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The Iron Curtain as an Aspect of the Sovietisation of Eastern Europe in 1949–1953

Zarys treści: Sowietyzacja była kluczowym etapem prowadzącym do utrwalenia „żelaznej kurtyny” na terenie Europy Wschodniej i pełnego podporządkowania krajów wschodnioeuropejskich Związkowi Radzieckiemu. W artykule omawiam różne aspekty sowietyzacji, m.in. wymiar ustrojowy, gospodarczy oraz wojskowy. W ostatniej z wyżej wymienionych dziedzin pozwoliłem sobie na wyartykułowanie przyczyn, które sprawiły, że władze sowieckie podjęły decyzję o przeprowadzeniu przyspieszonej sowietyzacji w dziedzinie militarnej na terenie Europy Wschodniej. Ważnym elementem niniejszego artykułu jest też kwestia prześladowania Kościoła w państwach zdominowanych przez ZSRR. W podsumowaniu nakreśliłem konsekwencje omawianych w artykule wydarzeń dla współczesnej rzeczywistości politycznej krajów postkomunistycznych w wymiarze politycznym, gospodarczym oraz społecznym.

Outline of content: Sovietisation was the key stage leading to the strengthening of the Iron Curtain sealing off Eastern Europe and to the total subjugation of Eastern European countries to the Soviet Union. In the article, the author discusses various aspects of Sovietisation, emphasising its political, economic and military aspects, including the reasons underlying the decision taken by the Soviet leaders to step up the pace of Sovietisation in the military field in Eastern Europe. An important part of the present study is also the question of the persecution of the Church in the states dominated by the USSR. In the conclusions, the author discusses the consequences of the described developments for the contemporary political situation of the post-communist countries in their political, economic and social aspects.

Słowa kluczowe: Europa Wschodnia, Kominform, RWPG, sowietyzacja Europy Wschodniej, zimna wojna, ZSRR, żelazna kurtyna

Keywords: Eastern Europe, Cominform, the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA), Sovietisation of Eastern Europe, Cold War, Soviet Union, Iron Curtain

When presenting an analysis of how the “iron curtain” in Central and Eastern Europe in the late Stalinist years was strengthened, it becomes justified to trace

the issue of Sovietisation of this area.¹ It is worth indicating that the purge in the years 1949–1953 differed significantly from the terror of the years immediately preceding this period, known as the first step towards Sovietisation in these countries. That time period was characterised by escalating terror towards all social strata. Particularly intensified was the search within own ranks for “enemies” of the regime, who had different views regarding the communisation of the individual countries. In the face of the breakdown of the political opposition in the years 1944–1948 through “salami tactics”, steps were taken to construct completely totalitarian states, subject only to the authority of Moscow, with the autonomy of their societies subordinated to the will of the Soviet Union. The Soviet dictator, in order to preserve the centralisation of the bloc’s actions, reacted strongly to any manifestations of independence on the part of the satellite state leaders. Realising the need for their maximum subordination to Moscow, Joseph Stalin was against making any even partially independent decisions without his approval.² Mutual co-operation between the countries of the bloc was also gradually fading away. The rulers of each of the “people’s democracies” usually went to see Stalin in person, avoiding concrete talks about the relations between the various communist parties of the countries behind the “iron curtain”. The dictator looked reluctantly at the cooperation of the bloc states behind Moscow’s back, seeing it as a possible conspiracy and aspirations to become independent from the “motherland of the world proletariat”. Keeping in mind the example of the Balkan Federation, from 1950 onwards Stalin did not call any meetings of the Cominform,³

¹ The definition of Eastern Europe, formulated by Mark Kramer, reads: “The term ‘Eastern Europe’, as used in this essay, is partly geographic and partly political, encompassing eight European countries that were under Communist rule from the 1940s through to the end of the 1980s [...]. The term does not include the Soviet Union itself, even though the western Soviet republics (Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova, and Russia west of the Urals) constituted the easternmost part of Europe. The term does include some countries in what is more properly called ‘Central Europe’, such as Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Poland, and what in 1949 became known as the German Democratic Republic (or East Germany). The other Communist states in Europe – Albania, Bulgaria, Romania, and Yugoslavia – are also encompassed by the term ‘Eastern Europe’. Countries that were never under Communist rule, such as Greece and Finland, are not regarded as part of ‘Eastern Europe’, even though they might be construed as such from a purely geographic standpoint”, see M. Kramer, *Stalin, Soviet policy and the consolidation of a communist bloc in Eastern Europe, 1944–1953*, http://fsi.stanford.edu/sites/default/files/evnts/media/Stalin_and_Eastern_Europe.pdf, p. 1 (access: 29 May 2016).

² Л.Я. Гибианский, “Форсирование советской блоковой политики”, in: *Холодная война 1945–1963 гг. Историческая ретроспектива. Сборник статей*, ed. N.I. Егорова, Москва–Новосибирск, 2003, pp. 150–155.

³ Cominform (Information Bureau of the Communist and Workers’ Parties) was created by the representatives of the communist parties of Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, France, Yugoslavia, Poland, Romania, Hungary, Italy and the USSR on 22–27 September 1947 during a conference in Szklarska Poręba. The activities of the Bureau aimed at coordinating the communist parties in Eastern Europe after the USA announced the Truman Doctrine (*doctrine containment*) and the Marshall Plan, in March and June 1947 respectively, but it was also the Moscow camp’s

deeming the activity of this organisation useless, although officially it was only dissolved in 1956.

The second stage of Sovietisation was characterised by an even more intensified “peaceful” propaganda, representing the Soviet Union and Eastern European countries as a model in all areas of life. However, in communism more than in any other social system, theoretical assumptions most of the time completely diverged from practice. When describing the process of the Sovietisation of Central Europe, Wojciech Roszkowski states:

Communists were supposed first to gain full political power, and then gradually carry out the Sovietisation of the societies. “People’s democracy” as “a transitional regime towards socialism” was a shield of changes in the direction of a totalitarian state. By using it, the communists wanted to numb the societies of Central and Eastern Europe which, for the most part, aimed at introducing their own social reforms and to make them insensitive to the introduction of “socialism” in the Soviet version. The official ideology, based on strength and lying, created an artificial, pseudo-scientific world compatible with the Russian doublethink allowing logical contradictions. “Democracy” meant here an absolute dictatorship, “progress” – overthrowing any values and the absolutisation of power, and “science” – a primitive belief in the chanting of ideologues. At the root of the later, at times hard to grasp internal dilemmas in the communist world was a contradiction between the utopian and seemingly beautifully sounding theory and the extremely cruel practices of the authorities.⁴

The emerging question about the purpose of the Sovietisation process in the Eastern bloc allows us to identify it with the desire of the governments of the individual communist countries to reduce the societies of Eastern Europe to outright moral slavery. The aim of the Kremlin was a degradation of family norms, the loss of the sense of civic community through collectivism, and an increased impact of the Soviet Union on culture and art in the countries of the bloc by imposing its “patterns” on them. The Soviets’ concern about the exceedingly slow spread of their educational ideas in Eastern Europe was first expressed in March 1949 in a letter to the head of the Soviet Foreign Ministry, Andrey Vyshinsky, and his Deputies Andrey Gromyko and Valerian Zorin, in which the head of the ministry’s Fourth European Division Stepan Kirsanov suggested i.a. opening schools for Soviet citizens living in “people’s democracy” states, introducing the practice of posting Soviet scholars and lecturers to work at local universities, and to draw the attention of satellite governments to the need for eradicating the remainder of

attempt to disrupt the aforementioned initiatives. The significance of Cominform in international politics is examined more broadly by M. Zacharias in “Powołanie Kominformu w 1947 r. Przyczyny, przebieg, skutki”, *Studia z Dziejów Rosji i Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej*, 31 (1996), pp. 95–115.

⁴ Quoted from C. Grzelak, “Ład pojałtański w Europie Wschodniej”, in: *Represje sowieckie wobec narodów Europy 1944–1956*, eds. D. Rogut, A. Adamczyk, Zelów, 2005, p. 18.

foreign cultural institutions and schools.⁵ Through the activities of their “governors” in Central Europe, the Soviet communists wanted to replace pre-war teaching staff, appointing in their places people who would be flexible and subordinate to the new authorities.

