

POLSKA

WARSZAWA

Warsaw, September 1, 2019

The
80th
Anniversary of
WWII
Outbreak

09/01
1939
卐

09/17
1939

INVASION OF POLAND

WWII started when Germany and Russia invaded Poland. Stalin desired territories in Eastern and Central Europe; Hitler hoped to avoid a two-front war and to isolate Poland. In fact, however, the ambitions of both of them were much greater. For this reason, the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact of August 23, 1939 was a temporary solution.

The pact could have shocked many. After all, just three years earlier, the Germans had concluded an Anti-Comintern Pact with Japan, to which Italy also joined shortly afterwards. The states in question pledged to work together against the communist international community. Hitler perorated many times that it had been the “Reds” who stabbed the Germans in the back in 1918, and contributed to their defeat in the Great War. The Führer and Stalin were on both sides of the barricade in the second half of the 1930s, when a war broke out in Spain. The Soviets sent equipment and soldiers to the Republicans; the Germans did the same to the nationalists led by General Franco. There was no trace of the good relations

of the 1920s, when the two world-isolated states concluded an open economic and secret military treaty in Rapallo, Italy.

“Those relations began to deteriorate at the end of the Weimar Republic due to the growing strength of the German communists. The Berlin-seated authorities saw them as a threat to state stability and democracy,” explains Prof. Marek Kornat, historian and Sovietologist of the Polish Academy of Sciences [PAN] and Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University in Warsaw. “When Hitler came to power, he almost completely froze his contacts with Moscow. He allowed only partial economic cooperation because the Germans could not do without Soviet natural resources,” he adds. Stalin was not so radical. “In the 1930s, Moscow would regu-

larly make it clear that it could go back to [the establishments of the Treaty of] Rapallo, but the Germans were not interested. Hitler for quite a time wanted to drag Poland to his side and ultimately make it his vassal,” explains Prof. Kornat. Now, it was Poland to be the first to fall prey to both dictators.

Fourth Partition

Three partitions of Poland by its neighbors – Prussia, Russia, and Austria – were held in the second half of the 18th century. As a result, the Polish state disappeared from the map of Europe for over a hundred years, to return back to it in 1919 – for twenty years.

The first signs of the rapprochement of the Germans and Soviets began to be evident at the beginning of 1939. Hitler then

understood that it was unrealistic to win Poland over to follow the anti-Soviet plans. He was furious, and Stalin felt that he could enter into a deal with him. He began to organize his supporters for this. In March, at the party congress, he gave a speech, which soon became known as “the chestnut speech.” He argued that the USSR could cooperate with anyone for its own good, and that the West was trying to drag its country into an unwanted war. “War-mongers who are accustomed to have others pull chestnuts out of the fire for them,” he thundered.

Then the day of August 23 arrived; the visit of von Ribbentrop to Moscow and the signing of the Treaty of Non-Aggression between Germany and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. However, the most important was not the document itself, but the top secret protocol that constituted an annex to it and concerned the future of Central and Eastern Europe. Stalin and Hitler decided that Poland would be divided along the lines of the Vistula, Narew and San Rivers. The Soviet zone of influence would include Finland, Estonia, and Latvia, which in time would be incorporated into the USSR. Germany, in turn, would seize

Continuation on the next page