

**Paweł Markiewicz**

Jagiellonian University,  
Kraków

## **Ukrainian Historical Memories and Interpretations: Volhynia 1943 and Operation 'Vistula' 1947<sup>1</sup>**

---

For Polish and Ukrainian historians and scholars, any discussion regarding relations between these two nations during World War II undoubtedly always centers on two key historical events — the massacres of ethnic Poles in the Volhynia region which eventually spread to eastern Galicia and the forced post-war resettlement of Ukrainians by the Polish communist authorities from their native homes to the so-called recovered territories in the north and west, what is most commonly referred to as Operation 'Vistula'. These two events are a crossroads, where opinions differ while memories and interpretations vary and linger. Recently, 2012 marked the 65<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Operation 'Vistula' while the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Volhynia massacres was observed in 2013. Because these two historical events provide varying views, memories and interpretations among these critical historical events within these two neighboring nations, this paper will be devoted to the presentation of these views from both the Polish and Ukrainian perspective particularly since in the past two years, a great amount of literature and numerous scholarly conferences have been devoted to these complex issues. Many articles on these two topics have compared and contrasted the views of Poles and Ukrainians<sup>2</sup>. I have decided to forgo from this style to instead present both perspectives parallel to one another in the hope of gaining a full perspective on each topic from each side. In order to do so, I made use of various interviews and publications of specialists from

---

<sup>1</sup> The results of this article were presented at the Association for the Study of Nationalities World Convention (24–26 April 2014) at Columbia University in New York City. The unedited article presented both the Polish and Ukrainian scholarly perspectives on the topics of Volhynia and Operation 'Vistula.'

<sup>2</sup> One such example is the article "The Tragic Massacre in Volyn Remembered" which appeared in *The Economist* on July 15, 2013. See: <http://www.economist.com/blogs/eastern-approaches/2013/07/polish-ukrainian-relations>

both nations from the past two years. For the purposes of this article, Ukrainian perspectives will be evaluated.

Known as “bloody Sunday,” July 11, 1943 stands as the keystone date with regard to the Volhynia massacres which engulfed this region beginning in February. The perpetrators of these massacres were members of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN) Bandera faction as well as its military arm, the Ukrainian Partisan Army (UPA). These massacres spread like wildfire and by 1945, in just over two years around 130 thousand Polish men, women, and children were brutally massacred. The motive is clear: they were ethnic Poles who occupied ethnic Ukrainian land. However, the reasons are still questioned by historians while varying interpretations are offered from both sides.

The Ukrainian perception on the topic of Volhynia varies from that of the Polish one which state that what happened in Volhynia were not just mere massacres but a targeted genocide against the ethnic Polish population of that region<sup>3</sup>. Andriy Portnov, a Ukrainian historian who focuses on Poland, Russia and Ukraine stated that the historical events in Volhynia are neither of primary or secondary concern in the contemporary Ukrainian wartime discourse. He explained this asymmetry and lack of importance through several key reasons. Firstly, the Volhynia events were isolated geographically. Because of this, Portnov suggested that Ukrainians from the east, center and southern regions where such events did not take place have no familial memory or association of those massacres. In essence, the isolation of the Volhynia massacres exists to this day and is a hindrance to the topic gaining mainstream historical attention and debate. This factor, to a wide degree, explains Portnov's second reason — the exclusion of the Volhynia topic from the Soviet-era anti-Bandera propaganda which Ukrainians were exposed to. This propaganda focused on collaboration with the Nazis, the murder of Ukrainians deported west and the killing of Red Army soldiers. Conversely, the murder of ethnic Poles did not appear on this list even though its historical relevance could have also served to fuel any anti-Bandera or anti-UPA campaigns. Perhaps this was left out of the picture as it dealt with the Poles sufferings and not the Ukrainians of Soviet Russians. Portnov also stated that since the fall of the Soviet Union, most post-1990 debates centered on Ukrainian nationalism focused more so on its relation with Russia and to communism (the east) and not to Poland and wartime relations or conflicts (the west). He did state that although the topic of Volhynia is being discussed more today than before, “these publications or comments are usually responses to what is discussed and written in Poland”<sup>4</sup>.

