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Comparing the Expulsion of Germans from East Prussia and Lower Silesia in the Immediate Post-War Period, 1945-1946

by *Claudia Kraft*

Abstract – On the basis of broad research in Polish archives, the paper discusses the expulsion of the Germans from Poland after World War II. By comparing the living conditions of the German population in two different regions of the so-called «recovered territories» – East Prussia and Lower Silesia – it is demonstrated, that the German population in post-war Poland cannot be seen as a homogeneous «community of fate» (*Schicksalsgemeinschaft*), as it was described for a long time in German historiography. The policies of the Polish government and of the Soviet troops widely differed concerning the respective regions. Although all political camps and the population agreed on the plan to expell the Germans, the process of expulsion and the living conditions before it differed in the two regions. For the living conditions of the Germans not only the Polish policy but also the demographic structure and the degree of the destruction due to the war were decisive. Hence, many factors played a role in the way in which the expulsions were carried out.

1. Introduction

Some years before the dispute about the Center against Expulsions (Zentrum gegen Vertreibungen)¹ made our topic a major problem in Polish-German relations, I took part in a Polish-German research project about the expulsion or forced migration of the Germans from Poland after World War II².

¹ In 2000, the chairwoman of the German Union of Expellees (Bund der Vertriebenen), Erika Steinbach, together with some adherents of this idea (politicians as well as scientists) established a foundation, which is planning to build a monument in the center of Berlin, where the fate of the German expellees shall be remembered. Above all, in the years 2002 und 2003 this plan caused a lot of criticism and worry in the Polish public opinion. Many Poles regarded this planned monument as an attempt to re-evaluate World War II focusing only on German victims and forgetting about perpetrators and the real responsables for the outbreak of war.

² The results of the project have been published in Polish and German. In Polish the edition is completed, see the four volumes: «*Nasza ojczyzna stała się dla nas obcym państwem ...*». *Niemcy w Polsce 1945-1950*, vols 1-3, edited by W. BORODZIEJ - H. LEMBERG, vol. 4, edited by D. BOĆKOWSKI, Warszawa 2000-2001. In German the first two volumes have been pub-

Our team (four Polish and four German historians) concentrated its investigations in the Polish archives on the official documents of all administrative levels (central as well as regional and local). For me one of the most important findings was that the policy of the Polish administration or in general the attitude of the Polish population towards the Germans was by no means clear-cut. While in Germany it was held for a long time that the mass of several million people that had to leave their former homelands in Eastern Europe constituted something like a uniform community of fate or as it is called in German «Schicksalsgemeinschaft»³, the Polish sources mostly of official, administrative provenance told us another story. It became clear that the situation of the German population differed substantially taking into consideration the different regional origins of the expellees⁴. The demographic structure of the German population played a role here as well as the economic situation of the respective regions they had lived in. Also crucial were Polish conceptions of how to integrate the new territories into the Polish state or how to treat that part of the population, which could not be clearly characterized as «German» as, for example, the Polish-speaking but Protestant Masurians in the southern part of East Prussia.

In my paper, I want to concentrate on the immediate post-war period (1945/46). I am going to compare the expulsion of the German population after World War II from two regions of the new Polish state that is from East Prussia and Lower Silesia. Both were so-called «recovered territories» («ziemie odzyskane») that had belonged to the German Empire before 1937 and had been put under Polish Administration by the Allies because of the territorial reorganization of Central Europe after the war. The policy of the new Polish government, the respective regional offices, and the Soviet military garrisons, which played a big role in 1945 but also later on⁵, differed a

lished so far, see W. BORODZIEJ - H. LEMBERG (eds), «Unsere Heimat ist uns ein fremdes Land geworden ...» *Die Deutschen östlich von Oder und Neiße 1945-1950. Dokumente aus polnischen Archiven* (Quellen zur Geschichte und Landeskunde Ostmitteleuropas. 4/I, 4/II), vol. 1, Marburg 2000, vol. 2, Marburg 2003.

³ For this view, see for instance, the huge collection of self-documents of the expellees, published in West-Germany after World War II: BUNDESMINISTERIUM FÜR VERTRIEBENE, FLÜCHTLINGE UND KRIEGSGESCHÄDIGTE (ed), *Dokumentation der Vertreibung der Deutschen aus Ost-Mitteleuropa*, prepared by T. SCHIEDER, Bonn 1953-1962.

