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Polish Operation of the NKVD in the context of the Great Terror of 1937–1938

The Stalinist repression reached its peak during a short period in 1937–1938. These events have been meaningfully and appropriately dubbed the “Great Terror”. This period in Soviet history has been discussed in many books and portrayed in many films reflecting the atrocities of the political purges, mass arrests and campaigns against opponents. The events of that time are not only interesting to historians merely because of the scale of the oppression that directly or indirectly affected millions of people, but also because of its nature. As opposed to earlier campaigns of arrests or deportations targeting strictly defined population groups, in 1937–1938, the oppression covered all the strata of Russian society without any exceptions and also institutions in the state and party apparatus.

The external symptoms of the mass terror during the period in question include well-known party activists, state officers as well as academic and cultural employees, numerous show trials of “spies, conspirators and saboteurs”, which have been extensively discussed in historiography. There was also a hidden aspect of these actions, which still cannot be seen as sufficiently studied. This affected the hundreds of thousands of ordinary citizens who fell victim to repression based on arrest and execution quotas defined by the government. The knowledge of the mechanisms and direction of the mass arrests of 1937–1938 started to improve after the documents from the Politburo of the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks) on the initiation of the “general purge” were published in 1992¹.

The so-called Politburo special file on the 1937–1938 “mass operation” against the so-called kulaks and anti-Soviet elements and the so-called ethnic contingents clearly show the personal role of Joseph Stalin, his closest circles and the top NKVD leadership in the use

of terror to an unprecedented extent². The direction of the actions and the mechanism and quota of the first campaign of mass arrests were defined in NKVD Order No. 0447 of 30 July 1937.³ It initially seemed that the government-planned mass arrest and execution operation against “hostile elements” fits the 1930–1931 OGPU campaign that involved extrajudicial bodies, so-called troikas, when peasants were judged and executed.

Later on, the new directions in mass repression were defined. They started simultaneously – i.e. in the summer of 1937 – as so-called ethnic operations or repression against “ethnic contingents” (Germans, Poles, Latvians and others)⁴. As stated in the documents of the Politburo and the NKVD, their aim was to eliminate “the espionage base of foreign intelligence services in the USSR”. The purpose was to eliminate exiles from countries neighbouring the USSR or people they were related to through ethnicity, family ties or even the mere fact that they had stayed in those countries. This ideological turn from the declared internationalism towards aggressive xenophobia was conditioned by the Stalinist vision of the political situation, where the USSR was perceived as a “besieged fortress” surrounded by external enemies. It was a logical consequence of the Stalinist idea of the nation state character of the USSR and the building of “socialism in one country”.

2 M. Lunge (Junge), G. Bordiugov and R. Binner, „Vertikal« bol`shogo terrora, Moscow 2008.

3 Order of the NKVD of the USSR No. 00447 of 30/07/1937 in the form of facsimile: Kniga pamiati zertw politicheskikh riepriessii, Ulyanovsk 1996, pp. 766–780. It was first published in an abridged form in: “Trud”, 04/06/1992; “Moskovskie Novosti” 1992, No. 25.

4 For more on the issue, see: N.V. Petrov, A.B. Roginskii, *Polskaia operacia NKVD 1937–1938 gg.* [in:] *Represii protiv poliakov i pol`skikh grazdan. Istoricheskie sborniki „Memoriala”*, 1st edition, Moscow 1997, pp. 22–23; N. Ohotin, A. Roginskii, *Iz istorii „niemieckoi operacii” NKVD 1937–1938 gg.* [in:] *Riepriessii protiv rossiiskikh nemcev. Nakazannii – narod*, Moscow 1999, pp. 35–75; N. Ohotin, A. Roginskii, „*Latishskaia operaciia*” 1937–1938 godov, “Arkivnii kommentarii” 2000, No. 4, p. 5.

