

Description for the general public

It is a sad paradox that one of the greatest crimes in the 20th century's history of Europe – the so-called Polish operation of the NKVD, a crime fulfilling all hallmarks of genocide – is very poorly known even in Poland itself, not to mention other countries. Hardly anyone – except specialists-historians – knows that in 1937-1938, the Soviets executed at least 120 thousand people. These persons, mainly Poles living for generations on the eastern fringe of the former Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth's territory, were accused of belonging to the Polish Military Organization, which led to absurd charges as espionage or subversive activities for Poland. In addition, tens of thousands of people were sent to the gulags. Historiographical knowledge about circumstances and course of this crime, as well as about its victims, is woefully inadequate.

The presented project aims to change this state of affairs. We want to document, as completely and comprehensive, as possible, victims of the "Polish Operation" of the NKVD, giving thus the tribute to their memory. In addition, we would like to fill a significant research gap of knowledge about causes, course and magnitude of this crime.

During the period of the project's realization, we are going to conduct archival research in Russia, Ukraine and Belarus, since the "Polish Operation", carried out in the years 1937-1938, took on the largest scale in these three countries. Our plans to reach a huge amount of documents, scattered within Russia and Belarus, will be facilitated through collaboration with independent researchers. Gathered in the Association "Memorial", they have been for many years overcoming obstacles made by the Russian authorities, and studying carefully the course of Stalinist repression. Work in Ukraine and contacts with Ukrainian historians will be, in turn, much easier thanks to the cooperation established by the Centre for Polish-Russian Dialogue and Understanding with the head of archive of the Ukrainian Institute of National Remembrance and the former director of the State Archive of the Security Service of Ukraine.

As a result of the implementation of this large project, which is absolutely important both for academic knowledge and for the whole society, four volumes of sources are to be published in two languages: Polish and Russian, and in full compliance with the rules of edition of sources. They will appear as a series "Polish Operation of the NKVD" in documents. In addition, a separate volume of studies will present new facts and conclusions, flowing from the thorough analysis of the reached materials. We are also planning a special English-language edition of the publication containing the most important documents and texts – this would contribute to the dissemination of knowledge in the world about crimes of the NKVD and about the results of the research.

One of the aims of the project is also documenting victims of the "Polish operation" of NKVD on the name-by-name principle. We want to create a publicly available online database. It will be an invaluable resource for researchers, not only historians but also for anyone interested in the fate of Poles - Soviet citizens, including surviving members of the families which felt victims of Stalinist totalitarianism.

The database will form a part of the website which – in an accessible and visually attractive way – will popularise the knowledge of the "Polish Operation" in the Polish, Russian and English languages. This portal will, among others, explain the historical context and publish the most important documents relating to the crime, as well as testimonies of witnesses.