Furthermore, Portnov also touched on several aspects of the Volhynia massacres from the Ukrainian perspective. Three key, significant factors emerged from

<sup>3</sup> See Grzegorz Motyka. „Ludobójstwo Na Wołyniu Jak W Rwandzie.” Interview. *Dziennik.Pl*. N.p., 01 Mar. 2013. Web. 12 Mar. 2014. <<http://wiadomosci.dziennik.pl/historia/wydarzenia/-artykuly/420845,prof-grzegorz-motyka-ludobojstwo-na-woyniu-jak-w-rwandzie.html>>; Ewa Siemaszko. „Nie Używajmy Eufemizmów.” Interview by Magdalena Semczyszyn and Andrzej Brzozowski. *Pamięć.pl* July 2013: Print and Ewa Siemaszko. „Genocidium Atrox.” Interview by Maciej Rosalak. *Historia Do Rzeczy* July 2013: Print; Rev. Tadeusz Isakowicz-Zaleski. „O Ludobójstwie Na Wołyniu.” Interview by Krzysztof Karwowski. *WPolityce.pl*. N.p., 7 May 2013. Web. 13 Mar. 2014. <<http://wpolityce.pl/wydarzenia/53038-nasz-wywiad-ks-isakowicz-zaleski-o-ludobojstwie-na-woyniu-nie-da-juz-sie-tego-dluzej-falszowac>>.

<sup>4</sup> Andriy Portnov. “The Vicious Circle of National Histories.” Interview by Jakub Majmurek. *Current Politics in Ukraine*. N.p., 17 July 2013. Web. 13 Mar. 2014. <<http://ukraineanalysis.wordpress.com/category/naionalism/>>. Also see Portnov's contribution to the European Network Remembrance and Solidarity's (ENRS) webpage dedicated to the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Volhynia events. <<http://www.enrs.eu/news/849-volhynian-massacre>>.

his analysis. First, he stated that although the historiographies of these events have a national character in both nations, the casualties suffered by the Poles “should not be equated to the losses of Ukrainians that happened due to Polish actions of vengeance”<sup>5</sup>. Colloquially speaking, this would be like comparing apples to oranges and should not be used to evade the facts. However, this point does bring to the forefront of the Volhynia debate the idea that Polish suffering at the hands of Ukrainians cannot and in essence should not be the basis for a counterargument. Instead, the fact that Poles were massacred by Ukrainians needs to be fully accepted. Second, he suggested that the events in Volhynia were the result of a longer Polish-Ukrainian conflict, one which stemmed from the oppressive minority policies of the Polish interwar government and intensified the national conflict. This is a point which many Polish historians connect to as well but is one which, even among them, is not fully agreed upon<sup>6</sup>. Third, the mass killing of Poles are seen as more of a spontaneous protest by ordinary Ukrainians and not an organized UPA campaign. This point is one which would not be agreed upon by some Polish specialists who regard the Volhynia region as a targeted zone and not one of spontaneous manifestation. In order to rectify these perceptions, Portnov suggested a new historical outlook with new target questions, placing the Volhynia events “in a psychological-social context in order to reveal the dynamics of local communities from a micro-historical point of view”<sup>7</sup> while revising the historical outlook of this event. However, if these perceptions are to be corrected or reexamined, the new perspective could have an adverse impact on nationalist supporters and their UPA narrative, making the inclusion of the nationalist movement into general Ukrainian history difficult, particularly because of the strong post-Soviet attitude still associated with UPA and its key figureheads<sup>8</sup>. According to Portnov, the problem which has emerged, that being how to criticize the OUN and UPA while not transgressing into

<sup>5</sup> Portnov. “The Vicious Circle of National Histories.”