1 N. Gevorkian, Vstrechnie plani po unichtozheniu sobstviennovo naroda, “Moskovskie Novosti” 1992, No. 25.

In 1937, the Plenary Assembly of the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks) that took place in February in March gave strong momentum to mass repression in the USSR. The meaning of all the papers and speeches delivered during the plenary sessions boiled down to the claim that the country was flooded with “spies, subversion agents, and saboteurs” who had infiltrated top positions. Neither before nor after was the issue of purge and repression against the state and party apparatus discussed so openly at a plenary assembly of the Central Committee. It was virtually the only plenary assembly in the entire history of the Communist Party devoted exclusively to the struggle against the “enemies”. The Plenary Assembly was exceptionally long – from 23rd February to 5th March 1937. It involved members of intra-party opposition who were accused of attempting to seize power by force since the early 1930s and formed the blocks of “Trotskyists”, “Zinovievists”, and “Rightists” and entered the path of terror and cooperation with “foreign fascists”.

On 3rd March, Stalin delivered his agenda-setting speech entitled “Defects in Party Work and Measures for Liquidating Trotskyite and Other Double Dealers”. He presented his vision of terror and the ideological grounds for the use of repression. The meaning of the speech boils down to the thesis that the former opposition had transformed into an “espionage, terrorist and subversion organisation of the German secret police” and the “capitalist neighbours” – Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Turkey, and Japan, assisted by France and the United Kingdom – aimed to crush the USSR, and therefore the country was flooded with the foreign agents. In the face of this, “the comrades at the top management posts in the party” turned out to be too “careless, kind-hearted, and blind” and helped the foreign agents reach high-ranking positions⁵.

In his speech at a plenary session, the People’s Commissar for Internal Affairs Nikolai Yezhov spoke of unsatisfactory measures taken by the NKVD and the enemies who had been present in its ranks for a long time. He publicly shared his idea about the hostile actions undertaken by Chekists of Polish origin for the first time. The theory about the “conspiracy of the Polish Military Organisation (POW)” inside the NKVD slowly began to take shape⁶. In its resolution, the Plenary Assembly recognised the measures taken by the NKVD as insufficient.

The repression according to the ethnic criterion started with the mass arrests of NKVD leadership members, which exploded soon after the Plenary Assembly of the Central Committee in late February and early March had ended. The process of removing “unreliable” staff involved numerous accusations of espionage for the benefit of neighbouring countries hostile to the USSR. The logic of that repression inevitably led its organisers (i.e. Stalin and Yezhov) to the conclusion that not only the NKVD but also other key state institutions – the military, people’s commissariats of defence and economy and other fields of public life – were actually flooded with spies working for foreign countries.

This conclusion can also be drawn from the speech by the Deputy People’s Commissar for Internal Affairs Mikhail Frinovsky, who travelled to Kiev in early June 1937 to organise a wide-ranging purge in Ukraine’s NKVD apparatus. On 21st June 1937, he took the floor at the meeting of the Ukraine’s party Chekist cadre and spoke of the previous arrests within the NKVD apparatus. “At that time Comrade Yezhov and a number of new employees appointed to carry out operational Cheka tasks in the NKVD and a portion of the old workers began a quick and resolute reorganisation and started to denounce various scum within the People’s Commissariat for Internal Affairs. The first ones to be arrested were Sosnowski and a group of Poles”⁷. Frinovsky called them Piłsudski’s agents. “Then they proceeded to expose the German network within the People’s Commissariat. Those who were imprisoned were Lurie, Stanislavsky, and then Volovich, Gai and others”⁸. Frinovsky noticed that Ukrainian Chekists isolated themselves from others, which resulted in a decrease in NKVD activity in the Ukrainian SSR. Yet the most important event that Frinovsky spoke about took place in May 1937⁹, when

Second Section of General Staff of the Polish Army (intelligence). He arrived in Soviet Russia to carry out intelligence tasks, was captured by Chekists and then joined the Cheka. A few people from his closest circles also started work in the “organs” along with him. This fact was publicised by a Pole – Felix Dzerzhinsky – who also accepted them in the Cheka. In the mid-1930s that group of Poles reached high-ranking posts and occupied a strong position in the NKVD. Yezhov decided to denounce them primarily as Piłsudski’s agents. And in fact, the first wave of arrests targeted Chekists of Polish origins. Then, there was time for Germans. Yezhov explained this by speaking of an “elimination of potential base for foreign intelligence services”.

