



International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance

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I want to address a very, very controversial issue. Obviously there is no intention of presenting it in any form for any type of decision for IHRA, but to open a discussion on it. It is the issue of the 23rd August: the date of the Molotov-Ribbentrop neutrality pact between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union. As many of you, probably all of you, know in 2009 the European Parliament adopted a resolution which was originally supported by such a very well-known and well-admired personality as Vaclav Havel from the Czech Republic, to view all the victims of both totalitarian regimes in the same way and commemorate them in the same way as equal victims.

Now, this is understandable. The Baltic States, Poland, and other Eastern European countries suffered for 45 years under Soviet occupation and it was, it seemed, obvious that the victims of these two totalitarian regimes should be remembered. And the idea was, and is, to be remembered in the same way. However, there are implications of such an approach. The first implication is that the two totalitarian regimes are the same more or less, that there is not much difference between them. The second implication could be that both of them were responsible for the outbreak of World War II. The third implication could be that the end of the war was not a liberation for Eastern Europe, but the exchange of one occupation by the other. In other words there was no liberation from the Nazi regime because it was replaced by another occupation. And beyond that, there is the possibility of opening an abyss between the understanding of World War II and, in fact, of contemporary life altogether; between people in Eastern Europe who were under Soviet occupation and the West, the Anglo-American world, the Latin American world, the West European world. Because what it could mean is that World War II was really the wrong war. The West should have fought against both totalitarian regimes- and so there was no liberation, and no real good and bad.

In the West, the consensus- not a complete consensus of course- among most experts, historians and politicians was, and is, that the alliance between the Soviet Union and the West liberated humanity from the worst regime that ever disfigured the face of this earth. And 23rd August could represent the opposite view. *Could*. Now what is the basis of this? You see, during the 1930s, and certainly in 1939, Stalin would have sold all the Russian mothers and grandmothers in order to avoid a war. The idea of an alliance between the USSR and the two West European Powers was a result of the failure of Britain and France to come to an arrangement with the Soviet Union, because until early August 1939 there were negotiations going on in what was then Leningrad between the representative of Stalin, Kliment Voroshilov, who was not exactly an Einstein but who had received the orders from his boss, and a very low-key, low-level military delegation from Britain and France. This failed because the Soviets said, if you want our army to confront Nazi Germany we need permission from Poland and Romania because we don't have a common border with Germany. And of course the Poles especially and understandably said 'no way'. The negotiations collapsed and the Soviet regime found itself in a situation where, after they had destroyed their own military in the purges, the only possibility they saw at that point of avoiding a clash with a vastly superior military power- which they understood was a superior military power- was by making an arrangement with them. So the first hesitant steps were taken by the Soviets, but the initiative came from Nazi Germany. Neither the Soviets nor the West wanted a war. Nazi Germany wanted a war. The war didn't break out because of the Soviets or the West, it broke out because of Nazi Germany. So the idea that the two totalitarian regimes are the same in this respect, is simply false.

Did the Soviets plan a genocide in Eastern Europe? Let me give you an example from a country that published an excellent resumé in English of a historical commission- Latvia. And I could do the same for Lithuania and Estonia. I could do parallel things for Poland and other countries. There were two Soviet occupations: 1940-41, 1944-1989/90. In the first Soviet occupation, the Soviets exiled and deported 15,400 Latvian citizens to Siberia. There was a Jewish community in Latvia of 95,000 people- slightly under 5% of the population, but amongst those 15,400 plus 3,000 Latvian citizens who were arrested by the Soviet security organs and put into jail, 11.7% were Jews. In other words, more than twice proportionately the number of Jews in the population. Nobody will accuse the Soviet authorities of committing a genocide against the Jews of Latvia. From 1944 to 1989, in fact between 1944 and 1948, the Soviets deported another 43,000 Latvian citizens to Siberia, so if you put it together, it is about 3.3% of the Latvian population that were exiled to Siberia and many

of them died and suffered terribly in camps and so on. But after Stalin's death in 1953, most of them returned- broken in body and spirit, but they returned. It was not a genocide. It was oppression. It was brutality. It was totalitarian rule, yes. No genocide.

The rule in all these countries was exercised not directly by the Soviets- although the orders came from Moscow- but by local collaborators, and some of them had quite some support in the local populations. There was in Latvia for instance, Augusts Kirhensteins who was a pro-Soviet professor, in a Latvian university. You had similar people, for instance Justas Paleckis in Lithuania. You had of course in Poland communist collaborators with the Soviet regime. So it wasn't a direct rule, it was proxy. There was no genocide. What about the Germans, Nazi Germany? Nazi Germany developed what they called the General Plan Ost, General Plan East. The first version of this came in 1941, a corrected version in 1942, and a third version in 1943. It was accepted by the SS who initiated the programme as a guideline for German policies. The Baltic nations were to be eliminated. In part, in large part, by Germanisation- turning them into Germans- abolishing the local languages, and turning them into Germans. Another section were to be recruited as helpers for Nazi Germany and in fact that part was put into practice- not only in the Baltic countries; in Belarus, in Ukraine, where police battalions were set up which murdered Jews and others, under German supervision, of course. And the third part, the ones who would oppose this kind of regime, were to be annihilated. You can read it. The first person, historian who found the actual documents and published them was a Polish historian by the name of Czeslaw Madajczyk. There were others who followed, the documents were analysed.