⁴ By comparison, the influence of the expellee's regional origins on their integration in the Federal Republic of Germany has already been analyzed, see K. GATZ, *East Prussian and Sudetengerman Expelles in West-Germany 1945-1960*, Ann Arbor MI 1989.

⁵ See M.L. KROGUSKI, *Okupacja w imię sojuszu. Armia Radziecka w Polsce, 1944-1956*, Warsaw 2000; W. MOCHOCKI, *Polnisch-sowjetische Freundschaft «auf Banditentum und Raub*

lot in the treatment of the Germans living in these two areas. By analyzing these differences, I will demonstrate how complex interactions between domestic and foreign policy influenced the expulsions. I want to analyze the following questions: To what extent did the Polish state control its own policy? What determined the different pace and the degree of brutality of the expulsions in different regions? How did the composition of the respective German communities influence Polish behavior towards them? My paper is based mainly on Polish administrative sources from the district archives in Olsztyn (Allenstein) and Wrocław (Breslau), from the central Public Record Office (Archiwum Akt Nowych), and to a smaller extent from the central military archive (Centralne Archiwum Wojskowe) both in Warsaw. The complete findings have been published in the above-mentioned collection of sources. In my paper, I will focus on the comparative aspects and will refer mostly to this collection. For detailed information concerning the archival sources, see my contributions concerning the province of Olsztyn in volume one⁶ and Wrocław in volume four⁷.

2. Concepts of Polish and allied policy during World War II

In the Polish opinion, it was quite evident that East Prussia would be a part of Poland after the end of the war already in the first phase of World War II. For Poland, it had been the cradle of the aggressive Prussian and later on German imperialism, a centuries-long «Drang nach Osten». The Polish government intended to acquire the entire territory of the former German province. Since a large part of that region never had been a component of the Polish state, the government argued for its incorporation to provide security for Poland against the eternal western aggressor⁸. On the other

reduziert»? Die Rote Armee in Polens wiedergewonnenen Gebieten 1945-1947, in «Osteuropa», 48, 1998, 3, pp. 286-299.

⁶ C. KRAFT, *Wojewódzchaft Allenstein. Einleitung, Auswahl und Bearbeitung*, in W. BORODZIEJ - H. LEMBERG (eds), *Unsere Heimat*, vol. 1, pp. 432-656; the Polish version C. KRAFT, *Województwo olsztyńskie. Wstęp, wybór i opracowanie*, in W. BORODZIEJ - H. LEMBERG (eds), *Nasza ojczyzna*, vol. 1, pp. 375-565. See also my article: *Who Is a Pole, and Who Is a German? The Province of Olsztyn in 1945*, in P. THER - A. SILJAK (eds), *Redrawing Nations: Ethnic Cleansing in East Central Europe, 1944-1948*, Lanham 2001, pp. 107-120.

⁷ Until now only in Polish: C. KRAFT - S. JANKOWIAK, *Dolny Śląsk. Wstęp, wybór i opracowanie*, in D. BOCKOWSKI (ed), *Nasza ojczyzna*, vol. 4, pp. 203-453. Here I concentrated mainly on the year 1945.

⁸ See several documents in W. WRZESIŃSKI (ed), *W stronę Odry i Baltyku. Wybór źródeł (1795-1950)*, vol. 3: *O Odrę, Nysę Łużycką i Baltyk (1939-1944)*, Wrocław 1990; see also

hand, the existence of a group of people in East Prussia that were of Polish origin, spoke a Polish dialect, and supposedly were germanized only under pressure, was held as proof, that the region was a genuine Polish territory. By addressing these people as «autochthons»⁹, the Poles attempted to prove that East Prussia actually was Polish because of its ethnically Polish inhabitants. In fact, these people were quite 'German', not so much as a consequence of a forced germanization policy but very often voluntarily. In fact, this borderland population had no clearly defined national identity. Therefore, it was the aim of the Polish policy to win over these people for the Polish state and to (re-)polonize them¹⁰.

