

# IST ER INE



1998. During the ceremony held in the village of Piatichatki near Kharkiv, blessing and laying the cornerstone for the Polish-Ukrainian cemetery of totalitarian victims, including Polish officers from the Starobelsk camp, the murdered victims of communist terror were mourned



foto RADEK PIETRUSZKA / PAP, PAP

kiv, and their bodies were buried in the suburbs of Piatichatki. 6287 prisoners from Ostaszów were shot in the NKVD building in Kalinin

## DISCOVERY OF THE GRAVES

The prisoners were searched for by their families and the Polish authorities for three years. After the signing of the Polish-Soviet treaty restoring diplomatic relations between the countries in July 1941, the Soviets did not give an explicit answer to all inquiries of generals Anders and Sikorski about prisoners of war. It was claimed that they had been released, „scattered” in the USSR, „disappeared” in the chaos of war, and even „flee to Manchuria.”

and buried in the town of Miednoje. In total, 14,587 people were murdered. Pursuant to the decision of March 5, 1940, the NKVD also murdered approximately 7,300 Poles held in various prisons in the territories incorporated into the USSR. 3,435 people were executed in Ukraine and around 3,800 in Belarus. They have arrested activists of conspiratorial organizations, offi-

From the autumn of 1941 until the discovery of mass graves, the Polish government-in-exile kept asking the Soviet side to explain the fate of the missing officers. It was only in 1942 that Polish forced laborers from the Todt Organization, whose task was to build military facilities, found the Katyn graves. In February of the following year, Germany begins questioning witnesses. On March 29, 1943, the first exhumation begins. On April 11, the Transoceanic Agency broadcast a message about the discovery of the bodies of 10,000 in the Katyn Forest. Polish officers. On April 13, 1943, the information was broadcast by Radio Berlin.

### Moscow's reaction

On April 15, 1943, authorities in Moscow are responding and trying to blame the murder on the Nazis. „The German fascist thugs do not retreat in their monstrous nonsense from



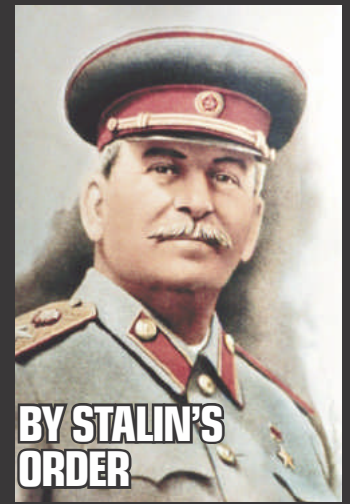
1943. A German commission examines the remains of Polish officers murdered in Katyn

vile lies with which they try to hide unheard-of crimes committed, as can be clearly seen now, by themselves.” The Polish government in London asked the International Red Cross to investigate the matter on April 17, 1943. At the same time, the Germans made such a request to this organization. The reaction of the USSR authorities to the disclosure of the crimes was to break relations

with Poland on the night of April 25-26, 1943. The Russians accused the Polish government of cooperating with Nazi Germany. It was not until April 13, 1990, that Moscow pleaded guilty to the crime. In 1992, the President of Russia, Boris Yeltsin, decided to provide the Polish side with documents relating to the Katyn massacre.

## KATYN MUSEUM

2007. Reproductions of photographs documenting the exhumations of the bodies of Polish officers murdered by the NKVD in the Katyn Forest carried out in the spring of 1943



## BY STALIN'S ORDER

The decision on the extermination of Poles was issued by the highest party-state organ of the Soviet Union, i.e. the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks). On March 5, 1940, a decision was made on the mass shooting of Polish citizens. Joseph Stalin, the secretary-general of the Communist Party of Poland, was the first to sign the death sentence for tens of thousands of Poles. Later, his associates signed the paper: Anastas Mikoyan, Wacław Molotov and Klimient Voroshilov. In the margin, the secretary added: „Kalinin - for, Kaganowicz - for.” The first was theoretically the head of the Soviet state, the second - deputy chairman of the Council of People's Commissars and the commissar of transport and the oil industry.