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Backstab

September 17, 1939. Columns of Soviet tanks on Polish soil. The aggression of the Soviets meant the end of the Polish Republic

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OF BORD**

For privileged poles, cherishing the conventions of hospitable white manor houses and the customs of the landed gentry, the loss of borderlands was a great tragedy. Soviet power crushed not only people but the centuries of legacy. They destroyed manors and with them Polish souls. The borderland province, with its ancestral estates, antiques, local colors, and a wonderful language, was drenched in mud and blood.

The loss of the Vilnius Region was a fatal blow against Polish Nobles' culture. Even though this folklore was parochial, sometimes not too bright, and stuck in a circle of superstitions, it was also extremely splendid. It was a living museum of Polishness. The borderland was also a place cherished by the Polish intelligentsia. They settled down here in Galicia- the place almost untouched during the Austrian partition. All

these doctors, professors, counselors, lawyers, and writers lived here as if in paradise, receiving respect from the rest of society.

The Borderland Nation

Even though the revolution was raging nearby, here, the communists would not have had a chance to enlist more into their ranks. The memories of Borderlands remained in the work of Czesław

Milosz, who lovingly portrayed the idyllic character of Kaunas Lithuania in „The Issa Valley”, or Tadeusz Konwicki's „Chronicle of Love Accidents”, showing with tenderness the pre-war Vilnius and its elites faced at the end of their history.

The „Borderland Nation” was a cultural melting pot in which Poles were messing up the most. In 1925, a regulation was introduced according to which the Polish language was to be the only official language. Ukrainian and Belarusian youth was being Polonized in Polesie, Volhynia, and Eastern Galicia. The authorities were persecuting Belarusian (Hromada) and Ukrainian (OUN) nationalist organizations. Settling in the Borderlands, Polish nobility was demonstrating sheer contempt and superiority towards the indigenous people, calling their representatives names such as “louts”, while considering themselves as their masters. But enough about it. If there was any conflict, any re-

bellion in the Borderlands, it did not even have a chance to arise enough. Because then, the Red Army came in. September 17, 1939.

Even barbarians ...

Wanda Trzeciecka, who lived in Vilnius before the Bolshevik invasion, wrote in her memoirs that then, just before hell began, she was glad that she lived „so far to the east, away from the front and the horrors of war.” She did not fear Russians, despite them being not far away from Poland, because, as she pointed out, the country had a non-aggression pact with them. “The truth is,” she wrote, “that everyone has the worst idea of them, but even the barbaric nations have kept their commitments.”

The barbarians, however, did not keep their commitments. Disregarding tradition, culture, or people, they entered the ranks of the Red Army, spreading fear and destruction. It was not just an occupation, but a revolutionary imposition. The elites were arrested and their property plundered. The natives of the Borderlands soon were singing revolutionary songs and praising Stalin at rallies forced by, as the Lviv mathematician Hugo Steinhaus wrote,



„dumb, lying, stupid barbarians who got their hands on us, like the giant monkey that took Gulliver to the roof.”

The invasion of Lithuania

Officially, Soviet soldiers „helped the oppressed fellow Belarusian and Ukrainian nations in the face of a threat from a foreign power.” Some of the Red Army soldiers thought that this foreign power was not Poland, but Germany. Thus, more

Deportations

At the turn of 1939/40, Poles began to be deported from the areas invaded by the Red Army to the north of Russia, and Kazakhstan. They were transported in cattle wagons. In winter, frozen bodies were thrown away along the way. The intelligentsia, members of the forest service, railroaders, agricultural and military settlers, officials, families of the arrested people, clergy, people who refused to accept Soviet passports, and natives of the Vilnius Region were also deported. In total, over 300,000 citizens of the Second Polish Republic were deported to Kazakhstan.