In the case of Lower Silesia, it was not quite clear as to whether it would be entirely incorporated into Poland. The shape of the border depended partially on the military successes of the Red Army. The more the Soviets advanced to the West the more German territories were to be given to Poland. Quite a long time Polish politicians thought the Glatzer Neiße and not the Lausitzer Neiße would be the new Polish/German border in the southwest. This would have meant that a great part of Lower Silesia would have remained German. Polish politicians held the opinion that it would be too dangerous to incorporate big parts of Germany's territory into Poland, which had – as in the case of Lower Silesia – only few, if any Polish inhabitants. They claimed the industrial zone of Upper Silesia (Górny Śląsk), traditionally inhabited by many Poles, and East Prussia – the symbol of German militarism, but they were skeptical about incorporating German cities like Szczecin (Stettin) or Breslau into their country¹¹. The Western

W. WRZESIŃSKI, *Prusy Wschodnie w polskiej myśli politycznej 1864-1945*, Olsztyn 1994, p. 430.

⁹ For the Polish nationality policy in this period, see G. STRAUCHOLD, *Autochtoni polscy, niemieccy, czy ... od nacjonalizmu do komunizmu (1945-1949)*, Toruń 2001.

¹⁰ R. BLANKE, *Polish-Speaking Germans? Language and National Identity among the Masurians since 1871*, Köln - Wien - Weimar 2001, pp. 279-310; A. KOSSERT, *Preußen, Deutsche oder Polen? Die Masuren im Spannungsfeld des ethnischen Nationalismus 1870-1956* (Quellen und Studien des Deutschen Historischen Instituts Warschau, 12), Wiesbaden 2001, pp. 301-333; for the immediate post-war period see also the documents in T. BARYŁA (ed), *Warmiaci i Mazurzy w PRL. Wybór dokumentów. Rok 1945*, Olsztyn 1994.

¹¹ For the different plans concerning the incorporation of bigger or smaller parts of Silesia, see A.R. HOFMANN, *Die Nachkriegszeit in Schlesien. Gesellschafts- und Bevölkerungspolitik in den polnischen Siedlungsgebieten 1945-1948*, Köln - Weimar - Wien 2000, pp. 42-52; see also W. BORODZIEJ, *Die polnische Grenzdiskussion im Lande und im Exil (1939-1945)*, in H. LEMBERG (ed), *Grenzen in Ostmitteleuropa im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert. Aktuelle Forschungsprobleme*, Marburg a.d.L. 2000, pp. 137-148; D. BRANDES, *Der Weg*

Allies were also reluctant to hand over such a big part of Germany. They knew that it would be very difficult to integrate the masses of expelled Germans into a territorially curtailed Germany. However, in the end the Soviet concept was enforced. This meant that Poland received a big portion of the former German territories as compensation for the large losses in the East, which were incorporated into the Soviet Union¹². Nevertheless, the initial insecurity about the western border played an important role in the relations between Poles, Germans, and the soldiers of the Red Army in Lower Silesia.

3. *The significance of the war for the two territories*

East Prussia was the first part of Germany that fell to the Red Army. Already in October 1944, the troops were at its eastern borders. The soldiers of the Red Army were strongly influenced by the hate that the Russian propaganda machinery produced since they had entered the native country of the Nazis, who had destroyed their country. But as N. Naimark has pointed out:

«There is little evidence that Soviet commanders purposely used violence in East Prussia as an example for the rest of Germany, in the hope of inducing an early German surrender ... In fact, there seems to be good reasons to believe that Soviet officers were surprised by the terror that followed the invasion»¹³.

The Nazis added to the fear of the German population by describing the Russian soldiers as wild beasts that would not spare women and children in their brutality¹⁴. When the Red Army conquered East Prussia in its winter offensive in January 1945 in only a few weeks, a big part of the Germans

zur Vertreibung 1938-1945: Pläne und Entscheidungen zum Transfer der Deutschen aus der Tschechoslowakei und Polen, München 2001.

¹² For the Problem of «shifting» the Polish state westwards after World War II and the expulsion of Poles from the territories of former Eastern Poland, see J. KOCHANOWSKI, *Gathering Poles into Poland: Forced Migration from Poland's Former Eastern Territories*, in P. THER - A. SILJAK (eds), *Redrawing Nations*, pp. 135-154; see also the documents in S. CIESIELSKI (ed), *Przesiedlenie ludności polskiej z kresów wschodnich do Polski 1944-1947*, Wrocław 1999.

¹³ N. NAIMARK, *The Russians in Germany. A History of the Soviet Zone of Occupation, 1945-1949*, Cambridge MA - London 1995, p. 72.