A similar trend occurred in culture. As early as in 1949, Soviet authorities exerted pressure to accelerate the unification of the bloc countries with the Soviet cultural system. This issue was touched on by the Hungarian minister of culture József Révai. With regard to the situation in his country, he explained: “the Soviet culture is a model for teachers and our new socialist culture. We are able to assimilate and use the rich experience of the Soviet Communist Party not just in economy and in the technique of class warfare, but also in the creation of a new socialist culture”.⁶ Thus, the communists sought to raise “a new socialist man”, “unstained” by Western influences. The intentions of the communists regarding not just Poland, but all socialist countries were clearly expressed by Włodzimierz Sokorski at the Polish Writers’ Union conference in Szczecin in January 1949, who said that “the Szczecin conference of writers in January 1949 openly addressed, for the first time, the issue of fighting against formalism and cosmopolitanism, and fighting for the art of socialist realism as the problem of a struggle for art which in its content will cover the entire, deep process of our country’s transformation, and in its purposes will become the educator or the new, socialist man”.⁷

It should be noted that the main, though not the only, reason for tightening the process of Sovietisation in Eastern Europe was a rift in the relations between the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia.⁸ While assessing the importance of this event for the exacerbation of political terror in the East of the European continent, it is advisable to refer to the views of John Lewis Gaddis, who writes:

Similar doubts [regarding Tito’s foreign policy] appeared in connection with the Yugoslavian post-war Balkan Federation plans. Stalin initially supported this idea, probably treating it

⁵ “Moskwa 21 marzec 1949 – Propozycje kierownika IV Wydziału Europejskiego MSZ ZSRR Siepana Kirsanowa w sprawie zwiększenia wpływu Związku Sowieckiego na życie kulturalne Polski, Czechosłowacji i innych państw Europy Wschodniej”, in: *Polska w dokumentach z archiwów rosyjskich 1949–1953*, ed. A. Kochoński, Warszawa, 2000, pp. 31–34.

⁶ Quoted from: B. Fowkes, *Eastern Europe 1945–1969. From Stalinism to Stagnation*, London–New York, 2000, p. 48.

⁷ Quoted from: J. Inglot, *Soc Fiction*, http://niniwa22.cba.pl/inglot_soc_fiction.htm (access: 9 August 2015).

⁸ The severity of the propaganda campaign against Tito in the countries of the bloc are reflected very well by the report presented by the Secretary General of the Romanian Communist Party, Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej in November 1950 at the Cominform meeting in Bucharest. The document outlines specific steps aimed at preventing “Titoism” in Romania – strengthening party organisations, the intensification of propaganda and agitation for the PCR, the strengthening of the state apparatus and some economic measures, see *November 1950 – Meeting of the Secretariat of the Information Bureau – steps to counteract Titoism in Romania*, <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/114541> (access: 5 August 2015).

as a good pretext that would allow him to remove the representatives of the American and British military authorities from the former enemy countries, such as Romania. However, he soon began to have reservations. There was a concern that the Yugoslavians would become too powerful, and their tendency towards impulsive actions – such as presenting their demands regarding Trieste and shooting down two US military aircrafts in 1946 – would be able to provoke the West. Therefore, instructions arrived from Moscow for Yugoslavians to avoid haste in the implementation of their plans to occupy Albania, and at the same time to stop providing aid to Greek guerrillas. In the context of the cold war, these decisions reflected Stalin's caution, as he avoided open confrontation with the British and the Americans, and so they greatly relieved tensions. However, from the point of view of belligerent Yugoslavians they were a manifestation of the arrogance of imperial power, bent on subjecting their interests – which they usually defined in ideological terms – to the interests of the Soviet state.⁹

For the Soviet dictator who did not intend to allow any country to leave his sphere of influence, the conflict with Yugoslavia became a pretext for a new “purge” in the area of the Soviet Union, but also in Central and Eastern Europe.¹⁰ This time it was to cover not only the anti-communist structures, but also people who did not fulfil Stalin's directives in a sufficient manner. Those sentenced to death, in 1949 and 1952 respectively, during an anti-Semitic purge included the former Hungarian Minister of Interior László Rajk and the General Secretary of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia Rudolf Slánský. Rajk's “trial” deserves particular attention.¹¹

⁹ J.L. Gaddis, *Teraz już wiemy... Nowa historia zimnej wojny*, Warszawa, 1998, pp. 63–64.

¹⁰ The atmosphere of misunderstanding between the two countries is well illustrated by a report by Milovan Djilas, one of Tito's closest associates, from 10 February 1948, in which the author describes his conversation with Stalin, Vyacheslav Molotov, Georgi Dimitrov and Vasil Kolarov, Dimitrov's successor as head of the Bulgarian government. In the document we read that Stalin, opposing Tito's idea regarding the formation of a single Federation of Central European countries, suggested the creation of three separate federations: Polish-Czechoslovakian, Hungarian-Romanian, and Yugoslavian-Bulgarian-Albanian. We can also notice significant discrepancies between Tito and Stalin on the Greek issue in Djilas's report. Dimitrov's remark that the victory of “the monarchist fascists” in Greece may lead to the deterioration of the situation in the Balkans was met with the Soviet dictator's support for maintaining a pro-Western government in Greece, which he motivated with a concern about the Western reaction, and the absence of conditions conducive to a communist coup in that country; see *10 February 1948 – Report of Milovan Djilas about a secret Soviet-Bulgarian-Yugoslav meeting*, <http://digitalarchive.wilson-center.org/document/117100> (access: 20 May 2016).

¹¹ The genesis of Rajk's arrest and his process was described by the Russian historian Nikita Petrov in his publication, Н. Петров, *Сталин и органы НКВД-МГБ в советизации стран Центральной и Восточной Европы. 1945–1953 гг.*, Amsterdam, 2008, pp. 153–184. His analysis suggests that the repressions of the Hungarian politician were initiated by the Ministry of State Security of the Soviet Union (MGB) in the person of General Fyodor Belkin, head of the Soviet “advisers” in Eastern Europe, and General Vasilii Makarov, Deputy Minister of State Security. On 20 June 1949, at the request of the head of the MGB, Stalin agreed to collect materials against Rajk. In order to preserve the confidentiality of the letters to the Hungarian leader Mátyás Rákosi, the dictator used the pseudonyms “Filippov” and “Borisov”.

It was the first time in the Eastern bloc that communists applied to their former comrades methods resembling those from the second half of the 1930s in the Soviet Union and from the political trials of Stalin's former associates, e.g. Grigory Zinoviev, Lev Kamenev, or Nikolai Bukharin. Nearing the end of his life, Stalin sought to subjugate with all his might all the leaders in Eastern Europe. In the case of Rajk, the pretext to arrest him was his service during the Spanish Civil War in 1936, where he fought actively on the side of the Republicans. He also maintained close contacts with the representatives of the Yugoslavian terror apparatus, e.g. with the Yugoslavian Minister of Interior, Aleksandar Ranković. For Stalin, who was in direct conflict with Josip Broz Tito, it meant the possibility of recruiting Rajk by former Yugoslavian intelligence. Another factor working against the Hungarian was his links with the American communist Noel Field, treated by the Soviet authorities as camouflage for anti-communist activities through teaching at universities in Eastern Europe.¹² By arresting Rajk, Stalin wanted to link his case to the alleged existence of a wider conspiracy, aimed at destroying the Soviet regime. United States were reputed to play a central role in it. Emphasising the international significance of Rajk's trial, the prosecutor said:

This trial is internationally significant. [...] It is not just Rajk and his partners who are sitting in the dock, together with them are sitting their foreign superiors, imperialist instigators from Belgrade and Washington. [...] The evidence presented during the trial clearly shows that even during the war against Hitler the American intelligence services were ready to fight the forces of socialism and democracy. [...] The conspiracy planned in Hungary by Tito and his clique, which was to be carried out by Rajk's network, cannot be fully understood beyond the context of the international plans of American imperialists.¹³

Two years later, in 1951, another victim of the terror machine became János Kádár, the interior minister and a close friend and godfather of Rajk's son, who incidentally encouraged Rajk to confess to faults he had not committed in return for saving his life¹⁴. In January 1953 one of the founders of the Hungarian system of repression, Gábor Péter, was arrested. Both Stalin and the then Hungarian leader Mátyás Rákosi, who considered himself the Soviet leader's best pupil, believed that only by maintaining people in a constant state of uncertainty about tomorrow could one force them into total obedience. At the time, Hungary was an example of a country Russified in such a way that even collective farms, burdened by high taxes, were called by the Russian name of *kolkhoz*. They did not bring the average farmer much profit, as they were forced to provide a certain amount of produce to the state for free.¹⁵

¹² C. Andrew, O. Gordijewski, *KGB*, Warszawa, 1999, pp. 360–361.

¹³ Quoted from: *ibid.*, pp. 362–363.

¹⁴ V. Sebestyen, *Rewolucja 1989. Jak doszło do upadku komunizmu*, Wrocław, 2009, p. 166.