7 Central Archives of the Federal Security Service of the Russian Federation [hereafter: FSB Central Archives], Investigation Records Archive, Frinovsky Case, N-15301, Vol. 15, k. 322.

8 *Ibidem*, p. 323.

9 According to Stalin’s visitor register, the meeting took place on 21st May 1937. In the presence of Vyacheslav Molotov, Lazar Kaganovich, Kliment Voroshilov, and Nikolai Yezhov, Stalin spoke with

5 I.V. Stalin, *Sochineniya*, Moscow 1956, Vol. 14, pp. 190–194

6 Significantly, Yezhov started a purge within the NKVD apparatus with the arrest of a 3rd rank commissar for state security, Ignacy Sosnowski, Deputy Head of the NKVD branch in Saratov. Sosnowski was a member of the Polish Military Organisation and an officer of the

a “group of comrades from the leadership of the People’s Commissariat had an opportunity to speak to Comrade Stalin about intelligence and counter-intelligence. According to Frinovsky, Stalin said that “we had been crushed in intelligence”¹⁰.

At the operational conference of the NKVD, which started in mid-July 1937 and discussed the planned operation against “kulaks and anti-Soviet elements” (later NKVD order No. 00447), which involved the heads of regional NKVD branches, Yezhov also raised the issue of future repression according to the ethnic criterion. As Sergey Mironov later testified in an investigation, the conference was conducted by Yezhov and Frinovsky. “Yezhov presented a general operational and political directive, and Frinovsky developed it and discussed the ‘operational quota’ with each of the heads of branches”. Yezhov’s orders started with threats to the heads of NKVD branches who demonstrated “operational inertia”, while other “completed their run-up to the detection of counter-revolutionary formations inside and outside the party”¹¹. As mentioned by Mironov, Yezhov informed the participants of the incoming “ethnic operations” for the first time: “Everyone should be preparing for the mass arrests of ‘Harbintsy’, Poles, Germans, kulak and White Guard groups as well as anti-Soviet groups inside the party and the Soviet apparatus”¹².

What was characteristic of the Great Terror of 1937–1938 was the fact that torture was used in investigations on a mass scale. In order to fabricate files, create various “conspiracies” and “espionage, subversion and terror” organisations with many branches, NKVD investigators forced the prisoners to testify as according to their wishes. A confession was one of the elements that was supposed to expose alleged hostile activities as there was no evidence for the functioning of all the fictitious “hostile organisations”,

Tortures were officially sanctioned and recommended as a method of investigation. It follows from the memoirs of former Military Prosecutor Afanasyev that during the interrogation he held in 1940, former People’s

Commissar for Internal Affairs Yezhov said that the Prosecutor General of the USSR Andrey Vyshinsky alluded to the necessity to use violence to force Tukhachevsky to give a relevant testimony. He also developed the theory about the uselessness of humanely treating enemies and mentioned that Tsarist gendarmes did not treat revolutionaries with kid gloves. According to Yezhov, Stalin did not express his own opinion, just said: “So, decide yourselves, and Tukhachevsky must be made to speak”¹³. Tukhachevsky and other “military conspirators” were forced to admit their guilt. Then there was a wide-ranging press campaign, trial, and eventually – their execution. Therefore Stalin started to believe in this radical but at the same time very effective method of investigation. Forced testimonies soon became common. At an instructional conference of regional NKVD branch heads in Moscow in July 1937, Yezhov and his deputy Frinovsky frankly told the Chekists during their preparation for mass arrests that they “may also use physical methods of influence”¹⁴.