¹⁴ The name of the small town Nemmersdorf in East Prussia had become proverbial for the alleged atrocities of the Red Army. Only some years ago a German eyewitness published a book, showing that to some extent the alleged massacre of Nemmersdorf was a product of the German propaganda machinery, see B. FISCH, *Nemmersdorf, Oktober 1944. Was in Ostpreußen wirklich geschah*, Berlin 1997.

fled in panic towards the west. However, the troops of the second and third Byelorussian Army encircled and cut off this territory from the rest of Germany¹⁵. Many people failed to get away and fell into the hands of the Red Army. Since East Prussia was an exposed bulwark against the Soviet offensive, most of the male population served in the Army or in the last levy of the German military. The officers of the respective Red Army units had received the order to recruit a certain amount of German forced laborers in the occupied territories. Due to the shortage of adult men, a lot of German women and children were detained in camps, from where they were deported to the Soviet Union¹⁶. Soviet officers soon realized that they had to restore discipline in their troops in order to successfully continue the offensive. When the Red Army marched into the northern and eastern part of Lower Silesia, it treated the German population there like it had been treated in East Prussia. However, already in the case of the more western and southern part of that region the situation was different. This territory was reached by the Soviets only when Germany had already surrendered and therefore was not touched by the war at all. The German population had not fled at all or had already returned from their flight (above all from Czechoslovakia). Since this region was relatively industrialized, much of the male population worked in factories and offices. Shops were open, the German administration was still active, and farmers were tilling their land. The Soviet officers, who organized the temporary administration in the western and southern parts of Lower Silesia, did not try to interrupt every-day-life. They were aware that they could profit most from a functioning German economy and administration¹⁷. With the help of the German workers, they ran the factories or dismantled them and brought them to the

¹⁵ As an expressive example for the flight from East Prussia, see for example W. TERPITZ, *Wege aus dem Osten. Flucht und Vertreibung einer ostpreußischen Pfarrersfamilie*, München 1997. Many Germans tried to leave the region in the winter 1944/45 over the frozen Frische Haff or by ship over the Baltic Sea. For a literary treatment of the catastrophe of the refugee ship «Wilhelm Gustloff», see the recently published short story by G. GRASS, *Im Krebsgang*, Göttingen 2002.

¹⁶ For the deportation policy of German forced laborers, see the documents in B. RITSCHER, *Zur Herausbildung und Organisation des Systems von Speziallagern in der SBZ Deutschlands im Jahre 1945*, in «Deutschland-Archiv» 2, 1993, 3, pp. 726 f.; see also M. ZEIDLER, *Kriegsende im Osten. Die Rote Armee und die Besetzung Deutschlands östlich von Oder und Neiße 1944/45*, München 1996, pp. 168-208; the fate of German women deported to the Soviet Union is described by F. KLIER, *Verschleppt ans Ende der Welt. Schicksale deutscher Frauen in sowjetischen Arbeitslagern*, Frankfurt a.M. 1996.

¹⁷ For this triangle of relationships between the Red Army, the German population, and the new Polish Administration, see C. KRAFT - S. JANKOWIAK, *Dolny Śląsk*, pp. 211-218; see also A.R. HOFMANN, *Nachkriegszeit*, pp. 70-76.

Soviet Union. There was less plundering but rather a systematic exploitation of existing resources. The attitude and policy towards the German population was better, for the Soviets needed them to uphold public order and production. Cases of rape, plundering, and devastation, which nevertheless occurred quite often, were punished. But this could not stop the increasing decline of discipline in the Red Army which not only worsened the living conditions of the Germans, above all of German women, but also impeded the establishing of Polish administrative units¹⁸.

4. *The structure of the German population*

When the first representatives of the Polish administration came to the «recovered territories» in the spring and early summer months of 1945, they encountered two very different situations in East Prussia – now called by the Poles «Warmia i Mazury» (Ermland and Masuren)¹⁹ – and in Lower Silesia. East Prussia was to a great deal depopulated. The earliest official reports of the Polish administration mentioned that there were only 200,000 people as compared to the 1.3 million people who lived in the southern part of East Prussia in 1939²⁰. The present population mostly consisted of women with their children and older people. The men had been withdrawn together with their defeated military units, as prisoners of war, or had already been deported to the Soviet Union. Public life hardly existed. The Germans tried to make a living in the devastated cities and on their plundered farms. Many of them had to work for the Red Army, which occupied the big estates. The Polish reports described the Germans as passive, dejected, as being in a state of shock after the defeat. A German underground did not seem to exist²¹. Nevertheless, these people posed a threat to the Polish administration. Although only a relatively small percentage of the German pre-war population remained in East Prussia, the remaining Germans far outnumbered the Poles. Especially in the northern part of that region, the Germans outnumbered the Poles ten to one²². Only

¹⁸ W. BORODZIEJ, *Einleitung*, in W. BORODZIEJ - H. LEMBERG (eds), *Unsere Heimat*, vol. 1, pp. 67 f.

