 2020 <<https://rg.ru/2020/04/04/vlasti-polshi-otmenili-vizit-v-godovshchinu-katastrofy-tu-154-iz-za-koronavirusa.html>> [accessed 15 September 2021].

<sup>100</sup> Natal'ja Anufrieva, 'Pol'sha potrebovala ot Rossii vernut' oblomki samoleta Kač'in'skogo', *Vzgljad*, 10 April 2020 <<https://vz.ru/news/2020/4/10/1033606.html>> [accessed 15 September 2021].



## RUSSIAN MASS MEDIA

### Newspapers, journals and radio

On 29 December 2019, *Kommersant* published an article 'As long as there is Poland, the reason will occur', authored by Galina Dudina, who stated that Poland had at the end of 2019 become the harshest critic of Russia and its role in the Second World War. She also condemned Poland for the lack of commemoration of not only the USSR's contribution to the victory, but also the Soviet victims, including soldiers murdered in the Nazi German camps located in Poland, and Soviet soldiers fallen during the liberation of Poland in 1944–45.<sup>101</sup>

On 31 December 2019, the *Rossija v Global'noj Politike* website gathered several prominent Russian historians to discuss the issue of historical memory: special correspondent of *Vzgljad*, Yury Vasilyev; associate professor of Moscow State University History Department, Fyodor Gayda; deputy director of the Institute of Scientific Information and Social Sciences of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Dmitry Yefremenko; deputy director of the Institute of the World Economy and International Relations of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Alexander Lomanov; professor of the European University in Saint-Petersburg, Alexey Miller; senior research fellow of the Baltic Federal University Institute of Humanities, Andrei Teslya; and professor of the Research University Higher School of Economics, Alexander Fillippov.<sup>102</sup>

The conversation started with a reference to the speech of Vladimir Putin on 19 December 2019, when the Russian President condemned the EP resolution that assigned equal responsibility to two regimes (Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union) for initiating the Second World War. Alexey Miller noted that the European narrative of World War II is changing because of the growing role of the Eastern European States, which have a different perception and experience of these two totalitarian regimes. Miller stated that Russian state bodies should not intervene in historical discussions as this is not their prerogative. Instead, Russian leadership should create a positive agenda so as not to exacerbate this conflict.<sup>103</sup>

Associate professor of Moscow State University History Department, Fyodor Gayda, stated that in order to be fair the real beginning of the war should be taken into consideration, namely the 1937 military clashes between China and Japan. A realistic assessment of Stalin's personality is also

<sup>101</sup> Galina Dudina, 'Byla by Pol'sa, a stat'ja najdetsja', *Kommersant*, 29 December 2019 <<https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/4207710>> [accessed 15 September 2021].

<sup>102</sup> Fëdor Gajda, and others, 'Istoričeskaja pamjat' – eščë odno prostranstvo, gde rešajutsja političeskie zadači', *Rossija v global'noj politike*, 31 December 2019, <<https://globalaffairs.ru/articles/istoričeskaja-pamyat-eshe-odno-prostranstvo-gde-reshajutsya-politicheskie-zadachi/>> [accessed 15 September 2021].

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*

necessary and the roles of state leaders are understudied. Thus, Piłsudski was hardly better than Mussolini. Now, the main scapegoat for Russians is Poland, therefore the issue of Poland's role in World War II should be studied most thoroughly.<sup>104</sup>

Deputy Director of the Institute of Scientific Information and Social Sciences of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Dmitry Yefremenko, concluded that the European Parliament resolution of 19 September 2019 should be analytically deconstructed wherever possible.<sup>105</sup> This resolution is extremely convenient for the political elites of Poland, the Baltic States and some other countries as it will shape the cosmopolitan culture of memory of the twentieth century and in the end might justify the collaboration in Nazi crimes.<sup>106</sup> Deputy Director of the Institute of World Economy and International Relations of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Alexander Lomanov, concluded that the growing estrangement between Europe and Russia would not disappear soon.<sup>107</sup>

One of the most popular Russian newspapers, *Izvestiya*, published a number of articles related to the recent Polish-Russian dispute. On 28 January 2020, *Izvestiya* published a big article entitled 'Warsaw Sect: How Poland re-writes the History of the Second World War', authored by Ksenia Loginova. This author stated that 'our [Polish] neighbours try to blank out anti-Jewish pogroms, annexation of territories and union with Hitler'.<sup>108</sup>

The article not only described the current situation in the history disputes between Poland and Russia. It also mentioned Polish-German relations, Poland's request for German reparations, disputes with Israel over Holocaust history in Poland, and the lack of cooperation on this topic between Russia and the Western states that were Allies during World War II. It also mentioned in detail all the disputable issues between the Russian and Polish perceptions of the Second World War, such as the removal of Soviet monuments in Poland, differing understandings of the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact of 1939, and the lack of celebration of the 17 January Warsaw liberation anniversary (Warsaw was liberated thanks to a joint effort of the Red Army and Soviet Union-organised Polish Armies).<sup>109</sup>

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> Ksenija Loginova, 'Varšavskaja sekta: kak Pol'sha perepisyvaet istoriju Vtoroj mirovoj vojny', *Izvestija*, 28 January 2020 <<https://iz.ru/969067/kseniia-loginova/varshavskaia-sekta-kak-polsha-perepisyvaet-istoriiu-vtoroi-mirovoi-voiny>> [accessed 16 September 2021].

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

Ksenia Loginova accused Poland of annexation of Czechoslovakia in 1938, but she also stated that Polish nationalists had also had plans to move all Polish Jews to Madagascar, which would then be colonized.<sup>110</sup>

The Russian Office of Radio Liberty / Radio Free Europe (RL/RFE) published a piece in the aftermath of Holocaust Remembrance Day.<sup>111</sup> After the European Union issued a statement that Auschwitz-Birkenau had been liberated by 'the Allies',<sup>112</sup> not solely the Soviet Union, this signalled that the 'memory wars' between Poland and Russia would continue. In his interview with RL/RFE, British historian and journalist Edward Lucas opined that he supported Poland in that recent dispute, but compromise between the two countries is 'unrealistic'.<sup>113</sup> Lucas concluded that 'the common perception of history is unnecessary' and 'vivid discussion based on facts and mutual respect should be the goal'.<sup>114</sup>

### Television and talk shows

One of the first talk shows to discuss the statements of Vladimir Putin during the press conference on 19 December 2019 was *Voskresnyj večer s Vladimirom Solov'evym*, which was aired by *Rossija 1* on 22 December 2019. The description of the show on the official web-site of *Rossija* (Russia.tv) states that Poland was one of the first countries to make a non-aggression pact with Germany, thus it bears enormous responsibility over European affairs at the end of 1930s.<sup>115</sup>

The show itself started with a reference to a resolution adopted by the European Union (on 19 September 2019)<sup>116</sup> which put the blame for initiating the Second World War on both Nazi Germany and the USSR, which were counterparties of the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact of 23 August 1939. TV Presenter Vladimir Solovyov said that he was waiting for Poles to reveal documents which would negate the documents shown by Putin at the meeting of 20 December 2019. Later, the participants of the show stated that Poland and the Baltic States were fascist regimes during the

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

<sup>111</sup> Jaroslav Šimov, "Pol'sha prava, kompromiss nerealen". Vojna za istoriju ne končaetsja', *Radio Svoboda*, 29 January 2020 <<https://www.svoboda.org/a/30404527.html>> [accessed 16 September 2021].

