

Abstract (popular-science)

There are two reasons why the international aspects of “Operation Vistula” deserve to be made subject of a separate research project in Poland today. **Historiographical reason** lies in the fact that so far it has not been determined whether it was an independent initiative of the then Polish government, dominated by the communists, or coordinated with the authorities of the USSR as part of a broader plan of the displacement of the Ukrainian residents, who provided support for guerrilla units in both countries. One cannot rule out that inspiration, or even command to carry it out came from the highest authorities of the USSR. If the latter is true, then the participation of Czechoslovakia was necessary for closing an escape route both for partisans, as well as for displaced civilians. Recently, it has become more achievable to establish which of the two versions of events is closer to the truth due to the fact that the new Ukrainian authorities decided to open the entire archives from the period 1917–1991 (Act of 9 April 2015). From this point of view, the grant team may be the first research team to tackle documents on the subject in Kyiv and Lvov. For the final clarification of the international aspects of “Operation Vistula” the team wants also to carry out a query in Slovak and Czech archives.

On the other hand, in order to explain the **social reason** to approach “Operation Vistula” from an international perspective, it is necessary to begin by outlining what citizens of Poland believed about that event at the time (these views are still shared by a large part of the public). The then authorities presented the operation as a necessary measure because there was no other way to combat guerrilla resistance of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA). by carrying it out, and by creating conditions for accelerated assimilation of minorities, Polish authorities contributed to the creation of a mono-ethnic state. The intention to build such a state had society’s support at the time.

Such a belief about “Operation Vistula” persisted in Poland until the end of the communist regime. In the years 1989–1991, the prevailing opinion in the public debate in Ukraine was that it had been intentional ethnic cleansing, and that the Polish state was responsible for it. It seemed then that there was a chance that Poles and Ukrainians might process the issue and develop similar views in the subject. However, in the first decade of the twenty-first century, public opinion regarding this issue in both countries drifted apart again (a similar trend was noted in the case of the assessment of anti-Polish actions of the UPA in Volhynia and Eastern Galicia in 1943–1944). It is because such biased views on “Operation Vistula” dominate in contemporary Poland and Ukraine, the research team wants to examine the role propaganda had in creating such opinions at the time. This would entail answering the question of what measures the Polish authorities used when they succeeded in obtaining support for that project, even though in many other cases no such support was given. It will also be examined how the authorities of the USSR and Czechoslovakia presented the issue to their own public. Team members want to address contemporary representations of that event in all the countries it concerned (Poland, Ukraine, Slovakia, Czech Republic). To this end, they intend to look into how it is described today in historical syntheses of each of these countries, in history textbooks, as well as how it is presented in government documents relating to the past. The aim of this research is to establish to what extent the contemporary image of “Operation Vistula” results from the way it was depicted by the authorities in 1947, what has changed in the way the event is perceived, and what factors caused it.

The project might be an opportunity to finally answer the question of how that mass-scale forcible resettlement of some of the citizens looks in the light of typology of mass crimes of the twentieth century. Was it a social engineering project, one of many that were carried out in totalitarian and authoritarian states, and even in some democratic ones? Was it a form of eliminating a minority and deserves to be called ethnocide? Finding an answer to these questions seems to be very important from the point of view of the social impact of history. It seems that explaining this issue will be very important for the progress of historical reconciliation between Poles and Ukrainians.