

Poland: Turn of History Through Camera Lenses

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The documentary film *True Story. Sharp Turn in Polish History* by Radik Kudoyarov hit the silver screen five years after it was shot (Ren TV, August 2, 2014).

A word said or a film shot never fade away without a trace. The current events related to the fascist junta coming to power in Ukraine and the sanctions the West imposed on Russia, which opposes the ulcer of Nazism and xenophobia emerged in the heart of Europe, as well as the unseemly role of Poland negatively affecting the situation, have made the story described by the filmmakers relevant again. The film is as acute as ever today, it has become even more important for understanding what is actually happening in Eastern Europe.

The story tells about the period of Polish history comprising the 1920-1930s. Those were the days of rampant Polish nationalism. The attempts of ethnic minorities – Ukrainians, Belarusians, Jews, Russians and Lithuanians – to preserve their national identity were quelled in the cruelest way. The regime of Juzef Pilsudski and its supports were reluctant to respect the basic minorities' rights. It had greatly weakened Poland making it doomed to collapse as soon as Germany military delivered the first strikes. It suffered defeat not only due to military superiority of Wehrmacht over the Polish armed forces but rather because of internal divisions tearing up the Polish society from inside – only few were ready to offer staunch resistance to defend the country which was more like stepmother than motherland.

Here is the historical paradox. Winston Churchill made an apt remark calling the Poland in the period between the two world wars the «Greedy Hyena of Europe». For many historians the importance of the role played by Poland those days paled before the fact that the country was the first to fall victim to Hitler's intervention that sparked the world war. The same way the crimes of German Nazism made pale what the regime of Pilsudski did with its concentration camps, ethnic cleansings and rough treatment of dissidents.

The crimes against humanity committed by the Nazi regime of Germany cannot make forget the atrocities perpetrated by the Polish government those days. Actually that's what the film is about. It offers facts and evidence to highlight the historic events that public at large has little knowledge of.

Few know that long before building concentration camps Poland had acquired rich experience of doing away with the dissenters who disagreed with the ruling regime.

In 1934 the first concentration camp was built in Bereza Kartuska (the territory of contemporary Belarus) to imprison those who were accused of «anti-state» activities: the activists of Ukrainian, Belarusian and Jewish national movements, Communists, members of underground groups and Greek Orthodox Church clergymen...There were no clear rules

about who to imprison – they were putting all dissenters without distinction into the camp. The «correctional education» included inhumane conditions, exhausting labor, harassing labor, beatings and tortures.

Polish «human rights activists» were close to German colleagues, the same way as their bosses, for instance Goebbels and Herring often visited Poland, foreign chiefs Ribbentrop and Beck were often seen together. Józef Kamala-Kurhański, the commandant of the camp, had received training in German concentration camps. Strange coincidence, he spent the last days of his life in Oswiecim (Auschwitz).

Germans were extremely pragmatic: when you are done, you can go. They did not need the Polish state and its potential for repressions. Now it was to go.

Germany needed Poland to do what it wanted – ethnic cleansing in Kresy («Eastern Borderlands», or «Borderlands») captured by Poland as a result of the 1920 war with the Soviet Russia. Today these territories lie in western Ukraine, Eastern Belarus, as well as Eastern Lithuania with such major cities, as Lviv, Vilnius and Hrodna. They wanted those lands to be free from «foreigners» like Ukrainians, Belarusians and Jews. The Polish regime coped with the task perfectly. Everyone non-Polish was forced to leave, the regime inspired Jewish pogroms in urban areas and coercive polonization was gaining momentum. The film introduces to the impressive figures: no matter foreigners accounted for 40 % of Kresy population with Greek Orthodox Church prevailing, they were destitute of their right to speak, read and teach children in native tongues, as well as pray in their churches. Only 37 schools out of 400 remained in Western Belarus. 1300 Orthodox churches were demolished or plundered.