¹⁹ For the arguments for the renaming, see C. KRAFT, *Wojewódzchaft Allenstein*, p. 434.

²⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 453. Some documents mentioned an even smaller population – namely 120,000; *ibidem*, document no. 235, p. 486.

²¹ *Ibidem*, pp. 458 f. and p. 465.

²² See, for example, the table with the number of the German, Masurian, and Polish Population for June 1945, *ibidem*, document no. 249, pp. 503 f.

slowly did Polish public servants establish a Polish administration in all districts of Warmia and Mazuria. In the beginning new Polish settlers came to the southern parts of the region. They avoided the north because it was difficult to get there as the lines of communication had been completely destroyed by the war.

In Lower Silesia, the Poles found a different situation. Some parts of that region were not only just as populated as before the beginning of the war, but there were even more Germans. People who had fled from the Red Army to Czechoslovakia quickly returned to their old hometowns after the end of war. Refugees from Upper Silesia had been stranded in adjoining Lower Silesia. Many people from the West of Germany who had been evacuated from the bombed cities had also remained there. The number of Germans even grew in the months after the end of war, so that in the fall of 1945 the Polish sources mentioned 1.3 million Germans inhabiting Lower Silesia²³. Besides this quantitative preponderance of Germans, the establishment of the Polish administration was impeded by the Soviet policy towards the Germans. The Soviets needed the Germans to run the factories and farms. Moreover, German town mayors and other administrative officers were kept in their former functions. When the first Polish administrative units reached the Silesian cities, they were often faced with a functioning German public life under the auspices of the Soviet military garrisons. German money circulated and all inscriptions in shops, on buildings, and street-signs were in German²⁴. The Soviet officers were reluctant to hand over the power to the Poles, because they wanted to retain the control over all public and economic life. Thus, it took the Poles several months to establish their administration over all parts of Lower Silesia. In the spring of 1945, the unclear situation relating to the new Polish-German and also the Polish-Czechoslovak border in the south of the region additionally weakened the Polish position²⁵. As far as bigger factories and estates were concerned, the Soviets were even more reluctant to hand them over to the Poles. As late as 1946, they still controlled many estates and factories²⁶. The Germans noticed that the position of the Poles was quite

²³ C. KRAFT - S. JANKOWIAK, *Dolny Śląsk*, p. 219.

²⁴ See footnote 17.

²⁵ For the lasting conflict between the Polish and Czechoslovak authorities over the final demarcation line, see documents no. 159, 165, and 178 in C. KRAFT - S. JANKOWIAK, *Dolny Śląsk*, pp. 265 f., pp. 275 f., and pp. 295-297.

²⁶ For the strong economic position of the Red Army in the new Polish territories, see also S. ŁACH, *Społeczno-gospodarcze aspekty stacjonowania Armii Czerwonej na ziemiach*

weak. Indeed, they showed no increased underground activity, but often ignored or resisted Polish instructions²⁷. Quite often, Germans prevented Polish settlers from taking over farms. They were able to do so, because they were in the majority. Beyond that, Soviet soldiers sometimes stood by the Germans against the Poles. However, it would be incorrect to assume that the Soviets showed special sympathy for the Germans, even if the Polish sources often deplored the German-Soviet relations. In the end, they were nothing more than an instrument in the hands of the Soviet officers and soldiers. A Polish commentator noted in July 1945: «In the conversation with the Germans [sic] it becomes clear that their life isn't rosy, the Soviets [sic] shoot at them, beat them, and rape the women»²⁸.