¹⁵ The degree of the crisis in Hungarian agriculture is apparent in the data, which suggests that in 1952 a farmer's income reached just 30.8% of what they obtained as recently as at the end of

The second, best-known show trial in Eastern Europe in the discussed period was the trial of Slánský, who until his arrest was the Secretary General of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia. Slánský, one of the most ardent Stalinists in Eastern Europe, fell victim to repression probably due to his Jewish descent. Out of fourteen defendants in his “trial”, nine were Jews.¹⁶ Slánský was the highest ranking dignitary in the Eastern bloc sentenced to death by hanging (3 December 1952). Controlling the trial directly through his advisers in Czechoslovakia, Stalin sent the communist parties in Eastern Europe a signal to “cleanse” their staff of Jews, but also showed his vassals that nobody was untouchable, and that the slightest opposition towards the Soviet Union could end in sharing Slánský’s fate.¹⁷

The Soviet leader was planning similar trials in Poland, where the former Secretary of the KC PPR (Central Committee of the Polish Workers’ Party) Władysław Gomułka, arrested in August 1951, was under special control. However, Gomułka’s trial did not take place, mainly due to his unwavering attitude in the investigation and “the insufficient value of the evidence” presented by the leaders of the Ministry of Public Security.¹⁸ However, Gomułka’s closest associates were arrested or demoted, i.a. Grzegorz Korczyński, Zenon Kliszko, and the future Marshal of Poland Marian Spychalski, who was submitted to both physical and psychological terror.¹⁹ Spychalski’s case, associated with the military circles in the KC PZPR, was linked by the security service with the so-called Trial of the Generals, dated to the period from 31 July to 12 August 1951, whose name was linked with General Stanisław Tatar, who in 1944–1945 was the Deputy Chief of Staff to the Chief Commander of the Polish Armed Forces in the West. Tatar, a supporter of cooperation with the communist regime taking shape at the time, was arrested on the grounds that, according to the authorities, he had allegedly organised, together with Spychalski, an anti-communist conspiracy in the Polish army.²⁰

the 1940s, see. A. Czyż, S. Kubas, *Doświadczenia węgierskiej transformacji ustrojowej – od Jánoša Kádára do Viktora Orbána*, Katowice, 2011, p. 26.

¹⁶ G. Bortoli, *Śmierć Stalina*, Wrocław, 1989, p. 68.

¹⁷ To this day, the definite motives for the arrest and conviction of Slánský by the Czechoslovakian court have not been determined. It seems reasonable to claim that he might have been undone by the removal of Viktor Abakumov from the position of the head of MGB in July 1951, as well as Stalin’s growing anti-Zionist paranoia and his distrust towards Beria. In the light of the preserved documentation, it is clear that it was Stalin who personally insisted on a trial against the Secretary General of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia; in November 1951, Stalin ordered his colleague, Anastas Mikoyan, to interview the President of Czechoslovakia Klement Gottwald to achieve the latter’s consent to arrest Slánský. Despite his qualms, Slánský was arrested; see V. Mastny, *Stalin i zimna wojna. Sowietkie poczucie zagrożenia*, Warszawa, 2006, pp. 248–251; Andrew, Gordijewski, *KGB*, p. 367.

¹⁸ R. Terlecki, *Miecz i tarcza komunizmu. Historia aparatu bezpieczeństwa w Polsce 1944–1990*, Kraków, 2007, pp. 104–105.

¹⁹ R. Spałek, *Komuniści przeciwko komunistom. Poszukiwanie wroga wewnętrznego w kierownictwie partii komunistycznej w Polsce w latach 1948–1956*, Warszawa, 2014, pp. 455–471.

²⁰ A.L. Sowa, *Historia polityczna Polski 1944–1991*, Warszawa, 2011, p. 136.

Similar political trials were taking place in other countries of the “socialist paradise”. After giving up on the idea of neutralising Germany,²¹ Stalin gave command to step up repressions in the GDR, resulting in the arrest in January 1953 and a sentence of 15 years in prison for the Foreign Minister of the GDR, Georg Dertinger – one of the signatories of the Treaty of Zgorzelec from 6 July 1950, signed between Poland and the GDR, sanctioning the recognition by East Germany of Poland’s western border on the Oder-Neisse line.²² Walter Ulbricht’s position as an incontestable ruler of the GDR was strengthened in Moscow due to the systematically increasing violence against political opponents both in and outside of the party. However, the deteriorating economic situation of the East German state revealed a growing opposition against Ulbricht in the leadership of the SED (Socialist Unity Party of Germany) from 1950. The opposition was led by Rudolf Herrnstadt, editor in chief of the party newspaper “Neues Deutschland”, and Wilhelm Zaisser, GDR’s Minister for State Security. These activists opposed to certain elements of Ulbricht’s policy, such as total subordination of the SED to the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, the cult of the individual – the East German leader, and the GDR industrialisation policy. Occasionally, they were supported by other members of the SED’s political bureau, e.g. by Anton Ackermann, Hans Jendretzky, Heinrich Rau or Elli Schmidt.²³ Herrnstadt and Zaisser were side-lined by Ulbricht with the consent of Moscow only after suppressing protests in East

²¹ On 10 March 1952, Stalin sent a memorandum to the Western powers on the reunification and neutralisation of Germany. On the basis of the documents it should be assumed that the Soviet initiative was a bluff, aimed to break down the unity of the West in the face of the rumours emerging in 1951 about a possible rearmament of the West German army by the United States, and talks of creating a European army. The Western powers saw through the Soviet charade, as the General Agreement with West Germany was signed on 26 May 1952, and the treaty establishing the European Defence Community – a day later. From the moment the Soviet memoranda were rejected by the West, Stalin began to gradually change his policy towards the GDR. On 1 April 1952, during a meeting with the leaders of the GDR Wilhelm Pieck, Otto Grotewohl and Walter Ulbricht, he said: “Recruit the People’s Army. The period of pacifism is over”. Several days later, on 7 April, at a further meeting with East German chiefs he stated: “regardless of any proposals on Germany that we could submit, the Western powers will not agree to withdraw from Germany. The Americans need their own army in West Germany in order to keep the whole of Western Europe in hand”. Perceiving the line dividing Germany as the boundary between the two political blocs, Stalin contested at the meeting: “The defence of this border should be strengthened”, see P. Ruggenthaler, *The Concept of Neutrality in Stalin’s Foreign Policy 1945–1953*, Lexington, 2015, p. 219; Ruggenthaler, “Wielki błąd Stalina. Dzieje noty Stalina z 10 marca 1952 roku na podstawie dokumentów przywództwa radzieckiego”, *Pamięć i Sprawiedliwość. Pismo Instytutu Pamięci Narodowej*, 2009, no. 1 (14), p. 277; W. Zubok, K. Pleszakow, *Zimna wojna zza kulis Kremla. Od Stalina do Chruszczowa*, Warszawa, 1999, p. 199.

²² M. Allinson, *Politics and popular Opinion in East Germany 1945–1968*, New York, 2000, p. 28.

²³ P. Grieder, *The East German Leadership 1946–73. Conflict and crisis*, Manchester–New York, 1999, s. 53.

Germany in July 1953, after the arrest of the former Minister of Internal Affairs of the Soviet Union Lavrentiy Beria.²⁴

The persecution of former communists in Bulgaria took on a particular character. In June 1949, Traicho Kostov, a leading Bulgarian communist politician and Deputy Prime Minister was arrested, and sentenced to death six months later. Also Georgi Dimitrov's position became significantly weaker; he was in disgrace with Stalin since he had endorsed Tito's concept regarding the Balkan Federation. Dimitrov died in unexplained circumstances in the USSR during treatment in August 1949. After several months of fighting for Kremlin's favour, Moscow appointed Valko Chervenkov as the Prime Minister, a collaborator of Comintern and former editor-in-chief of the Bulgarian Hristo Botev radio station, active in 1941–1944 in Moscow.²⁵ Chervenkov, together with the Interior Minister Rusi Hristozov, and Todor Zhivkov, the former head of the Sofia police who was moving up in the party hierarchy, implemented a model of Bulgarian internal and foreign policy subject to Stalin. Implementing the objectives of Bulgarian authorities was facilitated, among others, by the obedience of the society and its unwillingness to develop any form of organised resistance. In the case of the Bulgarian-Soviet relationship, strong cultural ties also played a role, in the form of the common religion and alphabet, which made it easier for the Soviets to control that country.

Also in Romania the direction of political repression was similar to other countries behind the "iron curtain". The leader of the country, Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej, after breaking up political opposition and forcing King Michael I to abdicate, pushed for the exclusion from the party of all his potential opponents. Lucrețiu Pătrășcanu, one of the founders of the Romanian Communist Party and justice minister in the new communist government was arrested as early as in 1948, and six years later executed by firing squad. Also the close collaborator of the Romanian leader, the Foreign Minister Ana Pauker fell into disgrace. The cause of her and Pătrășcanu's downfall was their status as communists involved in the resistance and imprisoned during World War II. Gheorghiu-Dej feared that they could seize power, especially that Pauker maintained contacts with Moscow.²⁶

Due to the use of political repression in Romania on a limited scale, the situation in this country was the reason for anxiety both in the Kremlin and in other capitals of the Eastern bloc, where it was believed that the Romanian leader did not fulfil "his responsibilities" sufficiently. In 1950, during a visit to Budapest of Victor Vezendean, Deputy Head of Foreign Affairs at the Central Committee of the

²⁴ J. Kopstein, *The Politics of Economic Decline in East Germany 1945–1989*, Chapel Hill, 1997, p. 37.

²⁵ http://sofiaecho.com/2003/06/19/630758_people-in-history-the-smelting-of-bulgarias-stalin (access: 9 August 2015).

