

DOI <https://doi.org/10.51647/kelm.2022.7.43>

MIĘDZYNARODOWE SPOJRZENIE PRAWNE NA ZBRODNIE MIĘDZYNARODOWE: „AKCJA „WISŁA” I „TRAGEDIA WOŁYŃSKA”

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Adnotacja. Prezentowany artykuł naukowy poświęcony jest międzynarodowej analizie prawnej dwóch wydarzeń historycznych – operacji wiślanej i tragedii wołyńskiej, które często omawiane są równolegle. W artykule dokonano analizy aspektów prawno-historycznych obu wydarzeń oraz zbadano kwalifikację prawną Operacji Wiślanej. Szczególną uwagę poświęcono badaniu przyczyn i skutków zbrodni, które miały miejsce podczas tych wydarzeń. Ponadto podkreślana jest aktualność tych zagadnień w kontekście dochodzenia do sprawiedliwości historycznej i świadomości potencjalnych manipulacji geopolitycznych przez Rosję poprzez wykorzystanie konfliktów historycznych pomiędzy Ukrainą a Polską do osiągnięcia własnych celów. Badania pozwalają nie tylko wzbogacić naszą wiedzę na temat wydarzeń z przeszłości, ale także rozważyć potencjalne zagrożenia teraźniejszości, związane z konfliktami historycznymi i próbami łamania norm międzynarodowych. Wyniki tego badania zachęcają do dalszych badań historycznych tych wydarzeń w celu osiągnięcia konsensusu, aby zapobiec manipulacjom i rozwiązać problemy historyczne między obydwojma państwami.

Słowa kluczowe: zbrodnie międzynarodowe, Akcja „Wisła”, zbrodnie przeciwko ludzkości, tragedia wołyńska, prawda historyczna, kwalifikacja.

INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVE ON INTERNATIONAL CRIMES: OPERATION VISTULA AND «VOLYN TRAGEDY»

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Abstract. The present research article is devoted to the international legal analysis of two historical events – Operation Vistula and Volyn tragedy. The article analyzes both events' legal and historical aspects and examines the legal qualification of Operation Vistula. Particular attention was paid to studying the causes and consequences of the crimes committed during these events. Additionally, the author highlights the relevance of these issues in achieving historical justice and awareness of potential geopolitical manipulations by Russia through the use of historical conflicts between Ukraine and Poland to conduct its own goals. The study allows us not only to enrich our understanding of past events but also to consider potential threats of the present related to historical conflicts and attempts to violate international norms. The results of this study invite further historical research into these events to reach a consensus to prevent manipulations and resolve historical issues between the two states.

Key words. International crimes, Operation Vistula, crime against humanity, Volyn tragedy, historical truth, qualification.

МІЖНАРОДНО-ПРАВОВИЙ ПОГЛЯД НА МІЖНАРОДНІ ЗЛОЧИНИ: «ОПЕРАЦІЮ ВІСЛА» ТА «ВОЛИНСЬКУ ТРАГЕДІЮ»

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Анотація. Представлена наукова стаття присвячена міжнародно-правовому аналізу двох історичних подій – Операції Вісла та Волинської трагедії, мова про які часто виникає паралельно. У роботі проведено аналіз правових та історичних аспектів обох подій та досліджено правову кваліфікацію Операції Вісла. Особлива увага приділялася вивченню причин та наслідків злочинів, що сталися під час цих подій. Додатково, висвітлено актуальність цих питань у контексті досягнення історичної справедливості та усвідомлення потенційних геополітичних маніпуляцій росією через використання історичних конфліктів між Україною та Польщею для досягнення власних

цілей. Дослідження дозволяє не лише збагатити наше розуміння подій минулого, а й розглянути потенційні загрози сучасності, пов'язані з історичними конфліктами та спробами порушення міжнародних норм. Результати цього дослідження запрошують до подальших історичних вивчень цих подій задля досягнення консенсусу з метою запобігання маніпуляціям та вирішення історичних питань між двома державами.

Ключові слова: міжнародні злочини, Операція Вісла, злочин проти людяності, Волинська трагедія, історична правда, кваліфікація.