<sup>112</sup> Statement by Presidents Michel, Sassoli and von der Leyen on the 75th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau, Council of the European Union, 23 January 2020 <<https://europa.eu/!Cj64qB>> [accessed 16 September 2021].

<sup>113</sup> Šimov, "Pol'sha prava, kompromiss nerealen".

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

<sup>115</sup> *Rossija 1, Večer s Vladimirom Solov'evym. Ėfir ot 22.12.2019*, online video recording, Smotrim, 22 December 2019 <<https://smotrim.ru/video/1078657>> [accessed 18 September 2021].

<sup>116</sup> European Parliament, 2819 (RSP) – Resolution on the importance of European remembrance for the future of Europe.

inter-war period but now try to forget this fact when they ask the European Union to initiate certain resolutions dealing with the politics of memory.<sup>117</sup>

Dean of the World Politics Department of Moscow State University, Andrei Sidorov, reminded the audience that the Russian President had initially touched upon the issue of this EU resolution on World War II during an informal summit of CIS states. He added that it was a shame that Vladimir Putin had to address the distortion of historical politics as there are many state institutions and bodies which should get involved when such situations happen, not only the President.<sup>118</sup>

Vladimir Solovyov replied that Russians had suffered during the 1990s, when history books started to put all the blame for many historical events on the Soviet Union and its citizens. He also added that the politics of the first president of the USSR, Mikhail Gorbachev, and the first president of Russia, Boris Yeltsin, towards the West had been a big mistake, including their politics of memory.<sup>119</sup>

In the concluding remarks of the TV show, Alexander Sosnovsky, editor-in-chief of World Economy magazine, Germany, said that he was aware of German documents which showed that Poles had not been going to fight Nazi Germany initially, and there had been no military conflict between these states.<sup>120</sup> Sosnovsky also added that Poles were directly involved in the murder of Jews, and they let Hitler exterminate many Jews – after all, the vast majority of death camps exterminating Jews were situated on Polish territory. After the end of World War II, Poles attempted to reconstruct Jewish life in their country to create an alibi, but it was hardly possible as there was practically no Jewish population left there.<sup>121</sup>

Sosnovsky continued that due to the lack of Jews in Poland, the authorities there started to convert people on a large scale to Judaism and began to reconstruct Jewish communities in Poland using fake Jews. However, Vladimir Solovyov responded that because the participants of the show wanted to follow the real historical truth, they must be fair and mention the fact that many Poles were honorifics of Righteous among the Nations and no nation should be labelled as bad or good as they all consist of different people.<sup>122</sup>

The next talk show to address this topic, *Kto protiv?* (in English, Who is against?) was aired by *Rossija 1* on 25 December 2019.<sup>123</sup> The show started with a video from the conference at which Vladimir Putin declared

<sup>117</sup> *Rossija 24, Voskresnyj večer s Vladimirom Solov'evym.*

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>123</sup> *Rossija 1, Kto protiv? O roli Pol'shi v razvjazivanii Vtoroj mirovoj vojny (Èfir ot 25.12.2019)*, online video recording, Smotrim, 25 December 2019 <<https://smotrim.ru/video/1979868>> [accessed 18 September 2021].

that the Polish Ambassador in pre-war Germany, Józef Lipski, supported Hitler's idea of sending all Jews to Africa and promised to erect a monument to him in Warsaw.<sup>124</sup> The show also cited the Polish onet.pl website, which had written about Putin's statements. The TV presenter accused it of manipulation with information as it did not use the word 'anti-Semitic', but only 'swine', when referring to Putin's statement about Józef Lipski. The presenter also criticized several Polish historians who had joined the discussion and blamed Poles for being anti-Semitic. Participants of the discussion shared information on the destiny of the Polish Ambassador who lived in the US and worked as an Ambassador of the Polish state in-exile after the end of World War II.<sup>125</sup>

One of the participants of the show, a journalist from Russia Today called Vladimir Kornilov, compared Lipski's after-war life with the lives of Ukrainian and other Nazi collaborators who were anti-Semitic but ended up living and working in the US for American global media, including Voice of America. Kornilov added that it was great that the Russian President had brought to the table the discussion of Poland's role in the Second World War, as Poland's role in the development of anti-Semitism in Europe is incredibly understudied.<sup>126</sup> Then, Kornilov shared photos of the pogrom in Kielce which took place in 1946, stating that Poland had been extremely anti-Semitic and had played a massive role in Adolf Hitler's consolidation of power in Germany.

The TV presenter added that in the aftermath of World War II the Home Army and the government in London had wanted to use the discontent of Poles who were unwilling to hand back property to the returning Jews. The declaration of Władysław Gomułka, Secretary of the Polish Workers' Party, that Jews should leave Poland in 1968 was a continuation of a long-standing Polish anti-Semitic tradition.<sup>127</sup>

Rodion Miroschnik, a representative of the non-recognized Luhansk People's Republic at the Minsk negotiations process, spoke about the Warsaw uprising and the 600,000 Soviet soldiers who died in Poland during the liberation. He recalled that Poland had attempted to divide Sudetenland with Germany and to negotiate with Hitler a new order in Europe.<sup>128</sup> Vasyl Vakarov, a political scientist from Ukraine, stressed that Poland had participated in the partition of Czechoslovakia together with Hungary and Germany, all of which were aggressors.<sup>129</sup>

<sup>124</sup> Rossija 24, *Kto protiv? : social'no-političeskoe tok-šou s Dmitriem Kulikovym ot 25.12.2019*, online video recording, YouTube, 25 December 2019 <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dSUH-pSKolw>> [accessed 18 September 2021].

<sup>125</sup> Rossija 1, *O roli Pol'shi v razvjazyvanii Vtoroj mirovoj vojny*.

<sup>126</sup> Rossija 24, *Social'no-političeskoe tok-šou s Dmitriem Kulikovym*.