²⁶ According to the researcher of Romanian history of the twentieth century Adam Burakowski, Gheorghiu-Dej started collecting materials compromising the "Moscow group" under the leadership of Pauker as early as in 1949 and waited for the best possible moment to strike, see A. Burakowski, *Geniusz Karpat. Dyktatura Nicolae Ceaușescu 1965–1989*, Warszawa, 2008, p. 32.

Romanian Communist Party, *Rákosi* suggested that the Romanians strengthen terror in the country and seek out enemies in their own ranks, based on the conviction that in each communist party there must be traitors.²⁷ Following the Soviet dictator's instructions, from the early 1950s Gheorghiu-Dej sought to eliminate from the party people of Jewish descent with links to Moscow. It was then that the position of Romanian communists with nationalist views was strengthened, for instance the young Nicolae Ceaușescu, the future Secretary General of the party and president of the country, and Emil Bodnăraș, an activist closely associated with the Soviet security services. Gheorghiu-Dej also used the purges to blame his own political opponents for Romania's economic failure resulting from the collectivisation of agriculture, a process for which Pauker was personally responsible. By agreeing to the repressions, the Moscow regime took into account that, as opposed to other Eastern European countries, the political structures in Romania after 1944 had not been immediately destroyed, and the very process of Sovietisation of the country was spread over time.²⁸

Despite the focus on the detection of alleged spies in their own ranks, in the period from 1949 to 1953 the persecution of opposition activists in the countries of the Eastern bloc was not neglected. This is evidenced, for example, by the trial of Milada Horáková, a well-known Czech activist in the resistance movement during World War II and an anti-communist, whose trial took place under direct supervision of Soviet special services, who arrived to Czechoslovakia in order to prepare the "trial" in accordance with the Soviet methods of forcing an admission of guilt.²⁹ In the entire communist camp during the discussed period, the number of prisoners convicted for political reasons increased exponentially. An example of this was Poland, where in January 1948 the number of political prisoners was given as 26,000, and in October 1952 already over 49,000.³⁰ According to the data presented by Tadeusz Wolsza, in the light of the remaining documentation Polish prisons and camps in Stalinist era held more than 100,000 people, while the number of prisoners in 1950 reached approximately 115,000, and around 20,500 people are likely to have lost their lives throughout the entire period of Stalinism. However, the author points out that the latter number may be significantly underestimated due to the difficulty in carrying out research regarding this issue.³¹ Those sentenced to death included military leaders who enjoyed considerable recognition for their pro-independence activities. Lieutenant Colonel Łukasz Ciepliński, head of the organisation Freedom and Independence (*Wolność i Niezawisłość*), was executed in August 1951. The investigation against him lasted since 1947 and was

²⁷ R. Levy, *Ana Pauker. The rise and fall of a Jewish communist*, London, 2001, pp. 154–155.

²⁸ S.D. Roper, *Romania. The Unfinished Revolution*, London–New York, 2000, p. 25.

²⁹ K. Bartosek, "Europa pod rządami komunizmu", in: *Czarna księga komunizmu. Zbrodnie, terror, prześladowania*, ed. S. Courtois et al., Warszawa, 1999, pp. 378–379.

³⁰ Terlecki, *Miecz i tarcza komunizmu*, p. 83.

³¹ T. Wolsza, *Więzienia stalinowskie w Polsce. System, codzienność, represje*, Warszawa, 2013, p. 270.

conducted under the direct supervision of the Soviet services.³² General August Emil Fieldorf, Deputy Commander in Chief of the Home Army and Commander of the Directorate of Diversion of the said army, was hanged in February 1953.

Another group targeted by the Kremlin and its puppets became the Hungarian Social Democrats. In June 1950, Rákosi called for a concerted offensive against them, calling the group traitors deserving of death.³³ Also in Bulgaria there were mass persecutions of political opponents, i.a. Kosta Lulchev and Ivan Korpinkov, sentenced to 15 and 12 years in prison respectively.³⁴ In Czechoslovakia, a public show trial took place in June 1950, when four people were sentenced to death, five to life imprisonment, and another four to between 15 and 28 years in prison. This group of convicts included known activists of the Social Democratic Party of Czechoslovakia, Vojtěch Dundr and Zdeněk Peska.³⁵ In Poland, the socialist activist Kazimierz Pużak, reluctant to cooperate with the communists, was among those murdered in prison in 1950.³⁶

The cases of political repression described above demonstrate the communists' pursuit to exercise the widest possible control over social life in all its dimensions. Certain aspects of Sovietisation of Eastern Europe will be deliberately traced, as will be the methods with which the communists attempted to subjugate the societies and gain Stalin's acceptance.

Aspects of Sovietisation

The first dimension of Sovietisation was reflected in the political system. Through their proxies operating in the satellite countries, the representatives of the Soviet power elite demanded that the leaders of subordinate states should introduce normative regulations praising the Soviet Union. An example of this could be the Hungarian Constitution, passed on St. Stephen's Day, the day of the country's patron saint, i.e. 20 August 1949. The preamble to the constitution contained thanks to the "Soviet Union, radiant with glory for its historical contribution to the liberation of our country".³⁷ An even more striking example of systemic Sovietisation was the constitution of the Polish People's Republic of 22 July 1952. Stalin's interference led to about 50 amendments in its final version.³⁸ In the territories under

³² Wolsza, *Więzienia stalinowskie*, pp. 86–87.

³³ A. Ban, "Hungary", in: *The Curtain Falls. The story of the socialists in Eastern Europe*, ed. D. Healey, London, 1951, p. 94.

³⁴ J. Jackowicz, *Partie opozycyjne w Bułgarii 1944–1948*, Warszawa, 1997, p. 195.

³⁵ V. Majer, "Czechoslovakia", in: *The Curtain Falls*, p. 96.

³⁶ F. Musiał, "Polska pojałtańska (1945–1948)", in: *Od niepodległości do niepodległości. Historia Polski 1918–1989*, ed. A. Dziurok et al., Warszawa, 2014, p. 227.

³⁷ Sebestyen, *Rewolucja 1989*, p. 35.

³⁸ In his amendments, Stalin often included the word "national". The claim that the Polish People's Republic "limits, displaces and removes social relations based on exploitation" was changed by the

Soviet control, administration functioned according to rules close to the Soviet “models” of democratic centralism. We can refer here to the law of 20 March 1950 passed by the Polish Sejm regarding the field organs of the unified state power, assuming the removal of the two-tiered system in Poland’s public administration and, consequently, the elimination of regional authorities, their associations and organs.³⁹ Generally speaking, the principle of state power uniformity means that local authorities are only a part of the monistic administration in a country, and “any power to protect their own interests may be derived only from acts considered to be an expression of the will of the state. Moreover, the powers are relative and limited [...] in the use and disposal of property”.⁴⁰ Despite the recreation of the bases of local governments after the war, in accordance with the decree of the Polish Committee of National Liberation of 23 November 1944 on the organisation and scope of the activities of local governments, which specified the records about the restoration of executive bodies in the form of municipal and urban authorities, as well as about expanding the administrative competence of the mayors in large cities, the essence of how field administration functioned in Poland was based on the national councils, appointed on 22 July 1944 using the Soviet model. According to the provisional statute of the 1 January 1944, they consisted of representatives of “all democratic and independence-oriented organisations and associations”, and the administrative committees of national councils became their executive and managing authorities.⁴¹ Essentially similar regulations were implemented in other countries of the bloc.

The second aspect of Sovietisation was related to the economic sphere. Stalin’s aim was the complete dependence of the Eastern European economies on the Soviet Union, for example through accelerated agricultural reforms, such as the one in Hungary in 1945,⁴² as well as forced collectivisation of agriculture in Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Hungary or Romania. The only country unable to effectively carry out this process was Poland. Regardless of the predatory treatment of Polish natural resources by the USSR, including the forced coal supplies at lowered prices, Stalin, along with Gomułka and Bolesław Bierut, came to the conclusion that it was not necessary to carry out the collectivisation in the early post-war years. Also, the actions taken by the authorities in the late 1940s and early 1950s for the collectivisation of Polish agriculture were relatively limited. The communists’ aim in terms of rural policy was enforced industrialisation. According to Dariusz Jarosz, its primary effects included: a considerable migration of the countryfolk, a mass

dictator to: “limits, displaces and removes the social classes living off the exploitation of workers and peasants”; see *Polska XX wieku 1914–2003*, ed. M. Derwich, Warszawa–Wrocław, 2004, p. 126.

³⁹ E. Ochendowski, *Prawo administracyjne. Część ogólna*, Toruń, 2013, p. 331.

⁴⁰ B. Jaworska-Dębska, “Zasady prawa administracyjnego i organizacji administracji”, in: *Prawo administracyjne. Pojęcia, instytucje, zasady w teorii i orzecznictwie*, ed. M. Stahl, Warszawa, 2013, p. 189.

⁴¹ H. Izdebski, *Samorząd terytorialny. Podstawy ustroju i działalności*, Warszawa, 2011, pp. 86–88.