The study of the problem of international crimes, in particular Operation Vistula and Volyn tragedy, is essential in the world's scientific literature on international law, political science, and history. This problem is the subject of detailed research by many scholars worldwide. Research works on this topic are imbued with serious analysis that questions various aspects of the legal qualification of the events and their consequences. Among international scholars, we should mention R. Lemkin, a well-known Polish-American lawyer who first used the term «genocide» and actively worked on the legal definition of this crime, which concerns the mass extermination of a people. N. Naimark is an American historian who focused on the study of mass violence during World War II, in particular, the events of Operation Vistula. T. Snyder is an American historian whose work covers events in Eastern Europe during World War II; mainly, he studies mass repression and violence, including the Volyn tragedy. Among the researchers of the Volyn tragedy, we should single out I. Plyushin, author of a work on the Volyn tragedy; J. Rysych-Szafraniecki, author of works on the Polish-Ukrainian dialogue on the Volyn tragedy; T. Hunczak, author of articles on the Volyn tragedy, and W. Viatrowicz, author of articles and publications on the Volyn tragedy and the Polish-Ukrainian dialogue. The Operation Vistula was studied by R. Drozd, V. Serhiichuk, author of works on the tragedy of Ukrainians in Poland; I. Halahida, author of works on Ukrainians in the western and northern lands of Poland in 1947-1957; E. Misylo, author of documents and studies on the deportation of the population of Poland and Western Ukraine, V. Shcherba – author of works on the deportation of the people from the Polish-Ukrainian borderland, and O. Solyarz – author of works on the trauma and stigmatization of the descendants of Ukrainians who were evicted as part of Operation Vistula.

The purpose of this paper is to conduct an in-depth international legal analysis of two historical events – Operation Vistula and Volyn Tragedy, to provide a legal qualification of the actions that took place during Operation Vistula, to study the legal and historical aspects of both events and to examine the causes and consequences of these crimes. An additional goal is to emphasize the relevance of these issues for achieving historical justice, as well as a conscious understanding of the ability of the enemy – russia – to use such historical conflicts between Ukraine and Poland to achieve its geopolitical goals.

The objectives of the study are as follows:

- to investigate the legal and historical aspects of Operation Vistula and Volyn tragedy;
- to study the causes and consequences of the crimes, namely, to analyze the factors that led to the crimes and their impact on society, politics, and the international community
- to qualify the Operation Vistula;
- to emphasize the relevance of the issues for historical justice.

The research methods used are analysis and synthesis, which were used to analyze sources and synthesize information; the historical process allowed the analysis of historical events and their impact; the hermeneutic approach was used to analyze legal acts to reveal their content, the case study method allowed to study a specific situation of an international crime, the comparative legal process was used to compare two international crimes, the forecasting method was used to determine possible provocations and speculations about Operation Vistula and Volyn tragedy;

The Volyn tragedy of 1943 is one of the bloody episodes of the Ukrainian-Polish conflict during World War II in Volyn, which many historians, primarily Polish, single out from the overall picture of the then interethnic Ukrainian-Polish armed confrontation in the territory cohabited by Ukrainians and Poles-Volyn, Eastern Galicia, Kholm, Podlasie, Nadsyannya, and Lemkivshchyna. This event has controversial interpretations and perceptions in the historical, political, and social context. In Polish historiography, the Volyn events of 1943 are primarily interpreted only as an anti-Polish action of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army, while Ukrainian historiography emphasizes the motives that prompted the Ukrainian Insurgent Army to conduct such an action, the instigators and organizers on the Soviet and German sides, and pays considerable attention to the retaliatory actions, including against the Ukrainian civilian population and the «Armia Krajowa». (Льюшин, 2003).

However, what is most important in this context is the historical truth and the dissemination of such truth among the population because it is essential in building healthy international relations with Ukraine's neighboring Poland, with which we have much more in common than we could have previously imagined.

Polish researcher J. Rysicz-Szafraniec writes about the problem of understanding the Volyn tragedy in detail in her work «Ukrainian «Working through the Past» in the Context of the Polish-Ukrainian Dialogue on Volhynia – 43. Asymmetry of Memory». (Rysicz-Szafraniec, 2020).