<sup>127</sup> Rossija 1, *O roli Pol'shi v razvjazyvanii Vtoroj mirovoj vojny*.

<sup>128</sup> Rossija 24, *Social'no-političeskoe tok-šou s Dmitriem Kulikovym*.

<sup>129</sup> Rossija 1, *O roli Pol'shi v razvjazyvanii Vtoroj mirovoj vojny*.



Screenshot. Source: Vesti nedeli. Ėfir ot 29.12.2019. Kak Pol'sha byla zaodno s Gitlerom <<https://vesti7.ru/video/1981175/episode/29-12-2019/>>

On 26 December 2019, Russia.tv published an episode of *Voskresnyj večer s Vladimirom Solov'evym* in which participants discussed Polish anti-Semitism. One of the participants, political scientist Yevgeniy Satanovskiy, claimed that almost 250,000 Polish Jews had been killed in World War II by their Polish neighbours. He added that the inter-war regimes in Eastern Europe had been saturated with the worst type of Nazi ideology.<sup>130</sup>

On 29 December 2019, pro-Kremlin Russian journalist Dmitry Kiselyov stepped into the Russian-Polish polemics. He made a video entitled 'How Poland was together with Hitler' and had a background photo of Józef Piłsudski and Adolf Hitler portraits as a reference to Piłsudski and Hitler's non-aggression agreement of 1934. The journalist spoke about the Polish MFA's request to talk to the Russian Ambassador in Warsaw and said that this had happened because Vladimir Putin had devoted most of his time in his speeches on 19 and 20 December 2019 to discussing Poland's behaviour before World War II.<sup>131</sup>

Kiselyov then pointed out that Poland had formed a union with Nazi Germany before the Second World War and had coordinated its actions to annex the territories of other states with Nazi Germany. Moreover, anti-Semitism in Poland, according to Kiselyov, became a state ideology, and this united Polish leadership with Nazi Germany. Hence, Poland was the second country that was responsible for initiating the Second World War, not the USSR.<sup>132</sup>

Kiselyov added that Poland had invaded the territories of contemporary Czechia and Slovakia as 'a predator'. In addition to that, Hitler had

<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

<sup>131</sup> Rossija 1, Vesti nedeli. Ėfir ot 29.12.2019. Kak Pol'sha byla zaodno s Gitlerom, online video recording, Smotrim, 29 December 2019 <<https://vesti7.ru/video/1981175/episode/29-12-2019/>> [accessed 18 September 2021].

<sup>132</sup> Rossija 1, Kak Pol'sha byla zaodno s Gitlerom.

promised Poland access to the Black Sea, thus reviving Poland 'from the sea to the sea'. Poland had prevented Soviet troops from passing through Polish territory to help Czechoslovakia in its fight against Germany, and France had decided against military assistance without Soviet help. As a result, the UK also abstained from doing so.<sup>133</sup> Hence, Poland paralyzed France and the UK, and this is how World War II began.

Furthermore, in relation to Polish anti-Semitism, Dmitry Kiselyov added that 'it was not incidental that Hitler decided to locate death camps in Poland'. Only death camps on Polish territory exterminated so many people. This was not the case in German camps.<sup>134</sup>

Germans exploited Polish anti-Semitism, Kiselyov continued. For instance, a Polish teenager revealed the hiding place of a Polish Jewish historian named Emanuel Ringelblum to the Nazis. The programme cited Ringelblum's memoirs, in which he stated that Poles became bystanders of the Nazi policies against the Polish Jews.<sup>135</sup> Kiselyov spoke about the victims of the Warsaw ghetto who had been sent to gas chambers in Treblinka. Polish police helped Nazis to gather Jews for deportation to Treblinka. Many Poles ignored the Warsaw ghetto uprising and participated in holiday events happening at the same time in the city centre. And, after the end of World War II, Polish anti-Semitism revived, Kiselyov concluded.<sup>136</sup>

On 12 January 2020, *Voskresnyj večer s Vladimirom Solov'evym* discussed the resolution on the shared responsibility for initiating World War II between the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany that had been adopted by the Polish Sejm. Participants of the discussion condemned the resolution and Poland's intention to review the history of World War II. They also remembered the European Parliament's resolution of 19 September 2019 on the Molotov–Ribbentrop non-aggression pact and expressed the idea that Poland is the leading country in the EU that promotes such ideas in the EP. TV Presenter Vladimir Solovyov declared that Russians are actually 'real Europeans' as they defend anti-fascist values.<sup>137</sup>

Member of the Russian Duma, Alexander Khinshteyn, stated that Poland was much more responsible for the Second World War than Russia. In terms of the destructive force of the consequences, the 'pact between Hitler and Piłsudski in 1934'<sup>138</sup> had caused much more harm than the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact of 1939. The Soviet Union was the last country to sign the non-aggression pact with Germany in 1939 and 'had no other

<sup>133</sup> Ibid.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid.

<sup>137</sup> SMOTRIM. Ves' Solov'ev, *Voskresnyj večer s Vladimirom Solov'evym* of 12.01.20, online video recording, YouTube, 12 January 2020 <<https://youtu.be/6AUuODs00k>> [accessed 19 September 2021].

<sup>138</sup> The name of the pact is non-aggression declaration between Poland and Germany, signed by Lipski from Poland's side and von Neurath from Germany's side, or the Hitler–Piłsudski pact.

choice as all other European countries had already made such pacts'. Poland was then a very dangerous neighbour, not only for the Soviet Union but also for other European countries, and it possessed an army bigger than the French one.<sup>139</sup>

Alexander Sosnovsky, editor-in-chief of World Economy magazine, Germany, remembered the words of the Chief Rabbi of Poland, Michael Schudrich, who condemned Putin's comment about Józef Lipski being 'and anti-Semitic swine', and he said that 'Poles had actually saved ten per cent of the Jewish population during the war'. Sosnovsky guessed that the Rabbi had been probably forced by the Polish authorities to say that.<sup>140</sup>

In the final part of the program, Alexander Khinshteyn stated that Russians actually do not remind Poles about the Soviet prisoners of war killed during the Soviet-Polish war by the Polish army, whereas Poles do talk about the Katyń massacre of 1940.<sup>141</sup> TV host Vladimir Solovyov asked the audience whether Polish authorities had even apologized for the shooting of these soldiers, as Russia had made official statements regarding the Katyń massacre.<sup>142</sup> Participants of the discussion were urged to remember that.