⁴² J. Zabłocki, *Prymas Stefan Wyszyński. Opór i zwycięstwo 1948–1956*, Warszawa, 2002, p. 31.

phenomenon of combining work in agriculture with work outside of it, a more egalitarian social structure in Polish villages, and the decreasing importance of land in determining social status and prestige in rural regions.⁴³ Despite the attempts undertaken by Polish authorities in the second half of 1948 to nationalise agriculture, the resistance of farmers, attached to their land and resistant to changes, shaped by decades-old traditions, caused a significant slowdown in the process of collectivisation in subsequent years.⁴⁴ The communists, who were only preparing to attack the Church in the years 1949–1953, were not ready to take up the fight with farmers, whose attitude was characterised by deep faith and radical anti-communism. In addition, the peasants, especially those from the eastern territories, who knew the Soviet economic reality and remembered the times of the Holodomor in 1932–1933, were downright hostile towards the introduction of similar methods in Poland. Anne Applebaum points out that many people living in the inter-war period in eastern Poland, with friends in Ukraine, feared a repetition of the famine.⁴⁵ In other countries of the camp, the climax of the forced collectivisation occurred just before Stalin's death and, ultimately, agriculture was nationalised in the early 1960s.

The economic dimension of Sovietisation was evident also in the creation of the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA) on 25 January 1949 in Moscow.⁴⁶ It comprised all the member states of the Soviet bloc. Despite the formal partnership in the activities of this organisation, the main role was played by the Kremlin, who ran a rapacious economy on the territories it controlled. The CMEA, which served to tighten the “iron curtain” in the economic dimension, constituted one more element of the economic dependence of Eastern European countries on the Soviet Union. According to Robert Skobelski, the primary goal of CMEA's existence was to create a particular economic community of the satellite states and Moscow, while limiting economic contacts with western countries. Socialist countries and the USSR were to develop and pursue economic projects, as well as plans for the export and import of goods for the countries belonging to the Council. In his view, the Kremlin used the CMEA to impose on the Eastern European countries a model of economic links existing between the Soviet republics, regardless of the existing economic systems of those countries.⁴⁷ Tony Judt,

⁴³ J. Holzer, *Europa zimnej wojny*, Kraków, 2012, p. 132.

⁴⁴ D. Jarosz, *Polityka władz komunistycznych w Polsce w latach 1948–1956 a chłopci*, Warszawa, 1998, p. 22.

⁴⁵ A. Applebaum, *Za żelazną kurtyną. Ujarzmienie Europy Wschodniej 1944–1956*, Warszawa, 2013, p. 188.

⁴⁶ W. Dobrzycki, “Historia stosunków międzynarodowych w czasach nowożytnych 1815–1990/1991”, in: *Stosunki międzynarodowe. Geneza, struktura, dynamika*, ed. E. Halizak, R. Kuźniar, Warszawa, 2010, p. 78.

⁴⁷ R. Skobelski, “PRL w Radzie Wzajemnej Pomocy Gospodarczej w latach 1956–1970”, *Kwartalnik Historyczny*, 114 (2007), no. 3, p. 50.

discussing the principles underlying the activities of the CMEA, points out that each member state led bilateral trade with the USSR, but in exchange for raw materials and fuel they were to sell industrial goods and food to the Soviet Union.⁴⁸ This did not only confirm the economic division of the world into two blocs, but also deepened the economic rift separating Eastern and Western Europe as the production of consumer goods and the development of light industry were almost entirely halted. At the beginning of the 1950s the Kremlin decided to break up the direct links between the internal and global pricing system by implementing an exchange rate mechanism.⁴⁹ In other words, any economic calculations were based on the belief that the exchange rate should not play a greater role in the formation of exchange in turnover between the East and West of Europe. Due to the differences in the value of the rouble, zloty, dollar or pound, the Soviet authorities pushed for the strengthening of the “iron curtain” and sentenced Eastern Europe to increasing economic and technological backwardness.

All the decisions of the CMEA countries had to be subordinated to the economic interests of the Kremlin. The most vivid example of Soviet economic interference may be Stalin’s letter of 9 January 1951 to Bierut. In the letter, the dictator demanded preferential treatment for the “strong and stable” rouble in the monetary reform carried out in Poland at the time, and fixing the rate of zloty to rouble at the rate of three to one.⁵⁰ However, it should be noted that in the years 1949–1953 the activities of the CMEA were only a façade. On this basis, it appears that the Council “represented little more than an institutional façade for the unilateral policy of exploiting people’s democracies by Moscow [...] there could be no question of ‘close economic cooperation’ as announced in the founding message”.⁵¹ As Stanisław Parzymies rightly emphasises, the Council was not able to organise economic cooperation and help in overcoming the difficulties encountered in the various economies of the Eastern bloc countries. It was only an instrument of coordinating the economic policy of Eastern European states in accordance with the needs of the Soviet Union.⁵²

Sovietisation must also be considered from the military perspective. We can notice that the first signals from Moscow about the need to adjust Kremlin’s satellite states to the USSR war machine appeared at the beginning of the military action in Korea. On 27 August 1950, when referring to the absence of a Soviet delegate at the United Nations Security Council (the Soviet authorities withdrew their representative to the Council due to the presence of Taiwan), in a letter

⁴⁸ T. Judt, *Powojnie. Historia Europy od roku 1945*, Poznań, 2008, p. 209.

⁴⁹ J. Kaliński, “Rubel transferowy”, *Kwartalnik Kolegium Ekonomiczno-Społeczne. Studia i Prace*, 2013, no. 3, p. 151.

⁵⁰ “Moskwa, 9 stycznia 1951 r. Depesza Józefa Stalina do Bolesława Bieruta w sprawie reformy pieniężnej w Polsce”, in: *Polska w dokumentach*, p. 97.

⁵¹ Holzer, *Europa*, p. 336.

⁵² S. Parzymies, *Stosunki międzynarodowe w Europie 1945–2004*, Warszawa, 2005, p. 80.

to the leader of Czechoslovakia Klement Gottwald, Stalin wrote that the Soviet Union had made such a decision for four reasons: to demonstrate solidarity with the new government in China; to demonstrate American “silliness”, i.e. the support for the candidate of the Kuomintang in the UN Security Council; to suggest that the Council acted unlawfully, as the USSR and China did not participate in the vote; and because of the desire to deteriorate the image of the American government in the national public opinion. In addition, Stalin insisted that through the military intervention in Korea the USA would lose its military prestige and moral authority. According to the Soviet leader, the war in Korea could “pull the United States away from Europe to the Far East”, and “the third world war will be postponed to an indefinite future, which will provide the time necessary to consolidate socialism in Europe”.⁵³

By showing scepticism with regard to the military capabilities of the United States on the Korean front,⁵⁴ Stalin sought to exploit this war to develop the army of the Eastern bloc. In the second half of 1950, a meeting took place between Edward Ochab, a member of the Politburo, and the Defence Minister Konstantin Rokossovsky with Stalin, the USSR Defence Minister Aleksandr Vasilevsky, and the head of the general staff of the Soviet Union, Vasily Sokolovsky, the former USSR delegate in the Allied Control Council of Germany. The Soviet dictator called for intensification of the development of armies in subordinated countries according to Soviet guidelines. At Ochab’s suggestion about possible difficulties related to the increase of armament costs without deteriorating the standard of living for the population, Stalin replied: “in the USSR, much heavier tasks are undertaken in conditions when there is a lack of bread, sugar, clothing and housing”. The dictator stressed that “if it becomes necessary, Poland will also have to tighten its belt and reduce the increase of consumption”.⁵⁵ Several months later, in January 1951, during Stalin’s meeting with defence ministers of people’s democracy states, Rokossovsky protested against the dictator’s idea, saying that the armament increase imposed on Poland cannot be reached before the end of 1956.⁵⁶ The party leader Vylko Chervenkov reacted in a similar manner. In response to their suggestions, Stalin emphatically said: “If Rokossovsky and Chervenkov can guarantee that by the end of 1956 there will be no war, then a limited programme can be accepted,

⁵³ August 27, 1950, *Letter from Filipov (Stalin) to Soviet ambassador in Prague, conveying message to CSSR leader Klement Gottwald*, <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/112225> (access: 21 May 2016).

⁵⁴ At the time of the discussed meeting of 9 January 1951 Stalin said that the United States had “failed to cope even with a small war in Korea” and that the American army would be stuck in Asia for the following two or three years. The dictator thought it the perfect situation for expanding the armed forces of the countries behind the iron curtain; see T. Snyder, R. Brandon, *Stalin i Europa 1928–1953*, Poznań, 2014, p. 269.

⁵⁵ R. Spałek, “Bez jednoosobowej dyktatury”, in: *Władza w PRL. Ludzie i mechanizmy*, ed. K. Rokicki, R. Spałek, Warszawa, 2011, p. 226.