This licence for common use of torture against the arrested people was given in 1937, which was confirmed by Stalin himself. In January 1939, he sent a special encrypted telegram to heads of regional party and NKVD branches stating that “use of physical influence in the practice of the NKVD was allowed starting in 1937 under a permit from the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks)”¹⁵. Stalin who fully and single-handedly supervised state security organs did not only set the general direction for repression but also a quota on executions and forced labour camp prisoners. He also directly instructed People’s Commissar Yezhov whom to arrest, how to conduct the investigation in particular cases, and in many cases he demanded brutal beatings.

Stalin’s handwritten notes are preserved on the records of prisoner interrogation from Yezhov, where the former wrote an order: “beat them”. For example, in his written order of 13th September 1937 addressed to Yezhov, Stalin demanded: “Beat Unszlicht for not denouncing Polish agents in districts (Orenburg, Novosibirsk, etc.)”, and on 2nd September 1938, he left the following note on a notification on “saboteurs in the rubber industry” received from Yezhov: “Note: Walter (a German)” and “Note: (beat Walter)”¹⁶. Bloodlust is also

the Deputy Commissar for Foreign Affairs Mikhail Frinovsky, Head of the Foreign Department of the Main Directorate of State Security of NKVD Abraham Slutsky, Head of the Special Group of the Foreign Department Yakov Serebryansky, and employees of the Red Army intelligence service: Urtsky, Nikonov, and Aleksandrovsky for 2 hours and 40 minutes (“Istorichesky Arkhiv” 1995, No. 4, p. 54).

¹⁰ FSB Central Archives, Investigation Records Archive, Frinovsky Case, N-15301, Vol. 15, k. 325.

¹¹ *Ibidem*, N-15301, Vol. 7, k. 33.

¹² *Ibidem*, p. 33-34. For text of the speech at the meeting, cf. N. Pietrow, M. Jansen, “*Stalinskii pitomec*” – Nikolai Yezhov, Moscow 2008, pp. 290–293.

¹³ Ushakov S.Iu., Stukalov A.A., *Front voennykh prokurorov*, Moscow 2000, pp. 71–72.

¹⁴ FSB Central Archives, Investigation Records Archive, Frinovsky Case, N-15301, Vol. 7, k. 34-36.

¹⁵ V. Haustov, V. Naumov, and N. Plotnikova, *Lubianka: Stalin i NKVD-NKGB-GUKR ‘Smersh’ 1939 – mart 1946*, Moscow 2006, pp. 14–15.

¹⁶ *Lubianka: Stalin i Glavnoe upravlenie gosbiezopasnosti NKVD*

manifest in Stalin's notes ("beat them, beat them") placed in the "execution lists" (*rasstrelnye spiski*) that have been published recently.

On 11th August 1937, Yezhov signed NKVD order No. 00485 on the elimination of "Polish subversion and espionage groups" and Polish Military Organisation cells approved by the Politburo two days earlier¹⁷. The order stated that the materials from the investigation concerning the Polish Military Organisation "depict many years of quite unpunished espionage and subversion campaigns by the Polish intelligence in the USSR". Though the Polish Military Organisation centre in Moscow had been eliminated and many of its active members had been arrested, the Polish intelligence service still had, as the order claimed, an espionage and subversion network in the Soviet national economy, particularly the defence industry. The duty of the security authorities was to put an end to those "anti-Soviet" activities and to "totally eliminate the previously untouched wide-ranging subversion and insurgency bottom-up structures of the POW and the basic personal contingents of the Polish intelligence in the USSR"¹⁸.