Prominent Russian director Karen Shakhnazarov also participated in the discussion. He opined that if Russia is the successor of the Soviet Union, and the Soviet Union is compared to Nazi Germany, then Europeans might start treating Russia as an aggressor and even initiate a war against it. Vladimir Kornilov from Russia Today recalled a few more of Poland's deeds from history. Firstly, Poles destroyed a beautiful Orthodox church in Warsaw after the Polish-Soviet war. Secondly, they had always dreamt of a Poland 'from the sea to the sea'.<sup>143</sup>

On 25 January 2020, Russian TV channel NTV aired the programme *Svoja Pravda*, which was devoted to the recent Polish-Russian conflict.<sup>144</sup>

Another talk show, *60 Minut* on *Rossija 1*, devoted its time to Poland on Holocaust Remembrance Day. The description of the program dated 27 January 2020 stated that Russian President Vladimir Putin had not been invited to Poland because 'the truth hurts'.<sup>145</sup> The Russian Ambassador to Poland was invited instead, but no one let him speak.<sup>146</sup>

The video of the show started with an introduction by TV host Olga Skabeyeva, who called the meeting in Auschwitz 'an aggressive get

<sup>139</sup> Solov'ev, *Voskresnyj večer s Vladimirom Solov'evym* ot 12.01.20.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid.

<sup>144</sup> NTV, "Svoja pravda": Istoriju pišut pobediteli?, online video recording, YouTube, 26 January 2020 <<https://youtu.be/EVda7laqS9M>> [accessed 19 September 2021].

<sup>145</sup> *Rossija 1, 60 minut. Ėfir ot 27.01.2020 (17:25). V Pol'se prochodit Den' pamjati žertv Cholokosta*, online video recording, Smotrim, 27 January 2020 <<https://smotrim.ru/video/1989439>> [accessed 19 September 2021].

<sup>146</sup> Ibid.



together'.<sup>147</sup> She added that the Russian Ambassador had been forbidden to speak. The Polish authorities invited 'their new friend' the Ukrainian president. Skabeyeva noted that both the Polish and the Ukrainian presidents avoided the usage of the 'Red Army' notion and accused not only Germany but also Russia of being involved in the Holocaust. Leader of the Law and Justice party, Jarosław Kaczyński, demanded reparations from Russia to compensate their losses during World War II, commented the TV hosts, laughing. The programme hosts and participants labelled such requests as nonsense and reminded the audience that Hungary, Poland and Ukraine remain the most anti-Semitic states in Europe.<sup>148</sup>

## RUSSIAN HISTORICAL AND MILITARY HISTORICAL SOCIETIES

### The Russian Historical Society

The Russian Historical Society (RHS) was 're-established' on 20 June 2012, claiming to be a successor of tsarist Russia's Imperial Historical Society by 'leading education, scientific and cultural institutions, research foundations and mass-media in order to respond to the challenges of modern times'.<sup>149</sup> Among the co-founders of the RHS are leading Russian universities, museums and libraries, as well as media giants such as All-Russia State Television and Radio Broadcasting Company (Rossija).<sup>150</sup>

Of the main co-founders of the Russian Historical Society is the Foundation of the Fatherland's History, which was established by the Decree of the Russian president on 6 April 2016. The main goal of the Foundation is 'the popularization of Russian history in Russia and abroad, preservation of Russian historical heritage and the traditions of its peoples, as well as support for programs of historical enlightenment'.<sup>151</sup>

Today more than 60 organizations and more than 50 regional offices comprise the Russian Historical Society. One of the aims of the RHS is to 'stand against the falsification of historical facts'.<sup>152</sup>

The Russian Historical Society leads a number of major projects devoted to the end of the Great Patriotic War – a notion which is still used in Russia as a continuation of the Soviet historiography tradition. Several

<sup>147</sup> Rossija 24, *60 minut po gorjačim sledam (večernij vypusk v 17:25) ot 27.01.2020*, online video recording, YouTube, 27 January 2020 <<https://youtu.be/bGea1QUIUC8>> [accessed 19 September 2021].

<sup>148</sup> Ibid.

<sup>149</sup> 'O Rossijskom istoričeskom obščestve', *Rossijskoe istoričeskoe obščestvo* (hereafter RIO) <<https://historyrussia.org/ob-obschestve/o-nas.html>> [accessed 28 September 2021].

<sup>150</sup> 'Učrediteli i členy Rossijskogo istoričeskogo obščestva', RIO <<https://historyrussia.org/ob-obschestve/nashi-partnery.html>> [accessed 28 September 2021].

<sup>151</sup> 'O fonde "Istorija otečestva"', RIO <<https://fond.historyrussia.org/>> [accessed 28 September 2021].

<sup>152</sup> 'O Rossijskom istoričeskom obščestve', RIO.

initiatives aim to commemorate the 75th anniversary of the 'Great Victory': 9 May 1945 and the 'liberation of Eastern Europe from Nazism'<sup>153</sup>:

- an international competition among school teachers and school children to commemorate the Victory in the Great Patriotic War – Lessons of the Victory,<sup>154</sup>
- the Steps to the Victory project – chronicles of the last days of the (Great Patriotic) war;<sup>155</sup>
- an international exhibition The Way to the Victory: Historical Chronicles Testify, which includes several exhibitions with approximately the same content and travels to the countries of Central and Eastern European Countries, the Balkans and inside Russia.<sup>156</sup>

Such activities were planned at the beginning of 2019.<sup>157</sup> Russia's *First Channel* broadcast a report about the RHS's agenda, stressing the fact that such measures are important in order to 'fight the falsification of history'.<sup>158</sup> The report quoted official Soviet documents that specified how welcomed Soviet troops felt in Bulgaria, Romania and Germany. The journalist also mentioned secret testimonies of Lieutenant-General Shatilov from the First Ukrainian Front concerning the fact that the Red Army was greeted by the local population in Poland: 'Our military units were greeted in an especially kind way by the local population, they treat us as liberators. Almost all inhabitants of towns and cities come out to greet us, bring us water and milk, treat us with berries, carry flowers for us'.<sup>159</sup> The information on the details of the international Lessons of the Victory competition are absent from the RHS website.

The Steps to Victory project describes the last days<sup>160</sup> of the Great Patriotic War, starting from mid-April 1945;<sup>161</sup> it also publishes documents and reveals details from the Soviet perspective. Thus, this project only mentions the (People's) Polish Army's (Pol. Ludowe Wojsko Polskie)<sup>162</sup>

<sup>153</sup> '75-letie osvoboždenija Vostočnoj Evropy ot nacizma', RIO <<https://historyrussia.org/proekty/75-letie-osvoboždeniya-vostočnoj-evropy-ot-nacizma.html>> [accessed 28 September 2021].

<sup>154</sup> 'Meždunarodnyj konkurs "Uroki Pobedy"', RIO <<https://historyrussia.org/proekty/meždunarodnyj-konkurs-uroki-pobedy.html>> [accessed 28 September 2021].