⁵⁶ Snyder, Brandon, *Stalin i Europa*, p. 269.

but since no such guarantees can be given, it would make more sense to carry on with the accelerated one”.⁵⁷

Stalin's desire to expand the armies of the countries of Central and Eastern Europe was due to three reasons. First of all, it would be justified to say that despite the activities in Korea, Stalin was still considering an invasion of Yugoslavia. This was evidenced by the military exercises of four Central European countries neighbouring Yugoslavia in late 1951 and early 1952. They were trained on variants which aimed to encircle and destroy enemy forces on the territory of Yugoslavia.⁵⁸ In the Soviet system, but also in modern Russia, these types of manoeuvres aim to intimidate the potential enemy and check their response to the conducted exercises. Despite the initial scepticism with respect to Stalin's plans of aggression towards Yugoslavia, US analysts showed that strengthening the military industry of Kremlin's satellite countries and accumulating stocks could reverse the military balance of power in the region in favour of Moscow, lead to an invasion, and break the Yugoslavian resistance to guerrilla warfare.⁵⁹ According to the well-known researcher of cold war history Mark Kramer, at the time of the conference of the Central European leaders at the beginning of 1951, Stalin emphasised the need for growth of the military potential in the bloc's countries within the following two or three years. Directing his words to the communist leaders of Eastern Europe, the dictator said: “at the beginning you will need bombers and at least one division from each country to carry out offensive operations”. Increasing the military capability of Central and Eastern European countries, the Soviets provided them with Soviet attack aircrafts Ilyushin Il-10 able to take strategic positions in Yugoslavia.⁶⁰

The conflict between the USSR and Yugoslavia was also used by the dictator to strengthen the control over the countries of Eastern Europe and completely deprive them of their sovereignty in military matters. This was due to the second reason for accelerating the Sovietisation of satellite state armies. Stalin was trying to show the leaders of these countries that only the USSR had the “right” to supervise their armed forces. It should also be mentioned that the related branch of industry was controlled by the Russians most closely as well. Stalin decided not only about the funds spent on the military, but also about personnel matters at many levels, as exemplified by the appointment of the Soviet Marshal, the aforementioned Rokossovsky, to the post of the Minister of National Defence in Poland, despite his reluctance.⁶¹ Following this, 270 Soviet officers were transferred

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 269.

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 271.

⁵⁹ M. Kramer, “Stalin, the Split with Yugoslavia, and Soviet-East European Efforts to reassert control 1948–1953”, in: *Imposing, Maintaining, and Tearing Open the Iron Curtain. The Cold War and East-Central Europe 1945–1989*, ed. M. Kramer, V. Smetana, Lexington, 2014, pp. 111–112.

⁶⁰ Kramer, Stalin, pp. 110–111.

⁶¹ E. Duraczyński, *Stalin. Twórca i dyktator supermocarstwa*, Warszawa–Pułtusk, 2012, p. 655.

to Poland, including as many as 36 generals.⁶² Most of them left Poland only after the Polish October of 1956. The appointment of Rokossovsky as head of the Ministry of Defence guaranteed the USSR the total subordination and loyalty of the Polish Army in a potential armed conflict with the West. Moreover, intense communist indoctrination of the soldiers was conducted in the armed forces of each of Moscow's satellite countries.⁶³ To strengthen direct supervision of the armed forces, the Kremlin sent (i.a. to Poland) "advisers" at every level, directly linked to itself. In all countries of the bloc, a military security service was established, whose methods in most cases were crueller than in civilian structures. An example of that was the activity of the ruthless Polish Military Information.⁶⁴

The third reason for the accelerated Sovietisation of the army was Stalin's pursuit of a war with the West. The increasingly paranoid Soviet dictator believed that in the face of his own health problems and the weakening of the United States caused by the war in Korea it was possible to take offensive action against the "imperialist world". The routine accusations towards the USA of actively preparing for and provoking a war, insinuated i.a. by the Kremlin's chief ideologist Mikhail Suslov at the Budapest convention in 1949,⁶⁵ served merely to show the Soviet society that it was the United States and the entire Western world who were striving to destroy the USSR. At the same time, at the end of the 1940s Stalin ordered an intensive arms race with the West, which made some analysts assume that the dictator sought to provoke another war. This is confirmed by the

⁶² F. Musiał, "Zaciskanie pętli 1948–1956", in: *Komunizm w Polsce. Zdrada, zbrodnia, zakłamanie, zniewolenie*, ed. W. Bernacki et al., Kraków, 2006, pp. 239–240.

⁶³ Methods of Sovietising the army implemented by communists in Poland and other countries were specified in the minutes of the meeting of the PZPR's Political Bureau of 2 January 1951, at which the "party-political work in the army" was discussed. The document clearly stated that, in the face of tense international relations, "educational and political work should definitely be intensified and love for the USSR should be fostered in order to reinforce the belief that Poland's safety can only be ensured in alliance with the USSR, with the states of the people's democracy, with the progressive forces of the world, with the camp of peace", see "Protokół posiedzenia Biura Politycznego KC PZPR z 2 stycznia 1951 r. w sprawie pracy partyjno-politycznej w wojsku", in: *Kierownictwo PPR i PZPR wobec wojska 1944–1956*, eds. J. Poksiński, A. Kočański, K. Perzak, Warszawa, 2003, pp. 226–227.

⁶⁴ The Military Information (Main Directorate of Information of the Polish Army), operating in 1944–1957, was the authority of military counter-intelligence used for repressing the soldiers of the National Armed Forces, the Home Army or the association Freedom and Independence. For a time it was supervised directly by the officers of the SMERSH (Soviet military counter-intelligence of 1943–1946, controlled by the aforementioned Abakumov, head of the MGB of the USSR in 1946–1951). Despite the lack of a comprehensive monograph on the functioning of the Military Information, numerous studies describe the secrets of its operations and cruelty towards the enemies of communism, see S. Cenckiewicz, *Długie ramię Moskwy. Wywiad wojskowy Polski Ludowej 1943–1991*, Warszawa, 2011; W. Tkaczew, *Organa informacji Wojska Polskiego 1943–1956. Kontrwywiad wojskowy*, Warszawa, 2007; P. Kołakowski, *NKWD i GRU na Ziemiach Polskich 1939–1945*, Warszawa, 2002.

⁶⁵ Duraczyński, *Stalin*, pp. 652–653.

Russian historian Leonid Mlechin, who quotes the reflections of General Nikolai Ostroumov from Stalin's meeting with the Soviet Air Force commanders in 1952. The dictator then demanded that the military form a hundred new squadrons of jet bombers.⁶⁶ Moreover, at the end of the 1940s it was decided that Moscow was to be surrounded by a missile defence system capable of detecting every plane coming from the outside.⁶⁷ Military preparations were also made in the Far North and the Far East, including the possibility of invading Alaska.⁶⁸

The steps mentioned above were to serve a quick start of a war between the Soviet Union and the capitalist world. That is why Jews became the next national group repressed in the USSR just before Stalin's death. The so-called Doctors' Plot at the turn of 1953 was the last murderous act of the dictator, aiming to remove the most prominent Politburo members, such as Beria, Vyacheslav Molotov or Anastas Mikoyan, who remembered Stalin's incompetence during World War II and had a modicum of political independence. By removing their co-workers and persecuting their families and friends (for instance, Molotov's wife Polina Zhemchuzhina was arrested in 1949 during an anti-Zionist campaign), Stalin sought to eliminate all witnesses of his erroneous decisions regarding cadre fluctuations. In their places he appointed new people who would be capable of launching a war that ended with the victory of communism all over the world, or at least in Europe. With numerical advantage over NATO states in terms of land and air forces, Stalin aimed, in all probability, to trigger World War III over the following few years.⁶⁹ The issue of Soviet Union's preparations for the war in the final months of Stalin's

⁶⁶ L. Mleczin, *Ojcowie terroru*, vol. 3: *Koniec epoki. Beria, Abakumow, Ignatiew*, Warszawa, 2004, p. 52.

⁶⁷ E. Radziński, *Stalin. Pierwsza pełna biografia oparta na rewelacyjnych dokumentach z tajnych archiwów rosyjskich*, Warszawa, 1996, p. 756.

⁶⁸ W. Zubok, *Nieudane imperium. Związek Radziecki okresu zimnej wojny, od Stalina do Gorbaczowa*, Kraków, 2010, p. 84.