Therefore, a "wide-ranging operation" was commissioned to start on 20th August. It was supposed to last three months – i.e. until the 20th November. The people to be arrested included prisoners of war from the Polish army who had remained in the USSR after the war of 1920, political refugees and emigrants from Poland, former members of the Polish Socialist Party and other "anti-Soviet" political parties, and the Polish population from the border regions. The investigation was to be conducted by a special group of operational employees. The arrested persons were divided into two categories: the people in the former category were executed by shooting, and the people in the latter were sent to prisons or forced labour camps for five to ten years. "Dvoikas" (including an NKVD head and a prosecutor) were supposed to be active in those areas and make lists in the form of "albums" and submit them to Moscow for approval. After the green light had been given by Yezhov and Prosecutor Vyshinsky, "the execution should be carried out immediately"¹⁹.

The heads of district NKVD branches received the order accompanied by a confidential letter, also signed by Yezhov, entitled "On the Fascist, Insurgency, Espionage, Subversion, Defeatist and Terrorist Activities of the Polish Intelligence in the USSR". This letter, approved by the Politburo along with Order No. 00485, confirmed the conclusions from Yezhov's speech presented at the Plenary Assembly in June 1937. It included various charges against the Poles: espionage, subversion, terrorism, military revolt, anti-Soviet agitation. As indicated in the letter, Polish Military Organisation agents had taken over the leadership of the Communist Party of Poland and the Polish section of the Komintern long before, and, what is more, infiltrated all levels of the Soviet state apparatus, including the People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs, NKVD, and the Red Army. The activities of the Polish Military Organisation in the Soviet territory were allegedly directed by the "headquarters" led by Józef Unszlicht, Romuald Muklewicz, Jan Olski, and others²⁰.

Later on, during an interrogation, an employee of an NKVD branch from the Moscow oblast, Aron Postel, testified that Yezhov's order had been understood as the command to arrest "absolutely all Poles, Polish immigrants, former prisoners of war, members of the Communist Party of Poland and others"²¹. Then Yezhov added "people contacting Polish consulates"²² – i.e. Polish official diplomatic missions in the USSR – as another category of persons to be subjected to repression under the Polish Operation. Analogous to the German Operation, the Polish Operation, which originally nearly exclusively targeted Poles, turned into a campaign of repression against all suspicious and dubious people that had any links with Poland and the Poles.

The decisions concerning the persons arrested as part of the Polish Operation and other ethnic operations were made by the NKVD Commission and the Prosecutor General of the USSR the under an extrajudicial procedure and in the absence of the defendant. The Polish Operation became a model for all ethnic operations carried out by the NKVD. It was Order of the NKVD No. 00485 that was the first to define the procedure and mechanism of extrajudicial trials against the enemies involving the NKVD Commission and the Prosecutor of the USSR.

The first victims of mass arrests according to an ethnic criterion were Germans (Order of the NKVD No. 00439 of 25th July 1937). This was followed by orders and directives concerning repression against Poles (11th

1937–1938, Arkiv Stalina, Dokumenti vysshih organov partiinoi i gosudarstvennoi vlasti, 1937–1938, ed. Prof. A.N. Iakovliv, collected by: V.N. Haustov, V.P. Naumov, N.S. Plotnikova, Moscow 2004, pp. 352, 547.

17 Archive of the President of the Russian Federation, Collection 3, List 58, Case 254, k. 85.

18 Lubianka: Stalin i Glavnoe Upravlenie Gosbezopasnosti NKVD..., pp. 301–303.

19 *Ibidem*.

20 Russian State Archive of Contemporary History, Collection 6, List 13, Case 6, k. 8–51.

21 V. Pyatnitskii, *Zagovor protiv Stalina*, Moscow 1998, pp. 72–73.

22 FSB Central Archive, Collection 3, List 4, Case 104, k. 262–274.

August 1937), "Harbintsy" – former clerks of the Chinese Eastern Railway, members of their families and persons with ties to them (20th September 1937), Latvians (30th November 1937), and slightly later, repression against Estonians, Finns, Romanians, Turks, Greeks, Iranians and representatives of other nations neighbouring with the USSR that had already started in late 1937 were legalised under various directives, circular letters and instructions sent to the local authorities. These campaigns also involved repression against representatives of the ethnic groups in the USSR who were suspected of spying for foreign powers.