To increase the Polish population the regime used to give large land lots to retired military making them and their families settle down in Kresy (especially in Volyn). They were at the forefront of assimilation policy to evoke the feeling of hatred among non-Poles. The film shows G. Matveev, doctor of history, saying that the Pilsudski regime made Poles hostages of their own ethnocentric policy leading to international strife, in particular the Volyn massacre with 80 – 100 thousand killed by OUN-UPA (the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists – Ukrainian Insurgent Army).

This is only one aspect of the issue. The OUN-UPA had its own Nazi ideology which had no place neither for Poles, nor Moskali (a term for Russians in Ukraine), nor Yids (a slang Jewish ethnonym of Yiddish origin) on Ukrainian soil. Having made short work of Poland in August 1939 the Hitler regime used the creation of Bandera and Shukhevych to cleanse the Volyn-Podolian region, as well as some other areas of Reichskommissariat Ukraine, of Poles and Jews. Inhuman atrocities (the fact is corroborated in the film by documentary footages and interviews) committed by Bandera followers (Banderites) became a routine matter. They formed special «instruments» to do the job – from battalion Nachtigall to Galicia Division. The Volyn massacre was not spontaneous, it actually was an army operation thoroughly planned and almost perfectly conducted by OUN (B) Volyn command.

Today they don't like to remember about those days neither in Warsaw nor in Kiev. Moreover, the two political regimes demonstrate rare solidarity when it comes to fighting the Donbass national-liberation movement. Even the leaders of Poland descend to playing the role of Kiev regime stooges. ASBS Othago is a private military contractor company created by former Polish Minister of Internal Affairs B. Sienkiewicz. The fact of its

participation in the Ukraine's so-called «anti-terrorist» operation has become public domain recently.

It appears to be unbelievable, but the forces that have fought each other join together now to pursue a common goal. It seems to be a paradox, but only at first glance. The matter is that today ethnocrats and Nazis unite on the basis of Russophobia. Poland made hunger and contagious diseases take their toll to exterminate dozens of thousands of Red army servicemen taken prisoner in 1920. It made its opponents rot in concentration camps and forcibly assimilated minorities. Now they put on a show and pretend to be democrats. The Kiev neo-Nazi regime that has come to power under Bandera banners uses multiple launch rocket systems and napalm to exterminate civilians, predominantly Russian, in Novorossia. Have a closer look at these two regimes: not exactly twins, but evidently birds of the feather flocking together.

It will hardly be a surprise if Poles will share their Bereza Kartuska experience with Poroshenko and Avakov. This experience has already been remembered. Ukraine's former acting Minister of Defence came out with an initiative to build filtration camps for all adult people of Novorossia, including women, to find those who have ties with the «separatists». He suggested that others should be deported to other regions.

Again, as dozens of years ago, leaders agitate people making their wild instincts come out. The majority of Ukrainians and Poles are prone to xenophobia and intolerance to another opinion. They are directly incited to be hostile to the neighbors who want to speak another language and pray in different churches.

We don't want to make open old and still hurting wounds; we're not calling on the Polish people to always make Ukrainians remember that they were responsible for the Volyn massacre. But the lessons of history should not be forgotten. Back then Hitler connived at Pilsudski supporters who were cleansing eastern Kresy of Ukrainians, Belarusians and Jews. Then Hitler's special services were condescending when the OUN-UPA militants massacred dozens of villages to cleanse them of Poles. If Warsaw convinces itself that Russia is the main enemy and the spiritual followers of Bandera and Shukhevych, who started to put their legacy in practice, are its friends with the friendship based on Stone Age Russophobia, it will face another Volyn tragedy. Perhaps it would be called differently but the consequences may be even graver.

The film True Story. Sharp Turn in Polish History inevitably leads to this conclusion; no matter it was shot long before the «democratic» Poland and the Neo-Nazi Kiev blended together in a warm embrace. The film of Radik Kudoyarov stands out for its relevance today.

No doubt if Poland admits its guilt and takes on responsibility for the deeds of the predecessors, the country situated between Western and Eastern Europe, would pave the way for new promising international prospects and play an important role defining the fate of the old continent.

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