⁶⁹ There are contradictory views in the literature on the subject concerning the outbreak of a new war in the final months of the Soviet dictator's life. A researcher of Stalin's life, Edward Radziński, believes that the dictator was planning to strike the West at an unspecified date. The second thesis is presented by Stalin's biographer Simon Sebag Montefiore. In his opinion, the Soviet leader was torn between the fear of a war and the likelihood of its inevitability. Montefiore quotes Stalin's words from a conversation with the Deputy Commander of Security of the Kuntsevo Dacha, Peter Losgachev. In response to the officer's suggestions that Americans may be fearing an attack on the USSR, the dictator said: "Remember: they will attack us. They are imperialists and will certainly attack us if we let them. This is the response you should give". The third view is represented by the Czech international relations analyst Vojtech Mastny. He stresses that the Soviet authorities had more reasons to fear military capabilities of Americans than vice versa, considering the fact that in the spring of 1952 the USA sent the first transport of tactical nuclear weapons to Europe and the restrained reaction of Moscow to another series of American air raids in Korea in June 1952. Regardless of the presented theories, it should be noted that this problem is still awaiting a comprehensive study; see Radziński, *Stalin*, pp. 760–765; S. Sebag Montefiore, *Stalin. Dwór czerwonego cara*, Warszawa, 2004, p. 640; Mastny, *Stalin i zimna wojna*, pp. 272–275.

life is a matter which remains inadequately investigated in the subject literature, mainly due to the lack of access to most Soviet documents.⁷⁰

Finally, the Sovietisation of Eastern Europe strongly manifested itself in the persecution of the Church, which was often the last entity independent of the communists. Despite the fact that the activities depriving the Church of its influence on society were spread over time, and various methods were being applied, the communists in all of the bloc countries achieved great success in this struggle, resulting in the laicisation of the societies, which in such countries as the Czech Republic or Romania are present to this day. In Poland, however, the effects of this activity were negligible, mainly due to the strong traditions of Polish Catholicism, the ties of the population with the Church, the political changes in the USSR after Stalin's death, and finally the sensible policy of the Polish Primate, Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński, who on 14 April 1950 signed an agreement with the authorities.⁷¹ Despite the Primate's several years of imprisonment, it was not possible to bring the Church under complete control. Polish communists, despite the Soviet pressures,⁷² were unable to start an open war on religion, as the Bolsheviks did after the revolution of 1917. For the benefit of the public opinion, the Polish authorities continued to stress that their aim was to eliminate priests engaging in political activities, but that they did not mind their religious service. In real-

⁷⁰ The last months of Stalin's life betray the atmosphere of fear and suspicion, increasing from week to week, both in the Soviet society and among the highest authorities of the Kremlin. On 13 January 1953, the Soviet newspaper *Pravda* published information about alleged criminal activities of Jewish physicians working, according to communist propagandists, for the United States and the United Kingdom. The article in *Pravda* suggested in no uncertain terms the alleged negligence of the Soviet security services. This was a signal for both the head of the MGB at the time, appointed in July 1951, Semyon Ignatyev, but above all for Beria that Stalin intended to get rid of them and appoint new people in their place. The case of the Doctors' Plot was described in a greater detail by Yakov Rappoport, *Ostatnia zbrodnia Stalina. 1953. Spisek lekarzy kremlofskich*, Warszawa, 2011.

⁷¹ Despite the controversial terms of the "Agreement", relating to, among other things, the clergy "distancing" themselves from "reactionary bands", I believe that in the long term the Agreement turned out to be a success for the Church. Wyszyński, aware of the geopolitical circumstances and the defensive position of the Church, was able to postpone the decisive confrontation for about three years, after Stalin's death and the progressive "thaw" in the bloc's countries. In order to look closely at the details of that document, I recommend the biography of Cardinal Wyszyński written by the Church historian Peter Raina, *Stefan Kardynał Wyszyński Prymas Polski*, vol. 1, London, 1979, pp. 367–371.

⁷² According to the recollections of the former Deputy Director of the Tenth Department at the Ministry of Public Security Józef Światło, who escaped to the West in September 1953, General Ivan Serov, whose idea it was to kidnap the leaders of the Polish Underground State in March 1945, proposed launching an attack on the Catholic Church to the head of the nationalist "Falanga" Bolesław Piasecki as early as in 1945. In the Stalinist years Piasecki, who until the arrest of Cardinal Wyszyński was a mediator in the relations between the Church and the authorities, became the President of the pro-government PAX Association. He held this function until his death in January 1979; see Zablocki, *Prymas*, p. 63.

ity, the long-term strategy of the authorities was to achieve complete eradication of religion from the public sphere; however, this was to take place in stages. To this end, the communist authorities attempted to break the church hierarchy, for example through the activity of “patriotic priests” compliant with the government. Stalin himself reassured Bierut of this strategy, suggesting in August 1949 that he should divide the Church into two groups, saying, “You won’t get anywhere with the clergy unless you split them into two separate and opposing groups. Into ‘reactionary’ priests and those loyal to the authorities, who will break the clergy from the inside”.⁷³ That same month, a decree on the freedom of conscience and religion was passed. State administration bodies used its provisions to intensify attacks on the Church. The accelerated action of Polish communists towards weakening Catholicism in Poland was due to the growing Soviet pressure. The USSR ambassador to Poland Viktor Lebedev stressed that “the Church in Poland did not suffer any serious harm in the four years of struggle to consolidate democracy. [...] In terms of the fight against the Church, our Polish friends are only at the very beginning of putting this sentence into practice. But they understand that this task is currently becoming a priority”.⁷⁴ However, in the long term it became clear that despite the PZPR’s use of methods aimed to make the financing of the Church dependent on the state (e.g. the status of Caritas), or intensified activities of the so-called “patriot priests”, communists had no instruments to fully subjugate the Church structures in Poland. Faced with the fiasco of their policy, on 9 February 1953 the authorities passed a decree on filling ecclesiastical posts, meaning that the authorities would need to approve the appointments of priests in individual parishes, which stood against the Church’s existing personal autonomy and the agreement of April 1950. Contrary to the position held by the PAX Association, Wyszyński – elevated to the rank of Cardinal in November 1952 – decided to publish a memorandum addressed to the authorities on 8 May 1953, entitled *Non possumus*, in which the Polish Episcopate expressly protested against the pressure.⁷⁵

⁷³ E. Czackowska, *Kardynał Wyszyński*, Warszawa, 2009, p. 101.

⁷⁴ A. Dudek, R. Gryz, *Komuniści i Kościół w Polsce 1945–1989*, Kraków, 2003, p. 43.

⁷⁵ In the context of this document, the following words deserve attention: “And if it should happen that external factors will prevent the appointment to the clerical positions of appropriate and competent people, we are committed to leave them vacant rather than place the religious rule of souls in unworthy hands. Everyone who dares to accept any position in the Church otherwise, should know that they will thus fall into the severe punishment of excommunication. [...] We cannot place God’s things on the altar of the emperor. *Non possumus!*”. It is my belief that the publication of this memorial contributed to the Primate’s arrest in September 1953. It made the authorities aware that they would not be able to enter into an agreement with Cardinal Wyszyński on their terms. In addition, after the arrest of Beria in the Soviet Union, the new First Secretary of the Communist Party Nikita Khrushchev agreed to arrest Wyszyński, but his fate was to depend on condemning Bishop Czesław Kaczmarek, sentenced in September 1953 to 12 years in prison during a show trial. According to Janusz Zabłocki, the authorities pressured

Despite some similarities, the situation of the Church was different in the other countries of the bloc. In Hungary, Czechoslovakia and Romania, with the help of Soviet security officers, the local authorities managed to take many bishops and priests to court, convicting them for years of imprisonment. An example of this was the show trial of the Hungarian Primate, Cardinal József Mindszenty in February 1949. The Hungarian hierarch was sentenced to life imprisonment for spying on behalf of the United States and the Vatican. By putting forward preposterous allegations of his counterrevolutionary actions hand in hand with reactionary agents, of restoring the Habsburgs to the Hungarian throne, or of supporting the Central European Federation under their rule, the Marxist regime sought to ridicule the cardinal in the eyes of the national and international public opinion. To this day it is unknown to what extent the Hungarian Primate was subjected to torture. It seems justified to hypothesise that the priest might have been given pharmacological substances, as a result of which there was in his words a noticeable lack of criticism, association disorders, and illogical remarks.⁷⁶ After his sentence to life in prison, the Hungarian Church did not play any role in shaping social attitudes and was largely subordinate to the communists. It was not until the Hungarian Revolution of 30 October 1956 that Mindszenty was released, but he never returned to his previous position.

Particular cases of repression against the Church took place in Czechoslovakia. In addition to the systematic policy of looting its goods and forcing its economic dependence on the state, the authorities sought to exert influence on appointing bishops through administrative means. This resulted for instance in the internment of the Primate, Cardinal Josef Beran, in June 1949. The laicisation of the country made the task easier for the communists. In the case of exceptionally recalcitrant priests, the authorities resorted to torture. The first of a series of show trials against Czechoslovakian clergymen took place in November 1950 in Prague. Among those given long prison sentences was the vicar general of Olomouc Stanislav Zela.⁷⁷ Another “trial” was conducted in January 1951, when three Greek Catholic bishops in Bratislava, described as “agents of the Vatican in Czechoslovakia”, were given sentences ranging from ten years in prison to life imprisonment. Perhaps the most grotesque case of communist “justice” was that of the Greek Catholic Bishop Vasil Hopka, who was sentenced for fifteen years in prison after a one-day trial on 25 October 1951 for the alleged support of Ukrainian terrorists and giving them false documents to travel to West Germany. He was also accused of participating in five illegal Episcopal conferences, whose participants would

Piasecki to convince the Primate to release statements criticising the Bishop. Wyszyński refused to comply with this request; see J. Żaryn, *Dzieje kościoła katolickiego w Polsce 1944–1989*, Warszawa, 2003, p. 138; Zabłocki, *Prymas*, pp. 154–156.