The extrajudicial decision-making mechanism during the ethnic operations was defined in the order of the NKVD No. 00485 of 11 August 1937 (order to carry out the Polish Operation). After a case had been closed, regional NKVD branches prepared information on every arrested person and proposed a sentence. Such information, in the form of lists and made into "albums", were approved by the head of the NKVD branch (people's commissar for internal affairs) and a prosecutor – the so-called "dvoika" – and then submitted to Moscow for final examination by the NKVD Commission and the Prosecutor General of the USSR (Yezhov and Vyshinsky). The sentence could be enforced only after it had been approved in Moscow and the "albums" had been sent back to the addressee. This procedure for issuing sentences began to be known as the "album procedure".

During the mass arrests under the ethnic operations in 1937–1938, the stream of "albums" submitted to Moscow turned out to be so large that Yezhov and Vyshinsky mandated their deputies, Mikhail Finovsky and Grigory Roginsky respectively, to approve the lists. As early as the spring of 1938, several heads of the central NKVD apparatus departments were appointed to examine and approve the "albums". These were: Vladimir Tsesarsky, Isaak Shapiro, Aleksandr Minaev-Tsikanovsky, etc. Even the extended groups of "competent" persons could not quickly and timely examine the "albums" submitted to the headquarters. In the late summer of 1938, there were numerous "albums" that had not been examined, which covered over 100,000 people arrested during the ethnic operations. However, a solution was found – on 15th September 1938, the Politburo of the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks) made the decision to submit the "albums" to the local authorities to be examined by the "special troikas" appointed for that purpose.

Even during the Polish Operation, Yezhov extended the repression against members of families of the persons arrested under Order No. 00485 (the Polish

Operation) and Order No. 00593 of 20th September 1937 (the Harbin Operation against employees of the Chinese Eastern Railway who remigrated to the USSR from Manchuria) under the special instruction of 2nd October 1937. As early as 15th August 1937, NKVD order No. 00486 on repression against the wives of traitors to the Motherland – members of rightist-Trotskyist espionage and subversion organisations convicted by the Military Collegium and military courts²³. Pursuant to that order, all the wives of the convicts were to be arrested regardless of whether they were involved in counter-revolutionary activities, together with their children over the age of 15 if they were recognised as "socially dangerous and capable of anti-Soviet actions"; children under 15 were placed in orphanages²⁴. The number of family members proved to be so high that on 21st November, Yezhov made the decision to restrict the measures under the Polish Operation and the Harbin Operation to the deportation of wives²⁵. Interestingly, NKVD Order No. 00486 on repression against family members was not applied in the course of other ethnic operations against the Latvians, Estonians, Finns, Romanians, Greeks, Afghans, Iranians, and the operation against the kulaks carried out under NKVD Order No. 00447.

The Polish Operation was supposed to end by 20th November 1937, but in the early November, local NKVD organs received an order to hurry their actions and end them by 10th December²⁶. When this failed, the deadline was extended to 1st January 1938.²⁷ On 31st January, the Politburo allowed the NKVD to prolong its operation aimed at "eliminating subversion agents and spies" among the Poles, Latvians, Germans, Estonians, Finns, Iranians, residents of Harbin, Chinese and Romanians until 15th April, and simultaneously ordered the operation to be extended to the Bulgarians and Macedonians²⁸. In this case, there was still the need to postpone the date of completion: on 26th May, the Politburo allowed the NKVD to prolong the operation against the representatives of all the above nations until 1st August, and added the Afghans to the list²⁹. Two days later, the NKVD sent this decision to its local organs and

23 Lubianka: Stalin i Glavnoe Upravlenie Gosbezopasnosti NKVD..., pp. 366-368.

24 *Ibidem*.