She notes that the asymmetry is most noticeable in political narratives related to the Volyn tragedy and is based on different understandings and perceptions of the events in Volyn in 1943 by Ukrainians and Poles. The author reports that the communication potential of the interstate dialogue in the political sphere is unsuccessful due to mixed historical assessments on both sides. Another critical factor in this failure is the politicization of this particular historical event by domestic ideological and political actors in Poland and Ukraine.

In most Polish sources, we can find approximately the following information about this event. In Polish memory, Volyn 43 is considered an act of genocide committed by Ukrainian nationalists from 1941 to 1943. The victims

of these murders were Poles, numbering more than 100,000 people, who lived in Galicia and Eastern Lesser Poland, including Volyn. The Ukrainian Insurgent Army considered these territories to be Ukrainian and planned to clear them of national minorities to create a mono-ethnic Ukrainian community in the future independent Ukrainian state after World War II. Moreover, the cleansing of these territories led to the ethnic cleansing of Polish civilians, mainly carried out by Ukrainian nationalists.

Historically grounded research, supported by documents, and conclusions about the actual events of 1943 in Volyn are made by Polish researcher M. Czekh in his work «Jak Moskwa rozpetala piekło na Wołyniu» (Cech, 2023).

The author points out that historical events, in particular those in Volyn during the war, may continue to create divisions and conflicts between Poles and Ukrainians rather than contribute to the process of reconciliation. He calls for detailed investigations and understanding of the events in Volyn to determine the truth and reduce the potential impact of these events on relations between both nationalities.

M. Cech notes the activities of the Soviet secret services, in particular Major Pavel Sudoplatov, who was an expert on the Ukrainian nationalist movement. Instead of the Ukrainian police, who fled to the forest, the Germans recruited Poles (about 1.5-2 thousand people), and the Schutzmannschaft Battalion 202 (mostly Poles) and police units from Greater Poland and Silesia were pulled from the Governorate General.

So in April 1943, in just one action in the Lutsk district, the Germans burned five villages: Kostiukhivka, Vovchyska, Yablonka, Dovzhytsia, and Zahorivka. In addition to the Germans, Poles also participated in the action. The Germans killed entire families, robbed them, and burned them, according to lists compiled by the Poles. During his stay in Horokhiv, Commissioner Erich Koch held the Poles fully responsible for the German actions in the village of Kniazhe.

A Polish report from April 1943 hints that the Soviets were involved in some of the bloodiest actions in Volyn. In their policy against Ukrainians and Poles, the Germans also played a game of «divide and conquer», thus exacerbating the already tense relations between the two nations. When, for example, Ukrainian police units (approximately 5,000 men) formed from the local population joined the Ukrainian nationalist insurgency (March 19-April 14, 1943), the Germans organized Polish police units grouped from the local population and Volksdeutsche (racial Germans) from the Poznan region. These were the units that joined the German punitive operations against the Ukrainian population. However, it is essential to note that this does not mean that Ukrainian acts of terrorism against the Polish population were justified. However, it is crucial to understand who was firing the guns. (Гунчак, 2003).

Also, the YouTube channel «TG Shevchenko» of the Kapranov brothers spreads the truth about this tragedy, confirming it with documents, facts, and works of Polish historians and researchers; in the comments, Poles confirm the idea that their history has only one opinion – it was genocide by Ukrainian nationalists. They do not know about the other side and the research of even their historians, who refute the fact that Ukrainians themselves wanted to kill Poles and programmed themselves to do so without outside influence. (YouTube канал ім. Т.Г. Шевченка, 2020).

However, the issue of the Volyn tragedy will remain open, especially in Poland, until the truth is told on both sides of the border about this tragic common page in the history of Ukrainians and Poles who lived on the same Volyn land. There is an opinion that another generation is needed to be able to speak, because neither Ukraine nor Poland is ready to speak openly about these events now.

Polish Prime Minister M. Morawiecki emphasized that Russia will try to use the Volyn tragedy to divide Ukrainians and Poles until the circumstances of those events are fully clarified (Терещук, 2022).