<sup>6</sup> For example historian, ethnographer and cultural anthropologist dr. Andrzej Zięba sees the idea that the interwar government and its policies are to blame for the eventual Volhynia events as a theory which has yet to be proved, one which is accepted along propaganda lines for, as he says, Poland’s interwar neighbors often portrayed or wanted Poland to be seen as an enemy to ethnic minorities, particularly to the Ukrainians. With regard to Volhynia, he points to the Polish Government’s lenient national policy in which the Poles “stretched out their hand to compromise” with the Ukrainians and removed social segregation. See Andrzej Zięba. „Czy Wołyń 1943 Musiał Się Zdarzyć?” *Zagłada Ludności Wschodnich Województw II RP W Latach II Wojny Światowej Dokonana Przez Ukraińskich Nacjonalistów Conference, Muzeum Armii Krajowej, Krakow. n.p., 14 July 2013. Web. 25 Mar. 2014. <<http://wkrakowie2013.wordpress.com/2013/07/14/andrzej-zieba-czy-wolyn-1943-musial-sie-zdarzyc/>>.*

<sup>7</sup> Portnov. “The Vicious Circle of National Histories.” Here, Polish historian dr. Jan Jacek Bruski suggested that the Volhynia region was consciously chosen as the conflicting territory because it was there that the Ukrainians had a numerical superiority in relation to Poles. See Jan Jacek Bruski. “Rzeź Wołyńska. ‘Wołyń Został świadomie Wybrany Jako Teren Konfrontacji z Polakami’” Interview by Tomasz Stańczyk. *Polska Times. N.p., 11 July 2013. Web. 12 Mar. 2014. <<http://www.polskatimes.pl/artykul/942239,rzez-wolynska-wolyn-zostal-swiadomie-wybrany-jako-teren-konfrontacji-z-polakami-rozmowa,id,t.html>>.*

<sup>8</sup> Ibidem. The *Svoboda* political party still adheres closely to the nationalist perception while the Communist party still totes the Soviet-era view. Portnov illustrates how both sides use the Volhynia events instrumentally: “In Ukraine, for example, there are newspapers eagerly republishing the negative texts about UPA written by some Polish authors. But those periodicals are not at all ‘pro-Polish’. Often next to the texts about UPA soldiers murdering Poles you can find different ones which “prove” that Poles in Katyn were “really” murdered by the Germans.”

the Soviet narrative, is difficult for Ukrainians to solve currently and seems to be a grey-zone between pro-Ukrainian and pro-communist labels.

Ukrainian historian Ihor Ilyushin suggested that the increased aggression and motives of UPA units against Poles in Volhynia and Galicia came as a result of primarily macro historical reasons. As the tide of the war turned with the German defeat at Stalingrad, Ilyushin wrote that it became evident to the OUN Banderites that the Red Army would soon enter ethnic Ukrainian territory. The Soviet Union became the OUN's informal enemy number one, next to Poland. Towards the end of 1942 and beginning of 1943 the OUN leadership decided to mobilize its forces in western Ukraine in order to resist the oncoming Red Army. According to Ilyushin, the break of diplomatic relations between the USSR and the Polish London government-in-exile in April 1943 also impacted later events particularly since the exile government and its representatives in occupied Poland, both political and military, continued to regard the territory annexed by the USSR in 1939 as Polish territory which would be returned to postwar Poland. It was these understandings and factors which, as Ilyushin suggested "contributed to the OUN national councils in Volhynia and Polesie adopting to 'depolonize' these territories"<sup>9</sup>. He also pointed to another factor which enflamed Ukrainian nationalists of the region — Polish cooperation with the Nazi occupation authorities. As he stated, this cooperation came in the form of Polish auxiliary police units at the local levels which followed the desertion of some six thousand Ukrainian auxiliary policemen and administrators who joined the ranks of the OUN or UPA<sup>10</sup>. Ilyushin saw this as a secondary, revenge motive which led to eventual attacks and massacres of Polish settlers in Volhynia.

In his argument, Ilyushin seemed to have two contrasting opinions regarding the question of official orders to undertake an anti-Polish campaign in Volhynia and Galicia. To this day Ilyushin stated, no official document ordering the liquidation of ethnic Poles exists however he did mention that members of the OUN national council "shared their thoughts on the necessity to cleanse the Ukrainian partisan territory from the Polish presence." Furthermore, during the third extraordinary meeting, the OUN's new national leader Roman Shukhevych approved of the anti-Polish actions in Volhynia and sanctioned similar action for eastern Galicia<sup>11</sup>. This raises the question: does a military order, to be official, need to be in writing and not communicated verbally? Were anti-Polish slogans enough to spark the initial murders in Volhynia? Did later approval allow for the spread of these massacres into other areas?

