

THE IMPORTANCE OF EUROPEAN REMEMBRANCE FOR THE FUTURE OF EUROPE

The Resolution “On the importance of European remembrance for the future of Europe“ was adopted by the EU Parliament on September 19, 2019, with 535 votes in favor, 66 against, and 52 abstentions.

At its beginning, the Resolution lists 15 documents that were considered by the EU Parliament at the time of its adoption—ranging from the United Nations 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights to a joint statement on August 23, 2018 by the representatives of the governments of the EU member states in commemoration of the victims of communism. This is followed by 13 premises, from A to M, followed by 22 conclusions, condemnations, and calls to EU member states. The overall message of the Resolution can be summarized in the following statements and conclusions:

F. whereas in some member states, communist and Nazi ideologies are prohibited by law;

L. whereas remembering the victims of (..) Stalinist, Nazi, and other dictatorships is of vital importance (..) for building European resilience to modern external threats;

2. (Resolution) stresses that the Second World War was started as an immediate result of the notorious Nazi-Soviet Treaty on Non-Aggression, known as the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact, and its secret protocols, whereby two totalitarian regimes that shared the goal of world conquest divided Europe into two zones of influence;

6. (Resolution) condemns all manifestations and propagation of totalitarian ideologies, such as Nazism and Stalinism, in the EU;

17. (Resolution) expresses concern at the continued use (..) of both Nazi and communist symbols;

18. (Resolution) notes the existence in some member states of monuments and memorials (parks, squares, streets, etc.) glorifying totalitarian regimes, which paves the way for the distortion of historical facts about the consequences of the Second World War;

19. (Resolution) condemns the fact that extremist and xenophobic political forces in Europe are increasingly resorting to distortion of historical facts, and employ symbolism and rhetoric of totalitarian propaganda, including racism, anti-Semitism, and hatred towards sexual and other minorities;

It sounds self-explanatory that remembering the events of the past is important for the future of society, that it should be a valuable experience that helps future generations to avoid repeating the mistakes of previous ones. Much like the scientific achievements and knowledge of one generation form the basis for discoveries and advances of the next. The fact is, however, that even scientific discoveries, when in conflict with the ruling religious or ideological dogma, are sometimes kept secret or stigmatized. This is especially true of historical events that are forged and mythologized in order to serve as a support and justification of the current policy.

The claim that the outbreak of World War II was a direct result of the Nazi-Soviet agreement is stated in the Resolution as an indisputable fact. However, numerous documents, primarily from the Third Reich, all of which have been available for over 60 years, show that this claim is more than questionable. Because this is a claim supported by the EU Parliament, a critique of this claim needs to be substantiated by a chronology of facts about the events that immediately led to World War II. Here is a synopsis of these events:

(1) At the end of May 1938, Hitler issued a directive to Wehrmacht to prepare an attack on Czechoslovakia for October 1, 1938. The directive starts with the sentence: "It is my unalterable

decision to smash Czechoslovakia by military action in the near future.”

(2) At that time, Czechoslovakia was militarily allied with France and USSR as well as Yugoslavia and Romania. Chiefs of the German Army were convinced that a German attack on Czechoslovakia would provoke a European war that Germany would lose “in view of present combination of the Powers.” Some of the high-ranking generals, ranging from the Army Commander in Chief to the Chief of the Army General Staff to the commander of the Berlin garrison, organized a conspiracy against Hitler. They were prepared to overthrow Hitler and the Nazi regime as soon as Hitler issued an order to attack Czechoslovakia if the French and British government would make clear that they would answer German aggression with armed forces. Conspirators secretly sent a courier to London to inform Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain and Member of Parliament (MP) Winston Churchill about their plans and conditions. Churchill sent them a letter of support.

(3) In his speech at the Nazi Party Rally in Nuremberg, on September 12, 1938, Hitler threatened that he would carry out annexation of Sudetenland, a part of Czechoslovakia where the German minority constituted the majority of the population, by military force. On that occasion, talking about Czechs with utmost contempt, Goering said: “This miserable pygmy race is oppressing a cultured people and behind it is Moscow and the eternal mask of Jew devil.”

(4) British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain visited Hitler on September 15, 1938. Chamberlain offered to Hitler that he would convince the Czech government to turn over Sudetenland, for the sake of peace, to Germany. (Sudetenland was a mountainous part of Czechoslovakia where Czechs had strong military fortifications that were essential for defense.) Hitler accepted his offer.