To summarize, discussing the Volyn tragedy requires special attention and objectivity. We need to be careful and restrained in our statements about the Volyn tragedy until the circumstances of those events are fully clarified. Discussing historical events must not lead to deteriorating relations between our nations. We need to overcome the challenges of our time jointly and work to strengthen cooperation and mutual understanding between Ukraine and Poland.

The Volyn tragedy had a severe impact on the formation of the concept of crimes against humanity and the understanding of mass crimes in international law. It drew significant attention from the global community and became the object of international condemnation. A large number of Polish civilians became victims of violence and murder, which drew attention to this conflict and its horrific nature. This situation has also led to an understanding of the need for an international legal response to such crimes and emphasized the importance of preventing and punishing mass crimes, including those motivated by ethnic or racial hatred.

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Operation Vistula is a painful topic for the Ukrainian people and the author's family personally because the author's grandparents, when they were young, were forcibly deported from the picturesque Lemkivshchyna to central Ukraine. Instead of farming their land, they ended up in collective farms, poverty, and survival, not to mention lifelong psychological suffering.

On March 28, 1947, the Polish communist authorities began the horrific deportation of Ukrainians from their ethnic territories during Operation Vistula. 150,000 Ukrainians were forced to survive, scattered around the world. An international crime was committed, hundreds of human lives were destroyed, causing people to suffer for the rest of their lives, and enormous material and spiritual losses were incurred.

Operation Vistula is a subject of dispute in international law and historical research. This terrible event, which took place after World War II in 1947-1948, involved the forced displacement of the Ukrainian indigenous

population from the eastern regions of Poland to the western regions. This object of dispute is viewed from different perspectives in international law. One approach is to qualify Operation Vistula as a crime against humanity, as some researchers argue that the forced displacement of large numbers of people using coercion and the restriction of their fundamental rights meets the criteria of a crime against humanity, which is also characterized by systematic and massive scale. Another approach sees the possibility of qualifying Operation Vistula as a crime of genocide.

Operation Vistula was preceded by the events of the mid-1940s, which became the most dramatic moments in the history of the population of the regions of Kholmshchyna, Podlasie, Nadsyannya, Lemkivshchyna, and Western Boikivshchyna in the context of the establishment of the USSR's borders after World War II.

This period of Soviet history is most often described as an era of agony under Stalinism, where both Ukrainians and Poles experienced repression and armed resistance to the totalitarian regime. The tragedy of both peoples was that after suffering the most incredible human and material losses during World War II, they were drawn into the geopolitical games of the USSR and the Cold War rivalry.

The archival collections contain documents confirming the use of local Poles in NKVD operations against the Ukrainian Insurgent Army and the Ukrainian clandestine. For example, the reports of the AK command on the situation in the city of Kremnets in the Ternopil region in July 1944 clearly show that the Soviet administration and NKVD units were favorable to Poles, dismissive of Jews, and hostile to Ukrainians (Babinski, p. 219-220).

Scholars have documented that the «population exchange» project was not only agreed upon in advance between the Soviet and Polish left-wing radical leadership but was also coordinated and controlled by them. As a result of the «exchange» of population, more than 482,880 people were evacuated to the Ukrainian SSR (НАН України, 2000: с. 214.), (according to Y. Misylo's estimates, 482,661 Ukrainians) (Misylo, 1993: p.14).

At an expanded meeting of the Ukrainian World Coordinating Council in Kyiv on August 22, 1996, it was noted that by September 1946, 488,662 people had been evicted from Poland to Ukraine. Despite this, about 200,000 people remained on these lands who were the victims of the bloody Vistula action. (Копчак, 1997).

On April 28, 1947, the Vistula Task Force, which consisted of about 20,000 soldiers, public security officers, and public police, began the expulsion of Ukrainians. (Szcześniak, 1973).

The operation lasted over three months, until July 29. Ukrainians were forcibly evicted from their ethnic territories and dispersed across northern and western Poland. During this action, military units used violence, burned Ukrainian houses, and destroyed churches and Ukrainian cemeteries. In addition, NKVD and Czechoslovakian border guard units blocked the borders in the east and north.

The action, which left no room for human dignity, was aimed at the complete expulsion of the Ukrainian people from their historical homeland.