<sup>155</sup> 'Šagi k Pobede', RIO <<https://historyrussia.org/shagi-k-pobede.html>> [accessed 28 September 2021].

<sup>156</sup> 'Put' k Pobede: istoričeskie istočniki svidetel'stvujut', RIO <<https://historyrussia.org/proekty/put-k-pobede-istoričeskie-istočniki-svidetel'stvujut.html>> [accessed 29 September 2021].

<sup>157</sup> '75-letie osvoboždenija Vostočnoj Evropy ot nacizma', RIO.

<sup>158</sup> Aleksandr Ljakin, 'Unikal'nye dokumenty publikuet Rossijskoe istoričeskoe obščestvo', *Pervyj kanal*, 5 June 2019 <[https://www.itv.ru/news/2019-06-05/366367-unikalnye\\_dokumenty\\_publicuet\\_rossijskoe\\_istoričeskoe\\_obschestvo](https://www.itv.ru/news/2019-06-05/366367-unikalnye_dokumenty_publicuet_rossijskoe_istoričeskoe_obschestvo)> [accessed 29 September 2021].

<sup>159</sup> Ibid.

<sup>160</sup> 'Proekt «Šagi k Pobede» (chronika poslednich dnej vojny). 20 aprelja 1945 goda', RIO <<https://historyrussia.org/sobytiya/20-aprelja-1945-goda.html>> [accessed 29 September 2021].

<sup>161</sup> 'Proekt «Šagi k Pobede» (chronika poslednich dnej vojny). 21 aprelja 1945 goda', RIO <<https://historyrussia.org/sobytiya/proekt-shagi-k-pobede-khronika-poslednikh-dnej-vojny-21-aprelja-1945-goda.html>> [accessed 29 September 2021].

<sup>162</sup> 'Proekt «Šagi k Pobede» (chronika poslednich dnej vojny). 22 aprelja 1945 goda', RIO <<https://historyrussia.org/sobytiya/proekt-shagi-k-pobede-khronika-poslednikh-dnej-vojny-22-aprelja-1945-goda.html>> [accessed 29 September 2021].

cooperation with the Red Army in their advancing operation towards Berlin<sup>163</sup> and liberation of various European cities and territories from Nazi troops. Polish forces such as the Home Army (*Armia Krajowa* in Polish) or other forces which operated under the legal government in exile in London (and recognised as legal by all members of the international community except the Soviet Union) are excluded from that narrative.<sup>164</sup>

The international exhibition *The Way to the Victory: Historical Chronicles Testify* is a visual project that is accompanied by a number of videos made by the *Rossija 1* channel of interviews from cities where the exhibition was displayed as well as photos of the exhibits.

The exhibition was first displayed in Sofia<sup>165</sup> on 10 September 2019, where it faced a diplomatic scandal. The Bulgarian MFA issued an official statement standing against the notion of the 'liberating role of the Soviet Army in Bulgaria' which was used in the exhibition.<sup>166</sup> In addition to that, a few dozen Bulgarians came out to protest in front of the building where the exhibition was taking place. In their reportage, *Rossija 24* criticised the protesters and showed alternative opinions of Bulgarians who expressed their gratitude to the Red Army and Russians and remembered how Alexander II liberated their country from Turks in the nineteenth century.<sup>167</sup>

Then, the exhibition moved to Bucharest, where it opened on 23 October 2019. The organizers proclaimed that 'the Soviet warrior came to Europe as a warrior-liberator – not to carry out revenge – and sacrificed his life for a sacred duty and a humanitarian mission for the sake of peace and liberty'.<sup>168</sup>

The video that accompanies the exhibit items clearly reveals elements of the Soviet narrative in terms of the beginning of the Second World War and the Great Patriotic War. It avoids mentioning the simultaneous attack on Poland by the Nazi Germany and Soviet Union and its partition after 17 September 1939; the Soviet-Finnish War (Winter War) of the winter of 1939/40 is also not mentioned.<sup>169</sup> The video also shows the Polish state on the map of Europe during World War II in borders which never existed as Poland encompassed only the territory occupied by Germany in 1939;

<sup>163</sup> 'Proekt "Šagi k Pobede" (chronika poslednih dnei vojny), 25 aprlja 1945 goda', RIO <<https://historyrussia.org/sobytiya/proekt-shagi-k-pobede-khronika-poslednih-dnej-vojny-25-aprelja-1945-goda.html>> [accessed 29 September 2021].

<sup>164</sup> "Šagi k Pobede" (chronika poslednih dnei vojny)', RIO <<https://historyrussia.org/sobytiya/shagi-k-pobede-khronika-poslednih-dnej-vojny.html>> [accessed 29 September 2021].

<sup>165</sup> Vera Marunova, 'V Sofii otkrylas' vystavka "Put' k Pobede: istoričeskie istočniki svidetel'stvujut"', RIO, 10 September 2019 <<https://historyrussia.org/sobytiya/vystavka-v-bolgarii.html>> [accessed 29 September 2021].

<sup>166</sup> RIO, *Vesti 9 09 2019 Otkrytie vystavki v Bolgarii*, online video recording, YouTube, 10 September 2019 <<https://youtu.be/V1fRt-uR-kk>> [accessed 29 September 2021].

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>168</sup> Vera Marunova, 'V Buchareste otkrylas' vystavka "Put' k Pobede: istoričeskie istočniki svidetel'stvujut"', RIO, 24 October 2019 <<https://historyrussia.org/sobytiya/v-bukhareste-otkrylas-vystavka-put-k-pobede-istoričeskie-istočniki-svidetel'stvujut.html>> [accessed 29 September 2021].

<sup>169</sup> RIO, *Prezentacija vystavki "Put' k Pobede: istoričeskie istočniki svidetel'stvujut". Osoboždenie Rumynii*, online video recording, YouTube, 24 October 2019 <<https://youtu.be/I2H2cxk4g>> [accessed 29 September 2021].



The Beginning of the Second World War and the Great Patriotic War. Source: V Moskve prochodit vystavka 'Put' k Pobede: Istoricheskie Istochniki Svidetel'stvuyut'. <<https://historyrussia.org/sobytiya/v-moskve-prochodit-vystavka-put-k-pobede-istoricheskie-istochniki-svidetelstvuyut.html>>

the video did not show the other part of Poland that was occupied by the USSR but now belongs to Eastern Poland, Lithuania, Belarus and Ukraine.

