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The secret plan of the 1952 displacements of the original inhabitants of Mazury in the light of documents from the New Files Archive in Warsaw

The change in political situation in 1948-49, which marked the beginning of Stalinism in Poland, meant new policy towards the 70 thousand of Masurian people. The meaningful aspects of the 'new policy' were the way of ending of the national vetting process (the so-called 'questionnaire operation'), and so far unknown plans from 1952 concerning displacements of whole Masurian families "who presented the most aggressive anti-Polish and pro-Nazi attitude, and whose influence on others was particularly negative." They were to be displaced to the provinces of Rzeszów and Lublin, from which, in turn, Ukrainians were displaced in the "Wisła" operation in 1947.

One of the first steps of the new policy was to eliminate the leaders of the population, who were made responsible for the failures and mistakes done when acting towards the Masurian people.

In February 1949 the compulsory vetting began, mainly in the 3 Masurian regions: the region of Mrągowo (11 991 people who weren't vetted and 1633 Germans), the region of Szczytno (5741 and 761 respectively), and the region of Pisz (3083 not vetted). In the province of Olsztyn before the operation there were 20067 people who objected to assuming Polish citizenship, and 5000 Germans. In the winter 1948-49 in the area of those three regions an intensive propaganda was spread. Those who opposed, especially the leaders, were intimidated, and even arrested. The authorities used administrative measures, means of intimidation, terror, and physical abuse; they broke the law. 19 000 thousands people were vetted during 2 months. Despite the pressure and persecution, 1304 people objected to assuming Polish citizenship. However, within a few months they received certificates confirming their Polish nationality. This group, and all those who experienced the compulsory vetting, still considered themselves Germans, and constituted the majority of people who – for different reasons - were hostile towards Polish identity and the new socio-economic conditions. They lived mainly in the country, in the regions of Mrągowo and Szczytno.

Another factor which contributed to social conflicts in Mazury were the operations of questionnaires and passports issuing, both begun in 1952. The operations were the result of a new Polish Citizenship Act from 1951, which demanded Polish nationality declarations and aimed at granting Polish citizenship to all the inhabitants, regardless of their sense of national belonging. The operation led to numerous conflicts and fierce resistance among the Mazurian people.

The operation of citizenship granting proceeded as follows: those whose names were included in the lists made by local branches of the National Council (Rada Narodowa) were recognized as Polish citizens. In other words, all the residents who until 1951 weren't Polish citizens were listed and recognized as Polish citizens. As, allegedly, there were too many of them, they were not delivered certificates of citizenship bestowal, but ready-made IDs. Many people refused to accept the IDs, hoping that this will equal to rejecting Polish citizenship. Citizenship bestowal meant compulsory military service for men at the military age, and those people tried to avoid the military service at all costs. Some people, mainly Germans, "whose Polish identity or citizenship weren't undoubtedly confirmed were given temporary identity certificates instead of IDs." Many Warmian and Masurian people refused to accept the questionnaires, to fill them in, to have photos taken, to accept IDs, and to do the military service in the Polish army, explaining that they are German citizens. The aversion and hostility towards the new social and political situation were expressed by wide applying for temporary certificates confirming German citizenship, issued by the US Embassy in Warsaw. Since 1951 also the Federal Republic of Germany issued such certificates and sent them by mail. Most of such certificates were given to people living in the regions of Mrągowo (13000, which constituted 63% of Masurian people living there), Szczytno (6000, 46%), and Ostróda (2000).

To stifle the resistance of Masurian people and Silesian people from the region of Opole towards accepting Polish citizenship the central authorities had to find new methods. On of them was a planned operation of displacements of the most resistant persons to the south-east of Poland. The documents below present the general guidelines for the operation of passports issuing (document 1), more detailed plans concerning the displacement operation (document 2), and the results of the passports issuing operation prepared by the Militia Headquarters (document 3).

Document 1: The Polish United Workers' Party (PZPR) Instruction concerning the operation of passports issuing:

- the operation proceeded very well in the provinces of Katowice, Opole, Olsztyn and Gdańsk, and most people confirmed their Polish nationality
- however, in some areas there were problems and resistance – some refused to fill in the forms, some didn't declare themselves as Polish citizens, and even more people declared themselves as Polish citizens but at the same time confirmed their German nationality.

The guidelines are as follows:

- to carry out a propaganda operation that will make people change the data in questionnaires
- those who declare themselves as Germans should be expelled from the Party, and the loyal ones should be admitted
- hostile German propaganda, German passports and other documents shouldn't be allowed to penetrate the communities
- those who refuse to change their declarations concerning the citizenship and nationality should be given temporary identity certificates
- the most aggressive and anti-Polish persons should be displaced to the regions of Rzeszów and Lublin
- especially influential and harmful priests should be displaced
- propaganda, administrative repressions and investigations should be administered in relation to those who didn't fill in the questionnaires

Document 2: concerning the execution of the displacements:

It is a proposal of the method of carrying out the operation. For the sake of law and order it should be carried out in the presence of militia officers. The target regions of the displacements are Ustrzyki Dolne and Lubaczów. The National Council of the province of Rzeszów will present a list of vacant farms, flats, and vacancies in PGRs (state-owned farms). The farm or any other real estate left by the displaced should be immediately secured and soon handed over by the local National Councils. Costs of the displacements will be paid by the National Council in Rzeszów.

Document 3: concerning the results of the passports issuing operation :

As a result of individual talks and meetings in work places some people filled in the forms or changed the previously declared German citizenship or nationality into Polish. Those who still opposed were dislocated. Generally speaking, the results are unsatisfactory, especially in the province of Olsztyn.