

**Abstract**  
**Revising the totalitarian past: institutions and streets**  
**Research project**

The articles collected in this volume have been written as part of the research project *Punishment, Memory and Politics: Revising the Past after World War II*, which was carried out by a group of Polish and French historians and political scientists. This project is an attempt at analysing the similarities and differences in the mechanisms of revising the 'bad past' and the totalitarian and dictatorial systems that collapsed due to internal factors or disappeared as a result of wars lost. This kind of revision has been already conducted, in the form of legal disposals (including the punishment of those found guilty) and systemic changes, as well as in the sphere of symbols and the formation of social memory. After World War II, however, the revision took on a special dimension and proved to be a long-lasting process: over 70 years after the end of the war, investigations and war crimes trials are still under way. The same is true of the dictatorial rule of General Franco in Spain, which in fact only became the subject of heated public debate 30 years after the regime had collapsed. There are also indications that the revision of the communist system, which broke down in Europe a quarter of a century ago, will not be

over soon. Furthermore, in many cases the 'bad past' also involved relations between states (e.g. aggression or forced subordination), and thus the way the revision is conducted affects current international relations. Therefore, our research project covers a relatively large chronological and geographical area, beginning with the defeat of the Third Reich and its allies in 1945, through the collapse of numerous dictatorships (which began in Portugal in 1974 and then occurred in Chile, South Africa and The Philippines), and ending with the collapse of the communist system in the Soviet bloc from 1989 to 1991.

The four papers relate only to selected fragments of our research and are factual and descriptive. They were presented (in abbreviated versions) at the conference on *The Memory of Communism: Actors, Norms, Institutions* during the International Council for Central and East European Studies in Makuhari (Japan) in August 2015. Three of the articles concern Poland: institutions that have been established specifically to revise the past and 'decommunize' public space. The fourth article presents the part of our research into international relations in the European Union on the issue of the communist 'bad past'. We are currently preparing the next volume, which will include further parts of our research (e.g. concerning the revision of World War II and the 'defrancoisation' of Spanish public space).

## Articles

Laure Neumayer, Université de Paris 1: *Integrating the Central European past into common narrative: mobilization around the 'crimes of communism' in the European Parliament.*

The author's main methodological approach is to acknowledge the need to combine discourse analysis with a sociological study of group mobilization within specific policy-making fora. Her research focuses on the 'Resolution on the European Conscience

and Totalitarianism,' adopted on 2 April 2009. Based on the extensive reference literature and sources from the European Parliament, the author presents the road that was followed by the European Union (EU) after the 2004–2007 period, when it was enlarged to include ten countries that had been liberated from the communist system. This road began with the declaration of the conservative European People's Party of February 2004 that called for the EU to adopt a declaration for the international condemnation of totalitarian communism in order to introduce the historical experience of the new member states to the previously narrated 'common European past'. It was difficult to implement this task due to a deep conflict between the right and the left over the recognition of the uniqueness of the Holocaust and the 'paradigm of totalitarianism'. The author analyses in detail the memory entrepreneurs, i.e. those who were particularly active on the part of the new member states, and the persuasion techniques they used to ensure that the EU institutions preserved the memory of and paid homage to the victims of totalitarian communism in the same manner as in the case of the Holocaust, which was the culmination of crimes committed by totalitarian Nazism. Neumayer draws attention to the mechanism of 'uploading', i.e. the transfer of demands from the national to the European level, which took place at the authoritative international conference in Prague in June 2008, attended by prominent former dissidents and MEPs. *The Prague Declaration on European Conscience and Communism* was adopted at the conference. In March 2009, it was publicly heard in the European Parliament, evoking passionate debate between socialists and conservatives, supported by liberals as well as the Greens. The debate was boycotted by a few members of the radical left, who found it sacrilegious to equate Nazism and Communism. A compromise was searched for in a plenary debate on 2 April, which ended in a vote.