In November 2019, the exhibition moved back to Moscow to the Museum of Contemporary History of Russia.<sup>170</sup> The article describing the exhibit items paid special attention to a number of items connected to Poland. Among them one can find the military uniform and personal items of Marshall Rokossovsky, who 'liberated Central Poland and Warsaw', and several items from the Nazi Majdanek and Auschwitz concentration camps that operated on the occupied Polish territories and which were liberated by the Red Army.<sup>171</sup>

The article concludes that 'they [the organizers] wish to believe that one of the final expiations which will take place in Poland, where 600,000 Soviet soldiers died, will become an occasion to remember and rethink this chapter of our common future, no matter whether one likes it or not, so that it does not serve the political conjuncture, but taking into consideration the price that was paid for the Victory. After all, 600,000 dead Soviet warriors on Polish soil could not know anything about NATO'.<sup>172</sup>

On 3 December 2019, the exhibition opened in the Russian Centre of Science and Culture in Warsaw.<sup>173</sup> During the opening ceremony, the Chairman of the Russian Historical Society, Sergei Naryshkin, reminded

<sup>170</sup> Anna Chrustalëva, 'Kak osvoboždali Evropu: vystavka v Muzeje sovremennoj istorii Rossii', RIO, 21 November 2019 <<https://historyrussia.org/sobytiya/kak-osvobodhdali-evropu-vystavka-v-muzej-sovremennoj-istorii-rossii.html>> [accessed 1 October 2021].

<sup>171</sup> Ibid.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid.

<sup>173</sup> Marunova, 'V Varšave otkrylas' vystavka «Put' k Pobede: istoricheskie istochniki svidetel'stvuyut».

visitors that ‘thanks to the bravery and military skills of the Soviet soldiers, we saved the pearls of Polish cultural heritage and hundreds of thousands Polish citizens convicted to death’, and ‘the Soviet Union provided Poland with massive economic assistance’.<sup>174</sup>

In *Rossija 24* channel’s video, Andrei Petrov from the Russian Historical Society criticized the removal of the monuments to the Soviet soldiers in Poland.<sup>175</sup>

In mid-December 2019, the exhibition moved to the centre of Moscow.<sup>176</sup> Similarly to its previous editions, the online photos of the exhibits lacked information on the attack on Poland by the Soviet Army and Nazi Germany and its partition between these states on 17 September 1939; only photos from the liberation of Poznań and other Polish cities and territories were displayed.

An exhibition designated for Slovakia with the same narratives opened on 14 December 2020,<sup>177</sup> when the Russian version was still open for visitors in Moscow. Similar messages were conveyed during the exhibition in Romania in March 2020 in the Russian Centre of Science and Culture.<sup>178</sup>

In January 2020, The Way to the Victory: Historical Chronicles Testify exhibition opened in Sarajevo.<sup>179</sup> Its opening coincided with the adoption of a special resolution by the Polish Sejm which claimed that both the USSR and Nazi Germany held equal responsibility for the outbreak of World War II.

Member of the Russian Historical Society and executive director of the Foundation of Fatherland’s History, Konstantin Mogilevskiy, criticised this decision and stated that ‘historians know very well that Poland moved consequently during the 1930s to the tragedy of 1939’. Mogilevskiy added that ‘all German politics of the second half of 1930s were filled with attempts to annex new territories, whereas the Soviet Union was working on a new system of international security, postponement of the war, and moving it away from the Soviet borders. However, Poland’s politicians tried to dig pits for others into which they themselves eventually fell’.<sup>180</sup>

<sup>174</sup> RIO, *Privetstvie S.E. Naryškina k organizatoram i gostjam vystavki «Put’ k pobede»*, online video recording, YouTube, 3 December 2019 <<https://youtu.be/8t5u8pK5FSY>> [accessed 1 October 2021].

<sup>175</sup> RIO, *Put’ Pobedy pokažut žiteljam Varšavy*.

<sup>176</sup> Vera Marunova, ‘V Moskve prochodit vystavka “Put’ k Pobede: istoričeskie istočniki svidetel’stvujut”’, RIO, 16 December 2019 <<https://historyrussia.org/sobytiya/v-moskve-prochodit-vystavka-put-k-pobede-istoričeskie-istočniki-svidetelstvuyut.html/>> [accessed 1 October 2021].

<sup>177</sup> Anna Chrustalëva, ‘V Slovakkii otkrylas’ vystavka k 75-letiju osvoboždenija Evropy ot nacizma’, RIO, 14 December 2019 <<https://historyrussia.org/sobytiya/v-slovakkii-otkrylas-vystavka-k-75-letiyu-osvoboždeniya-evropy-ot-nacizma.html>> [accessed 1 October 2021].

<sup>178</sup> Vera Marunova, ‘V Rumynii prochodit vystavka “Put’ k Pobede: istoričeskie istočniki svidetel’stvujut”’, RIO, 13 March 2020 <<https://historyrussia.org/sobytiya/v-rumynii-prochodit-vystavka-put-k-pobede-istoričeskie-istočniki-svidetelstvuyut.html>> [accessed 1 October 2021].

<sup>179</sup> Vera Marunova, ‘V Saraveo otkrylas’ vystavka “Put’ k Pobede: istoričeskie istočniki svidetel’stvujut”’, RIO, 17 January 2020 <<https://historyrussia.org/sobytiya/v-saraveo-otkrylas-vystavka-put-k-pobede-istoričeskie-istočniki-svidetelstvuyut.html>> [accessed 1 October 2021].

<sup>180</sup> Marunova, ‘V Saraveo otkrylas’ vystavka “Put’ k Pobede: istoričeskie istočniki svidetel’stvujut”’.



Liberation of Czechoslovakia and Poland. Source: V Moskve prochodit vystavka 'Put' k Pobede: Istoricheskie Istochniki Svidetel'stvuyut'. <<https://historyrussia.org/sobytiya/v-moskve-prochodit-vystavka-put-k-pobede-istoricheskie-istochniki-svidetelstvuyut.html>>

In his interview with the organizers of the exhibition, Russian Ambassador to Bosnia and Herzegovina, Pyotr Ivantsov, criticised the countries who were trying to demonize the liberation role of the Soviet Army and the Polish authorities and the Baltic States for their anti-Russian historical rhetoric.<sup>181</sup>

In February 2020, the exhibition opened in the Headquarters of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) in Vienna, where member of the Board of the Russian Historical Society and Director of the History Institute of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Yury Petrov, underlined that 'the Soviet Army came to Europe not as a conqueror but as a liberator. It was Europe's liberation: the Soviet Army saved Europe from the fascist occupation'.<sup>182</sup> Deputy Chairman of the State Duma of the Russian Federation, Pyotr Tolstoy, pointed out that 'unfortunately, 75 years later we have to defend the memory of those who sacrificed their lives to save Europe from fascism'.<sup>183</sup>

<sup>181</sup> RIO, *Interu'ju s Črezvyčajnym i Polnomočnym Poslom RF v Bosnii i Gercegovine P. Ivancovym*, online video recording, YouTube, 29 January 2020 <[https://youtu.be/\\_5kQA8K-S8I](https://youtu.be/_5kQA8K-S8I)> [accessed 1 October 2021].