⁷⁶ T. Wolsza, *Za żelazną kurtyną. Europa Środkowo-Wschodnia, Związek Sowiecki i Józef Stalin w opiniach polskiej emigracji politycznej w Wielkiej Brytanii 1944/1945–1953*, Warszawa, 2005, pp. 213–215.

⁷⁷ Bartosek, *Europa pod rządami komunizmu*, p. 383.

supposedly talk about pastoral letters and Vatican decrees (classified as “hostile towards the state”) which excommunicated the communists,⁷⁸ while the bishop himself allegedly distributed those decrees in his parishes.⁷⁹

The most drastic examples of repression against priests relate to the Pitești Prison in Romania. The priests, students of theology and seminarians imprisoned there were tortured, which was referred to in the propaganda as “re-education”. The prisoners had to kneel on the floor with their hands behind their backs for extended amounts of time, were hung with their heads pointing downwards, and dipped in a bucket full of urine.⁸⁰ The torturers’ aim was to make the tortured indiscriminately praise the communist ideologists and Stalin himself and to reduce them to abject humiliation. The persecution was also supposed to make them believe that their faith was worthless compared to the “strength” of the communist system. All existing social ties, both religious and familial, were supposed to disintegrate.

Conclusion

The Sovietisation of Eastern Europe by the Soviet Union at the turn of the 1950s was a result of Europe’s division, and it strengthened the “iron curtain”. The fact that the Eastern Bloc was increasingly shutting itself to the West over that period was also evident in the ban on all visits to the West, with the exception of sports delegations and a few security service representatives of individual countries.⁸¹ The violent progress of Sovietisation made the peoples conquered by the USSR aware of their helplessness and inability to resist the constant terrorising of all social groups opposed to communism. The societies became apathetic, passive and obedient to those in power, seeing in this a possibility of survival. This is related to one of the fundamental goals of the Sovietisation of the late Stalinist period, often overlooked today. By this I mean its consequences for the social development of the successive generations of the societies subjected to indoctrination. The period of the “iron curtain” deepened the distance between East European

⁷⁸ It is necessary here to mention that in July 1949 Pius XII excommunicated communists in Eastern Europe due to the persecution of priests and political opponents, see W. Roszkowski, *Półwiecze. Historia polityczna świata po 1945 r.*, Warszawa, 2005, p. 33.

⁷⁹ P. Borza, “Represje wobec duchownych na przykładzie bł. bp. Vasil’a Hopki”, in: *Represje wobec Kościoła w krajach bloku wschodniego. Komuniści przeciw religii po 1944 roku*, ed. J. Marecki, Kraków, 2011, pp. 62–63.

⁸⁰ The main initiator of establishing the Pitești Prison in December 1949 was Alexandru Nicolski (Nicolschi), an employee of the Securitate, collaborator of the Soviet intelligence service, and one of the members of Pauker’s faction. Along with Eugen Țurcanu, Nicolski was directly responsible for the repressions carried out in the Pitești Prison. The last “experiment” was conducted in August 1952. Țurcanu was sentenced to death in 1954; see D. Deletant, *Ceaușescu and the Securitate. Coercion and Dissent in Romania, 1965–1989*, New York, 1995, pp. 29–35.

⁸¹ Roszkowski, *Półwiecze*, p. 55.

countries and the West in the spheres of civilisation, economy and mentality. By accepting the Marshall Plan and laying the foundation for economic integration of the European Coal and Steel Community in the 1950s enabled the Western Europe an impressive increase in the standard of living, in contrast to the countries under communist control.

For many decades, Sovietisation also prevented the subjected societies from developing a capability to criticise the authorities, while remaining open to cooperating with the state. It contributed to the morals becoming corrupt across the society. This is confirmed by the following statement of the Hungarian writer, lawyer and political scientist Ferenc Vála: “Many people believed that there was nothing wrong in stealing from the state, from large-scale embezzlement to petty theft. It was even argued that it was a form of struggle, of resistance”.⁸² The social habits of robbing the state taken on during that time, i.a. by tax avoidance or extorting social benefits without meeting specific conditions, are often present today in the post-communist public space.

In general, it is precisely the Sovietisation and the acquisition of certain features of Russian despotism, such as distrust, jealousy, contempt for the weaker or egoism, that have preserved many stereotypes about the inhabitants of Eastern Europe. The division of the world conceived during the meetings of the Big Three, and sealed during the Stalinist era has impeded and sometimes prevented the nations of Eastern Europe from discovering new trends of thought and significantly limited the sense of self-reliance and independence in decision making. The consequences of this process are present to this day in various aspects of the socio-cultural and political life.

The Iron Curtain as an Aspect of the Sovietisation of Eastern Europe in 1949–1953

Abstract

Sovietisation of Eastern Europe by the Soviet Union at the turn of the 1950s was a consequence of the division of Europe and strengthened the so-called Iron Curtain. The restrictions of the Iron Curtain included the ban on all travel to the West, except of delegations of sportsmen and some of the members of security services of those countries. Rapid Sovietisation made the nations subjected by the Soviet Union realise how helpless they were and how impossible it was to oppose such a reign of permanent terror of all social groups hostile to communism. Societies became apathetic, passive and submissive to the USSR, seeing it as the only possibility of existence. It is related to one of principal purposes of Sovietisation at the end of the Stalinist period, quite often neglected: its consequences for the social development of subsequent generations of indoctrinated societies.

The period of Iron Curtain led to the growing civilisation and mentality distance between East-European countries and the West. The implementation of the Marshall Plan and some

⁸² V. Sebestyén, *Dwanaście dni. Rewolucja węgierska 1956*, Wrocław, 2006, p. 53.

basis of economic integration of the countries members of the European Coal and Steel Community in the 1950s contributed to an enormous rise of the standard of living, contrary to the states under communist control.

For many decades Sovietisation destroyed the generations able to criticise the authorities, but also willing to cooperate with the state. It contributed to a multi-layered demoralisation of societies. Some of social customs of those times, such as robbing the state through tax avoidance or embezzlement of public money through obtaining social allowances under false pretence, are still present in contemporary post-communist states.

Taking of some features of the Russian despotism, such as mistrust, envy, contempt for the weak, or egoism, perpetuated many stereotypes of people from Eastern Europe. The division of the world made by the Big Three and sealed during the Stalinist period made it impossible for the Eastern European nations to know new currents of thoughts, and significantly limited their sense of independence and ability to make independent decisions. Consequences of this process are still present in various dimensions of socio-cultural and political life.

“Железный занавес” как аспект советизации Восточной Европы в 1949–1953 гг.

Аннотация

Советизация Восточной Европы Советским Союзом на рубеже 40-х и 50-х гг. произошла от совершившегося раздела Европы и она укрепляла «железный занавес». В обсуждаемом мною временном промежутке все сильнейшая замкнутость Восточного блока на Запад проявлялась также в запрете всех поездок на Запад, за исключением командировок – спортивных и некоторых представителей служб безопасности данных государств. Бурный ход советизации открыл глаза нациям, завоеванным СССР, на их бессилие и невозможность сопротивляться перманентному террору по отношению ко всем социальным группам, выступавшим против коммунизма. Общества становились апатичными, пассивными и послушными СССР усматривая в таком поведении возможность дальнейшего существования. Это связано с одной из основных целей советизации конца периода сталинизма, о которой сегодня часто умалчивается. Я имею в виду ее последствия для общественного развития очередных поколений индоктринированных обществ. Период «железного занавеса» углубил пропасть между восточно-европейскими странами также в цивилизационной, экономической и ментальной сферах. Принятие Плана Маршалла, а также введение основ экономической интеграции стран ЕОУС в 1950-х гг. сделали возможным невиданное повышение стандартов жизни для Западной Европы в отличие от государств, остававшихся под коммунистическим контролем.

Советизация перечеркнула также на многие десятилетия формирование наций способных к критике власти, но и готовых на сотрудничество с государством. Она повлекла за собой многослойную деморализацию обществ. Перемятые тогда общественные нравы обворовывания государства м.пр. путем неуплаты налогов или выманивания социальных пособий, не соответствуя определенным требованиям – часто присутствуют в общественном пространстве посткоммунистических государств. Заимствование некоторых особенностей российского деспотизма, как недоверие, зависть, презрение к более слабым или эгоизм, закрепило существование многих стереотипов, касающихся жителей Восточной Европы. Свершившийся во время встреч Большой Тройки, а закрепленный в сталинский период раздел мира усложнял, а иногда препятствовал восточно-европейским нациям ознакомлению с новыми мыслительными течениями и значительно

ограничил чувство самостоятельности и независимости принятия решений. Последствия этого процесса присутствуют и сегодня в разных измерениях общественно-культурной и политической жизни.

Перевод Агнешка Поспишил

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