Ukrainian historian Yaroslav Hrytsak presented a perspective which sought to transcend the new phase of assigning a proper term to the Volhynia events<sup>12</sup>. While he said that the information and discussion on the topic of Volhynia has advanced since 1993 and 2003 among Poles and Ukrainians, he is under the impres-

<sup>9</sup> Ігор Льюшин, "Трагедія Волині" in *Волинь 1943: сімдесяті різниці злочину* (Київ 2013), p. 9.

<sup>10</sup> "The goal of this [Polish] cooperation was revenge against the Ukrainians; these efforts strengthened the Polish position in the entire region prior to the defeat of the Wehrmacht and the return of the Red Army and partisans there." Льюшин, "Трагедія Волині," p. 9.

<sup>11</sup> Льюшин, "Трагедія Волині," p. 10.

<sup>12</sup> Hrytsak is also director of the Petro Jacyk Program for the Study of Modern Ukrainian History and Society (University of Alberta); director of the Institute for Historical Research (Ivan Franko National University of Lviv); chair of Modern World History (Ukrainian Catholic University). See Columbia University ISHR: Yaroslav Hrytsak. 2014. Web. 14 Mar 2014. <[http://www.hrcolumbia.org/historical/bio.php?n=Yaroslav\\_Hrytsak](http://www.hrcolumbia.org/historical/bio.php?n=Yaroslav_Hrytsak)>

sion that the current discussion has stalemated, reaching something of a quiet corner. This stalemate in question is not from a lack of information or facts but centers on the realm of terminology — should the events in Volhynia be classified as genocide or not? What Hrytsak proposed to solve this impasse is a mutual, two-step approach for both the sides. First, Ukrainians must openly define the Volhynia massacres as genocide. Second, Poles must define their acts of revenge against Ukrainians as having the characteristics of genocide. Although this idea is difficult to comprehend and is even borderline taboo for both sides, Hrytsak believes that it is something which is possible<sup>13</sup>. Regarding the greater topic of genocide and how it relates to Volhynia, Hrytsak focused on the borderland regions which experienced mass bloodshed in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and referred to Andrea Graziosi's pyramid of genocidal acts which came about when the author questioned whether the Ukrainian famine of 1932–1933 should be classified as genocide. His pyramid is divided between what he refers to as 'absolute' genocide (the Holocaust, the Armenian genocide), 'perfect' genocide and 'less perfect' genocide (these contain different elements such as class/ethnic warfare or ethnic cleansing)<sup>14</sup>. Based off of these criteria, Hrytsak clarified the trivialization which surrounds the term genocide, whether with a capital 'G' or with a lower case 'g' by first suggesting to remove naïve perspectives because in the Polish-Ukrainian region "all nationalities were exposed to genocide and none of them in any certain way contributed to genocide. Just as genocides were trivial so was participation in them." Secondly, he suggested that trivializing genocide does not necessarily lend it to relativization meaning that the act of genocide cannot be treated as a common occurrence of every war because it was not. In all cases, it should be treated as a unique occurrence to a given region or area. Finally, he believes that it is necessary to inform of the fact that people have rarely been both victims and perpetrators of genocide, something which he sees as common in the formula 'we forgive and ask for forgiveness'<sup>15</sup>. As is evident from this statement, one party targeted another party and committed genocide while that party which committed the genocide cannot be a victim as well (perhaps only in extenuating, hypothetical circumstances). Only by conforming to such reasons does Hrytsak believe the so-called vicious circle of the current Polish-Ukrainian discussion on the Volhynia 1943 topic can be straightened out and discussed mutually and openly.

Any discussion on the topic of Volhynia 1943 from the Ukrainian perspective must include Volodymyr Viatrovych, a young historian, publicist and president of the Ukrainian Institute of National Remembrance who published works primarily relating to the OUN and UPA topics while promoting the nationalist school of thought. His most recent book and current work contend to place the UPA on a similar level as the Polish partisan Home Army (*Armia Krajowa* — AK) while classifying the Polish-Ukrainian events as a war and not genocide<sup>16</sup>. Viatrovych sees the

<sup>13</sup> Ярослав Грицак, "Чому Волинські акції 1943 року таки були геноцидом, і що з цього випливає" in *Волинь 1943: сімдесят річниця злочину* (Київ 2013), p. 14.