<sup>182</sup> Vera Marunova, 'Vystavku "Put' k Pobede" predstavili v štab-kvartire OBSE', RIO, 22 February 2020 <<https://historyrussia.org/sobytiya/vystavku-put-k-pobede-predstavili-v-shtab-kvartire-obse.html>> [accessed 2 October 2021].

<sup>183</sup> RIO, *Vystavku "Put' k Pobede" predstavili v štab kvartire OBSE*, online video recording, YouTube, 27 February 2020 <[https://youtu.be/wg4N\\_mP430A](https://youtu.be/wg4N_mP430A)> [accessed 2 October 2021].

## The Russian Military Historical Society

The Russian Military Historical Society (RMHS) was established by the Decree of the Russian President, dated 29 December 2012, 'to consolidate the forces of the state and society in studying the military and historical past of Russia, encourage the studying of Russian military history and stand against the attempts to distort it, support the popularization of the achievements of military historical science, and increase the prestige of military service and patriotic education'.<sup>184</sup>

Previously, the RMHS organized a number of exhibitions devoted to the Great Patriotic War, but none of them are active at the moment.<sup>185</sup>

RMHS also demonstrated a number of activities related to the 75th anniversary of the Great Victory (9 May 1945). In a special calendar that was created to commemorate 1945, a visitor can find all important dates, including the date of the start of the Wisła-Oder military operation on 12 January 1945, the 'Liberation of Warsaw' on 17 January 1945, and the 'Liberation of Auschwitz prisoners' on 27 January 1945.<sup>186</sup> The 'Liberation of Warsaw' and the start of the Wisła-Oder military operation are also listed among the dates under the category of 'memorable dates in Russian military history' on the project page.<sup>187</sup>

The Russian Military Historical Society is undertaking another big project together with *Russkaya Gazeta* (rg.ru) and the Ministry of Defence of the Russian Federation: 'Stars of the Victory'. There, these three entities publish information on soldiers who should have been awarded a medal or order and arrange its delivery to their families.<sup>188</sup>

## Independent Historians

Remarkably, the recent Russian-Polish conflict was completely ignored by the Free Historical Community (FHS). There have been no publications on this topic on their website.<sup>189</sup>

However, independent historians, including those from FHS, took an active part in discussions concerning Russian-Polish relations on independent Russian media platforms. On 13 January 2020, professor of the

<sup>184</sup> 'Ukaz № 1710', *Rossiiskoe voenno-istoričeskoe obščestvo* (hereafter RVIO) <<https://rvio.histrf.ru/official/decreed-no-1710/>> [accessed 4 October 2021].

<sup>185</sup> 'Muzejno vystavočnaja dejatel'nost', RVIO <<https://rvio.histrf.ru/projects/museum-activity/>> [accessed 4 October 2021].

<sup>186</sup> '1945 GOD', RVIO <<https://web.archive.org/web/20200907045306/https://rvio.histrf.ru/activities/projects/item-6999/>> [accessed 4 October 2021].

<sup>187</sup> 'Pamjatnye daty voennoj istorii Rossii', RVIO, 10 January 2020 <<https://rvio.histrf.ru/activities/projects/dates/1/>> [accessed 4 October 2021].

<sup>188</sup> 'Zvezdy pobedy', *Rossiiskaja gazeta* <[https://rg.ru/zvezdy\\_pobedy/](https://rg.ru/zvezdy_pobedy/)> [accessed 4 October 2021].

<sup>189</sup> Vol'noe istoričeskoe obščestvo, *Vol'noe istoričeskoe obščestvo* <<https://volistob.ru/>> [accessed 6 October 2021].

European University in Saint-Petersburg, Alexey Miller, gave an interview to *Novaya Gazeta* to discuss the recent 'memory wars'.<sup>190</sup>

In Miller's opinion, the Russian President became very angry with the resolution of the European Parliament (19 September 2019), hence his aggressive statements such as 'anti-Semitic swine' towards the Polish Ambassador in Nazi Germany. Another tactical reason for doing this might have been Putin's plan to discourage Polish President Andrzej Duda from going to Israel for Holocaust Remembrance Day.<sup>191</sup>

Miller opined that Putin had probably been waiting since September 2019 for European politicians to speak up about the fact that the EP Resolution had been adopted by consensus voting. As this never happened, he decided to make a point. Importantly, the Professor believed that the Baltic States and Poland promoted the very convenient notion of the responsibility of the two totalitarian regimes in World War II and the Holocaust, although in the interwar period their state models were authoritarian and contained 'anti-Semitic excesses'.<sup>192</sup> Miller pointed out that the politics of the previous Polish Prime-Minister, Donald Tusk, was wiser and he had found a common language with Vladimir Putin in terms of interpretation of the historical past. When the government in Poland changed, the situation deteriorated.

Alexey Miller added that the Russian Historical Society and the Russian Military Historical Society had been established in 2012 to take an active part in the formation of the historical policy in Russia. The Russian 'Law on Foreign Agents' was also adopted in 2012 to protect Russian historical policy from foreign influence, in his opinion.<sup>193</sup> However, Russia started to work on historical narratives much later than other countries.

Miller confirmed that the topic of the Holocaust remained a cornerstone in historical policies. The Holocaust Remembrance ceremony of 23 January 2020 demonstrated that the previous war narrative regarding the Holocaust was still applicable. For this reason, Israeli authorities refused to let Polish President Andrzej Duda speak during the Holocaust Remembrance ceremony, and he decided against going, in Miller's opinion.<sup>194</sup>

Finally, Alexey Miller condemned Putin's decision to become involved in this 'memory war'. Previously, the countries of Old Europe and big European countries treated Eastern European countries as 'younger brothers' and never interfered in their propagation of the narratives they imposed. If Russia decides to step in, it means that it equates itself to such

<sup>190</sup> Andrej Lipskij, 'Vojny pamjati i pervoe lico', *Novaja gazeta*, 13 January 2020 <<https://novayagazeta.ru/articles/2020/01/13/83431-voyny-pamyati-i-pervoe-litso>> [accessed 6 October 2021].

<sup>191</sup> Ibid.

<sup>192</sup> Ibid.

<sup>193</sup> Ibid.