Yes, Nazi Germany intended a genocide of the Baltic nations. In other words, the disappearance of an ethnic or national group as the convention for the prevention of genocide of the United Nations of 9 December 1948 says very clearly, the elimination of an 'ethnic, national, religious or racial group as such, in whole or in part'. Whatever the argument about that definition, that's what it says. And clearly what Nazi Germany intended with these people was a genocide. So there is a difference between the two totalitarian regimes. Not only there. The regimes were both totalitarian but different. There was never a German government after 1938, it never met. There were ministers of the Nazi government who never spoke to Hitler. The Minister of Transportation for instance. The Minister of Education for instance. Between 1938 and 1945, none of these people even met Hitler. I mean they heard him, but they never spoke with him. There were never any minutes taken of

meetings between Hitler and his immediate subordinates. Hitler prevented any secretary to take any notes with the exception of diplomats or people from other countries. There we have some minutes.

The Stalinist dictatorship was completely different. It was in effect the continuation of the Tsarist regime with a completely upside down ideology and there was a politburo in Moscow which met every ten days or so. There are minutes! There were discussions there. Always in the same kind of form; where a problem was proposed, the people at the table were asked for their opinions, Stalin sat there and listened and then comrade Stalin said what the conclusion should be and that was it. But there were meetings. There was a bureaucratic tradition. There was no such thing under Nazi totalitarianism. We are victims in a way of Hannah Arendt's definition of totalitarianism in her very famous book- although towards the end of her life she retreated from those concepts. Yes, they were totalitarian regimes. No, they were not the same. Yes, they were both responsible for mass deaths. In different ways. Now was Eastern Europe *liberated* by the Soviets or *conquered* by the Soviets? And, of course, the Soviet Union suffered about 26 million dead in World War II. It is a fact, whether we like it or not, that the German Army was defeated first and foremost by the Soviets. The West certainly helped. It supplied all the lorries and jeeps and so on and so forth to the Soviet army, supplied all kinds of things. Very important things. But it was the Soviet industry, especially east of the Urals that produced the mass of tanks and Stornovik planes that enabled them to face the Wehrmacht.

So what are we dealing with here? We are dealing with a liberation- and it *was* a liberation, I think- but a very difficult, problematic liberation. No if you look at it that way, you can see the complexities. If you say it is the same thing, and you put everything into the same pot then you are unable to analyse your own history. Where does IHRA come in then? Where does the Holocaust come in? If everything is the same then the Holocaust is the same as other events in that period. But it was *not* the same. It was *different*. It was within that context, yes, but it was different. The attempt by the supporters of the European parliamentary decision to say that they do not include the Holocaust in their equalization of the victims does not hold. The Nazis developed over time the idea to annihilate every single person *they* defined as being Jewish. All over the world. Without any exception. That was the intent. It was clearly announced by Adolf himself on 28 November 1941 in a meeting that he had with Amin al-Husayni, the then-head of the Palestinian national movement

who was in Berlin collaborating with the Germans. Now Mr al-Husayni didn't know any German and Mr Hitler didn't know any Arabic, so there was a translator who took notes so we know exactly what was said. And Hitler said in so many words that, not *if* we win the war, but *when* we win the war we shall turn to all the countries in the world to treat the Jews the way we are treating them here. The suffering of all the victims was the same, but the victims of the Holocaust died in a different type of mass atrocity than the many millions who suffered in the war.

23rd August, same thing, same victims. I cannot accept that. Unacceptable to me. And I'm not the only one. Many historians, politicians and so on share this view that I'm presenting to you. Now it's not an argument, it's a discussion. It is not to be submitted to the Plenary of IHRA in any form, but I think we must face the issue. I think we must face the problem that it presents, that we cannot simplify, we cannot throw everything into- as I said- the same pot. It doesn't work. The genocide of the Jews was the most extreme genocide, in my view, until then. It was unprecedented. But that means that it was a precedent. It can be followed and in a way it already has been followed. And the task that underlies all our discussions is that it should be a warning and not a precedent. That things like that can happen, not in exactly the same way. Nothing ever happens in exactly the same way. But in similar ways. And when we spread the word about what happened then, when we spread the word about this extreme case of genocide, whether we are aware of it or not, we are trying to do our best that it should remain a warning.

I realise that we have here 24 representatives of governments who are part of the European Union and it will be very difficult to go against the decision of the Parliament of the European Union. So, I am really crying wolf and am turning to the governments, not only in Europe, to see that all these things are connected. That you have to analyse them in detail, that you cannot simplify them. That they are much more complicated than these statements, all the victims are equal. They are equal in terms of suffering, there is no difference between the suffering of any victims of any mass murder of any genocidal situation: they are all the same. Jews didn't suffer more or less than Tutsi or Cambodian Khmer or Armenians or whoever it was. Human suffering is always the same, but the context in which these things take place is difference. We should remember that.