(5) British and French governments subjected the Czech government to pressure to turn over a large part of the territory to Germany. All in the cause of peace. If Czechoslovakia did not accept their proposal, Great Britain and France would leave her to settle the problem of Sudetenland with Germany alone. If the Czech government accepted the Anglo-French proposal, Britain and France would guarantee the borders of the remainder of Czechoslovakia. The President of Czechoslovakia, Edvard Beneš, turned to the USSR. The Soviet Foreign Commissar, Maxim Litvinov, answered that USSR would stand by its treaty with Czechoslovakia. But the Czech government realized that the pact with the USSR called for the Soviets to come to their aid on the condition that France did the same. And France had reneged. The Czech government capitulated and accepted the Anglo-French proposal.

(6) The Polish and Hungarian governments raised territorial claims towards Czechoslovakia. Hitler egged them to take advantage of the right moment to realize their claims. He told the Hungarian Prime Minister: "The only satisfactory solution would be to destroy Czechoslovakia." He was sure that England and France would not go to war for Czechoslovakia. "The only danger is that Czechs may submit to all my demands."

(7) Chamberlain brought to Hitler the answer given by the Czech government, which had been forced to accept all of the German claims. Hitler said that it was too late now. Germany would occupy the Sudeten area in two days (September 29), and it depends on the Czechs regarding whether it would be by hook or by crook.

(8) Czechoslovakia rejected Hitler's new demand and mobilized her Army. France carried out partial mobilization and Britain mobilized the fleet. Yugoslavia and Romania warned Hungary that they would attack her if she attacked Czechoslovakia. The leading German generals were against an attack on Czechoslovakia. Hitler wrote a letter to Chamberlain, moderate in tone, and he accepted a peaceful takeover of Sudetenland and guaranteed the borders for the remainder of Czechoslovakia.

(9) Chamberlain proposed to Hitler an international conference about the Sudeten crisis. He also sent a letter to Benito Mussolini asking his support for the conference. Mussolini wrote back to Hitler, saying that he gave him full support but told him that he, Mussolini, was in favor of the conference. Hitler accepted Mussolini's proposal and scheduled the conference for "tomorrow (September 29) at noon in Munich."

(10) Hitler invited Chamberlain to the conference, as well as Édouard Daladier (Premier of France) and Mussolini, but he did not invite representatives of USSR and Czechoslovakia. Mussolini, speaking third in turn, read "his" proposal for a "practical solution" of the crisis. Chamberlain and Daladier welcomed Mussolini's proposal and accepted it. German documents, discovered after the war, have shown that the "Mussolini's proposal" had been written in the German Foreign Office, approved by Hitler, translated to French, and sent to Mussolini.

(11) Hitler won a reputation in Germany and in the Army beyond anything that could have been imagined a few weeks before Munich, and his self-confidence and self-conceit became boundless. He was right (about Britain and France) and all generals were wrong, he

successfully annexed Austria and a good slice of Czechoslovakia, and 10 million Germans to the Third Reich, without spilling blood. Hitler's judgment that Britain and France were hesitant and weak and that they would not go to war because of some Eastern European countries even if they had formal treaties with them, looked very convincingly after Munich.

(12) The day after Munich, October 1, 1939, the German army poured into Sudetenland. Poland and Hungary swept down, "like vultures" according to Churchill's expression in his book "The Second World War," upon helpless Czechoslovakia and took territories assigned to them by Hitler. At the beginning of 1939, Germany occupied the western part of the rest of Czechoslovakia and in Slovakia established an "independent" Slovak State with a pro-fascist, quisling government. Neither Britain nor France, in spite of their solemn promises and guarantees given in Munich, would react.

(13) In the spring of 1939, Germany was making increasing territorial demands towards Poland. Germany also asked Poland to join the treaty of Germany, Italy, and Japan directed against USSR, the so-called Anti-Comintern Pact. The British government, coming to her senses after the disappearance of Czechoslovakia, gave her guarantees to Poland. Hitler issued a secret order to Wehrmacht to prepare a surprise attack on Poland for September 1.

(14) On April 17, 1939, the USSR proposed an agreement to Britain and France. According to that agreement, those three Powers would jointly oppose further German aggressions. Chamberlain turned down the proposed agreement as "premature." The Polish government refused to accept any agreement with the USSR, alleging that the USSR was a "military of little account."