<sup>14</sup> Andrea Graziosi, "The Soviet 1931–1933 Famines and the Ukrainian Holodomor: Is a New Interpretation Possible, and What Would Its Consequences Be?" in *Hunger by Design: the Great Ukrainian Famine and Its Soviet Context* (Harvard Papers in Ukrainian Studies, 2008), pp. 1–19.

<sup>15</sup> Грицак, "Чому Волинські акції 1943...", pp. 18–19.

<sup>16</sup> In 2011 the publication of Viatrovych's book *Drukha polsko-ukrayinska vyina 1942–1947* was met with criticism not only by Poles but by some Ukrainians as well. See Grzegorz Motyka's review entitled "A Failed Book" Rev. of *Drukha Polsko-ukrayinska Vyina 1942–1947*. *Nowa Europa Wschodnia* vol. 2, 2012 and Roman Kabachiy's article "Ukraine-Poland:

Polish-Ukrainian conflict of World War II through the lens of the two respective partisan army units — the UPA and AK. According to him, both armies committed war crimes which must be condemned, neither can be considered an “evil formation” and the goal of protecting their population and restoring an independent state fueled the animosity and caused them to clash between one another, proving that the only ultimate winner of this conflict was the USSR<sup>17</sup>. To him, the dialogue and reconciliation between Poles and Ukrainians has stagnated not only because of what he called the ignorance of Poles to not invite or invite only some historians to Volhynia-related conferences but because of the failure of Polish historians to research a recently declassified KGB archive in Ukraine. Viatrovykh wrote that the documents found (or in this case not found) there challenge the key Polish historiographical argument — “there was no political decision to conduct a planned military operation [in Volhynia and Galicia]”<sup>18</sup>, an argument which falls into line with Ilyushin’s. Furthermore, he stated: “there is no Polish, Soviet or German documentary proof of mass destruction of Polish villages on July 11, 1943; there are no sources to reasonably back the number of 100,000 massacred Poles”<sup>19</sup>. He also disagrees with many of the figures and statistics presented by Polish historians, contesting that they are exaggerations and embellishments of ‘actual’ figures. His argument regarding the clarity of statistical figures relating to victims of the Volhynia massacres perhaps shifts attention from the actual topic to what seemed very prevalent in the initial, post-1990 discourse which emerged on this topic, that being numerical disagreements between both sides. Finally, Viatrovykh suggested that the political emotions surrounding the Volhynia anniversary are unnecessary from the Polish side and that in order for a closer Polish-Ukrainian reconciliation to take place “the one-sided desire to only talk about one’s own grief”<sup>20</sup> needs to be overcome. Such actions as the Polish Parliament’s acceptance of a resolution listing the Volhynia events as “ethnic cleansing with elements of genocide” are regarded by him as halting or rolling back the progress made since 2003 in which Presidents Aleksander Kwasniewski and Leonid Kuchma signed a joint Polish-Ukrainian resolution entitled “Reconciliation during the 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the tragic events in Volhynia”<sup>21</sup> while also making statements regarding the topic of Volhynia, forming an open dialogue between the two nations. The two nation’s parliaments also released similar statements during that anniversary.

---

history wars rage on.” <<http://www.opendemocracy.net/od-russia/roman-kabachiy/ukraine--poland-history-wars-rage-on>> N.p., 26 Oct. 2011. Web.

<sup>17</sup> Volodymyr Viatrovykh. “The Polish-Ukrainian Memory Monologue.” Editorial. *KyivPost*. N.p., 11 July 2013. Web. 14 Mar. 2014. <<http://www.kyivpost.com/opinion/op-ed/the-polish-ukrainian-memory-monologue-326886.html?flavour=mobile>>.