5. Polish policies for the treatment of the Germans in 1945

After the establishment of Polish administration in the «recovered territories», the central government in Warsaw and the respective local authorities started to elaborate policies for dealing with the German population. In Olsztyn, the capital of Warmia and Mazuria, it was planned to confine them to certain parts of the towns – often named «German ghettos» – and exploit their labor to clean up the ruins²⁹. Soon it became clear, that the Polish population that had migrated to the region in the spring of 1945 would be too small to bring in the harvest. So the order was given to move most of the Germans from the cities to the countryside, where all should be employed in agriculture. The Germans, who already lived in the countryside, were to stay on their farms³⁰. In the fall of 1945, when the harvest had been got in, German labor was no longer needed. More and more Polish settlers came to the region and claimed farms and houses still inhabited by Germans for their families. As already mentioned, the German population consisted above all of women, children, and elderly persons. Another problem was

odzyskanych po II wojnie światowej, in S. ŁACH (ed), *Władze komunistyczne wobec Ziemi Odzyskanych po II wojnie światowej*, Słupsk 1997, pp. 255-277.

²⁷ For the problem of possible German underground activities, see C. KRAFT - S. JANKOWIAK, *Dolny Śląsk*, pp. 230-232.

²⁸ Archiwum Akt Nowych, *Ministerstwo Administracji Publicznej* 2443, «Jerzy Zahorski do Generalnego Pełnomocnika Ziemi Odzyskanych, 11.07.1945», pp. 21-24, here p. 22.

²⁹ C. KRAFT, *Wojewódzchaft Allenstein*, pp. 543 f.; see also document no. 257, pp. 512-514.

³⁰ *Ibidem*, document no. 242, p. 494.

the scarcity of food. For all these reasons, the process of pauperization of the Germans proceeded quite quickly.

In order to resolve the lack of housing and food the local Polish administration decided to get rid of the German population deemed less productive. Towards the end of September 1945, all Germans were urged to leave the region, as it was said «voluntarily»³¹. Everybody who did not register for emigration was to be directed to a labor camp. The district president of Warmia and Mazuria ordered the Polish population to create such living conditions for Germans, that they would willingly leave the country. This was put into practice in different ways. A growing number of Polish settlers expelled them from their former homes. Many lived in very cramped conditions, suffering from the spread of infectious illnesses like typhoid fever³². Moreover, after they had finished their work in the cities and on the farms, they could not afford food. Although Poles and Germans had planned for the emigration of the Germans by the end of 1945, only few actually left. The exodus of the Germans was above all impeded by a lack of transportation. Very often, they lived far from the next train station and had no possibilities of getting there. Many railroads had been destroyed during the war and some regions were completely cut off. There was another, even more important reason, why only few Germans were able to leave during the winter of 1945/46. While the southern districts of the region were settled relatively quickly by Poles, the northern part near the Soviet borderline was still depopulated or inhabited mainly by Germans. If they had been removed, a lot of farms and houses would have been vacant for a certain time. Many so-called «wild settlers», who only wanted to enrich themselves in the «recovered territories» and then go back to their former homes, plundered and devastated the farms³³. To prevent this, the district president ordered, that in these regions the Germans should be kept until the arrival of those Poles who sincerely wanted to settle there. For this reason the number of Germans in Warmia and Mazuria diminished by only around some ten thousand people up to the beginning of the centrally planned «transfer» in August 1946³⁴.

³¹ *Ibidem*, document no. 260, pp. 517-521.

³² *Ibidem*, pp. 456-459.

³³ For the problem of plundering (*szaber*), see also P. THER, *Deutsche und polnische Vertriebene. Gesellschaft und Vertriebenenpolitik in der SBZ/DDR und in Polen 1945-1956*, Göttingen 1998, pp. 126-130.

³⁴ C. KRAFT, *Wojewodschaft Allenstein*, pp. 457f.

In Lower Silesia, the number of Germans, which left the region in 1945, had a different extent. As already mentioned, the new German-Polish border was not stable yet. Therefore, the Polish government wanted to create a *fait accompli* before the Allies decided about the shape of the border in August 1945. In June 1945 the Polish Army got the instruction to «... clean up the ancient Polish lands of the German vermin»³⁵. The army carried out the expulsions brutally and in an unorganized manner. The soldiers dragged the Germans out of their houses and chased them out of the region. Soviet officers, on the other hand, often obstructed the expulsion from the beginning or guided the Germans back to their homes³⁶. It is difficult to estimate the exact number of Germans who were expelled by the army from Lower Silesia. Figures vary between 200,000 and 700,000, though certainly the latter estimate is too high. At any rate, even the lowest estimation offers a clear impression of how much more decisively the Germans were driven out of the western borderlands in comparison with distant East Prussia. In addition, after the end of the military expulsions in July of 1945, the civil administration in Lower Silesia continued with the expulsions.³⁷ The district president nominated a special agent for the «transfer» of Germans. In September 1945, he proposed a plan to expel 800,000 Germans from Lower Silesia within two months³⁸. This would have meant that by the end of 1945 the majority of the remaining Germans would have been driven out. However, in his report from January 1946 the district president had to admit that the whole campaign had failed. He complained that there were no trains and that transfer from the respective collecting points to the German border took much longer than expected³⁹. In this phase of expulsion, all transports were directed to the Soviet Zone of Occupation. Nevertheless, the Soviet authorities already in October and then again in December 1945 showed reluctance about accommodating more Germans. So only about 40,000 Germans were transferred from Lower Silesia in organized convoys. A much bigger number left the region on its own account. In Wrocław, for example, the Germans organized their departure