Article 7(2)(d) of the Rome Statute defines deportation as : «Deportation or forcible transfer of population means forced displacement of the persons concerned by expulsion or other coercive acts from the area in which they are lawfully present, without grounds permitted under international law» .(Римський статут, 1998).

While studying certain acts of crimes against humanity, M. Hnatovsky notes that: «the difference between deportation and forcible transfer is that deportation is understood as the forcible transfer of a person outside the state in which he or she was staying, while in the second case, the state border is not crossed. The transfer of crime victims must be carried out with the use of certain acts of violence. In particular, this term is not limited to the use of physical force. It may include the threat of force or coercion caused, for example, by fear of violence, brute force, detention, psychological pressure, abuse of power against such person or persons or another person, or the use of a position of coercion. The main factor in determining the forced nature of the displacement of persons is the involuntary departure of a person from the territory. The subjective side of deportation as a crime against humanity meets the requirements of Article 30 of the ICC Statute. In addition, as noted by the ICTY Trial Chamber in the case of Naletilić and Martinović (2003), the perpetrator of the crime must seek to prevent the victim from returning to his or her residence» (Гнатівський , 2007:32).

Crimes against humanity are defined by several specific features that help to understand its nature. First, it is systematic when acts are part of a complex system or organized practice aimed at massive human rights violations. Secondly, these crimes are characterized by their scale, i.e., many victims and coverage of large areas. Third, such crimes often involve attacks on civilians or systematic violence against defenseless persons. Moreover, these crimes are often committed with political, racial, religious, or ideological motives aimed at the destruction or oppression of certain groups of the population.

The arguments that support the qualification of the events as a crime against humanity are, firstly, that Operation Wisla was part of a large-scale campaign conducted by the National Socialist regime. It was planned, systematic, and aimed at deporting many people, a characteristic feature of a crime against humanity. Secondly, the fact that archival documents also show that people were killed during the operation, as well as exiled to the Yavorozhna camp. Thirdly, the forcing of a group of people, namely Ukrainians in Zakerzonja, to live in undignified conditions, first in freight cars for several months, which led to a physical deterioration in the quality of life and deprivation of access to food or water, and even more so – inhumane living conditions in the new lands to which they were deported, often without a roof over their heads. Fourthly, the forced relocation of the group from their historical lands against their will, which has belonged to them for centuries, where their churches stand and where their ancestors are buried, violated numerous norms of international law, including the 1948 Declaration of Human Rights (Загальна декларація прав людини, 1948) and the 1949 Geneva Conventions (Конвенція про захист цивільного населення під час війни, 1949).

Just as the Nazis and Communists did in the 1940s, so today, russians are happy to use the Polish-Ukrainian confrontation based on the past to divide us and make us weaker. They succeeded in stirring up our enmity during and immediately after World War II. Eventually, they destroyed the Ukrainian and Polish organized resistance forces amidst contradictions, which served as a price for our people in terms of loss of freedom and great human sacrifice. This must not be allowed to happen again.

The Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine declares: «The only way to reconciliation and unity between the Ukrainian and Polish peoples is through a common understanding of the facts and circumstances of history and calls on current and future generations of Ukrainians and Poles to continue their strategic partnership and not to succumb to attempts by certain political forces to manipulate sensitive pages of the historical past against the interests of the Ukrainian and Polish peoples» (Про Заяву Верховної Ради України, 2016).

The lesson we can learn from this historical moment in the life of the Ukrainian nation is that we cannot expect good from communist regimes and their descendants, including the russian federation. This history reminds us of the tragic consequences of totalitarian regimes and the importance of protecting the human rights and dignity of every nation. However, there is now enough evidence to accuse russia of genocide against the Ukrainian people and bring it to justice. In Ukraine and Poland, we need to talk more about such events because we need to remember the dark past without embellishment or falsification to move into a bright future. Historical truth is also our defense.

It is essential to spread the truth about these tragedies. So that Poles and Ukrainians know it and who set us against each other. So that we can unite and fight together against a common enemy. As R. Shukhevych said, we must unite with the Poles to fight the same enemy. Moreover, restoring historical justice and truth is extremely important for the victims and their descendants and for healthy public policy in general.

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