

Eugeniusz Misiło, comp. and ed., with an intro. *Akcja "Wisła" 1947: Dokumenty i materiały.* Warsaw: Archiwum Ukraińskie and Management Academy Group, 2012. 1246 pp. Illustrations. Maps. Documents section. Appendices section. Biographies sections. Miscellaneous lists. English-language summary. Indexes. Cloth.

In Communist Poland, it was impossible to independently examine the 1947 forcible resettlement of the Ukrainian minority, an action known as Operation Wisła, because no one was allowed to challenge the official version of the event. With the fall of the regime in 1989, however, censorship ceased and archives were opened. Thus, a collection of documents on Operation Wisła was published in 1993 by Eugeniusz Misiło (Evhen Misylo), a Ukrainian-Polish historian whose parents had been resettled. He wanted to shed light on the whole issue.

Indeed, Misiło's collection contributed to opening a debate on the topic. It was a difficult debate because of the painful nature of the event; because the subject had been taboo for so long; and because Poles and the Ukrainian minority had two starkly different memories of the event. The difficulty was compounded by the fact that Operation Wisła was just one episode in an extremely dark period in Polish-Ukrainian relations, stretching from 1943 to 1947.

In spite of this, the debate was fruitful. Over the next two decades, contributions from both Ukrainian-Polish and ethnically Polish scholars deepened our knowledge and understanding of Operation Wisła. Mainstream Polish historians and intellectuals recognized it as a deplorable instance of ethnic cleansing. This led to acts such as the Polish Senate's resolution condemning Operation Wisła and the official expression of regret over the operation by the Polish president, Aleksander Kwaśniewski. The author of the first collection of documents on the topic could be satisfied with its impact.

Why, then, was there a need for a second edition? Quite simply, new documents became available after the establishment of the Institute of National Remembrance, a Polish government-affiliated research institute. Its mission includes researching and documenting crimes committed against Polish citizens by the Polish Communist regime, and it has vast archives on the Polish Communist security apparatus.

Thus, about half of the 513 documents included in the book's second edition were not featured in the first edition, and most of them are published for the first time. All of the documents are accompanied by extensive notes. The book has a section with appendices and also includes biographic notes on the main figures responsible for Operation Wisła and on the leaders of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN) and its armed wing, the

Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA), in Poland. There is even a colour map showing the territories from which, and to which, the Ukrainian minority was resettled.

Most of the documents show Operation Wisła from the Polish side. Highlights include a plan of the operation, signed by the ministers of State Security and National Defence, defining its goal as “solving definitively the Ukrainian problem in Poland” (doc. 62); a list of 442 rail transports that took 140,627 ethnic Ukrainians and their livestock from southeastern to northwestern Poland (appendix 3); and a list of 1,244 localities, in nineteen counties of three provinces, from which Ukrainian inhabitants were resettled (appendix 1). Another highlight is the instruction of the Ministry of State Security that no more than three to five ethnic Ukrainian families were to be resettled per village (doc. 122).

The book includes Misiło’s monograph on Operation Wisła, highlighting the documents featured. The author confirms that he is one of the leading specialists on the topic, and his monograph offers valuable insights and conclusions.

For instance, Misiło argues persuasively against the view that Communist Poland carried out Operation Wisła under orders from Moscow. This view, introduced in 1987 by the late Polish historian, Ryszard Torzecki, has been accepted in Polish historiography, although he never produced any document to support it. The documents available since then suggest, however, that Moscow had nothing to do with the operation (106-12).

The author’s discussion of the resettlement’s legal basis is impressive, possibly even brilliant. The original decision, taken by the Politburo of the Polish Communist Party, had to be confirmed by the government in order to be legally binding. In this instance, however, it was confirmed by “the Presidium of the Council of Ministers” (164-66), formed by the chief ministers, who were also leading Communists. Since the Presidium had not been defined in the Constitution, the decision’s legality seems questionable, argues Misiło. He even challenges the authenticity of the single preserved copy of the Presidium’s decision, thus suggesting that it may never have been made in the first place.