<sup>18</sup> Viatrovykh. “The Polish-Ukrainian Memory Monologue.” Here Viatrovykh refers to a February 2013 conference under the patronage of the Institute of National Remembrance in Lublin to which Ukrainians were not invited as the organizers did “want to see their Ukrainian colleagues to avoid arguments.” In June 2013 the central conference on the Volhynia topic in Warsaw only invited those Ukrainians who share the Polish sentiment on this topic.

<sup>19</sup> Viatrovykh. “The Polish-Ukrainian Memory Monologue.” Viatrovykh mentioned that there is material regarding the Polish terror in the Chełm region against the Ukrainians there, the destruction of the Ukrainian villages in Nadsyannya and the Soviet factor in this area.

<sup>20</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>21</sup> During the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary year of 2013, the two presidents continued to appeal for reconciliation between Poland and Ukraine on this issue. See Piotr Guzik, “Kwaśniewski i Kuczma apelują o pojednanie między Polakami i Ukraińcami” *Rzeczpospolita*, N.p., 9 Jul 2013, Web, 28 April 2014. <<http://www.rp.pl/artukul/1027897.html?print=tak&p=0>>

Following the end of World War II, the rebuilding of Europe began. A key facet to this rebuilding process became the establishment of mono-ethnic states (particularly in east central Europe), ones which, unlike their interwar predecessors, would contain very little ethnic minorities. Although this process began as early as 1945 in Poland, it did not gain full momentum until March 1947 when deputy defense minister Gen. Karol Świerczewski was assassinated in an UPA ambush. This event propelled the Polish communist government to develop an action plan in solving its so-called Ukrainian problem. Between late April and July, the Polish army initiated a campaign of forcefully repatriating ethnic Ukrainians to Poland's new, western territories. Over 140 thousand were dispersed to these territories while many others were imprisoned and sentenced to death. This event has become most synonymous with its military code-name — Operation 'Vistula'.

For Ukrainians, particularly the Ukrainian minority in Poland, the forced repatriation of their families within the ramifications of Operation 'Vistula' is regarded as a tragic chapter described in varying terms. Yuri Havryliuk, a poet, historian and editor of the Ukrainian Associations main organ for the Podlasie region, described the repatriation program as the "last act of the Polish-Ukrainian tragedy." Havryliuk referred to the methods used by the Polish communist authorities as *modo sovietico* with one chief aim — the forced polonization and destruction of ethnic Ukrainian national life. The latter he said became part one of Poland's two-part goal; the destruction of the UPA movement being the second part.<sup>22</sup> To him, Operation 'Vistula' became the culminating event of what he called the Polish-Ukrainian 30 Years War, referring to the events which transpired between Poles and Ukrainians from 1917–1947. Since the end of World War II, Havryliuk noted that "the enemy to the restoration of Ukrainian statehood in ethnographic frameworks is not only a post-imperial Russia (either 'white' or 'red') but also Poland"<sup>23</sup>. Furthermore, he wrote that during the period of communist rule, the crimes of UPA against Poles and the campaign against the "predatory" Ukrainian nationalists were written and described in great detail, portraying the new authorities as advocates for the integrity of the state which served to turn the society's attention away from the real oppressors of Poland–Moscow and the Kremlin<sup>24</sup>. This tactic of political propaganda not only targeted UPA and Ukrainians but served to portray anyone who openly resisted the new regime as anti-Polish and in turn pro-German, pro-Nazi, pro-fascist, pro-capitalist or pro-western. Havryliuk concluded that today's Polish political circles are in no position to correct the grievances suffered by the resettled Ukrainians.

Volodymyr Viatrovych also sees Operation 'Vistula' as an operation targeted at containing and eliminating Ukrainian national consciousness in postwar Poland. Describing this operation as the *final solution* of the Ukrainian problem, he emphasized that this was not only the desire of the Polish communists — the image of the "true henchmen of Moscow" — but also the Kremlin's want to remove an UPA stronghold from along its borderlands<sup>25</sup>. To him, the murder of Deputy Defense Minister Gen. Karol Świerczewski by Ukrainian partisans was used as the

---

<sup>22</sup> Юрій Гаврилюк. "Акція 'Вісла' — останній акт українсько-польської трагедії." *Українська правда, Історична правда*. N.p., 19 Feb. 2011. Web. 18 Mar. 2014. <<http://www.istpravda.com.ua/articles/2011/02/19/25892/>>.

