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ABSTRACT

**The Soviet Occupation of the Eastern Voivodeships of the Second Republic of Poland
(1939–1941)
as Depicted in German Polish-language Press in the General Government (1939–1945)**

One of the first consequences of World War II was the occupation of the Polish lands by the Germans and the Soviets. The occupiers introduced new administrative structures in the captured areas. The Germans established the General Government, which comprised the central and southern areas of the Second Republic, while the northern and western parts of Poland were incorporated into the Third Reich. The eastern voivodeships, captured by the Red Army, were incorporated into the Byelorussian and Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republics.

The Germans abolished all press outlets which had previously existed in their occupied areas, as well as confiscating all radio receivers. A propaganda department was instead established in the General Government that published Polish-language press, which was commonly referred to as the occupier's mouthpiece. A number of newspapers were distributed, including dailies, as well as illustrated, rural and specialised magazines – several dozen in total. An information agency was also established – *Polskie Wiadomości Prasowe* (Polish Press News), later renamed *Telepress*. The agency's responsibilities included relaying curated news content to the editorial boards of individual newspapers. The content was always in accordance with the guidelines formulated in Berlin by Joseph Goebbels and his subordinate officials from the Ministry of Propaganda and Public Enlightenment of the Third Reich.

Articles published by the press outlets were centred around, among other topics, matters related to the Soviet occupation of the eastern voivodeships of the Second Republic of Poland. The narrative was shaped in accordance with government guidelines, which in turn were shaped by the German-Soviet relations at the time. The narrative thus underwent an evolution that began in the first several weeks of publishing and ended with the withdrawal of the Germans from the Polish lands.

The dissertation features a subject-based, chronological layout and four chapters. The first chapter contains an analysis of Germany's information policy for the General Government. The structure of the propaganda apparatus is described, and the German indoctrination efforts

in the Third Reich and the occupied territories are presented, in addition to propaganda instruments other than press outlets.

The chapter also contains an analysis of the Polish-language newspapers published in the General Government, as well as how they changed and developed over time. The staff members comprising the individual publishing outlets and their sources of information are identified, and the methods of distribution in Polish society are described.

The remaining chapters illustrate the changes in the German narrative on the subject of the Soviet occupation of the eastern voivodeships of Poland that occurred throughout World War II.

The second part of the dissertation focuses on the propaganda guidelines and how they were implemented between 1939 and mid-1941, when the relations between Berlin and Moscow were friendly. The chapter lists the directives and orders which influenced the propaganda press during the emergence of the new administration system in occupied Poland. The content published in the press is quoted and analysed, organised according to the main subject matter, which is related to the Soviet occupation – reports on the establishment of the Soviet government, its projects and the repercussions of the German-Soviet collaboration in matters such as population transfers between the two occupiers.

Chapter three describes the activities making up the anti-Soviet propaganda effort that began after the German invasion of the Soviet Union on 22 June 1941. This part of the dissertation focuses on the period of German victories on the Eastern Front, which ends with the events of February 1943 (German defeat in the Battle of Stalingrad).

The chapter presents the occupier's plans regarding anti-Communist propaganda and the resulting activities in the Polish lands. Examples of newspaper articles reporting on the Soviet occupation of the Polish lands are presented, including reports on crimes perpetrated by the Soviets, which were widely covered. Also presented are the propaganda activities which took place in the months leading up to the Battle of Stalingrad, which saw Germany lose its strategic initiative on the Eastern Front.

Chapter four focuses on propaganda content published by the press regarding the Soviet occupation of the eastern Polish voivodeships during the final stage of the war, i.e., between February 1943 and January 1945. That is when, after Goebbels's call for a total war, the anti-Soviet propaganda effort was redoubled. This part of the dissertation presents the goals of the anti-communist propaganda effort, as well as its concrete examples in the Polish-language press of the General Government.

These include descriptions of Germany's indoctrination attempts involving the publication of information on the Katyń Massacre perpetrated by the Soviets. Also presented are the repercussions of the attempt at changing existing propaganda policies, examples of which include the anti-Bolshevik operation 'Berta'.

Chapters two through four end with assessments of the effectiveness of Germany's propaganda efforts related to the subject matter of this dissertation. For this purpose, Polish and German reports are analysed, in addition to various memoirs written by chroniclers of the period. Based on available sources, the outlooks and attitudes of the Polish people – the recipients of the propaganda, and the Germans – its creators, are thus characterised.

The conclusions drawn from the study and presented in this dissertation clearly demonstrate that the Germans were consistent in their propaganda efforts in the General Government. The narrative regarding the occupation of the eastern Polish voivodeships by the Soviet Union evolved as the German-Soviet relations changed, as well as being impacted by the situation on the front line. The propaganda effort continued for as long as the Germans published Polish-language newspapers in the General Government. In the initial period, the descriptions were neutral, and refrained from attacking the USSR. This changed after 22 June 1941, when the Third Reich's invasion of the Soviet Union marked the beginning of an anti-Soviet and anti-communist propaganda operation. For this purpose, the Germans were consistent in utilising materials pertaining to the Soviet occupation of the eastern voivodeships of Poland between 1939 and 1941.