Dear Readers,

The term, "The Great Patriotic War" ("Великая отечественная война") was coined to describe the German-Russian War in its first hours (although the term "Patriotic War" itself was first used by the poet Fyodor Glinka in 1813 for the French Campaign in Russia in 1812).

In a radio address, broadcast to all citizens of the USSR on June 22, 1941, Vyacheslav Molotov said, among other things: "This is not the first time that our nation has come to deal with an invading, conceited enemy. During its past, our nation responded to Napoleon's march on Russia with the **Patriotic War** and Napoleon suffered defeat and came to his own downfall. It will be the same also with the conceited Hitler, who has launched a new campaign against our country. The Red Army and our entire people will again prevail in a **victorious Patriotic War** for the Motherland, for honor, for freedom". It was obvious to the Soviet leadership and its propaganda apparatus that the struggle against Germany and its allies would not only equal effort of the War of 1812, but actually surpass it. The war thus acquired a name that was perpetuated in the propaganda of the following years—including the postwar years.

Molotov's speech of June 22, 1941 was short, but it is among the most myth-making texts of World War II. In this speech, the People's Commissar of Foreign Affairs of the USSR included phrases crucial for the later narrative about the Soviet position on the world war. The phrase from this speech that was repeated many times in later communist propaganda—"unprecedented perfidy in the history of civilised nations"—used to describe the German attack on the Soviet Union, has a deep justification.

In fact, the Soviet Union contributed an extraordinary amount towards the success of the Third German Reich in the early years of World War II. In the same speech Molotov emphasized: "The invasion of our country was carried out without looking at the fact that there was a non-aggression pact between the USSR and Germany, and the Soviet Government fulfilled all the conditions of this agreement with full conscientiousness. […] during the entire period when this agreement was in force the German government could not once raise a single claim against the USSR concerning the fulfillment of this agreement. […] Germany initiated the attack on the USSR without considering the peaceful attitude of the USSR".

The allegedly peaceful attitude of the Soviet Union in 1939–1941 was in fact a state of *de facto* alliance with the Third German Reich, of which the break-up occurred due to the divergence of the two empires' partitioning appetites (which became clear during Molotov's visit to Berlin in November 1940).

At the end of Molotov's speech another slogan echoes: "Наше дело правое. Враг будет разбит. Победа будет за нами". ("Our cause is just. The enemy will be smashed. Victory will be with us").

"Just (in the sense of equitable) cause" meant the "sanctity" of the war against Germany. The term comes from the song Священная война [Holy War], composed almost immediately after the outbreak of the German-Soviet War by Vasily Lebedev-Kumach, the author of the words of the 1939 Bolshevik Party anthem. The memory of the war with Nazi Germany was sanctified—in a communist, materialist sense. The use of para-religious terms played a significant role in totalitarian propaganda—removing its theses from discussion and dismissing the need to justify them.

The "sanctity" of the war was guarded by propaganda, censorship, disinformation or quite simply falsehood, with which the communist regime filled a significant part of its functioning. The narrative created in this way was meant to justify and reinforce the actual consequences of the war: the conquest and annexation of Eastern Europe, the establishment of illegitimate dictatorships in Central and Southern Europe, and finally—confrontation with the free world.

To the propaganda image of the war, evolving and perpetuated throughout the subsequent years of the USSR and then the Russian Federation, we have decided to devote the pages of the third issue of the *Institute of National Remembrance Review* journal. The concept of the "Great Patriotic War" was originally used by Stalin as a myth to mobilise Soviet society to fight the German invaders. Today, quoting Prof. Filip Musiał's statement from the editorial discussion, one can say that "this myth serves to redefine the role of the Soviets in World War II", presented exclusively as victors in the war against Nazism, in which the Allies also had some share. It is precisely this myth-making, characteristic of Soviet and Russian propaganda, that forces the historian of modern history to reflect on a much broader (including in a chronological sense) context of events, that is, above all, around the genesis of the regaining and consolidation of influence in a post-Versailles Europe by the "degraded powers" that were emerging from crises.