<sup>23</sup> Гаврилюк. "Акція 'Вісла'."

<sup>24</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>25</sup> Володимир В'ятрович. "Остаточне вирішення української проблеми в Польщі" *Українська правда, Історична правда*. N.p., 28 Apr. 2012. Web. 18 Mar. 2014. <<http://www.istpravda.com.ua/digest/2012/04/28/82934/>>.

pretext for the mass deportation of Ukrainians from the eastern territories of the postwar Polish state. This argument is one which totes the traditional, postwar communist rhetoric line. Many contemporary Polish historians argue that whether Gen. Świerczewski was assassinated or not, sooner or later the time for action against the remaining Ukrainian insurgent units would have been handled by the Polish authorities. Polish professor of Ukrainian extraction Roman Drozd even suggested that the idea that his murder stimulated the organization of Operation 'Vistula' is false. As he wrote, Operation 'Vistula' was planned already in 1946 while organization began in early 1947<sup>26</sup>. Citing a Polish military document, Viatrovych underlined that this indeed was an operation targeted first and foremost against the UPA formations (described as *bandyty* or bandits) who still found themselves in the new, postwar Poland. He, like other Ukrainian historians, sees the beginnings of Operation 'Vistula' in the initial reparation program which the Polish authorities undertook in 1945 and 1946. Initially voluntary, these reparations took on a forceful tone when few Ukrainians chose to leave their familial and ancestral homes. As he says, Ukrainians were forced to leave their ethnic homes particularly since Moscow suggested the use of military forces in these repatriations. "The result led to numerous war crimes committed by soldiers of the Polish Army against the Ukrainian civilian population. The same initiatives were used in the spring of 1947 with the deportation of the last 150 thousand Ukrainian"<sup>27</sup>. Viatrovych also suggests that Operation 'Vistula' served two key purposes. First, this served the Polish communist authorities in gaining the sympathy of the highly anti-communist Polish population. Furthermore, he says that by undertaking such a campaign against the Ukrainians, the Polish population, at least for a time being did not see the new communist authorities as "foreign" or as "henchmen of Moscow." Just the opposite: "they acted as defenders of the Poles national interests as the avenger of thousands of their dead relatives." Secondly, through Operation 'Vistula', he says that the Soviets too were pleased to see such an active partisan element and a population which supported their actions be removed from their periphery<sup>28</sup>. In essence, the desire of one had been committed at the hands of another.

Volodymyr Sereda, chairman of the Association of Deported Ukrainians, described the resolution project which appeared before the Polish Parliament in 2012, one put forward by Miron Sycz, a Parliament member of Ukrainian extraction who chaired the Parliamentary Committee on Ethnic and National Minorities to classify Operation 'Vistula' as an ethnic cleansing with genocide attributes. Under this resolution, Parliament would agree that Operation 'Vistula' violated the fundamental rights of deported Ukrainians, that the characteristic totalitarian principles of collective responsibility were used and that around four thousand Ukrainians were imprisoned — usually without legal basis — in the Jaworzno camp<sup>29</sup>. This

<sup>26</sup> During the 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Operation 'Vistula' in 2007, Drozd published an article in which he described 9 myths surrounding the repatriation campaign. Myth nr. 3 related to the topic of the murder of Gen. Świerczewski. Roman Drozd, "Mity o Akcji Wisła." *Związek Ukraińców w Polsce*. N.p., n.d. Web. 18 Mar. 2014. <[http://www.zup.ukraina.com.pl/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=80&Itemid=23](http://www.zup.ukraina.com.pl/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=80&Itemid=23)>.

<sup>27</sup> В'ятрович. "Остаточне вирішення української проблеми..."

<sup>28</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>29</sup> Володимир Середя. "Акція "Вісла" - етнічна чистка з ознаками геноциду. Звернення до Сейму." *Українська правда, Історична правда*. N.p., 30 July 2013. Web. 18 Mar. 2014. <<http://www.istpravda.com.ua/articles/2013/07/30/132432/>>.