<sup>194</sup> Ibid.



countries, which is a strategic mistake. Instead, representatives of official historical institutions, like Sergei Ivanov, Naryshkin and Medinsky, should be the ones who debate history.<sup>195</sup>

On 16 January 2020, a professor of the European University in Saint-Petersburg, Ivan Kurilla, shared his views on 'memory wars' with Russian Radio Liberty.<sup>196</sup> He condemned Vladimir Putin's attempts to get involved in a historical debate about Poland's role in World War II. Complicated periods of history should not become instruments for political attacks, in Kurilla's opinion. Kurilla added that each nation formulates its own historical memory, similarly to individuals who have different memories about the same event. This is an objective truth and should not be politicized. Nowadays, opponents in 'memory wars' try not only to propagate their views but also to eliminate their opponents' versions of historical memory, but this might be impossible.<sup>197</sup>

Kurilla also opined that laws on historical memory should not be imposed by a state as there should be space for free expression even about history. This Russian Professor concluded that had it not been for the events of 2014 in Ukraine, Russia would probably have more supporters in their 'memory wars' these days.<sup>198</sup>

On 23 January 2020, the leaders of the European Union published their view on the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau camp 'by the Allies'.<sup>199</sup> On 27 January 2020, Prof. Miller condemned such an approach because, in Russian historiography, 'the Allies' relates to the Western partners of the Soviet Union in World War II.<sup>200</sup>

<sup>195</sup> Ibid.

<sup>196</sup> Jaroslav Šimov, 'Chronika pol'skoj vojny. Moskva i Varšava deljat istoriju', *Radio Svoboda*, 16 January 2020 <<https://www.svoboda.org/a/30380646.html>> [accessed 6 October 2021].

<sup>197</sup> Ibid.

<sup>198</sup> Ibid.

<sup>199</sup> Statement by Presidents Michel, Sassoli and von der Leyen.

<sup>200</sup> Alexey Miller, 'Vynesu v otdel'nyj post to, na čto Jurij obratil moe vnimanie v komentarii k predyduščemu postu' (Facebook post, 28 January 2020) <<https://www.facebook.com/alexey.miller:7/posts/1775867212547038>> [accessed 07 October 2021].

## CONCLUSIONS

The Russian internet media space has demonstrated a drastic increase of anti-Polish rhetoric since Vladimir Putin's press-conference in 19 December 2019. The leading actors who participated in the proliferation of anti-Polish historical narratives were as follows:

- The President of the Russian Federation;
- The Russian MFA, represented by minister Sergei Lavrov; the Head of Information and Press of Russian MFA, Maria Zakharova; Russian Ambassador in Poland, Sergei Andreyev; and other members of Russian diplomatic corps;
- semi-official comments of Russian diplomacy that were published on social media, primarily those of Maria Zakharova;
- state-funded historical societies, i.e., the Russian Historical Society, and their members, high-ranking historians such as executive director of the Foundation of Fatherland's History, Konstantin Mogilevskiy, or often influential state officials such as the director of Russian Foreign Intelligence Service, Sergei Naryshkin;
- mainstream Russian mass media, controlled directly or indirectly by the Kremlin, as well as their internet platforms and YouTube channels.

All these sources utilized the following narratives to discredit Poland:

1. The 'Piłsudski-Hitler' non-aggression agreement of 1934;
2. Poland's participation in the division of Czechoslovak territories in 1938;
3. Poland's support for Germany during the 1938 division of Czechoslovakia; prevention of assistance to Czechoslovakia from the Soviet Union;
4. Poland's ambition to stretch 'from the sea (the Baltic) to the sea (the Black Sea)';
5. The absence of the Polish government and lack of resistance from the Polish Army against Nazi Germany in 1939, when Soviet troops entered Polish territory;
6. Polish anti-Semitism and the fact that this was shared with Nazi Germany;
7. Poland's friendship with Hitler's Germany before 1939;
8. The location of Nazi Germany's death camps in Poland due to Polish anti-Semitism;

9. Polish post-war anti-Semitism; the anti-Jewish campaign of 1968, initiated by Władysław Gomułka; contemporary Polish anti-Semitism;
10. The disgraceful removal of monuments to Soviet soldiers and the Red Army in Poland since 2017;
11. Poland's initiatives on the international arena to discredit Russia's past and worsen its present by encouraging anti-Russian sanctions;
12. Historical manipulations by contemporary Polish authorities; distortion of facts for the sake of Poland's victimization;
13. Demonization of Russia's role in the 2010 Smolensk catastrophe.

Historical events ignored or diminished by the Russian internet media space:

1. USSR's and Germany's partition of Poland on 17 September 1939;
2. Soviet-Finnish (Winter) War of 1939–40;
3. Katyń massacre of 1940;
4. The Allies' assistance to the Soviet Union in various instances, from 1941 until the end of World War II;
5. The origin of Anders' Army, which was formed from Polish POWs and GULAG prisoners on the territory of the Soviet Union in 1941–42;
6. Repressions and deportations of Polish civilians, from 1939 until the end of World War II;
7. Lack of assistance to the Polish population during the 1944 Warsaw Uprising;
8. Military campaigns against the Polish Home Army and fights between them and the Soviet Army during the war.

The main approaches utilized by the Russian media were:

- Manipulation with information;
- Hate speech;
- Biased historical narratives;
- Narratives adopted and integrated into the historical narrative of contemporary Russia that are not impartial and illuminate only one historical perspective, mainly reinterpretation of the Soviet historical narrative.

A number of opinion polls were carried out right after the period of the information campaign. Interestingly, a poll conducted on 13–20 June 2020 revealed that around ten per cent of Russian citizens believed that Poland was guilty for the outbreak of World War II.<sup>201</sup> Similar trends were visible in an opinion poll carried out closer to the 75th anniversary of the end of the Great Patriotic War, on 14–21 April 2020.<sup>202</sup>

The results of both surveys suggested another important observation: some of the Russians' negative stereotypes or perception of Poles stem from the nineteenth century. However, official Russian historical propaganda exerts little effort to change this image. On a positive note, representatives of the young Russian generation see Poland and Poles in a much more pleasant light and are eager to visit Poland and have friends from there. Thus, despite massive information campaigns operating on multiple levels that aim to shape a certain agenda and attitude amongst the Russian population, the development of information technologies and the proliferation of the online and social media make it almost impossible to prevent Russian youth from reaching out to alternative historical narratives. This process seems to be inevitable and unstoppable, therefore there is hope that historical policy will soon cease to be an instrument in the hands of politicians.

<sup>201</sup> *Obraz Polski w Rosji przez Pryzmat Sporów Historycznych. Raport z badania opinii publicznej* (Warszawa: Centrum Polsko-Rosyjskiego Dialogu i Porozumienia, 2020).

<sup>202</sup> *Wojna informacyjna i propaganda historyczna. Raport z badania opinii publicznej* (Warszawa: Centrum Polsko-Rosyjskiego Dialogu i Porozumienia, 2020).

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