³⁵ C. KRAFT - S. JANKOWIAK, *Dolny Śląsk*, Document no. 168, p. 279.

³⁶ For the military expulsions in general see W. BORODZIEJ, *Einleitung*, pp. 67-73; see also documents in W. BORODZIEJ - H. LEMBERG (eds), *Unsere Heimat*, vol. 1, no. 34-36, 39-41, and 43, pp. 159-168; for Lower Silesia see C. KRAFT - S. JANKOWIAK, *Dolny Śląsk*, pp. 223-225, see also *ibidem*, documents no. 168, 174, 179, pp. 279-281, pp. 291 f., and pp. 298 f.

³⁷ *Ibidem*, pp. 225-227.

³⁸ *Ibidem*, document no. 191, pp. 310-312.

³⁹ *Ibidem*, document no. 215, pp. 337 f.

by chartering public busses⁴⁰. However, by the end of 1945 the Polish administration began to realize that in spite of its efforts, the number of Germans did not significantly diminish. In the beginning of 1946, still over one million Germans lived in this region⁴¹.

6. *The fate of the Germans in 1946*

In 1946, the Ministry for the Recovered Territories (Ministerstwo Ziem Odzyskanych) assumed responsibility for expelling the Germans, which it attempted to plan and to organize by setting up general rules and standards⁴². Nevertheless, the expulsion still differed substantially in the two respective regions. In former East Prussia, the fate of the Germans was inseparably linked to the treatment of the so-called autochthon population by the local authorities. While in 1945 there were no clear guidelines for proving the Polish nationality of this group of inhabitants of Warmia and Mazuria, in 1946 all of them had to undergo the process of so-called verification. Verified autochthons received Polish citizenship. Since a large number of naturalized autochthons was necessary as proof of the allegedly Polish character of that region, the local government in Olsztyn wanted to «verify» as many people as possible. For this reason the transfer of Germans to the Allied Zones of Occupation was postponed, because the government wanted to avoid the expulsion of «autochthons», which had not yet undergone verification⁴³. As it was generally put after World War II by Polish politicians: «We do not want any Germans, but we do not want to lose one Polish soul»⁴⁴. The administration on the lower level criticized this policy and the district president who also pursued it. The local politi-

⁴⁰ *Ibidem*, document no. 213, pp. 334-336; the leaving on coaches was organized by the German Anti-Fascist Association. This organization first tried to play a political role in Lower Silesia after the war. But soon it had to recognize, that there would be no place for a German political force, even if it was of a supposed left origin. Therefore, the Association concentrated upon organizing means of transport for Germans who wanted to leave the region on their own account. For the German Anti-Fascist Association, see *ibidem*, pp. 227 f.

⁴¹ *Ibidem*, document no. 210, pp. 331 f.

⁴² W. BORODZIEJ, *Einleitung*, p. 61.

⁴³ C. KRAFT, *Wojewodschaft Allenstein*, pp. 460-464; for the process of verification see also L. BELZYT, *Miedzy Polską a Niemcami. Weryfikacja narodowościowa i jej następstwa na Warmii, Mazurach i Powiślu 1945-1960*, Toruń 1998.