(15) On May 3, 1939, Stalin dismissed Litvinov, the Commissar for Foreign Affairs, and replaced him with Vyacheslav Molotov. For years, Litvinov pleaded for the military alliance of the USSR, Britain, and France, which would have opposed the aggressions of the Third Reich. After Britain and France turned down the Russian proposal of April 17, 1939, Stalin judged that Litvinov's policy had failed. Moreover, he concluded that Britain and France would not go to war because of Poland and that, after Poland, the USSR might be confronted with Nazi Germany alone. Dismissal of Litvinov, who was a Jew, Hitler interpreted this as a sharp turn in Soviet policy. In August 1939, when German army was ready to attack Poland, Hitler estimated that it would be useful, for the time being, to keep the USSR neutral. He offered to Stalin a nonaggression pact for a period of 25 years. According to "Secret Additional Protocol," the USSR would get territories which Tsarist Russia lost 20 years ago, after the (First) World War. In 1939, those territories included three Baltic states and parts of Poland, Finland, and Romania.

The only logical explanation for the reasons why the authors of the Resolution have engaged in a “distortion of historical facts” about World War II is the overall message of the Resolution, which equates communism and Nazism as ideologies and, in fact, as ideas. Throughout the Resolution, communism and Stalinism are used synonymously. This message is reinforced by the claim that Nazi Germany and the USSR were equally guilty for the outbreak of World War II. The fact that this is not true does not alter the character of the Stalinist dictatorship, nor does it diminish the crimes committed by that dictatorship.

The Resolution expresses equal concern about the use of Nazi and communist symbols and about “monuments glorifying the totalitarian regime.” In Croatia, as in some other Eastern European EU member states, the political right has for decades been stating that monuments in the fight against Nazism and Fascism, and in particular against their domestic quisling regimes, are “symbols of the glorification of totalitarian regimes.” Thousands of such monuments, at least when it comes to Croatia, were demolished precisely because they were monuments to the fight against a criminal totalitarian regime. The extent to which this Resolution supports this grotesque attitude and its destructive consequences is best seen in the reactions of the pro-Ustasha portals, as well as some right-wing political opinion columnists, in the Croatian media. They all complain that the Resolution is not made sufficiently popular within the Croatian public. For example, journalist Ivan Ugrin of the daily *Slobodna Dalmacija*, in the article entitled “EU Parliament: Nazi and Communist Atrocities are the Same!”, writes that the Resolution shows how right the Croatian President was when she removed Tito's bust from President's palace at Pantovčak, as was the Zagreb mayor when he changed the name of the Marshal Tito Square.

Although it deals with the start of World War II, the Resolution on the Importance of European Remembrance does not even “remember” that the USSR suffered the greatest casualties, and the USSR was one of the main contributors to the victory over Nazi Germany and the liberation of countries that were under Nazi terror. The “consequence” of this is not only the imposition of the pro-Soviet authorities in the countries of Eastern Europe, but also the return or establishment of democracy in much of Western Europe. Without these casualties and the victory over the then-invincible German army, a united Europe would look very different. It should be recalled that on almost all propaganda posters of Nazi Germany and its allies, the attack on the USSR was presented as a defence of a united Europe against the dangers of Bolshevism.

Finally, the Resolution condemns the extremist and xenophobic forces in today's Europe that spread—by means of “rhetoric of totalitarian propaganda”—“racism, anti-Semitism, and hatred of sexual and other minorities.” It is clear that the propaganda of such views has nothing to do

with communism but rather is at the heart of what was advocated and imposed by Nazism. Today, xenophobia, racism, and hatred against minorities are regularly featured in the rhetoric of the far right across Europe, to the extent that this Resolution had to refer to them as a threat to ethical values on which the EU is founded, and this pertained only to those threats that were not external but rather internal and not particularly modern. Rising nationalism, and shortsighted selfish policies, yielded to such policies and extremist movements that are increasingly vocal in propagating attitudes that are precisely contrary to the principles of freedom, equality, and social justice. And those who stand up to these principles will be singled out by the political right for a lack of patriotism and easily named Communists and apologists of Stalinism.

The members of the European parliament (MEPs) who voted in favor of this Resolution, including all Croatian MEPs, on the one hand have a vision of the communist white mice, and on the other hand show a striking lack of “historical memory.” All of this has already been seen in Europe. It is clearly stored in the European collective memory, where constant appeasement of political bullies, who have been known by “racism, anti-Semitism and hatred of minorities,” can lead.

Zoran **Pusić**