25 N.V. Petrov, A.B. Roginskii, *Polskaia operacia NKVD...*, p. 26.

26 FSB Central Archive, Collection 3, List 4, Case 150, NKVD cryptogram No. 49721, 03/11/1937, k. 247-248.

27 Russian State Archive of Contemporary History, Collection 6, List 13, Case 3, NKVD Telegram No. 50194, 11/12/1937 r., k. 81.

28 Lubianka: Stalin i Glavnoe Upravlenie Gosbezopasnosti NKVD..., pp. 468-469.

29 *Ibidem*, p. 538.

emphasised that the cases should be examined “under a simplified (album) procedure”³⁰.

Under the ethnic operation, there were no quotas – the heads of the district NKVD branches were free to act. As a result, the arrests proceeded ad hoc and were carried out on a mass scale. This was carried out with the full support of the regional party leaders. For example, the First Secretary of the Party Committee in the Krasnoyarsk Krai, Sergey Sobolev, who spoke at the operational conference of the NKVD branch, stated: “Enough of the internationalist nonsense, it’s time to beat all these Poles, Koreans, Latvians, Germans, etc. These all are corruptible nations that have to be exterminated... All the nationalists have to be seized, ordered to fall to their knees and eliminated as rabid dogs”. After Yezhov’s downfall, the party organisation of the NKVD branch convicted Sobolev – it was recognised that “by giving such instructions, Sobolev slandered the Central Committee of the VKP (b) and Comrade Stalin, claiming that he had received such guidance from the Central Committee of the VKP (b) and Comrade Stalin by claiming that he had such guidance from the Central Committee of the VKP(b) and Comrade Stalin himself”³¹.

Between August 1937 and September 1938, the total of 235,122 people were convicted, 172,830 of whom were sentenced to death by shooting, under a decision of the NKVD Commission and the Prosecutor General of the USSR.

The “album” procedure resulted in much delay, primarily due to the inability of the Moscow NKVD apparatus to cope with the abundance of submissions. Therefore, on 15th September 1938, the Politburo made the decision to stop the “album” procedure sentences and to appoint “special troikas” in each region whose task was to issue sentences in regard to ethnic contingents – i.e. in all cases of the “albums” that had not been examined³².

The ethnic operations ended in mid-November 1938. Their total number of victims amounted to nearly 350,000 people: 247,157 had been sentenced to death, 88,356 sent to prisons or forced labour camps³³. The Polish Operation itself involved the arrests of 144,000 people – over 111,000 of them were sentenced within the first category, with nearly 29,000 in the second category³⁴. Nearly the entire Polish section of the Komintern was eliminated; 46 members of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Poland and 24 candidates for Central Committee members were shot³⁵. In August 1938, the Communist Party of Poland was officially disbanded by the Executive Committee of the Communist Internationale³⁶. The percentage of people sentenced to death under the Greek, Finnish and Estonian Operations was even higher, while the majority of people arrested under the Afghan and Iranian Operations were deported³⁷. ■

30 Russian State Archive of Contemporary History, Collection 6, List 13, Case 4, k. 33.

31 FSB Central Archive, Collection 3, List 6, Case 93, k. 6-7.

32 N.V. Petrov, A.B. Roginskii, *Polskaia operacia NKVD...*, pp. 30–31.

33 *Ibidem*, p. 33.

34 *Ibidem*, p. 33.

35 A. Paczkowski, *Pologne, la „nation-ennemi”* [in:] *Le livre noir du communisme. Crimes, terreur et répression*, Paris 1997, pp. 399–400.

36 M. M. Panteleev, *Repressii v Kominternie (1937–1938 gg.)*, “Otczestvennaia istoria” 1996, No. 6, p. 163.

37 N.V. Petrov, A.B. Roginskii, *Polskaia operacia NKVD...*, p. 33.