The Jaworzno Concentration Camp, first established by the Nazis in 1943 was used by the Soviets and later by the Polish communists until 1956 to intern those opposed to the new



resolution was not adopted by Parliament, much to the disappointment of many Ukrainians in Poland and abroad. Sereda, on behalf of this organization, signed a joint letter to the Marshal of the Polish Parliament Ewa Kopacz in which the Ukrainians expressed their disappointment in the Parliament's inability to accept the resolution put forward by parliamentarian Sycz. Furthermore, the letter expressed the disappointment that some politicians argued that in order to accept the Operation 'Vistula' resolution, Ukraine should recognize the Volhynia events as genocide. For them, Operation 'Vistula' cannot be compared to the Volhynia massacres, which, according to the letter, represent in essence the culmination of the Polish-Ukrainian war. Sereda himself describes Operation 'Vistula' as "very close and painful...the tragic events vandalized the fate of almost 150 thousand Ukrainians — our former countryman, fellow villagers, neighbors, and relatives." Furthermore, to him and many Ukrainians, particularly those whose families were repatriated, Operation 'Vistula' is regarded as an example of an ethnocide or more accurately, as stated above, an ethnic cleansing with genocide attributes which the postwar Polish totalitarian state carried out in relation to its Ukrainian national citizens.<sup>30</sup>

### Conclusions

Presenting the most recent perspectives of Ukrainian specialists and social representatives on the topic of their national relations during the 20<sup>th</sup> century provides for a greater, more balanced image of the opinions which are prevalent in both nations. From the articles and interviews described in this work, it is evident that the discourse which emerged in 2012 and 2013 regarding Operation 'Vistula' and the Volhynia events are varied. For Poles, the Volhynia events still leave a lasting impression and are uniformly seen as genocide against the ethnic Poles of that region while Ukrainians see this as a response or the final response to the Polish Government's cruel interwar policy towards its ethnic minorities. Several Ukrainian historians have also proposed as how best to move past the impasse which is plaguing the current, mutual discourse. However, these differences of opinion will continue to remain until both sides come to a common understanding as to how best to classify the Volhynia events. This however may continue to prove difficult. The same can be said about Operation 'Vistula'. What Volhynia is to the Poles, Operation 'Vistula' is to Ukrainians. Although a more uniform opinion exists on this topic in Poland and Ukraine, the question of how it should be classified or labeled still continues to remain unanswered. The most recent anniversaries of these two events have shown that both societies have begun to move away from what is considered the traditional argument of detailing and numbering casualties to attempting to classify them with a universal term: massacre, genocide, *etnობწjstwo*, ethnic cleansing with genocide attributes, etc. Due to the complex nature of Polish and Ukrainian relations and their mutual modern history, the reason as to what led to these events or why they happened or perhaps most important of all — who is most at fault will continue to plague these issues and topics over subsequent anniversaries.

---

political system and ideology. Through a discussion of the Polish Workers' Party politburo, a subcamp was later created for ethnic Lemko and Ukrainian prisoners while the Jaworzno camp was selected as a detention center for civilians during Operation 'Wisła.' (April 23, 1947. This is mentioned in Document 98 in Eugeniusz Miśiło (ed), *Akcja "Wisła" 1947: Dokumenty i Materiały* 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Warszawa, Archiwum Ukraińskie, 2012), p. 397-398.

<sup>30</sup> Серета. "Акція "Вісла" — етнічна чистка..."

**Paweł Markiewicz. Ukrainian Historical Memories and Interpretations: Volhynia 1943 and Operation 'Vistula' 1947**

This article represents a portion of the author's presentation from the Association for the Study of Nationalities World Convention (24–26 April 2014) at Columbia University in New York City. The presentation analyzed both Polish and Ukrainian historical memories and interpretations regarding two shared regional events: the Volhynia massacres and the forced, postwar deportation of ethnic Ukrainians within the borders of the new Poland. This article focuses on the Ukrainian aspect of those events, analyzing various perspectives of specialists and scholars from material published within the past several years, years which marked important milestones for the Volhynia events (the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2013) and Operation 'Vistula' (the 65<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2012).