

Our mission

In the Name of Historical Truth

The past is an element of the present. For even if we do not “live” the past or do not take particular interest in it, the echoes of past events frequently resound in our own times. This includes when politicians talk about the past, when newspapers write about it, and when it becomes the subject of films and public debate. This is how the past is “contemporized” and becomes a part of our lives.

But do we conceive the past in accordance with historical truth? Do we not distort it due to lack of knowledge or other reasons?

...the German Concentration camps were born not in Polish territories, but in the Nazi Third Reich in the 1930s.

The phrase “Polish” extermination or death camps, which appears from time to time, is a glaring example of the distortion of truth about the past, that is, of historical truth. This phrase suggests that Poles established the camps and were camp administrators.

It is altogether understandable that this phrase is strongly opposed in Poland — a country that suffered so much during World War II. The reason for that is simple: those camps were established when Poland was occupied by Nazi Germany. It was the German political bodies and the police (specifically the SS) who made the decision to create and run the camps. They were helped (mainly in the General Government) by the German civil administration in organizing deportations to the camps. Therefore those numerous German offices, political and civil administration structures as well as particular individuals bear responsibility for the death and suffering inflicted on the millions of victims of the camps. It is also true that the camps’ staff was not exclusively German – there were also Austrians and the so-called “Trawnikimänner”, who included former Soviet POWs: mainly Ukrainians, but also Russians, Belarusians, Estonians, Latvians, Lithuanians, Tartars, Georgians, Armenians and Azerbaijanis.

This truth so obvious in Poland, should become internationally recognized. In German-occupied Poland there were no (nor could there be) any “Polish” extermination, death, or concentration camps. The German occupier established the camps to execute its criminal policy of enslavement and extermination of people of various ethnic backgrounds – Jews and Roma in the first place but

also Poles and other Slavs.

The Institute of National Remembrance (Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, IPN), whose duty is to disseminate knowledge on Poland's recent history, cannot remain indifferent with regard to the fact that this historically incorrect phrase of "Polish" death or extermination camps, which is so offensive to Poles, reappears in various speeches and publications. Thus, we have created the "German Camps in Poland" website within the framework of our mission. Its clear message is the historical truth that there were no "Polish" extermination, death, or concentration camps. Those were German camps, for they were established and managed by the Germans, who governed occupied Poland through terror.

The phrase "Polish" extermination or death camps, which appears from time to time, is a glaring example of the distortion of truth about the past, that is, of historical truth. This phrase suggests that Poles were the creators and administrators of such camps.

The website consists of texts supplemented with iconographic materials. The first one illustrates the obvious truth that the German concentration camps were devised and started operating in the Nazi Third Reich in the 1930s and not in Poland. The Germans transplanted the camp models they had developed in Germany onto Polish territories, modifying them to suit their new purposes. The next two articles show the dramatic situation of Poles under the German occupation.

Having read them, the reader will soon realize that there were various "Polish" aspects of the occupation-period reality in the occupied country (for example, the Polish resistance movement, the attempted annihilation of the Polish intelligentsia or - in some cases - Polish peasants blackmailing or murdering Jews fleeing the ghettos and other Poles rescuing Jews), but there were certainly no "Polish" camps."

The texts about the camps in the General Government describe a camp network created by the Germans in the occupied country. The last text focuses specifically on the German exterminatory policy (the Holocaust) in which the death camps played a key role.

We hope that the website we are launching on the anniversary of Nazi Germany's invasion of Poland will meet our expectations and contribute to the elimination of the phrase "Polish" death camps which misrepresents historical truth.

Dr. Sławomir Kalbarczyk

„Words Matter - German Nazi Camps”. We would like to invite you to watch a short film prepared by the Embassy of the Republic of Poland in Washington, DC

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