In the editorial discussion that opened the issue, German-Soviet cooperation in the interwar period resounded with extraordinary clarity. Its broad perspective was superbly outlined by Professor Marek Kornat, who presented a panorama of Soviet foreign policy in the sequence of successive pacts and treaties of the interwar period, emphasising the coherence of the adopted concept of rebuilding the state's superpowerhood and the effectiveness of its implementation. Thus, the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact appeared as a natural consequence of all of Stalin's actions—the plan for the Sovietization of Central and Eastern Europe. The Russian reinterpretation of this agreement—as Professor Filip Musiał pointed out in turn—without mentioning the secret protocol to the agreement, invalidates the earlier cooperation of both countries and in this way perfectly fits into the myth of the USSR as a victim of unprovoked German aggression.

And yet Soviet policy in 1939–1941 had little to do with peace. The Soviet

Union supported Germany's drive to war in 1939—not only by concluding the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, but also by militarily fulfilling its obligations under this pact. Subsequent acts of aggression and annexation (against Poland, the Baltic States, Finland and Romania) can hardly be regarded even as an "appeasement" policy towards Germany, or a "peace--loving stance" ("миролюбивая позиция") of the USSR. Geopolitical thinking also dominated their subsequent cooperation with the Allies. The decisions of the Yalta Conference are presented in contemporary Russian discourse as a model of perfect peacemaking, as Professor Kornat pointed out.

The discussion is supplemented by an interview with Professor Jan Szumski, a Polish historian born in the former USSR, a scholar of the Historical Research Office of the Institute of National Remembrance and the L. & A. Birkenmajer Institute for the History of Science, Polish Academy of Sciences. Professor Szumski presented the topic of propaganda in chronological terms of successive phases of Soviet "policy on the historical front", as the official formulation called it.

The instruments of power developed by the communist dictatorship found a continuation in the post-Soviet area. Where the authorities saw their advantages and did not want to give them up, they considered the maintenance of the old narrative policy as the *raison d'état*.

The survival of the, only partly reformed, myth of the Great Patriotic War is visible in the narrative politics of Belarus and Russia. The problem of propaganda activities undertaken by the authorities of the Russian Federation is discussed in the articles of two analysts from the Centre for Eastern Studies Maria Domańska, PhD, and Jolanta Darczewska, PhD. The former took up the subject of the place of the Great Patriotic War in the contemporary propaganda discourse of the Russian Federation, while the latter dealt with the problem of activity of the Commission of the President of the Russian Federation for Counteracting of Falsification of History to the Detriment of Russia (2009–2012).

Further studies are devoted to the various faces of perpetuating the propaganda image of the Great Patriotic War: Kamil Kłysiński from the Centre for Eastern Studies in Warsaw (on maintaining the myth of war as an element of state propaganda of the Republic of Belarus) and Aliaksei Lastouski (a description of the circumstances and propaganda enunciations accompanying the Victory Day Parade on May 9, 2020 that was organised in Minsk during the COVID-19 pandemic without sanitary restrictions).

The themes of the Great Patriotic War in Russian as well as Ukrainian cinematography were touched upon in the debate by Łukasz Jasina, PhD, and in articles by Olga Gontarska, PhD, and Ilya Tsibets.

Soviet propaganda during the Great Patriotic War is the subject of study by Dariusz Miszewski, PhD of the War Studies University in Warsaw.

The Books section contains a critical discussion of the collection of articles entitled Sovietisation and violence: the Case of Estonia published by the Estonian Institute of Historical Memory (2018) presented by Władysław Bułhak, PhD.

The issue of the contemporary perception of the history of the German-Soviet War was aptly summarised in the debate published here by Łukasz Jasina, PhD, with the words, "…perhaps never has the expression that 'history has no meaning for the present' been more false".

Anna Karolina Piekarska
Editor-in-Chief
Institute of National Remembrance Review
Franciszek Dąbrowski PhD
Deputy Editor-in-Chief
Institute of National Remembrance Review

DOI: 10.48261/INRR210301

Monument at the Soviet War Cemetery, Warsaw, Poland (Bohdan Lachert, Jerzy Jarnuszkiewicz, Stanisław Lisowski, 1950).
© Franciszek Dąbrowski, 2019