Misiło convincingly argues that Polish authorities could do more to recognize the injury to the Ukrainian minority from Operation Wisła. For example, Ukrainians then convicted by the Communist regime’s notoriously unjust courts are unable to ask for a review of their convictions. Likewise, the functionaries of the State Security who used illegal methods of investigation, such as torture, cannot now be prosecuted because the statute of limitations for initiating legal action is ten years—unless the crime is deemed to have been committed against the Polish nation, but in the cases involving the Ukrainian minority, it is not so deemed.

Some aspects of the monograph are questionable, however. For example, Misiło claims that according to international law, Operation Wisła is an instance of genocide (205). This is certainly a misinterpretation. The United Nations definition of genocide refers to the destruction of certain groups of people. And according to that definition, as Genocide Watch explains, only one kind of forcible resettlement is considered to be genocide, namely, “forcible relocation or expulsion into deserts” (Stanton). Obviously, Operation Wisła is not guilty of that. As is clear from the documents, this operation was not meant to destroy the Ukrainian minority outright, but to facilitate its future assimilation.

One document is misinterpreted. Misiło holds that the deputy minister of State Security, Colonel Grzegorz Korczyński, “discovered with amazement” that the armed Ukrainian underground was cleverly concealed and its members extremely committed. This, he argues, is “an excellent illustration” of the Poles’ “feeling of superiority and contempt” for the Ukrainians (70). Yet, the document in question, Korczyński’s report to the minister of State Security (doc. 245), is very matter-of-fact and does not give any indication of surprise, let alone amazement.

In his discussion of the Poles’ unwillingness to employ political methods to pacify the Ukrainian minority, Misiło omits the issue of the 1943 slaughter of the Polish minority in Volhynia by the Ukrainian Insurgent Army. He merely refers to “the tragic struggles of the [German] occupation period” (51). Yet, it is impossible to understand the then prevailing Polish attitudes toward Ukrainians without considering this particular issue.

The numerical strength of the armed Ukrainian underground is not discussed properly. Misiło holds on page 54 that the entire underground included “1,000 partisans” and on page 141 that it counted “nearly 2,000 people.” To obscure matters even more, the total number of fighters, whom he lists on page 141 as captured, killed, or having escaped from Poland, appears to be 2,335. The issue of how many Ukrainians were resettled is similarly mishandled. The author holds on pages 19, 163, and 166 that their number was 150,000 and on pages 194 and 205 that it was 140,000.

The idea that the Politburo’s decision on Operation Wisła should be “changed or waived” (202) has little merit, since the Polish Communist Party has ceased to exist. In addition, it makes no sense to suggest that the willingness of the Lemkos—an ethnic group within the Ukrainian minority—to volunteer for the Soviet Army in 1944-45 is proof of their “exemplary loyalty to the Polish State” (52).

The number of 145 Lemko families resettled from two counties of Kraków province seems much too low, given that this resettlement involved as many as 2,061 people (52). It would mean that the average family included 14.2 persons. Yet, the average size of a Lemko family resettled from Kraków

province to Soviet Ukraine in 1944-46 was 4.4 persons (49). The difference in family size is too great to be credible. This conclusion is confirmed by the fact that average family sizes for groups of Lemkos and Ukrainians resettled from other regions (according to data found in the book) varied from 2.9 to 6.2 persons, with the median being 4.1 persons.

It is difficult to agree with Misiło that the resettlement of those Ukrainians who had participated in the establishment of Communist Poland was “one of the most repugnant [acts] in the entire history of Operation Wisła” (129). It is certainly ironic that those who had helped establish an arbitrary and unjust state, presumably in the hope that it would deal arbitrarily and unjustly with people other than themselves, suddenly found themselves one of the targets of this very treatment. Their disappointment is understandable. Yet, it is unclear why that would be more repugnant than the arbitrary and unjust treatment of other, innocent people.

In conclusion, the second edition of Misiło’s important collection of documents on Operation Wisła ought to further advance scholarly examination of this event. As for his monograph, it offers valuable insights and conclusions. Nonetheless, some of its claims and interpretations are questionable. A definitive history of Operation Wisła remains to be written.

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Works Cited

Stanton, Gregory H. “What is Genocide?” *genocidewatch.net*. Genocide Watch, 2002. Web. 11 Feb. 2016. <<http://www.genocidewatch.org/genocide/whatisit.html>>.