Ultimately, 87% of those voting were in favour of the negotiated formula, including 63% of socialists. As the author states, the resolution is 'a turning point in discourse towards such an interpretation of communism that focuses on its criminal nature and structural similarity to Nazism' and constitutes 'the symbolic weapon of the anti-communist members of the European Parliament' who in 2010 formed the group 'Reconciliation of European Histories' [REH]. However, the group has not been recognized as an official body in the European Parliament and few of its calls for punishing communist crimes by the Court of Justice of the European Union have been taken into account. Laure Neumayer concludes that while 'the hegemonic Western narrative has been modified... through the inclusion of the specific history of post-communist Europe', the interpretation of Communism through the paradigm of totalitarianism is still 'regional rather than pan-European', and the societies of the 'old Europe' have not yet responded to the anti-communist efforts taken by the memory entrepreneurs.

Łukasz Jasiński, *Museum of the Second World War: Central Commission for the Investigation of German/Hitlerite Crimes in Poland: the tool of retribution and propaganda.*

The Central Commission for the Investigation of German Crimes in Poland (CC) was formally established on 10 November 1945, i.e. after the International Military Tribunal began the trials of the Third Reich leaders. One of its first tasks was to represent Poland in Nuremberg. In December 1945, the CC presented a study entitled *German Crimes against Poland* to the Nuremberg tribunal. In his article, Łukasz Jasiński shows that the CC quickly developed a lively documentary activity, created a dozen or so branches and conducted around 2,000 court proceedings throughout Poland in 1947 alone. The members of the CC, however, did not have the power

to file indictments, and their task was to gather evidence (including witness statements) that they later sent to prosecutors' offices. In 1948/1949, i.e. relatively shortly after the establishment of the CC, Polish authorities severely limited its activity by closing down its regional branches, among other things. In December 1949, its name was changed significantly: the adjective 'German' was replaced by 'Hitlerite'. This was related to the formation of the communist German Democratic Republic and putting an end to the prosecution of war crimes, which – as Jasiński writes – occurred in all communist countries. This political line culminated in the amnesty of April 1956, which covered a large number of those convicted of war crimes. The CC resumed its work in the mid-1960s, when the problem of punishing German war criminals was taken up again following the trial of Adolf Eichmann. The archival research conducted by the author shows that the initiative to revive the CC's work came from the party apparatus – the Propaganda Department and the Administrative Department of the Central Committee of the Communist Party. Regional commissions were re-established and a series of large investigations began (or were resumed). As a result, a total of some 4,000 investigations were conducted between 1965 and 1969, covering more than 11,200 people. In 1971/1972 alone, about 5,700 investigations were conducted. The CC started collaboration with the Central Office of the State Justice Administrations for the Investigation of National Socialist Crimes, which was established in West Germany at the end of 1958. It took part in political campaigns, including the 1968 offensive against the 'Zionist centres' undertaken by the Polish authorities and intensified research into Poles who had helped Jews during the German occupation and into negative attitudes within the Jewish community (e.g. the Judenrats or Ghetto Police). In 1984, a separate research division was created to broaden the scope of the CC's activities. A significant change occurred after the systemic transformation

had begun: in 1991, the CC was given the task of investigating 'Stalinist crimes' (committed before 31 December 1956) and crimes against humanity. Shortly afterwards, the CC underwent a major transformation and became part of a new institution – the Institute of National Remembrance – which is described by Georges Mink in the next article. Jasiński concludes that the CC, whose main task – effectively carried out between 1945 and 1948 and from 1964 – was to document German Nazi crimes, was often torn between its substantive activity and political pressure.

Georges Mink, College of Europe – Natolin: *Is there a new institutional response to communist crimes? Institutions dealing with issues of national remembrance in post-communist countries: the case of Poland (1998–2010)*.

The author states that the political forces which controlled the 1989 political transformation in Poland assumed that the problem of responsibility for crimes committed by any regime that gave up without fighting should be settled according to Adam Michnik's principle of 'amnesty yes, amnesia no'. However, it became clear that it was impossible to implement the first part of the principle ('amnesty') and in 1991, the concept of 'Stalinist crime' was introduced into Polish law. As a result, until 1999, the Central Commission for the Investigation of Crimes against the Polish Nation (described by Łukasz Jasiński) initiated 1,145 investigative procedures against officers of the communist security apparatus. However, the key element of the conflict over the communist past in Poland was the so-called vetting, which involved disclosing the identities of secret police officers and military counterintelligence agents. Existing regulations and institutions were not enough and – according to Georges Mink – a separate institution, the Stasi Records Agency (so-called Gauck's Office), was therefore created in Germany to manage

