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Joanna Aleksandra, President of the Patria Nostra Association, expert for Eastern affairs

Lost cultural goods.

The Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact – consequences for years

For each nation, its culture, customs, tradition, and even scientific achievements are a source of pride. It is thanks to culture that nations are able to survive. Even those that have long died out live on through their culture which has survived and bears witness to the nation's greatness, as is the case with the Maya, Minoan, or Babylonian civilisations. The same applies to Poland. The state was non-existent for 123 years, torn between three occupying powers. There were no Polish state institutions, authorities, army, or administration. Yet Polish culture and science continued to exist, and were so interesting that numerous distinguished artists and scientists with no Polish origin considered themselves Polish. As a result, many foreigners constitute now a most significant element of the Polish culture, so firmly embedded in its landscape that no one suspects their parents' language was other than Polish. That is the case with e.g. Lange, Kolberg, Lelewel, or Pol. Thus, the Polish culture and its artefacts were the element that formed the Polish nation and thanks to which this nation has survived. When Poland regained its independence after the period of partitions, it faced a virtually impossible task – to unite Polish territories that had been occupied by Russia, Prussia, and Austria. They differed immensely in character and level of development; witness left-hand traffic in the Austrian territories or the width of the railways in the Russian partition. In addition, after several years of World War I, the fronts

passing back and forth across the land left it completely devastated and ruined. Hundreds of villages had ceased to exist, and towns such as e.g. Tarnopol, Białystok, and even the 1000-year-old Kalisz were razed to the ground. If we add the border struggles, the Polish–Soviet War 1919–1921, the German–Polish customs war, and the world crisis, we see the picture of the emerging Poland. What country could have risen from such a position with no elites of the highest intellectual and cultural level. And Poland united three different legal, banking, and communication systems into one organism. The Central Industrial District (COP) and the seaport city of Gdynia were built; more than 1,400 schools were established over the period of 20 years. All this was possible thanks to the Polish elites. According to statistical data, 18% of the Polish population in 1938, which amounted to 34 million citizens, were members of the intelligentsia, educated at the world’s best universities. Polish scientists of the time were, among others, Prof. Bryła – a welding pioneer and creator of the first welded road bridge in the world, murdered by the Nazis in a street execution in Warsaw, and Prof. Bartel – who served three times as the Polish Prime Minister and who was murdered in Lviv together with several dozen other Lviv university professors. Polish museums, despite the pillage by the partitioning powers, were full of works by outstanding artists representing all styles. Lviv, Vilnius, and Stanisławów were centres of Polish literature, music, and film, with Poland being the main producer of Jewish films. Hollywood giants such as Aleksander Ford, Michał Waszyński, or the founders of Metro-Goldwyn-Meyer Studios were born and educated in Poland. Founders of major cosmetics companies such as Max Factor or Helena Rubinstein likewise come from Poland. And so, could Nazi Germany as well as Nazi Austria or Bolshevik Russia – the three partitioners – bear the existence of a country with a potential like Poland’s? Another partition of Poland and the resulting pillage began with the signing of the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact in August 1939.

But before hell was prepared for Poland, fascist Germany and Bolshevik Russia jointly trained their assassins. SS men went to Soviet forced labour camps, the so-called gulag camps, for training, and German airmen trained their Soviet counterparts. Even before the outbreak of World War II, both countries had prepared lists of members of the Polish elite to be liquidated. The liquidation campaigns began as soon as in the first days of September 1939. On the German side, this included for example Piaśnica, murders throughout Pomerania, Greater Poland, and Silesia. It is necessary to add here that the German *AB-Aktion*, i.e. the

