



DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER
MINISTER FOR CULTURE AND NATIONAL HERITAGE
prof. dr hab. Piotr Gliński [professor, PhD]

*Honourable Former Prisoners,
Dear Conference Participants,*

when a few days ago, during the commemoration of the 83rd anniversary of World War II, I had the honour of opening an open-air exhibition #bezPrzedawNIEnia at the Pilsudski Square in Warsaw, part of a campaign about Polish war losses. I said then that Poland had suffered unprecedented harm from Germany. The Polish state suffered huge population losses during World War II which were the result of Germany's conscious and consistent policy of seeking to destroy Polish citizens and gain so-called *living space* or *Lebensraum* in the east for Germany. It cost the lives of 5 minimum 200 thousand Poles.

Łódź, where the Germans had installed one of the most abhorrent institutions: Polen-Jugendverwahrlager der Sicherheitspolizei in Litzmannstadt, a police-supervised punishment camp for Polish children and youth, is an appropriate place to remember the child victims of the war: 157 thousand children taken from their parents and deported to be Germanised in Germany – of this number, barely 30 thousand children returned to the country. It is an appropriate place to remember nearly 200 thousand child fatalities, either directly murdered or died as a result of superhuman labour, exhaustion, malnutrition, disease.

'(...) The demoralization of Polish juveniles has grown into a problem of grave and serious danger to German children living there,' Obergruppenführer SS Reinhard Heydrich, head of the Security Police and SD, justified the decision to establish the facility. *'The reasons for this neglect lie in the unbelievably primitive standard of living of Poles. And he continued: 'In addition, the war has uprooted many families from their former living conditions, those responsible for upbringing and education are unable to fulfil their responsibilities, and Polish schools are closed.'* What a twisted reasoning! The camp is a great stinging wound, calling into question the humanity of its architects and executors. It represented a shameful and inhumane solution to the problem of Polish orphans, children caught in petty crimes, children of so-called *Polish terrorists* whose parents had been killed or arrested, and homeless children, and young people from the Polish territories annexed to the Third Reich, so that they would not be in childcare centres with German children.

Dear Ladies and Gentlemen,

this twisted rationale is really not subject to any justification of reason. What evil intentions, what character defects, what demoralization can the infants or toddlers be accused of? The infants or toddlers who were also prisoners and victims of the Łódź children's punishment centre. No, there is nothing that can justify the German criminals, the officers of the Third Reich. Their action was dictated by racial cleansing and the decision to destroy the Polish nation. We do not currently have knowledge of the total number of victims. It is estimated that the Łódź concentration camp

for Polish children cost the lives of some 200 victims, most of whom we will never know anything about again, as traces of their lives and burials have been obliterated. Two to three thousand children were incarcerated in the camp. Many of them fit into the macabre statistic of 157 thousand deported for Germanisation.

Dear Ladies and Gentlemen,

concluding our consideration of the tragic past and the crimes committed by the officers of the Third Reich, it should be said that we have always expressed the hope that they will not happen again in the future, that by maintaining the memory and paying tribute to the victims, we prevent the repetition of these events.

Unfortunately, for the past six months we have been dismayed to see that the wheel of history has turned and we are witnessing Russia's bestial rape of Ukraine and Ukrainians. What is most abhorrent and objectionable is the anti-people and anti-civilisation dimension of this war, as well as the hypocritical rhetoric of the Russian leadership. In June this year, a decree by the Russian leader simplifying the granting of Russian citizenship to Ukrainian children came into force. By the time the decree was formulated, i.e. during the first 4 months of the war, some 240 thousand children had been kidnapped and deported to Russia from the occupied Ukraine and naturalised! The UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights recorded 350 child deaths in Ukraine in August as a result of Russia's attack on Ukraine.

The legitimate question remains whether the kidnapping, deportation and naturalisation of Ukrainian children is not part of a ruthless policy, implemented along the same lines as the German Nazis did with Polish children.

Dear Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to thank you from the bottom of my heart for your presence at the conference. I would like to express my gratitude also to the team of the Museum of Polish Children – victims of totalitarianism, for their continuous and uninterrupted work to preserve the memory of the crimes committed here.

[signature: Piotr Gliński]

To the participants in the celebration of the 1st scientific and didactic conference of the Museum of Polish Children – victims of totalitarianism, entitled

“Polen-Jugendverwahrlager Litzmannstadt in the context of German crimes against Polish children during World War II”

Łódź, September 9-10, 2022