the archives of the liquidated secret police. Polish politicians and lawyers were inspired by this example, but they did not imitate it. The Institute of National Remembrance (IPN) created by the Act of December 1998 included the archive and the historic research offices, as well as the prosecutor's office. Based on the IPN's detailed reports and extensive press materials, the author presents the creation and development of the IPN under successive presidents, who have been independent and almost self-reliant due to the centralized structure of the institution. Mink presents a substantial critique of the IPN. When discussing the nearly five-year presidency of Janusz Kurtyka (2005–2010), who died in the presidential airplane crash near Smolensk, he clearly emphasizes the negative aspects of the conservative right-wing 'politics of memory' in which Kurtyka was fully involved. The author points to the main directions of the critique presented by center and leftist journalists, as well as in academia. They include 'structural anomalies' resulting from the fact that one institution consists of prosecuting and research and educational units, and that most members of the prosecutors' office are incompetent to conduct historical investigations. He also draws attention to 'substantive, methodological, ethical and epistemological' shortcomings in the research of historians employed in the IPN, most of whom perceive the world in black and white, base their research exclusively on IPN documents of the security apparatus and use them to describe the past. Mink states that the IPN – just like other analogous institutes in several other post-communist countries – is a bureaucratic institution in the Weberian sense, with its internal and external dynamics. He concludes that the repertoire of activities and the structure of the institution should be divided between two or three other bodies. The author does not believe, however, that this is likely to happen.

Bartłomiej Różycki, The Institute of Political Studies, the Polish Academy of Sciences: *Decommunization of public space in Poland, 1989–2016*.

Różycki begins his article with a statement that communism has left a huge symbolic legacy in Poland, which is present primarily in public and almost exclusively urban space. This legacy consists mainly of street names and monuments, which the author briefly presents. It was obvious that the systemic transformation in Poland would involve the inevitable change of public symbols. Based on the available literature and press articles, the author sets out the scope of some of these changes. Between 1989 and 2012, about 180 monuments of gratitude to the Soviet Army, which were erected after 1945 initially by the army itself, were 'decommunized'; between 1989 and 1992, 1,829 streets were renamed, nearly two-thirds of them in 1990. Later, this kind of activity declined, because of the lower number of names that remained and the political situation. Różycki analyses the main institutional actors involved in this activity. Local governments were responsible for formal decisions, but initiatives were often taken by social organizations (including those of veterans) and some residents of the streets whose names were changed. The author discusses in detail different types of activities taken with respect to monuments (not only those devoted to the Soviet Army) and distinguishes: demolition, relocation outside the central parts of the city (e.g. to cemeteries) and 'neutralization', which often involved changing the symbolic dimension of monuments, most often by removing the red stars or commemorative plaques. The problem of naming streets was more complicated, albeit technically trivial: while squares could be left empty after removing monuments, streets had to have names. The authorities had to select the names of streets (squares, etc.) to be removed and to suggest new names, corresponding to the symbols preferred by the new state.



Based on extensive press articles and his own research on municipal documents, Różycki presents the arguments used in the debates. While it was 'obvious' that some names had to be removed (e.g. Lenin or the October Revolution), others aroused controversy (e.g. 8 March or Labour Champions). Although it was sometimes possible to restore the pre-war names, particularly in older districts, most buildings did not have such names as they had been erected in communist Poland. The author distinguishes the following types of arguments for change: 1. those based on values that rejected the symbols of foreign domination; 2. those declaring that leaving communist symbolism 'would spoil the perception of history and promote relativism'; and 3. those based on 'practical aspects', such as the aesthetics of monuments, which might adversely affect the whole surrounding space. Advocates of the status quo would often say that the monuments were 'already integrated into the cultural background of the city' and that others, such as the Warsaw Palace of Culture and Science, even became symbols of it. Financial arguments were used in the case of names, as changing names required changes to official documentation. Różycki concludes that the disputes over the decommunization of public space are an element of changes in historical consciousness and of political (ideological) conflicts, which also affect society at the local level.