campaign aiming to eliminate Polish intelligentsia, alone resulted in the murder of 39% of doctors, 33% of lower-level school teachers, 30% of scientists, i.e. 700 professors, 28% of priests, 26% of lawyers, etc. On the other hand, after 17 September, i.e. after the Soviet invasion of Poland without a formal declaration of war, the NKVD began to eliminate Polish landowners, officials of all levels, and especially Polish officers. It was accompanied by the plundering of Polish museums and, most grievously of all, the wanton destruction of hundreds of Polish manor houses, palaces, and castles filled with works of top-class art. Manufacturing plants fell victim to looting, two examples being the Elektrit Radiotechnical Society in Vilnius and the J. A. Baczewski Vodka and Liquor Works in Lviv. The former produced radios of the highest European quality. With an area of 10,000 sq m, the plant employed around 1,100 people. It boasted its own power station, carpentry shop, state-of-the-art assembly lines, and laboratory. It manufactured 54,000 units of various types of receivers, including for India, South Africa, and the Middle East. The entire plant was moved to the Soviet city of Minsk in 1940 to produce Soviet Minsk radios. It never returned to Poland. The same happened to the world-famous J. A. Baczewski Vodka and Liquor Works in Lviv. After the invasion of Lviv, the plant was looted – Soviet officers filled entire train cars going East with the plant's products.

Going back to the museums, for instance all such establishments in Lviv were liquidated, and the collections gathered in several warehouses were segregated into those considered proper and those destined for destruction. The invasion on 17 September was followed by mass devastation of churches and liquidation of monasteries, which were usually turned into prisons and filled with arrested Polish intelligentsia, businesspeople, bankers, merchants, etc. After the Soviets entered Zaleszczyki, all the vineyards in the area were cut down and about a hundred vineyard owners were murdered. The baroque town hall in Zaleszczyki was blown up to make room for a monument to Lenin. In 1940, amidst an exceptionally cold winter, a mass deportation of the Polish population from the East to Siberia and Central Asia began. During the transports, people died en masse, especially children, whose bodies were simply thrown out of the trains. The concentration camps throughout Siberia were filled with Polish elites, i.e. writers, doctors, musicians, or actors. The most symbolic is the death of the pre-war Polish cinema actor Eugeniusz Bodo, murdered in one of the Siberian forced labour camps. Finally, the year 1940 saw the massacres in Katyn, Kharkiv, Mednoye, and

thousands of other places strewn with the bodies of the Polish intelligentsia. When Germany invaded its accomplice, Soviet Russia, in 1941, the NKVD began to liquidate prisons by murdering the inmates and to evacuate them, which often ended with the murder of the prisoners on the way, e.g. a railway bridge was blown up in Zaleszczyki along with a transport of prisoners, of whom no one survived.

World War II resulted in the destruction of not only large centres, but also thousands of minor institutions significant for the development of Polish culture. Let me give two examples: the Jesuit College in Chyrów, and the Krzemieniec Lyceum. The former dates back to 1580; it enjoyed the rights of a secondary school from 1886 to 1939. It boasted a library of 30,000 books – including antique volumes and incunabula, well-equipped science rooms, natural history, geographical, and historical collections, its own numismatic museum, four tennis courts, eight sports fields, a theatre, power station, hospital, steam mill, laundries, and an astronomical observatory. Taken by Soviet troops in September 1939, the College was completely devastated and then ultimately demolished at the end of the war. Only some buildings have survived to this day, obviously without any equipment.

The latter, the Krzemieniec Lyceum, was founded in 1805. Teaching at the school was carried out using the university lecture method. The Lyceum had well-equipped teaching rooms, its own printing press, an experimental botanical garden, modern photographic laboratories, and a library, which originated from the collection of King Stanisław II August. Unfortunately, on the basis of lists prepared by Ukrainian students, the Nazis executed about 30 professors of the Krzemieniec Lyceum. Nothing survived of all the equipment of the pre-war Lyceum, and the buildings were devastated.

Unfortunately, the pillage of Poland by the Soviet authorities did not cease with the end of the war. Although Poland cooperated with both the Allies – witness Anders' Army liberating Western Europe – and the Soviets, the Soviet military continued to plunder Polish intellectual and cultural property. The displaced Polish population from the former Eastern Borderlands was still robbed and murdered. There were also the treacherous arrests of Home Army soldiers, who were deported to Siberia or murdered in former Nazi concentration camps, such as the Lublin Castle or Auschwitz, turned into an NKVD camp after liberation.

To sum up, according to the 1938 statistical survey cited at the beginning of the paper, the intelligentsia made up for 18% of 34 million Polish citizens. In 1953, based on statistical data, the intelligentsia constituted 2% of some 24 million Polish citizens. The missing 16%, which disappeared – are for Germany and Russia to share. And it is up to them to decide how to distribute those 16%.