⁴⁴ Quoted after W. BORODZIEJ, *Einleitung*, p. 108.

cians wanted to get rid of the Germans as quickly as possible, stressing the difficult material situation of the region. Besides that, civil servants were often not aware of the complicated nationality structure and regarded all Masurians as Germans. Polish settlers also regarded them as Germans and treated them like enemies. Therefore, many chose to leave Poland rather than to accept Polish citizenship. Hence, the transfer of «real» Germans from Warmia and Mazuria did not start before August 1946⁴⁵. Until the end of the year, only about 16,000 Germans left the region with organized transports. The whole campaign never took on the mass character, which the government in Warsaw demanded. Although the transport of the Germans was poorly organized and the expellees suffered a lot from misconduct in office while they were waiting for their trains, they still were lucky in comparison with their compatriots, which stayed. These became increasingly impoverished. Hunger, diseases, and the hard winter of 1946/47 cost many lives. Repeatedly the Germans demanded their emigration. At that time, it looked like the only way to end the suffering, although it would mean the loss of their property⁴⁶.

The course of expulsion was very different in Lower Silesia, which still was inhabited by more than a million Germans. Here, 1946 was the crucial year in the process of expulsion. The 1.3 million people who were to leave Poland that year included over one million from this region⁴⁷. The collecting points for the Germans were often overcrowded and epidemics spread among those waiting for transports⁴⁸. The huge number of Germans that arrived almost every day in the Occupied Zones of Germany also created many problems for the local authorities. Quite often Soviet and British officers complained about the poor condition of the Germans and announced that they would not accept any more people. They had extreme difficulties accommodating millions in a country that largely lay in ruins⁴⁹. Nevertheless, for the Polish authorities the quick transfer of the Germans was a top priority. The government wanted to demonstrate in Lower Silesia, that the Polish state was successfully able to incorporate its new territories. Wrocław – as

⁴⁵ C. KRAFT, *Wojewódzchaft Allenstein*, documents no. 283 and no. 286, p. 553 and pp. 556-559.

⁴⁶ *Ibidem*, pp. 464-469.

⁴⁷ W. BORODZIEJ, *Dokumente der Zentralbehörden*, in W. BORODZIEJ - H. LEMBERG, *Unsere Heimat*, vol. 1, document no. 147, pp. 290-292.

⁴⁸ S. KRAFT - S. JANKOWIAK, *Dolny Śląsk*, pp. 241-245.

⁴⁹ W. BORODZIEJ, *Einleitung*, p. 102-106; A.R. HOFMANN, *Nachkriegszeit*, pp. 234-239.

the biggest city of the «recovered territories» – was supposed to obtain a Polish face as soon as possible⁵⁰. Hence in the first months of 1946, Germans from that city and from the southern districts of Lower Silesia, where some cities still were almost exclusively German, had to leave their homes. Unlike in former East Prussia the local administration was often opposed to the quick departure of the Germans, who were needed as specialists in the industry. Besides that, many Poles employed them privately as cheap labor⁵¹. On the other hand, the Germans in Lower Silesia were less keen on leaving their homes than their East-Prussian compatriots. Especially in counties where the German communities had remained almost intact, one could detect a tendency to wait for the forthcoming development in Polish and international politics. From time to time people even resisted Polish officials who organized the «transfer»⁵².

7. Conclusions

By comparing the two mentioned regions, it becomes clear that the expulsion of the Germans from post-war Poland demanded by all Polish political camps and approved by the Allies, was not a uniform process. External factors like the interest of the Red Army in the respective region, its geographic position or historical meaning for the Polish state played a big role in forming Polish political concepts concerning the German population. In addition, the structure of the latter was not without influence on the Polish attitude towards this group. Although it was clear from the beginning that all Germans would have to leave Poland, a great number of reasons delayed or at least altered the process of expulsion. By investigating these factors, one will be able to come to a more precise picture of Polish post-war politics. The attitude towards the Germans differed a lot on the various political levels as well as among the Polish population. Working with official sources that treat the expulsion process, one can learn a lot not only about forced migration, but also about the situation in post-war Poland, its political priorities, and its society. Moreover, the sources also allow an interesting insight into the structure of German population present in new Poland after World War II. Comparing Lower Silesia and East Prussia it becomes

⁵⁰ For this problem, see the excellent book by G. THUM, *Die fremde Stadt. Breslau 1945*, Berlin 2003.

⁵¹ S. KRAFT - S. JANKOWIAK, *Dolny Śląsk*, pp. 235-237 and pp. 255-258.

⁵² See, for example, *ibidem*, document no. 246, pp. 370 f.

evident, that no uniform community like «the» Germans existed, but that this group differed noticeably in its behavior, state of self-confidence, and its capacity to act at least immediately after the war.

